MARIETTA HOLLEY ON TEMPERANCE AND WOMEN’S RIGHTS: FRAMING AND INTERPRETING A LEGACY OF SOCIAL REFORM

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The values of historical figures may be misconstrued when later scholars view the past through a perspective of newer facts and beliefs. Such revisionist research can apply new values to reshape understanding, but in the process may inadvertently marginalize or invalidate the original values at stake. Consequently, the interpretation of past events and cultural trends can be very different from the intended meaning of the principals involved. An examination of the life, work, and legacy of Marietta Holley exemplifies this type of skewed interpretation. As a writer, supporter of political rights for women, and advocate of social reforms in late nineteenth and early twentieth century America, Holley had ample opportunity both to express her personal values and to influence American society. Holley became a focus of twentieth century feminist scholars who framed her work to further a specific interpretation of feminist history – in the process these scholars displaced Holley’s values and the meaning of her legacy and niche in American culture.

Studying Holley illuminates the creative ways through which a group can exercise freedom within a restrictive social environment, using that very creativity to challenge that environment. This thesis will address two major questions: how Holley constructed a unique personal legacy through the use of language and actions as a humorist, temperance and women’s rights proponent, and social reformer; and how a number of twentieth and twenty-first century researchers distorted her intended impact on American social and cultural development. The Holley analysts placed her within a frame of women’s rights and distanced the scholarship from an alternative interpretation that temperance was her main reform cause and the impetus behind her women’s rights stance.
As this thesis will reveal, both life and literature reflected values that found expression in female involvement in the temperance and women’s rights movements. Holley believed in political and social empowerment for women, especially as that female power could be used constructively toward reform. With Holley as a focal point for the convergence of women’s history, culture, and literature, this study will explore her place in popular fiction and find alternative interpretations for the influence she hoped to have on society.
To my mother, Alice Marie Shaw Harkin
## CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Section</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>ABSTRACT</td>
<td>ii</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DEDICATION</td>
<td>iv</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INTRODUCTION: WHICH IS TO BE READ, IF IT HAIN’T ASKIN’ TOO MUCH OF THE KIND HEARTED READER</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER ONE: SHE WUZ A WOMAN, A AUTHOR, AND A REFORMER FOR HER SECT</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER TWO: LIFE AND REFORMS WITHIN WIMMEN’S SPEAR</td>
<td>44</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER THREE: HOW SHE ROTE HER BOOKS</td>
<td>85</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FOUR: HOW SHE WUZ REMEMBERED</td>
<td>133</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER FIVE: HER JONESVILLE FOLKS</td>
<td>161</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SIX: SHE WUZ BIG ON WIMMEN’S RIGHTS</td>
<td>174</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CHAPTER SEVEN: BUT TEMPERANCE WUZ HER THEME</td>
<td>207</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>BIBLIOGRAPHY</td>
<td>275</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
INTRODUCTION

WHICH IS TO BE READ, IF IT HAIN’T ASKIN’ TOO MUCH OF THE KIND HEARTED READER

If anybody tries to prove sunthin’ they want to, they can most always dig up sunthin’ to prove it.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley, *Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife*

In 1873 a novel appeared that promoted the movement to change women’s roles from a primary emphasis on domesticity to one of involvement in public affairs. The book, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s* by Josiah Allen’s Wife, launched 37 year old Marietta Holley as one of the most widely-read American woman authors in the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries. Prior to Holley’s bursting into literary prominence, nineteenth-century female American authors had flooded the market for popular fiction with countless stories, poems, and novels, mostly with an extremely sentimental bent. These works were often formulaic, offering romanticized, genteel views of the world combined with didactic, values-laden messages about the importance of proper living. The authors understood the power of the printed word in disseminating ideas, and fiction reached a larger audience of both women and men than other kinds of writing. Literature, particularly popular fiction, was one of the primary ways to press for political rights and social reform. Holley, too, set out the make a political and reform statement with her book, but she operated outside of the well-worn trajectory of her female predecessors. What set Holley apart from the usual offerings of women writers was her groundbreaking technique of combining humor and satire with a female-driven reform message.

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Humor allows a writer to express opinions on a variety of topics, including customs, politics, and culture in general. By the late nineteenth-century, American writers had a long-established tradition of humor and satirical writing that was often used to deliver political or social commentary.\(^3\) With very few exceptions, these techniques had been almost exclusively the province of male authors such as Seba Smith and Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward).\(^4\) Holley stepped into this tradition and veered off in a new direction, using her female comic persona Samantha Allen to expose and lampoon the illogical and unjust cultural constructs that made women second class citizens based solely on sex. Holley rode the popularity of her books to invade the male realm of public opinion and claim a place of female equality guaranteed by social reform.

Holley emerged during the heyday of female-driven social reform movements in America. Two of the prominent reform movements, the ideology, rhetoric, and impact of which touched and influenced nearly all other reform causes, were temperance and woman suffrage.\(^5\) To nineteenth-century women the values underpinning temperance and woman suffrage were essential to the nurturing and survival of a healthy society. For the women involved in the temperance and suffrage movements these forces were inextricably intertwined -- the success of either one depended on the adoption of the other. These movements were very closely aligned, with many woman suffragists having started out as temperance agitators. The formidable obstacles thrown up by the anti-temperance business and political interests spurred these women to demand an equal voice in


\(^4\)Smith and Browne, popular nineteenth-century male literary humorists, are discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

\(^5\)Abolition was a third major nineteenth century reform. Of course abolition expired after the passage of the 13\(^{th}\) Amendment, and as a movement did not have a direct impact on Holley or the work of the Holley scholars. Therefore, other than general references, a discussion of abolition is outside the scope of this thesis.
shaping society and culture: for many, temperance was the natural entrée into suffrage work. Holley was one of these women. Having witnessed since her girlhood the devastating effects on women and families of the abuse of alcoholic drink, she espoused temperance from the very beginning of her literary career. She also infused her books with an advocacy of suffrage as the means to achieve temperance.

Beginning only a few years after her death in 1926, Holley’s focus on reforms of especial value to women made her the subject of scholarly research. Later, with the advent of university women’s studies programs, the woman historians that emerged out of the second wave feminist movement of the 1960s became focused on an entrenched anti-female cultural bias, the impact of that bias on the lives of ordinary women, and the ways that women demanded the dismantling of obstacles to equality in American society. This emphasis produced a picture of a predominantly middle-class, white, female population increasingly dedicated to reform and to instilling a specific values system, not exclusively for women, but also for society as a whole. Marietta Holley fit this picture in almost every way.

As a writer, supporter of political rights for women, and advocate of social reforms in late nineteenth-century America, Holley became a focus of both feminist scholars and male literary and social historians who sought to use her work to further the study of feminist history. These scholars and historians may have placed too narrow a perspective on Holley’s work, in the process stunting the intellectual gratification of diverse interpretations. Numerous thinkers have expressed this sentiment in a variety of ways. In his 1882 “The Sentiment of Rationality,” psychologist, philosopher, and pragmatist William James noted, “Every way of classifying a thing is but a way of

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6 A large body of historical work has been devoted to the connections between temperance and woman suffrage. These connections are at the core of this thesis and in many of the sources used to support my argument, with an overview in Chapter Two.

handling it for some particular purpose. Conceptions, ‘kinds,’ are teleological instruments. No abstract concept can be a valid substitute for concrete reality except with reference to a particular interest in the conceiver.”

8 Philosopher Richard J. Bernstein wrote, “It is the beginning of wisdom to realize that what we take to be intuitive, natural, obvious, or universal may not be so at all but is only one historical social possibility among several alternatives.”

9 Social analyst George Lakoff described metaphorical frames: “mental structures that shape the way we see the world” and characterized the work of scholars who fall into the use of these frames: “They have a frame and they only accept facts that fit that frame…if a strongly held frame doesn’t fit the facts, the facts will be ignored and the frame will be kept.”

10 Of course James, Bernstein, and Lakoff were not referring specifically to Marietta Holley. However, Holley scholar Gwendolyn B. Gwathmey applied the spirit of these sentiments even more succinctly when she claimed, “Modern critics have reconstructed Marietta Holley to suit their own political agendas.”

11 Gwathmey’s “modern critics” overlooked a more holistic interpretation of Holley’s work in the interests of feminism. Whatever conclusions one may draw from a study of Holley’s life and work, analysts of that life and work seemed unaware of or uninterested in alternative interpretations.

With this thesis I will argue that the twentieth and twenty-first century Holley analysts’ emphasis on her as primarily a feminist writer has been a misunderstanding of her intended legacy, and what such a misunderstanding, whether unintentional or deliberate, might mean for the

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integrity of scholarly analysis. I will contend that Holley’s primary concern was temperance and that the goal of Holley’s quest for women’s rights was to remodel traditional female roles in a way that would retain domestic responsibilities while gaining a voice in public affairs. Holley’s vision and mission were to give women the political legitimacy that would advance temperance, a reform that she believed would most improve the lives of women and society in general.

As with any study or review of scholarly sources concerned with nineteenth century women’s movements, this thesis must acknowledge that the concept of feminism did not exist during Holley’s early career, and even toward the end of her career was poorly defined. Two articles dating from the years of the explosion of interest in women’s history, the first published in 1968 and the second in 1975, may help to put the attitudes of the Holley scholars into perspective and simplify a very large and complex debate. One may view Holley as a social feminist, a term coined by historian William L. O’Neill “to describe that part of the [women’s] movement that put social reform ahead of women’s rights.” O’Neill pointed out that “the woman movement was not the same thing as feminism,” but was populated by women who saw social reform as the major benefit of equal rights. O’Neill called the temperance movement the epitome of social feminism, in which the home and family were the underpinnings of the quest for suffrage.¹² In counterpoint to O’Neill, historian Ellen DuBois called O’Neill’s thesis “revisionist” history. DuBois claimed that suffrage became the “core of a feminist program,” with the emphasis squarely on the public arena. For DuBois, feminist suffragism epitomized both “the most radical aspect of nineteenth-century feminism” because the vote removed women’s interest from an exclusively domestic purpose, and “the cause of [suffragism’s] failure to establish a mass base.” For DuBois, feminist suffragists saw the vote as the means to female empowerment in the political realm. DuBois mentioned temperance

as a self-defeating use of the vote that initially negated any feminist outcome of suffrage because temperance’s “defensive character” promoted a strong focus on family. Furthermore, DuBois concluded that the temperance movement’s eventual support of suffrage indicated “that the woman suffrage movement has succeeded in becoming the defining focus of nineteenth-century feminism.”

O’Neill and DuBois each offered valid, but conflicting, arguments. However, the Holley scholars were firmly in DuBois’s camp, and brought Holley along as a feminist suffragist.

The literary and historical analysts repeatedly labeled Holley as a feminist writer who used humor and satire to advocate feminist causes – in the process displacing Holley’s temperance values and the meaning of her legacy and niche in American culture. Holley published twenty-one novels between 1873 and 1914. The first two, My Opinion and Betsey Bobbet’s (1873), Josiah Allen’s Wife as a P.A. and P.I., Samantha at the Centennial (1877), and the last two, Samantha on the Woman Question (1913), and Josiah Allen on the Woman Question (1914) will be used to support this thesis with the focus on women’s rights. Sweet Cicely: Josiah Allen as a Politician (1885) and Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife (1905) will be used with the focus on temperance. Holley’s work also advocated a variety of reforms that would improve life for women and families, as clearly shown in the titles of some of the seventeen books published between 1877 and 1913: My Wayward Pardner; or, My Trials with Josiah, America, the Widow Bump, and Etcetery (1880); Samantha Among the Brethren (1890); and Samantha on the Race Problem (1892); and Samantha on Children’s Rights (1906). Many of Holley’s other books, the titles of which suggested plots built around travel such as Samantha at the World’s Fair (1893); Samantha

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14The use throughout this thesis of the label feminist in describing Holley reflects the opinions of the Holley scholars.
at Saratoga or Flirtin’ with Fashion (1887); Samantha in Europe (1895); Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition (1904); Samantha vs. Josiah: Being the Story of the Borrowed Automobile and What Became of It (1906); and Samantha at Coney Island and a Thousand Other Islands (1911), contained strong reform undercurrents. Notwithstanding Holley’s obvious calling to, as her comic persona Samantha Allen would say, promiscuous reforms, for Holley the most important reform was temperance, with support from women’s rights and suffrage.

With this thesis I will investigate the events, writing, and culture that informed Marietta Holley’s work and contributed to her popularity and goal of social reform, mingling her personal temperance views with women’s rights. Holley’s work reflected her advocacy of female issues but always with values of home and family. I will use her novels to argue that, contrary to how she has been interpreted in most scholarly discourse, as a writer and social commentator Holley was less a feminist in the sense conveyed by the Holley scholars than a spokesperson for temperance.

As my argument will reveal, both life and literature reflected values that found expression in female involvement in the temperance and women’s rights movements. I will use Holley as a focal point for the convergence of women’s history, culture, and literature. She has been called the only woman author who successfully used vernacular humor specifically to promote social reform. She enjoyed a lucrative career and achieved the financial independence that she espoused in her work as a right that women should be empowered to pursue.

The thesis will explore the nineteenth-century American culture that influenced Marietta Holley’s writing and work as a social reformer. All quotes from Holley’s work will be verbatim, including the cacography and grammatical errors. Chapter One will include biographical

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15 Holley published two other books of fiction, Miss Richard’s Boy and Other Stories (1883) and Widder Doodle’s Love Affair and Other Stories (1893). Both titles were compilations of mostly sentimental short stories.

16 Marietta Holley and Jane Curry, Samantha Rattles the Woman Question (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), xiii.
information, and an examination of Holley’s place in and impact on her society. This chapter will introduce the human values -- such as self-reliance, freedom to choose one’s life path, and social responsibility -- that engendered the atmosphere of reform in nineteenth-century upstate New York and informed Holley’s writing.

Chapter Two will examine life for women in nineteenth-century America and how the facts of that life appeared in Holley’s books. This chapter will investigate traditional roles and values for women like Marietta Holley: middle-class, white, socially conscious, and reform-minded. Discussion will include the evolution, practical application, and impact of woman’s sphere, a phrase and concept that appeared repeatedly in Holley’s books and was integral to understanding the personal, social, and political circumstances for nineteenth-century American women. At the core of woman’s sphere were extrinsically imposed but socially sanctioned restrictions that violated human values.

Also women’s participation in the temperance and women’s rights movements will be discussed, including the connections between the two movements. This chapter will provide some insight into these movements to explain why and how Holley and women like her were drawn to this type of activism and the values that working for reforms entailed.

Chapter Three will review the literary genres that Holley combined into her writing and Holley’s place in the nineteenth-century American literary tradition. The discussion will include the popular sentimental and domestic novel, why women wrote and read these stories and books, and how this literature was often at once a reflection and a rejection of the very gentility and sentimentality that underpinned middle-class society. Temperance literature, both non-fiction and fiction, will be introduced and selected important examples that may have influenced Holley will be discussed. Finally, this chapter will survey nineteenth-century humor literature. Topics will include the development of a unique style that reflected American individualism and rejected of Old World traditions. Humor writing was mostly male, using vernacular, satire, and political and social
commentary. Holley emerged as a woman author who used both typically female and male methods to produce a new type of literature to convey a message and meaning that was sentimental, satirical, and reformist.

Chapter Four will be a review of scholarly literature with Holley as the subject. Chapter Five will review some Holley short stories to illustrate how she introduced and developed her main characters, her style, and her devices. These stories launched Holley’s career as a humorist and satirist, and allowed her to test the audience for her reform writing.

Chapter Six will examine Holley’s women’s rights novels. The chosen works will be those in which she presented her most focused advocacy of women’s rights. These were the books that have been used repeatedly and consistently as support for the opinion of scholars that Holley’s primary aim was to advance feminist causes.

Chapter Seven will examine Holley’s temperance novels. This chapter will argue that Holley’s primary goal was temperance, and that she intended her novels to communicate to as wide an audience as possible the benefit of this specific reform not only to women as individuals, but to families and society as a whole. This argument will be supported by an analysis of Holley’s novels, both those that scholars have emphasized as proof of Holley’s feminism, and others that have been dismissed or ignored as lacking a proper feminist message.

Chapter Eight will conclude the thesis with a discussion of the academic interpretation of Holley’s message and legacy. This chapter will summarize my argument, with specific conclusions about Marietta Holley’s place in history and how her writing promoted human values as an impetus to agitate for what she considered to be social improvement. I will use Holley’s work to discuss the importance of a holistic approach to assessing the intent, impact, and legacy of historical figures.

This study could raise some questions that have no simple answers, but could reflect on the integrity of scholarly research and respect for an individual legacy. Why should anyone care about Holley, her life, her work, or her legacy, if she has one? Why should anyone care about how
the Holley analysts saw her? Does the fact that Holley has become the subject of scholarly analysis have implications for the worth of her writing? Has her being been channeled in ways reminiscent of the dictated being of nineteenth century American women? Did the Holley analysts distort her message to support a thesis of Holley as a feminist suffragist writer instead of a social feminist? If so, is such distortion necessary to a body of scholarship that chooses only certain facts to prove a point while dismissing or ignoring other facts that might disprove that point? If so, what is the effect of such distortion on the validity of the scholarship? Does the discourse become degraded enough to blur the line between fact and interpretation? Most importantly, how does one know and express the knowledge contained in scholarly research? These questions reflect the need for ongoing research and diligence in scholarship.
CHAPTER ONE
SHE WUZ A WOMAN, A AUTHOR, AND A REFORMER FOR HER SECT

Always when time honored customs change from the old to the new, from bad to better, there is a period of upheaval and unrest, until the new becomes natural and common.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley, Josiah Allen on the Woman Question

Marietta Holley was one of the most popular and successful American authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. She was a prolific writer, with a portfolio of magazine articles, short stories, and, most important to this thesis, numerous reformist novels. Holley was famous, her name was a household word, her life and opinions were of interest to her legions of readers, and she was sought after by various women-centered social and political reform organizations. Her fame, reputation, and influence spread throughout the United States and to a number of foreign countries. This chapter will illustrate how and why Holley’s place in and impact on her time and culture captured the attention of later scholars.

In 1923 Marietta Holley wrote some reminiscences about her life. Originally titled “About My Books and Interesting People I Have Met,” these nostalgic musings were published posthumously as chapters in serial issues of the Watertown Daily Times from February to April, 1931, under the title “The Story of My Life.” An unsigned introductory essay to the chapters recounted Holley’s reaction to the suggestion of Harold B. Johnson, the editor of the Watertown Daily Times, that she should write an autobiography: “No one would be interested in it….My life

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Holley had dabbled in autobiography previously. A two-page article that appeared in Harper’s Bazaar in 1911 entitled “How I Wrote my First Books” showed that “The Story of My Life” was a reworking of and elaboration on Holley’s previous autobiographical essay. Nearly the entire shorter article appeared word for word in various chapters of the longer work, including Holley’s desire to be a poet, her disappointment when American Publishing Company owner Elisha Bliss encouraged her to write in dialect, her surprise at the success of My Opinions, the common misconception that the book had been written by a man, and other events and experiences. The shorter essay did not chronicle Holley’s travels or explain her methods, and offered little insight into her motivations or true feelings about social reform.
has been spent quietly here; I am just one of a pioneer family of Jefferson county and I could not write anything about myself that would be interesting.” However, several months later Holley contacted Johnson and handed him a “great mass of manuscript, several hundred pages,” and said deprecatingly, “I have been busy with this all winter…I am not satisfied with it but possibly it will do.” Marietta Holley, the author of numerous bestselling books, whose second book (1877’s *Samantha at the Centennial*) sold over one million copies, and who penned the biggest seller of 1887 (*Samantha at Saratoga*), believed that her personal story was less interesting and less important than the impact she hoped her work had had as an impetus for social reform. The chapters illustrated that Holley’s primary reform interest was temperance, and her other reform goals, including what the authors of several analytic scholarly works have interpreted as Holley’s staunch feminism, were either ways in which to achieve temperance or secondary benefits of temperance.

“Story” was filled with details about business transactions and gossipy drama about experiences, events, acquaintances, and adult friends and colleagues. Holley did not give specific dates for any of the anecdotes she related. The chapters touched only briefly on Holley’s family history and childhood, and also revealed little about her formative years or family relationships.

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3 Ibid., Introduction.

4 Ibid., Introduction.

5 For example, Holley gave only passing mention in Chapter Fifteen of her “Story” to her adopted daughter, May Shaver: “I took a little girl into my family who needed a home and cared for her and educated her.” May’s father was Will Shaver, a book agent and widower who was also an habitual drunkard. Holley adopted May in 1894, when Holley was 58 years old, and May was eight years old. May lived with Holley for ten years; during that time Holley had May’s legal name changed to Marietta Holley Shaver. After marrying at age 18 May had two children and continued to visit Holley. May’s husband died in 1916. The following year May remarried and moved to Jersey City, NJ. May was widowed a second time, married a third time, and moved to St. Louis, MO. Holley and May saw each other infrequently after 1919. May attended Holley’s memorial service. See Kate H. Winter, *Marietta*
She explained that the Holleys had migrated from Connecticut; she did not note the year of this migration, but only referred to her paternal great-grandmother as a member of this family. Her grandfather bequeathed land and a house to her father, where he and his wife, whose family had migrated from Rhode Island years earlier, lived and raised seven children. Marietta was the youngest of these seven. The Holleys were far from indigent. Mr. Holley owned three farms near Adams, New York, and although the family lived simply, Marietta recalled having ample leisure time for reading and drawing.  

From her early years Holley had a penchant for reading and learning. She studied astronomy, botany, French, drawing, and music. She attended the local school until age fourteen, and later studied with private tutors. Even as a young child she believed that she was “meant to be a great artist.” She was also influenced by the theistic fervor of the upper New York State so-called “burned-over District” noted for religious revivals and conversions that spurred and nourished a

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Holley did not mention Lew Hoxie, a handyman who lived at Bonnie View, the home that Holley had built in 1888 on the grounds of her family’s farm; Holley biographer Kate Winter noted that Holley’s decision to build this house was both an expression of her success and an affirmation of her Jefferson County roots. Holley employed Hoxie to do chores and home repairs from 1888 to 1908. Hoxie left Holley’s home after the two had a dispute about his use of alcohol. However, even in later years he continued to serve as Holley’s transcriptionist, typist, and chauffeur. See Winter, Marietta Holley, 104, 125-126, 129-130. Hoxie was also a source of Holley biographical information for Katherine Blyley’s 1937 dissertation discussed in Chapter Four of this thesis.

Holley also did not mention Ella Page Copeland, her niece and, in Holley’s later years, frequent companion. Copeland wrote some reminiscences of Holley that were published in the Watertown Daily Times in 1934 and are discussed in Chapter Eight of this thesis.

Holley, “Story,” Chapter Twenty-Seven.

For the remainder of the thesis the name Holley will refer to Marietta Holley, unless otherwise specified.

Holley, “Story,” Chapter Two.
local culture of social reform. Holley’s father was a Universalist, and she was exposed to current events and reformist convictions through publications such as *The Universalist Magazine and Gospel Advocate.*

The young Holley noticed the restrictions placed on women in her community: “A woman’s place, her only place was the home, the fireside. Here sheltered behind a man’s personality she was allowed to exist, and quietly labor from dawn till dark, safe from the vulgar gaze of the public.” The adolescent Holley found a role model in an unmarried female school teacher who boarded with local families and also worked as a traveling book agent. Holley was impressed by the independence this woman enjoyed, her education, and her ability to move freely about the region and earn her own income. These early impressions of women’s low status and the promise of uplift through social reform combined to germinate in Holley “a great idea of doing good in the world, large and noble plans filled my head of what I would do when I got older and my ship had come in laden with wealth.”

Although as a very young girl she may have accepted as a matter of fact a woman’s lack of self-determination, clearly the mature Holley did not subscribe to the traditional ideal of womanhood she remembered from her childhood. She was a self-sufficient writer who as an adult was the primary breadwinner of her household. Perhaps these experiences influenced Holley to remain single. Later in life Holley wrote, “Heaven only knows why I never married. I only know that when the situation became imminent…it was always easier for me …to

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9The Burned Over District of nineteenth century upstate New York has been the subject of numerous scholarly studies. For a brief overview, see Mary P. Ryan, *Cradle of the Middle Class: The Family in Oneida County, New York, 1790-1865* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1981), xii.

10Holley, “Story,” Chapter Two.

11Ibid., Chapter One.

12Ibid., Chapters One and Two.
turn my back on care and matrimony. …Art is a jealous mistress and one who follows her would do well to weigh the question well before setting up another rival.”

Ironically, for all of her talent and fame Holley grew up with an aversion to public appearances and public speaking. She attributed this aspect of her personality to the childhood teasing she had endured from her older brothers. The brothers would make fun of her manner of speaking and her spelling, and would tell her scary stories about monsters in dark corners of her home. Holley forgave her brothers with a boys-will-be-boys attitude. However, she admitted that she probably hurt herself financially by not accepting offers to travel or requests for personal appearances and speeches.

As the years passed the Holley siblings went out to seek lives apart from the family. Mr. Holley died in 1861, when Marietta was 25 years old. Her brothers moved west. One sister married and lived close by. Another sister was a recluse and avoided contact with people outside the family. Holley felt an obligation to care for her mother and sister and stayed in Adams on the family farm; she managed to make enough money, with the help of hired local boys, to make ends meet. Holley continued to write and submit her work to local editors, hoping for a breakthrough into the world of professional literature.

Holley’s first stories appeared in a local newspaper under the penname “Jemema.” However, Holley’s true hope at that time was to become a poet. She told of spending many hours

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13Marietta Holley, quoted in Kate H. Winter, Marietta Holley, 33.

14Holley, “Story,” Chapters One and Twenty-One.

15This sister was the mother of Holley’s niece, Ella Page Copeland.

16Winter, Marietta Holley, 28, 29.

17Holley, “Story,” Chapter One. As frequently happens in the “Story,” the spelling of names changes, and is also different from the spelling used in much Holley scholarship. The spelling “Jemema” is taken from the “Story” as published.
composing verses, some of which were also published in her local newspapers. She sent samples of her work to prominent poets L. H. Sigourney and Oliver Wendell Holmes. She received encouraging replies, and so solicited the advice of her cousin Henry Holley, who was a newspaper editor. Cousin Henry suggested that Marietta should write stories and essays rather than poetry and encouraged her to submit some pieces to Peterson’s Magazine. Several early stories, written in dialect using the penname Josiah Allen’s Wife and introducing the characters Samantha and Josiah Allen, were accepted. When Holley received her first payment of $30.00 she realized that she could use the income from her writing “to bring many comforts and conveniences into our little home which we had not had before…I spent my first money in making my mother comfortable.” Her early success with Peterson’s spurred her to try to advance her career with a book publisher.

With her popularity increasing as a result of her first few appearances in Peterson’s, in 1873 Holley dared to send some of her work to Elisha Bliss of the American Publishing Company. Bliss had published numerous books by notable humor authors, including Josh Billings and Mark Twain. Holley sent Bliss a sampling of her work: “a poem, a chapter of the serial ‘Gypsy and I,’ written in good English, and a sketch in dialect written by ‘Josiah Allen’s wife’, and asked him if he wanted me to write a book for him.” Mr. Bliss was most interested in Holley’s prose, but asked her to write a book in dialect style. Holley appealed to Bliss to reconsider her poetry and non-dialect prose, but he was adamant. She reluctantly agreed because she needed the money, but she

18Peterson’s Magazine was a popular woman’s magazine published from 1842 until 1898.
19Holley, “Story,” Chapters Two and Three.
20Josh Billings was the pseudonym Henry Wheeler Shaw, a well-known and popular nineteenth century humorist. Mark Twain was the pseudonym of Samuel Clemens, a very famous humor writer and Holley contemporary whose work is well known and popular even today.
21At the end of her life, Holley still regretted her lack of success as a poet. She stated in Chapter Twenty-Six of her “Story,” “In all the years of dialect writing and devotion to the matter of fact Samantha…never have I forgotten my first love. I have always held the conviction that though
made the “most melancholy and lugubrious predictions” about the success of such a book. Holley wrote the book in secret and stated that the sentence in her preface when Josiah asked Samantha, “Who will read the book when it is wrote?” aptly described her attitude toward her work. When Bliss’s firm balked at the completed book, he declared that he would “publish the book himself if they refused.” To Holley’s amazement and delight, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s* was an instant best seller and established her as a writer of satirical dialectal novels. Bliss had “the ever enduring satisfaction of telling [Holley], ‘I told you so.’”

*My Opinions*, along with Holley’s first several books, was published using the pseudonym Josiah Allen’s Wife. Holley explained: “I thought it was an original name and one that no one else would be likely to want.” Furthermore, the book’s “decidedly unpopular” pro-woman suffrage arguments might be better accepted if offered by a “writer meekly claiming to be the wife of Josiah Allen, and so stand in the shadow of a man’s personality.” Holley created Samantha Allen and Betsey Bobbet to be “the two sides of the question,” to personify the opposing views of the women’s rights dispute. Samantha was the plain, common sense woman who, though devoted to home and home duties, was still desirous of claiming all the just rights belonging to our common humanity, while Betsy Bobbett was portrayed as the lackadaisical romantic female who in an endeavor to please the forever masculine professed herself willing to not have any rights at all, and was only too desirous to become a clinging vine if a tree were forthcoming to which she might cling.

expressing myself in prose for a while, still poetry was my real language and what was more worthwhile.”

22Holley, “Story,” Chapter Three.

23The spelling of the name Betsey Bobbet varies in Holley’s “Story,” in her books, and in the scholarly analysis about Holley’s work. Holley attributed the inconsistent spelling to “a mistake of the printer.” Holley commented on this variation in Chapter Four of “Story.” This thesis will use the spelling Betsey Bobbet, except in direct quotations from sources.


25Ibid., Chapter Four.
The acclaim and popularity of *My Opinions* was widespread and Holley was continually surprised by the reactions and the comments she received from those who had read the book. A “Presbyterian aunt” said, “‘since I have this book to read I have entirely given up reading the Bible.’” A clergyman said he had derived more inspiration than from any other book, “‘except, perhaps, the Bible.’” In response to questions about how an unmarried author could write with so much insight about the behavior of men, Holley replied that even unmarried women have fathers, brothers, and other male relatives. Holley found amusing the popular belief that the book had been written by a man, stating “I have always supposed it was a compliment.”

Holley’s characterization of the inhabitants of rural, small town communities was so realistic that the names of Samantha, Josiah, and Betsey came to be used as epithets. Holley found this fact odd and strangely comical. She was frequently told, “‘We have a perfect Josiah or Samantha living near us.’ Or a Betsy Bobbett or some other one of the characters of the book, from which I was encouraged to think there must be a good deal of our common human nature in it.” Later in life Holley replied to the question, “‘Is Samantha a real character?’” by saying, “‘I don’t know where I got Samantha first, it was so long ago….Perhaps she was real, perhaps she was a composite, perhaps she just developed naturally though all these years.’”

An interesting development stemming from Holley’s pseudonym was the persistent confusion about Holley and Samantha. Moreover, Holley may have inadvertently contributed to this confusion by making Samantha a successful author. People did not seem to understand that

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26Ibid., Chapter Four.

27Ibid., Chapter Four.

Samantha was a fictional character and that Holley had actually written these books.\textsuperscript{29} Holley told of how she was once approached by a man who insisted that Holley’s name was Allen because his wife had read one of her books and told him so. After trying several times to convince him of her true identity and the difference between herself and Samantha, Holley “ceased to argue, and left him evidently in the firm belief that [his wife] and not I had told the truth.”\textsuperscript{30}

The confusion of Holley and Samantha was evident in the popular press. Early in her career Holley entertained in her home Robert Burdette, a humorist and writer who had come to Adams on a lecture circuit. Burdette later wrote of his visit in a local newspaper. He described “Josiah Allen’s wife” in meticulous detail, exclaiming that “Josiah Allen’s wife is Miss Holley! Think of that!”\textsuperscript{31} Of course Burdette knew that Holley was not Samantha, but his article may have added to the strange interplay between fact and fiction that followed Holley throughout her career and persisted after her death.\textsuperscript{32}

A review of \textit{Samantha at Saratoga} in \textit{The Portland (Indiana) Commercial} referred to “Marietta Holley, popularly known as Samantha Allen, or Josiah Allen’s wife.” The reviewer noted that to research this book Holley spent several months in Saratoga, “in her famous assumed role of Josiah Allen’s wife,” and assigned many of the fictional Samantha’s character traits and behaviors to Holley.\textsuperscript{33}

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\textsuperscript{29}Even the later Holley scholars had difficulty keeping Holley and Samantha separate. See Chapter Four of this thesis for a discussion.

\textsuperscript{30}Holley, “Story,” Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{32}In Chapter Twenty-Six of her “Story” Holley admitted that after forty-plus years of dialect writing, “indeed [Samantha] seems like a second self to me.”

Columnist Adelaide E. Byrd of *The Logansport (Indiana) Pharos* went further in fostering the confusion between Holley and Samantha. In a short article titled “Marietta Holley, Woman Humorist Like Her Own Samantha Allen” Byrd claimed, “Miss Holley is herself Samantha Allen.” The article detailed Holley’s life, appearance, and home, and half way through used the names Miss Holley and Samantha interchangeably: Samantha designed the gardens at her home, Bonnie View. Samantha managed to have a career as a writer while managing a home and estate.\(^{34}\)

This Holley/Samantha confusion continued even after Holley’s death. A notice in the 1950 *Oak Park (Illinois) Oak Leaves* titled “First Summer Program at Century Club” described a lecture by a local clubwoman about female humor authors. The lecturer mentioned Holley, whom she said was a “kinswoman of Miss Grace Allen, who was in the audience. Miss Holley visited in the old house on Lake Street where Miss Allen still lives. Of course, Marietta Holley was not her real name. She was Samantha Allen, but had to have a pen name for her books.”\(^{35}\) This statement was completely false, of course.

These references to Holley in the contemporary press revealed the magnitude of Holley’s popularity. Just like the fans of any celebrity, her readers were hungry for gossipy snippets about her life regardless of the truth of these ostensible facts. These articles were really about Samantha, and rarely mentioned Holley as a reformer. However, from the very beginning of her career all of Holley’s novels and even many of her shorter stories contained at least one reform message.

Holley was clearly an advocate for women’s rights. She noted that even as a novice writer struggling for recognition she was driven to advocate social reforms. She persisted in submitting stories to the local newspaper, *The Adams Journal*, to “pass on a message to a world that certainly

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\(^{34}\) Adelaide Byrd, “Marietta Holley: Woman Humorist Like Her Own Samantha Allen,” *The Logansport Pharos*, August 16, 1904.

showed very little interest in what I was telling it.” However, in all of the twenty-seven chapters of “Story,” Holley’s only references to women’s rights and suffrage pertained directly to her writing, specifically to her novels. She did not discuss her own rights or lack of rights, or how the women’s rights movement affected her or any of her friends or acquaintances. Holley was self-sufficient and supported herself and her family independently through her work, but she did not spout feminist views in her personal experiences or relationships.

In contrast, Holley’s “Story” frequently referenced temperance in relation to her writing and many and varied life experiences. The strength of her convictions about temperance showed through unmistakably. Beginning in her earliest work, “Temperance and woman’s suffrage, which were decidedly unpopular at that time were the themes of many of my preachments, poured out with a constancy and zeal that would do credit to the most earnest reformer.” Holley mentioned temperance first, and she truly meant that temperance was her primary motivation for advocating women’s suffrage. Holley expressed gratitude to the people she saw as champions in the cause of temperance. She had great admiration for Senator Henry Blair, one of Holley’s fans, and an “eminent statesman and laborer in the temperance cause.” Blair was “fearless…one of the grand old band that had the courage of their convictions and in the face of discouragement and ridicule toiled on in the dark, hoping and trusting that light would come at last and mankind would be freed from the awful tyranny of drink.”

Holley recounted meeting many great temperance and suffrage advocates, including Frederick Douglass, Wendell Phillips, Mary Livermore, Susan B. Anthony, Henry Ward Beecher, Henry Blair was a politician from New Hampshire and a vocal temperance advocate. He introduced the first prohibition amendment proposal to Congress in 1876.

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37 Ibid., Chapter Three.
38 Holley, “Story,” Chapter Four. Henry Blair was a politician from New Hampshire and a vocal temperance advocate. He introduced the first prohibition amendment proposal to Congress in 1876.
and Frances Willard. She was pleased when Douglass praised her writing as “the best argument on temperance that he had ever heard.” Phillips was “genial and...good natured.” After attending a lecture by Livermore and Anthony, Holley had a conversation with Anthony “lasting into the small hours.” Holley revered Beecher, “the first clergyman of his day.”

Holley devoted the most commentary to her meeting with Frances Willard. Holley had great respect for Willard, and had received a number of letters from Willard praising Holley’s temperance writings. Holley was delighted to meet Willard after attending a temperance lecture in New York. However, Holley was dismayed that as part of the lecture Willard quoted a passage from Samantha at the Centennial without attribution to Holley. Holley tried to “reconcile [this plagiarism] with Miss Willard’s undoubted honesty.”

Although Holley clearly felt slighted at this

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40Frederick Douglass (1818-1895) had escaped slavery as a young man and became a noted abolitionist, newspaper publisher, and statesman.

Wendell Phillips (1811-1884) was an abolitionist, orator, temperance advocate, and supporter of universal suffrage.

Mary Livermore (1820-1905) was a journalist, temperance advocate and woman suffragist.

Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) was a temperance advocate and internationally known woman suffragist.

Henry Ward Beecher (1813-1887) was a renowned minister, orator, and advocate of temperance and woman suffrage.

Frances Willard was the president of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union from 1878 until 1898. See Chapter Two of this thesis for a brief biography of Willard and discussion of the WCTU.

41Holley, “Story,” Chapter Five. Although as usual Holley did not provide specifics of date or book title, this meeting took place at the home of General Solon D. Hungerford, a prominent citizen in Adams, NY, and former brigadier-general of the 18th Regiment of the New York State Militia during the Civil War. Based on this information, Douglass was probably referring to Samantha at the Centennial.

42Ibid., Chapter Five.

43Despite the fact that Holley and Willard have been described by later scholars as close friends, and the sources for this thesis include a number of letters from Willard to Holley, according to “Story” the two met once after a lecture Willard had made in New York City, and thereafter “I never saw Frances Willard only in short meetings after her lectures.” Holley, “Story,” Chapters Six and Thirteen.

violation of her work, she did not challenge Willard directly. However, many years after the incident the intrusion was still raw enough to mention, and to relate to a world full of readers.

From the outset of “Story,” Holley repeatedly noted experiences that were unfavorably colored by the use of intoxicating drinks. These references were not lengthy -- often seemingly off-handed observations of episodes long past -- but showed that even as an elderly woman Holley recalled the destructive effects of intemperance with sadness and a sense of incomprehension that such a scourge should exist. She remembered that as a child she “wondered what made [her uncle’s] face such a bright red….Later I learned that his color was the bloody badge John Barleycorn bestows upon his victims in return for the ruin of their soul and body.”

Holley met True Williams, an artist who had been hired by Elisha Bliss to illustrate many of her early books. Williams “was excellent when his enemy, John Barleycorn, was absent.” Later she noted that Williams “might have gone far in his chosen profession had it not been for the Drink Demon who so often overtakes and overpowers them to whom the gods have given genius…Good hearted, gifted with rare genius, he was one of the costliest victims of John Barleycorn that I have ever met, and as I look back on it, the path of life seems strewn with them.”

Holley wondered if somehow Fate were conspiring to place her into situations in which she would confront the ever-despicable fact of intemperance, “the system I was always warring against and writing about.” She remembered that a fellow guest at a dinner party “made rather light of my extreme temperance views when I turned down my wine glass, remarking as I did so that I was old

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45Ibid., Chapter One. John Barleycorn is a slang expression meaning whiskey, derived from a 18th century British folk song describing the process of distilling alcohol.

46Ibid., Chapter Eight.

47Ibid., Chapter Twenty-four.

48Ibid., Chapter Eleven.
fashioned. Certainly he did not follow my example.”

When staying at the Willard Hotel during a visit to Washington, DC, Holley encountered a woman who spent her days drunk and entertaining in her room a constant succession of men and boys. Holley learned of this woman’s exploits from the chambermaids and could only surmise that the influence of the woman’s wealthy family prevented her eviction. In a New York City hotel a drunken woman in a neighboring room ripped the telephone out of the wall when room service refused to bring her any more liquor, and subsequently pounded on Holley’s door demanding to be admitted and allowed to drink. After this woman, only partially clothed, passed out in the hotel corridor she was finally removed to “the inebriate department at Bellevue Hospital.” In a hotel in Saratoga, Holley’s room was next to that of a young man “who lay for days…in the stupor and delirium that follows a long debauch.” A constant stream of people went into and out of the room, presumably to make sure that this young man did not harm himself, “as that end is one John Barleycorn is partial to.” For Holley these were only a few of the “countless incidents John Barleycorn delighted in.”

Holley later recounted an incident during a visit to Arlington National Cemetery in which a carriage driver mistakenly, and dangerously, took a rough road because “he had drunk not wisely but too well.” Her traveling companion became angry, “which is always worse than useless in dealing with a drunken person, and she warned him with many angry adjectives that she should write him up in the World.” This did not filter through his mind at all, I think.” The travelers finally left the driver alone in his drunkenness.

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49Ibid., Chapter Twenty-Four.

50Ibid., Chapter Eleven.

51The New York World was a newspaper published in New York City from 1860 until 1931.

52Holley, “Story,” Chapter Nineteen.
Holley was mentioned in a news item about William Shaver, her erstwhile book agent and the biological father of her adopted daughter May, when Shaver was arrested for forging Holley’s name on bad checks. The article described Shaver, “whose child is being cared for by Miss Holley,” as “a slave to drink at times. During the past few days he has been on a prolonged debauch and is now bordering on delirium tremens.” Holley protected Shaver when she “refused to say whether or not the check was genuine.”53 These reminiscences together with Holley’s statements and opinions on the evils of drink and the benefits of temperance showed how these convictions formed the core of her strongest values.

Of course Holley had a life separate from her work, and as with most celebrities she was the subject of many magazine and newspaper articles, her opinions were sought after, and her lifestyle and home were news. A sampling of these items revealed the breadth of her fame and the reach of Josiah Allen’s wife into the popular culture. Interestingly, these items not only managed to maintain a distinction between Holley and the fictional Samantha, but also highlighted the differences between the two -- seemingly to dispel any notion that Holley was an overweight hayseed instead of the well-spoken and successful author of some of the best-known books available. The November, 1887, issue of the Ladies’ Home Journal featured an article by Fanny Chambers Gooch titled “Marietta Holley (Josiah Allen’s Wife).” Gooch had an interview with Holley in New York City. Gooch described Holley’s dress and demeanor, emphasizing her femininity and sense of style. Holley’s “graceful figure, well-poised and nobly proportioned head, calm, intellectual face, lit up by those wondrous eyes, all formed a picture striking and queenly.” Gooch summarized Holley’s youth and home life, mentioning Bonnie View and Holley’s habit of wintering in the city. Gooch expressed gratitude that Holley’s writing should be the most successful of her many talents, so the world could enjoy Samantha Allen’s common sense advice on the social

53“Suspected of Forgery: A Drunken Man was Passing Out Checks with Marietta Holley’s Name on Them,” Watertown Daily Times, September 6, 1895.
ills of her day. Gooch noted that even with her busy schedule Holley kept apprised of current events and took time to reply to the mail she received from fans showing “gratitude for the good her noble championship has done them.” Gooch gushed with complimentary adjectives. Holley was “patient and brave…sympathetic and benevolent…unselfish…enthusiastic in every cause she espouses…absorbed in her theme.” Gooch reported that *Sweet Cicely* was Holley’s favorite book.\(^{54}\) Gooch closed her article with a comparison between Holley and other literary humorists.\(^{55}\) Needless to say, Holley was incomparable and far superior to any of her contemporaries:

> Not the least striking or important part of Miss Holley’s style, is the deep purpose and clear logic which underlies all this fun and badinage. In this respect she differs from other humorists, generally, of the other sex. …In her peculiar line she stands almost alone. She has few competitors and not a peer. She is, emphatically, the woman humorist of America.\(^{56}\)

An item in the May, 1889, edition of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* was titled “Confidence in Our Columns.” The magazine touted a complimentary letter from Marietta Holley concerning an advertisement she had placed in the magazine. Boasting that Josiah Allen’s Wife should use the magazine in this way, the item quoted Holley’s letter: “You never in your life, saw answers come pouring in as they have from that advertisement of mine in the *Journal*; it shows what a circulation you have from Maine to Texas.”\(^{57}\) Of course Holley’s letter also showed how wide an audience her

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\(^{54}\) *Sweet Cicely* is the first of Holley’s temperance novels, and is discussed in detail in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

\(^{55}\) Literary humorists of nineteenth century America are the subject of Chapter Three of this thesis.


work reached and how much income could be generated for the magazine simply by running her advertisement.  

The July 28, 1893, edition of the Watertown Daily Times ran an unsigned article titled “Farmers’ Picnic” describing a local event featuring speakers on various current event topics. One of the speakers discussed temperance, and the work of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union and the organization’s organ, the Union Signal: “the greatest prohibition paper, published, edited, and printed entirely by women. And, as Josiah Allen’s Wife says, not a male man to be found on the premises.”  

This reference to Holley was pertinent on several levels – connecting her to the temperance movement, showing that Josiah Allen’s Wife was a name that needed no explanation, and extolling Holley as an advocate for causes and accomplishments important to women.

An article titled “Evenings for Literary Clubs” by Fannie Mack Lothrop in the November, 1897, Ladies’ Home Journal suggested various themes for people interested in starting reading groups. One suggestion was “An Evening with American Humorists.” The item included a list of humorists, all male except for: “Any scene from Marietta Holley’s books might be given as a reading or a recitation. With a little ingenuity they might be arranged in dialogue form, with the

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58 Holley related an anecdote in Chapter Eleven of “Story” about the impact that the publication of her stories had on the Ladies’ Home Journal. As usual, she did not give a specific date for the event she described, other than after publication of Samantha at Saratoga, which means shortly after 1887. Holley found herself in a dispute about publishing her book chapters as magazine stories. She agreed to publish Samantha at Saratoga with Hubbard Publishers of Philadelphia, and accepted a $10,000.00 advance. She was subsequently offered a lucrative deal by Mr. Cyrus Curtis to publish individual chapters of the book as stories in the Ladies’ Home Journal. She obtained a verbal agreement with Hubbard to accept Curtis’s offer; Hubbard subsequently withdrew his word when Curtis tried to gain exclusive rights to the stories because Curtis had commissioned matching illustrations. The dispute was resolved when Holley agreed to write different stories to match Curtis’s illustrations. Holley appreciated Curtis’s position and his desire to have her stories published in his magazine. She wrote, “I suppose it is just as right to be truthful one way as another even if one is accused of egotism…And I do know that the little paper began to pick up after I commenced to write for it… I saw that some reader of the Ladies’ Home Journal had written… ‘Josiah Allen’s wife MADE the Ladies’ Home Journal’… I am very sure that Josiah Allen’s wife did help to make it very popular at that time.”

suggestion of a home scene, with Josiah Allen and his wife sitting talking beside a centre-table covered with a green felt cloth."^{60}

The “Woman’s World” page in the June 28, 1898, edition of the *Logansport (Indiana) Pharos-Tribune* contained an item titled “Dishonoring the Flag.” The article was a report on a symposium held in New York City about the trend of using “Old Glory for every kind of purpose, utilitarian or decorative, with the view to solving a question just where the dividing line might be between patriotism and desecration…Miss Marietta Holley, creator of Samantha Allen and well known as Josiah Allen’s Wife, was appealed to for her opinion.” Holley agreed that the flag should be used for patriotic purposes only, and advocated exposing children to the flag as much as possible. Holley was asked specifically about “using the colors for sofa pillows, draperies, and the like.” She replied, “Use it for nothing that tends to cheapen or dishonor it in any way. It is a sacred emblem and should be cherished as such.”^{61} Holley’s opinion was noteworthy and of social influence.

The *Ladies’ Home Journal* March, 1902, edition ran Franklin B. Wiley’s article, “Summer Homes of Famous People.” Holley’s Bonnie View was one of the featured residences. Wiley described Holley’s “trim, sedate” home as having beautiful grounds befitting the name. He noted that Holley was born and lived her entire life near the site of Bonnie View. The home was tastefully furnished, the gardens and fish pond well tended, and the household pets happy and healthy.^{62} To Mr. Wiley, Holley’s lifestyle was worthy of admiration.

The *Ladies’ Home Journal* for October, 1903, contained an unsigned article titled “If They Had a Million Dollars: What Nine Famous Women Would Do if a Fortune Were Theirs.” Marietta

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^{61}“Dishonoring the Flag,” *The Logansport (Indiana) Pharos-Tribune*, June 28, 1898.

Holley would build a stone chapel in her local community that she would call “Hope Chapel.” The chapel would serve as a Sunday school for the local children, and would be furnished with an organ, library, and stage, so that young people would have a safe place to go for entertainment and to mingle with friends. After establishing the first chapel in her home district, Holley would “build many ‘Hope Chapels’ in all parts of our land…and so do my little part toward glorifying the quiet country crossroads and remote districts with these helpful agencies, bringing sunshine into so many monotonous lives.”

In a follow up article the January, 1905, edition of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* reported that Holley had established a Hope Sunday-School in an existing building near her home in Adams, New York. Holley provided the monetary support for the school, which included her envisioned school supplies, organ, and library. The school had a children’s choir and sponsored special events such as Children’s Day and Harvest Day. Holley played the organ at services whenever possible. She exclaimed, “Some day I hope to see erected for the Hope Sunday-school the little stone chapel of my dreams.” Holley was portrayed as an esteemed philanthropist.

A column in the November, 1903, edition of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* was titled “A Glimpse of Marietta Holley,” by Mabel Wagnalls. Wagnalls was the daughter of Adam Wagnalls, who, together with Isaac Funk, published a number of Holley’s books. Wagnalls related the details of an afternoon spent with Holley at Bonnie View. Wagnalls took pains to describe Holley as an elegantly attired and poised woman, completely opposite from Samantha Allen. Holley recounted amusing anecdotes about tourists and fans dropping by the home looking for Samantha, and being disappointed to discover that Samantha did not exist and that Holley was a refined woman who

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spoke good English. Holley also explained why she chose the names Samantha and Josiah Allen’s wife for her main character: Holley wanted a name that conveyed “practicality,” as well as self-confidence and “‘love …so solid that she was willing to take second place before all the world as plain Josiah Allen’s Wife.’”

Adelaide E. Byrd’s August 19, 1904, article in The Logansport (Indiana) Pharos noted that Holley was “charming…but not glib.” Furthermore, “It would be hard to find a finer type of womanhood than Marietta Holley. She is honest and sincere as the sunlight, and no human being can have more decided convictions of right and wrong, yet she says the lesson of life to her has been that of tolerance, to think kindly of all mankind, even of those who are erring.” Byrd complimented Holley’s hominess, saying she should be an example to all women of the great achievements one person can accomplish given the talent and the resources. For Byrd, Holley should be “an inspiration to her sex.”

The Lowell (Massachusetts) Sun August 20, 1904, Woman’s Page ran an article by Elizabeth Lee titled “Marietta Holley, Woman Humorist.” Lee recounted her discovery of Holley’s work through a friend who was a book agent. Conventional wisdom of the day held that a woman could not be a humorist. Lee was surprised and pleased that “it was an American author who proved woman to have an unmistakable sense of humor.” Lee was determined to meet Holley in person, and arranged a trip to New York City during one of Holley’s annual visits. To Lee, Holley had “the face of a strongly intellectual woman with a serious moral purpose to do all the good she can, [who] nevertheless cannot help laughing at people and things as she goes along.” Lee went on to note:

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But she took hold of the tendency to laugh at people and things and harnessed it down to work out her moral purpose. That is the key to Miss Holley’s literary productions. But for the moral purpose to benefit us by her writing she would never have written. To heal mankind of its folly she doses it with the laughter cure. In her heart she thinks of herself as a moralist rather than a humorist.

Lee pointed out Holley’s main causes were “those of women and temperance.” She compared Holley to Mark Twain as a humorist and to Michelangelo as an artist. She explained that Holley laughed and cried along with her readers, a quality in a writer that assured success.67

A British magazine *The Critic* printed a brief item in the January, 1905, edition, in a column signed only “The Lounger.” The Lounger noted, “Miss Marietta Holley has done much to add to the gaiety of nations. As ‘Josiah Allen’s Wife,’ she has entertained as large an audience…as has been entertained by Mark Twain. Miss Holley’s humor is homey but none the less attractive to thousands of readers. Its very homeliness is its charm.”68

This short paragraph in “the Lounger” became the basis for many comparisons between Holley and Mark Twain and eventually evolved after her death into repeated characterizations of Holley as the “female Mark Twain.” This epithet appeared to be a value judgment, to lend some legitimacy to the study of Holley’s life and work: surely an author that could stand up to comparison with the famous Mark Twain must be worthy of remembrance. An early example was an article about Holley by Richard G. Case published in the November 7, 1976, edition of the *Syracuse Herald American* titled “Our ‘Female Mark Twain.’” The fact that the article mentioned Twain only once and only in reference to the 1905 “Lounger” review might suggest that the title


was intended to hook subscribers into reading what might otherwise be uninteresting or overlooked. Furthermore, nearly every Holley analyst mentioned the “Lounger” review.

Holley’s reminisced in her “Story” that her publisher urged her to travel to Nook Farm in Hartford, Connecticut, to meet the writers in that literary community, including Twain. However, Holley did not make the trip, and she did not note ever meeting Twain in person. She also remembered a conversation during which illustrator True Williams exclaimed, “Mark Twain is jealous of you, yes jealous! And the company doesn’t pay you half enough. They are cheating you.”

Holley also commented:

I have nearly all of Twain’s books I think in my library, but I am sorry to say that I don’t believe I have ever read one of them entirely through unless it was Tom Sawyer. I rather liked that, and also some of his magazine articles, especially the one he wrote after the untimely and tragic death of his daughter Jean. His heart spoke through that and went to other hearts.

Notwithstanding this non-relationship between Holley and Twain, the comparisons persisted and may have seemed natural since the two authors shared a publisher and illustrator, were active during the same years, and both used vernacular language. Holley scholar Charlotte Templin even evaluated Twain’s longevity and Holley’s obscurity: “because of her gender, Holley could not meet certain cultural needs or fill certain cultural roles that Twain, as a male, was eligible

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70Holley, “Story,” Chapter Four.

71Ibid., Chapter Twenty-Four. The “company” Williams referred to was The American Publishing Company, publisher of both Holley’s and Twain’s books. Williams illustrated both Holley’s and Twain’s books.

and qualified to fill…how could [Samantha], a woman, represent individualism to a culture in which women were only marginally individuals?”

However, Holley was quite capable of creating political satire equally as biting, ironic, and funny as that of her male fellow humorists, as illustrated in a line of dialogue from My Opinions. Samantha, exasperated with the stupidity of a minor character, asked him, “Hain’t there no other business you can get into…Hain’t there no cornfields where you could hire out for a scare-crow – can’t you get to be a United States Senator?” This line, published in 1873, predated by eight years Twain’s famous 1881 quip about being both an idiot and a member of Congress. Holley was a female political satirist and reformer, in her own right.

In fact, Holley was sought after by many prominent reformers and corresponded with a number of her contemporary luminaries. A few of the letters have survived, and have been stored in the Flower Memorial Library and the archives of the Watertown Daily Times, both in Watertown, New York. Some of these letters revealed not only the wide appeal of her work but also the hope that her writing might have a true and long-lasting impact on the social reforms of her day.

Of the available letters, most were from Frances Willard, Mary E. Willard, and Anna Gordon of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU). Willard’s earliest letter to Holley was in 1877, shortly after the publication of Samantha at the Centennial. Although this book has often been touted as an example of Holley’s women’s rights activism, the story contained a strong

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74Marietta Holley, My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1873), 200.

75The Twain quote is, “Suppose you were an idiot, and suppose you were a member of Congress; but I repeat myself.”

76The available letters were all written to Holley; no letters written by Holley were available.

77See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of Samantha at the Centennial.
temperance message that may have caught Willard’s eye. The brief missive has a self-introductory tone, with Willard inviting Holley to attend the Fourth Annual meeting of the WCTU, and enclosing an event brochure. Willard wrote, “Representing, as you do, so much of beneficent influence, it is earnestly hoped that you may accept this invitation hereby extended, to send words of counsel or encouragement.”\[78\] After Willard became president of the WCTU in 1879, her letters and postcards to Holley became much more familiar, often using the salutations, “My Dear Betsey,” “My Dear Samantha,” or “My Dear Friend.” Willard’s letters all had the same goal – to convince Holley to attend a WCTU meeting, to speak in public for the temperance cause, or to submit an article for publication in the WCTU organ, The Union Signal.\[79\]

Willard continued to write to Holley, and persisted in her attempts to connect Holley directly with the WCTU, until Willard’s death in 1898. Willard’s goal was unrealized. Although Holley was a prolific pro-temperance writer, she did not have a specific WCTU role, and she did not mention even having a WCTU membership.\[80\]

Holley also received several letters from Susan B. Anthony. As with Willard, the Holley scholars have portrayed Holley and Anthony as close friends. In fact, Holley mentioned only one meeting with Anthony, again after a lecture.\[81\] Anthony, too, wrote to persuade Holley to make

\[78\]Willard to Holley, September 19, 1877.

\[79\]Willard to Holley, November 19, 1879; November 28, no year on postmark; January 29, no year on postmark.

\[80\]Holley was listed as honorary vice-president of the Adams, New York, “W.C.T.U.” in articles published in the Watertown Daily Times on September 30, 1915, and May 5, 1916. There was no mention of her attendance at these meetings or active participation in the organization. The September 20, 1913, edition of the Times about a local county WCTU meeting mentioned that “A telephone message was sent to the convention by Miss Marietta Holley of Pierrepont Manor sending greetings and wishing success to the convention.”

\[81\]Anthony wrote an undated letter to Holley in which she mentions this visit. Holley mentions the visit in Chapter Four of “Story.” Interestingly, among the books on display at the Susan B. Anthony House Museum in Rochester, NY, is a copy of the 1904 Samantha at the St. Louis Exposition.
public appearances to promote woman suffrage. She, too, sometimes addressed Holley as “My Dear Betsey Bobbitt,” or “My Dear Samantha.” In a letter dated June 26, 1878, Anthony sent Holley the report of a congressional committee against a National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) petition for a 16th Constitutional Amendment to enfranchise women. Anthony hoped that “Samantha may have a comment to make on it.” Anthony also suggested that Holley should write for NWSA publications, exclaiming, “I am so glad New York has the honor of giving such a genius on woman & of woman to the world.” Finally, Anthony wrote, “especially to invite you – nay, urge you – to attend our 20th Anniversary of the W.R. Movement…If you cannot be present, will you not send a letter to be read and printed – that we may have the influence of your name as well as good word – to start us on our 4th Decade.”

In a letter dated May 29, 1884, Anthony mentioned having received a recent letter from Holley, expressing delight “to know that Samantha is writing another book…telling the woes of Washington life” detailing the “legal disabilities” of a “hapless woman.” This book must have been *Sweet Cicely*, published in 1885. In a subsequent letter dated January 31, 1886, Anthony wrote to compliment Holley on *Sweet Cicely* and to ask her to make a public statement in support of woman suffrage: “I want you to send us a letter or better come here [to Washington, DC]

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82 Women gained the right to vote via the 19th Amendment, ratified in 1920.

83 Anthony to Holley, June 26, 1878.

84 Anthony to Holley, May 29, 1884.

85 See Chapter 6 of this thesis for a discussion of *Sweet Cicely*. Anthony’s letter listed these “disabilities” suffered by women, all of which Holley used in her satire in *Sweet Cicely*, including the daughter who works wherever her father decrees, “in his kitchen, out on his farm –for the Liquor seller…–even to a house of ill fame –if he allows her to choose her own trade – the proceeds are legally his until she is of age…,” the wife who has no right to her person or property or the “profits of the marriage copartnership;” the mother denied the custody of her own children, including unborn children, who may be willed away by the father; and as citizens paying “penalties & bearing the burdens” while being denied the “privileges and immunities, especially the right to vote.” Anthony’s letter, while factual and logical, read like a scolding, bitter, frustrated handbill. Holley colored these very issues and with her rueful and ironic humor, still with an undercurrent of bitterness, but also infused with the sympathy and sentiment that she hoped would move her readers to support reforms.
yourself and give a real earnest truth to Congress in person…so essential to carry forward this most
momentous revolution the world has ever seen.”86 Of course Holley never attended a NWSA or
NAWSA convention, submitted any articles to The Woman’s Journal,87 or spoke before Congress.
For all of Holley’s advocacy of women’s rights, she also never mentioned a membership in any
suffrage organization.88

Holley was celebrated and revered by those in reform circles and by her immense
following of enthusiastic readers. As an extremely prolific, popular, and financially successful
author, Holley was also, quite naturally, the subject of scrutiny from book reviewers. The reviews
showed a range of opinion that seemed to reflect the interests of the reviewer more than the merits
of or intent behind Holley’s work. Some reviewers seemed to have forgotten that Holley’s writing
was popular fiction with a specific purpose: to promote social reform to a wide audience of
frequently unsophisticated readers seeking humorous entertainment. Of course not all of Holley’s
readers were bumpkins; many well-educated and reform minded luminaries were among her
aficionados. However, a reviewer looking for great literature, believable characters, and well-
developed plots was undoubtedly disappointed. An unnamed reviewer began a critique of Sweet
Cicely with, “The power of style is never better exemplified than when it is absent.” This person
went on to comment, “Admirers of Miss Holley’s work will like this better than ever, and those
indifferent to the charms of ‘Samantha’ will sigh as they glance at page after page of the familiar

86 Anthony to Holley, January 31, 1886.

87 NWSA was the National Woman Suffrage association, founded by Elizabeth Cady Stanton
and Susan B. Anthony in 1870. NAWSA is the National American Woman Suffrage Association, the
result of the 1890 merger between NWSA and AWSA, the American Woman Suffrage Association
founded by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell. The Woman’s Journal was the NAWSA organ.

88 Holley did support publically Leonard Wood (1860-1927) for president in 1920. Wood was
the Chief of Staff of the United States Army, Military Governor of Cuba, and Governor General of the
Philippines. He became a prominent Republican Party leader and a candidate for the 1920 presidential
nomination.
Another review of *Sweet Cicely* stated that the book had “at least a hundred pages to many…Samantha…becomes wearisome long enough before the last chapter is reached.” The review went on to belittle Samantha’s reform goal, her meeting with political leaders, and her attempt to promote temperance through the use of the overly sentimental Cicely and her shocking mistreatment at the hands of almost everyone around her with any ties to liquor interests. The “absurdity of these spun out pages” was hardly offset by the “large amount of shrewdness and logic about Samantha…” However, the reviewer did concede that “the arguments here dressed up in laughable style may have weight where a less entertaining presentation of vital questions would fail – if the author only knew when to stop.”

*The Portland (Indiana) Commercial* of August 18, 1887, published a front page review of *Samantha at Saratoga*. This favorable notice lauded Holley’s lampooning of “gay, artificial Saratoga…[in] ludicrous, laugh provoking contrasts.” The review complimented the appearance of the book, especially the illustrations by Frederick Opper, “the leading artist of *Puck*,” and one of the best known cartoonists and illustrators of the late nineteenth century. The article concluded, “The book is decidedly a hit…the reader looks and laughs and looks again. Altogether, the book is a rare product and the purchasers will not be disappointed.”

Another brief notice about *Samantha at Saratoga* appeared in the December, 1889, *Ladies’ Home Journal*. The first part of this item was an advertisement for the book that included the

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statement, “Our readers will doubtless remember that the first six chapters of this book appeared for the first time in the numbers of the *Ladies’ Home Journal.*” The *LHJ* editors apparently wanted to take some credit for the success of the book, to tout the quality of the stories published in the *LHJ*, and to cultivate a connection between the magazine and a best-selling author. The end of the article was an excerpt of a review from the *Lutheran Observer*:

Now that Miss Holley has written *Samantha at Saratoga*, she is in the zenith of her fame and her glory. Her book is the most amusing ever written. The book is not only inexpressibly and irrepressibly amusing – it has a purpose and a mission. It is an evangel of the keenest, slyest, wittiest and drollest sarcasm and irony on the follies of fashion. In short, Miss Holley is, so to speak, a Widow Bedott, Mark Twain, Petroleum Nasby, and Sam Slick all rolled into one, and intensified by a bright woman’s wit and indescribable way of putting things.

A Holley family friend, Bishop Newman, submitted a review to an unnamed New York newspaper, which Holley called “the most brilliant tribute of all.” Newman praised *Samantha at Saratoga* as a “tonic for mental prostration…a provocation for wholesome laughter, and an inspiration to godliness. …It is the bitterest satire sugar coated with the sweetness of exhilarating fun.” Newman went on to laud Holley’s genius, her art, and her personality, concluding that, “The world would be blank without her.”

Senator Henry Blair wrote a letter to a New York newspaper praising Holley and her writing: “I have often thought when wearied out with grave and exhaustive labors that one great reason why I wanted to live, in fact why I continued to live, is that Miss Holley writes a book

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92 Other issues of the *Ladies’ Home Journal* contained advertisements for Holley’s books. All of these ads pointed out the *LHJ* connection to Holley as a featured author for the magazine.

93 These are the names of the characters or personae of other nineteenth century humorists. Bedott and Slick are discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis. Nasby was the pseudonym of David Ross Locke, a well-known vernacular humorist and political commentator most active during the Civil War.


95 Holley, “Story,” Chapter Thirteen.
occasionally and that I read it, and keep on reading it till a new one comes. Her works are full of wit and humor, and yet are among them most logical eloquent, pathetic and instructive productions of our time.”\textsuperscript{96}

A British literary magazine, \textit{The Athenaeum} published a review of \textit{Sweet Cicely} on January 10, 1891. The unnamed author clearly despised the book, which was already six years old when this article appeared. The review opened, “\textit{Sweet Cicely} may be truthfully described as the most afflicting piece of would-be drollery that has been perpetrated by any of the long line of imitators, conscious or unconscious, of Artemus Ward.” The reviewer used the word “tedious” repeatedly in describing Holley’s writing, and said that her combination of humor and pathos “are productive of acute mental dyspepsia.” Holley’s style was “a mixture of unbridled dialect and high-falutin’ melodrama.”\textsuperscript{97}

The \textit{New York Times} reviewed \textit{Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife} on November 18, 1905.\textsuperscript{98} The notice really said very little about the book and did not bother to rate the book at all. The unnamed author described the story briefly, mentioned some of the travels of Samantha and her entourage, and concluded that “readers of Samantha books do not need any further information about this addition to the series. They know Samantha’s way.”\textsuperscript{99}

Of the reviews mentioned here, only the \textit{Portland Commercial} and the \textit{Ladies’ Home Journal} seemed to understand Holley’s work. These reviews were not looking for lasting literary value, but rather accepted the books’ value as good reads, funny, attractive, and full of moral

\textsuperscript{96}Ibid., Chapter Four.

\textsuperscript{97}Unsigned review of \textit{Sweet Cicely}, \textit{The Athenaeum}, Issue 3298, January 10, 1891.

\textsuperscript{98}\textit{Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife} is discussed at length in Chapter Seven of this thesis.

messages about right living. Holley often commented on her surprise at her books’ popularity. However, she took full advantage of her success and made the books her platform for promoting social reforms. A reviewer looking for some deep meaning or lasting literary excellence was bound to be disappointed. Furthermore, Holley’s reforms, particularly temperance and woman suffrage were very unpopular, especially with men. A male reviewer might be inclined to pan a book that promoted reforms that would give women a greater voice in public affairs.

The important point, and one that some of the reviewers seemed to miss, was that Holley worked hard and wanted her books to be successful, but she was writing popular fiction with a specific goal. The books were time sensitive, and necessarily superficial. Through her characters, Holley spoke plainly to be sure to convey her message. She was funny, sarcastic, ironic, and pointed in her story-telling. She was necessarily repetitive, but for her that repetition was not the tedious ramblings of a hack trying to fill as many pages as possible with meaningless drivel. She was a reformer, and she had to remind society over and over again until those reforms were achieved. Christine V. Whipple Clarke explained Holley’s mission and worth in a short letter published in the January 27, 1900, New York Times:

A Word for Miss Holley
To the New York Times Saturday Review:
In looking through your issue of to-day, “Woman Among Humorists” calls forth a protest in favor of my sex as I recall the works of Marietta Holley. I don’t know that the man referred to would call her or that she calls herself a “professedly humorous woman writer,” but the fact remains that her writings many times provoke the risible to the point of tears. I consider it the surest proof that her works are to the reading public humorous that her advocacy of temperance, equal rights and kindred unpopular subjects is put in a form that is read by so long a list of persons as is indicated by the slips in the volumes by the author that we find in the public libraries. If it is said that chapters of Miss Holley’s books are not humorous, it ought also to be said that the same is true of the works of a number of the writers whom the male speaker classed in the “long list of male humorists.”

Clarke captured Holley and her intentions. Clearly Clarke agreed with Holley’s arguments for social reforms. Just as clearly Holley enjoyed a wide audience and notable popularity. The negative reviews were irrelevant. Holley’s fans bought and read her books, and received her unmistakable reform message. Indeed, Holley closed her “Story” with this statement from Chapter Twenty-seven: “I have always kept a light burning in my mind, a vivid hope and desire that I might do some little good in the world… that I might never write a word that would do harm and discourage any soul, but that I might brighten the way a little for poor humanity and perhaps kindle a new flame of hope and aspiration in some tired and desponding heart.”101 These lines did not suggest the thinking of a radical reformer, but of a person who saw problems and used her unique talents to offer solutions. Holley’s mission was accomplished.

Despite the uneven opinions of Holley reviewers during her active years, and her virtual disappearance from public memory after her death, Holley has been remembered in scholarly circles for her literary contributions and has been listed in several compilations of notable American female authors. In 1937 Edwin Mims included Holley in the Dictionary of American Biography. After a brief biography, Mims noted that Holley “express[es] in Samantha’s clumsy vernacular one of her own basic theories of writing. But it is in Samantha’s philippics against the liquor traffic…and male corruption and stupidity in government that it is possible to identify most completely the character of Josiah Allen’s Wife.”102 Mims’s favorable assessment of Holley’s work emphasized her temperance stance and praised her creation of Samantha as a tactic for promoting reform.

Also in 1937, Ellis Parker Butler wrote a complimentary article about Holley’s work, noting her talent for making her readers laugh while promoting her reform causes. Butler noted

101 Holley, “Story.” Chapter Twenty-seven.

Holley’s “keen sense of the practical application of humor to situation and of the use of the popular topics of the day to interest her readers.” Butler concluded that Holley’s work was worth reading and that she should be remembered as “a person worthy of our sincere respect- living sanely in a small up-state New York village, writing industriously for many years, never too impressed by her own importance, accumulating a competence, and always gentle and kind.”

Margaret Wyman Langworthy’s biographical sketch of Holley appeared in 1950’s Notable American Women 1607-1950. Langworthy, one of the scholars who had assigned to Holley a predominant women’s rights agenda, claimed that Holley’s books “owed their tremendous popularity to the rising tide of streaming rationalism as well as to their comic treatment of domestic incident and masculine presumptions in a way that endeared Samantha to many a wifely heart.” Langworthy mentioned temperance as one of a number of reforms that Holley championed in addition to women’s rights.

Patricia L. Morse contributed a Holley biographical sketch to 1994’s The Oxford Companion to Women’s Writing in the United States. Morse claimed that Holley “found success with one of the first positive female characters in American comic writing, which she may have created in reaction against Frances Whitcher’s Widow Bedott.” Morse noted Holley’s mixture of humor, dialect, and sentiment in her creation of Samantha in contrast to Josiah’s anti-woman attitudes and Betsey Bobbet’s foolish pursuit of a husband. Morse characterized Holley’s work as


104Margaret Wyman Langworthy wrote a doctoral dissertation that included a study of Holley’s work. See Chapters Four and Eight of this thesis for a discussion of Langworthy’s paper.


106Whichter and Bedott are discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.
“Christian feminism” that promoted suffrage, temperance, and justice, and reached a wide audience with a pro-women’s rights message.\textsuperscript{107}

These biographical entries showed Holley’s lasting contribution to the social causes of her times. These reviewers accepted Holley’s work at face value, without judgment on lasting literary merits. Literary immortality was never Holley’s goal. The meaning of her work was in her present, in human life and relationships, in liberty and freedom for women. She hoped and liked to believe that she had made a positive contribution to her world, and lived her life accordingly and responsibly.

As this chapter has clearly shown, Holley’s life had an impact on her work. Her work had an impact on her society. She was one voice among many, a talented voice able to reach out to her world to try to change for the better the reality of life for American women. The following chapters of this thesis will examine the social forces and writing styles of nineteenth century America that influenced Holley’s life and work, review the Holley scholarship, explore how she used her novels to convey her reform messages -- and in the process search beneath the women’s rights façade to uncover Holley the temperance movement champion.

CHAPTER TWO

LIFE AND REFORMS WITHIN WIMMEN’S SPEAR

You do know, don’t you, dear Samantha, that it has always been men’s chief aim and desire to protect the weaker inferior sect…Men love to protect wimmen.

--Josiah Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley, *Josiah Allen on the Woman Question*

By the time Marietta Holley was born on July 16, 1836, American society had long been a patriarchy in which women were secondary players. Women were integral to society, of course, but men were society’s architects and directors. In striving to assert autonomy and a voice in public affairs women became the engine behind many social reforms. Holley’s experience as a woman in this culture that defined female existence from a male perspective had clear implications for her interest in two of the major reform movements of the late nineteenth century: temperance and women’s rights. Her satirical stories and novels reflected the tension between the male-derived roles for women and the drive among women to claim, create, and exercise self-definition.

In this chapter I investigate traditional roles and values for women like Marietta Holley, who were white, middle-class, socially conscious, and reform-minded. I will also explore the temperance movement from a woman’s perspective as a necessary reform closely entwined with the movement for women’s rights. I will argue that male attempts to curtail the life experiences of these women had results that may have been unintended but should not have been unexpected. Holley and her contemporaries were drawn to social reform activism, which reflected and supported the values of greatest importance to the lives of women, especially politically guaranteed rights to help shape society. As a writer dedicated to social improvement and a role for women in American culture, Holley enjoyed a unique opportunity incorporate her passion for these reforms into her work. She wrote to influence public opinion and to educate her readers that women could transcend male-imposed restrictions; that women deserved and should claim a place in society that would be valued as much as that of men.
American women in the nineteenth century were relegated to a subordinate social and political status that obstructed the exercise of self-determination. This gender-based, extrinsically imposed denial of self formed the foundation of restrictions on women’s lives. Society had expectations for acceptable female behavior both in and outside of the home, and limited opportunities for education, independence, and participation in public affairs. Historian Nancy Woloch noted that from the earliest days of the new republic women’s lives centered on the home, domestic affairs, family, health, and morals. Conventional wisdom dictated that a woman was dependent on the men in her life. She should be interested primarily in marriage and in making the kind of home that would be welcoming to a husband. She should be self-effacing, modest, compliant, and humble.¹ In the nineteenth century this ideology of sex came to be known as woman’s sphere. This term was ingrained in the lexicon and was commonly understood, either positively or negatively depending on who was using the term, to describe women’s existence. In fact, woman’s sphere, or in the vernacular of Marietta Holley’s characters “woman’s spear” or “wimmen’s spear,” was a theme that Holley used repeatedly throughout her career to satirize the marginalized status of women in American society.²

The concept of woman’s sphere has been studied and debated extensively by the women whose lives were affected, either for better or for worse, and by contemporary nineteenth century observers including Marietta Holley. Modern historians have also analyzed the concept with varying conclusions. Historian Linda Kerber considered woman’s sphere a “metaphor for complex power relations in social and economic contexts.” She claimed that women were confined to the home not because of some biological predisposition or intellectual inferiority, but by design to


²Holley was not the only humor author to use the phrase woman’s spear in a disparaging way. See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of the humor of Charles Farrar Browne.
distinguish authoritative masculinity from feeble femininity. For Kerber woman’s sphere was a trope, a metaphor that twentieth century historians used to support the claim that the restrictions placed on women’s lives represented prescriptive limits instead of the perspective of sphere as a description of women’s lives.

Historian Mary P. Ryan concluded, “the very location of the individuals in society, as well as the roles, temperaments, and spaces assigned males and females, was implicated in the doctrine of spheres, a notion that was as grandiose as it was vague. A whole theory of being has been constructed around gender differences, a veritable ontology of sex.” Ryan likened the sex-based dichotomy of the nineteenth century to “separate but equal.” Society operated within a culture that was not to traverse the “border [between] privacy and family life.” Ryan noted that even female participation in the temperance and women’s rights movements in the late nineteenth century did not dispel the notion of woman’s sphere. Indeed, most men, and many women, respected and accepted the limitations of sphere and believed that women could exercise rights “without tampering with [the] fundamental elements of the existing social order.”

Marietta Holley’s observations of the experiences of nineteenth century American women validated Kerber’s and Ryan’s interpretations. In fact, Holley noted in her autobiographical writings, “Perish the thought of

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6Ibid., 241.
a woman seeking or deserving any other profession in life save matrimony… to sit quietly in the corner in the home.”

As a woman living in the society and culture rather than an historian looking a century into the past, Holley could be more pointed in depicting what was for her a personal affront to the choices open to women. In response to the constraining forces encircling women, Holley created Betsey Bobbet and Josiah Allen to represent and satirize the concept of woman’s sphere. These characters were generally ignorant, short-sighted, and resistant to change, much like the people and attitudes in Holley’s observations upon which the characters were based.

Holley was born into an America that had a well-established gender-based social structure. In fact, the concept of woman’s sphere was evident from the inception of the American republic. Historian Barbara Welter coined the term the cult of true womanhood to describe the effective application of the concept of woman’s sphere in the first half of the nineteenth century. Welter was one of the earliest analysts of woman’s sphere, and set the tone for the work of later researchers. For Welter the cult of true womanhood, and by extension, woman’s sphere, was a negative prescription for female behavior. Indeed, Welter’s use of the word cult had undertones of imposed mind-control. According to Welter’s interpretation, society saw a woman as physically and intellectually weak, unprepared for a meaningful role in the larger community, and unable to cope with the harsh realities of business and politics; her strength lay in her ability to make a home into a kind of sanctuary, sheltered from the tumult of the outside world. Welter noted that a woman should exhibit “four cardinal virtues – piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.” Only through the constant exercise of these virtues could a woman achieve her rightful place in society, and only within the confines of the home, marriage, and motherhood. The pious wife and mother was

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8 See Chapters One, Five, Six, and Seven of this thesis for discussions of Holley’s characters.
charged with shielding her family from base, immoral influences and behavior. Female piety was ordained by God, and only woman could save those around her from worldly temptation and sin. Purity in body, spirit, and intentions was critical to happiness; wives should be not only personally pure, but also promote pure motives and honorable actions among others, particularly husbands. Submissiveness was perhaps the greatest of all feminine virtues. A woman must conform to customs, obey her husband, and bear any and all hardships with passivity and acceptance. All of these virtues must be embedded in a perfect sense of domesticity.

The society that Welter described accepted as a matter of course the separation of the sexes that perpetuated economic and political inequality and denied a woman the most basic human value: determining the meaning of one’s life. Indeed, the facts of life for American women in the nineteenth century have been well-documented by both primary participants and secondary scholarship. A brief sampling of the writings of five influential nineteenth century thinkers, three male and two female, revealed the predominant cultural attitude toward women and supported the conclusions of later studies of woman’s sphere. Furthermore, the ideas of these five, and countless others who shared similar convictions, illustrated the types of limits and attitudes that influenced Holley’s brand of satire and social commentary.

The son of French aristocrats, twenty-five year old Alexis de Tocqueville (1805-1859) left the political upheaval of the French Revolution of 1830 to observe democracy in the new American republic. He recorded his observations in his lengthy, two-volume Democracy in America, published in 1835 and 1840. Among the many facets of American life that fascinated Tocqueville was the relationship of the culture to American women. Tocqueville offered his impressions of life

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for Anglo-American women, primarily Protestant women of financial means from families with social standing. These women were raised and educated with the goal of successful marriage and even those who followed husbands to the western wilderness and experienced the hardships of frontier life had an “inward strength” that reflected the resolute character necessary for survival. Tocqueville’s account was the perfect, and possibly one of the earliest, descriptions of woman’s sphere, and may even have been the derivation of the term. His language evoked an existence in which women orbited around the nucleus of the home and family. He noted that “in the United States the inexorable opinion of the public carefully circumscribes woman within the narrow circle of domestic interests and duties and forbids her to step beyond it.”  

Tocqueville also recorded his impressions of American marriage, the basic social relationship within the home sphere. The primary domestic institution, marriage was both fundamental to a woman’s role in society and, in the early nineteenth century, a relationship predicated on inequality. The concept of couverture, one of the earliest manifestations of the inequality of marriage, was incorporated into law and reinforced the second class status of married women in American society. Historians Jane L. Coryell and Nora Faires explained that couverture was carried over during colonial times from English common law and amounted to a “civil death” for women after marriage. A married woman had no property rights, no legal rights, no title to any

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12 Ibid., 223, 225.
earned wages, no right to sue for divorce, and no custody rights. Kerber pointed out that although couverture was touted as a means of protecting women from unscrupulous husbands and male relatives, a woman living in this state of enforced powerlessness lacked the resources to shelter whatever wealth, land, or possessions that she may inherit or bring into a marriage. She was left at the mercy of a male-dominated “Western political tradition that defined all women as politically and legally irresponsible.”

Beyond the financial and political ramifications of couverture, nineteenth century marriage was also an instrument of social control over women. Tocqueville matter-of-factly wrote of his observations of American marriage: “In America, the independence of woman is irrecoverably lost in the bonds of matrimony…a wife…lives in the home of her husband as if it were a cloister.” He also observed that economic dependence “obliges a wife to confine herself to the house.” He noted that an American woman submitted to the restrictions of marriage “without a struggle and without a murmur. …She voluntarily and freely enters upon this engagement [and] supports her new position with courage, because she chose it…and follows it to the end without seeking to turn back.” Tocqueville’s perception of marriage was non-judgmental, completely accepting, and in total disregard for a woman’s self-determination.

Perhaps as a man Tocqueville was unable to view marriage from a woman’s perspective. Had he been able to do so, he may have anticipated the emergence of attitudes later in the century that challenged the earlier conventions of marriage. Seemingly so entrenched in American culture

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15 Tocqueville, *Democracy in America*, 212.

16 Ibid., 218.

17 Ibid., 213.
since the beginnings of the new nation, unquestioned by a large segment of society, and extolled as illustrative of the virtue of American womanhood, by mid and late nineteenth century the confines of marriage had become anathema to a growing number of women determined to dismantle the cultural and legal inequality of the sexes. Although, of course, she never mentioned Tocqueville or his work by name, Marietta Holley created Betsey Bobbet to satirize these persistent attitudes and to lampoon the social conventions that measured a woman’s worth and dignity as a function of her marital status.

Francis Wayland (1797-1865) was another well-known and respected nineteenth century theologian, philosopher, physician, and educator. Ordained as a Baptist minister at age twenty-one, by age thirty-one he left his pastorate to become President of Brown University in Providence, Rhode Island. The politically, socially, and morally conservative Wayland offered his perspective on life for women. In The Elements of Moral Science, published in 1835, he explained the laws of a Christian marriage. At first Wayland appeared to suggest a modicum of equality in the conjugal relationship. He stated that neither party had control over the conscience of the other, the wife could not dictate the methods of the husband’s livelihood, and each party should be motivated by affection to consider the happiness of the other.

However, Wayland soon revealed his adherence to popular culture by explaining that when differences of opinion or important decisions arose that affected the home and family, the word of the husband was paramount. From Wayland’s perspective:

as the husband is the individual who is responsible to civil society, as his intercourse with the world is of necessity greater, the voice of nature and of elevation unite in conferring the right of ultimate authority upon him. By this arrangement the happiness of the wife is increased no less than that of her husband. Her power is always greatest in concession.18

Although he did not use the specific terminology, Wayland was describing woman’s sphere and couverture. He was unable to envision a role for women beyond prescribed domesticity, or to acknowledge that biology did not predetermine a woman’s capacity for logic or participation in public affairs. The social arrangement Wayland referred to was, of course, completely formulated and enacted by and for men. Just as Tocqueville had, Wayland was speaking matter-of-factly in describing his version of reality while disregarding the right of women to self-determination.

Wayland saw a man’s superior social standing as inherent to the nature of humanity; he treated a purely cultural phenomenon as an incontrovertible fact of human life. Once again, Wayland’s attitudes were engrained deeply enough in American culture to persist and appeared decades later in Holley’s writing. She constructed frequent interactions between Samantha and Josiah that mimicked Wayland’s ideas, although in Holley’s books the woman always came out at least as the equal, and often the logical superior, of the man.

Wayland went on to reinforce the concepts of the cult of true womanhood and separate spheres for the sexes when he stated that “in the domestic society…there are special duties devolving upon each member….Thus it is the duty… of the husband to provide for the wants of the family; and for the wife to assume the charge of the affairs of the household. His sphere is the duty without, her sphere is the duty within.”19 Furthermore, Wayland noted that “the duty of the wife is submission and obedience…the act of submission is in every respect as dignified and lovely as the act of authority…it involves an element of virtue that does not belong to the other.”20 Inarguably Wayland’s assessment of typical family dynamics as he observed his reality was accurate – men conducted business in the public arena and women cared for home and family. However, his reality was based on a cultural violation of human value. Wayland saw male and female in different planes

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19Ibid., 284.

20Ibid., 285.
of existence, with the male deciding how the female should be. For Wayland women were innately ordained to an acquiescent being. His contradictory remarks appeared to place female power, the “element of virtue,” in feminine impotence, the “dignified submission.” Wayland’s conclusions echoed Tocqueville’s lofty female dependence, and were equally poised to become fodder for Holley’s future satire.

Coming after Wayland but expressing similar sentiments, lawyer, minister, theologian, and philosopher Horace Bushnell (1802-1876) carried the cult of true womanhood and the concept of separate spheres into the mid-nineteenth century. His Discourses on Christian Nurture appeared in 1847 as a compendium of Bushnell’s ideas on sin and virtue relative to family relationships and the larger society. Bushnell later expanded this volume which was published in final form in 1861 as Christian Nurture.\(^2\) Bushnell agreed with his conservative contemporaries’ ideas on the balance of power within the family, using as his guide German theologian Heinrich Wilhelm J. Thiersch’s\(^2\) “excellent little treatise on the Christian Family Life.” Bushnell depicted a society founded on the family. He identified an “organic law” in which individuality within the family unit endangered the divinely intended order of being.\(^2\) All members of the family must work together, but always in divinely prescribed roles. Bushnell devoted the most attention to the role of the mother, including the tenet that her authority was “subordinated to that of the father.”\(^2\) Bushnell’s organic law endowed the mother to teach her children the principles of truth based within the family unit. Bushnell saw no need for a woman to look outside the home for personal fulfillment; such individuality would threaten the well-being of the family and the domestic structure of society. A


\(^{22}\)Heinrich Wilhelm J. Thiersch (1817-1885) was a German theologian and minister. His Christian Family Life was published in 1856.


\(^{24}\)Heinrich Wilhelm J. Thiersch, quoted in Horace Bushnell, Christian Nurture, 322.
mother needed merely to practice “chastity, modesty, temperance…the virtues that give beauty, and worth, and majesty, to character” to instill the moral compass that only the instruction of a mother could provide.25 These important female characteristics could be nurtured within the family, without the need for contact with a world outside the home. Bushnell, like Tocqueville and Wayland, believed that culture shaped human nature. Holley would have disagreed with many of the ideas of Tocqueville, Wayland, and Bushnell, not because she believed in some sort of inherent evil in marriage, but because of the way in which this model of marriage was used to restrict a woman’s self-determination.26

Although mistaking culture for truth with regard to woman’s independence and place in society worked against a woman’s self-interest, as with many cultural perspectives woman’s sphere and the cult of true womanhood had some female adherents. Maria J. McIntosh (1802-1878) was a popular and respected author of children’s books and moral treatises. Her work tended toward the


26Among the many books Bushnell also wrote was Women’s Suffrage: The Reform against Nature, published in 1869. In this volume Bushnell discussed the ramifications of woman suffrage, which he believed would change society and culture permanently by upsetting the natural order of human relations. This book will be part of the discussion of Marietta Holley’s advocacy of women’s rights in Chapter Five of this thesis.

Relative to woman’s sphere and the cult of true womanhood, in Reform Against Nature Bushnell reiterated and expanded upon a number of the opinions he offered in Christian Nurture, such as “The man-type subordinates the woman-type…so long as men are men and women are women”…man is “primary and capital” (102, 105); and the woman must “submit herself” because of “the natural subordination of women” (56). In addressing the question of women’s working outside the home, Bushnell declared that a woman could strive for self-improvement but she should not expect equality in instruction, profession, or wages. A woman could study languages, botany, moral science, and mathematics, but not philosophy, metallurgy, chemistry, or engineering. A woman could be a physician, but never a surgeon. A woman could work in a law office or a church, but could never be a lawyer and should never be a minister (18, 19, 20, 25). A woman was best suited for social work, nursing, and teaching (179).

Bushnell noted that in a society based on political equality marriage would become a legal contract, a woman would retain her maiden name, and divorce would become commonplace. The whole fabric of society would unravel if men and women were equal partners, “work[ing] against marriage to make it less sacred and less permanent and just as much less beneficial” (152; 156). See Bushnell, Horace. Women’s Suffrage: The Reform against Nature. Washington: Zenger Publishing Company, 1978.
sentimental and religious and is little known today. In her 1850 Woman in America: Her Work and Her Reward, McIntosh shared many of the same sentiments espoused by her male contemporaries. McIntosh asserted that political inequality between the sexes was “ordained in Paradise…a law which emanated from the all-perfect Mind.” She noted that a man shaped and propelled the “outward machinery of government, the body, the thews and sinews of society.” A woman’s rightful place was in the home where she was the heart, the source of comfort and peace, and the fount of life-giving power. For McIntosh this gender-driven social order was indisputable. The womanly mission was sacred; to chafe against one’s divinely ordained being was futile and blasphemous. The woman’s vital role should be apart from public affairs, “debate and harangue,” and political activism. Rather, a woman should use “every feminine grace and charm” to influence society toward moral principles. McIntosh’s language differed from that of Tocqueville, Wayland, and Bushnell in that she did not make even the slightest reference to female independence or equality between the sexes. These male writers all professed to respect the power of women, so long as that power was bestowed and expressed in ways prescribed by men. McIntosh believed that a woman should be contented with her subordinate status, and she expressed her opinion honestly and without qualification or disclaimer. Betsey Bobbet’s pathetic quest to be married, to surrender any right to self-determination and thus attain the type of life that McIntosh extolled, would become Holley’s version of the self-destructiveness of McIntosh’s message.

Catharine Beecher (1800-1878) was the eldest daughter of a well-known and influential nineteenth century family. Her father, Lyman Beecher, was a prominent minister and temperance


advocate. Her brother Henry Ward Beecher was a famous minister, orator, abolitionist and supporter of woman suffrage. Her sisters were Harriet Beecher Stowe, author of Uncle Tom’s Cabin, and Isabella Beecher Hooker, a noted suffragist. When Catharine was sixteen years old, her mother died; Catharine became her father’s confidante and helper, taking on many of the domestic and childrearing duties for her younger siblings. After Catharine Beecher’s fiancé was killed in a shipwreck in 1823, she remained single and became a teacher with a personal mission to instruct girls and young women in what she considered to be the most important womanly professions: marriage, motherhood, and homemaking. Beecher believed that women should work within the socially and culturally assigned private role of domestic management. In her 1865 article “How to Redeem Woman’s Profession from Dishonor” Beecher noted that the very design of the home should be a testament to the dominant but nurturing role of the wife and mother: “When houses are built to honor a woman’s profession…[the family room]…will be provided with sunlight and pure air….Woman’s work will be honorable and tasteful and agreeable when cultivated women undertake to make it so.” Furthermore, women’s work in the home should be revered as an integral and critical component of a healthy, functioning society. Beecher stated, “A time will come when women will give as liberally to elevate the true profession of women as the ministers of home, as

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29 See Chapter Three of this thesis further discuss of Lyman Beecher’s views on temperance.

30 Henry Ward Beecher was the first president of the American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA).

31 Barbara M. Cross, The Educated Woman in America: Selected Writings of Catharine Beecher, Margaret Fuller, and M. Carey Thomas (New York, Teachers College Press, 1965), 4-7.


32 Henceforth Beecher will refer to Catharine Beecher, unless otherwise specified.
they have to elevate the professions of men.”

Beecher also addressed the matter of gentility in American society. In her 1841 work, “A Treatise on Domestic Economy For the Use of Young Ladies at Home and at School,” Beecher noted that American women were caught between the new republic’s rejection of the genteel aristocracy of the pre-Revolutionary era and the expectation that women should somehow retain an aura of gentility as a mark of femininity despite having to attend personally to domestic affairs. Beecher claimed that a woman who did her own housework, tended her own family, and raised her own children without the benefit of servants could still function with dignity so long as her clothes were clean, her children healthy and her home tastefully decorated. She argued:

It may be urged, however, that it is impossible for a woman who cooks, washes, and sweeps, to appear in the dress, or acquire the habits and manners, of a lady; that the drudgery of the kitchen is dirty work, and that no one can appear delicate and refined, while engaged in it. Now all this depends on circumstances. But, if a woman will make some sacrifices…if she will take pains to have the dresses, in which she works, made of suitable materials, and in good taste; if she will rise early, and systematize and oversee the work of her family, so as to have it done thoroughly, neatly, and in the early part of the day; she will find no necessity for any such apprehensions…and every American woman, who values the institutions of her Country, and wishes to lend her influence in extending and perpetuating such blessings, may feel that she is doing this, whenever, by her example and influence, she destroys the aristocratic association, which would render domestic labor degrading.

For Beecher woman’s sphere included work done honestly and cleanly. Work done with the proper attitude elevated a woman to a genteel position within democratic society. A woman should be satisfied with this domestic superiority as a means of supporting her community.

Biographer and historian Kathryn Kish Sklar explained that as a vocal opponent of woman suffrage, Beecher believed that women’s voting and political activism could do nothing to correct society’s unjustified denigration of women’s contributions. Direct public action was an unnecessary


distraction for a woman striving to attain her rightful existence: education, commitment to family, and economic independence. Society had merely to acknowledge and appreciate the value of women’s work as “dignified, important, and difficult,”35 with the most obvious manifestation of this appreciation being equal education and equal pay for equal work. Given proper training in domestic matters, young women could wield great influence through educating children and modeling healthful household habits to foster happiness and prosperity without the need for participation in politics.36 Beecher insisted that female influence had a place in the hierarchy of male governments. Women could, through the gentle but persistent exercise of moral principle, have a positive impact on public policy and promote peaceful solutions to civil problems. The power of domesticity could mitigate the sometimes socially destructive nature of the political process.37 In her 1869 home guide American Woman’s Home Beecher declared:

Let us suppose that our friends have gained the ballot and the powers of office: are there any real beneficent measures for our sex, which they would enforce by law and penalties, that fathers, brothers, and husbands would not grant to a united petition of our sex, or even to a majority of the wise and good? Would these not confer what the wives, mothers, and sisters deemed best for themselves and the children they are to train, very much sooner than they would give power and office to our sex to enforce these advantages by law? Would it not be a wiser thing to ask for what we need, before trying so circuitous and dangerous a method? God has given to man the physical power, so that all that woman may gain, either by petitions or by the ballot, will be the gift of love and duty; and the ballot will never be accorded till benevolent and conscientious men are the majority—a millennial point far beyond our present ken.38

Beecher seemed to say that a moral society should see and act upon the rightness of equality between the sexes and that nothing further could be gained by direct female political action


36Kathryn Kish Sklar, Catharine Beecher; a Study in American Domesticity (New Haven, Yale University Press, 1973), 268-269.

37Ibid., 134-135.

38Beecher, American Woman’s Home, 343.
than by moral suasion. Her stance appeared to be self-contradictory and surprisingly naïve for a woman of her background and experience who obviously observed firsthand the indisposition of male-centric culture to relinquish power voluntarily. Holley’s writing came after much of Beecher’s, but was also contemporary to Beecher’s later work. One might conclude that Holley may have agreed with parts of Beecher’s message, but not at the expense of a female voice in public affairs. Indeed, thinking similar to Beecher’s became the fodder for much of Holley’s satire. Holley was not willing to allow men to decide the best path for women: she wanted direct and equal power to protect the home.

In the observations and opinions of Tocqueville, Wayland, Bushnell, McIntosh, and Beecher, five well-known and widely respected cultural spokespersons appeared to reinforce prescribed existence for men and women -- in other words, woman’s sphere and the cult of true womanhood. In these primary accounts of American life a woman’s place was to be subordinate to the man. Despite language that lauded women’s domestic roles, the reality was that a woman’s primacy in the home did not empower her in family governance or public affairs. Her way of life had to conform to customs to which she had little formative contribution. She was reared and guided into a particular existence that denied her access to basic human values, especially freedom of conscience and liberty of choice. In short, her life was created for her in ways that were often male-centered, obliviously demeaning, and couched in praise for assigned attributes that attempted to limit choices and stifle personal expression – what Mary P. Ryan called the ontology of sex. Of course these authors believed that women, and by extension society, benefitted from a restricted female role and did not mean to be dismissive or cruel. However, as the nineteenth century progressed and women with greater educational opportunities and life experiences chafed against a lack of self-determination, the constraints of a purely domestic role devoid of legal rights became the driving force behind the movement for women’s rights and other reforms.
Marietta Holley grew up in this limited environment. In her formative years she learned to question the seemingly arbitrary authority that men held over women as well as the notion that marriage should be the goal for every young girl. The conflicting ideas and ideals between woman’s traditionally restricted sphere and the desire among women to expand that sphere outside the home provided the material for Holley’s satire in support of female self and social reform. She created the character Samantha Allen to argue for women’s self-sufficiency. With Samantha’s seeking to stretch woman’s sphere to include political equality of the sexes, and Josiah and Betsey’s resisting any such change at every opportunity, Holley crafted the perfect comic microcosm though which she pushed her reform cause.

A rich body of secondary scholarship has analyzed the reality of life for nineteenth-century American women. Although the terminology varied, the cult of true womanhood and woman’s sphere comprised the core of these studies. Women presented with limited choice in determining how to live and function in society had various reactions to or ways of coping with this reality, such as accepting, or working to create an existence with the resources at hand, or seeking change. These cultural forces for white, middle-class women in the northeast United States informed Marietta Holley’s life and writing.

In her biography of Catharine Beecher, Sklar described a social dynamic that reinforced Tocqueville’s, Wayland’s, Bushnell’s and McIntosh’s assessments of women’s assigned reality. Sklar noted that the concept of woman’s sphere was ingrained into young girls from a very early age. A successful woman’s goal was a lifelong commitment to submissive wifehood and nurturing motherhood, with family as the most important milieu through which to acquire and practice this existence.39

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39 Sklar, Catharine Beecher, 17, 31, 83-84.
In fact, in an observation that evoked the attitudes of Tocqueville, Wayland, Bushnell, and McIntosh, Sklar explained that a woman of proper upbringing who accepted her assigned role gained a domestic ascendancy that afforded a sort of empowerment encapsulated within extrinsically imposed culture – the woman had a voice so long as that voice stayed within the home and family.\textsuperscript{40} This empowerment was different from that enjoyed by men in public life, and stemmed from a woman’s propensity to generosity, kindness, and compassion.\textsuperscript{41} Of course, as an historian writing in the twentieth century, Sklar’s perspective on woman as an independent person desirous and capable of self-determination was very different from that of the contemporary nineteenth-century observers who wrote in support of conservative cultural constructs. Sklar concluded, in a way that none of the earlier authors would have expressed explicitly but that was evident in the interplay among the characters in Holley’s books and satire, that woman’s sphere was politically advantageous and allowed men to retain control over the democratic process that was developing in nineteenth century America. A nineteenth century woman was expected to place herself secondary to the interests of a society built on gender inequality.\textsuperscript{42}

Mary P. Ryan noted that Bushnell’s so-called the “organic” family relationship was not imbued with equality. Bushnell’s seemingly soft-spoken Christian outlook notwithstanding, Ryan used much sharper language to emphasize the unquestioning patriarchal obedience inherent in family organicity. She pointed out that family members were subject to the will and decisions of the husband and father; indeed, societal survival depended upon the supremacy of the male head of household.\textsuperscript{43} However, Ryan noted that for some women this organic hierarchy of woman’s sphere

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 113.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 135.

\textsuperscript{42}Ibid., 156, 158.

\textsuperscript{43}Ryan, \textit{Cradle}, 32.
provided a sense of protection, a cohesiveness of femininity that translated to an existence that, although limited, gave women some personal control. Women navigated what Ryan called a “social geography” in which small female groups created bonds that could be stronger than those between women and men. Female friends and relatives supported each other emotionally to foster a modicum of independence that did not rely on male approval, but stayed within acceptable roles and customs. Social geography also allowed women the opportunity to exert influence over the male members of the household but always within the confines of woman’s sphere.

Ryan also studied the lives of rural housewives in nineteenth century New York State. Ryan’s comments and conclusions were particularly applicable to Marietta Holley, both the woman and the writer. In fact, Ryan’s descriptions mirrored Holley’s autobiography and the lives of her fictional characters. The forebears of the middle-class in New York State, like Holley’s ancestors and neighbors, were relocated New England Yankee farmers. The rural homesteads of farm families, again not only like the Holleys’ but also like Samantha and Josiah Allen’s, were isolated from the early urban centers and by necessity were almost totally self-sufficient. The daughters in Ryan’s study were trained from an early age to perform household tasks, not only to help out around the house, but also to acquire the skills necessary to make a dutiful and useful wife. The home was the center of social and personal relationships, the “prime unit of society.” The church and secular governments looked to the home for validation and promulgation of religious tenets and civil laws.

The home was a place of work and production as well as a haven. Farm wives did all of the housework, cooking, and child rearing, as well as other chores such as gardening, taking care of

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44Ibid., 210, 218.
46Ibid., 51.
animals, and spinning and weaving. As depicted again and again in Holley’s work, despite contributing significantly to the family economy wives had no legal claim to any of the produce or possessions in the home. Any money or valuables that the wife brought into the marriage came immediately under the control of the husband.47

Ryan used the diary of Lavinia Johnson to illustrate the day of a typical farm wife, and the nature of household chores. Women were proud homemakers; housework took on a “patina of artistry.” Cooking became a symbol of domestic ability as women lovingly prepared meals that were pleasing to the eye as well as nutritional:

“I washed my parlor windows, the blinds, cleaned the shades, my kitchen window, the large window in the chamber, wiped, dusted, and cleaned and was home all day.” Two days later Mrs. Johnson reported a mundane retinue of female chores, washing ironing, and shopping. The last activity provoked some perennial woman’s complaints as well, about the cost of living. In exchange for kerosene, meat, apples, milk and butter, she was charged the exorbitant sum of fifty cents. The rhythms of her work shifted with the season. In the fall she tackled the local harvest, pickling and preserving cucumbers, blackberries, peaches, and plums in massive quantities. In the evening at odd hours she picked up her sewing basket, and then her diary, recording all the intricacies of style and fabric that went into the latest creation.48

Ryan account could have been lifted from one of Holley’s novels, without the dialect, of course. Samantha performed every one of these tasks in Mrs. Johnson’s list of chores, and took just as much pride in her work as Mrs. Johnson did.

In fact, Marietta Holley’s work may be seen as a validation of the conclusions of Ryan and the other historians. Holley based her work on personal experiences and the lives of families in her community as she incorporated all of these aspects of woman’s sphere and the cult of true womanhood into her stories and novels. She created male characters that enjoyed liberties not available to their female counterparts and female characters that accepted and actually sought out

47Ibid., 28.
48Ibid., 198.
restrictive lives in the name of femininity and supposed female dignity; these characters were the basis for Holley’s satire. Of course Holley also created female characters that had strong bonds of friendship and held family ties sacred, female characters that pressed for self-determination, and male and female characters that worked together to pursue common sense solutions to social problems: these characters conveyed Holley’s reform messages.

Historian Nancy Cott noted another layer of woman’s sphere and the cult of true womanhood. Cott identified female influence as moral suasion based in religious convictions and child rearing. Of course, female influence was not new. During the Revolutionary Era, a woman was endowed with the responsibility for instilling education, morals, and patriotic values in her children, especially her sons. Linda Kerber coined the term Republican Motherhood to describe this quasi-political phenomenon, which gave women a venue for engagement, albeit indirectly, in the public affairs of the community. Kerber explained that the “tangled and complex role of the Republican Mother offered…structures and contexts in which women might define civic culture and their responsibilities to the state.” Kerber went on to note that later in the century women strained against Republican Motherhood in favor of a more direct role in public affairs.

By the middle of the nineteenth century women’s influence reemerged in a new incarnation. Whereas the Republican Mother had been respected for her systematic involvement, instruction, and shaping of culture, the influence of a mid-nineteenth century woman was muted and centered almost entirely in domesticity. Rather than emphasizing a direct impact on society, this type of influence was a step removed and represented an extrinsically assigned way of life completely separate from that of men. However, the combination of these views of woman’s place,


50 Kerber, Women of Republic, 43.

51 Ryan, Cradle, 190-191.
social geography, family obligations, and indirect societal influence had an ironic and unexpected
effect. The separate spheres allowed women to develop a self-styled being that increased female
public activism and found expression in the social reforms promulgated in Marietta Holley’s
novels. Women aspiring to a more direct role in culture and society actively sought out ways to
express influence while maintaining ties to the home. These women chafed under the restrictions of
woman’s sphere when so many social ills needed attention. Since the male political leaders were
inclined to grant women neither political equality nor protection from the destructive forces of
intemperance, women had to rely on ingenuity to carve out inroads into the public arena. An early
manifestation of female self-determination and cultural growth was involvement in public
benevolence, which became the basis for many women-led nineteenth century reform movements.
In fact, Marietta Holley had come of age in the reformist atmosphere of upstate New York, exposed
to attitudes that would later appear in her novels in support of reforms by and for women, primarily
temperance and women’s rights.

Historian Lori D. Ginzberg explored the effects of female participation in the benevolent
work that would awaken a profound desire in women such as Marietta Holley to effect social
reforms. Ginzberg noted that benevolence was embedded in the cult of true womanhood because of
the womanly nature of work aimed at moral and social uplift. Benevolent activities presumed a
level of female moral superiority in defining a woman’s character. Ginzberg discovered through her
research that nineteenth century American women were commonly considered to be at the
foundation of a moral social ethic. She illustrated her conclusion by quoting an 1833 newspaper
article’s reference to reformer Paula Wright Davis: “‘Her strongest moral organ is Benevolence.’”
Ginzberg explained that a woman keeping to her own sphere exercised the divinely ordained
“‘moral organ’ in her very being.” Women searched for an aura of respectability that allowed for
association with the community and in society at large. Benevolent work increased a woman’s reach beyond the home, while remaining within the realm of domesticity.\textsuperscript{52}

Mary P. Ryan, too, discussed benevolence, which she saw as an expansion of moral standards toward secular activism that constituted a stepping stone from womanly influence to outright reform activity. Initially women who founded and participated in benevolent activities did so overwhelmingly within the confines of woman’s sphere. The most popular type of community contribution remained restricted to causes that helped others. Women could visit the sick, console the grieving, feed the hungry, and clothe the needy -- but women could not have any direct involvement in politics, business, or professions. Women must remain “fastidious” in conforming to the womanly pursuits, first in the home and only afterwards outside.\textsuperscript{53} For Ryan this early benevolent work was at once a move away from the restrictions of domesticity and a manifestation of the ontology of sex.

Ironically, the concept of woman’s sphere became a means both to encourage feminine benevolence and to discourage and discredit explicit female reform activity. Strict believers in the doctrine of separate spheres considered outspoken women reformers to be morally inferior, misguided unfortunates confused about proper womanly being. Such behavior sullied a woman’s reputation and rendered her unmarriageable, thereby placing her beyond the pale of polite society.\textsuperscript{54} However, some women who persisted in spite of social disapproval came to recognize woman’s sphere as a social construct designed to place women in a disadvantaged position. This realization led to the questioning of the arbitrary power of male-run governments that ruled women without

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regard to the human value of self-determination. Women who made the connection between woman’s sphere and lack of rights started to think about a public, potentially political, voice.

Approaching mid-century, women reformers, the forebears of women like Marietta Holley, may have started with benevolent work. As this social involvement took women increasingly outside the home, some moved toward the emerging women’s rights movement. In time, as Ginzberg noted, some “women...agitated for at least partial suffrage in order more efficiently to undertake the work of benevolence.” Partial suffrage would give women a modicum of direct input into public policy regarding social welfare issues. Women could remain in the domestic realm while pushing for reforms from a moral perspective. The established political order would remain largely undisturbed; men would still be in charge but women would have a lawful right to be heard. However, a partial voice was insufficient to effect long-term, society-modifying reforms, such as temperance and woman suffrage.

Some important social and political events in the middle decades of the nineteenth century sparked the push for female independence that by the 1870s burst out of Marietta Holley’s first stories dealing with women’s rights. In 1848, Elizabeth Cady Stanton delivered her “Declaration of Sentiments” at the first Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, New York. Stanton listed thirteen Resolutions to claim rights for women under the law, including social, spiritual, and religious equality; political education; equal punishment for crimes; speaking in public; determining sphere according to personal desires; recognition of human rights; and protection from denial of rights. Stanton declared that men and women should work together to achieve these Resolutions. The ninth and most controversial Resolution was the demand for the “sacred right to

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55 Ryan, Cradle, 228.

56 Ginzberg, Work of Benevolence, 70.

57 The 1848 Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY, is generally considered to be the start of the women’s rights movement.
the elective franchise.” All the Resolutions were adopted, but the demand for the vote was the only one that was not unanimous. 58

In the years between the success of Seneca Falls and the Civil War, women’s rights conventions were held almost annually in states and localities throughout the northeast and Midwest. Participants met, discussed, and resolved about the injustices facing women. Furthermore, women developed skills in logic and public speaking, and became versed in anti-woman legislation. Convention attendance grew over the years, from a few hundred to several thousand, as women took advantage of the chance to engage in activities outside of the home in a secure, non-threatening environment. In the antebellum years, the conventions were the heart of the women’s movement. 59 However, this female momentum was interrupted during the Civil War, as women’s rights activism was supplanted by work to pass the 13th amendment to the Constitution to abolish slavery.

Shortly after end of the Civil War, the proposed 14th Constitutional amendment defined the rights of citizens to representation in government, prohibited the denial of “the right to vote…to any of the male inhabitants” and stipulated that representation would be based on “the whole number of male citizens.” 60 Women who had worked for months to support the social revolution of abolition were rewarded with legislated exclusion from direct government representation.

The fact was that many women viewed women’s rights and woman suffrage as natural rights, with those rights at the nexus between political status and personal fulfillment as American citizens. Suffrage activists believed that because a woman was an individual and a citizen, she was entitled to the same inalienable rights as a man. The denial to women of the primary right of


59Campbell, Man Cannot Speak for Her, Volume I, 50-51.

60U.S. Constitution, amendment 14, section 2.
citizenship exposed in shocking starkness the true position of women as subject to a government created and enacted solely in the interests of men. With the ratification in March, 1870, of the 15th Amendment that ignored women while enfranchising African American men, the movement turned toward the ultimate goal that would precipitate the achievement of all the other goals: full woman suffrage. Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony formed a new organization, the National Woman Suffrage Association. Men were welcome to join, but not to hold positions of leadership. Stanton and Anthony explained:

While we hold in loving reverence the names of such men as Charles Sumner, Horace Greeley, William Lloyd Garrison, Gerrit Smith, Wendell Phillips and Frederick Douglass, and would urge the rising generation of young men to emulate their virtues, we would warn the young women of the coming generation against man’s advice as to their best interests, their highest development. We would point for them the moral of our experiences: that woman must lead the way to her own enfranchisement, and work out her

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61 The political impotence of women was the main theme of Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s “Declaration of Sentiments,” delivered at the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Falls, NY. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, “Speech at the Seneca Falls Convention, 1848,” in Man Cannot Speak for Her: Key Texts of the Early Feminists, Volume II, ed. Karlyn Kohrs Campbell (New York: Praeger Publishers, 1989), 42-70. See also Chapter Six, note 34 of this thesis.


63 The NWSA rhetoric was too radical for some suffragists, who formed a separate, more conservative group. The American Woman Suffrage Association (AWSA) founded by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell, allowed men to serve as officers and advocated a state by state approach to gaining woman suffrage rather than a constitutional amendment. The two groups would remain at odds for more than twenty years. By 1890, Wyoming was the only state that assured full woman suffrage and a few states had adopted various limited forms of suffrage, but many more resisted. Both the NWSA and the AWSA recognized the detriment that two organizations working at cross purposes would have on the success of the work, and after protracted negotiations, the groups merged in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA), the organization that would take the struggle into the twentieth century. See Elisabeth Griffith, In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 137, 139; Ida Husted Harper, The Life and Work of Susan B. Anthony, Volume I (1898; reprint, Charleston, South Carolina: Bibliobazaar, 2007), 409; Eleanor Flexner, A Century of Struggle: The Women’s rights Movement in the United States (New York: Atheneum, 1998), 169.
own salvation with a hopeful courage and determination that knows no fear nor trembling.
. . . standing alone we learned our power; we repudiated man’s counsels forevermore.⁶⁴

Suffrage was the route to legitimate female inclusion in American culture and politics.

Because of the cult of true womanhood, many American women had not been given the educational opportunity to understand fully the ideals of republican government. Many men had denied or disregarded or deliberately kept women ignorant of these ideals.⁶⁵ Some activists pointed out that men who lived by the Golden Rule would be unable in good conscience to deny female enfranchisement.⁶⁶ However, unwilling from experience to rely on male generosity, woman suffragists declared that women, not men, should determine what was best for women.

The quest for suffrage was not an attempt to declare female superiority. Rather, suffrage meant social and political equality, self-determination, and independence.⁶⁷ A woman must choose her own life, culturally, politically, and humanly, with the latter and most important goal dependent upon the other two. Unsurprisingly, men socialized to believe in the inferiority of women strongly disagreed, and ignored or ridiculed the idea of votes for women. Marietta Holley began her career during these years of turmoil as the women’s rights movement evolved into a woman suffrage movement. In fact, her story “Woman’s Spear” appeared in Peterson’s Magazine in August, 1870.


⁶⁵Woloch, Women and American Experience, 377.

⁶⁶The Golden Rule is a maxim for right living that has been handed down, usually in religious doctrine, since well before the Common Era. Ancient versions can be found in the Code of Hammurabi, the writings of Confucius, and many other moral and religious tracts. The Golden Rule as known today refers to verses in gospels of the Christian Bible, including Matthew 7:12 “Therefore all things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them: for this is the law and the prophets” and Luke 6:31 “And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.” In reference to the American woman suffrage movement, the term denotes the idea that enfranchised men were morally obligated to admit women to the franchise.

just five months after the passage of the 15th Amendment. The messages of this new suffrage cause permeated Marietta Holley’s books as Samantha repeatedly declared that women naturally expected the rights of citizens of the United States, to be treated justly. Neither women nor men were superior to each other. Samantha was simply and purposefully acting in the best interest of her “sect.” The differing perspectives held by women and men provided Holley with the basis for many satiric exchanges between Samantha and Josiah Allen. Unfortunately, in Holley’s books as well as in reality, few men had any reason to take the women’s arguments seriously; disfranchised women posed little threat to anyone’s political career or special interests.

However, many women suffragists had a special interest: the vote was the key to social reforms. Even women who were reluctant to pursue political equality sought the ballot as an outgrowth of benevolent work and a means to reform. The vote became a both a symbol and a tool for advancing women’s influence in creating a moral society, and one of the primary uses for the vote was temperance. Women, including Marietta Holley, embraced temperance as a necessary reform that would change the circumstances obstructing individual female autonomy, personal liberty, and freedom of conscience. Many of these women also supported suffrage as the means to temperance. Holley’s writing appeared at the confluence of these two great, female-driven reforms. A brief overview of the temperance movement in the United States leading up to the 1870s will help to illuminate the forces that spurred Holley to write about this most important topic.

Women became involved in temperance in the early nineteenth century in an attempt to establish control over the chaotic societal effects of male drunkenness. By the turn of the

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68 See Chapter Five of this thesis for a discussion of “Woman’s Spear.”

69 Ginzberg, Work of Benevolence, 70, 117, 125.

70 Of course women were also intemperate. Middle-class reformers attempted to recast women’s intemperance to deflect a negative association between drunkenness and middle-class women. Drunkenness was perceived as a habit of low-class immigrant women and prostitutes. Furthermore, women were held less accountable if men had tempted the women with alcoholic beverages. See Scott Martin’s Devil of the Domestic Sphere: Temperance, Gender, and Middle-Class Ideology, 1800-1860.
nineteenth century medical doctors and temperance advocates had begun to suspect the possibility of physical addiction to alcohol. Habitual drunkards could be pitied as weak; however the inability to resist was considered a moral failure. Conventional wisdom held that those who drank to excess engaged in bad judgment. A man of character should have the ability to remove himself from situations that led to the temptation to drink. Intemperance was considered a choice, and the intemperate man chose alcohol over family safety and community security.

Temperance as a cause was perfectly suited to women. The impact of alcohol abuse on the home and family was devastating to women, and the primary concern in the early years of the quest for temperance was family and domestic survival. The remnants of couverture persisted in the American social structure and legal code. A married woman could hold no personal property -- a woman’s work, possessions, even her children were legally under the control of her husband. Much of her life, almost her entire being, was determined for her; she was culturally and politically powerless to stop an inebriate and potentially physically abusive husband from wreaking havoc on the family. Furthermore, overconsumption of alcohol interfered with a husband’s ability to work,


Jack Blocker claimed that middle-class women reduced or abstained from drinking because of the shame associated with drunkenness. Woman’s sphere simply did not allow a woman to drink to excess. Blocker also noted that middle-class women avoided drink to distinguish proper, native born women from low class immigrants. See Blocker, Jack S. American Temperance Movements: Cycles of Reform (Boston: Twayne Publishers, 1989) 10-11, 37.

See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of the writing of Dr. Benjamin Rush, a late eighteenth-early nineteenth century temperance advocate who early suspected that habitual drunkenness could have a physiological component.

leaving a woman to cope with depleted income and destitution. Alcohol became a symbol of the destruction of the household, and temperance work was a woman’s only line of defense.\textsuperscript{73}

Protestant churches were proponents of temperance from the turn of the nineteenth century and into the first few decades, with clergy and male congregation members taking the lead. By the 1840s women formed the first organized, but auxiliary, women’s temperance groups, such as the Martha Washington Society (1841) and the Daughters of Temperance (1842). Attempting to move beyond the confines of restricted lives, women found in temperance a vehicle for self-expression and a goal that could lead to personal fulfillment and social reform. As with previous reform efforts, early temperance activism included the use of moral suasion as a way to influence society while retaining a primary focus on the home and family; temperance work was considered a duty that women incurred as a natural part of insuring family and domestic harmony. Because social, legal, and political recourse were non-existent, women used the cultural construct of woman’s sphere to press a moral agenda for sobriety and eradication of intoxicating drinks.\textsuperscript{74} Unmarried women encouraged suitors to avoid ardent spirits; wives sought to change husbands; children pleaded with fathers not to drink.\textsuperscript{75}

Before the Civil War women formed independent, woman-run, temperance societies in New York and other states to press the cause. Years of combating intemperance through moral suasion had failed to achieve results, but by mid-century female influence swayed lawmakers in


\textsuperscript{74}Ryan, \textit{Cradle}, 136.

several states to regulate or prohibit the transport and sale of alcoholic beverages.\textsuperscript{76} However, male legislators concerned more with their own political coffers than with the effects of intemperance did little to enforce anti-temperance laws. Ultimately business interests trumped the influence of disfranchised women and “their stuff and nonsense about ‘Women’s Rights.’” The laws were gradually weakened or repealed.\textsuperscript{77} Women were exhorted to return to the home and the ideal of the Republican Mother whose virtuous example and teaching steered male family members along the path of moral, temperate behavior.\textsuperscript{78}

With the focus of male and female reformers on abolishing slavery and restoring the Union, temperance work, as did women’s rights activity, declined during the Civil War. After the war, women again took up the temperance cause. The destructiveness of intemperance on the family intensified the need for female influence in public affairs. As historian Carol Mattingly noted, “Alcohol became the primary women’s issue of the century, because it came to symbolize and gave vent to frustration about women’s powerless and precarious situation.”\textsuperscript{79} Alcohol penetrated woman’s sphere in ways that spurred women toward politically based temperance agitation. Intemperance threatened domestic harmony so much that women, increasingly

\textsuperscript{76}Blocker noted a significant legislative push to ban alcohol during the 1850s. The 1850 Maine Law prohibited the manufacture of liquor; liquor could be sold and used for medicinal or industrial purposes only. In 1851 Ohio passed a no-license law, prohibiting sale of liquor within state boundaries. Between 1851 and 1855 fifteen states and territories passed laws limiting or prohibiting the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages. See Blocker, \textit{American Temperance Movements}, Chapter 2, pages 30-60.

\textsuperscript{77}“Within 10 years most state prohibition laws had been repealed, declared unconstitutional, or abandoned as unworkable.” Martin, \textit{Devil of the Domestic Sphere}, 149.

\textsuperscript{78}Martin, \textit{Devil of the Domestic Sphere}, 129, 130, 148.

\textsuperscript{79}Mattingly, \textit{Well Tempered}, 144.
dissatisfied with political second-class citizenship, set out on a more public role to fight the battle against liquor in both the home and the marketplace.80

Women moved into public protest after male political leadership refused again and again to implement lasting and effective temperance legislation.81 In confrontation against the liquor interests in commerce and politics, the Woman’s Crusades of the early 1870s were the first sit-in style demonstrations in the United States. Starting in Ohio and spreading to several states, crusading women demonstrated near and sometimes inside saloons to disrupt businesses and the sale of liquor.82 Crusading women picketed and entered saloons to sing and hold prayer vigils. Saloon keepers and customers retaliated: the Crusaders were ridiculed and assaulted, spat upon, and dragged through the streets. One saloon keeper, Charles Van Pelt, threw dirty water and threatened the women with an axe. After being jailed for several days, Van Pelt repented of his actions, and in behavior reminiscent of the most stereotyped temperance fiction,83 became an ardent temperance supporter. The Crusaders of course took credit for this conversion of “the wickedest man in Ohio.”84

Despite the occasional victory the Crusades were short-lived and too geographically isolated to have a widespread impact. Even so, the Crusades showed the female participants the value of organized, direct action and the potential for wide-ranging social influence.85 Interestingly, Marietta Holley emerged onto the literary scene at about the same time as the Crusades and from the very beginning of her career injected a temperance message into almost all of her stories and

80Martin, Devil of the Domestic Sphere, 89, 99, 102, 108.
81Bordin, Woman and Temperance, 13.
82Epstein, Politics of Domesticity, 96.
83Temperance fiction will be discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.
84Mattingly, Well Tempered, 42; Epstein, Politics of Domesticity, 96-97.
85Epstein, Politics of Domesticity, 98.
books, what she described as her “earnest talk on temperance from the time I began writing.”

Holley added her voice to the growing female pro-temperance outcry.

In response to the increasing female temperance agitation the proponents of liquor traffic argued for the legitimacy of personal liberty to engage in business and denied responsibility for the moral inadequacy of habitual drunkards. For these businessmen and political leaders, the fact that the effects of the liquor traffic restricted the personal liberty of women was inconsequential.

Furthermore, American democracy did not support a woman’s claim to personal liberty. Attempts to control women’s behavior, expression, fervor for independence, and social reform served to strengthen the growing movement for women’s rights. Ultimately, the legal protections guaranteed to the vendors of alcohol precipitated a pushback by women, including the well-known and influential Holley, to find direct ways to change the law.

Indeed, temperance was the platform from which the leaders of nineteenth century women’s rights movement emerged. Prominent and vocal woman reformers including Susan B. Anthony (1820-1906) began as temperance agitators. Throughout childhood, Susan Anthony was exposed to progressive causes and reform. She was raised in H Hicksite Quakerism, which held that


87Martin, Devil of the Domestic Sphere, 11, 117, 125.


89For many antebellum women the roots of reform activity was in both temperance and abolition. An in-depth discussion of abolition is outside the scope of this thesis. After the Civil War these women reformers continued in the temperance movement.
men and women were equal in the eyes of God and expected to participate equally in services and other religious events. Anthony came to generalize this belief in equality of the sexes to all social and political contexts. With this reform-minded and progressive background, Anthony joined the Daughters of Temperance in 1851, organizing suppers and festivals as a means of raising the funds necessary to promote the cause.\textsuperscript{90} Anthony defended human values as she decried the indignity of women exposed to harassment by creditors after drunkard husbands squandered assets and wages. She recounted her awakening consciousness in an 1895 interview for the \textit{New York Mail and Express}: “In those early days…there were cases where women with…dissipated husbands …had no rights and no privileges; where, in fact, they hardly had a soul to call their own. The thing struck me so forcibly…that I determined to enter public life and battle for my sex.”\textsuperscript{91} With these sentiments, Anthony expressed her dedication to freedom of conscience and political rights for women.

Women most involved in temperance, including of course Marietta Holley, were also most vocal in seeking the right to vote. For these women, the vote meant being able to claim self-determination within the political context of American culture. Moral suasion and behind-the-scenes influence had for decades yielded very little long-term impact on the problem of intemperance. Social change had to become political as well as moral. Women who demanded to be raised to equality with men on a political footing understood that the solution to the impotence of moral suasion was the vote.\textsuperscript{92} A grass-roots effort was required.

\textsuperscript{90}Ida Husted Harper, \textit{Susan B. Anthony}, 50-56, 98.

As a young woman and throughout the Civil War Anthony was also involved in abolition. The war years were active ones for anti-slavery agitators, including Anthony, who turned efforts toward the passage of the 13\textsuperscript{th} amendment to the Constitution to abolish slavery. Anthony served as the first secretary of the abolitionist Women’s Loyal National League, formed in 1863. For fifteen months, the League members wrote letters, organized meetings, and circulated petitions in favor of the 13\textsuperscript{th} amendment. See Lynn Sherr, \textit{Failure is Impossible}, 34.

\textsuperscript{91}Susan B. Anthony, quoted in Sherr, \textit{Failure is Impossible}, 48-49.

\textsuperscript{92}Ginzberg, \textit{Work of Benevolence}, 110, 125.
The formation of the Women’s Christian Temperance Union (WCTU) in 1873 placed women squarely at the center of the temperance movement. The *Standard Encyclopedia of Alcohol* described the WCTU as “[T]he largest mass movement of women in the nineteenth century,” with an “army of women fighting the saloon…arrayed against every other evil threatening the home and striking against civilization.”

Carol Mattingly saw that the WCTU solidified the link between the temperance movement and woman’s sphere. Indeed, this link was at the core of Holley’s reform stories and novels that will be discussed in this thesis. Samantha and her fellow pro-temperance characters were motivated to fight the destruction of the home and family that so often accompanied intemperance.

Temperance protected the home, and, in fact, the motto of the WCTU was “Home Protection.” An alcohol-free family strengthened domestic harmony and allowed a woman to devote her attention to her household duties and child rearing in a safe environment in keeping with the traditional notion of woman’s sphere. Temperance work also expanded woman’s sphere into the political realm as a woman fighting to keep her family safe and intact by necessity had to carry out this fight on public terms. Historian Janet Zollinger Giele noted a four-tiered connection between temperance and social feminism: ideology, leadership, organization, and strategy created a bridge between domesticity and public affairs.

Historian Rebecca Edwards explained that temperance gave women an opportunity to influence society, to put free time to good use, and to show alcoholic husbands the way to self control. Temperance work was at once “effective and womanly.” Even disfranchised women could have an impact -- a male vote for prohibition was a

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93 *Standard Encyclopedia of the Alcohol Problem* (Weatherville, OH, 1925), 2849.


vote for home and family, and was a way to translate womanly influence into political action.\textsuperscript{96} Women flocked to the cause, making the WCTU the largest women’s group in United States history, with a membership of 245,000 in 1911.\textsuperscript{97} The temperance movement transformed the cult of true womanhood insofar as women worked to preserve the sacredness of the home, marriage, motherhood, and family while providing a means of transcending this cult through public agitation and self-assertiveness.

Marietta Holley had great respect for Frances Willard (1839-1898), who was one of the great woman politicians of the nineteenth century and became president of the WCTU in 1879. Born in Churchville, New York, and raised in Wisconsin and Illinois, Willard was influenced by her politically minded father and college-educated schoolteacher mother. Her parents showed Willard the importance of public service, education, and independence. Willard was homeschooled until seventeen years of age when she enrolled at Milwaukee Normal Institute, founded in 1851 by Catharine Beecher. She later entered North Western Female College, a three year prep school in Evanston, Illinois. While at North Western, Willard reached some conclusions about relationships between men and women, and the inequity in gender roles in American society. She knew she was destined to be an independent woman and resolved to work hard to achieve her goal. She made an entry in her diary: “‘Have I told you I was going away to earn my own living, fight my own battles, and be a felt force in the world?’” Willard was on a trajectory that would take her to the highest levels of American social reform.\textsuperscript{98}

\textsuperscript{96}Rebecca Edwards, \textit{Angels in the Machinery: Gender in America Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era} (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), 41, 45.

\textsuperscript{97}Woloch, \textit{Women in American Experience}, 287.

After many years as an educator, including the office of Dean of Women at Northwestern University, Willard in 1874 threw herself into the temperance movement. Like Holley and so many other women temperance advocates, Willard had been touched by the destructive power of liquor: her brother Oliver was an alcoholic. Also like Holley, Willard had the inner resourcefulness to take a public stand on this most important issue. With her charismatic personality and inner drive, Willard rose quickly through her local and state temperance organizations and was instrumental in the formation of the WCTU. She served as WCTU corresponding secretary for five years before being elected president in 1879.\textsuperscript{99} As president Willard steered the WCTU toward a dual agenda of temperance underscored by woman suffrage. Initially, support for woman suffrage as a separate entity was controversial within the WTCU membership -- temperance was an acceptable female reform, suffrage less so. However, Willard embraced an alliance with the men’s Prohibition Party in exchange for a woman suffrage plank in the party platform. Both sides understood that the votes of women could be a deciding factor in passage of major legislation for the control, or better still, the eradication of alcoholic drinks. From Willard’s perspective the push for a constitutional amendment for prohibition was driven by the need to protect the home and family from the evils of drink.\textsuperscript{100}

Like Holley, Willard approached suffrage from the standpoint of the need for equal rights both within and outside the home. The WTCU allowed women to seek rights with a focus on issues of concern to women and in women’s best interest. Willard argued that suffrage would give women a voice in forming and working toward social policies favorable to family life. Suffrage activism and temperance work presented just the proper mix of involvement in public affairs while

\textsuperscript{99}Ibid., 67, 69, 73.

\textsuperscript{100}Bordin, \textit{Woman and Temperance}, 58.
maintaining women’s ties to the home.\textsuperscript{101} Furthermore, as Mattingly claimed, “Framed in language that evoked concrete, familiar images of injustice, women’s rights issues could be safely heard and discussed by a broad spectrum of listeners” with ties to temperance.\textsuperscript{102} Therefore, WTCU discussions about suffrage were cloaked in temperance rhetoric.

The WCTU quest for political equality and female self-determination emphasized domesticity. As a means of supporting women’s rights, female temperance activists often showed how alcohol contributed to women’s wrongs. In fact, Marietta Holly’s novels, which will be discussed in detail later in this thesis, were packed with male-alcohol-induced female misery. Pro-temperance women denounced the evils of liquor and sought the right to vote as the only effective means of transforming society and protecting the family. These women wanted to reinvent woman’s sphere, to erase the last vestiges of couverture while preserving a woman’s domestic role. A woman must have control of her property, wages, and children, but should also be able to choose the extent of her involvement in public affairs.\textsuperscript{103} Epstein explained, “Only female equality would ensure responsible male behavior and give family issues their proper place in public life.” The interplay between temperance and women’s rights did not amount to radical change: temperance brought woman suffrage into the public eye in a way that was more conciliatory and acceptable than the methods of the single-minded woman suffrage agitators.\textsuperscript{104} Frances Willard was a respected and influential voice for combining woman suffrage with female domesticity. In her July 4, 1879, “Home Protection [II]” speech Willard declared:

\begin{quote}
Of the right of woman to the ballot I shall say nothing. ...Of the Republic’s right to woman’s ballot I might say much. …Since the crusade, plain, practical temperance people
\end{quote}

\textsuperscript{101}Epstein, \textit{Politics of Domesticity}, 120, 129.

\textsuperscript{102}Mattingly, \textit{Well Tempered}, 16.

\textsuperscript{103}Ibid., 18, 23.

\textsuperscript{104}Epstein, \textit{Politics of Domesticity}, 129, 133.
have begun appealing to [the] average woman, saying, “With your vote we can close the saloons that tempt your boys to ruin;” and behold! They have transfixed with the arrow of conviction that mother’s heart, and she is ready for the fray. Not rights, not duties; not her need alone, but that of her children and her country; not the “woman” but the “human” question is stirring in women’s hearts and breaking down their prejudice today.\textsuperscript{105}

The spirit of Willard’s words appeared again and again in Holley’s books. Holley’s readers undoubtedly included some WCTU members. For those women, and for others, the WTCU provided the organization through which women could advocate rights within a context of culturally accepted femininity.

As the WCTU membership grew, men of the Prohibition Party, seeing potential in the sheer numbers of women working for temperance, proposed collaboration with the WCTU. The women were interested, proclaiming at the 1881 WCTU convention: “Home Protection where Home Protection is the strongest rallying cry; Equal Franchise, where the votes of women joined to those of men can long give stability to temperance legislation.”\textsuperscript{106} This collaboration served to emphasize the differences in perspective between the sexes. Unsurprisingly, the goals of the women’s temperance movement were at odds with those of the men’s, which viewed the social turmoil resulting from alcohol in terms of “crime, disease, poverty, and political corruption.”\textsuperscript{107} The male agenda showed less direct concern for domestic impact, instead focusing on broader societal effects related to the functioning of public institutions and affairs. However, recognizing the growing power and influence that could be gained from an army of woman temperance zealots, the party supported woman suffrage in exchange for the women’s party work. Women for whom the

\textsuperscript{105}Frances E. Willard, Carolyn De Swarte Gifford, and Amy R Slagell, *Let Something Good be Said: Speeches and Writings of Frances E. Willard* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2007), 42.

\textsuperscript{106}Bordin, *Woman and Temperance*, 119.

driving motivation behind the work was not suffrage but temperance might eagerly volunteer time and effort to gain the single most important benefit of the ballot: prohibition.\textsuperscript{108}

The WCTU insisted on maintaining a non-partisan attitude toward voting. Like the female suffragists, the woman temperance workers claimed to be uninterested in political parties and back-room deal making. The women backed candidates who supported temperance, regardless of the candidates’ party affiliation. This self-distancing from partisanship allowed the women to focus on the most important issue rather than other platform planks, and keep the domestic considerations in the forefront.\textsuperscript{109} In fact, the WCTU publication \textit{Union Signal} declared that for temperance women the primary importance of the vote was to quash the liquor traffic, not to add to “‘their own individual rights and privileges.’”\textsuperscript{110} Willard wrote to “[urge] women who have crusaded in the rum-shops [to] crusade in the halls of legislation…go to the voters in your town…[and] reveal our opportunity and duty as the Republic’s daughters.”\textsuperscript{111} Although Willard strove to preserve the femininity of women while advocating a public female role, the WCTU \textit{Signal} also claimed the right to a political voice: “Men have no more moral or natural right to ordain that women shall not vote, than women have to disfranchise men.”\textsuperscript{112} Reform was both domestic and politicized, and reflected a cultural shift away from male domination and toward the inclusion of a female perspective. Women used reform as a stepping stone to self-determination. Always looking for ways to promote her cause, Willard wrote several letters to Marietta Holley with invitations to write for the \textit{Union Signal} or speak at WCTU conventions. Although Holley never accepted any of these

\textsuperscript{108}Edwards, \textit{Angels}, 41-42, 44, 57.

\textsuperscript{109}Ibid., 48.

\textsuperscript{110}\textit{Union Signal} in Ginzberg, \textit{Work of Benevolence}, 186.

\textsuperscript{111}Willard et.al., \textit{Something Good}, 23.

\textsuperscript{112}Bordin, \textit{Woman and Temperance}, 120.
invitations, many of her stories and books had a strong temperance theme, and *Sweet Cicely* was praised by prominent temperance advocates, including Willard and Susan B. Anthony.113

Marietta Holley’s writing emerged in the 1870s, at a critical intersection of time, changing social forces, and female activism in both the temperance and woman suffrage movements. Holley’s work reflected the very type of cultural expansion that resulted both from and in expanded public roles for women. The dynamics of woman’s sphere, women’s rights, and temperance were central to her writing and message. As a nineteenth century American woman, Holley surely experienced the interplay of social and cultural constructs described in the foregoing discussion. Coming of age in upstate New York in an environment of reformist fervor, she was exposed to attitudes and ideas that informed her outlooks. As the primary caregiver for her handicapped sister and aging mother, Holley certainly felt the economic pressures of making a living in a society that placed little monetary value on women’s work. As an observer of people and human nature, Holley understood the impact of human relationships on the structure of a community. As a nineteenth century U.S. citizen she experienced the marginalization shared by numerous residents of a so-called democracy that denied equal rights to large segments of the population. As a woman living under a male-dominated government she grasped the necessity of political equity and the injustice of second-class citizenship. As a writer Holley claimed a platform for her social and political beliefs, and a voice for women seeking to create an independent existence. As a humorist she reached a large audience; as a satirist she delivered social commentary and advocated reform.

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113See Chapter One of this thesis for a discussion of the correspondence between Holley and Willard and Holley and Anthony. See Chapter Seven of this thesis for a discussion of *Sweet Cicely.*
CHAPTER THREE

HOW SHE ROTE HER BOOKS

But still that deep voice kept a ’swaiden me—“Josiah Allen’s wife, write a book…about your life, as it passes in front of you and Josiah, daily…The great publick wheel is a rollin’ on slowly, drawin’ the Femail Race into liberty; Josiah Allen’s wife, put your shoulder blades to the wheel.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley, My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s

From the early nineteenth century the American popular fiction that evolved out of the mélange of literary styles appealed to a middle-class, white audience. Much of this fiction was not great literature, but rather writing that penetrated society, illustrated ordinary life for the average American, and provided entertainment with a message. Of course, male authors dominated the literary field. However, over the decades a few women were able to put a female perspective on popular literature. By the 1870s social and political conditions for women intersected in the writing of Marietta Holley. Her work was a composite of numerous popular American literary styles; to appreciate Holley’s work, one must know a bit about these styles.

One of the earliest types of nineteenth century American fiction was the popular sentimental and domestic novel. Holley’s books had a large dose of the sentimental, for which she was often criticized.¹ However, particularly for Holley, this melodramatic writing was often at once a reflection and a rejection of the very gentility and sentimentality that underpinned middle-class society. Also, temperance literature, both non-fiction and fiction, was an obvious and important influence in Holley’s work. Of course, humor was the style for which Holley was, and is even today, most remembered. American literary humor grew out of a unique style that reflected American individualism and rejected Old World traditions. I will argue that, taken together, these

¹Interestingly, Holley usually signed her sentimental stories with her real name, reserving “Josiah Allen’s Wife” for her dialect works.
three methods allowed Holley to pioneer a type of literature that would convey a message in a way that was sentimental, satirical, and reformist.

The transition from the North American British colonies to the United States of America triggered the birth of a new and different culture. American society had an identifiable beginning, deliberately designed by men according to Enlightenment values of personal liberty and natural rights. American culture was essentially humanist, encouraging men to seek out a special path, to live a dream of complete self-determination, and to make personal goals inviolate. However, as American culture matured the application of those values revealed divergent realities for different segments of society. For white male property owners, reality entailed the freedom to define one’s life, with liberty of choice an important and cherished component. For white middle-class women, the primary subject of this thesis, reality entailed limits on both individual freedom and liberty of choice. This dichotomy pervaded American society and was reflected, both implicitly and explicitly, in American writing.

In the nineteenth century Americans built upon pre-Revolutionary traditions to form a unique culture. As in any diverse population, a social stratification developed that divided the larger whole into smaller segments according to class, gender, and race. This stratification was evident in a number of literary styles that both promoted and criticized values such as domesticity, involvement in public affairs, and social reforms that affected the lives of white middle-class women. The literary styles were both fiction and non-fiction, and included expository writing, advice guides, magazine articles, short stories, novels, reform tracts, and humor. Some of these works were serious, some were didactic, others sentimental, and still others irreverent. A number of these works were extremely well received, widely read, and influential in creating, reflecting, and fostering the evolution of American culture.

Sentimentality and genteel values were important components of middle-class life and popular fiction in nineteenth century America. Underlying both sentimentality and gentility was the
gender-based culture that placed women within an ideological sphere separate from that of men, with women as the moral gatekeepers and caretakers of the home and family, and men as the guardians of public affairs. ² Sentimentality and gentility fostered a set of customs and expectations for acceptable behavior that fueled and perpetuated what many contemporary analysts viewed as pretentious foolishness intended to detract from meaningful social discourse. Indeed, Marietta Holley’s Betsey Bobbet embodied the epitome of ridiculous sentimentality and gentility, and some of Holley’s most biting satire was evident in the interactions between Betsey Bobbet and Samantha Allen. However, twentieth century historians and literary scholars have re-examined and reinterpreted certain aspects of sentimentality and gentility to expose an undercurrent of female empowerment beneath the façade.

Historian Karen Halttunen described a system of etiquette that provided the rules for genteel behavior in sentimental culture: “At the center of the genteel performance was an important contradiction: the contents of polite social intercourse…were natural and sincere feelings; but the forms of polite conduct…were deliberate and restrained.” ³ All social interactions were to follow an almost scripted pattern. Dress, personal hygiene, table manners, greetings, departures, courtship, and marriage were all subject to a politeness manifested through proper restraint and emotional control. ⁴ These rules led to a conflict between reserved gentility and demonstrative sentimentality; this conflict was alleviated by the ideal of naturalness, the belief that stilted insincerity should be avoided in favor of genuine, relaxed self-confidence. ⁵ Halttunen used the set-up of the genteel

²See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of the concept of woman’s sphere, including life for women in the home, women’s domestic and childrearing duties, middle-class women’s chores, manual labor required of women in rural settings, and educational opportunities and needs.


⁴Ibid., 96.

⁵Ibid., 100-101.
home as an example. In what she called social geography, a home was constructed similarly to a theater with a parlor that served as the stage and a hall that doubled as a sort of backstage dressing room. Guests stepped into the hall to effect repairs to appearance and dress that resulted from the stress of travel, then entered the parlor fresh and ready to be seen in polite company. An important adjunct to this social geography was tact – a host, hostess, or other guests must refrain from noticing and commenting on a lapse in gentility; one person should not monopolize a conversation; humor should be self-deprecating and never aimed at others. People who were given the time and opportunity to attend to appearances could be more natural and considerate in interaction with others.

Literature was an important tool for communicating rules and guidelines for genteel etiquette. In fact, middle-class society depended on literature to provide advice and examples of proper gentility. Literary historian Richard Bushman argued that an intellectual or mental culture arose to connect reading with genteel values: “No single item was more essential to a respectable household than a collection of books, and no activity more effectual for refinement and personal improvement than reading.” Just as the Republican Mother of the Revolutionary Era was responsible for instilling the proper values in her children, the middle-class housewife of the mid-nineteenth century was expected to improve her mind through reading. Bushman explained that an ignorant woman was anathema, and the most expedient antidote to ignorance was a good book. Of course the female members of the household were not the only ones to benefit from reading, but

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6 Halttunen’s social geography was different from that of Mary P. Ryan. Where Ryan applied the term to family relationships, Halttunen meant actual positioning of furniture and objects in the home. See Chapter Two of this thesis for Ryan’s definition of social geography.

7 Halttunen, Confidence, 107-110.


9 See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of Republican Motherhood.
being well-read was an essential ingredient to a woman’s personal and social improvement. The bookcase that became an important furnishing in the genteel home was often well-stocked with the sentimental fiction that was so influential in the cultivation of gentility.\textsuperscript{10}

Although true intellectuals considered academic subjects such as history, biography, and philosophy to be the only worthwhile reading material, the ordinary middle-class reader was drawn to fiction. Bushman noted that novels illustrated the genteel values to which the middle-class should aspire, and fiction’s large audience insured the dissemination of these values. Most likely penned by women, sentimental fiction’s popularity could be attributed to the desire of the readers to imagine a life of gentility and to identify with characters who led such lives. One of the main attractions was a wildly improbable storyline in which was embedded the slightest kernel of truth. Such a formula hooked the reader into identifying with the fictional characters that lived, worked, loved, and died in circumstances that could at least partly reflect middle-class experience. An ironic feature of sentimental literature was that the genteel storylines that drew in the female reader could be critical of the middle-class culture of gentility. For example, sentimental novels frequently contained language condemnatory to novel reading.\textsuperscript{11}

Bushman pointed out that despite, or perhaps because of, sentimental fiction’s enduring popularity, a budding democratic American society dismissed this type of literature as lacking a valid contribution to mental or intellectual culture. Such fiction promoted aristocratic values that were at odds with the very foundation of American republicanism. A society trying to establish and develop a culture of independence in which the individual could achieve self-expression without the constraints of rigid social hierarchy rejected the pretentiousness of gentility that evoked outdated values of the old country and way of life. Furthermore, Bushman noted that the spirit of

\textsuperscript{10}Bushman, \textit{Refinement}, 285.

\textsuperscript{11}Ibid., 288.
the sentimental novel presented a paradox to the female reader: she was reading for self-

improvement, but the material she was reading often conveyed self-contradictory messages such as

“women’s subordination to men” and adherence to restrictive rules for behavior.\textsuperscript{12} The public

needed to find a way to reconcile genteel aspirations with democratic ideals; women needed to

transcend stereotypes while indulging in fantasy.

Bushman explained that one way to alleviate the tension between genteel nonsense and

reality for the burgeoning American middle-class while preserving the entertainment derived from

the sentimental novel was “to redesign gentility for an American setting.”\textsuperscript{13} As part of the concept

of woman’s sphere, education for young girls should include not only the higher arts and

intellectual pursuits, but also training in domestic and household operations. Most middle-class

women did not lead lives of leisure with servants at beck and call; rather, women that cared for

home and family required practical knowledge. Also, women living on farms needed additional

skills that may have included manual labor. Education should provide a “balance” wherein a

woman could acquire genteel refinement as well as industry and frugality.\textsuperscript{14} Historian Mary Kelley

pointed out that education for girls was tailored to instill culturally acceptable character traits

devoted to the home and imbued with domestic wisdom.\textsuperscript{15} Thus gentility was reshaped to fit a

society in which women were expected to work, but in which that work was private, feminine, and

genteel.\textsuperscript{16}

\textsuperscript{12}Ibid., 290.

\textsuperscript{13}Ibid., 298.

\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 300-302.

\textsuperscript{15}Mary Kelley, \textit{Private Woman, Public Stage: Literary Domesticity in Nineteenth-Century


\textsuperscript{16}See Chapter Two of this thesis for Catharine Beecher’s interpretation of the gentility of
domesticity, which epitomized this attitude.
Marietta Holley’s work showed obvious influence of the genteel, sentimental writing style. She wrote dozens of sentimental short stories that were published in popular women’s magazines from the late 1860s. These stories contained all of the features of the classic sentimental tale, and were always taken very seriously. Holley’s novels also incorporated the sentimental and genteel but with contrasting focus and purpose. The sentimental was sometimes serious when dealing with the tragic consequences of intemperance as in Sweet Cicely and Samantha at the Centennial, and sometimes a source of satire when illustrating Betsey Bobbet’s ridiculous poetry and self-defeating attitudes towards marriage.

Another genre that was an offshoot of the sentimental literature and through which gentility found literary expression was the domestic novel. Centered on hearth and home, domestic novels melded middle-class Americans, homey values, and local customs with gentility. Holley’s work contained a strong relationship to the domestic novel, showing Samantha’s happy and healthy family life. This domestic component to Holley’s work was mostly without satire, although the domestic relationship between Samantha and Josiah Allen was the source of much humor.

Fiction and non-fiction author and biographer Helen Waite Papashvily explained that domestic novels often mirrored the experience of women in nineteenth century America, reflecting the lives of the overwhelmingly-female authors in a simultaneous but paradoxical acceptance and rejection of the concept of woman’s sphere. Papashvily’s description of the almost clichéd nature of the domestic novel was frequently evident in Holley’s books: “The common woman was always glorified, her every thought, action, gesture, chance word fraught with esoteric meaning and far-reaching influence; her daily routine of cooking, washing, baking, nursing, scrubbing imbued with

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17 Holley’s stories appeared primarily in Peterson’s Magazine and the Ladies Home Journal. Other than to mention her repertoire, a discussion of Holley’s sentimental short stories is outside the focus of this thesis and will not be included.

18 See Chapters Six and Seven of this thesis for detailed discussions of these works.
dramatic significance; her petty trials and small joys magnified to heroic proportions.” True to the rules of genteel society, the events and adventures of the stories had marriage as the central focus. Unfortunately, the heroines were often trapped in unhappy relationships with men. However, divorce was unthinkable, resulting in a fallen woman who became a social outcast. A strong heroine endured her trials stoically, looking for solace in her children and other family members.

The irony in the domestic novel, as in Holley’s books, was that the female authors often used the heroines to expose the inequities of woman’s sphere; an aura of discontent arose when the seemingly resigned and compliant wife and mother glimpsed a better life of womanly independence but did not have the wherewithal or resources to grasp that life. Papashvily argued, “the domestic novels were handbooks of another kind of feminine revolt…these pretty tales reflected and encouraged a pattern of feminine behavior” that would challenge gender-bias and shatter woman’s sphere.

Again, as seen in Holley’s work, stories that featured beleaguered wives and dissipated husbands held a veiled message of the need for women’s political rights and other reforms, especially temperance. Literature scholar Elaine Showalter described formulaic tales of the happy heroine who fell on hard times before marrying the right man with whom she lived happily ever after. Such a heroine showed strength, self-reliance, and common sense and often supported women’s rights, but generally did not seek life far outside of woman’s sphere.

 Literary scholar, editor, and professor Herbert Ross Brown supported the idea that the domestic novel “sought to glorify the American home” and that a woman “who entertained

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20Ibid., xvi.

21Ibid., xvii.

ambitions outside the family circle was regarded as ‘the moral horror of the time.’” Indeed, the novels glorified family life sometimes at the expense of the plot. Brown described a genre in which the “old homestead” with the “venerable patriarch” presiding over the family unit provided the perfect backdrop for the loving relationship between husband and wife. A woman must marry, and must stay married and satisfied in her homely environs and the dignity of her homely duties, a vine clinging to the strong tree of the protective husband. Furthermore, if a woman did find herself trapped in an unhappy marriage or home, she was expected to demonstrate “submissive endurance…as a model for all suffering wives to follow.” Brown’s perspective evoked Holley’s satirical characterization of Betsey Bobbet as a “clinging vine” willing to sacrifice her integrity and happiness for the false dignity of marriage -- except for Betsey no man wanted to be her supportive tree. In any case, other researchers shared Brown’s conclusions. Literature scholar Susan K. Harris noted that in these nineteenth century novels even a self-sufficient heroine living independently ultimately gave up her liberty for matrimony. Halttunen stated that “The central premise underlying all the sentimental fiction that poured off the American press in the nineteenth century was that private experience was superior to public life.” In keeping with the idea of woman’s sphere, the heroine was sensitive, affectionate and motivated by the heart. She was emotionally transparent, and incapable of hypocrisy, and adhered to the “lofty ideal of personal conduct.”

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26Halttunen, *Confidence Men*, 56-57, 60.
In an effort to validate the true feminine values of home and hearth, some of the domestic novels actually strayed from the genteel culture to criticize phony manners and exaggerated politeness. These novels were set in the country, away from the temptations of city life. Country women were more self-sufficient and able to fashion the perfect domicile out of the limited resources available on a farm. Country women had a groundedness that the flighty gentility of the city did not support. City dwellers could appreciate the simplicity of farm life without ever wanting to live on a farm. Country dwellers saw no attraction in city life whatsoever. However, even with her expanded role, the country woman was still most importantly a wife and mother. Holley’s Samantha Allen was such a character: happy with her life on the farm, down-to-earth, resourceful, logical, and completely incapable of hypocrisy. Family harmony was Samantha’s primary concern. Of course, Samantha dictated the terms of that harmony, but always respected the feelings the others even when she disagreed with those feelings.

Papashvily noted that throughout the nineteenth century the domestic novel was dismissed as bad fiction written by incompetent authors who told silly tales appealing only to bored women. Conventional wisdom held that a woman with a penchant for writing and a talent for story telling was an appropriate target for ridicule from the male literary establishment. She was merely capitalizing on her overactive curiosity, her uncontrollable affinity for gossip, and her desire for fame. However, the fact was that these books were hugely successful, made the publishers very wealthy, and provided the female author with a socially acceptable means of contributing to the economic support of her family while maintaining her ties to the home. Woman-authored domestic novels were the among the best selling books in 1852, 1866, 1872, and 1876, making record sales

27 Brown, Sentimental Novel, 312-313.
28 Papashvily, Happy Endings, 40.
for the nineteenth century and becoming some of the most popular books ever published in the
United States.  

Female authorship carried financial implications for women and families. Susan Coultrap-
McQuin, a professor of English and Women’s Studies, noted that some women turned to writing to
supplement family income during hard times. Marietta Holley was an example of the type of
woman Coultrap-McQuin described. Writing was a safe way to bring in some extra money without
having to step too much away from the home, and could generate a higher and more stable income
than other traditional female work such as sewing or teaching. However, as Coultrap-McQuin
noted, women faced with the conundrum of “affirm[ing] noncommercial values while competing
for a good income” felt the frustration of gender-based pay inequity.  

Mary Kelley also noted that
the financial success of the female authors had implications for the nature of women’s self-
determination. Bringing in money, no matter how sorely needed, was a reversal of the traditional
male/female roles. Although financial necessity trumped the stigma of public exposure, women
rationalized their work; talent and a desire to create were insufficient grounds for excusing the
transgression into male world of commerce. Consequently, women had difficulty with a self-
perception as breadwinners and were left feeling like “deviants, anomalies, merely substitutes for
males.”

In addition to the financial motives behind female authorship, women wrote to claim a
public voice. Often the novel became a forum for reforms such as temperance and women’s rights.

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29Ibid., 118, 132, 156, 180. The books Papashvily referred to were Harriet Beecher Stowe’s
*Uncle Tom’s Cabin* (1852), Augusta Jane Evans’s *St. Elmo*, (1866), and E.D.E.N. Southworth’s *The
Lost Heir of Lilithgow* (1872) and *Self-Raised* (1876). See Mott, Frank Luther. *Golden Multitudes: The

30Susan Margaret Coultrap-McQuin, *Doing Literary Business: American Women Writers in the


32Ibid., 177.
Writers like Holley sought to influence public affairs that related directly to women’s lives and livelihoods. Historian Ann Douglas Wood noted that by the late nineteenth century the lives of the heroines were more realistic and less sentimental; the heroines “were forced into the ways of subversion and … of opposition.” Some of these later novels depicted women entering female careers such as teaching or writing as a means of self-empowerment. Harris remarked on “literature’s function to teach readers moral conduct.” Authors had to tread a precarious course between the divergent systems of values with regard to female characters. Although a woman’s public persona had to be one of submission, she could express independent views in the privacy of her home. A strong female character showed the reader that autonomy for women was possible. Even the use of sentimental language was a means of creating a uniquely feminine environment in which to express self-sufficiency within the bounds of cultural oppression.

Wood noted that the female authors understood the immensity of the obstacles to women’s independence. The act of writing in the first place was a rebellion against artificial restrictions. In fact writing was a way for women to engage in a “profession” while keeping to the “unprofessional” confines of the home. Coultrap-McQuin exposed the “paradox” of the “persistence and success” of women writers “in the face of attitudes and behaviors that could render them invisible” and the “cultural beliefs and social circumstances in nineteenth century America that both created the possibility of woman writer and devalued her efforts.” She described a social and literary environment in which women writers labored within the cultural restrictions of

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34 Papashvily, Happy Endings, 16, 158-159.

35 Harris, “‘But is it Any Good?’” 48-50, 56.


37 Coultrap-McQuin, Literary Business, 3.
woman’s sphere. Coultrap-McQuin mentioned the components of the “province of women,” including literature, church, home, motherhood, character building, family, genteel manners, moral superiority, self-reliance, and sentimentality. Writing was a way for women to draw upon these factors to find and project a voice in society, to claim a position of authority and worth, and to make a living. Marietta Holley certainly wrote to support her family. In fact she remembered that the first payment she received from a publisher was a revelation: she wanted to write and being paid justified her pursuit of this desire.

Female authorship had significant ramifications for the structure of society and the nature of woman’s existence. Those who stepped beyond socially-assigned ideals of femininity often experienced inner conflict. Kelley noted that men shaped social structures; women had traditionally been “receivers of culture,” with education and training all geared toward specific roles, first as daughters and later as wives and mothers. The act of writing was an assertion of self-definition. Women authors were transformed from passive cultural consumers into creators of culture, a situation that changed the very nature of female personhood. However, this transformation was not a static accomplishment and women authors continued to move in a reality that fluctuated between extrinsically imposed limitations and self-determining expression.

In her investigation into nineteenth century women authors, Showalter noted the conflicting opinions of male historians of nineteenth century American female literature. Fred Lewis Pattee, whom Showalter described as a “pioneering scholar” for his 1940 study The Feminine Fifties, described the 1850s as a time when “feminine fiction began to appear in a flood, and the greater part of it was produced by New England women or transplanted New England

38Ibid., 7-9.


40Kelley, Private Woman, 183-184.
women, and women and even men were buying it in unheard of quantities.” Showalter interpreted Pattee’s comment to mean that the proliferation of female-authored best sellers signaled a change in the way women interacted with society and culture, and was “essential to our understanding of the nation and the times.” Showalter also noted that nineteenth century male authors often showed “open hostility” toward their female contemporaries while competing for readers and ownership of the most popular storylines and themes. She referenced “American literary historian” and Harvard University professor F.O. Matthiessen’s 1941 *America Renaissance*, which focused on five male authors that he believed were representative of the best of 1850’s American literature. Matthiessen gave passing reference to the work of female authors, which he noted was remembered more for the sheer volume of book sales rather than any literary value. In fact, Matthiessen quoted Nathaniel Hawthorne’s famous comment:

> America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I should have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash–and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed. What is the mystery of these innumerable editions of the ‘Lamplighter,’ and other books neither better nor worse?–worse they could not be, and better they need not be, when they sell by the 100,000.

Showalter concluded that Matthiessen agreed with Hawthorne’s belittling of the contribution of female authors, stating that Matthiessen “acknowledged [that] there were American women turning out books…but they were not significant.” Given that many of the plots developed by female authors reflected woman’s sphere, these negative attitudes that the women authors faced illustrated the irony of women’s being criticized for expressing publicly what was revered within the confines of the home and family.

41Showalter, *Jury*, 70.


Despite the inroads that women authors may have made into public life, writing often did not provide the freedom or credibility necessary to have a true impact. As previously mentioned, female authorship could precipitate a crisis of being. Kelley claimed that some nineteenth century women writers felt compelled to seek anonymity behind a pseudonym, either male or female: exposing one’s true identity endangered the woman’s status and femininity, and keeping the author’s identity unknown was an act of cultural self-preservation.\textsuperscript{44} Historian Patricia R. Hill noted that even Harriet Beecher Stowe, one of the best-known authors of her time, established, respected, famous, and marketable, felt the need to “display a self-consciousness.” In her \textit{House and Home Papers}, Stowe was compelled to assume a male persona as a means to “clothe herself with authority.”\textsuperscript{45}

Marietta Holley used the pseudonym Jemema for her earliest stories, and later settled on Josiah Allen’s Wife for her dialect sketches and novels. Holley appreciated the anonymity that the pseudonym provided, especially early in her career when she was unsure of how successful she might be. Later when she started using her real name readers continued to confuse Holley and her fictional Samantha. This confusion has persisted and even some twentieth and twenty-first century Holley scholars use the two names interchangeably.\textsuperscript{46}

Despite the many obstacles, women authors played a significant role in the development of an American literary establishment. Writing wielded influence; women writers used this influence in both subtle and obvious ways, especially when motivated by the desire to have a societal impact. In addition to sentimental and domestic fiction, women used writing to promote a number of

\textsuperscript{44}Kelley, \textit{Private Woman}, 127.


\textsuperscript{46}See Chapter One of this thesis for a discussion of Holley’s pseudonym and the lingering confusion the penname created.
popular nineteenth century social reforms. Marietta Holley was the foremost and most widely-read woman reformist author.

Specific reform movements often generated idiosyncratic bodies of literature. One of the longest-lived movements -- the one that attracted the largest number of women and gave rise to a distinctive literary genre -- was temperance. As with other writing styles surveyed in this chapter, temperance literature evolved from male origins to be adopted by a number of woman authors. In the mid to late nineteenth century a body of temperance fiction emerged with interesting and heartbreaking stories to target a larger audience and spread the temperance message. Marietta Holley was a prolific writer of temperance fiction, taking her place in the trajectory of such literature and establishing herself as an effective literary and social reformer.

A brief examination of some of the best known temperance literature will help in understanding the social and literary forces that influenced authors like Holley. Temperance literature began as non-fiction, often as pamphlets containing medical or moral admonishments about the evils of liquor. Benjamin Rush (1746-1813) was one of the earliest American temperance advocates. As a medical student at Scotland’s Edinburgh University, Rush became aware of the devastating consequences of overconsumption of distilled liquors. In 1784, Rush published the first version of An Inquiry into the Effects of Spirituous Liquors upon the Human Body, And their Influence upon the Happiness of Society. This pamphlet would go through eight editions, with the last one being published in 1814, a year after Rush’s death, with the title An Inquiry into the Effects of Ardent Spirits upon the Human Body and Mind, with an Account of the Means of Preventing, and of the Remedies for Curing Them. Rush created “A Moral and Physical Thermometer” that illustrated the effects of various drinks, from water, which represented the best of temperance,

through “Gin, Brandy, and Rum, in the morning,” which represented the worst of intemperance and typically resulted in “Vices” including “Burglary and Murder;” “Diseases” including “Melancholy, palsy, apoplexy, Madness and Despair;” and “Punishments” including “Gallows.” Rush was one of the first to call habitual drunkenness a disease with a list of recognizable and predictable symptoms. He also noted the “hereditary and family” features of drunkenness, and advised that parents should consider intemperance when “deciding upon the matrimonial connexions of their children.”

Rush noted the moral failures of habitual drunkards, who had little regard for the welfare of wives and children when choosing to drink. He called upon “Ministers of the gospel” to exhort the flock to avoid “the great destroyer of lives and souls.” He called upon governments to enact laws to “limit the number of taverns – to impose heavy duties upon ardent spirits – to inflict a mark of disgrace upon…every man convicted of drunkenness.” He finally offered a list of behavioral management techniques to prevent men from overindulging, such as adequate sleep and good nutrition, breaking drinking routines, and avoiding contact with drinking buddies. For Rush intemperance was a combination of illness and moral failing. The moral component became the greater focus of later temperance advocates, especially those in the clergy.

Lyman Beecher (1775-1863) was the progenitor of the famous and influential Beecher family and an early religion-based temperance activist. He became focused on temperance early in his ministerial career in Connecticut. In 1811 he devised a seven-step program to combat intemperance for the General Association of Congregationalists in Sharon, Connecticut. He continued his temperance work and in 1825 wrote *Six Sermons on the Nature, Occasions, Signs,*


Evils, and Remedy of Intemperance, a manifesto that helped to spur the nineteenth century temperance movement. Beecher’s treatise covered many of the same points that Rush had previously made about the dangers of consumption of “ardent spirits:” the daily after-work drink, the giddy feelings that can result from drunkenness, the physical maladies engendered by long-term drinking, and the addiction and ever increasing quantities required. He warned of the false safety of social drinking, of medicinal drinking, and of liquor consumption by children. Beecher addressed all the arguments used to justify drinking, and debunked every one.  

Although Beecher’s treatise was non-fiction, his descriptions of intemperate behavior became recurring themes in later temperance fiction, including that of Marietta Holley. Indeed, as will become clear later in this thesis, every one of Beecher’s observations about, condemnations of, and solutions to intemperance appeared numerous times in Holley’s novels -- both her temperance and her women’s rights books. Beecher noted that the habitual drunkard associated “time and place” with drinking; found “occasions and opportunities” to drink; hid his drinking; developed a distinctive physical appearance, including “bloated countenance, and flushed visages, and tainted breath, and inflamed eye;” and became angry when denied a drink. Beecher called intemperance “a disease as well as a crime,” and likened the “prudent use of ardent sprits” to prudent exposure to the plague, prudent daily poisoning, or prudent association with venomous snakes. He asserted the only certain way to avoid intemperance was never to drink in the first place, and the only effective way to become temperate was to stop drinking completely.  

Beecher discussed the inextricably complicated relationship of intemperance, economics, and law: “There is too much capital vested in the importation, distillation, and vending of ardent spirits, and too brisk a demand for their consumption in the market, to render mere legal influence

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52 Ibid., Sermon II.
to keep the practice of trafficking in ardent spirits within safe limits.” Beecher wrote that outcry from saloonkeepers, politicians supported by the liquor interests, and the general public undermined any regulations on the sale of liquor. People would certainly not stop drinking voluntarily. Supply would meet demand. Beecher noted the destructive influence of liquor on families and society. He concluded that no good could ever come from the commerce of the liquor trade, and that humanity, patriotism, conscience, and religion all dictated that this trade must be abolished.  

Beecher accused the suppliers of liquor of being every bit as culpable in the resultant social destruction as the drinkers. Vendors who did not break any laws in the sale of liquor to the intemperate were nevertheless ethically at fault. To promote drinking was as great a sin as intemperance, and to promote drinking with full knowledge of the social consequences was an act of moral self-destruction. Claims of blamelessness based on the “free agency” of the drunkard were invalid and made the vendor complicit in immeasurable evil. Beecher did, however offer a solution: “rectified public opinion…Our all is at stake; we shall perish if we do not effect it. There is nothing that ought to be done, which a free people cannot do.” Reform was possible when men found hope and turned that hope into action.

Beecher ended his sermons with “The Remedy of Intemperance.” The public must be educated about the dangers of drink, and this education must begin in childhood. Groups of people needed to band together into associations for mutual support in the fight against intemperance. Liquor should not be earned as a reward for hard work. The churches needed to take a great role in working for intemperance. The manufacture and distribution of liquor should be made illegal.

53Ibid., Sermon IV.
54Ibid., Sermon V.
55Ibid., Sermon VI.
Beecher wrote for the common person; his language was simple and direct; his arguments were logical and persuasive; his goal was humanitarian and noble. Although he recognized a psychological drive of the intemperate to drink, Beecher saw intemperance primarily as a moral failing and a powerfully destructive social force. He had a very clear view of human nature and the effects of intemperance on individuals, families, and society as a whole. He knew that economic forces and political favors always trumped morality. He knew that people who valued liberty resisted any regulation, even when that liberty was self-destructive and regulation would alleviate suffering. Immediate gratification was a powerful force, and people avoided self-examination and sacrifice in favor of momentary pleasure. For Beecher intemperance showed a lack of human values; temperance held the opportunity to exercise self-determination.

Marietta Holley echoed Rush’s and Beecher’s thoughts on and condemnation of intemperance in relating her personal experiences and in her fiction. Her autobiographical work contained numerous references to John Barleycorn, the appearance of drunkards, the humiliating behavior that could result from inebriation, the destruction of families and careers, and the waste of talent.\(^{56}\) With her fiction she blamed political and business leaders for the scourge of intemperance; accused the Christian Church of complicity in perpetuating a sinful, immoral, and devastating practice; and advocated pro-temperance legislation and prohibition.\(^{57}\) She persisted despite the discouraging lack of what she would have considered to be the only moral and productive social and cultural response. However, in the intervening decades between Rush’s and Beecher’s treatises and Holley’s novels a whole genre emerged and matured to convey the same moral message to a wider audience to promote social reform.

\(^{56}\text{See Chapter One of this thesis for Holley’s reminiscences about drunkenness.}\)

\(^{57}\text{Primarily Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife, discussed in Chapter Seven of this thesis.}\)
A great body of fiction arose from the temperance movement. As Benjamin Rush’s *Inquiry* and Lyman Beecher’s *Sermons* illustrated, early temperance literature was primarily expository and sought to change human behavior through moral suasion and practical advice. However, temperance fiction found a following among readers looking for a message packaged in sensationalism, with a moral explicitly communicated in shocking revelations with which many readers, unfortunately, were familiar. 58 Indeed, temperance advocates promoted fiction as the most effective method of spreading the word to the largest possible audiences. Herbert Ross Brown noted that people were more apt to read a work of fiction complete with lurid details of the dangers of intemperance than treatises full of stark statistics and dire admonitions. However, these works of fiction were always infused with implicit truth. 59

Temperance fiction was an outgrowth of sentimental fiction, and was similarly formulaic. Brown explained that recurring themes included the power of alcohol to overpower the most well-intentioned man: one taste usually led to a rapid, downward spiral from which the victim could not be saved. Even superiorly aloof observers of the destructive effects of intemperance inevitably met ruin in alcohol’s seductive pleasures. With little scientific knowledge but much anecdotal evidence of the processes of physical addiction, authors depicted the drunkard as a weak-willed, moral degenerate and destroyer of family unity. Intemperate men met graphically described and horrifyingly violent deaths from suicide, freezing, accidental cremation, delirium tremens, or spontaneous combustion. Innocent family members often died as well, usually as a result of the behavior of an inebriated husband, father, son, or brother. The most heart-wrenching scenes included a suffering wife, a dying mother, a distraught sister, or the deathbed of a small child injured or fallen ill because of a drunkard’s negligence. Women pledged to remain unmarried in an


effort to convince suitors to take a temperance pledge. Married women formed temperance societies and worked to influence male family members to vote pro-temperance. In fact, temperance legislation figured prominently in these stories, with arguments for and against legal prohibition often ending in the passage of local ordinances regulating the manufacture and sale of alcohol. Most importantly, these stories were intended to convey a strong message that the evils of drink could be escaped only through a steadfast resolve to temperance by any and all possible means.

Perhaps the most famous work of temperance fiction was T. S. Arthur’s *Ten Nights in a Bar-Room, And What I Saw There*. Written in 1854, this book chronicled the destructive effects of liquor on an entire community. The format of this book was typical of temperance fiction: “the belabored thesis, the step-by-step decline of the inebriate, the lurid episodes of horror and death, the martyred innocents, and the all-pervading atmosphere of sanctimonious piety.” The story, which unfolded over a period of several years, focused on the life of Simon Slade, a mill-operator turned tavern owner. At the outset of the tale, Slade was an upstanding businessman who insisted that monetary benefits outweighed the possible dangerous impact of the liquor trade. By tale’s end Slade and his son Frank were hardened alcoholics and the tavern had become a run-down, filthy dive frequented by corrupt politicians. The efforts of Slade’s wife and daughter to maintain a modicum of stability were completely overpowered by the evils of drink, and a small, innocent child was killed from injuries sustained when she entered the tavern and walked into the middle of a drunken brawl. Recurring discussions of political reforms centered on the issue of civil liberty -- the right of a citizen to drink and the infringement on that liberty implicit in laws designed to regulate the sale of alcohol. Opponents of such laws claimed that the true solution to the problem of intemperance was education: “We must inculcate temperance as the right principle. We must teach

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60Ibid., 216-235, *passim*.

our children the evils of intemperance, and send them out into the world as practical teachers of order, virtue, and sobriety. If we do this, the reform becomes radical, and in a few years there will be no bar-rooms, for none will crave the fiery poison." Of course the events of the story revealed the literally fatal flaw in such an argument. In the end Frank killed Slade in a drunken fight; Frank was convicted of murder and sent to jail. In reaction to this terrible chain of alcohol-induced events, the town government enacted resolutions to close all taverns and stop the sale of liquor. Temperance and right thinking prevailed.  

Rush’s Inquiry, Beecher’s Sermons, and Arthur’s Ten Nights in a Bar-Room set the groundwork for temperance writing. However, later in the nineteenth century as women’s participation in the temperance movement grew in numbers and influence, women authors including Marietta Holley adopted, and adapted, temperance fiction to suit the cause of female-driven social reform. Woman-authored temperance fiction was a re-working of the sentimental and domestic novel, with familiar themes of home and morality folded into a distinctly reformist vehicle. Literature scholar and historian Carol Mattingly discussed the rhetoric of temperance fiction, the differences between male and female-authored temperance fiction, and sentimental women’s fiction. In contrast to the decidedly male perspective of the earlier stories, female authors focused on women’s lives and experiences. Unlike the ineffectual women such as Arthur’s Mrs. and Miss Slade, female authors depicted women as strong, principled, and capable of facing hardships and finding solutions. Temperance literature was the first forum through which women could address social and political issues directly and explicitly, including domestic violence, married women’s property rights, and divorce. Although the stories were fiction, the circumstances

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63 Ibid., summary.
reflected the sad reality for many women impacted by the behavior of intemperate men. Female characters confronted the full gamut of intemperance-fueled, gender-based social injustice, including publicly documented situations that unfortunately still occur in the twenty-first century: husbands hiding or selling the wives’ clothing, wives and children forced out of homes on winter nights, husbands who beat and killed wives with impunity. Women authors used fictional women to spur the agitation for reform of social conventions and laws that provided insufficient protection against men who “pose[d] the chief danger for women through physical force and legal privilege.”

Mattingly called temperance fiction “cultural work” that revealed, albeit in a fictional format, the actual challenges and powerlessness of women and families trapped in intemperate marriages. These stories were widely disseminated and read by large numbers of women, many of whom could relate to the experiences of the fictional characters. In contrast to the sentimental or domestic novel in which marriage was the desired culmination of a woman’s life, woman-authored temperance fiction usually began with the happy wedding and moved on to the destruction of the home life that resulted from the husband’s drinking. Sometimes the husband exhibited, even before the wedding, behaviors, habits, and even physical traits that foreboded the inevitable doom related to overindulgence in ardent spirits.

Marietta Holley incorporated all of these rhetorical devices into her temperance novels. In *Sweet Cicely* alone Holley included the strong-willed but weak-constitutioned Cicely whose devoted husband succumbed to habitual drunkenness and inevitable death after two happy years of marriage. Cicely’s drive to protect her son from a life of intemperance ruined her health and

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65Ibid., 7, 8, 9.

eventually led to the deaths of both. In a subplot the women of the Burpy family endured unspeakable humiliation at the hands of intemperate male relatives.\textsuperscript{67}

Marriage, for many women the most important personal relationship and indicator of social standing, was an overarching topic in women’s temperance literature. Women were duped by attentive suitors who became intemperate monsters after the wedding. This fiction often served as a warning to young women – marriage did not ensure happiness or domestic stability; an intemperate suitor always became an intemperate husband regardless of the young wife’s attempts to reform him; the lack of legal rights placed a woman in danger and at the mercy of a male society that cared little for her safety or that of her children; even a strong woman could become the victim of an intemperate husband; remaining single was safer than being in a marriage wracked by husbandly drunkenness.\textsuperscript{68} Holley’s Betsey Bobbet met this type of fate when she relentlessly pursued the reluctant Simon Slimpsey, a widower who left her at home to take care of his many unruly children while he spent his days at the local saloon. However, Holley used Betsey’s predicament both to condemn intemperance and to lampoon the all-important cultural ideal of marriage: Betsey, who had expended incredible effort to snag a husband and achieve the dignity of marriage, ended up pining for widowhood.\textsuperscript{69}

The common denominator of all women’s temperance fiction was that women were responsible for creating and maintaining a temperate society. The heroines never drank liquor, but were always virtuous, domestic, and caring wives and mothers.\textsuperscript{70} As Mattingly pointed out, the message was clear: “Alcohol jeopardizes the birth hope of young women who trust their futures to intemperate men; it also often endangers children physically, economically, and socially, especially

\textsuperscript{67}See Chapter Seven of this thesis for a detailed discussion of \textit{Sweet Cicely}.

\textsuperscript{68}Mattingly, \textit{Well-Tempered}, 128-130.

\textsuperscript{69}Holley, \textit{My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s}, Chapters 3, 14, 17, 31. See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of \textit{My Opinions}.

\textsuperscript{70}Mattingly, \textit{Well-Tempered}, 144.
daughters, who must live with alcoholic fathers; fathers, mothers, daughters, and sisters face heartbreak because of the devastating effect drink has on sons and loved ones.71

By the end of the nineteenth century, probably as a reflection of increased education for women and suffrage activism, the heroines of temperance fiction became stronger and more independent. As in Holley’s *Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife*, the heroines became role models: unafraid to speak out in public; more inclined to remain single; able to assume family responsibilities after the death of the dissipated husband and provide a happy home life for the children; working outside the home to support the family.72 Some of the heroines were placed in subplots that described hardships not directly related to intemperate husbands but that would not have occurred in temperate marriages: widows lost property to the family of the deceased husband; or, as with Holley’s Cicely, the wife’s inheritance was mismanaged by unscrupulous male relatives or executors.73

Of course, not all nineteenth century literature was about reforms or conveyed the doom and gloom messages of temperance works. Humor was another type of writing that was widely popular in nineteenth century America. This genre was less accommodating to women authors than the sentimental, domestic, or temperance. However, humor could have a social impact, and an author who could combine levity with social commentary could create a powerful vehicle for change. A woman author who could accomplish this feat could advocate for social reforms on a formidably broad scale. Marietta Holley was particularly successful in this regard. She was a master in writing not only humor, but also satire to deliver her reform messages.

71Ibid., 149.

72See Chapter Seven of this thesis for a discussion of *Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife*.

Humorous and satirical literature has long been a particularly effective tool for examining social and human values. An author may use humor to express opinions on a variety of topics, including customs, politics, and culture in general. French philosopher Henri Bergson characterized comedy as a purely human phenomenon that derived meaning from the nature of human being. Bergson noted that as a societal construct that had social significance and often appealed to common sense, humor’s critical element was the focus on the human. In effective humor literature the reader must be able to relate to the joke on a superficial level; successful humor was devoid of sentiment and neither required nor withstood in-depth analysis. Humor writing was naturally formulaic -- an author used any number of standard comic devices such as exaggeration, humiliation, and repetition to convey a message. For Bergson, humor was culture-specific: any entity from a family to a national populace could develop an idiosyncratic humor that reflected the values of the particular group. Humor could play an important role in the creation of culture and serve as an effective window into the workings of society, providing a unique historical perspective on the reality of a given period.

When combined with irony, humor became satire. Professor of English and humor literature Leonard Feinberg analyzed and compared satire and humor. Both employed ridicule, exaggeration, and distortion of facts. However, as Feinberg explained, satire’s ironic component cut deeper than the superficially humorous. Satire was unfair, and targeted sentimentality, vice, and folly, but most of all hypocrisy. Satire exposed failings of social systems and institutions that were assumed to be noble simply by virtue of blind acceptance and control of one class of people over another. Satire appealed to the emotions to evoke strong feelings about a given topic. Furthermore, satire was of the moment, had limited longevity and survived only in relation to issues with far-

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reaching relevance. Satire was effective insofar as the criticism was palatable, and should not be overly cruel or heartless. The objects of satire were ridiculous, not wicked, and the satirist must appear to be right. Although truth could be used as a satiric tool if employed when unexpected or embarrassing, the element of caricature often revealed a truer picture of the satiric object than did reality.

Nineteenth century American humor writers developed some standard devices such as comic personas, fictional letters, and skits to create a humor tradition that ranged from simple lampoons to biting political satire. This humor was sometimes self-deprecating, often fantastic and bombastic, but always distinctively American. Linda Morris, a professor of English who has studied humor literature and the work of Marietta Holley, described the literary satire found in nineteenth century America:

[Nineteenth century literary satire] relies upon humor to expose both human and institutional failures…Most satire, in spite of the anger that may lie behind it, depends for its success upon a sense of restraint and underlying…hope that exposing society’s excesses might lead to reform…[this type of] American satire…often relies upon the creation of a naïve persona who inadvertently, and in an understated manner, reveals social truths…[and] frequently relies on comic exaggeration….Because satire, to be relevant, must be topical and timely, its fine points and even some of its broader strokes may be lost upon modern readers.

Holley’s work contained all of the elements delineated by Bergson and Feinberg, and also fit into Morris’s description. Holley added to this mix a technique of using verbal irony, banalities, and seemingly stupid characters who revealed the truth to communicate to the reader a feeling of superiority. Holley’s methods melded humor and satire based on a deliberately fashioned tradition of American literary comedy.

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76 Ibid., 86, 117, 144-146.

Early American humor literature reflected an attitude of newness that stemmed from a desire to establish an identity as an independent society that valued an ideal of individuality and equality. Educator, historian, and cultural anthropologist Constance Rourke wrote that the American comic sense specifically and deliberately rejected the European literary style that might have been considered a natural forebear in favor of a uniquely American humor—a native phenomenon that, although developed and expressed in a variety of ways, emerged out of a culture of commonality. She noted that American humor “often turned toward legendary characters…Many external influences were at work. But the basic patterns…had been amply developed in a native comic lore.”

Rourke identified the Yankee as an important literary characterization that represented American society. This figure was a metaphor for the American man and was easily adapted to a humor that, paradoxically, was both fictional and rooted in reality. Ironically, and probably intentionally, Holley created Samantha Allen as a Yankee oracle, turning the traditionally male humor device into a means of expressing and supporting female interests. However, in Rourke’s and other male-centered studies, the Yankee was male and manifestly American. As a personification of the attitudes of the citizens of a youthful nation searching for an identity separate from that of the British, the Yankee gained popularity after the War for Independence. Rourke claimed that for an “unformed American nation pictur[ing] itself as homely and comic” the Yankee was a “national symbol.” Often dubbed Jonathan, the Yankee was a free-wheeling persona who displayed traits and behaviors antithetical to British decorum—he was “rural, sharp, uncouth, witty…[and engaged in] Peddling, swapping, practical joking.”

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79 Ibid., 12.
outright and quiet in manner; he offered opinions of common sense and local wisdom.\textsuperscript{80} As a symbol of separation from Britain, the Yankee’s idealized reflection of the American self-image made him almost a cult hero.\textsuperscript{81}

Walter Blair, an American folklorist who studied humor in literature, also identified the Yankee as an important character in the development and expression of American folk humor. For Blair, the salient feature of the Yankee was his manner of speaking -- the broad, flat accents that distinguished him from his British ancestors and set him apart as unmistakably American. The Yankee was a plain man, with simple tastes and strong, common sense values.\textsuperscript{82}

Literary scholar Nancy Walker, too, saw the Yankee as a focal point of American pride, valued for his stark departure from British culture. Walker quoted professor of English Cameron Nickels, who described the Yankee’s “‘homespun dress, manners, and speech…[that] embodied the American common man…achieving an indigenous national identity.’” Walker went on to note that the Yankee’s naiveté, the object of British scorn, became the basis for the homely wisdom, dialect, and vernacular language that later typified the Yankee persona as portrayed in humor literature.\textsuperscript{83}

The Yankee had a major characteristic that was often expressed in humor writing and characterized Samantha Allen: horse sense. Blair described horse sense as “the same thing as common sense, homespun philosophy, pawkiness, cracker-box philosophy, gumption, or mother-wit” and horse sense writing as “based on life itself…referring in a figurative way to a deep lesson…picked up while…walking the highways of the world.”\textsuperscript{84} Horse sense was not dependent

\textsuperscript{80}Ibid., 17-19.

\textsuperscript{81}Ibid., 30.

\textsuperscript{82}Walter Blair, \textit{Horse Sense in American Humor, from Benjamin Franklin to Ogden Nash} (New York: Russell & Russell, 1962), 98.

upon formal education. Indeed, Blair suggested that the best horse sense authors seemed to dismiss the need for education and extolled knowledge gained from life experience. Many humorists created seemingly educated but truly ignorant or unlikeable characters as foils for the horse sense persona’s superior logic.  

Walker stated that the contraposition of characters of oblivious ridiculousness or affectation against those of common sense was a popular literary device of American humor authors dating back to the colonial period. In creating a comic culture, many nineteenth century literary humorists used the Yankee and the horse sense philosopher to form some of the most popular humor of the times. Blair noted that the authors of horse sense humor shared a number of techniques that rendered the writing somewhat formulaic but were intended to enhance the comic message. This type of humor relied on brevity, overt mockery, and superficiality. Bad grammar and spelling were common tools of nineteenth century humorists – these devices not only allowed the authors to assume a homey demeanor, but also distracted the reader from the lack of character development. Local color set the scene and identified the characters with specific places and customs. Biographer and literary humor analyst James C. Austin noted the Yankee was a “schemer,” whose humor relied heavily on the “witty monologue…likely to be epigrammatic and to employ…overstatement and understatement, word play, anticlimax, paradox…It was nearly always satiric.”

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84 Blair, *Horse Sense*, vi-vii.
85 Ibid., 28.
87 Blair, *Horse Sense*, 186.
88 Ibid., 202.
Walker noted that “Americans have devoted a large share of their humor to the expression of political beliefs.”^90^ With the same line of thinking, Blair discussed the common practice of publishing pieces in newspapers to convey the opinion, often political, of the author through the mouth of a fictional character. The authors were usually of Yankee stock, New Englanders or New Yorkers, who often had connections to political leadership. The fictional characters were not afraid to speak out, allowing the authors to express opinions with impunity and in a style that appealed to the general public. ^91^ Austin concluded that the evolution of American humor was spurred by the presidency of Andrew Jackson, who stood as a symbol of the vanquishing of political aristocracy and the power of the common man. The aura of folksy good sense, the use of dialect, and the indiscriminate criticism of all sides of any political or social issue represented the ability of the average citizen to have an opinion about and participate in his own governance. ^92^

Holley’s Samantha Allen was a Yankee in the full American literary sense. Samantha was a native of rural New York, an astute observer of people and situations, the voice of common sense amidst a gaggle of foolish foils, but still a naïve hayseed. Samantha’s uniqueness lay in her sex. Through Samantha, Holley showed that a woman could be more than the butt of the joke; she could expose and press issues of importance to women. Holley’s creation of a respectable and respected female persona was both a reflection of and a departure from the male-dominated humor technique.

Holley’s use of Samantha Allen as the voice of reform was in keeping with a long tradition of humor as political commentary in American literature. One of the early examples of the comic persona as political commentator, and one that shared many of Samantha’s attributes, was Seba Smith’s Jack Downing. A letter-to-the-editor writer who combined ironic observation and common

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^91^Blair, *Horse Sense*, 57.

sense, Downing became involved in, and educated the public about, the political issues of
Jacksonian America. Smith (1792-1868) was the editor of a small newspaper in Portland, Maine,
who in the 1830s wanted to infuse his columns with political commentary while maintaining an air
of political indifference. To accomplish this goal Smith created Jack Downing, a small town young
man with a flair for letter writing and a lot of opinions to express. Blair described Smith’s Downing
as a “hayseed [who] had a mind which could emphasize funny details in happenings when he told
about them…sometimes showed himself up as a fool, but sometimes…cut through the piffle to the
heart of truth.”93 Linda Morris described Smith’s use of Downing: “the humor is gentle and muted,
with Jack’s naïveté as much the target as the partisan wrangling in the State House.”94 Smith
documented Downing’s adventures in his newspaper letters and enjoyed widespread popularity for
his humorous interpretations of and comments on current events. Downing was active in local
politics in his hometown of Downingville, Maine, and his success led him to seek a government
position in Washington, DC. He managed to become good friends with Andrew Jackson, eventually
being included as an informal advisor in Jackson’s Kitchen Cabinet. Downing recounted how
President Jackson, or, in Downing’s words, the “Gineral,” expressed gratitude for Downing’s
advice: “I told him my way, when anybody talked to me in a lingo that I didn’t understand, was jest
to say nothing, but look as knowing as any of ´em. At that the Gineral fetched me a slap on the
shoulder, and hawhawed right out. Says he, Major Downing, you are the boy for me; I don’t know
how I should get along in this world if it wasn’t for you.”95 Smith and his persona helped construct
a methodology of comic literature that would be emulated for decades by successive generations of
humorists. In fact, Holley frequently used real-life political leaders in her novels. Samantha often

93Blair, Horse Sense, 58-59.


95Seba Smith, quoted in Blair, Horse Sense, 59-63.
either sought after, or ran into unexpectedly, prominent and powerful men and women. And she always ready to dish out her nuggets of logic and advice.

Later in the nineteenth century a slightly different type of humorist emerged: still male; still of Yankee stock; still using non-standard grammar and spelling; still the voice of common sense in a world replete with illogic, snobbery, and bad judgment. However, these popular comics were somewhat less pointedly political in orientation, instead using keen powers of observation and well-traveled life experience to practice their amusing craft as social critics and commentators. One of the best known examples of this type of humorist was Charles Farrar Browne (1834-1867). Born in Maine, Browne was a mischievous boy who enjoyed cutting up and practical jokes. As a young man he traveled to Ohio, which at that time was considered the West; his experiences became the fodder for many of his humorous essays and lectures. After working briefly as a teacher, he found work as a writer for newspapers in Tiffin, Toledo, and Cleveland.96

Browne’s persona, Artemus Ward, was a traveling performer who combined amusing lectures and stories with a display of wax figures and an animal act, expressed opinions about the prevailing social and political issues of his day, and made observations about human nature and relationships in general. Browne’s lectures and essays often seemed to ramble through a number of seemingly unrelated topics before coming back to make his point: “One of the features of my entertainment is that it contains so many things that don’t have anything to do with it.”97

Browne was fabulously popular in the mid-nineteenth century. He had a good stage presence and a knack for identifying and satirizing issues of wide interest to his audiences. He

96 Austin, Artemus Ward, 20, 28.

empowered his criticism with humor and projected an appearance of consistent amiability.\textsuperscript{98}

Browne imbued Artemus Ward with a self-effacing humility; Ward was a common American “sitterzen” with whom his audiences could identify as an equal.\textsuperscript{99} James Austin described Ward:

In fact, Artemus represented the typical American, as caricatured by Charles Browne. Far from perfect, always logically consistent, scoffing at scholarship and pomp, materialistic and self-reliant, Artemus was good-hearted, unsentimental, and an enemy of hypocrisy in everyone but himself. …His show is the great show of American life, and he and the rest of us are but actors in it…It is full of sham, greed, and stupidity yet also of color, geniality, and fun: the great American carnival.\textsuperscript{100}

A twenty-first century reader may think that Browne carried the devices of bad grammar and spelling to an extreme that detracted from the humor of his work. Furthermore, the technique of spelling errors would be ineffective in a performance venue. However, for writers such as Browne poor grammar and spelling were the driving force of the humor and a way to convey a sense of belonging to the masses of the common man; the message behind the humor was often secondary. In describing Browne’s humor, literary critic and playwright W.D. Howells (1837-1920) noted: “How much the fun was helped from one entirely American heart to other entirely American hearts by the showman’s bad spelling can never be known…It was strictly of his time and place, and it was dwarfed and deformed by the popular prejudices, the partisan prejudice.”\textsuperscript{101}

Browne used Ward to express opinions about the popular reforms of the day. In fact, Marietta Holley and Samantha Allen were often compared to Browne and Ward. However, and unsurprisingly, Browne’s attitude toward reforms that would benefit women was very different from Holley’s. His treatment of temperance was half-hearted and, according to Austin, “generally


\textsuperscript{99} Austin, \textit{Artemus Ward}, 63.

\textsuperscript{100} Ibid., 78.

\textsuperscript{101} W.D. Howells, quoted in Ward, \textit{Ward}, viii.
Browne used sharper satire in Ward’s support of the widespread nineteenth century opposition to women’s rights, using his sketches to show the prevailing attitudes about the proper place for women in society and lampoon women who demanded equality. Infusing his work with the bad grammar, bad spelling, and common stereotypes so popular with his audiences, Browne recounted Ward’s meeting “On the cars [with a] he-lookin’ female with…a handful of reform tracks” who proclaimed “every woman should have a Spear” and protested the idea that she should “…stay at home & darn stockins & be the ser-lave of a domineerin’ man.” After she “whirled her umbreller round severl times, & finally jabbed me in the weskit with it,” Ward reminded her that he “has no objeeshuns to…the Spear bizness” but that he “ain’t no pickerel.”

Ward also told of a “deppytashun” of women led by a “tall and feroshus lookin critter” who asked Ward if his wife ever thought of “throwin off the yoke of tyrinn & thinkin & voting for herself.” He replied, “Not being a natural born fool…I kin safely say that she dothunt.” Ward’s wife’s sanity was apparent in her adherence to home and family, and her lack of desire for the female ballot. Ward concluded, “The female woman is one of the greatest institooshuns of whitch this land can boste…you air an angle when you behave yourself; but when you take off your proper appairel & and (mettyforically speaken) get into pantyloons…in short – when you undertake to play the man, you play the devil and air an emfatic noosance.”

Through Ward, Browne exemplified the anti-female perspectives that became the object of later women’s humorous reform literature. Ironically, Holley was often compared to Browne because her use of dialect included cacography and bad grammar, and both authors commented on the foibles of human nature. However, at least in the messages conveyed in their writing, Holley

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102 Austin, Artemus Ward, 24.

103 Ward, Selected Works, 49-50.

and Browne could not have been farther apart. If one assumes that Ward expressed Browne’s opinions, then Browne would not have supported the reforms most important to Holley. Any comparison between the writing of these two very popular authors must deal only with superficial features.

With Browne’s work as an example, humor, like most of the social institutions of nineteenth century America, was primarily a male domain. Tall tales, vulgar stories, and practical jokes helped male humor to reflect the freedom that came with being a man in American society. Furthermore, as historian, biographer, and actress Jane Curry noted, male humorists frequently used undesirable stereotypes to depict women as gossipy, impulsive, illogical, gullible, vindictive, or nagging; the male counterparts to these helpless, stupid, or ridiculous females were long-suffering martyrs in the battle of the sexes.105 Of necessity, as Walker pointed out, the few women who became successful authors of comic works modified some of the techniques of their male counterparts so that the focus of the women’s humor was distinctly female: “American women had produced a body of humorous work that is in many respects quite different from that created by men…women have been interested in those [aspects of society] that have most directly affected their own lives.”106 Discussing nineteenth century humor Walker claimed that an entrenched anti-female bias pervaded American society in which women were seen as less powerful and less intelligent than men. Women used humorous writing to negate this bias and expose some formidable obstacles for American women: “…to be a member of a subordinate group in a culture that prides itself on equality…to meet standards of behavior that are based on stereotypes rather than on human beings.” Women understood their place in society, their “apartness,” and cultural separation into “spheres” of influence, and therefore chose topics that centered on the female

105Marietta Holley and Jane Curry, Samantha Rattles the Woman Question (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1983), xi.

106Walker, What’s So Funny, 9-10.
experience and reflected the stability of the home and family: “housework, children, community affairs, and relationships between men and women.” Women were not well traveled and looked to their own communities for their comic material. Marriage was a common vehicle for female humorous expression. The generally accepted condition for a woman in American society, marriage was also the perfect target of ridicule as a means of protesting the confines of woman’s sphere.

Even while engaging in writing that seemed to further cultural stereotypes, women turned these stereotypes to advantage as a way to protest second-class citizenship. Walker identified two basic stereotypes in nineteenth century women’s humor writing: the “clinging vine” who represented woman’s submissiveness and incompetence, and the “nag” or “gossip” who represented the kill-joys of life. These characterizations were antithetical to reality and were a reflection of women’s anger with the anti-female bias. Professor of English and Women’s Studies Emily Toth agreed with Walker. Toth stated that the humor of women expressed anger against “patriarchal norms” and promoted the need for equality between the sexes. Women’s humor exposed the “traditional social norms…and the foolish choices made by those who do not think or criticize their own society.” The antics of Betsey Bobbet, the husband hunting spinster willing to give up all rights and subsume her very being into what she considered the dignity of marriage was Holley’s way of satirizing Toth’s “patriarchal norms.”

Walker followed the evolution of nineteenth century American women’s humor writing. Early to mid century authors navigated a paradoxical course between expectations for gentility and respectability. Later in the century authors focused on public expression of opinions including


108 Ibid., 62-64.

demands for social and political equality. Early nineteenth century women’s comic literature seemed simultaneously to support stereotypes of and criticize woman’s sphere, and to create personae as “the mask of the untutored rustic to comment pithily on the American scene.” Walker distinguished between sentimental and witty writing of nineteenth century women authors. The depiction of women in the sentimental writings reinforced and perpetuated the prevailing cultural separation of the sexes into public and private spheres; the witty authors satirized the sentimental. Walker noted the witty women’s “efforts to demote [the sentimental female stereotype] from the high status accorded her by genteel society were part of their rebellion against the widely-held notions of women’s ‘proper’ role in American culture.” Furthermore, she claimed, “if sentimentality is a result of powerlessness, wit may be seen as the opposite: an expression of confidence and power…Sentimentality exerts a passive, often subversive power; wit…is a direct and open expression of perceptions, taking for granted a position of strength and insight.” Witty authors often lampooned the types of writing common in sentimental literature, especially sentimental poetry. Walker pointed out that witty authors used verse to “spoil the sentimental poem, with contrived rhymes, awkward grammar, and ludicrous emotional excess;” the sentimental poetess exhibited “extremes of vanity, petty competition and an appalling lack of sophistication.” Holley made Betsey Bobbet the epitome of the sentimental poetess, whose ridiculous verses not only extolled the restrictions on women’s lives, but also expressed women’s frustrations with those restrictions.

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112Ibid., 71-72.
Walker noted that one of the biggest obstacles to female humor in nineteenth century American society was the persistent myth that women lacked a sense of humor, “that rarest of qualities in woman.” Successful female humor, including Holley’s, was often assumed to have been written by men. Women were thought to lack the intelligence or ability for logical thought necessary to recognize the incongruities in life sufficiently to communicate humor. Furthermore, women’s creation of humor violated the basic social ascendancy of man as the teller of jokes and woman as the appreciative audience.

However, despite the challenges women faced as creators of humorous literature, some female authors were able to incorporate many of the well-known and successful humor techniques to create a popular and enduring body of work that was every bit as effective at satire and social commentary as that of contemporary male authors. Ann Stephens (1810-1886) and Frances Whitcher (1811-1852) were women writers of the early nineteenth century who ventured into the male-dominated genre of humor literature and adopted the popular method of vernacular language as a humorous medium, and may have been influential to Holley’s development of her own techniques. Both Stephens and Whitcher fashioned works that featured humor not simply for humor’s sake, but as a satirical vehicle aimed at effective social commentary. As vernacular humorists, Stephens and Whitcher used many of the comic devices evident in male humor, including social criticism delivered by a persona to express values or opinions while maintaining a sort of protective detachment from direct expression. The persona used colloquial language to foster a sense of ordinariness to reach a particular audience that was looking for a good and funny

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113 Walker, *Serious*, 73-82 passim.  
114 Ibid., 140-142.  
story with a moral – the narrator appeared to be part of the community, with knowledge of local events and affairs.\textsuperscript{116}

Women vernacular humorists were immersed in the rapid societal changes of the nineteenth century, particularly the shift from rural living to urban industrialization, women’s increased access to education, and the accompanying popularity of genteel values that reinforced the prevailing gender stereotypes and notion of a separate sphere for women.\textsuperscript{117} These developments provided ample material for lampooning served up in a common sense delivery. Initially the women authors tended to aim the most biting satire at women who not only endured, but also often sought out, this second class status in exchange for social position. However, the message of the female humor changed as the century progressed and agitation for women’s rights spread. Each of these features was evident in Holley’s writing and her core characters of Samantha and Josiah Allen and Betsey Bobbet.

Ann Stephens was the earliest female vernacular humorist. Born in Connecticut in 1810, as a young married woman Stephens moved to Portland, Maine, where she and her husband founded a magazine to which she contributed stories and other features. The Stephenses moved to New York City in 1837 and for many years Ann Stephens edited and wrote sentimental stories, poetry, and essays for a number of popular magazines, as well as several novels.\textsuperscript{118} In 1843 Stephens published her most famous work, the one for which she is most remembered, \textit{High Life in New York} under the pseudonym Jonathan Slick. The book was in the format of a series of letters written by Jonathan, the quintessential and traditional rural Yankee, to his father on the family farm in Weathersfield, Connecticut. The letters reflected Jonathan’s impressions of the clash between genteel society of

\textsuperscript{116}Ibid., 6, 15.

\textsuperscript{117}Ibid., 1, 2.

\textsuperscript{118}Ibid., 52.
1840s New York City and the old-fashioned country values of home and hearth. Linda Morris claimed that as Stephens’s persona, Jonathan represented “the deep uncertainties Americans felt about the new values they seemed to embrace with such enthusiasm” and the contrast between the “silliness of society women [and] Yankee common sense and natural beauty.” Jonathan took part in a series of humorous sketches in which he consistently was surprised by the decadence surrounding him. He expressed his amazement and displeasure in the vernacular speech patterns of a country bumpkin. Stephens used Jonathan to target the city dwellers’ stilted manner of speaking; penchant of the women to form liaisons with pretentious men of foreign birth; ridiculous fashions including wigs, false teeth, and corsets; and disdain toward anything perceived as coarse or unrefined. Through the reactions that Jonathan elicted from the other characters, Stephens made Jonathan the butt of the joke. However, Stephens’s “rebuke is directed firmly at the women” who succumbed to such nonsense. Jonathan always emerged as the voice of reason, using his down-home common sense to expose phony gentility and aristocratic airs. Before returning home to his “country sweetheart,” Jonathan expressed his disappointment: “It’s the first time on earth that I could believe that women could raly be so deceitful and bad. I feel as though I should never think so well of them again…I’d as well stay in a world without sun, as to have no sartinty in the truth of women folks.”

Stephens’s use of vernacular and misspellings emulated the popular writing styles, but not the intent, of her contemporary male humor authors. The humor in Jonathan’s letters was not a function of these literary devices. Jonathan’s speech was a tool to illustrate the distance between his horse sense persona and the pretentiousness of the other characters, his true Yankee dissociation

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119 Ibid., 63, 68.
120 Ibid., 74.
from the outdated aristocratic values held over from the British. His malapropisms, country manners, and the resultant misunderstandings contributed to the humor, but his true message was that of a satirical social critic. Stephen’s primary targets were the urbanized women who sacrificed self-esteem in favor of keeping up genteel appearances. Stephens’s use of a male pseudonym and persona gave the letters credibility: a woman traveling alone to New York City and having Jonathan’s experiences would be been unacceptable in any social circles. Moreover, for a woman author to create the earthy and often crude scenarios and express the controversial opinions depicted in Jonathan’s letters would have been unbelievable. Clearly Jonathan’s experiences, attitudes, and manners had enduring attraction for the reading public, and he may be considered a prototype for Holley’s Samantha Allen. At the very least, by the time Holley created Samantha Allen a generation later, the idea of a seemingly naïve, but outspoken, common sense woman was no longer impossible.

Holley may also have been influenced by Frances Whitcher, another well-known female author who used the literary methods of vernacular and cacography to convey her ideas. Born in either 1811 or 1814, she lived her entire life in New York State. She reminisced that as a child she could “scarcely remember a time when the neighbors were not afraid that I would ‘make fun of them’.” As a minister’s wife, she came into close contact with the middle-class members of her community, and developed a disdain for the pretentious gentility that she later satirized in her writing. Whitcher sought to expose not “merely the silliness of genteel ladies…but…the destructiveness and perniciousness of the genteel mentality.” Indeed, Whitcher’s childhood


123 Morris, Women Vernacular, 95.
penchant for mockery resurfaced as she ran afoul of her community because her neighbors recognized themselves in her sketches.\textsuperscript{124}

By the 1840s Whitcher was a well-known author of humorous sketches. As might be expected of a female humorist, she submitted her first stories anonymously although once her identity was uncovered she did not use a pseudonym.\textsuperscript{125} Whitcher wrote in the Yankee tradition; however, the Yankee value of horse sense was implied through her characters’ utter lack of that very trait. She wrote about “small town women as gossipy, competitive husband hunters…critiquing the origins of such behavior in the rise of the genteel culture” of economic dependence for women. Her stories were not overtly political, tending to deal with the small-town and family relationships rather than the possibility that women may be capable or deserving of interest or involvement in public affairs. Instead, Whitcher created “cautionary tales” intended to spur women to reject the social confines of woman’s sphere by a sort of reverse psychology.\textsuperscript{126} Whitcher’s characters were obsessed with proper female etiquette and social standing. These characters often jettisoned self-esteem in the single-minded pursuit of the respectability that only marriage and family could provide. Whitcher’s goal was to expose the foolishness and humiliation that ensued when women relinquished aspirations for independent being in favor of culturally-imposed social roles.

Whitcher’s best known character, and one that may have foreshadowed Holley’s Betsey Bobbet, was the Widow Bedott, a woman whose primary goal was to remarry and regain the status that accompanied being a wife and homemaker. The Widow Bedott deplored her town as “a terrible place for talkin’…a regular slander mill,” but also exclaimed, “who cares for comfort when

\textsuperscript{124}Walker, “Wit,” 70.

\textsuperscript{125}Neal, in Whitcher, Bedott, ix.

\textsuperscript{126}Walker, Serious Thing, 20.
gintility’s consarned!” The satire lay in the hypocrisy of the Widow’s criticism of the women in
her community when she herself was the biggest, most vindictive gossip in town. Even Whitcher
choice of Bedott’s given name – Silly, short for Priscilla – was a tool for commentary.

Silly Bedott was a relentless man-chaser who understood that she must temper her quest
with a veneer of restraint and respectability. Whitcher initially instilled in Bedott’s escapades a
sense of sympathy for being a widow in a society that marginalized women without husbands.
However, as Morris pointed out, after Bedott remarried Whitcher immediately mounted an attack
against the loathsome airs of gentility – Bedott treated her servants poorly; made rude comments on
the hospitality of her neighbors while a guest in their home; flaunted the wealth of her new
husband; and relished her ability to make others uncomfortable. “The character of the Widow
Bedott had undergone a marked transformation, and the author’s disdain for gentility had become
increasingly prominent.”

As previously mentioned, one might be tempted to compare Silly Bedott and Holley’s
Betsey Bobbet as two characters that shared some attitudes and behaviors. However, where Bedott
relished and actually used married life to personal advantage, Betsey was a miserable wife. Of
course, desperation drove Betsey to a poor choice of a husband. However, for Betsey the physical
reality of a husband was not required to achieve the dignity of marriage. The mere fact that a
woman had been married was sufficient to guarantee the type of superficial respect to which Betsey
aspired. In fact, after Betsey made her disastrous marriage she immediately longed to become a
widow. Widowhood provided the best of both worlds – the respectability of being marriageable
without the mess and bother of having to live with a despicable man.


Notwithstanding certain differences, as with other writers of Yankee vernacular humor, both male and female, an almost symbiotic relationship was evident between Whitcher and Bedott, author and persona. Vernacular humorists used the distance between writer and persona to convey opinions in a neutral, country voice. Just as Jonathan Slick allowed Stephens the latitude to explore the workings of New York City society without the encumbrance of female gender, Silly Bedott allowed Whitcher to express ideas that, because of the social restrictions placed on women’s involvement in public affairs, would have been impossible to express in any other way. Whitcher used vernacular and dialect not, as her male contemporaries did, to generate humor but as tools to expose the superficiality and sheer foolishness of her female characters. Ironically, for all of her distaste for what she perceived as female foolishness, Whitcher was not an advocate of women’s rights, but poked just as much fun at female agitators for equality as at genteel behavior: Whitcher identified problems, but did not offer solutions.\(^{129}\)

Holley used many of the techniques evident in the writing of Stephens and Whitcher. With few exceptions the residents of Jonesville shared the common traits and behaviors of the country bumpkin whose lack of worldliness exposed either wisdom or foolishness, depending on the situation and characters involved. Samantha was not easily surprised by her family and neighbors, but was often shocked by city-dwelling strangers. Her inexperience was Holley’s satirical delivery system as Samantha passed her always-sound judgment about people, places, and events. Samantha had no patience for hypocrisy, extreme gentility, or women such as Betsey Bobbet who relinquished independence in the name of false dignity. Holley’s use of dialect was not the driving force of her humor, but added dimension to her characters. However, unlike Stephens and Whitcher, Holley also used sentiment when doing so served the purpose of her reform message.

\(^{129}\)Ibid., 125, 126.
Holley fit her work into the nineteenth century American literary humor trajectory with her appeal to a largely female readership, her use of the well-established literary devices of vernacular language and dialectal spelling and speech patterns, her matter-of-fact attitude, her understanding of human nature and relationships, and her ability to apply humor to ordinary experiences to make her point. Marietta Holley’s humor represented the deep seated sense of frustration among late-nineteenth century American women resulting from decades of denied access to full participation in public affairs. Jane Curry summarized Holley’s uniqueness as a female humorist: “Only Holley wrote consistently from a pro-women’s rights point of view and exposed as foolish the various arguments against the development of full human potential for women.”  

Holley was a funny spokesperson for un-funny issues; Samantha Allen was a Yankee with a message – she was a fictional character that reflected reality for women in American society. Holley’s work was a sort of pressure-release valve that provided for the expression of a female perspective on social and political matters that had a direct impact on women’s lives but that women were powerless to control. She helped propel the literary humor trajectory by bringing current events pertinent to women into her work just as women agitated for an equal role in American democracy.

Although the humor format distinguished Holley from other women social reform authors and allowed her to disseminate her message to a larger audience of both women and men readers than might be reached by more serious or didactic speeches, tracts, or pamphlets, Holley’s work was an obvious composite of all of the literary styles discussed in this chapter. Most importantly, her work carried a message of woman suffrage as a means to achieving what she considered to be essential social improvements that would benefit her largely female audience -- equal pay for equal work, property rights, and most importantly, temperance. Holley did not advocate a social revolution or the total abandonment of woman’s sphere. She believed that a woman’s primary duty

\[130\] Holley and Curry, Rastles, xiii.
was to herself and to her family, but with an equal partnership among all members and with the intention of the betterment of society in general. Some of her work combined several genres into a single piece or novel through her use of story lines and subplots. However, regardless of the mode of delivery, Holley’s ultimate goal was a constant: a better life for women within the structure of American society.
CHAPTER FOUR

HOW SHE WUZ REMEMBERED

As is all too often in this world – as all true Reformers know -- my motives wasn’t took as they was meant.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley, josiah Allen’s Wife as a P.A. and a P.I.: Samantha at the Centennial

As a nineteenth century American writer Marietta Holley was at the intersection of humor fiction, political satire, and gender-based cultural constructs. A spokeswoman for causes of importance to women, Holley was a writer of exceptional popularity who used her books as a forum to press for social reform and for every woman’s right to participate fully in American democracy. Holley’s contribution to nineteenth century women’s literature has been both lauded and devalued. Although her life and work have generated a number of interpretations, most of these interpretations were grounded in a common thread: that of Holley as a feminist author.

Like that of many nineteenth century woman authors, Holley’s writing reflected the interaction of social forces that shaped life for white, middle-class, American women. In a study of nineteenth century women’s fiction, literature professor Susan Harris put forth an argument that applied to Holley’s work, the motivations of Holley’s reform fiction, and the interpretation of that fiction by later scholars. Harris stated that women wrote to tap the female potential to express publicly opinions that smoldered beneath the veil of women’s domestic domain. Harris noted an evolution in women’s fiction from early to late nineteenth century, wherein the heroines of the later works such as Holley’s operated from a stance of autonomy even as society reinforced the concept of woman’s sphere.1 Harris explained the intent of female authors to instill in the readers a desire for change, to relate fictional events to real life, and to “strike the balance between socially and textually created ideological imperatives.” Pointing out literature’s ability to expose the conflict of

1See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of woman’s sphere.
“self against self,” she argued that woman authors sought a self-determined existence, combining an understanding of far-reaching future influence with the limits of domesticity. Harris’s argument was pertinent to writers such as Holley, who tried to reach into women’s confinement to engender an appreciation for the power that women could wield by seizing the opportunity for public discourse whenever possible. Harris claimed, “Literature’s function was to teach,” and women learned that assertion of even a limited independence could lead to personal and social betterment.

Harris’s ideas have been echoed in the following review of scholarly analysis of Holley’s work, literary message, and legacy. This review was organized along a loose chronology from early to late with like studies grouped according to the conclusions of the researchers. In examining and interpreting Holley’s methods -- including humor, satire, and use of language -- the studies offered varying perspectives and detail. Holley’s message evoked some strong views of women’s

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3Ibid., 47-49.

4The Holley studies used as sources for this review were those that examined Holley as a feminist author. The researchers hailed from a number of different academic fields including doctoral students, and professors of history, literature, sociology, women’s studies, American studies, and philosophy. A number of other dissertations have included Holley as a partial subject but focus on different aspects of her work. These other works are “The American Aspasia: The Woman Lecturer in American Women’s Rights Fiction, 1839-1915.” Angela F. Ridinger-Dotterman, City University of New York, 2015 (Content unknown. This paper is not digitized, could not be obtained through interlibrary loan, and email to the author was unanswered); “Women and Humor: A Linguistic and Rhetorical Analysis of Joke Target.” Karman, Barbara Ann, Kent State University, 2013 (humor, rhetoric, semantics, and jokes); “To reunite the nation: Constructing memory after reconstruction, 1876-1904.” Rachel Ann Simon, University of Kentucky, 2012 (patriotism at the 1876 Centennial); “What she carries with her: Gender and American national identity in nineteenth-century women’s travel narratives.” Kristin Lynn Fitzpatrick, University of Washington, 1999 (travel narratives); and “Swindler, spy, rebel: The confidence woman in nineteenth century America.” Kathleen R DeGrave, The University of Wisconsin - Madison, 1989 (how Holley wrote the Samantha Allen books as confidence games to promote reform ideas among the masses of readers).
position in nineteenth century society, cultural gender-based discrimination, and female-driven reforms. Her method evoked debate about her use of humor and satire as mechanisms for achieving social change. Even her word choice was scrutinized in a search for significance. Women analysts had an appreciation for Holley’s work that differed from that of male analysts. With few exceptions, Holley’s work was mostly interpreted as a vehicle for women’s issues, with suffrage as the most important goal and self-evident end. Her advocacy of social reforms with woman suffrage as a means was considered secondary. Also secondary was a consideration of Holley’s legacy and the potential of her work to instill a sense of the worth of female being beyond the concrete logistics of the American political process.

The earliest mention of Holley as a scholarly subject appeared in Martha Bensley Bruere and Mary Ritter Beard’s 1934 *Laughing Their Way: Women’s Humor in America*, in a chapter entitled “Feminists.” Bruere and Beard offered excerpts solely from Holley’s first book, *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s*, the one that presented the strongest message for women’s rights and suffrage. In the three pages devoted to Holley, including one paragraph of introduction and the rest excerpts without analysis, Bruere and Beard explained that Holley used the comic persona Samantha Allen, the loveable but culturally misguided husband Josiah Allen, and the pathetic, husband-hunting spinster Betsey Bobbet to construct and support her arguments. For Bruere and Beard, Holley’s humorous scenarios were designed to contrast Samantha’s formidable and indestructible strength, sensibleness, and moral certitude with the ludicrous foibles of Josiah and Betsey.⁵ Bruere and Beard used passages that focused exclusively on woman’s sphere and advocacy of woman suffrage to prove Holley’s feminism.

Katherine Blyley’s 1937 dissertation “Marietta Holley” was the first doctoral study of Holley, and only dissertation to date devoted solely to Marietta Holley’s life and work. Blyley,

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whose paper has been credited as a major source in many subsequent Holley studies, appeared to be
the origin of the focus on Holley as primarily feminist.

Blyley opened with a Holley biography that by necessity relied heavily on Holley’s only
autobiographical writing, the posthumously published “The Story of My Life.”6 Blyley recapped
Holley’s reminiscences about the publication of her early work. Blyley relayed Holley’s anecdote
that her first publisher, Elisha Bliss, went with his hunch “that the masses of uncultivated readers
would find delight in Miss Holley’s unpretentious rustic characters; he hoped, also to attract
cultivated readers by her way of applying logic to serious questions in national life.”7 Taking
another anecdote from Holley’s “Story,” Blyley reported that Holley preferred her sentimental
pieces to her humorous vernacular writing, and that the money she earned from her “sketches in
dialect brought her a comfortable income, but she had little liking for them.”8 Blyley noted that
through the main character and comic persona Samantha Allen, Holley aired her reformist views on
“the controversial but popular subjects of women’s rights and temperance.”9 Blyley perceived that
Samantha allowed Holley to express her strong convictions about the status of women and families
in society and the main cause that would bring improvements to both: women’s rights.

In discussing Holley’s use of humor and vernacular language, Blyley noted that Holley
was “the only writer to present her material through the medium of witty common sense arguments

6See Chapter One of this thesis for more about Holley’s autobiographical writing.

Blyley’s dissertation has been cited extensively as the main source for biographical information about
Holley. Of course reading Blyley’s paper would not be equivalent to reading Holley’s autobiography.
This reliance on a secondary source of biography instead of the primary source of autobiography may
have contributed to the later analysts’ skewed interpretation of Holley’s reform motives and priorities.

8Ibid., 14.

9Ibid., 17, 20.
and homely inoffensive satire written in provincial Yankee dialect.”

Blyley also noted that Holley was the only female author to use common sense humor specifically to expose the need for woman-driven reforms. Blyley described how Holley modified the male humor tradition in several ways - using her characters’ folksy manner of speaking more as dialect than as a pure comic device; having Samantha deliver pointed observations on the limitations and sometimes the sheer stupidity of human nature and behavior; reversing the usual roles by making Samantha the rustic philosopher who dispensed bits of wisdom and her husband Josiah and the other male characters the illogical, impulsive gossips; and using Betsey Bobbet to personify the effects of a culture that deprived women of independent choice, dismissed the value of equal rights, and extolled woman’s sphere through a focus on the supposed dignity and purpose of marriage.

Blyley described how Holley also indulged in sentimentality, particularly when addressing the tragic consequences that women endured as the victims of male-dominated society. For Blyley, Holley sometimes drifted into blatant moralizing that critics claimed hurt her work and made her books trite and stale. Fortunately, in Blyley’s opinion, Holley always kept her sights on her women’s rights message, avoiding the extremes of sentimentality that may have endangered her popularity and offended or bored her readers.

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10Ibid., 68.

11Of course, male authors had been using humor for decades in American popular literature as a way of delivering social commentary. See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of nineteenth century male humorists.

12Ibid., 84, 88, 95, 96.

13Ibid., 97. See Chapter One of this thesis for a discussion of the contemporary reviews of Holley’s books. See Chapter Seven of this thesis for examples of Holley’s use of sentimentality in her novels.
As did most of the later Holley analysts, Blyley placed the most emphasis on Holley’s treatment of The Woman Question. Blyley claimed that Holley’s penchant for involvement in social reform was a natural consequence of her early life and the reform environment in her native upstate New York. Blyley stated that Holley intended her books to encourage women to work for social and political equality, “to arouse women to new thought and a love of personal liberty.” In fact, “Miss Holley’s attempt to influence the women of her time to her own way of thinking is implicit in all of her books.”

Blyley addressed Holley’s feminism. Again, like most of her successors, Blyley argued that Samantha expressed Holley’s own feminism. For Blyley, a feminist “stood in the public mind as a woman who not only believed in social rights for her sex, but as one who was willing to work for the realization of them.” By this definition, Holley was indeed a feminist. However, Blyley also noted later that “there is no evidence to prove that [Holley] was a student of any of the treatises which placed women’s rights in the category of fundamental human liberties.” Blyley stated that Holley was not breaking any new ground, but was simply reflecting well-established reformist attitudes that women should be a social force, assertive, and confident in the power and justice of rights that could be unleashed only through the vote. For Blyley, Holley was careful not to make

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14 The Woman Question was a popular term used in the nineteenth century to refer to the debate over women’s rights. Holley used this term frequently in her novels. In fact, “The Woman Question” appeared in the titles of Holley’s last two novels, *Samantha on the Woman Question* and *Josiah Allen on the Woman Question*, discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.


16 Ibid., 55.

17 Ibid., 60.

18 Ibid., 66.
Samantha a “dangerous radical” or “man-hater.” She needed to reach women who were not looking to explode accepted social roles, but wanted a measure of control over their own lives.\textsuperscript{19}

In her shortest chapter, “Miss Holley on Liquor Reform and Other Social Reforms” Blyley placed Holley’s interest in temperance secondary to women’s rights, although she did acknowledge the connection between suffrage and temperance as “two reforms…synonymous in the public mind during the late [18]’70’s.”\textsuperscript{20} Blyley’s brief discussion of Holley’s work for the temperance cause included Holley’s reform roots, her correspondence with Frances Willard and that these two women who had met only once shared a passion for reform, a hatred of intemperance, and a conviction that the vote was an essential tool in winning the struggle for socially and politically imposed sobriety.\textsuperscript{21} Blyley acknowledged the enormously successful \textit{Sweet Cicely} and \textit{Samantha at the Centennial} as Holley’s major and best-known temperance novels.\textsuperscript{22} Blyley attributed Holley’s fall into obscurity to the fact that the causes she had advocated were passé. Blyley’s emphasis on women’s rights and secondary consideration to temperance may have influenced the scholarship of successive Holley analysts.

For example, Margaret Wyman devoted twenty pages of her 1950 doctoral thesis “Women in the American Realistic Novel, 1860-1893: Literary Reflection of Social Fact” to Holley as a feminist writer. Wyman followed Blyley’s lead in using the words feminist and feminism to describe Holley. However, Wyman’s focus was on female fictional characters. Consequently, for Wyman, Samantha, not Holley, was the “outspoken feminist” who signaled a “changing public attitude towards the woman’s cause.” Confining her analysis almost exclusively to \textit{My Opinions},

\textsuperscript{19}Ibid., 38, 95.

\textsuperscript{20}Ibid., 63.

\textsuperscript{21}Ibid., 70-72.

\textsuperscript{22}See Chapter Six of this thesis a for discussion of \textit{Samantha at the Centennial} and Chapter Seven for a discussion of \textit{Sweet Cicely}.
Wyman saw Samantha as Holley’s women’s rights propaganda tool. Samantha’s tendency to be opinionated, judgmental, and sarcastic was sufficiently cushioned by her conventional, housewifely demeanor to allow her to spread viewpoints that would otherwise be culturally unacceptable for a woman.\textsuperscript{23}

Wyman credited Holley’s “ingenuity” in creating the “feather-brained” Betsey as the perfect foil for Samantha’s common sense approach to life. Betsey’s obsession with marriage at any cost, especially at the cost of a woman’s independence, was the spur for many of Samantha’s tirades. Like many of her successors in Holley scholarship, Wyman described Samantha’s attitude toward Betsey as one of contempt.\textsuperscript{24} Furthermore, Wyman seemed to see Holley and Samantha as interchangeable, or Samantha as a type of alter ego for Holley – Samantha was the vehicle through which the shy, demure, and genteel Holley could promote her true feelings about women’s lives and rights.

In these twenty pages, Wyman mentioned a few of Holley’s other titles, mostly in footnotes. She devoted only one paragraph to temperance. Wyman was most interested in Samantha as Holley’s voice on suffrage and rights, and mentioned temperance only in passing. With this attitude, Wyman reinforced the stance initiated by Blyley and adopted by most successive Holley analysts: suffrage first and foremost, and temperance secondary.

An overview of the available Holley scholarship of the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries revealed that most analysts identified feminism as Holley’s primary motive. Patricia Williams engaged in hyperbole when she called Holley “a radical, feminist subversive humorist who satirized male chauvinism.” Taking that statement as the basis of her analysis, Williams focused mostly on Holley’s humor techniques, including her use of comic personae and foils,


\textsuperscript{24}Ibid., 301, 303, 305.
metaphors, and “cracked” logic, always aimed at promoting women’s rights.25 Using similar language, Lara Hernandez Corkrey argued that “Holley’s masterstroke [was] to put her radically subversive arguments in the mouth of a woman who serves as the epitome of [Barbara Welter’s cult of] True Womanhood.”26 For Corkrey, Holley created Samantha almost as a disguise for a message that was not truly feminist because Holley was a True Woman, but was still dangerous because Holley’s brand of political commentary that claimed equality for women was “anathema” to her audience.27 Corkrey acknowledged that Holley was as much an advocate for women as was possible in her cultural milieu.

Corkrey’s and Williams’s assessments were in direct conflict with that of Nancy Walker, who wrote, “One need not look for any subversive messages or codes in Holley’s work.”28 For Walker, Holley’s humor lay in the convergence of domesticity and female liberty of choice: Holley was open and honest in her feminism as she exposed sex-based injustice and advocated voting as the answer to women’s constricted existence. In another article, Walker and co-author Zita Dresner commended Holley’s “implacable logic” as her method of delivering her satiric reform message.29 Despite the differences in outlook and assessment of Holley’s methods, for these analysts Holley’s one and only concern was woman suffrage.

27Ibid., 101.
28Nancy Walker, A Very Serious Thing: Women’s Humor and American Culture (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 120.
Cherie Ross described Holley as “the first widely popular American woman novelist whose work was openly feminist.” For Ross, Holley’s goal was “to improve women’s status,” through her focus on “the right to vote, the powerlessness of women before the law, and the inequality of sex roles.” Ross claimed, “Without the right to vote women would never be able to take control of their lives and make changes in the way they were treated by society.” Jane Curry also saw Holley as a feminist who “proposes solutions” to the “place” of women in the “land of liberty…the vote, economic independence, freedom to speak publicly against wrongs.” Curry identified Holley’s focus and argument for woman suffrage on the basis of natural rights, using generic terms such as “justice and social purity” to explain Holley’s motive. Melody Graulich grounded Holley’s goals in the American Ideal: “America’s constitution and laws, Holley suggests, deny women the basic rights Jefferson claimed Americans fought the Revolution to attain.” Graulich concluded that women were treated unfairly and excluded from political equality, and that Holley strove to change this reality.

Shelley Armitage took a slightly different view of Holley’s goals. Armitage said, “But more than just argue for the vote, it’s clear that Holley intended to awaken her audience from their complaisant endorsement of hollow values.” Armitage noted Holley’s respect for women’s domestic duties and the need for a “balance between the private and the public spheres and an
application of the training the private sphere gives women.”34 Armitage approached the concept of rights as a means to an end.

The feminist scholars noted that Holley’s use of humorous fictional characters to deliver her political satire and reform positions was a departure from the speeches, pamphlets, and tracts common to literature of the women’s rights movement. Charlotte Templin agreed with Ross that Holley’s use of vernacular language appealed to readers accustomed to cracker-box philosophy and old fashioned common sense.35 Walker claimed that Holley’s vernacular language was no mere comic dialectal device, but instead was Holley’s deliberate and calculated inversion of language to expose and lampoon “women’s social and legal oppression in American culture.”36 Walker pointed to Samantha’s use of the words “wimmin’s spear” for woman’s sphere and “sect” for sex, concluding that these were no “simple mispronunciations.” Walker concluded that through Samantha, Holley was “announcing a group’s engagement in the battle for the right to vote.”37

Analyzing Holley’s character development, Armitage focused on Samantha Allen as the voice of Holley’s message. Armitage described Samantha as both a “wise fool” and a “hero…strong, wise, active, self-reliant, a leader, organizer, adviser.”38 For Armitage, Samantha was a rural wife, with firm, domestic values and a logical mind that brooked no sentimental or genteel nonsense. She freely expressed her opinions about the current events of her day, but always with an eye to how those events affected the lives of women. Samantha’s perspective was decidedly


36Walker, Serious, 157.


38Armitage, “Marietta Holley,” 194.
domestic and she often constructed arguments using homey metaphors and imagery; however, she did not believe that women should accept unquestioningly the roles imposed by men or the injustice of political inequality.\textsuperscript{39}

Curry and Templin each saw Samantha as supportive of women but not as a radical feminist. Samantha did not advocate supremacy for either women or men, but saw both as imperfect persons deserving of fair treatment.\textsuperscript{40} For Curry, Samantha was a reflection of Holley’s support for women within a framework that expected and accepted a separate female social role: “she advocates what today’s feminists would consider conservative and repressive morality... She recognizes that men and women do and should perform different functions in society, but...Women should not be above or below men – they should sit side by side as equals.”\textsuperscript{41}

Armitage noted that Holley placed Samantha at odds with a number of comic foils, most notably Josiah Allen and Betsey Bobbet. Josiah and Betsey represented the two gender-defined social spheres for men and women, and were opposite to Samantha with regard to women’s rights. Neither Josiah nor Betsey believed that women should have any rights whatsoever, unless those rights were the right to be a good cook and housekeeper or the right to marry.\textsuperscript{42} Melody Graulich also noted that Josiah “mouths the platitudes of male superiority,” while Betsey “reveals how women are socialized into becoming caricatures of themselves.”\textsuperscript{43} These researchers concluded that Holley used her three main characters allegorically to illustrate the social, political, and cultural

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 198, 199.

\textsuperscript{40}Curry, “Samantha Rastles,” 810; Templin, “Marietta Holley,” 79.

\textsuperscript{41}Ibid., 822.

\textsuperscript{42}Armitage, “Marietta Holley,” 195.

\textsuperscript{43}Graulich, “Wimmen,” 193, 194.
forces that informed reality for women. She used the humor and satire formats to hook readers looking for a laugh into putting some thought into this reality.

Linda Morris studied Holley as a vernacular humorist whose focused social role appealed to her mostly female readership. Morris said, “Holley deserves our attention because she was an amusing, innovative writer who reshaped vernacular humor to advance the cause of the women’s rights movement; she was the only humorist to do so and the only feminist to use humor as her chief weapon in furthering the women’s cause.” 44 Morris believed that Samantha directly expressed Holley’s views, and that every aspect of Holley’s development of Samantha was purposeful. Samantha’s marital status lent credibility to her political outlooks, captured both female and male readers, and widened Holley’s reach and the dissemination of her message. Samantha supported female liberty that could be achieved within marriage but for which marriage was not required, and approached life with a logic that exposed and shattered the prevailing bias against women in the nineteenth century. 45 Morris pointed out Holley’s paradoxically gentle but firm approach to her humorous advocacy of women’s rights. Samantha stood unwaveringly for “the cause of right;” but “her commitment to her family and community serve to reaffirm her conviction that female reform must be brought about by peaceful reasonable persuasion.” 46

Morris placed great emphasis on Holley’s feminism and on the argument that Holley’s primary motivation for writing was to promote woman suffrage and the resultant political rights and equality. Morris offered ample support for her claims. Morris argued that Samantha’s domesticity was both Holley’s shield and her secret weapon. Holley “was careful to demonstrate that women’s rights did not conflict with women’s domestic natures,” and to infuse Samantha with family and

46 Ibid., 172, 173, 176, 180.
community values – “Holley’s strength as a humorist resides in her use of homely details from the Allen family’s domestic life, particularly as experienced from a woman’s point of view…In fact, [Samantha] makes some of her arguments in favor of women’s suffrage while she is engaged in household chores.”47 For Morris, the unmarried Holley created the married Samantha to round out slightly the sharp edges of her feminist message to urge her audience into recognition of and rebellion against “their own culturally instilled sense of inferiority and inadequacy, their concurrent belief in men’s superiority... [and] the central issue of women’s rights.”48 However, while Samantha was happily married, she did not believe that marriage was necessary for female happiness: a woman needed political and economic self-sufficiency far more than she needed a husband.49

According to Morris, “Holley’s female readers are never far from her mind.”50 Holley “reserved her deepest anger and indignation for men who had political power,” withheld that power from women, and used that power in self-serving ways against women.51 Morris discussed Josiah, Samantha’s comic foil, the foolish husband who repeatedly invoked hackneyed arguments against women’s rights, in the process making himself look ever more ridiculous. Josiah noted women’s delicacy, claimed that women do not have the time for rights, that women should be protected from the stresses of political responsibilities all the while expecting Samantha to do all the household chores and support his public activities. For Morris, the hypocrisy of men who argued against

47 Ibid., 152, 191.
48 Ibid., 188-190.
49 Ibid., 201.
50 Ibid., 208.
51 Ibid., 214-215.
women’s rights on the grounds of female frailty was a source of Holley’s righteous, feminist ire; Samantha’s dealings with Josiah’s exploits reflected the feminist Holley’s contempt for men.  

Morris mentioned temperance and Holley’s correspondence with Frances Willard, but stated that Holley’s temperance writing was some of her weakest work, “overtly propagandistic,” and detracted from Holley’s popularity. Morris called temperance a “related issue,” second to Holley’s “most fundamental feminist issue, enfranchisement.”

Carol Whitehouse claimed that Holley created Samantha Allen as the voice of reason in a society founded on a system of inequality and moral failure. Whitehouse expressed a perspective different from the other analysts’ with her claim that “Holley’s contrast between the ideals of gentility [Betsey Bobbet] and the harsh existence of the rural country woman [Samantha] is the foundation of her feminist expression.” Whitehouse saw Samantha’s “inherent strength and intelligence” as proof of Holley’s rejection of “gender prejudice.”

Whitehouse gave minimal attention to Holley’s/Samantha’s temperance ideals. Whitehouse mentioned Holley’s correspondence with Frances Willard and listed among the names of Holley’s most popular novels the temperance manifesto *Sweet Cicely*, but otherwise reduced temperance to a parenthetical reference: “(Temperance was also one of the issues Samantha championed.).”

Corkrey took an opposite view of Holley from those of the other Holley analysts, claiming that Holley’s use of domestic humor negated any feminist message that she may have tried to

\[52\text{Ibid., 196-197.}\]
\[53\text{Ibid., 159.}\]
\[54\text{Ibid., 186.}\]
\[56\text{Ibid., 250.}\]
convey. Corkrey called Holley a True Woman, who used the “traditional to advocate the progressive.”\(^{57}\) Corkrey claimed that Holley created Samantha as purposefully “illiterate” as indicated by Samantha’s use of “homely metaphors” and dispensing of sage advice derived from personal experience. For Corkrey, this type of character would be Holley’s only effective means of delivering a women’s rights message without offending her readers. Furthermore, Corkrey saw Samantha’s vernacular speech as Holley’s attempt to soften the impact of her ideas, to make Samantha appear uneducated because “a certain amount of foolishness and humiliation are necessary to keep her from seeming an upstart feminist.”\(^ {58}\) Corkrey noted that Holley used satire as a “social corrective” by counterpointing inappropriate attitudes with logical solutions. The reader laughed, but the message was clear. Holley’s malapropisms may have been simple errors, or may have been salvos fired against injustice.\(^ {59}\)

Karen Lee Cole interpreted Holley as a stanchly feminist woman and author, and gave almost no attention to reforms other than woman suffrage. She focused on the methods of Holley’s writing, stating, “No other humorist had made the opponents of feminism the targets of her humor, and no other feminist used humor as her primary weapon for furthering the women’s rights movement.”\(^ {60}\) Cole pointed out that Holley used Samantha, Josiah, and Betsey to illustrate the popular public debates about women’s role in society and the need to expand women’s rights. Holley’s technique was a combination of “three literary traditions of the period:” humor, vernacular language, and appeal to women’s sense of self.\(^ {61}\)

\(^{57}\)Corkrey, “Marietta Holley, Alice Duer Miller,” 88.

\(^{58}\)Ibid., 103-105.

\(^{59}\)Ibid., 131, 136, 139.


\(^{61}\)Ibid., 136-137.
Cole described Holley’s method as pragmatic feminism, a mix of accepting certain aspects of woman’s sphere while working for independence from others. For Cole, Holley used Samantha and Josiah to expose the absurdities of women’s social and political position within the context of the reality of life for a farm wife. She noted that Holley consistently used the masculine pronoun when referring to the laws that defined a woman’s existence. Furthermore Betsey’s extreme defense of woman’s sphere represented “the waste of women’s potential.”

Louisa Cherciu limited her study to Holley’s treatment of women’s rights in *My Opinions*, which she described as Holley’s “most successful work.” Cherciu focused on Betsey Bobbet, whom she described as a “viciously negative” character, and a “sign for social structures that turn women into empty vessels of imposed meaning.” Holley’s depiction of Betsey’s appearance, behavior, and perspectives made Betsey an unsympathetic character that persisted in self-defeating activities in her search for a veneer of dignity.

Cherciu discussed the efficacy of Holley’s use of humor to “cod[e] a radical message,” that women should have social and political equality. She pointed out that Holley created relationships among Samantha, Josiah, and Betsey to contrast Samantha’s wisdom with Josiah and Betsey’s foolishness. Cherciu lauded Holley’s genius in using this threesome to communicate her women’s rights message, particularly in making Samantha a happily married woman who relished her domestic duties but still saw the importance of female independence.

In a review of Holley’s use of language, Irene Keller described the “heteroglossia” of political discourse that appeared in *My Opinions*. Keller believed that Holley used the words “sect”

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62 Ibid., 145, 146, 150.
64 Ibid., 77, 78.
65 Ibid., 86, 89.
for “sex,” and “pole” for “poll,” to satirize the degraded position of women in American society. Furthermore, Holley’s use of fictional dialogue between Samantha and notable political leaders such as Horace Greeley exposed the prevailing male perspective that women should remain in the domestic sphere, and not venture into public affairs. However, for Keller, the words that Holley created for Greeley were designed to “subvert the patriarchal norm for women,” in effect using social restrictions to support the need for women’s rights reform. Keller described Holley’s work as a “subversive, humorous narrative” aimed at “hard-working Americans” who wanted “some common-sense direction with the woman question.” Keller saw Holley as a valuable resource of information, but limited that resource to women’s rights.

Shelly M. Combs also focused on My Opinions to argue her thesis that Holley “offered a radical perspective” that women could combine political rights and homemaking. In fact, Combs stated that Holley’s fictional “Samantha Allen was the embodiment of modern feminism.” For Combs, Holley’s intent in politicizing domestic fiction was to support suffrage as the vehicle for women’s independence, and to show American wives the benefits of taking a role in public affairs. To accomplish this goal Holley gave Samantha “the uncanny ability to evoke a tone of submission with words of subversion.” However, Holley did not resort to “tear[ing] men down” in her humor;

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67 Ibid., 55, 56.

68 Ibid., 59.

rather she used Samantha’s common sense to expose the fallacy of social mores that stifled women’s voice simply on the basis of sex.\textsuperscript{70}

Combs argued that Betsey Bobbet was an “ineffectual character because she fails to challenge socially constructed ideas about women’s roles,” and that Holley pitted Samantha against Betsey to underscore the rightness of Samantha’s preachments.\textsuperscript{71} Combs also noted that Holley worked to show that women’s second class social and political status was not self-generating or self-perpetuating, but was the consequence of ideology and culture. Combs used this assessment to support her argument that Holley has been forgotten because male literary and social historians purposefully obliterated her from the canon. For Combs, Holley’s “recovery” represented “an important step to engaging with the social and political commentaries of the past.”\textsuperscript{72}

Gwendolyn B. Gwathmey studied Holley’s popularity by approaching her not as a humorist or satirist, but as an author of sentimental stories with a reformist message. Gwathmey’s interpretation of Holley was a departure from the focus on feminist issues discussed by most of her predecessors and contemporaries. Gwathmey claimed that Samantha’s development as a humorous character was Holley’s way of attracting readers, but pointed out that Samantha was never funny when she was advocating reform – “Holley does not intend mockery when she is expounding …her most pressing themes.”\textsuperscript{73}

In exploring what she called a “tremendous discrepancy between Holley’s critical reception and her public one,” Gwathmey offered a summary of the reviews of Holley’s books. For Gwathmey, the reviewers were generally negative in describing the worth and readability of

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{70}Ibid., 121, 124, 131. \\
\textsuperscript{71}Ibid., 136. \\
\textsuperscript{72}Ibid., 144. \\
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Holley’s work: the reviews criticized the books as formulaic and too long; Samantha’s adventures tiresome; and Holley’s humor predictable; the satire was by turns amusing and tedious, astute and colorless, realistic and ridiculous, and strained to adhere to a storyline. The critics also stressed that Holley’s work was aimed at a female audience. Gwathmey described the attitude of the reviewers as “disdain,” but noted that despite bad critical reviews, Holley’s books were best-sellers.74

Gwathmey’s study foretold the shift away from the prevailing assessment of Holley as primarily a feminist advocate of women’s rights for rights’ sake. Templin took analysis of Holley a step further toward a different direction, with her assertion that: “Feminists who have been instrumental in recuperating Holley’s reputation have focused almost exclusively on Holley’s concern for equal rights…however, we must locate her at the center of a number of social reform movements, preeminently temperance…[and] how that reputation…made possible Holley’s literary prominence…”75 Templin saw Holley’s advocacy of women’s rights not as an end, but as an instrument that would allow for a broad feminine influence on social structure.

Templin pointed out that the late twentieth century feminists’ revival of Holley’s work misguidedly marginalized her social-reformist attitude. Templin referred to *Sweet Cicely*, in which Holley combined satire and sentiment to create a bitingly pro-temperance novel. The women characters in this book almost unanimously had lives ruined by the effects of liquor, both from drunken husbands and other unscrupulous and greedy men with liquor interests.76 These characters were unable to preserve home and family because of the iniquity of disfranchisement. In her 1975 study, Curry, too, noted that through Samantha, Holley argued for suffrage as “the way to insure that traditional morality and the sanctity of the home will be guaranteed” against the threat of

74Ibid., 39-40.

75Templin, “Marietta Holley,” 77.

76Ibid., 79-80.
liquor. However, Curry described *Sweet Cicely* unfavorably as a “dim reminder of what Miss Holley’s work would have been without her humor...sentimental, melodramatic episodes of didactic moralizing that seeks to manipulate the emotions and point the way to justice and reform.” Curry’s assessment did precisely what Templin warned against: took Holley’s work out of the context of her times and applied a late twentieth century perspective to nineteenth century values.

Carol Mattingly included Marietta Holley in a list of the most popular and well-known women writers of temperance fiction. However, Mattingly went on to state that these women, including Holley, were better known for their non-temperance fiction, being remembered in scholarly studies more for participation in other causes such as suffrage. Mattingly claimed that this preference among feminist historians and literary analysts for suffrage literature over temperance literature was a function of temperance’s focus on domesticity. Women temperance fiction writers were not avid suffragists apart from their temperance work. Mattingly later mentioned Holley again, with an excerpt from *Sweet Cicely*; however, Mattingly did not mention Samantha Allen, Holley’s humor, or women’s rights rhetoric.

Notwithstanding the various opinions and interpretations of Holley’s work among the woman scholars, most agreed that Holley’s goal was to expose the obstacles to women’s rights and the resultant detrimental societal effects. Male analysts offered very different viewpoints from those of the female scholars. The conclusions of the few male-authored studies were reminiscent of the opinions of the male critics summarized by Gwathmey, and depicted Holley as a hack of minimal importance who deserved to be relegated to the depths of literary oblivion. As did the contemporary

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77 Curry, “Samantha Rastles,” 814.

78 Ibid., 818.

male Holley reviewers, the modern day male analysts focused on Holley’s technique rather than her message.

Walter Blair offered one of the earliest male interpretations of Holley’s work. Blair appreciated Holley’s uniqueness as a woman humor author and her ability to convey a reformist message through her use of vernacular language and comic caricatures. Blair admired the “shrewd” Holley, who in the voice of Samantha Allen “brilliantly handled” the “propaganda” of the women’s rights movement. However, Blair also opined: “To me, Miss Holley’s writings are interesting not only as preachments but also as biographical documents…we cannot help wondering whether her Samantha did not gain a great deal in vitality because a certain amount of envy and admiration entered into her creation.”

Alfred Habegger questioned the validity of Holley’s feminism that made “domesticity the basis of women’s liberation...in a decidedly self-righteous women’s movement.” He found Samantha unrealistic and her use of vernacular language contrived. He called Samantha the “great nineteenth-century superwoman” who was able to take care of her home and family, dispensed invaluable and indisputable advice to any and all listeners and even some who would not listen, and pontificated on “the big social and political questions of the day.” Habegger was put off by Samantha’s “blockbusting sermons” and said that somehow Holley must have been unable to grasp that Samantha’s travels and interactions with prominent political and social figures were “preposterous.” Habegger offered his opinion that Samantha became a truly comic character only as a role for the popular nineteenth century male comedian Neil Burgess.


Neil Burgess was a well-known comedic actor who often portrayed female characters. Holley related an episode in Chapter Eight of her “Story,” in which Burgess contacted her to propose creating a
Gregg Camfield appreciated Holley’s vision when he noted that Holley’s method was to work together with the social and political forces that she was trying to change. In Camfield’s view, Holley did not rail against male privilege, but rather cleverly sought to gain privilege for women on an equal footing. Holley’s goal was to show that equality for women was no threat to male standing: on the contrary, female political power would improve society for both women and men.\(^{82}\)

Camfield went on to say that Holley destroyed her humor with ham-handed satire – that she lost sight of the power of subtle humor in her zeal to “correct the sins of the world,” becoming a ‘monistic, preachy, self-righteous…martyr…in the cause of right.’\(^{83}\) Camfield noted Holley’s choice of words, her malapropisms, and her bumpkin-like misunderstanding as the comic engine behind her message. He claimed that in the process, Holley made Samantha into a sort of omniscient hayseed who dispensed truth and wisdom with the confidence acquired from years of marriage and observation of human nature. Camfield questioned whether Samantha could be taken seriously in her crusade for women’s rights when she was content to live within the domestic limits

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\(^{83}\)Ibid., 104.
of nineteenth century woman’s sphere. Camfield believed that Samantha and Betsey had the same goal: “to make converts of men,” although each saw the goal as the means to a different end.

Camfield cited examples from Holley’s work to support his argument that her unfunny satire made her popularity incomprehensible, her disappearance from literary history inevitable, and her resurrection by feminist scholars ludicrous. He described a scene in which a “female lecturer” launched a tirade condemning men for all the ills of the world and for the oppression of women. Samantha responded reasonably that the reality was that men were in charge and the way to promote change was not through revolution, but through mutual appreciation between the sexes – not to strip men of the power of self-determination, but to raise women to an equal self-determining level. And besides, men were good for heavy lifting, putting out fires, and handling unruly animals. Camfield concluded that “Samantha refuses to get caught up in belief…in her own moral superiority…she considers men to be horses…[but] also accords them sympathy as human beings.” Camfield noted that later in the same scene this female lecturer exhorted her listeners: “Less vote! less take a hammer and go at men, and make them let us vote this minute.” Camfield stated that Holley’s use of “less” for “let’s” was calculated to indicate Samantha’s belief that patience, not violent confrontation, was the way to achieve reforms.

In another example, Camfield cited a scenario in which listeners fell asleep during one of Samantha’s “sermons.” Camfield concluded that Holley created this situation as a “point of humor,” a sort of admission that her message was tedious but was so necessary and important that

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84 Ibid., 106-109.
85 Ibid., 114.
86 Ibid., 107, 108.
she must persevere as the only way to overcome her audience’s apathy. In the process, her constructive humor was inadvertently absorbed into self-defeating, fault-finding satire.\textsuperscript{87}

Camfield criticized Holley’s “bombast” that led her to write “great expanses [that] are virtually unreadable, so heavy-handed are they in their didactic irony…especially when dealing with the temperance crusade.”\textsuperscript{88} Camfield blurred the line between Holley and Samantha. He noted that in the later books Samantha became more genteel, and the illustrations showed her not as fat and rough-looking but as a tall, slim, dignified woman. Her speech became refined and her sermon-like passages more detailed and thoughtful. Camfield concluded that Samantha became Holley, but lost her comic value: “Holley…was already beginning to believe in the moral superiority of women…she continued to write satire, but duty had conquered pleasure and humor was squeezed out by Samantha’s weighty didacticism.”\textsuperscript{89}

Michael H. Epp wrote two articles about Holley and the meaning of her work. In the first of these articles Epp saw the Samantha novels as Holley’s attempt to use stereotypes to promote woman suffrage through exploitation of American consumer culture. In contrast to other Holley analysts who view Samantha, Josiah, and Betsey as representative of the social forces impacting nineteenth century American women, Epp argued that these characters were convenient tools in “promoting a politics and securing a living.” He rejected the conclusions of other scholars who interpreted Holley’s work as “sophisticated and complex,” claiming that Holley’s agenda was really rather restricted and simple: sell books and advocate the vote.\textsuperscript{90}

\textsuperscript{87}Ibid., 108.

\textsuperscript{88}Ibid., 109.

\textsuperscript{89}Ibid., 119.

Epp used Holley’s way of life and method of publication to support his argument. He pointed to Holley’s homebody personality, use of guide books and other secondary sources to flesh out the details of Samantha’s travels and adventures, and subscription sales as proof of her calculated methods of reaching as large an audience as possible with a minimum of personal upheaval.\textsuperscript{91} Epp believed that Samantha’s touting of woman suffrage reflected Holley’s sincere desire for female political equality, but disagreed with the feminist interpretation of some women historians and literary analysts. Instead, he claimed that Samantha’s devotion to home and family and connection to her community combined with the humor of the stories indicated that Holley sought a voice for women but not a radical social or cultural shift.\textsuperscript{92}

In discussing Holley’s use of stereotypes, Epp noted that she “challenges certain stereotypes as misrepresentations, not ‘the stereotype’ as constitutively misrepresentative.”\textsuperscript{93} For Epp, Holley’s political message centered exclusively on advocacy of woman suffrage. He did not mention any of her other reform interests, not even temperance. Epp offered his opinion of why Holley’s books, that were so popular during her life, essentially disappeared since her death. He claimed that the mechanics of subscription distribution – “the heaviness of the book, the bright colours and gaudy cover, the copious illustrations, the entertaining stereotypes” – relegated Holley’s books to a certain place and time. The nineteenth century consumer of popular literature would value an impressive looking volume and Holley’s books were prominently displayed on the bookshelves of many middle and lower class homes. This desire for an appearance of sophistication served the purpose for Holley of increasing her sales and disseminating her message. However, as the twentieth century progressed, the children’s book adopted many of the design features of the

\textsuperscript{91}See Chapter One of this thesis for a discussion of Holley’s temperament, aversion to travel, and methods of writing.


\textsuperscript{93}Ibid., 109.
subscription novels of the previous era. In fact, Epp noted that Holley’s books can be found in the children’s historical literature section of at least one major university collection. He stated, “the reduction of…feminist politics and humour to a children’s narrative…consigns Holley’s writing to the wrong generic classification and obscures that book’s real history in the 1890s suffrage movement…”94 For Epp, the humor has overshadowed the satire, the message has become obscured and outdated, and the meaning invalid.

Epp published a second article about Holley in which he reiterated many of his initial arguments. However, he added some new dimensions to his interpretation of Holley and her books. Epp placed Holley in a unique position as a female humorist: she “challenged boundaries established by patriarchal interests, and inevitably brought to light deep contradictions between patriarchy and democracy.”95 For Epp, Holley’s use of the pseudonym Josiah Allen’s wife served a number of humor and social commentary purposes. The name exposed the tension between domesticity and feminism. Furthermore, Samantha was too politically aware to stay demurely within the shadow of a man. Most importantly, both Samantha the fictional author and Holley the real author used the same pseudonym, one to express domesticity and the other to rebel against gender-based restrictions and underscore the need to female independence.96

Epp noted that Holley created a character in Samantha who was committed to staying within the bounds of patriarchy as a deeply dedicated housewife, while simultaneously seeking for herself and for all women the most direct route to public involvement through woman suffrage. Holley’s use of dialect placed Samantha in a specific time and place; her regionalism that made her appear to be a backward hayseed camouflaged the depth and breadth of her interest in social causes.

94Ibid., 112.


96Ibid., 22.
Epp called Holley’s writing “gendered and public:” Holley took a public stand on private issues by publishing books to criticize women’s second-class social and political status. Epp stated that woman suffrage in nineteenth century America “meant a significant change in gender roles, since it granted women increased participation in the public sphere.” He went on to claim:

By writing a politically charged humour, often focused on specific issues like...suffrage, Holley was taking part in a major public debate. Also, by writing about less overtly political issues such as home and mobility, issues typically considered of traditional “feminine” interest by virtue of their relationship to the private sphere, Holley was participating in the manifest domesticity that was intimately bound up with the nation and with empire. And finally, by grafting together familiar literary genres, such as regional and dialect humour, Holley was leading the transformation of a recognized, popular, and profitable genre.97

Epp supported his claim with an excerpt from Samantha on the Woman Question.98 Epp chose a scene between Samantha and an unnamed U.S. senator to illustrate Holley’s pro-suffrage position. However, although in this scene Samantha’s argument was entirely about temperance and the need for female empowerment to press for temperance reform, Epp never mentioned temperance as one of Holley’s causes or even as a public issue.

This review of the scholarly analysis of Marietta Holley’s life and work has shown how one author can generate an array of interpretations depending on the time, place, and goals of the analyst. The next three chapters will discuss specific Holley works, examine where her reform proclivities lay, and show how and why the Holley scholars may have truncated or been over restrictive in interpreting her message.

97Ibid., 13, 14.
98See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of Samantha on the Woman Question.
CHAPTER FIVE

HER JONESVILLE FOLKS

I had no idee there could be so many folks skairst up in Jonesville. I thought to myself, I wonder if they’d flock out so to a prayer meetin.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley, “Fourth of July in Jonesville”

Throughout her career Holley published a number of stories in Peterson’s Magazine under the pseudonym Josiah Allen’s Wife. These stories which introduced the various characters that made up Samantha’s Jonesville community invariably also appeared in Holley’s novels, often with slight alterations in wording and editing. The stories showed the close relationship that Holley had with Peterson’s. The earliest stories were taken from the magazine and became chapters in Holley’s first books. After Holley’s reputation and popularity had been established and assured, chapters were taken out of her later books and adapted as stories for the magazine. The initial shorter works revealed the foundation of Holley’s dialect sketches and her use of satirical commentary on human nature, as well as her penchant for reform.

The early short stories launched Holley’s career. After she achieved fame the later stories served to keep her before the public between novels. She was also able to press her reform agenda with an audience that might read a magazine but might not buy or read a longer book. The stories showed how Holley may have written her books in segments, developing her longer work out of these shorter tales. Also, Holley may have been testing her audience’s reception of her reform ideas with shorter stories before expanding the themes in her novels. Most importantly, these stories revealed Holley’s talent for using believable fiction as a basis for satire. As the years passed Holley

1Holley’s stories were also published in a number of other popular magazines, including the Ladies’ Home Journal and Harper’s Bazaar. Peterson’s was the publisher of her earliest stories.
must have seen a greater financial benefit from this recycling of her stories into and out of book chapters.²

Holley’s dialectal language was much stronger in these stories than in her later Samantha novels.³ In keeping with the literary techniques of other nineteenth century humor authors,⁴ Holley’s stories were somewhat formulaic as she created scenes revolving around Samantha and Josiah Allen and other stock character types that recurred in most of her humorous work. The Allens had a large extended family, related both by blood and by marriage, with nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws who in turn had nieces, nephews, cousins, and in-laws. Furthermore, Jonesville and the surrounding region were populated with the usual ministers both sincere and callow; politicians both ethical and unethical; businessmen both honest and underhanded; pretentious prominent citizens; shady peddlers; local inebriates; misguided women who acted against self-interest; and unscrupulous freeloaders. Holley created an inexhaustible supply of characters that, depending on the theme of the story, could interact with Samantha on an intimate level, remain just remote enough to be the butt of a joke, be the personification of human weakness, or simply make Samantha’s adventures possible.

The first Samantha sketch, “Fourth of July in Jonesville,” appeared in the July, 1869, Peterson’s. This story was reminiscent of the dialect sketches of Charles F. Browne, who wrote

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²Large portions of Holley last novels were reworked parts of her previous books. See Chapter Eight of this thesis for discussion.


⁴See Chapter Three of this thesis for discussion of nineteenth century literary techniques that may have influenced Holley’s writing.
under the pseudonym Artemus Ward and to whom Holley has been compared. This story also became a chapter in *My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s*, Holley’s first novel. Holley’s cacography was prominent in this story, which introduced Samantha and Josiah Allen, and Betsey Bobbet.

In keeping with the well-established literary humor technique of using protagonists’ letters to the editor of the publication in which the letters appear, the story was in the format of a letter from Samantha to Mr. Peterson describing the Independence Day celebration in Jonesville. The entire community turned out for a lavish event, complete with families and small children, sashed young women representing the states of the Union, and the editor of the local newspaper, the Jonesville *Auger*. The main focus of the festivities was a speech by the local poet and “Oriter of the Day, Aspine Todd.” Holley used Todd to lampoon the type of self-important windbag that could dominate small towns with nonsensical verbiage intended to inspire awe in the intelligence and wisdom of the speaker but that no one listened to or understood. Todd opened his remarks:

I am here, noble brothers and sisters of Jonesville, not in a mephitical manner, and I trust not in a mentorial – but I am here to present a few plain truths, in a plain manner for your consideration. My friends we are in one sense but tennifolious blossoms of life – or if you will pardon the tergiversation – we are all but minorating tenutoasters, hovering upon an illnition of mythoplasm.  

Todd’s oratory continued in this ridiculous and meaningless vein, punctuated by the approving exclamations of the town drunk, old Mr. Peedick, “who was settin on a bench rite under the speakers stand, with his fat red face lookin up shinin with enthusiasm, (and the brandy he had

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5 Artemus Ward was the pseudonym of Charles Farrar Browne, a well-known humorist popular in the mid-nineteenth century in both the United States and in England. Holley was often compared to Browne, who is discussed in Chapter Three of this thesis.

6 See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of the humor writing of Seba Smith, whose comic persona Jack Downing often “wrote” letters to the editor of Smith’s own newspaper.

took to honor the old revolutionary hero’s.)” Todd persevered in his address, with Peedick’s frequent interruptions, until the food was served.

Samantha was caught in the rush to the food table. Hungry celebrants in total disregard for manners or decorum tore Samantha’s best dress and flattened her favorite bonnet. The day was capped with numerous toasts, to “The Eagle of Liberty,” “the 4th of July,” “The Press of Jonesville,” “The Fair Sect,” and Todd’s toast to “The Luminous Lamp of Progression.” Samantha ended the day with a vow never to attend another 4th of July celebration “‘as long as my name is Josiah Allen’s wife’…And when I say a thing, Mr. Peterson, I mean it.”

This story had several components of Holley’s trademark humor: cacography, poor grammar, and satirical criticism of arrogant community leaders. Samantha was an aloof observer hovering above the scene until she was dragged down into the fray, but after all her common sense prevailed. She was Josiah Allen’s wife, but had a mind of her own. Most importantly, although Holley did not include an overt reform message and made no mention of women’s rights, she did inject a temperance theme into the story. Peedick’s role was at once humorous and satirical, intended to poke fun at the pompous Todd while illustrating the humiliating behavior that could result from alcohol consumption. This story would appear to support my argument that temperance was Holley’s first concern, “the system,” as she noted on Chapter Eleven of her autobiographic “Story of my Life,” “I was always warring against and writing about,” and the one that she most returned to in her novels.

Holley followed her first story with “My Last Year’s Magazine” in the November, 1869, Peterson’s. Again in the format of a letter to Mr. Peterson, this story was a lesson about the dangers of lending. Against her better judgment Samantha agreed to lend her new and unread Peterson’s to her neighbor, Miss Gowdey, who promised to keep the book safely on her parlor table, use a cloth

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8Ibid., 55-57.
cover to protect the book from dirt, and return the book the next day. Eight weeks passed. Samantha
resolved to retrieve the book. When she arrived at Miss Gowdey’s Samantha discovered that little
Johnny Gowdey had cut the book to pieces to make clothes for his paper dolls. When Miss Gowdey
entered the room, she exclaimed, “You awful child you, how dare you touch that book? How dare
you unlock the parlor door, and climb up on the best table, and take the clean paper off of it, ore
handle it? How dare you, John Wesley?”9 John’s reply: “You give it to me yourself ma, you know
you did last night when the minister was here, you said if I wouldn’t tease you for any more honey,
you’d lem’m me take it, and cant I have some honey now? Say, ma, cant you gim’me some?” Miss
Gowdey launched into a tirade listing all of Johnny’s transgressions, and the stress of being the
mother of such a poorly behaved child. Samantha kept her wits and calmly suggested that Miss
Gowdey should purchase her own magazine next time. When Miss Gowdey protested that she
could not possibly bother to buy a magazine when she could borrow one, Samantha picked up the
shredded book and left.

Upon arriving at home Samantha asked Josiah to go to town to purchase a new magazine.
This request led to an accusatory exchange about why one should never be a lender, punctuated
with numerous I-told-you-sos. Samantha vowed never to lend again: “Now, any body that gets my
magazeens this year will get ’em over my prostrate form.”10 This story most likely struck a note of
familiarity to many readers, and showed Holley’s talent for creating a fable about everyday life.
The story also showed Samantha as a person who looks for the good in others, but who is able to
turn her mistakes into homey wisdom. Holley was building Samantha’s credibility as a conveyer of
moral lessons.

9Holley’s use of the name John Wesley, who was the founder of the Methodist church, was
probably intended to show the religious proclivities of the Jonesvillians, as well as to create a humorous
paradox about a rambunctious and disobedient little boy named after a religious icon.

1869, passim.
“Woman’s Spear” appeared in the August, 1870, edition of Peterson’s, and “A Allegory on Wimmen’s Rights,” in the April, 1872, edition. Both of these stories were adapted into chapters in My Opinions. Both stories focused on woman suffrage. Both also identified temperance as a main benefit of the vote. “Woman’s Spear” was Holley’s first pro-woman suffrage piece. She presented all of the common anti-suffrage arguments through the words of Josiah and Betsey. Josiah argued that a woman “hain’t the rekisit strength to vote; she is too fraguil.” Josiah also opined that a woman would disregard the issues in an election and vote for the handsomest candidate. Betsey argued that voting “would devour too much ov a woman’s time…the study that would be inevitable [would] be too wearin’ on her.” Of course Samantha debunked these and all other arguments, countering that a woman must vote to ensure a safe and secure life for herself and her family. Samantha concluded that woman suffrage was necessary to promote a healthy society, a conclusion that allowed Holley bring temperance into this mix of arguments. Samantha mentioned “‘the poor drunkard’s wife’” left to shiver in the snow because she had no political voice for her own self-

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11Holley may have been influenced to write her “Allegory” by the new departure philosophy of the woman suffrage movement. In 1871 and 1872 women sought to achieve suffrage through the judiciary, primarily by engaging in behavior that would force the authorities to bring suit against women, thereby creating the opportunity to argue in court that the 14th and 15th Amendments taken together guaranteed for women the right to vote. This was the new departure theory, which held that all American citizens were entitled to equal rights under the Constitution. In keeping with the new departure tactic, the National Woman Suffrage Association encouraged women to vote in the 1872 presidential election. The most high-profile participant was Susan B. Anthony, who was arrested, tried, and convicted of illegal voting in the State of New York. However, the most influential impact of the new departure voting plan was the trial of Virginia Minor, who had also voted in 1872 and whose case went to the Supreme Court as Minor v. Happersett. The Supreme Court ruled that suffrage was not a natural right of citizenship, and that the states’ jurisdiction over voting rights could extend to disfranchisement of women. This decision marked a turning point in the woman suffrage movement: no longer could the right to vote be effectively argued in the courts; a federal amendment would be necessary. See Elisabeth Griffith, In Her Own Right: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 148, 154, 155, 160-161; Eleanor Flexner, A Century of Struggle: The Women’s rights Movement in the United States (New York: Atheneum, 1998), 169; Aileen Kraditor, The Ideas of the Woman Suffrage Movement 1890-1920 (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, Doubleday and Company, Inc., 1971), 231.

12My Opinions is discussed in Chapter Six of this thesis.
protection. Temperance was part of a woman’s “‘instrinsick interists,’” for which she would gladly vote, no matter how much time was required.\textsuperscript{13} A vote for temperance was worth the effort.

In “Allegory” Holley expanded on the need for woman suffrage, again exploding the same, tired anti-suffrage rhetoric mentioned in “Woman’s Spear,” and placing temperance squarely among the greatest benefits of the vote. Samantha related an exchange between Woman and the Law. The Law ordered Woman to “embrace a license bill that is ruinin’ your husband.” Samantha did a mental arithmetical calculation to conclude that most drunkard husbands had wives who were trapped by the powerlessness of disfranchisement and were legally unable to protect families and society from the effects of intemperance.\textsuperscript{14} Holley’s message was a simple one. Woman should vote. The Law should change. Society would benefit. This formula was the way to temperance, and success.

Holley also wrote early stories that served as commentary on human behavior and relationships. “A Nite of Trubbles” about a good night’s sleep interrupted by a local young man who mistakenly serenades under Samantha and Josiah’s window instead of their daughter’s, appeared in Peterson’s in 1870 and was a chapter in My Opinions. The Widder Doodle stories appeared in Peterson’s in 1876, 1877, and 1878, and featured the widow of Josiah’s brother who, in a manner reminiscent of Frances Whitchers’s Widow Bedott, pined away for her dead second husband, Doodle, all the while looking to remarry.\textsuperscript{15} The “Female Lect’rer” about a radical women’s rights agitator, and “Melankton Spicerses Wife” about a woman who had no legal

\textsuperscript{13}Marietta Holley, “Woman’s Spear,” \textit{Peterson’s Magazine}, Vol. LVIII, No. 2, August 1870, \textit{passim}.


\textsuperscript{15}The Widow Bedott was a creation of Frances Whitcher, an early female humorist. See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of Whitcher’s work.
recourse against her abusive husband, appeared in *Peterson’s* in 1877. All of these stories were used as chapters in *Samantha at the Centennial*.

Within ten years Holley had established a reputation as a writer who was able to depict people and rural, small town life so realistically that her readers could identify with the personalities, experiences, and events she created. A series of stories in that appeared in *Peterson’s* in 1879 and 1881 used Josiah’s exploits to develop and reinforce the roles of Samantha as the voice of reason and Josiah as the bumbling fool. These stories were not reform vehicles, but were cautionary tales about human nature and the unpleasant outcomes of greed, selfishness, and exploitation. “How the Bamberses Borrowed Josiah” and “What Came of Borrowing Josiah” appeared in the January and February, 1879, magazines. The first story began with Josiah’s plan to rent out a house on the family farm as a way to make some easy money. When Samantha pointed out that living too close to others and being a landlord could destroy “peace, quiet, and repose,” Josiah retorted that she should “talk common sense” but then conceded that women could not be expected to understand business. Josiah found tenants, the Bamber family. Samantha warned him repeatedly not to rent to this family, who had a reputation for shiftlessness. Josiah, with “the doggy obstinacy of his sect,” of course ignored Samantha’s advice and the situation quickly deteriorated into total chaos. The Bambers had no sense of personal boundaries and were incessant borrowers of all manner of items: “ten pounds of side pork, some flour, the dish-kettle, and my toothbrush…garden sass of all kinds, and the lookin’ glass, groceries, vittles, cookin’ utensils, stove

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pipe, a feather bed, bolsters, bed-clothes, and the New Testament…they even borrowed Josiah’s clothes.” The story ended when the “Bamberses” borrowed Josiah to do all the household chores.\textsuperscript{17}

In the concluding story Josiah was exhausted from working at the Bambers’ house. The Bambers took greater and greater advantage of Josiah until Mr. and Mrs. Bamber started going to parties and leaving the children with Josiah. When Mrs. Bamber expressed delight in finding neighbors that made her and her family feel comfortable, Josiah angrily demanded, “If you don’t stop neighborin’ with me, I’ll know the reason why.” Samantha intervened and urged Josiah and Mrs. Bamber to take “mejum courses” in life, including in being neighbors. Josiah evicted the Bambers and vowed, “if any human bein’ ever comes to rent that house of me, I’ll shoot ’em down, jest as I would a mushrat.” Samantha’s final words were, “Josiah Allen, can’t you ever learn to take a mejum course…you needn’t go around huntin’ up renters, or murder one, if they come nigh you …you must learn to be more moderate and mejum.”\textsuperscript{18}

Josiah did not learn this lesson, though, as demonstrated in two more stories published in \textit{Peterson’s} in November and December, 1881, “How We Took in Summer Boarders” and “How the Boarders ‘Took Us In.’” These tales had Josiah making more bad choices and gave Samantha an opportunity to air her views on marriage.

In the first story Josiah again became involved in a hare-brained get-rich-quick scheme, this time to take in summer boarders. Samantha refused, but “Josiah, like other pardners of his sect, is very fond of havin’ things as he wants ’em; and he is also fond of makin’ money.” Of course Josiah accused Samantha of having no head for business and Samantha relented: “Any female

\textsuperscript{17}Marietta Holley, “How the Bamberses Borrowed Josiah,” \textit{Peterson’s Magazine}, Vol. LXXV, No. 1, January 1879, \textit{passim}.

woman, who has got a beloved pardner, and also a heart inside of her breast bones, knows how the conflict ended. I yielded, and giv’ in.”

Naturally little time passed before the arrangement became a fiasco. The boarders were the Danks family, a mother, an older boy, Bill, and three unnamed younger children; the father “wouldn’t be there till Saturday night.” The children were loud, destructive, and ate incessantly. Miss Danks did not try to control her children. Both Miss Danks and Bill had frequent “historickal fits” that always occurred when breakable objects were close by. Samantha felt sorry for the boy, who was apologetic whenever he broke any item. Josiah regretted taking in the boarders, but by the story’s end had not yet reached his limit.19

In the second story, Samantha described the mayhem created by the three younger children, who “made me more work than all my housework put together…a-handlin’…a-breakin’…and ridin’…everything.” These children ran soil and stones through Josiah’s mill and bread through Samantha’s spinning wheel. The children had a penchant for sweets and baked treats, but “wasted three times over what their board come to every week.” Samantha held her peace and let Josiah feel the full, unbearable effects of his misguided scheme. Josiah’s pride spurred him to endure this misery rather than admit that Samantha had been right. Mr. Danks arrived three weeks late, stayed one night amidst his wife’s “historicks,” Bill’s fits, and the carnage left by the little ones, and promptly announced his departure. Josiah became increasingly agitated and threatened to “prosicute” if Danks left his family behind.

Samantha finally intervened, delivering a lecture to Mr. Danks about marriage and fatherhood, the responsibilities of a “matrimourner.” When Danks protested that he was not prepared to handle his wife and son’s health problems and his younger children’s brattiness, Samantha reminded him that marriage was a choice, and one must take responsibility for one’s

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choices: “No man or woman ought to be drove into the state of matrimony by anybody…
But…after you have drove yourself into that state, you ought to histe your moral umberell, and
make the best of it.” Of course, Samantha’s philosophy was lost on Danks, who exclaimed that he
was leaving, his family was staying, and if Josiah evicted them Danks would not pay for the room
and board. Josiah did evict the family, and he did “prosicute” Danks; but Danks hired a clever
lawyer who won the case, and Josiah had to pay all the court costs for both litigants. Samantha was
satisfied with the knowledge that never again would Josiah take in summer boarders. 20 These
stories again allowed Holley to use a fable format to espouse her opinions on human nature and the
human condition.

Holley’s first purely temperance short story was “Eben Landers and his Cider Mill,”
published in the February, 1883, edition of Peterson’s. The prevailing wisdom in the temperance
movement was that distilled spirits were the problem, but fermented beverages were acceptable.
Holley’s choice to target hard cider reflected the attitude of female-driven temperance work.21 This
story predated Sweet Cicely, Holley’s first temperance novel,22 but may have laid the ground work
for Holley to solidify her reputation as a temperance author.

Eben Landers was a Jonesville apple farmer who made “hundreds of barrels” of cider
every year from the crop of his orchards. Samantha deplored this nefarious use of an innocent and

20Marietta Holley, “How the Boarders ‘Took Us In,’” Peterson’s Magazine Vol. LXXX, No. 6,
December 1881, passim.

21The WCTU pledge includes all alcoholic beverages:

I hereby solemnly promise, God helping me, to abstain
from all distilled, fermented and malt liquors, including
wine, beer and hard cider, and to employ all proper
means to discourage the use of and traffic in the same.

22See Chapter Seven of this thesis for a discussion of Sweet Cicely.
Prior to the publication of “Eben Landers,” Holley had already written Samantha at the
Centennial in 1877, her second novel. This novel is one of those used by the Holley scholars to support
the thesis of Holley as a feminist author. However, the book also contained a significant temperance
theme, and caught the eye of Frances Willard, who influenced Holley to write a temperance novel. The
result was Sweet Cicely.
otherwise wholesome fruit, and thought that if the apples were self-aware “I believe they would have thought it their duty to crumple their bright leaves right together and fall right off the tree and die, before their sweet life had been given ter nourish seeds of death an’ despair, and everlastin’ ruination.” Samantha confronted Landers with her disapproval, but, of course he did not listen.

Landers was also an elder in his church, and the hypocrisy of a supposedly religious man’s distributing hard cider was more than Samantha could tolerate. She held him responsible for all the fights in Jonesville in the previous five years. She also worried about “boys graduatin’ the cider school…ready ter be advanced inter the higher departments o’ brandy and whiskey.” Landers went to church meetings drunk, all the while denying that cider was a danger. He claimed to take cider “for my blood…consumption… an’ rheumatiz.” Cider was the perfect medicinal tonic, a “pious” drink unlike “mean -- wicked” whiskey.

After setting this background, Holley launched into the typical sentimental temperance tale.\(^{23}\) The Landerses had a much-cherished son Tip, a fine, upstanding young man, bright, polite, scholarly, generous, and good-natured. However, Tip had taken to sneaking into the cider cellar with his friends, and in addition to the cider he consumed at home, had become an habitual drunkard. One cold night Tip and his college chums set off in a carriage to attend a meeting; the young men brought along a jug of cider to ward off the frigid air. When the boys were late coming home, Tip’s mother began to worry. After hearing a wagon but not hearing the boys, she convinced Landers to check the barn. Landers found the wagon and one drunken young man, but not Tip. Landers immediately went out to look for his son, and found Tip unconscious on the ground, with both of his hands and feet frozen. Tip’s hands and feet had to be amputated.

\(^{23}\)See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of temperance literature.
After this tragedy Samantha accused all anti-temperance men, including Josiah who had also dismissed Samantha’s arguments about the dangers of hard cider, of responsibility for Tip’s horrible but completely preventable fate. As usual in temperance literature, a personal tragedy convinced even the staunchest defender of intemperance to change his mind. Josiah felt “awful on the subject.” He destroyed his own supply of hard cider; he had “come right out an’ acted like a hero an’ warrior in the path of right.” More importantly, “Eben Landers is a changed man. Not a drop of cider will that man ever make agin as long as he lives…Truly when the divine pleadin’ of sorrow an’ the hauntin’ voice of repentance are speakin’ to a man’s soul, Samanthy’s is not needed. But poor Tip – poor boy!” Typical of temperance literature, tragedy fostered contrition.

This sampling of Holley’s stories shows her shorter work helped to establish her as a humorist and satirist and to grow as a reformer. The stories showcased Holley as an observer of human behavior and relationships, and allowed her to develop the unique mixture of humor, pathos, and political commentary that catapulted her reputation as a writer of popular fiction. Most importantly, the stories introduced or furthered Holley’s arguments for social reforms that would allow women to claim self-determination, especially temperance and women’s rights. The next two chapters will offer in-depth discussion of the reform novels that emerged from these stories, starting with women’s rights and moving on to temperance.

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24 In all of Holley’s temperance fiction Josiah was pro-license. Holley used this tension between Samantha and Josiah to provide a forum for Samantha’s pro-temperance arguments.

CHAPTER SIX

SHE WUZ BIG ON WIMMEN’S RIGHTS

When the young girls of our country are considered of equal importance with cows and clover to oversee and protect, there will be different laws, and I believe wimmen’s votin’ will hasten that day.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley,
Josiah Allen on the Woman Question

Marietta Holley, a pioneer among nineteenth century women fiction authors, has been identified as the first to use humor specifically to promote reforms and propose woman-driven solutions to social problems. Holley’s work combined tried-and-true humor writing methods with her own techniques to fashion a new style.¹ Her use of a comic pseudonym, dialect, malapropisms, cacography, and literality; her tendency to have stock characters tie together often unrelated stories in one volume with little plot; her use of travel; her incorporation of real political figures into storylines; and her creation of a persona to deliver a message imbued with unassailable logic and common sense placed her firmly in the trajectory of nineteenth century American humor literature.² However, Holley’s work was unique in that her no-nonsense persona Samantha Allen was a hefty, powerful, judicious, and unfailingly moral woman surrounded by small, ignorant, self-serving, ridiculous men. Of course, Holley also created ludicrous female foils, thereby constructing the perfect pyramidal reflection of society with bumbling men at the base, self-defeating women in the midsection, and all capped by the righteous social oracle.

Although Holley’s preferred reforms were those that would have a profound effect on the lives of women, her motives were not confined to the purely feminist activism assigned to her in

¹See Chapter Four of this thesis for a review of scholarly opinion about Holley and her work.

²See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of nineteenth century American humor literature.
many scholarly analyses of nineteenth century women’s history and literature. Holley began and ended her career with a strong women’s rights message: My Opinion and Betsey Bobbet’s (1873), Josiah Allen’s Wife as a P.A. and P.I., Samantha at the Centennial (1877), Samantha on the Woman Question (1913), and Josiah Allen on the Woman Question (1914). These four novels contained Holley’s most vocal and direct advocacy of woman suffrage, and therefore are the books most often cited by Holley analysts to support a thesis of feminism ranging from a step barely removed from the cult of true womanhood to radical and subversive. Surely Holley used these books to advocate political and social equality for women; indeed, she used the most common nineteenth century anti-women social constructs to expose the injustice of extrinsically imposed gender roles. Her satirical commentary combined the political, cultural, and philosophical to convey her message that women as human beings were entitled to freedom of conscience and liberty of choice on an equal footing with men. However, the books also contained an undercurrent of Holley’s broader vision: societal betterment through female self-determination.

In My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s, her first full-length novel, Holley laid the groundwork for her subsequent books and established herself as an author who would use her writing as a vehicle to press for reforms in nineteenth century America. Holley set the tone for this book on the title page and in the dedication. The full title of the book is My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s: Designed as a Beacon of Light to Guide Women to Life, Liberty and the Pursuit of Happiness, But Which may be Read by the Sterner Sect, Without Injury to Themselves or the Book, by Josiah Allen’s Wife; “Who will read the book, Samantha, when it is rote?” The dedication is:

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See Introduction of this thesis for a brief explanation of feminism as defined by scholars of the late twentieth century.

These four books were the first two and last two published books of Holley’s career. In the intervening thirty-six years she published seventeen other novels and numerous short stories.

In this thesis the title of this book is shortened to My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s, or simply My Opinions.
“To my own Lovin’ Pardner, JOSIAH. Whom although I have been his Consort for a little upwards of 14 years I still love with a CAST-IRON DEVOTEDNESS.” This title and dedication conveyed several messages: the unmarried Holley used a married woman character to make her message safer or more socially palatable; she targeted a female audience and encouraged that audience to strive for self-sufficiency as women; she invited men to read the book to spread her ideas among those who had the political capital to act on her reform agenda; and she advertised her domestic values and the sanctity of marriage and the family. Furthermore, Samantha Allen, or Josiah Allen’s wife, was the book’s ostensible author, a literary device that allowed Holley to distance herself from the narrative; have Samantha tell the story in the first person; and set the stage for Samantha’s celebrity and renown when she met social reform and political leaders of the day, all of whom had heard of Samantha and read “her” book.

In the preface to My Opinions Holley introduced Samantha and Josiah Allen, the married couple whose exploits comprised the core of the stories of all of her books. Samantha was a reformer of many-years’ standing -- she had worked for abolition – and a farm wife who took her domestic responsibilities of homemaking, child rearing, and bill paying very seriously. But after emancipation, her step-children’s departure from the home, and paying off the mortgage, Samantha succumbed to an inner voice that spurred her to “write a book givin’ your views on the great subject of Wimmen’s Rites.”

Holley’s second book, published in 1877 and selling over a million copies, was Josiah Allen’s Wife as a P.A. and P.I., Samantha at the Centennial: Designed as a Bright and Shining

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6Samantha and Josiah Allen were characters that Holley created in her earliest published short stories. See Chapter Five of this thesis for details.

7Marietta Holley, My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s (Hartford, CT: American Publishing Company, 1873), v.

Light, To Pierce the Fogs of Error and Injustice That Surround Society and Josiah, And to Bring More Clearly to View the Path That Leads Straight on to Virtue and Happiness.⁹ Once again the title of the book revealed the intent of the author as a social commentator and reformer. Holley made Samantha a Promiscuous Advisor (P.A.) and a Private Investigator (P.I.) to facilitate the delivery of her reform messages. Holley created Samantha’s mission to expose social ills, dispense her common-sense wisdom, and point the way to family and community harmony. Samantha, an excellent judge of character able to assess a situation very quickly and accurately, identified the vast and diverse missteps of those around her and provided solutions. Her solutions were not necessarily easy, but were always steeped in justice and “the cause of Right.” By making Samantha a P.A. and a P.I., Holley broadened her venue for social commentary, criticism, and reform.

Samantha on the Woman Question and Josiah Allen on the Woman Question were Holley’s last two books, written in 1913 and 1914, respectively. Holley seemed to have come full circle with these books that conveyed a sense of the seemingly endless futility of decades of pro-women’s rights arguments. Holley was seventy-seven years old when Samantha was published in 1913. She recycled significant portions of the story from her previous work, leaving today’s reader either to wonder if Holley was expressing frustration and resignation, or to marvel at her tenacity. Of course, by 1913 Holley’s readership would have been into a second or even third generation and few readers would have recognized the reworked sections. In any case, Holley was still writing about these same themes forty years after the publication of her first book. Samantha naturally made some good commentary, but the book did not flow along a progression from chapter to chapter. Fittingly, the book had no ending, but simply stopped in the middle of a non-story about a situation that seemed hopeless and interminable.

⁹In this thesis the title of this book is shortened to a working title of Samantha at the Centennial.
In *Josiah Allen*, Holley seemed revived. She revamped old thoughts in this story, too, but at least the events of the book were original and hilarious. In fact, the humor and satire in this book rivaled those of *My Opinions*, making those two novels the foundation and the capstone of Holley’s career.

Written from Josiah’s point of view, *Josiah Allen* was a sort of male-centric flip-side look at the women’s rights and social reforms issues that Holley had espoused throughout her career. In explaining her idea for the book, Holley said, “Josiah never had half a chance…He has always been a good, faithful husband, respecting Samantha’s views, but nevertheless rebellious regarding her utterances on women’s rights. I therefore thought I would give him an opportunity to write a book and say just what he wanted to. He calls his book *Josiah Allen on the Woman Question* and he gives free expression to his opinions that have been pent up more or less for forty years.”

In *Josiah Allen*, Josiah, basking in male self-aggrandizement, inadvertently delivered indictment after indictment of the unjust society that marginalized women. Holley had expended great effort in all of her books trying to debunk the threadbare arguments against women’s rights and other causes but to no avail. The problem was that these threadbare arguments still had enormous power even as temperance and suffrage, Holley’s main reforms, gained popularity and, more gradually, political legitimacy. Life for women had changed in many respects since Holley’s first book was published in 1873, with women having gained at least partial suffrage in some states and full suffrage in others. However, after forty years a Constitutional amendment for woman suffrage was still out of reach, keeping most women as second class citizens.


11In the years between the 1848 Seneca Falls women’s rights convention and the 1914 publication of *Josiah Allen on the Woman Question* women had gained voting rights as follows: 1861: Kansas gave women the right to vote in local school elections; 1869: Wyoming territory granted women the right to vote and to hold public office; 1870: Utah territory gave full suffrage to women; 1893: Colorado gave women the right to vote; 1894: Some cities in Kentucky and Ohio gave women the vote
Holley kept the struggle for women’s rights as the main message in these four novels. She placed that struggle in context, interweaving current events into Samantha’s exploits by using some of the most prominent political leaders of the day as characters. In My Opinions alone, Samantha’s acquaintances included Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Theodore Tilton, Victoria Woodhull, Ulysses S. Grant, and Horace Greeley. All these political luminaries had read Samantha’s book, although not all agreed with her philosophies. Samantha had great respect for the woman suffragists, of course. She described Stanton as a “noble woman, who had asked God what He wanted her to do, and then hadn’t shirked out of doin’ it…She was givin’ her life to others.” Anthony “had made the ‘Cause of Wimmen’s Rights’ her husband.” Samantha chastised Tilton and Woodhull about so-called free love. The three engaged in a lengthy and heated debate in which

in school board elections; 1895: Utah granted woman suffrage. 1896: Idaho approved woman suffrage; 1902: Kentucky repealed limited school board election voting rights for women; 1910: Washington state votes for woman suffrage; 1911: California gave women the vote; 1912: Michigan, Kansas, Oregon and Arizona approved woman suffrage; 1912: Kentucky restored limited voting rights for women in school board elections. However, women who moved from a suffrage state into a non-suffrage state lost the right to vote.

12 Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton were well-known women’s rights agitators; historian Kathleen Barry claimed about these two women: “They are women’s history of the nineteenth century.” (qtd. in Ward, Geoffrey C. and Burns, Ken. Not for Ourselves Alone: The Story of Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony. New York: Alfred A. Knopf. 1999, viii-ix. Anthony and Stanton have been the subject of a large body of historical analysis and biographical studies.

Victoria Woodhull was known for her advocacy of “free love,” meaning marriage, motherhood, and divorce choice for women. She was also the first woman to run for U.S. president, in 1872. Theodore Tilton was a well-known newspaper editor and abolitionist, whose wife was involved in a suspected extramarital affair with Henry Ward Beecher. Tilton and Woodhull were friends and colleagues in social reform. See Buhle, Mari Jo, Teresa Murphy, and Jane Gerhard. A Concise Women’s History. Boston: Pearson Education, 2015; and Schreiner, Samuel Agnew. The Passionate Beechers: A Family Saga of Sanctity and Scandal that Changed America. Hoboken, NJ: John Wiley & Sons, 2003, for lengthy discussion of the relationship of these two people.

Ulysses S. Grant was the 18th President of the United States. Horace Greeley was a prominent newspaper editor and politician who ran for president in 1872. He has been the subject of numerous biographies, including Williams, Robert C. Horace Greeley: Champion of American Freedom. New York: New York University Press. 2006, and is mentioned in numerous works of U.S. history.

13 Holley, My Opinions, 314-315.
Samantha steadfastly advocated the sanctity of marriage and condemned divorce.\textsuperscript{14} Samantha thanked Grant for his hard work during the Civil War, but told him that she had decided to support Greeley in the upcoming election.\textsuperscript{15} Samantha advised Greeley on his presidential campaign platform. She argued with Greeley about the need for woman suffrage and female independence without marriage; Greeley put forth the usual arguments against and Samantha answered each one with her unassailable logic. In the end, Greeley agreed that women could and should be self-supporting without marrying. But he still did not support woman suffrage.\textsuperscript{16}

In the other books discussed in this chapter Samantha met President and Mrs. Grant, President Taft, and Antoinette Blackwell. She mentioned Amelia Bloomer, Henry Ward Beecher, William Jennings Bryan, and Queen Victoria. Samantha made numerous biblical analogies and referred to John Bunyan, John Keats, and classical characters including Ulysses and Penelope.\textsuperscript{17}

Some Holley analysts have criticized her for bringing famous people or classic and religious literary allusions into the stories, claiming that hayseed Samantha’s meeting these people or using

\begin{flushright}
\textsuperscript{14}Ibid., 318-330. \\
\textsuperscript{15}Ibid., 281. \\
\textsuperscript{16}Ibid., 371-396. \\
\textsuperscript{17}William Howard Taft was the 27th President of the United States. Antoinette Blackwell was a prominent woman suffrage advocate, early female graduate of Oberlin College and first woman ordained minister in the United States. Amelia Bloomer was noted for her advocacy of dress reform. Her outfit of loose pants that women wore under calf-length skirts was the derivation of the word bloomers. See Buhle, et. al. for more information and references for further reading.  
William Jennings Bryan was a prominent politician who ran for president numerous times in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. As a one time member of the Populist Party, he was known for his reformist policies. See Edwards, Rebecca. \textit{Angels in the Machinery: Gender in America Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era}. New York: Oxford University Press, 1997, for details and references for further reading.  
Queen Victoria was the queen of England from 1837-1901. Holley used Victoria as an example of a noble widow and a woman who, like Samantha, was self-sufficient while being domestic; Samantha called Victoria “the Widder Albert.”  
John Bunyan was a seventeenth century religious leader and author of \textit{Pilgrim’s Progress}. John Keats was an eighteenth century British poet. Ulysses and Penelope were main characters in Homer’s \textit{Odyssey}. 
\end{flushright}
classical and biblical references in her everyday speech was absurd. These analysts must have forgotten that Holley’s stories were satirical fiction intended to convey messages about specific social and cultural issues. Holley’s use of real people as characters was a comic device. The absurdity allowed Holley to deliver a serious message under the guise of humor.¹⁸

Holley’s most important pro-women’s rights tactic was to make Samantha a fount of common sense, honesty, and morality. Samantha’s grounded outlook on life, her logical mind, and her ability to study and assess human behavior and relationships defied both the cultural bias toward women and the popular depiction of women literary characters. Early in My Opinions Samantha revealed herself when she stated matter-of-factly: “I am not the woman to encourage any kind of foolishness…I abhor all kinds of shams and deceitfulness.”¹⁹ She said tongue-in-cheek, “I don’t know much about grammar, but common sense goes a good ways.”²⁰ In keeping with Samantha’s common sense pro-women’s rights stance, Holley lampooned one of the most misguided social constructs – the division of society into different, gender-based spheres, or in the dialect of the books’ Jonesville characters, “spears” of existence.²¹ Samantha Allen, Betsey Bobbet, and Josiah Allen frequently debated the issue of spheres, with Samantha’s realistic view of life and human relationships countering Betsey and Josiah’s romanticized versions. Samantha’s frustration

¹⁸Holley related an anecdote in Chapter Four of her “Story” in which she met Schuyler Colfax, who had been Vice-President in the Grant administration, and whom she had Samantha meet in My Opinions. Colfax told Holley that he had been asked by several people: “‘When did you and General Grant have 50 verses of poetry read to you by Betsey Bobbet and were rescued by Josiah Allen’s wife?’” Holley wrote, “He took these remarks very pleasantly and laughed with them. But I confess I did not feel much mirth in meeting in real life the eminent person whose name I had taken in vain, and dared to make light of in fancy’s field.”

¹⁹Ibid., 23, 24.

²⁰Ibid., 29.

²¹Woman’s sphere was a popular concept in nineteenth century American society and culture. See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of woman’s sphere.
with the persistence of this demeaning myth of spheres reflected the disempowerment of women forbidden by custom and law to assert and take responsibility for a way of life.

As an important component of woman’s sphere, female self-determination was clearly a major part of Holley’s work. Samantha frequently said, “I always make it a rule to stand up for my own sect,” or declared, “Wimmen is my theme.” For Holley, woman’s sphere posed an enormous threat to a woman’s independence. Holley personified woman’s sphere when she introduced Betsey Bobbet in *My Opinions*. Betsey was a woman “awful opposed to wimmen’s rights [who] thinks it is wimmen’s only spear to marry” but, ironically, “can’t find any man willin’ to lay holt of that spear with her.” Betsey spent her time chasing the local bachelors and widowers in her desperate quest for the social legitimacy that she believed only marriage could provide. Betsey’s dialogue made her the voice of what later researchers would call the cult of true womanhood, the sainted homemaker, the devoted helpmeet whose primary goals were to look beautiful – a difficult proposition for Betsey with her false teeth, frizzy hairpieces, long pointy nose, and scrawny body -- and defer to her husband always. Betsey ignored Samantha’s repeated attempts to debunk the magical thinking of a sphere in which a woman was protected from life. Betsey had fabricated an ideal at odds with the reality of life for women – she was relentless in her pursuit of this ideal despite ample, stark evidence and Samantha’s warnings that this ideal was not only impossible, but also detrimental to a woman’s well-being. Betsey was concerned with superficialities, appearances, and adhering to established social convention. Samantha believed in real, human relationships, and changing established social convention in the name of justice. However, Holley was careful to make Samantha work toward positive changes to benefit the lives of women, not radical social upheaval.

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23 See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of the cult of true womanhood.
Although marriage was an enormous part of woman’s sphere about which Holley clearly had many strong opinions, the characters in her books generally accepted marriage as a viable and valuable social institution. Holley never had Samantha even imply that marriage was inherently bad or should be eliminated or was at the root of women’s second class citizenship. To Betsey, the steadfast voice of woman’s subordination to man, Samantha was always Josiah Allen’s wife. Indeed, never one to abandon her domesticity and respect for family, Samantha readily self-identified as Josiah Allen’s wife. Samantha performed her own domestic duties willingly, admitting her pride in Josiah’s “white shirt bosom” or extolling the value of a well-set and stocked table: “I will have good vittles as long as my name is Josiah Allen’s wife…For as the great philosophers have discovered, if a woman would keep her table spread out from year to year and from hour to hour, filled with good vittles, that woman would have a clever set of men folks around.”

However, mindful of the importance of female self-worth Samantha also frequently referred to herself in all of Holley’s novels as “Samantha Allen, whose maiden name was Smith.” When Betsey considered changing her name to sound more dignified, Samantha exhorted her to “‘Hang on to the Betsey.’”

For Holley, female independence was the key to political equality, and a woman’s name symbolized independence. This independence could be achieved within the bonds of marriage and family, but only by choice and only if a woman retained a sense of self. The marriage that Holley criticized and Samantha condemned was that which stifled female independence or amounted to little more than domestic servitude in which a woman’s work was both never-ending and taken for granted.

Samantha and Betsey engaged in numerous debates about the nature and the social and political ramifications of marriage that depended on stymieing female independence. Holley

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24Ibid., 160, 201.

25Ibid., 66.
included a chapter on “Wimmen’s Speah” to illustrate the tension between Samantha and Betsey, or between the necessity of female self-determination and the prevailing cultural notion of female restriction. Samantha believed that the only true marriage was based on love and equality between husband and wife, and that companionship was the hallmark of a successful domestic relationship. However, more important was the idea that a woman should not feel compelled to marry for the sake of cultural approval, dignity, or for the security of a home. Such motivations reflected the degraded position of women in society that could be changed only through politically guaranteed female liberty and freedom. Samantha looked to a future “when men and wimmen are independent of each other [and] marriage will be what it ought to be.” Of course, this female independence required the right to vote. An enfranchised woman had the power to change society through liberty of choice, the ability to earn an independent living, and having a voice in her government. Women did not want superiority over men; women and men had different natures and would continue to fill different roles in society. “Men and wimmen votin’ side by side would [not] alter their dispositions,” but “women’s speah is where she can do the most good…[with] braens and souls…used to the best advantage.” Woman’s sphere should not confine a woman to the home; her sphere included every part of life, both private and public.

The public aspect of woman’s sphere appeared in the opening pages of Samantha at the Centennial when the Jonesville Creation Searchin’ Society or C. S. S., a men’s organization, invited Samantha to attend a meeting as a published author and local celebrity -- not to speak, but to

\footnote{This chapter had been previously published as a short story titled “Woman’s Spear.” See Chapter Five of this thesis for details.}

\footnote{Ibid., 236.}

\footnote{Ibid., 238, 239.}
lend some sophistication to the assembly. Samantha’s presence sparked a debate about the propriety of allowing women to attend the group’s meetings. The main theme of the discussion was the danger of allowing a woman to rise above her sphere, lest she begin to think she had the right to the respect of and equality with men. A woman’s mere presence at the C. S. S. entailed enough violations of conventional wisdom to pose a serious threat to the entire workings of society; a woman actually speaking at or participating in such a meeting in any way other than setting tables and laying out refreshments was unthinkable. Holley voiced the popular arguments against women in public life in the statements of the various members of the Society; her satirical exposure of the deep ignorance of the Jonesville civic leaders lampooned the gender bias in nineteenth century American culture and politics. The Jonesville men claimed by turns that “wimmen’s minds is weak;” “Men has their place…and wimmen has hern…and men and wimmen are safe for they don’t come in contract with each other;” “Beware of bein’ infringed upon.” After each of these declarations, Samantha drily commented on the ridiculousness of sentiments that were clearly disproved daily in ordinary human relationships and interactions. Of course, the men persisted, and in the heat of debate ultimately raised a motion: “‘Be it resolved, and motioned and acted upon by us, “Creation Searchers and World Investigators,” that wimmen’s body and mind, both of ’em, as much too weak and feeble to tackle the subjects that will be brung up here, as a span of pismires are, to lay to and move a meetin’ house.’” After the motion passed, Samantha quietly but determinedly vowed that no such rule would prevent her from attending any meeting that she wished to attend. Holley as usual let the illogic of the characters make her point – a woman should decide for herself whether or not, and in what capacity, to attend a public meeting;

29Gentlemen’s clubs were a common social entity in the nineteenth century, where men could go to relax, discuss politics and current events, gossip, or socialize without female influence or interference.

participation in public affairs did not violate a woman’s sphere or make her any less domestic; and rules based in bias were detrimental not only to women but also to society.\textsuperscript{31}

In a subsequent meeting of the Creation Searchin’ Society the group discussed the selection of a Jonesville delegate to the Philadelphia Centennial Exposition.\textsuperscript{32} Samantha’s fame as an author and reputation as a woman of common sense led to her nomination to represent her community, but her gender disqualified her. After a heated discussion during which the group’s leader declared that “‘No female woman needn’t think she was the equal of a man,’” Samantha was selected to go not as a delegate, which would imply her membership in the Society, but as Josiah Allen’s Wife, P.I., Private Investigator. Samantha argued that she would go only as a P.A., a Promiscuous Advisor in the cause of Right. Finally, Samantha and the Society agreed that she should be both a P.A. and a P.I. Samantha declared: “In my mission of Promiscuous Advisor I shall go forth, expectin’ to tread on the hot coals of public opinion; be briled on the grid-iron old bigotry keeps to brile her enemies on; be scalded by the melted lead of old custom; and be burnt up on the

\textsuperscript{31}Women’s public life in nineteenth century America is discussed at length in Chapter Two of this thesis. A good source for further reading is the collection of primary documents included in \textit{The Women’s Rights Movement: Opposing Viewpoints}. Bruno Leone, ed. San Diego, CA: Greenhaven Press, Inc., 1996.

\textsuperscript{32}Holley may have used the 1876 Philadelphia Centennial exposition in a nod to an incident that occurred at the event involving the ongoing women’s rights movement. Elizabeth Cady Stanton had drafted a Woman’s Declaration of Rights, and sent a letter to the organizers of the celebration requesting seats for the National Woman Suffrage Association on the convention platform and time on the agenda to read the document. When the request was denied, the women planned to attend the meeting uninvited and to read the new Declaration. A parade of women led by Susan B. Anthony entered the convention hall, approached the stage, handed a copy of the Declaration to the presiding officer, then turned to exit, all the while distributing copies of the document to outstretched hands in the audience. Anthony climbed the platform reserved for musicians and read the Declaration to a cheering crowd. The press coverage of the event was mixed, with many newspapers denouncing the women’s actions as rude, sensational, and doing nothing to advance the suffrage cause. Nonetheless, the spectacle did serve to keep the suffrage fight in the public eye. See Elizabeth Cady Stanton, \textit{Eighty Years and More}: Reminiscences 1815-1897. 1898 Reprint, (New York: Shochen Books, 1973), 310-313; Elisabeth Griffith, \textit{In Her Own Right}: The Life of Elizabeth Cady Stanton (New York: Oxford University Press, 1984), 167; and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Matilda Joslyn Gage, eds. \textit{History of Woman Suffrage} (Rochester, NY: Charles Mann, 1889, CD-ROM by Bank of Wisdom Louisville, KY, 1999), 1: 44-45.
stake of opposition.”

In this one scenario Holley treated numerous social, political, and cultural conventions: the indefensible prejudice against equality for women, the belief that empowering a woman would somehow set into motion the demise of orderly society, and the self-delusion of male superiority. Furthermore, Holley identified women as the proponents of social reforms, secure in the knowledge that reform would improve society and that women were the most able to recognize and implement reform. Most importantly, Holley claimed a female existence separate from, and every bit as valuable, personally and socially, as that of men.

Rather than argue the mutual exclusivity of woman’s sphere and women’s rights, Holley showed the close interaction between the two concepts, building her case for woman suffrage as a means to increase female influence on society and achieve woman-driven social reforms.

Samantha, Betsey, and Josiah had numerous debates about the threat that women’s rights posed to “Wimmen’s Speah.” Of course, Betsey and Josiah presented the anti-rights arguments that Samantha countered with her usual logic and common sense. Betsey and Josiah claimed that

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33 Holley, Samantha at the Centennial, 29-30.

34 Holley’s choice of anti-rights arguments reflected the well-used protestations of anti-suffragists dating from the very beginnings of the American Republic. See Chapter Two of this thesis, note 26.

These arguments also surfaced in the women’s rights movement. In her Declaration of Sentiments at the 1848 Women’s Rights Convention in Seneca Fall, NY, Elizabeth Cady Stanton included, and responded to, many of the same arguments that Holley’s characters espoused, as shown in this summary of the anti-suffrage statements and Stanton’s rebuttals:

- Women should be protected from the vulgarity of the polls
  - the vulgarity of the polls will be reduced by the female presence
- Women would be expected to go to war
  - women have demonstrated courage in the field of battle, but war would be unnecessary under women’s influence
- Women would gain nothing by voting, already being represented adequately by fathers, husbands, brothers, and sons
  - man does not have the best interest of woman at heart in enacting laws designed to keep her in a degraded position
- Women do not want to vote, and would not vote if given the right
voting was “‘unwomanly;’” that a woman “‘hain’t got the rekrisite strength to vote, she is too fraguile;’” and that “‘it is revoltin’ to female delicacy to vote.’” Voting would be too time consuming and interfere with the “‘duties that are incumbent upon’” a woman. Voting would destroy woman’s sphere and unfit women for womanhood. Samantha countered matter-of-factly with a long list of the labor involved in her daily chores and concluded that dropping a slip of paper into a box once every few years could not possibly be more physically and emotionally draining than what she did around the house every day.\(^{35}\) Samantha saw voting as a part of woman’s sphere, necessary for justice and equality.

Naturally, Josiah and Betsey, as the personifications of wrong-minded cultural bias, were unable to see a positive interdependence between woman’s sphere and women’s rights. Both believed that a woman could never find the time or the energy to learn about all the issues at stake in a given election. In language that echoed Horace Bushnell,\(^{36}\) Josiah argued that women were angels, “‘too good to vote with us men;’” besides, women would simply vote for the handsomest of the candidates, or would engage in fraud by changing clothes in between multiple trips to the poll.

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\(^{35}\) Holley, My Opinions, 223-226.

\(^{36}\) See Chapter Two and later in Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of Horace Bushnell’s attitude toward women in society.
Samantha replied that voting would infringe female modesty less than dancing did, and female delicacy less than housework did. She claimed that women were perfectly capable of learning the issues in an election, and could never engage in voter fraud on a scale worse than men who routinely bought and sold votes.\textsuperscript{37}

Josiah claimed that woman suffrage would forever change the relationship between the sexes. Female enfranchisement would destroy the main attractions that women held for men: legal impotence, dependence, and property.\textsuperscript{38} Ironically, one of Josiah’s most feared outcomes of gender equality was that he should come to be known as “Samantha Allen’s Husband.” Samantha invoked her maiden name of Smith to emphasize her independence as a woman, but she was not threatened by being called Josiah Allen’s wife. However, because Josiah would be completely emasculated if his identity were subsumed in that of his wife, he vigilantly guarded the masculinity inherent in his name. A man should always be in charge, rule over his home and family, lead his community, and distance himself from any pursuits or behaviors that may be construed as womanly. He reveled in his daily shaving ritual, which he saw as an assertion of “the supremacy of my sect.”\textsuperscript{39} What was better than a beard as a public and unmistakable declaration of Not A Woman?

Josiah could not comprehend why a woman would resent being protected from the “turrible hardship and labor of votin.’”\textsuperscript{40} Men were merely showing deep and sincere consideration for women in denying female suffrage. However, Samantha was not swayed by false and self-serving shows of thoughtfulness. Cutting to the very core of the issue, she retorted, “‘One of the most convincin’ arguments for Woman’s Suffrage [is] that bad men fight against Women’s

\textsuperscript{37}Holley, \textit{My Opinions}, 228-230.

\textsuperscript{38}Marietta Holley, \textit{Josiah Allen on the Woman Question} (New York: Fleming H. Revell, 1914), 76-77.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 115-116.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 104.
Suffrage with all their might.”41 Samantha noted that men who were in favor of women’s rights had a “noble look...bein’ free themselves they want everyone else to be free.” 42 For Samantha truly considerate and secure men were not threatened by female independence and political equality.

In defending her position, Samantha declared that female voting would not change the basic structure of society; women would not fight in wars while men stayed home and washed dishes. She exploded the stereotype of the mannish she-male woman suffragist: “Suffragists are the best mothers, the best housekeepers, the best dressers of any wimmen in the land.” 43 Samantha deplored a society that expected a woman to work in the home and family but denied her any claim to property, the rewards of her labor, and even her own children. 44 Political equality would create a sphere that consisted of a woman’s individual choices, in which she could care for her home and family and have a voice in public affairs. 45 Samantha advocated equality between the sexes, but acknowledged that men and women were different; the difference made female self-sufficiency all the more important. 46 She had a goal of achieving an equitable society of “Good men and good women, each fillin’ their different spears in life, but banded together for the overthrow of evil, the


42Holley, My Opinions, 86.

43Holley, Samantha Woman Question, 135.


45Holley, My Opinions, 41, 236.

46Holley, Samantha Woman Question. 134.
uplift of the race.” Women would no longer be at the mercy of “‘men [who] think that women are obleeged to be vines,’” but did not feel “‘obleeged to make trees of themselves, for ’em to run up on.’” For Samantha a major benefit of the ballot was the female independence that voting would entail. Voting would clear the way to political equality and opportunity for women to be self-supporting.

Samantha gloried in the pro-rights arguments of well-spoken and charismatic woman suffragists. When listening to the “reasonable and convincin’” arguments of suffragists Samantha was unable to “see how anybody can help bein’ converted to their righteous cause, the liftin’ up of wimmen from her uncomfortable crouchin’ poster with criminals and idiots, up to the place she should occupy buy the side of other good citizens of the United States, with all the legal and moral rights that go with that title.” Of course, many men and women were unfavorably impressed or contemptuous of the suffragists and the pro-suffrage arguments. Samantha considered these men and women to be ignorant and dangerous.

Holley illustrated the most prevalent political arguments against women’s rights in “A Allegory on Wimmen’s Rights.” Josiah opined that the law provided women with enough rights, and that any woman should be satisfied with life as custom dictated. Samantha pointed out that according to law “lunatics, idiots, and wimmin” were classed together in being excluded from political participation, but that of these three, only women were subject to paying taxes or prosecution. She told a story in which Woman conversed with the Law. Woman began by asking the meaning of the words, “‘True government consists in the consent of the governed.’” The Law

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47 Ibid., 175.

48 Holley, My Opinions, 237.

49 Holley, Samantha Woman Question, 141.

50 This book chapter was previously published as a short story in Peterson’s Magazine in 1870. See Chapter Five of this thesis for details.
replied that “‘wimmin hain’t included and mingled in the law books and statutes of the country only in a condenmin’ and punishin’ sense.’” Although a woman had an illogical, weak mind “‘unfit from ever havin’ any voice in makin’ the laws that govern you…you have the right…to be punished.’” Woman realized the “‘fundymental truth: I can be hung by the political rope, but I can’t help twist it.’” Woman pointed out the injustice of a system that would take her from her home and family for years if she broke a law but would not allow her to leave her home for an hour to vote because of the “‘indelikacy’” of being in a “‘public court room crowded with men.’” Woman concluded, “‘Would that I were an idiot…then I should be respected.’” With this satirical tale Holley exposed the blunt reality for women in pre-suffrage American society – excluded from the democratic process, denied the right to liberty of choice, subjected to demeaning treatment with no direct recourse, and unable to exercise the freedom of personal responsibility. Furthermore, a woman’s contributions to society were devalued when she was denied the opportunity to participate fully in the political system that governed her. She would be better off if all the cultural biases about her were true; at least then she could not be held accountable for her humiliating and socially sanctioned position as a lesser human being.

Holley’s knowledge of the mechanics of political campaigns and the electoral process was evident in her satirical description of events in “How I Went to ’Lection.” Josiah agreed to allow Samantha to go to the polling place in the Jonesville General Store on Election Day because she needed to buy new buttons to mend his shirt. This scenario allowed Holley to explode many anti-suffragist myths. Samantha encountered a woman struggling to carry a large package from the store while her husband stayed at home writing an article about women’s being too weak to vote. An illiterate man asked Samantha to read the ballot to him so he could be sure to vote for the candidates who had paid him the most; the man was horrified to discover that he had voted the

51Holley, My Opinions, 85-98 passim.
wrong ticket seventeen times and worried that he might not be paid his due when his mistake became known. When Samantha suggested that elections would be more honest if women could vote, this illiterate man scornfully retorted, “‘Wimmen don’t know enough to vote.’” Samantha met an unscrupulous politician who declared “‘that the nation would be so maddened to have wimmen try to vote that it would rise up to a man, to defend the purity of the pole.’”

Holley’s fictional commentary was reminiscent of Horace Bushnell’s arguments on the devastating effects on society of the female vote. In his Women's Suffrage: The Reform Against Nature Bushnell imagined a number of dire consequences of woman suffrage, among which was the new level of corruption at the polls. One of woman’s key duties in her limited public sphere was to keep the polls free of corruption, to be a morally uplifting influence on voting places that flowed with liquor and backroom wheeling and dealing as candidates bought the votes of men. Bushnell wondered about the morally destructive effects of women’s going to the polls to vote: “Where away goes the refinement of the polls, when the polls have unrefined the refiner?” Unscrupulous, grasping women would stuff the ballot boxes by casting multiple votes; between numerous visits to the polling place the women would change clothes to avoid being recognized by the election judges. Not only would electoral corruption flourish, but corruption in public affairs would skyrocket. Bushnell’s predictions and warnings of similar dire consequences of woman suffrage were commonplace anti-suffrage arguments. Holley’s scenes were satirical versions of these types of predictions; she exposed the irony of the popular idea that women could have a corrupting effect

52Holley, Samantha at the Centennial, 32-35.


54Ibid., 112.
on polling places and elections when both were already rife with male-conceived and male-driven corruption.

Samantha was so distressed by her experiences at the polling place that she launched into “episodin’” on the topic of woman suffrage. Holley used these speeches to present her case for the need for women’s rights, women’s freedom, and social reforms. Samantha’s speech was packed with biblical references to Solomon, Adam and Eve, and Abraham and Hagar, and long-standing customs that marginalized and vilified woman “‘because man willed it so.’” However, Holley also acknowledged female anti-suffragists when Samantha admitted that “The female sect wink at men’s sins…We have got to toe the mark in morals, and we ort to make them toe the mark. Winkin’ at men’s sins is what is goin’ to ruin us all…ruin men, ruin wimmen, Jonesville, and the hull nation.”

With these statements Holley held women who did not join the struggle for equal rights partly responsible for the second class citizenship to which women were subjected. Equality could emerge only when women held men accountable for the opportunistic, greedy, and destructive behavior that led to corruption and moral decay. Furthermore, Holley did not deny the relationship between woman’s sphere and women’s rights. In fact, the point of Holley’s whole argument was that women’s rights were part of woman’s sphere.

Because Holley saw equality between the sexes as both a legal and a moral issue she did not attempt to separate these two aspects of woman’s place in society. She exposed law as man’s attempt to manipulate reality for his own gain -- although many laws were just and necessary, others were self-serving and without moral basis. Holley put some telling words into the mouth of a minor character, a male poet and lecturer who wanted Samantha to listen to his greatest work, “Logical Reveries on the Beauties of Slavery.” In justifying his stance this man pointed out that

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55 Holley, Samantha at the Centennial, 39.
“slavery was right, because the constitution didn’t say it was wrong, and then I viewed the subject in a Bible and moral light, but the last bein’ of less importance, of course I didn’t enlarge upon it.” Holley was criticizing those who profess to follow a moral code but in practice were motivated by power and money.

Like many well-known woman suffrage activists, Holley placed the blame for political exclusion of women squarely with elected lawmakers, including members of Congress. On a trip to Washington, DC, Samantha admitted “I’ve hearn how laws of eternal right and justice are set one side in Washington, D.C., as bein’ too triflin’ to attend to.” Samantha later discussed woman suffrage with an unnamed U.S. senator. When the senator admitted that he had never seriously considered woman suffrage, she retorted, “wimmen need the ballot to protect her from all sorts of wrongs and indignities…until women are men’s equals legally and politically.” Samantha argued that the Constitution was a fluid document designed to grow and change according to the needs of the people. The senator replied that indeed, the Constitution could be changed “in cases of necessity, [not] for any frivolous cause, any trivial cause;” besides, he had “not the time to devote

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56Holley, My Opinions, 43.


58Holley, Samantha Woman Question, 84.

59Ibid., 116-119.
to the cause of Right and Justice.’’60 The attitude and response of this fictional senator echoed those of numerous political leaders when confronted with the issue of woman suffrage.61 Holley’s satirical treatment of this senator’s behavior reflected the frustration of woman suffragists when looking for support to leaders who had no political reason to listen and no moral motivation to act.

After repeated rebuffs of her appeals for fair treatment for women, Samantha walked through the halls of the U.S. Capitol and wondered, “that a law, a little unjust law could ever be passed in such grand and magnificent surroundin’s…it can’t be the fault of the place, anyway.” Samantha marveled “how the law-makers, born and nussed by wimmen and dependent on ’em for comfort and happiness, use the wimmen’s tax money to help make laws makin’ her of no legal importance only as helpless figgers to hang taxation and punishment on.”62 Again, Holley blamed the men in power not only for purposeful inaction without regard to the effect on so large of segment of the population, but also for purposeful degradation of women as a means to political supremacy.

Samantha did not need to look to Washington, DC, for first-hand experience of the male anti-suffrage philosophies. Legislative immorality began at the local level, in Jonesville, and in her very own family. Samantha challenged Josiah’s support of what she considered to be unjust and immoral laws that placed control of women’s lives in the hands of husbands: “‘God’s laws can’t be repealed, Josiah Allen, they wasn’t made in Washington, DC.’” In explaining why women did not need the vote, Josiah pointed out, “‘you know I represent you legally, Samantha; what I do is jest the same as though you did it.’” However, when Samantha gave him a list of her chores and errands

60Ibid., 104.

61Presidents Grant, Arthur, Cleveland, T. Roosevelt, Wilson, and future president Hoover all made statements similar to those of Holley’s fictional senator. See Joan LaCoss, “Elizabeth Cady Stanton, Susan B. Anthony, and Alice Paul: Woman Suffrage and Gender Bias in the American Ideal,” MALS Thesis, December 2010, 7-8.

62Holley, Samantha Woman Question, 127, 138.
he demurred: “‘Well…men hain’t expected to represent wimmen in everything, it is mostly votin’ and tendin’ big meetin’s and such.’” 63 According men offered only selective representation. However, Holley’s point was much deeper and more serious than humorous wordplay might communicate. Women were held in subjection to a government and laws that were passed and enacted without the consent of the governed. This situation was not only culturally, socially, and politically unjust, but also morally reprehensible. Women were being marginalized, exploited, and deprived of liberty. Consequently female being was snatched and devalued.

Holley emphasized her belief in the need for equality between the sexes through Samantha’s clear-eyed observations about human behavior. In “A Wimmen’s Rights’ Lecturer” Holley presented the extremes of women’s rights agitation. Samantha met a woman who was “one of the wild eyed ones, that don’t use no reason.” This woman talked about “tyrant man” who was responsible for woman’s degraded social and political position. Samantha conceded the undercurrent of truth in the woman’s words, but pointed out that not all men were bad. Samantha stated that her goal for the vote was not to raise women above men, but to have both sexes on an equal footing, to have “‘justice done to every human bein’.‘” She believed that the female ballot would “‘bring a greater good to the female race and to the world.’” Furthermore, Samantha voiced Holley’s belief in female independence, in metaphorical women “‘who take thier reputations in thier hands, and give thier lives to the cause of Right, goin’ ahead walkin’ afoot through the wilderness, cuttin’ down trees, and diggin’ out stumps, makin’ a path for the car of Freedom, that shall yet roll onward into Liberty.’” 64

63Ibid., 57-58; Holley, My Opinions, 96.

64Holley, My Opinions, 341-346.
Samantha ran into this same female lecturer at the Centennial. This woman persisted in blaming men for the world’s problems and once again Samantha found herself defending men and pointing out that women must take responsibility for their own lives. Samantha celebrated the female accomplishments that were showcased at the Centennial, but said that women must work even harder to claim political equality. Women were held down by men, but “No stream can rise higher than its fountain; a universe full of laws to elevate wimmen can’t help her, unless she helps herself.” Men were not going to give up power or give the vote to women; women must claim the right and stop “fightin’ ag’inst their own best interests.” The fight had gone on for a long time, and would probably continue even longer: “We may never see the seed spring up. We may not be here when it springs through the dark mould triumphant; but somebody will see it; happy skies will be over it; happy hearts will hail it; and if Freedom, Truth, and Justice is remembered what matters it if Josiah Allen’s wife is forgotten.” Holley was speaking metaphorically, of course, but she was also unwittingly prophetic. She knew that woman suffragists had been agitating for decades with only incremental success. Writing in 1877, she seemed to suspect, but could not know of course, that the struggle would endure for many more decades before the vote would be won, only to be taken for granted or forgotten later by all but historians. Even the most famous nineteenth century female names and voices of women’s rights would be unknown a few short years after the passage of the 19th amendment. Holley’s point was that all of these possibilities did not matter so long as equality for women endured. In the end, the nameless and the voiceless would triumph.

Of course, the people in Samantha’s local community were among the most resistant to change and reform. The Creation Searchin’ Society moved opposition to women’s rights into the twentieth century. The debates raged in C. S. S. meetings with the same arguments that Samantha had countered forty years previously: female citizenship included paying taxes and obeying laws but not the right to vote; women were not smart enough to vote; voting would endanger women’s

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Holley, *Samantha at the Centennial*, 121-124.
femininity. The Jonesville Creation Searchin’ Society even had a debate on a resolution to condemn the tactics of the British woman suffragists. The C. S. S. held that the British suffragists were the perfect example of how the vote would destroy womanhood and proof that only bad women wanted the vote. Furthermore, the bad votes of bad women would lead to election fraud and social chaos. Samantha, with impeccable logic and extreme calmness, pointed out that election fraud had existed for decades without the votes of bad women. Furthermore, in the handful of western states that had enfranchised women, those women voted for positive social reforms to improve life for both women and men.

Although opposition seemed insurmountable, woman’s sphere had changed in the intervening years despite disfranchisement, and Holley’s writing reflected these changes. Women’s support of social reform had gained more attention, enough to make the businessmen of Jonesville C. S. S. feel a threat of economic hardship if unscrupulous business practices were subject to the female ballot. This type of economic pressure had been all but unknown in the days of My Opinions. In 1873, Holley and other women’s rights advocates were focused primarily on woman’s sphere and gaining access to public affairs. But by 1913, women had become an economic force, with more education, more autonomy, and more time to devote to the cause. These changes made

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66 In Britain the woman suffrage movement took a radical turn under the leadership of Emmeline Pankhurst. The suffragists engaged in civil unrest, violent public demonstrations, and destruction of property. The women were imprisoned, went on hunger strikes and were subjected to force-feeding. For more information see Adams, Katherine H. and Michael L Keene. Alice Paul and the American Suffrage Campaign. Urbana, IL: University of Illinois Press, 2008.

67 Holley, Josiah Allen, 172-173.

68 Holley, Samantha Woman Question. 42-44.

the attitudes of groups upon which the fictional C. S. S. was based all the more frustrating for Holley and her contemporary activists.

In her final book Holley appeared revitalized for one last statement on her career-long cause of women’s rights and social reform by and for women. The opening chapter of *Josiah Allen on the Woman Question* was a satirical masterpiece. Holley put all the arguments against suffrage and rights that had dogged women for decades and that had filled the pages of her previous books into the mouth of Josiah Allen. The result was a bitingly hilarious exposé of the utter nonsense of opposition to legal and political equality of the sexes. Josiah decided to write a book to counter all of the books that Samantha has written “agin’ the righteous cause of man’s superiority to wimmen.” He worried that agitating for equal rights would interfere with a woman’s cooking and housekeeping and could only conclude that Samantha’s persistence in this pursuit stemmed from “a lackage of good horse sense and not inherent depravity.” Josiah had “never…been able to make [Samantha] own up to how inferior her sect is to the more opposite one,” when “every fool knows that wimmen hain’t a people, hain’t a citizen and never has been.” Women needed to be kept in the “shaller narrer safe channels [the female sect] is fitted for” so “men can enjoy their Heaven born rights to rule the world.” Samantha encouraged Josiah in his project, explaining that his book would actually help the cause of women’s rights. Of course, Josiah could not understand Samantha’s attitude, which clearly showed “female’s inability to grasp holt of important questions, and answer ’em in a straightforward way as males do.”

Josiah gained the support of the men of Jonesville, who saw his book as a long overdue answer to the “‘uroneous and blasphemous’ ideas that Samantha had ‘disseminted…that females are equal to males, and want rights that we know they don’t need or deserve, rights that will bring...

'em to the brink of ruin if not held back by a manly arm.’” Josiah consulted his Uncle Simon for advice on how to write the book. The two men shared ludicrous opinions to which Samantha did not respond. Holley used Samantha’s lack of reaction to emphasize the appalling ignorance of Josiah and Simon’s ideas, and in the process let the satire convey her message better than any direct pro-women’s rights tirade ever could. The two men discussed biblical and scientific proof of the superiority of men and the insignificance of women who showed no gratitude for being made from a man’s rib but instead tried to “‘stomp on him and bring him down to her level by votin’.’” Simon was vociferous in his condemnation of the idea of gender equality, exclaiming, “Why, if Adam had hearn to me and kep’ that rib bone where it was, jest think what the world would have escaped, think of the jealousies, angers, revenges, weariness, expenses, wars, ruin and bloodshed caused through the centuries by changing’ that rib bone into a female!”70 For Simon the divinely intended peace of the world had been destroyed by women’s demands for independent being. The irony, of course, was that every social ill that Simon listed was the result of male decisions and actions from which women had always been excluded. Woman confined to her sacred sphere could not possibly have caused or participated in any of the destruction that Simon listed. Simon’s protestations were Holley’s best tool for exposing the inanity of the longstanding male arguments against gender equality. Men did not need women to ruin the world; men were perfectly capable of and successful in creating mayhem. The problem was in men’s obstinate refusal to take responsibility for these events, or to have to learn how to function in a society in which all citizens had an equal voice.

As the foregoing discussion has revealed Marietta Holley was a strong proponent of women’s rights and woman suffrage. Much of the scholarly analysis of Holley’s work focused exclusively on her women’s rights message and downplayed her interest in broader social reforms. In fact, Holley scholars appeared to be in general agreement that Holley’s treatment of reforms

70Holley, Samantha Woman Question, 9-23 passim.
other than women’s rights detracted from the value and effectiveness of her work. Consequently, the four novels discussed in this chapter were those most remembered, and primarily in terms of women’s rights and woman suffrage. However, a careful reading of these books revealed Holley’s deep commitment to temperance, the other great reform of the day and Holley’s overarching motivation for advocating women’s rights. Although Holley’s consistent and direct arguments for women’s rights were unmistakable, she also peppered these books with references to intemperance and the evils of liquor -- references that were almost unanimously ignored in the feminist scholarly analyses.

The tone and intensity of Holley’s treatment of temperance evolved in each successive book. Beginning with *My Opinions* Holley constructed Samantha’s temperance arguments around the broader theme of women’s rights. Samantha described her mission to “influence men in the cause of Temperance and Justice.” She mentioned women as victims of laws that license the sale of liquor at the expense of ruined families. She noted that liquor could and did make even a well-mannered, devoted husband into a “fool and a brute.” She mentioned a 4th of July celebration at which the male speakers and leading members of the community had the red faces and effusive manner that resulted from intoxicating drink. She described how drinking destroyed the morals of an upstanding young man. She claimed that temperance would be the greatest social benefit of equal rights for women.\(^7\) Each of these social ills and moral failings could be alleviated through the influence of enfranchised women working to pass needed temperance reforms.

Samantha often paired “Temperance and Justice” in her arguments. In the allegorical conversation between Woman and the Law, Woman had to “embrace a license bill that is ruinin’

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The woman was powerless to change the laws because she could not vote. Furthermore, the possibility that she may achieve the right to vote was dangerous, particularly if she were to use that right to vote for temperance and justice. Such voting would mean infringement on the rights of businessmen and economic collapse, and economic considerations far outweighed any social benefit that may result from a ban on liquor licenses.

Holley later brought in more social impacts of intemperance, including domestic ruin and election fraud. Samantha argued with Josiah that “‘there are at least one-third mean, dissipated, drunken men in the world, and they most all have wives, and let them tread on those wives ever so hard, if only they tread accordin’ to law, she can’t escape.’” The law dictated that women’s basic human rights were unimportant. Despite the prevalence of domestic upheaval because of intoxicating drinks, the law protected the rights of liquor interests to sell and the rights of men to imbibe, but not the rights of women to protect home and family.

At her visit to the polls on Election Day, Samantha could not help but notice the magnitude of corruption fueled by liquor. She condemned illiterate and ignorant, but franchised, men “‘whose knowledge concernin’ public affairs wasn’t so good as it was about rum, and who would sell their votes for a drink of whiskey, and keep it up all day, votin’ and drinkin’ and then drinkin’ and votin.’” Samantha argued that female enfranchisement would eliminate corrupt elections and fraud at the polls. Temperance gave women a deep vested interest in voting: “‘Like wise concerning Temperance, I spose every drunkard’s wife and mother and girl would go to the pole, that could get there. Poor things, under the Legislator they have enjoyed the right of sufferin’; sposen it lets them enjoy the right of suffragin’ for a spell.’” Samantha declared that a woman

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72 Ibid., 86.
73 Ibid., 95.
74 Ibid., 230.
should have “‘the right of not bein’ compelled…to support public men, who are makin’ laws that
are ruinin’ them she loves best, such as givin’ licenses to ruin body and soul…this evil spirit of
intemperance …that is runnin’ rampant through the land.” Holley had from the very beginning of
her career as a writer and novelist drawn a connection between woman suffrage and temperance.

In *Samantha at the Centennial* Holley made a deeper foray into temperance. In the opening
pages Samantha, attending a meeting of the C. S. S., remarked on the sobriety, or lack of sobriety,
of some of the men. Holley used Betsey Bobbet, the devotee of woman’s sphere who had married a
widower with eleven children, as an example of a woman whose life was negatively affected by
intemperance. Betsey’s husband “drinks, too, when he can get anything to drink. He says he drinks
to forget his trouble; but what a simple move that is, for when he gets over it, there his trouble is,
right before his eyes…topers find…they have the old trouble, all the same, bedsides shame, and
disgrace and bodily ruination.” Holley’s message, voiced by Samantha, was clear: alcohol was
never the answer to anyone’s problems. In fact, alcohol only exacerbated problems.

At the C. S. S. meeting a debate raged about adopting a resolution: “Resolved: It is right to
license intemperance.” Most of the members were in favor of the resolution. Samantha and Josiah’s
son Thomas Jefferson Allen (Thomas J.) presented a lengthy argument against the resolution. He
listed the effects of intemperance, including death, crime, birth defects, and personal financial ruin.
He chastised the government for pumping taxpayer dollars into supporting the liquor business
interests instead of using the funds to support better schools and other social programs. He decried
the hypocrisy of legalized destruction, the corruption of the profit motive, and the immorality of a
society that “supports four drinkin’ salons to one church…Men in their greed and self interest may

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75Ibid., 243.

76Ibid., 374.

77Holley, *Samantha at the Centennial*, 3.
make their wretched laws to sanction this crime, but God’s laws are mightier and will yet prevail.”

Samantha followed Thomas J.’s speech with a lengthy tirade in which she invoked “‘God’s truth,’” “‘the wickedness of the laws,’” and “‘that wonderful Woman’s Crusade.’” In the end the C. S. S. struck down the resolution, but only after receiving the news that the son of one of the members had been found dead after falling in a drunken stupor into a snow bank.

Holley also examined the wider social and political ramifications of intemperance to tackle the issue on a national level. Upon meeting President Grant in her role as a P.A. and P.I. at the Centennial, Samantha “reminded him of [a] great battle going on between temperance and intemperance” and how winning that battle would “help another race of human female bein’s to liberty.”

Moments later, Samantha was appalled to discover that the Centennial was licensed for liquor: “…when a mother is weepin’ over the ruin of what was once her son, and tracin’ back his love of strong drink to this place a beauty and enchantment, it won’t remove her agony or hisen…If the Nation gives her lawful consent and lets the Sentinel drink all the beer and wine it wants to in 1876, in 1976 she will reap the seed she is plantin’ now.”

Holley showed Samantha as a visionary able to see the long term effects of legalized immorality: a future in which alcohol abuse would wreak destruction of the basic institutions of civilized society. No good could come from

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Ibid., 15-18.

The Woman’s Crusades of the early 1870s started in Ohio and spread to several states. These crusades, in which women demonstrated near and sometimes inside saloons to disrupt businesses and the sale of liquor, were the first sit-in style demonstrations in the United States. Although the Crusades were short-lived and had limited impact, the female participants learned the value of organized, direct action and the potential for wide-ranging social influence. The Crusades are discussed in Chapter Two of this thesis. See Epstein, Barbara Leslie. The Politics of Domesticity: Women, Evangelism, and Temperance in Nineteenth-Century America. Middletown, CT: Wesleyan University Press, 1981.

Holley, Samantha at the Centennial, 19, 20. This outcome followed the temperance fiction formula of tragedy leading to repentance. See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of temperance fiction.

Ibid., 90.

Ibid., 92.
intoxicating drink, even if that drink were served in celebration of what should be an atmosphere of justice and righteousness. Women needed the vote to eradicate the evil of intemperance and insure a future of health and productivity.

Even in *Josiah Allen*, Holley’s final book, the subject of temperance, together with suffrage, was a recurring theme. Forty years of advocating both reforms had yet to reap sweeping, concrete, nation-wide results. Josiah argued that woman suffrage would be a vote for temperance and a vote against the economic success of businessmen. Holley quoted statistics when she had Josiah note that woman suffragists asked “leadin’ questions” such as, “What of the one billion, four hundred million dollars loss to the country every year, caused by strong drink and ask if you know that as many Americans are killed every year by it as has been killed in all the battles since time begun.” Josiah also gave voice to the most prevalent anti-temperance sentiments, taking comfort in the knowledge that, “Liquor dealers have got…oceans of money, and they let that money flow along where it will do the most good, into female channels if necessary. Anything to dam up the big waters of Reform from risin’ up and washin’ ’em away, and stop Woman Suffragists from ruinin’ their bizness…and votin.’”83 Women who did not have the right to vote were powerless to combat the lucrative, government-backed liquor trade. Holley faced the greatest obstacles to female liberty: disfranchisement and intemperance. She poured creative her energies into fighting both. The next chapter will be a discussion of Holley’s temperance novels to illustrate her goal of a better society through woman-driven reform.

CHAPTER SEVEN

BUT TEMPERANCE WUZ HER THEME

Oh Lord, forgive my enemy, the Government of the United States, for it knows what it does.

--Samantha Allen, fictional character in Marietta Holley,
Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife

Marietta Holley has been remembered primarily as a woman author who used her popular nineteenth century fiction to advocate social reform. Most of the Holley scholarship has focused on her women’s rights message as her most valuable legacy and the driving force behind her success.\(^1\) Women’s rights may very well have been the primary motivation behind the Holley scholarship, but were only part of Holley’s broader goal. For Holley, women’s rights were a tool. Women needed rights, especially the right to vote, as the first step toward a greater social agenda. The vote was not a glorious capstone to women’s lives, like a pot of gold at the end of a rainbow. The vote was a beginning and a means through which women could have a concrete influence on American culture. Seen from the perspective of a nineteenth century American woman reformer, the vote was the grease on the machinery of society. Marietta Holley was a staunch advocate of social reform who used her books to expose, and propose solutions to, the many ills of life in her United States. To remove her from her milieu to justify an interpretation of her work, as the Holley scholars have done, was to misunderstand her intentions.

Holley was a true believer in temperance. A careful reading of the novels discussed in this thesis as the basis of the Holley-as-women’s-rights-agitator scholarship revealed Holley’s temperance roots.\(^2\) Janet Zollinger Giele wrote, “…half a century after the passage of suffrage and prohibition, the conventional wisdom had it that the suffragists were more forward looking and

\(^{1}\)See Chapter Four of this thesis for a discussion of Holley scholarship.

\(^{2}\)See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of the novels used to support the women’s rights interpretation of Holley’s work.
more important to the first feminist movement than the temperance women.” Furthermore, Giele claimed that the temperance movement actually fortified the quest for suffrage in areas of the country that might otherwise have insufficient fervor for a female ballot, but plenty of women dedicated to protection of home and family and willing to put the power of domesticity to the test.\(^3\)

The fact was that the temperance movement was the largest female-driven reform movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The importance of temperance to women’s lives was an unmistakable undercurrent in Holley’s early books. However, she waited until her popularity was assured to produce her temperance themed novels, *Sweet Cicely* (1885) and *Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife* (published in book form in 1905). Unsurprisingly, these books have been dismissed by the Holley scholars as too long, tedious, preachy, sentimental, and a number of other uncomplimentary adjectives. The scholars have been short-sighted. Holley wrote her temperance novels to promote this critical reform to improve life for countless Americans. For Holley, the most valuable right was the right to a safe, secure existence. The right to vote was integral to achieving this greater right to a life of personal freedom.

Holley wrote only two temperance novels. However, these works had a powerful message that combined politics, satire, comedy, pathos, sentimentality, and righteous indignation. In this chapter I will argue, through analysis, that these books commanded and deserved at least as much, if not more, attention as Holley’s women’s rights novels.

*Sweet Cicely* was Marietta Holley’s fourth book, published in 1885. This book was Holley’s first temperance manifesto, in which Holley’s comic persona, Samantha Allen, presented the arguments and challenges that American women faced in the late nineteenth century in the struggle to eradicate the scourge of alcoholic beverages. The central story was very much in the

style of temperance fiction popular at the time. The main character was Samantha’s niece Cicely, a young woman whose childhood nickname was Sweet Cicely after the small, white flower because she was “prettier and purer and sweeter than any posy that ever grew.” Cicely was thoughtful, considerate, and mature beyond her years. Her face shone with “a look of power…a look of strength, as if she would venture much, dare much, for them she loved.”

Cicely married Paul Slide, a wealthy, college-educated young man whose chin portended an unfortunate fate. Samantha worried about Paul’s chin, which “‘jest sits back from his mouth…The place where his chin ort to be is nothin’ but a holler place all filled up with irresolution and weakness.’” This chin could lead only to utter disaster and heartache.

Cicely and Paul were happy for three years until Paul, under the influence of a dissipated college chum, fell into a life of intemperance that resulted in the very doom that Samantha had feared. Paul died in prison after shooting his chum in a barroom brawl, leaving Cicely with a considerable estate and a young son. To add to Cicely’s misfortunes, Paul’s estate had been placed in the hands of an unscrupulous executor, who invested the money in a number of saloons. Cicely was powerless to stop this abhorrent use of her money and came to realize that her only hope was to change the law and shut down the sale of liquor. Cicely was motivated not only by her grief for her dead husband, but also by her terror about the future of her young son – to save him from his father’s lot she must protect him from a society and culture that promoted intemperance. Cicely

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5See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of temperance fiction.


6Ibid., 5. Holley’s reference to a receding or “weak” chin reflected the popular nineteenth century pseudo-science of phrenology, “the view that there was a means of deriving information about the character of individuals by examining their head size and shape.” People were believed to have certain talents or personality traits based on physical characteristics such as prominent foreheads, large eyes, or, in the case of Holley’s book, weak chins. For Holley, a weak chin indicated a flaw in moral fiber. See James N. Butcher, “Personality Assessment from the Nineteenth to the Early Twenty-First Century: Past Achievements and Contempoary Challenges,” *Annual Review of Clinical Psychology*, (2010), Volume 6, Issue 1, 3-4.
enlisted Samantha’s help, but when Samantha was unsuccessful Cicely withered away and died. Cicely’s son also died soon after in an accident, thereby avoiding the inevitability of drunkenness.⁷

Sweet Cicely gave Holley ample material for social commentary, criticism, and satire.

Temperance was the major concern. Women’s rights and the vote were present, but always in the context of the wrongs done to women by intemperate men and a government that not only condoned, but also sanctioned the sale and consumption of intoxicating drink. Holley’s temperance message required a different approach to rights from the one she used in her women’s rights novels. She constructed Sweet Cicely to argue that the overarching value of equal rights was improving women’s lives and society in general rather than frank female political involvement. Holley was starkly direct in her attack on a society that valued political and economic gain over the protection of home and family. She wasted no words on subtlety, but used the books’ characters, relationships, scenarios, and dialogue for an unmistakable temperance message. She exposed government corruption; election fraud; and power-hungry, greedy, unethical, devious, and dismissive public and elected officials; always from the standpoint of the destructive effects of the actions of these men on women, families, and society.

The names of the main characters set up expectations for how those characters would behave. Cicely was named after sweet cicely, a flower that has small bunches of aromatic, white blooms. Cicely was beautiful, delicate, fragile, and ephemeral, just like a flower. Cicely’s husband Paul Slide came from a long line of men with receding chins who would inevitably slide into the maw of intemperance after fathering sons who were unable to overcome a predisposition to heartbreaking self-destruction. Paul represented the seventh generation of Slide men whose portraits revealed the “irresolute, handsome, weak, fascinating” faces of men with bad chins who had “every one of ’em got into trouble of some kind,” or “died a drunkard.” Samantha warned

⁷Holley, Sweet Cicely, summary.

210
Cicely repeatedly about the dangers of marrying Paul Slide. His chin was the mark of weakness and could only lead to a life of misery.⁸

Holley gave the characters distinctive personality traits designed to create humor, satire, and tension, with a strong undercurrent of moralizing. Of course Samantha was the strongest character and the common denominator among all the relationships. Throughout Sweet Cicely Samantha assigned to herself all the best and most desirable qualities and motives. Samantha was “both liberal and truthful – very.” She was convinced of her own rightness and ready to fight for the people and causes she loved. Samantha explained, “like warriors on a battle-field, I grew stronger for the fray; and the fray didn’t scare me none.” Samantha had common sense that was “firm and solid,” and reason that was “strong, vigorous and fur-seein’. ” She was a hard worker who never shirked her duty or avoided a righteous confrontation: “I was always one to tackle hard jobs immejutly and to once, so’s to get ’em offen’ my mind.” Her “cast-iron principles” spurred her to “stand up for my sect” because, as she said, “‘I love justice, I almost worship it.’” No extremist, Samantha was also considerate, “naturally one of the kindest-hearted of Jonesvillians.”⁹

Samantha’s most important relationship was with her husband Josiah, and Holley created a sometimes contradictory interplay between these two characters that showed how a marriage based on love could withstand even the most infuriating and disappointing behavior that a wife had to endure from her husband. Of course, Samantha and Josiah weathered these experiences with their marriage intact: Holley could not afford to have this relationship disintegrate if she were to succeed in her temperance message.

Holley often used Josiah as the voice of anti-temperance and anti-woman suffrage. Samantha and Josiah exchanged many barbed words about these issues, with Samantha ultimately

⁸Holley, Sweet Cicely, 7, 11.
⁹Ibid., 4, 5, 22, 23, 43, 55, 69, 89, 77.
triumphant even though at the end of every argument women’s status remained unchanged. Samantha’s victories were moral and symbolic. The aftermath of Paul Slide’s death presented the perfect segue into one of these scenes.

Despite her claim that “Josiah is as kind-hearted a man that was ever made,” Samantha held Josiah partly responsible for Paul Slide’s descent into intemperance and death. Josiah always put business interests before social reform by voting against temperance, which for Samantha made him complicit in the evil traffic perpetrated by the American government. Josiah was also against woman suffrage, primarily because the female vote for temperance would be economically disastrous for Jonesville’s leading citizens, the saloon owners. Josiah was pained by Cicely’s state of worry and regret, but redoubled his anti-temperance and anti-woman suffrage stance when Cicely’s anguish spurred her temperance activism.

Cicely worried that her son would follow his father’s example to temptation from growing up with easy access to alcoholic beverages and the proliferation of saloons. Samantha thought that Cicely’s concerns were justified because the boy had inherited his father’s weak chin. Samantha listened disapprovingly to a conversation between Josiah and Cicely. Josiah urged Cicely not to worry about the boy, but to put her trust in prayer; perhaps her fears would never be realized if she had faith in a higher power. Women should influence society by example, by piety, and by love. Men knew what was best for society. Women were too weak and too busy to go to the polls and were intellectually unable to understand the political process. Men would protect women, and the most important part of that protection was that women should not vote.

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10Ibid., 39.

11Ibid., 10.

12Ibid., 26.
Cicely countered that she had prayed. She had prayed for her husband. Cicely was finished praying. She was ready to take action: “She was willin’ to vote on the temperance question.” Cicely had seen her inheritance used to support intemperance. She was powerless to stop the unscrupulous executor of Paul’s will from investing her money in saloons. This executor “hired votes with [Cicely’s] money. Her money used to hire liquor votes!...Her property used agin to spread the evil!” Cicely argued that she and all women needed to shape society directly. Indirect influence was no influence. Women should have the right to vote for temperance.

Never one to remain silent during this type of discussion, Samantha declared that men had controlled society and politics for selfish gains long enough. A woman’s desire to protect her family and help society was not “unwomanly.” Women were already as low as possible in the eyes of men, and grouped with “‘idiots, lunatics, and criminals’” in being denied the vote. Women had a right to help loved ones and did “‘not need to ask for it.’” However, as usual Samantha also tempered her outburst with a word of caution: “‘Cicely, women’s voting on temperance would...be an experiment. I candidly think and believe it would be a good thing, -- a blessing to the youth of the land, a comfort to the females, and no harm to the males. But after all, we don’t know what it would do.’”

Holley used this scene to show women’s powerlessness in effecting meaningful social change. Josiah represented the male centric and male dominated society that stubbornly excluded female participation in the political process. Men had the power, and women were marginalized or patronized or ignored. Josiah’s arguments were the same ones that men had been making and women had been challenging for decades. Cicely represented Holley’s message of societal betterment through female votes for temperance. For Josiah, women’s voting was dangerous and would lead to chaos. For Cicely, women’s voting was necessary to save society from the clutches of

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13Ibid., 25-30 passim.
men who placed greed and self-interest before the sanctity of the home and family. A female vote for temperance was the epitome of woman’s sphere. Samantha sided with Cicely, of course, but as usual ended her commentary on a conciliatory note. Holley needed to make Samantha take a somewhat middle course. An offensive main character and oracle might reduce the impact of the message.

Temporarily shifting the focus of the book away from the sentimental temperance story, Holley created a subplot of Josiah Allen’s run for the U.S. Senate to expose and condemn the government’s apathy toward the devastating effects of intemperance. This was Josiah’s most surprising and, for Samantha, terrifying caper, and the one that strained their marriage almost to the breaking point. This episode was dripping with satire and contempt for the government, the electoral process, elected officials, and the behind-the-scenes machinations that perpetuated a status quo of social destruction in the name of economic gain. Josiah was excited: “I do want to be a senator, Samantha. I want to, like a dog, I want the money there is in it, and I want the honor.”

First he had to decide whether he should run as a Stalwart or a Half-breed, both branches of the Republican Party. Never one to be associated with the political party of social reform Josiah was a conservative Democrat, but he was also fickle enough to represent whatever side might win. Samantha retorted that he “would run more like a lame hen,” but then she challenged him: “Josiah Allen, hain’t you got any principle? Don’t you know what side you are on?” He replied that he

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14See Chapter Two of this thesis for a discussion of woman’s sphere. See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of the use of woman’s sphere in Holley’s novels.

15In late nineteenth century America, the Republican Party was the party of progressive social reforms and the Democratic Party was the party of conservatism, small government, and states’ rights. The parties’ ideologies began to switch during the New Deal, with FDR’s social programs to combat the Great Depression. The change in ideologies was reinforced with LBJ’s Great Society and is still in evidence today, with Republicans considered the conservative party and Democrats the progressive, liberal party. See Miller, Gary and Norman Schofield, “The Transformation of the Republican and Democratic Party Coalitions in the U.S.” Perspectives on Politics. Vol. 6, No. 3 (September 2008), 433-450.
would run "‘on the side that beats.’” The irony was that neither major political party was in favor of temperance reform, so Josiah’s party affiliation was irrelevant.

Holley created a dialogue between Samantha and Josiah that was a satiric commentary on the motivations and integrity of members of the United States Congress. In response to Samantha’s challenge to his principles, Josiah, in his classic inadvertently self-condemnatory style, retorted, “‘I have got as much as most political men.’” He would spend “hours and hours” telling Samantha “what great things he was going to do when he got to Washington.” Josiah’s appalling plans included promoting friends and relatives to “‘some high and responsible place’” regardless of qualifications, or lack of qualifications. He would “‘get rid of [all] –Chinamen, Irishmen, Catholics – the hull caboodle of ’em’” because these people were poor and heathenish and did not buy or sell votes. With one of her many biblical metaphors, Samantha accused Josiah, and by extension, politicians in general, of worshipping a “‘golden calf of selfishness…blanketed with thick patriotic excuses.’” This calf would be branded with Josiah Allen’s name, followed by a list of all the wrong, self-serving reasons to enter political office: “‘Worldly Honor and Fame…Wealth…Pride, Vanity, Old Creeds, Bigotry, Selfishness.’”

Josiah launched into a ridiculous explanation of his political platform, in the process revealing his shocking lack of understanding of the workings of government, which he saw as primarily a means of self-aggrandizement. He was against machine politics because politics could not be made with machines. He was for free trade, especially if he could have groceries, meat, and neckties paid for by the government. He would abolish bureaus, especially any bureaus that might lead to womanish reforms. He would pass laws “‘to make money out of the nation…laws for [his]

16Holley, *Sweet Cicely*, 40-42.
17Ibid., 42.
18Ibid., 43-47 *passim*. 
own personal comfort.” He would use his apple crop to buy votes. He would use intimidation to coerce the votes of the local colored people.\(^{19}\)

Although Josiah’s reasoning was childish and ignorant, Samantha’s challenges, while cutting and direct, showed only moderate exasperation. However, Josiah crossed a line when he declared that he would support the use of liquor at the polls, a platform plank that evoked Samantha’s wrath:

"To think a human bein’, to say nothin’ of a perfessor, would go to work deliberate to get a man into a state that is jest as likely as not to end in murder, or any crime, for gain to himself...Think of the different crimes you commit by that one act, Josiah Allen. You make a man a fool, and in a way that put yourself down on a level with disease, deformity, and hereditary sin. You steal his reason away. You are a thief of the deepest dye; for you steal then, from the man you have stole from – steal the first rights of his manhood, his honor, his patriotism, his duty to God and man. You are a thief of the Government – thief of God, and right.\(^{20}\)

Holley’s intent was clear. She had contempt for unscrupulous politicians and little faith in the intelligence or moral compass of those elected to public office. She believed that Government’s responsibility was to shape a society and culture in which all citizens could share equally and safely. Holley delivered her message with irony and sarcasm. However, she never joked about temperance. Her language was blunt and plain. Holley dropped her comic dialect in Samantha’s righteous anti-temperance statement. Samantha must make Holley’s point clearly, concisely, and resolutely. She could leave no doubt about the seriousness of the temperance message.

Samantha’s dismay at Josiah’s intentions and lack of principle spurred her to a decision to go on a “tower” (tour) to Washington, DC. The trip was ostensibly for Samantha to see the business of government so she could decide whether she should try to stop Josiah’s plan. However, this journey became the heart of the book as Samantha came to realize the magnitude of government opposition to temperance, complete with collusion with liquor interests and indifference to the

\(^{19}\)Ibid., 48-54 passim.

\(^{20}\)Ibid., 51.
social effects of intemperance. Holley presented these attitudes in darkly humorous scenes that conveyed a sense of futility but had the ironic result of nurturing the steadfast determination of righteousness to break down and destroy immorality.

The entire Jonesville community was interested in Samantha’s “tower.” Her neighbors asked her to do “errants” in Washington, DC. Holley used this device to illustrate the powerlessness of disfranchised women and the need for temperance reform. Holley presented the story of Dorlesky Burpy, a woman who had endured countless hardships at the hands of intemperate men and a society and government that had no compassion or respect for women as human beings.

Dorlesky “wanted the Whiskey Ring broke up.” She told “how her hull life wus ruined and how the Whiskey Ring had done it…and wimmen’s helpless condition under the law…She wanted the whiskey ring destroyed, and she wanted her rights; and she wanted ’em both in less than 2 weeks.” Dorlesky had a number of female relatives, all of whom suffered from intemperance and lack of rights, with no recourse from a legal system that provided no protection from unscrupulous and cruel men and no mechanism for self-protection. Dorlesky’s sister was in the poorhouse after all of her family assets went “down [her husband’s] throat,” and her nephews “‘drink as bad as he duz.’” Dorlesky’s niece “‘is in the lunatick asylum’” after fainting on a hot day, being accused of drunkenness, and being raped by a policeman. Dorlesky’s aunt was in jail after refusing to install new sidewalks in front of her store so she could be taxed at a higher rate for the improved property but with no say as to how that tax money would be used. Another of Dorlesky’s aunts was forced to marry for money a man she did not love because the death of her first husband, a minister, voided her tax-exempt status and left her responsible for high taxes that she could not afford to pay. A cousin was married to a man who hid her clothes whenever he became angry.

But Dorlesky herself had the worst story: she was given at birth to an abusive uncle as payment for a debt. She was made to work until the uncle became too destitute to support her, and then she was sent to work for a woman “who kep’ a drinkin’-den.” Dorlesky ran away and married
a man who deserted her and took all her money and her two children. Holley used this pathetic litany infused with sarcasm to show the powerlessness of women in American society. These women wanted rights, not to run the government or leave their families, but to enjoy simple human rights and domestic stability – to have a say in and equal protection of the law.

In Washington, DC, Samantha met with numerous government officials and members of Congress. Holley’s reverence for the ideal of the presidency and for the United States was obvious in these scenes. However, Holley also revealed her disdain for the reality of the male-driven workings of the government as Samantha’s cogent and moving arguments were dismissed time after time. As in her women’s rights novels, Holley used real politicians as characters to stress the timeliness and urgency of her message in *Sweet Cicely*. The men that Samantha met listened to her with varying degrees of attentiveness tinged with superficiality, and clearly had no intention of honoring her requests. These men, who occupied the highest reaches of the United States Government, created the laws, and shaped the culture, placed politics above morality. No argument that Samantha could make would penetrate their overwhelming self-interest.

Samantha arrived at the office of President Arthur, “him who stood in the large, lofty shoes of the revered G.W., and sot in the chair of the (nearly) angel Garfield.” Holley used a play on words in having Samantha feel a closeness to Arthur because of his middle name “Allen! (That name I took at the alter in Jonesville, and pure love.)” Of course Samantha had no idea that Arthur spelled his name differently from her own surname. She rushed forward, “For I honored him as a

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21Ibid., 58-64 passim.

22Holley also used the Dorlesky Burpy story in *Samantha on the Woman Question* (1913). The entire scene was placed almost verbatim into the later book. Holley changed only the names of the characters. Holley’s use of this scenario in a book published twenty-eight years after *Sweet Cicely* showed how little had changed legally for women in the intervening years. See Chapter Six of this thesis for a discussion of *Samantha on the Woman Question*. 

218
President...As I stood before him...I said...'Allen, I have come!'”

Samantha told Arthur about Dorlesky’s “errents;” Samantha admitted that Dorlesky’s demands might be a little unreasonable because two weeks was not very much time to destroy the Whiskey Rings and grant women’s rights, and suggested that Arthur may need an extra week to accomplish these goals. However, to show that these demands were serious, Samantha added that “‘Dorlesky told me to tell you that if you didn’t do these things, she would have you removed from the Presidential chair, and you should never be President again.’” Of course, Arthur sympathized with Dorlesky’s situation but demurred: “‘The laws of the United States are such, that I cannot interfere.’” He cited the power of the liquor lobby and the revenue generated by the sales of liquor, and then fell silent under Samantha’s onslaught before finally advising her to consult with Senator Blaine.

Senator James Blaine was a prominent and very powerful figure in nineteenth century American politics. At the time of the publication of Sweet Cicely Blaine had had an unsuccessful run for the presidency and was serving in the United States Senate. In the story Blaine also sympathized with Dorlesky’s plight but failed to see how “the 3 can be reconciled...The liquor traffic, liberty, and Dorlesky.” Samantha continued to press her case, again acknowledging that Dorlesky’s demanded timeframe might be slightly unreasonable while insisting that surely Blaine “can see for yourself that she is right.” When Blaine, too, continued to demur Samantha repeated her warning: “‘Dorlesky told me to tell you that if you didn’t do her errent, you should not be the next President of the United States.’” The irony was, of course, that Dorlesky’s threats and Samantha’s message were completely meaningless because women had no voice in choosing the next president. Blaine finally managed to put Samantha off by sending her to Senator Logan.

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23 Holley, Sweet Cicely, 74.

24 Ibid., 77, 78.

25 Ibid., 82.
Senator John Logan was another prominent political luminary, Blaine’s unsuccessful running mate, and United States senator. Samantha “didn’t like his looks from the very first minute I sot eyes on him.” Logan tried to avert Samantha’s attention through compliments and appeals to vanity but Samantha was wise and immune to such tactics: “ Truly, I had heard much of the flattery and the little talk that statesmen will use to wimmen, and I had heard much of their lies.” Logan’s talk precipitated a multi-page tirade in which Holley had Samantha debunk the arguments promoted by male politicians and the male-dominated American culture in general that denied women’s rights. Touching on the most common rationales for disempowering women, she insisted that voting did not damage a woman’s femininity; women suffered the effects of male drunkenness; rights for women were not against nature; the Bible was full of strong women who revered justice and right. Samantha exclaimed that husbands were not substitutes for rights. She argued that women were not angels but were human beings deserving of justice: “‘if wimmen are angels, give ’em the rights of angels…Who ever heard of an angel havin’ to take in washin’ to support a drunken son or father or husband…[or pay] taxes to a Government that in theory idolizes her, and practically despises her, and uses that same money in ways abominable to that angel?’” She said that a woman would be “‘contented and proud if you would give her the rights of a dog.’” Among the many benefits of being a dog were not having to pay taxes “‘to a Government that withholds every right of citizenship from it,’” not having to “‘see its property taxed to advance laws that it believes ruinous,’” not having to “‘listen to soul-sickening speeches from them that deny it freedom and justice.’” In short, “‘[a dog] knows, if it knows any thing, that it is a dog.’”

Samantha replied dismissively to each of Senator Logan’s efforts to appease and distract her from her mission. Holley made Logan the representation of male political self-interest. He compared women to “‘savage races, who knew nothing of civilization.’” He argued that “‘Modern

\[26\]Ibid., 84–88 passim.
history don’t seem to encourage the scheme’” of justice. He noted that “‘The Bible teaches man’s supremacy, man’s absolute power and might and authority.’” He confused Galatians with Lilliputians. He thought Herod had served in the United States Congress. He admitted that “‘I am not fully familiar with that work [the Bible]. Being so engrossed in politics…I don’t get any time to devote to less important publications.’” In exasperation, Samantha asked why laws that had been enacted to cater to the liquor interests could not be changed. Logan replied that the law could only be changed for important matters and that “‘we senators and congressmen…have no time to devote to the cause of Right and Justice,’” because of more pressing issues, such as “‘trying to pass laws to increase our own salaries.’”

Logan finally referred Samantha to Senator William Wallace. Disappointed, frustrated, and exhausted from the futility of her quest, she enlisted the help of her cousin Bub Smith, with whom she was staying during her visit to the capital, to complete Dorlesky’s “errents.” Bub became embroiled in a buck-passing procession through Washington’s upper political echelons, including future president Grover Cleveland; senators Mr. [George] Edmunds, Samuel Tilden, Mr. [Thomas] Bayard; and congressmen William Walter Phelps, Benjamin Butler, and Roswell Flower. Bub even went into the Senate chamber, where he witnessed the presentation of a “long petition come from thousands and thousands of wimmen…a plea for justice and mercy” and temperance

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27Ibid., 89-93 passim. This scene between Samantha and Senator Logan also reappeared in *Samantha on the Woman Question*, but in the later book the senator was unnamed.

28Roswell P. Flower was a United States representative from New York who later served as governor of the state. He was a local son of Watertown, NY, in Holley’s native Jefferson County. Holley and Flower were contemporaries and likely were acquainted as the two most famous Jefferson County residents of the late nineteenth century. Because Holley included Flower in her list of political opponents of women’s rights and temperance, one may conclude that she had little respect for his views on these issues. Watertown now houses the Roswell P. Flower Memorial Library. The Flower Memorial Library owns copious primary Holley sources that were accessed for this thesis. The library also boasts the Marietta Holley Reading Room, an ironic twist of events that pairs for posterity these two prominent citizens that were most likely political adversaries.
legislation. The senators “jeered at it, threwed it around the room, called it all to nort, and made the meanest speeches…talked nasty, and finally threw it under the table.”\textsuperscript{29} After listening to Bub’s story, Samantha finally realized:

They knew they was elected by liquor…and they knew, if they voted against whisky, it would deprive ’em of thousands and thousands of voters. Diligent voters, who would vote for ’em from mornin’ till night, and so they dassent tackle the ring. And if wimmen was allowed to vote, they knew it was jest the same thing as breaking the ring in two, and destroying intemperance. So, though they knew that both errents was jest as right as right could be, they dassent tackle ’em, for fear they wouldn’t run no chance at all of bein’ President of the United States.\textsuperscript{30}

Samantha ultimately gave up and went back to Jonesville, knowing that she “had done my best,” discouraged, but determined to fight on.\textsuperscript{31}

Holley used her dark humor in this episode to convey effectively the frustration of women who were repeatedly exhorted to support social change through moral suasion, and yet must watch that moral suasion be completely ineffective. The always optimistic Samantha was sure that the elected officials would see the validity and rightness of her logic, and although she was frustrated by repeated rebuffs, she persevered until she finally had to face the futility of her quest. She ultimately understood that the country she loved was governed by men who jealously guarded the power of political office, put the money that flowed from liquor interests above the welfare of the citizens, were afraid to go against social convention, or simply could not be bothered to serve in the name of justice and right. This reality was a crushing blow, but Holley could not allow this situation to break Samantha’s spirit. Holley knew that the only true catalyst for change was empowerment through enfranchisement; the vote was the only means of eradicating hypocrisy and improving society. Samantha must go on with the work to keep the message alive.

\textsuperscript{29}Holley, \textit{Sweet Cicely}, 96-97.

\textsuperscript{30}Ibid., 97.

\textsuperscript{31}Ibid., 98.
Samantha returned to Jonesville determined to keep Josiah away from Washington, DC, and the base morals of politics. However, she need not have worried: Josiah was so lonely during Samantha’s absence that he gave up the idea of being a senator. He could not bear the separation from his wife and home that moving to Washington would entail. Once again, Holley created an ironic scenario to disparage the gender bias underlying American culture. Josiah placed an open letter in the local newspaper to announce his withdrawal from the senate race. He listed the reasons for his decision. Politics would destroy his loving and peaceful character and make him hard-hearted and rude. Politicians swear. Politicians drink. Josiah did not want to swear or drink, and “Samantha is afraid I shall yield to the temptation; and I am most afraid of it myself.”

Josiah had family commitments. As a husband, “home is my dearest and most sacred treasure.” He could not leave his wife “lonely and unhappy while I plunge into the wild turmoil of caurkasses and town meetin’s, and while I go to ’lection and vote.” He wanted to spend time with his little granddaughter.

Josiah had too many community commitments. He was a “pillow” of the Methodist church; he was a school-trustee; he was a salesman in the cheese factory. He had chores around the farm that could not be neglected. Unless he fulfilled his family duties his wife might “get dissatisfied with home and husband and wander off into the paths of dissipation and vice.” He did not have the time to be a politician.

Josiah was surprised by the reaction to his letter. He was hurt and embarrassed by “the way it was took…Tongue can’t tell the way them Jonesvillians has sneered and jeered at me, and run me down, and sot on me.”32

In this scene Holley very cleverly reversed the gender roles to emphasize the unfair attitudes toward and treatment of women in American culture. Josiah’s reasons for quitting politics

32Ibid., 118-119.
echoed the arguments well known to Holley for justifying the restrictions of woman’s sphere: domestic obligations, church obligations, lack of time, and falling into moral turpitude. Josiah did not like the reception that his announcement elicited. He did not like being treated like a woman.

In ending the story, Holley switched abruptly from satire back to sentimentality to construct Cicely’s fate. Samantha’s failure did not diminish Cicely’s resolve to protect her son from the evils of intemperance. Cicely confronted the executor of her husband’s will to demand that her money not be used to support saloons. Although the executor was “a good man…he didn’t like a woman’s interference.” He was making money from the liquor trade, and appeals to his conscience were ineffective. Cicely, however, was consumed with guilt that her money was contributing to the dissipation and death of other mothers’ sons, and that retribution would somehow fall upon her own boy. The executor argued that his business dealings would make Cicely a rich woman and insure a comfortable future for her son when the proceeds from the liquor traffic were invested in government bonds. He claimed the law was behind his dealings. Cicely knew that “Women have no other weapon they can use, only just to plead, to beg for mercy;” begging and pleading were no match for political tyranny. As Cicely’s health rapidly failed, she made out a will that placed all her property, including her son, in Josiah and Thomas J.’s guardianship. Cicely’s will superseded that of her late husband, and she was finally able to atone for the evil perpetrated in her name and keep her son safe. Although she had no legal rights in life, her will was legally binding and allowed her to achieve justice in death. A few short weeks later her son died in an accident, and mother and son were reunited and safe for eternity. Intemperance did not triumph over Cicely, although the work for and of society remained unfinished.

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33Cicely could not include Samantha as one of her son’s guardians because as a disfranchised woman, Samantha would be equally as powerless as Cicely had been in protecting her assets.

34Holley, *Sweet Cicely*, 129-133.
*Sweet Cicely* was Holley’s initial pro-temperance novel, in which she expressed strong feelings about the dangers of intemperance and the political and cultural obstacles to achieving what she considered to be the most critical social reform of her day. The book contained satirical episodes and Holley’s trademark humor, mixed with empathy. Holley constructed the story as a vehicle of moral suasion, with a sentimental thread designed to evoke a compassionate response from the reader to support the cause. Twenty years later Holley and other temperance advocates were still engaged in the struggle for this reform. The time had come to go on the offensive, to treat the temperance issue with the anger and bitterness borne of decades of frustration. Holley set out to place the blame for this destructive and despicable situation squarely and unequivocally at the feet of the two most important institutions in American culture: the United States government and the Church of Christ. Her goal was temperance. Her method was frontal assault. The result was her twelfth novel, *Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife*.

In Chapter Twenty-Six of her autobiography *The Story of My Life* Holley explained that *Around the World* started as a series of weekly installments submitted to a newspaper called *The Christian Herald*. The publisher paid Holley $100 a week for stories about Samantha Allen’s around the world trip. Holley wrote the stories in 1899 and 1900, and afterwards sold the entire collection to a New York publisher, who compiled the vignettes into book form in 1905. Never having visited any of the places mentioned in Samantha’s journey, Holley researched the stories using newspaper reports; travel brochures; letters; maps; and political, historical, and cultural studies. Nearly every installment included a discussion or discourse on temperance. Holley wrote that “I think after all that the public was not displeased with my story…My long preachments on temperance in the story won the warmest approval of the world’s temperance workers.”

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The story began when Samantha’s young grandson Tommy was in the throes of a long and difficult recuperation from the measles. The boy’s physician suggested a sea voyage to a warm climate. Coincidentally Albina Meechim and Dorothy Snow, relatives of Samantha’s daughter-in-law, were planning a voyage to China and offered to travel with Samantha and Tommy. Miss Meechim had a nephew, Robert Strong, who was a humanitarian worker in developing countries, and who would be a part of the entourage. Miss Meechim and Dorothy’s maid, Aronette, was also included. Samantha’s neighbor Arvilly Lanfeare invited herself to go along. Arvilly was Holley’s voice of temperance. Josiah initially stayed at home, but ultimately joined Samantha just as she and her friends were about to embark on a ship out of San Francisco. Holley gave this group, as well as other characters introduced throughout the book, diverse interests that served several purposes. The tension that arose among the travelers provided ample material for humor, sarcasm, and satire; Holley’s esteem for marriage and the family; and most importantly, temperance.

As in *Sweet Cicely*, the names of the main characters in *Around the World* predicted and reflected personality traits and behaviors. Albina Meechim evoked a combination of poor vision (albino) and Samantha’s slang word for a defiantly contrite person (meachin’). Miss Meechim was a woman certain of her own rightness, with a limited outlook and fawning attitude that exposed her wrongness at every turn. She vacillated between adherence to superficial social conventions and rejection of social institutions and healthy human relationships. She “wuz a maiden lady by choice [with a] chronic dislike to man” who constantly looked for the gentility in any situation. Miss Meechim engaged in social drinking, and therefore was continually at odds with Arvilly.

Robert Strong was a man who was “fanatic on the subject” of temperance and social justice. Robert was a businessman whose deep principles led him to treat his employees with respect and to insure basic human values in all of his dealings. Robert lived by Scripture,

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particularly “‘Do unto others as ye would have them do unto you.’”\textsuperscript{37} He was “undoubtedly following his ideas of right” as he “sought to strengthen his “only weak spot…his own incompetence and inability to carry out the Christian idea of love and justice as he wants to.”\textsuperscript{38} Dorothy Snow was a young woman of pure morals who fell in love with Robert and supported his humanitarian values despite the objections of her traveling companion Miss Meechim. Miss Meechim threw Dorothy and Robert Strong together at every opportunity because she wanted “Dorothy to be a bachelor maid” and Robert “is good as gold…a help to me in protecting Dorothy from lovers.”\textsuperscript{39} Predictably, by the end of the book, Dorothy and Robert were married.

Elder White was a young minister who mounted a crusade against the saloons in his community near Samantha’s hometown of Jonesville. White was a man whose name symbolized purity. He kept his church open seven days a week to provide a refuge for those wishing to combat intemperance. White “is trying to inculcate into [the] minds [of his congregants] right living in the way of health as well as morals…in Temperance and all good things.” However, White was also an activist who knew that prayer alone would not produce social change. He understood political power and influence, and “‘went right to the polls ‘lection day’” to combat the “‘Whiskey Power…tryin’ to brutalize and craze the men into votin’ as the Liquor Power dictated.’” White’s work paid off when his town “‘went no license, and not a saloon curses its streets today… the election wuz a triumph for the Right.’”\textsuperscript{40} Waitstill Webb was a young woman of resolute faith in those she loved who worked as a temperance missionary after her husband was killed in a fight in a Cuban saloon. She “goes about doin’ good, waitin’ kinder still, some like her name, till the Lord

\textsuperscript{37}This philosophy is The Golden Rule. See Chapter Two, note 66, of this thesis for an explanation.

\textsuperscript{38}Holley, \textit{Around the World}, 5, 9, 10.

\textsuperscript{39}Ibid., 5.

\textsuperscript{40}Ibid., 18, 19.
sends her relief by the angel that shall stand one day in all of our homes.”

Waitstill ultimately returned to Jonesville where she married Elder White, creating the perfect union of good and righteousness.

Rev. Dr. Weakdew was against social justice. His name described his surrender to the interests of his wealthy congregants. Weakdew looked to the “many great texts that he has preached from all his life...[that] would be destroyed and meaningless” if temperance and human rights became the law. He exhorted the poor and downtrodden in his community to suffer through life on earth as an entry into the glory of life everlasting in heaven. Elder Wessel (pronounced “weasel?”) was a shiftless preacher who embarked on a mission to China with his daughter Lucia who was to be employed as a governess to a wealthy Chinese family. Wessel “wuz real mild and conservative, always drank moderate and always had wine on his table, and approved of the canteen and the saloon, which he extolled as the Poor Man’s Club. He thought that the government wuz just right...and license laws jest as they should be.” Samantha “didn’t set so much store by” Wessel.

Fate handed Wessel his comeuppance when Lucia fell in with a whoremonger who hooked her on liquor and made her a prostitute.

_Around the World_ was a travelogue. Samantha’s group left Jonesville and stopped at Chicago and San Francisco before leaving the mainland for Hawaii and then on to Asia. The route included visits to Japan, China, Viet Nam, the Philippines, India, Egypt, Greece, the Holy Land, Rome, Paris, and London. Holley’s descriptions of scenery and customs were good, and just detailed enough to give the reader a feel for the locales without being boring. In typical Holley style, along the way Samantha had ample opportunity to meet and advise foreign dignitaries.

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41Ibid., 29, 30.

42Ibid., 35.

43Ibid., 41.
religious leaders, and American missionaries and military personnel. The group had adventures, usually involving misunderstandings due to language barriers, exotic foods, and conflicts among the travelers. Holley combined humor and sentimentality to infuse the scenes with satire, pathos, and social and political commentary.

From the first page of the book, Holley conveyed the importance of the family to a functioning society, and that women must work to ensure the elimination of threats to the family, especially intemperance. Holley set up a semi-adversarial relationship between Samantha and Miss Meechim, whose differing opinions formed a dialogue about the value of marriage. Miss Meechim was Samantha’s foil, a woman who despised marriage but revered gentility. She had been turned against marriage because of the disastrous experiences of many of her female relatives: after squandering the family money on gambling, her father left her mother destitute; her sister had been divorced three times, each time from an abusive husband on the grounds of cruelty; Miss Meechim herself had had a bad marriage, but she refused to disclose the details. Miss Meechim was at once the book’s Betsey Bobbet and the antithesis of Betsey Bobbet. Miss Meechim was as adamantly opposed to marriage as Betsey was desperate to be married; both characters were repeatedly at odds with and at a disadvantage to Samantha’s moderate common sense.

In contrast to Miss Meechim, Samantha made several statements that reflected her steadfast belief in the value of marriage without losing sight of the fact that men and matrimony were far from perfect. Samantha noted that she loved her “pardner” despite his faults, and that she “should feel dretful lost and wobblin’ without him.” Although she was sometimes “hash” with Josiah and had to keep his penchant for “naterel overbearness” in check, “I worship him and he

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44Ibid., 6.

45Betsey Bobbet was a recurring character in many of Holley’s novels. Bobbet is discussed throughout this thesis.

46Holley, Around the World, 6.
knows it.™ Samantha agreed with a minor character who exclaimed, “Oh, it is such a beautiful state, matrimony is.” Of course, Samantha supported marriage only for the right reasons – husband and wife must share love, mercy, honesty and justice. Samantha’s sentiments were feminine, but not feminist; she believed in a society based on the family, in which women had significant influence and opportunity for self expression and self support if necessary, but always within the context of family relationships.

After Holley ingratiated her readers with her views on the importance of marriage and family, she turned her attention in the remainder of the book to her bigger concern: temperance. In fact, the issue of temperance was the heart of the book. Women’s rights and suffrage were barely mentioned in this book, and only in terms of temperance. Not once did Holley have any character in this book mention women’s rights or woman suffrage from a perspective of pure politics or gender equality.

Many Holley analysts have interpreted Around the World as Holley’s anti-imperialist message. Holley did criticize the activities of the United States government in lands conquered through the Spanish American War. However, Holley’s disdain was not aimed at ideology or at the simple fact of imperialism. Holley had Samantha declare again and again her allegiance to the United States, and never did Samantha even hint that the cultures of the acquired territories would suffer as a result of annexation. If the attitudes assigned to the book’s characters were an indication of Holley’s beliefs, her only criticism was aimed at the anti-temperance policies and practices of the occupying forces. In one of Arvilly’s particularly vituperative tirades she exclaims, “You say that [the war] was to give freedom to the people of Cuba…You miserable hypocrites, you…you that...

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47 Ibid., 122.
48 Ibid., 20.
49 Ibid., 235.
know no pity and no mercy for your own women and children.’’ She went on to accuse, “‘You pose before foreign nations as a reformer, a righter of wrongs…this governmunt, that set out as a reformer to Christianize Cuba and the Philippines, ha[s] planted here this heaviest artillery of Satan, the saloon, to bind the poor islanders in worse bondage and misery than they ever dremp on.’’” 50

These sentiments were not anti-imperialist. Holley’s characters did not argue that Cuba and the Philippines did not need to be reformed or that the United States was unjustified in doing so. These characters saw annexation in terms of temperance: the American government erred not in annexation, but in promoting intemperance in the annexed territories.

Almost every relationship, event, or scenario was constructed as a statement on temperance. Samantha, Arvilly, Dorothy, and Robert never failed to point out that the main effect of the United States’ presence throughout the world was the propagation of intemperance. Holley used these characters to emphasize the pro-temperance belief that the U.S. government cared more about the taxes and revenue generated from the liquor trade than about spreading positive influence to developing nations. 51 In Sweet Cicely, Holley used Samantha’s interactions with political leaders to indict the American government for supporting intemperance. In Around the World, Holley extended this indictment to include the Church. The overarching and unmistakable message of the book was that Church and State were in cahoots to accept the support of the Whiskey Power by condoning and licensing the liquor trade. 52

For Holley, the two most important institutions in American society and culture were responsible for egregious attitudes and policies contributing to the destruction of that society and culture. Early in the story, the travelers stopped in Chicago to visit the Woman’s Temperance

50Ibid., 45-46.

51Ibid., 28-29.

52Ibid., 50.
Building, headquarters of the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union. Samantha was awed by the work of “them noble wimmen,” who were fighting to correct the errors of “Uncle Sam, good-natured, shiftless old creeter, well meanin’…but jest led in blinders up and down the earth by the Whiskey Power that controls State and Church today.” Holley did not mince words in her treatment of the deep, embarrassing, and unmitigated wrongness of political and religious support for intemperance.

Arvilly Lanfeare, a steadfast, angry, and vocal pro-temperance agitator, was a major character in the book. Arvilly’s husband had died in a drunken brawl in Cuba. Arvilly was so scarred by her husband’s murder that she became an obsessive temperance advocate. She traveled as a book agent, hawking *The Twin Crimes of America: Intemperance and Greed* to anyone who would listen, including the Pope. Holley gave Arvilly space throughout the book for pro-temperance tirades that became rather repetitious in a book, but were probably very effective in the original format of weekly newspaper columns.

Holley developed a relationship between Samantha and Arvilly that simultaneously meliorated and preserved the urgency of her temperance message. For Holley, and thus for Arvilly, intemperance was the greatest evil, and the United States of America the greatest proponent of that evil. Samantha agreed with Arvilly on principle, but not always on tactics. Arvilly had a tendency to be shrill in her speeches, and Samantha often commented that Arvilly could be “hash.” After almost all of Arvilly’s diatribes Samantha would make a mitigating comment or statement. Holley had to keep Samantha distanced from Arvilly’s venom. Arvilly served as the indignant messenger of stark reality. Samantha served as the moderating counterpoint to Arvilly’s extremism. Through these two characters Holley could express her views without offending her readers. When Arvilly

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53 Ibid., 16.

54 Ibid., 7, 186-187.
called “this Christian government…[a] fool and villain” and held the government responsible for
the killing of her husband in a bar fight “not for patriotism or honor, but for a few pennies of
money,” Samantha was shocked. Samantha fretted, “To think on’t. Arvilly wuz talkin’ to the
govermunt, and callin’ it a fool and a villain! The idee! Why, it was enough to skair anybody most
to death.”

Arvilly delivered numerous diatribes throughout the book all with the same theme. She
blamed the government for her husband’s death and at every chance she orated on the topic. These
preachments were deemed tedious by Holley’s contemporary detractors as well as the later Holley
analysts. However, Holley was not trying to be funny when discussing temperance. Furthermore,
one must remember that Around the World was published in weekly installments. The weekly
format would have diminished the overwhelming effect that Holley’s message held when read as
chapters in a contiguous novel. Holley clearly took advantage of the bully pulpit afforded to her by
the serial nature of this work. She wanted to keep her message before the public and to drive home
her temperance beliefs in a way that probably seemed to her audience more reasonable than
relentless.

Arvilly was a formidable adversary when arguing the evils of intemperance and of the
society that condoned such an evil. Arvilly was clever, persistent, logical, and convinced of her
own rightness. She was the perfect medium to deliver to Holley’s readers a weekly dose of
temperance rhetoric. The fact that Arvilly’s arguments rang true for many women and families only
strengthened her message.

Both Arvilly and Samantha were fonts of pithy sayings designed to expose the U.S.
government and the Church’s support for and dependence upon intemperance, such as:

Go to the Liquor Power…that rules the Church and State, that makes…personal laws
in a man’s favor.

55Ibid., 46.
The United States of America, guilty of murder in the first degree.

What has this country ever done for me? I had no more voice in making the laws than your dog there.

Well I never see or hear of any savage idol to compare in heigiousness with the Whiskey Power that is built up and pampered and worshipped by Americans rich and poor, high and low, Church and State.

Uncle Sam…[is] real good hearted, though…he is deceived …by them that want to make money out of him, such as…the liquor power.

The political bosses and the liquor power are rulin’ things about the same as ever.

Every ’lection time hain’t the great serpent of the liquor power fed and pampered by the law-makers of our country?

What is cuttin’ off the heads of twenty or thirty babies compared to the thousands and thousands of murders that this licensed evil causes every year?

They keep right on preachin’ sermons against wrong and votin’ to sustain it, if they vote at all.  

The book contains hundreds of such statements. Holley never let her guard down or lost sight of her goal. She was a temperance advocate and a temperance author, and she had to keep temperance in the minds of her readers. Her mission was doubly important because women did not have the direct ability to effect meaningful political change on a national level.  

Holley attacked the patriotism of a government that appeared insensitive to the consequences of promoting intemperance in the interest of economic gain. Samantha questioned the logic of public exhortations to “Remember the Maine” when the nation stood by “cool and demute…[as]…every year sixty thousands of its best sons [were] slain by the saloon…or law-makers…dropped [their eyes] so’s not to delay the work of signin’ licenses…and writin’ permits to

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57At the time of the publication of Around the World only women in Wyoming, Colorado, Utah, and Idaho had full suffrage.
the murderers to go on with their butchery."^{58} However, even though Holley’s characters criticized the United States, often in very direct and biting terms, this criticism was intended to be constructive, to show a way through which the government, culture, and country could be improved. Never did Samantha or any of her companions imply a lack of allegiance to the United States; rather the common sentiment among everyone was that the country was basically good, and would realize greatness once the values of courage, justice, and love impelled the country’s leaders to shun corruption and follow the path of duty and right. Samantha exclaimed:

I felt that I loved my country with that passionate, jealous love that could never be contented till she rises up to the full glory she might and will have. When she sweeps her long strong arms round and brushes off vile politicians and time-servers, and uses a pure free ballot to elect good men and wimmen to make good laws, then will come the Golden Age that I look for, and that will come, when Justice takes her bandages off, and looks out with both eyes over a prosperous and happy land. God speed the day!^{59}

In keeping with her faith in a government that needed to be reminded of the worth of doing good in the world, Holley devoted a full chapter to a meeting in Manila of Samantha and Arvilly with Frederick Grant, who was serving as a General in the occupying American army. Holley used the interchange between Samantha and Grant as a direct attack on American temperance policy and to expose and condemn the intemperance spread by occupying American forces in the Philippines. Worried that Arvilly might alienate Grant and thereby jeopardize the mission of their meeting, Samantha extracted a promise from Arvilly to remain quiet during the meeting with Grant. Samantha began by praising Grant’s father as a savior of the Union during the Civil War and sainted former U.S. president, and asked Grant if he was brave enough to emulate his father in a

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^{58} Holley, Around the World, 28.

^{59} Ibid., 228.
fight against “‘the worst foe America ever had.’” Grant, being “dretful smart,” immediately knew that Samantha meant temperance. Samantha launched into a multi-page speech in which she appealed to his emotions as a husband and father, and asked that he ensure that other husbands and fathers be allowed to protect their families as he had been able to protect his own. Samantha “read the thoughts on [Grant’s] forehead” and appealed to his sense of right and wrong. She believed he could do more than the “‘Church and State’” to encourage a moral society to make “‘our country…the greatest and best that the sun ever shone on.’” Samantha knew that this task would be difficult, but she and all women needed his help because “‘wimmen can’t reach up to [the challenge], they can’t vote.’” When Grant remained silent throughout Samantha’s oration, she assumed he was in thoughtful agreement with her arguments. Arvilly was less impressed with Grant’s lack of response, and finally could not resist approaching Grant directly to plead for action in the cause of justice and right. The most Grant would do was to promise to think about Samantha words, and to subscribe to Arvilly’s book.

As in her dealings with other political leaders, Samantha was unable to comprehend that her words were totally ineffective. Grant treated Samantha with respect and politeness, which Samantha interpreted as sincere interest in her plea. Of course, Grant’s response was only a thinly veiled brush-off, but Samantha was so sure of her righteousness that she believed he “would help save…young boys from the demon that sought their lives – the bloody demon that stalks up and down our country wrapped in a shelterin’ mantilly made of the Stars and Stripes—…that General Grant would come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty” liquor traders. Samantha had

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60 Samantha’s praise of President Ulysses S. Grant, a man well-known for overindulgence in alcohol consumption during the Civil War, is one example of the inconsistency in some of Holley’s arguments.


62 Ibid., 74-76.
faith in those she revered, and she believed that her work in the Philippines was done. Surely Grant would act to eliminate liquor from the territory.

Of course, Holley constructed this scene so that the reader understood what Samantha could not. The dark satire of this scene was evident in the tragic irony that Samantha’s faith was misplaced. Samantha had been duped by a polite but insincere politician who, although he may have recognized the worth of Samantha’s words and possibly even agreed with her ideals, had no intention of carrying through her request. Holley was showing that women could not rely on the government to act in the cause of right and justice in regards to social reforms, especially when those reforms may have negative economic repercussions. Women needed to carry on with the work.

The inaction of the government towards temperance reform was matched by that of the Church. To support Holley’s stand that the Church was also complicit in condoning intemperance, Arvilly had a tendency to pick arguments with the ministers in the book. Samantha recalled an interaction between Arvilly and Elder Minkley, who was the father-in-law of Samantha’s daughter. Arvilly had just returned to Jonesville after her husband’s death and was quick to spew bitter invective on anyone who she perceived as connected to intemperance, including ministers. Elder Minkley greeted Arvilly innocently enough and offered his condolences. Arvilly sharply accused Minkley of murder as a representative of the Church of Christ that refused to condemn the “evil [anti-temperance] law” that caused so much destruction. Minkley reasoned that “The power of the Church is great…but no-license laws don’t stop drinking; liquor is sold somehow; folks that want it will get it.” Arvilly saw Minkley’s argument as a cowardly attempt to deflect responsibility. She grilled him on his convictions that “the Church of Christ is invincible.” When she learned that Minkley did not vote, but relied on prayer to effect social change, Arvilly retorted: “By your criminal indifference and neglect, you encourage the evil power that rules and ruins.” After Arvilly
ultimately extracted a promise from Minkley to vote as he prayed, she embraced him and “from that day they have been the best of friends.”\(^{63}\)

In a similar exchange between Arvilly and Wessel, she attacked Christian ministers who “spend their strength in writin’ eloquent sermons against sin, and lettin’ it alone, instead of grapplin’ with it at the ballot box.”\(^{64}\) Wessel explained that he did not vote because he believed a minister should not meddle in worldly concerns such as laws and “the right and wrong of actions.” Arvilly countered that the duty of the Church of Christ was to save humanity from danger and evil. Men such as Wessel “that refuse to vote…are just as guilty as license voters…The Church of Christ is responsible for this crime.” Wessel argued that the saloon is the “Poor Man’s Club,” a refuge for a man after a long, hard day at work: “‘the poor man, after he has worked hard all day, and has nothing to go home to but a room full of cryin’ children, discomfort, squalor and a complaining wife, is justified in my opinion to go to the only bright, happy place he knows of, the saloon.’” Arvilly pointed out that a large part of the husband’s unpleasant home life could be blamed on his stopping at the saloon and coming home drunk. Wessel did not have an answer for Arvilly’s arguments. As usual in these scenarios, Arvilly’s tenacity won out and her opponent, in this case Wessel, left the room.\(^{65}\)

The humor in the book centered on Josiah. At each stop on the “tower” he would become fascinated by a part of the local culture. He repeatedly imagined himself involved in whatever he was observing, and fantasized about bringing an incredible variety of foreign customs back to Jonesville. He might adopt some foreign words, dress, or behaviors to make himself stand out back in Jonesville.

\(^{63}\)Ibid., 172-174.

\(^{64}\)Ibid., 65.

\(^{65}\)Ibid., 55-58.
However, in a serious temperance scenario, Samantha discovered that Josiah had rented one of the outbuildings on his farm to a man who used the location to sell liquor. She argued with Josiah, insisting that he put a stop to this evil trafficking in human misery. Josiah replied several times that he “would consider it.” Samantha’s ire increased with each of Josiah’s evasions until she decided to leave the “tower” and travel alone back to Jonesville to stop the liquor trade herself. She declared, “‘It don’t seem to me that I can ever live with a man that is doin’ what you are.’” At the prospect of living without Samantha, Josiah relented.  

No temperance novel would be complete without a typically sentimental subplot of a family torn apart by alcohol abuse. In Around the World this subplot opened when Aronette and Lucia disappeared after going on an evening outing. The girls were last seen with two drunken young men exiting a saloon in Manila “Licensed by Christian America.” Samantha lamented that America should “reach out her long arms clear across the Pacific to lead them sweet girls into the pit she has dug for her soldiers.” Samantha and Robert decided to let Dorothy think that Aronette was dead rather than reveal the true circumstances of her disappearance. However, Elder Wessel could not accept Lucia’s fate. He instantly became “an old man, a haggard, wretched, broken-down old man.” He no longer called the saloon the Poor Man’s Club. To Wessel, these “licensed institutions Christian America furnished for its citizens…seemed now…instead of something to be winked at and excused… to be accursed hells yawning for the young and innocent.” Wessel never dreamed that his own daughter would become ensnared in the poisonous maelstrom of intemperance. “No, it was for the undoing of some other man’s daughter that he had imagined these institutions had been raised and cherished.” Detectives were called in and made a half hearted search for the girls, but as Samantha observed:

66Ibid., 101-102.
67Ibid., 76-78.
The detectives also seemed to regard it as nothing out of the common, and as to the saloon-keeper, so much worse things wuz happenin’ all the time in his profession, so much worse crimes, that he and his rich pardner, the American Governmunt, sees goin’ on all the time in their countless places of bizness, murders, suicides, etc., that they evidently seemed to consider this a very commonplace affair, and so of the other house kep’ by the two pardners, the brazen-faced old hag and Christian America, there, too, so many more terrible things wuz occurin’ all the time that this wuz a very tame thing to talk about.68

This sentimental subplot resurfaced throughout the book to keep the emotional component of the temperance struggle in the mind of the reader. Besides, the sentimental subplot needed to be resolved in extremely tragic circumstances to show the horrible impact of intemperance on society’s innocents. Holley used Wessel as the nexus between the sentimental story and the travelogue, as Samantha’s entourage repeatedly encountered Wessel coincidentally in every stopover of Samantha’s group. Wessel had abandoned his mission and his ministry as he traveled obsessively from city to city looking for his daughter, and always he asked, “‘Where is Lucia?’” He ultimately learned that she had died, a victim of intemperance and debauchery.

Aronette was found in New York City on the brink of death, “her plump little arms almost skin and bone, dead and cold, frozen and starved.” She could not be resuscitated.69 Holley used Aronette’s death as a moral lesson: “sence Aronette’s dretful death in New York [Miss Meechim] had gradually changed her mind about drinking.” Miss Meechim joined a Temperance mission and took to writing temperance tracts, which she was convinced would bring an end to the awful scourge of drunkenness. Samantha lauded Miss Meechim’s conversion, and hoped that “the hull Christian world shall be converted…to move along a mighty overwhelmin’ power that will sweep these ungodly evils from the face of the earth.”70 The book closed with all of the main characters being converted to work for temperance, each in his or her own way, but with the common goal of

68Ibid., 78-79.

69Ibid., 226.

70Ibid., 236, 237.
uplifting the United States, and therefore the world, out of the muck of wickedness and greed. This “united influence will…sweep these ungodly evils from the face of the earth. Then will come the golden days of peace [and] righteousness.”71

Marietta Holley was a reform minded author of popular fiction. Her social criticism included many issues important to women in nineteenth century America. Surely Holley advocated a variety of causes. However, she has been remembered and celebrated as a feminist first and foremost, with other reforms being swept aside as unimportant. The fact is not that these other reforms were unimportant to Holley; rather, reforms that were considered less than feminist were uninteresting to Holley scholars.

_Sweet Cicely and Around the World with Josiah Allen’s Wife_ exposed the skewed interpretation of Holley’s reform message. These books have been criticized as boring, preachy, unfunny, and not worth reading, even by Holley enthusiasts. However, some of Holley’s best satire was in these books. This satire was not necessarily comedic, but certainly communicated Holley’s sense of the ironic and ridiculous in American society, and the often tragic results. For these books to be overlooked or dismissed has been a great disservice to Holley and her intentions. These books clearly revealed that temperance was every bit as important to Holley as any of the other reforms she advocated, including women’s rights. Temperance was the end; women’s rights were the means. Holley deserved not to have her legacy diminished by her temperance beliefs, but to be remembered as a temperance author.

71Ibid., 237.
CHAPTER EIGHT

TO SUM UP: EPISODIN’, ALLEGORIN’, AND THE LIBERTY OF THE FEMAIL RACE

I love to think that perhaps my earnest talk on temperance from the time I began writing to the present time has helped a little to forward the great wave that is sweeping over this world at this time.

--Marietta Holley, “The Story of My Life,” Chapter Twenty-Six

Marietta Holley was a woman with strong convictions and a life-long penchant for reform who developed and used her talent as a writer to press for social and political equality through female empowerment. As the subject of scholarly research Holley has come to be known as a feminist author. Although Holley did contribute to the cultural discourse on what was known during her lifetime as The Woman Question, I have argued that her primary motivation within that discourse was temperance, with women’s rights as a necessary, but supporting, cause. I have challenged the scholars’ use of what William James called “a particular interest in the conceiver,” George Lakoff called reality-shaping frames, and Gwendolyn Gwathmey called “[the scholar’s own] political agendas,” and presented what Richard J. Bernstein held as integral to a balanced perspective: an alternative interpretation of Holley’s work, her values, and her legacy.¹

The Holley analysts chose one feature of her work – the arguments in support of women’s rights and independence -- and interpreted those arguments to mean that Holley was a staunch feminist and a leader among nineteenth century American feminist activists. One might conclude that the scholars framed Holley’s main and most important reform cause to be women’s rights, and then constructed a body of supporting evidence to prove this thesis and validate a feminist conventional wisdom about nineteenth century women’s history and literature. Holley’s work was attractive, particularly to the late twentieth century scholars who claimed that her writing was feminist, advocated feminist behavior, and was a direct reflection of Holley’s own feminist

¹See Introduction of this thesis for the presentation of the thoughts of James, Lakoff, Gwathmey, and Bernstein.
philosophy. If considered in light of the ideas of James, Lakoff, Bernstein, and Gwathmey about historical or current events, these academic arguments contained some kernels of truth, but overlooked alternative interpretation. Instead, the researchers framed Holley, her life, and her books within a particular scholarly discourse. The frames included not only Holley’s intent, but also her personality and relationships, and those of her fictional characters. Some of the facts of Holley’s life and her writing -- that temperance was her dominant motivation and message, her ultimate goal, and the impetus behind her avid support of women’s rights and woman suffrage -- did not fit a feminist frame and, therefore, were not given thoughtful or serious study.

From the 1873 publication of My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s until her death in 1926, Holley was in the public eye. A look into Holley’s microcosm of Jefferson County, New York, through the 1870-1922 issues of the local newspaper, the Watertown Daily Times, revealed a woman who was respected and active in her community, and promoted the causes she had espoused in her writing. This look also supported my contention that temperance was Holley’s primary concern and challenged the frames used by the later Holley scholars.

During her active years, 1870-1914, Holley’s name appeared in nearly two-hundred Times articles. Almost all of the items were human-interest-style gossip about Holley. Nine of the articles

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1 I chose the Watertown Daily Times for this search because the Times is the longest continually published daily newspaper in Jefferson County, New York. Throughout Holley’s active years the region also supported a few weekly newspapers that ran stories by and about her, but those newspapers are either defunct or unavailable digitally. Even using the Times limited this aspect of my research because the Times has digitized issues from 1870-1922, and from 1988 to the present. The intervening 66 years are not available except at the newspaper’s office or on microfilm at the Flower Memorial Library in Watertown, NY. Furthermore, without an index of articles in a daily newspaper in the intervening 66 years, finding information about Holley would be overly cumbersome. I will make my point with the available digitized sources.

2The exact number of articles in which Holley was mentioned was difficult to ascertain. Her name was spelled, and misspelled, in many different ways. The approximately two-hundred articles accessed for this thesis were found through a search of the Watertown Daily Times online archive for 1870-1922 using the terms Holley, Holly, Marietta Holley, Marietta Holly, Josiah Allen’s Wife, Samantha Allen, Betsey Bobbet, and Betsey Bobbett.
dealt specifically with Holley’s reform interests. Of those nine, two connected Holley specifically to suffrage: a letter to the newspaper from Holley, and an interview that mentioned “women’s rights” and quoted Holley’s description of Samantha as “an ardent suffragist.”\textsuperscript{4} Two others linked Holley to “women’s rights,” “women’s wrongs,” and “equality of the sexes,” all in the context of temperance.\textsuperscript{5} Six more mentioned Holley solely in reference to temperance. One of these six quoted a speaker at a community event who referred to “that great temperance temple at Chicago, built by the Women’s Christian Temperance Union…[and] the Union Signal, the greatest prohibition paper, published, edited, and printed entirely by women. And, as Josiah Allen’s Wife says, not a male man to be found on the premises.”\textsuperscript{6} The Times continued to consider Holley newsworthy in her retirement, with approximately eighty-nine mentions between 1915 and 1922. Again, most of the articles contained local gossip or tabloid-style looks at Holley’s life. Of the eight articles that linked her specifically to politics and community activism, one noted that “Miss Holley has long believed that women should participate in civic affairs,” and one mentioned Holley’s “profiting immensely by her pen, especially the temperance and suffrage cause.”\textsuperscript{7} Another combined temperance and suffrage when quoting Holley shortly after the 1916 presidential election:

> “Regarding the stand of both Wilson and Hughes on suffrage, Miss Holley said that this was inevitable.
> ‘Both parties saw that is was surely coming and they wanted to get in line. If I had been a voter, I would have voted the Prohibition ticket if I had thought it would have done any good…”\textsuperscript{8}


\textsuperscript{6}“Farmers’ Picnic,” \textit{Watertown Daily Times}, July 28, 1893.


\textsuperscript{8}“Josiah Allen to be in the Movies,” \textit{Watertown Daily Times}, November 15, 1916.
Five articles linked Holley solely to temperance, two published before 1917, when New York granted woman suffrage, and two afterwards. The other temperance item was a three-column piece that Holley wrote herself in March 1917 titled “The Partners of John Barleycorn.” These articles appeared to show Holley as a vocal temperance advocate from the onset of her public life, with suffrage as an important, but ancillary cause.

Marietta Holley died on March 1, 1926. She left a considerable estate, including money, personal items, and her mansion, Bonnie View. Holley’s will distributed her estate among her family and friends, including her adopted daughter May, her handyman Lew Hoxie, and her niece Ella Page Copeland. To serve her community, Holley left her beloved home, Bonnie View, to the Salvation Army as a shelter for needy women and children.10

The revisionist framing of Marietta Holley took seed immediately after her death. The Watertown Daily Times ran a lengthy obituary of the famous Jefferson County native. This obituary, although extremely complimentary, contained many inaccuracies. In a foreshadowing of how Holley would be remembered, or misremembered, the sub-headline called Holley “One of the Earliest Advocates of Woman Suffrage.” Of course, the women’s rights movement had been in existence long before Holley wrote even her first magazine short story. The column reported Holley’s age at the time of her death as “about 80 years.” Actually, Holley was only four months

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10 In Holley’s will May, who married three times, was named as Marietta Holley Barksdale. See Kate H. Winter, Marietta Holley: Life with “Josiah Allen’s Wife.” (Syracuse, NY: Syracuse University Press, 1984), 154-155.
shy of her 90th birthday when she died. The obituary also contained unsubstantiated statistics that may or may not have been true, including that even her earliest books sold more than 100,000 copies each, an amazing number in the 1870s.\footnote{Samantha at Saratoga was the best-selling book of 1887, and Holley’s overall book sales were estimated at over 10 million. Obituary of Marietta Holley, \textit{Watertown Daily Times}, March 1, 1926.}

The rest of the death notice borrowed heavily from Holley’s autobiographical “The Story of my Life,” including quotes such as, “I wrote nothing except good common sense as we people out in the country know it,” and the anecdote about Holley’s stories launching the national circulation of the Ladies’ Home Journal. The column noted Holley’s work for temperance, calling her a “prohibitionist 40 years before the passage of the 18th amendment.” Holley was described as a student of human nature, compassionate, religious, generous, community-minded, and physically beautiful.\footnote{Marietta Holley Obituary, \textit{Watertown Daily Times}, March 1, 1926.}

Holley’s fame made her death national news. Several obituaries contained inklings of the future distortion of Holley’s work and legacy. An obituary published on March 17, 1926, in \textit{The Anniston (Alabama) Star} gushed that the passing of “Miss Marietta Holley aroused a flood of pleasant recollection.” The notice went on to list a number of laudatory comments from other newspapers across the country. The \textit{Waterbury (Connecticut) Republican} declared Holley as “America’s foremost woman humorist …[whose] ‘strictly humorous chapters, written without intent’ to paint a moral will never lose their freshness.” The \textit{Cleveland Plain Dealer}, contradictory to the \textit{Waterbury Republican}, claimed “‘Miss Holley, though she wrote with lightness and appeared on the surface to give her pages no serious purport, worked nevertheless with constructive aims in mind’ with the result that ‘wide recognition was given to her work for justice to women…”’ The \textit{Philadelphia Inquirer} stated, “‘Miss Holley’s passing at the age of 80…will be regretted by thousands who would have had her round out her itinerary of world fairs with a visit here this
summer.’” The Hartford Daily Times “explains that her books ‘once went to editions of thousands, were translated into many foreign languages, and brought her world-wide fame.’” The Manchester (New Hampshire) Leader declared, “‘Marietta Holley was as well known as Mark Twain.’” The Buffalo Evening News reported, “‘Josiah Allen’s Wife…changed the mental atmosphere so that new ideas could live in it. That is, after all, essential to the very survival of literature.’” The Indianapolis Star “concedes her work ‘was not high-class literature’ and that critics never considered her worthy of their serious attention…Nevertheless, her books were best-sellers of their day and contained clever and amusing portrayals of…human nature.’”13

The community of Jefferson County, New York, took pride in Holley’s work and fame. After her death in 1926, she was remembered occasionally. In 1927 a ceremony was held in Watertown, NY, at the transfer of Bonnie View, which Holley had bequeathed to the Salvation Army for use as a home for needy women and children. Harold B. Johnson, editor of the Watertown Daily Times, gave a speech in which he celebrated Holley’s life, her humble beginnings, her fame, and how she used that fame to further social reforms. In keeping with the common conflation of Holley with the fictional Samantha Allen, Johnson declared that “Samantha was half real and half fiction. The reality in the character was Marietta herself. The fiction was the extravagant caricature that she threw around the picture of herself which undoubtedly broke through.” He extolled her work for woman suffrage and temperance, her religious convictions, and her generosity and

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13“Miss Holley, Dead, is Called Greatest Woman Humorist,” The Anniston Star, March 17, 1926.
“humanitarian instincts.” Her donation of her home to the Salvation Army was her way of insuring that her work would continue well into the future.

In 1933 The Watertown Daily Times reported that Samantha at the Centennial had been named by the conclave of International Women Writers as “one of the 100 outstanding books written by an American woman during the past century...[for meeting standards of] literary quality and influence in shaping public thought of their own and succeeding generations.” The article mentioned Holley’s use of humor combined with “truth and naturalness.” Holley’s book was one of only three in the humor award category.

On November 23, 1934, and December 28, 1934, The Adams (New York) Journal ran articles by Holley’s niece, Ella Page Copeland, titled “Some Memories of Marietta Holley and her Family” and “More Memories of Marietta Holley and her Family.” The articles contained family reminiscences from a child’s point of view, including a few interesting observations. Marietta’s “keen sense of humor was inherited from the Holley side.” Copeland also quoted an elderly Holley, “Sometimes I feel I made a great mistake in not marrying.” However, Holley could not give up her work, which she would inevitably have had to do if she became a wife. Copeland concluded that Holley “had many offers of marriage but used to say Josiah needed her.”

Copeland also wrote an undated memoir titled “Memories of Marietta Holley.” In this article Copeland stated that she went to Bonnie View in June, 1926, three months after Holley’s

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14 Undated, typed manuscript of “An address delivered by Harold B. Johnson at the dedication of the Marietta Holley home near Pierrepont Manor, Sunday afternoon, July 13, 1947.” The manuscript listed the wrong year for this speech and ceremony, which occurred in 1927.

15 Bonnie View fell into disrepair and was eventually sold at auction for payment of back taxes. Winter, Marietta Holley, 155. The house is now a private residence.


death. Copeland could find no family records, papers, letter, bibles, or other keepsakes. Copeland did find an old clipping from the Adams Journal, dated 1861, an essay that Marietta Holley had written about slavery that contained the line, “I say the greatest evil that can befall a slave is intellect, unless with it God gives him the strength to break his chains. It only takes away the veil from before his eyes that he may see all the horrors of his hopeless wretched condition and feel his degradation and misery.” Copeland took this essay as proof of Holley’s longstanding penchant for reform. Copeland noted that the temperance novel Sweet Cicely was Holley’s “best loved book.” She quoted Frances Willard on Sweet Cicely: “It’s the greatest temperance book of the age. Great wrongs cannot stand against well-directed satire and ridicule. Her shafts are directed against the greatest evil of today.” To Copeland, Holley was “fearless in denouncing injustice.”

Several years later, with the scholarly rediscovery of Holley in the 1970s and 1980s, Jefferson County renewed the tributes to this most famous native with frequent community events and newspaper articles. Most of these articles described Holley as the “female Mark Twain,” and focused on her women’s rights message. Although some even gave passing notice to some of her other reform interests, none discussed temperance.

The local Town and Country News ran a story on May 19, 1971, titled “The North Country in prose and poetry: A champion of women’s rights in small town America” by George J. Moffat. After a brief Holley biography, Moffat mentioned Holley’s reform agenda once, and filled the rest of the article with references to the comic tension between “Aunt Samantha and Uncle Josh.” For Moffat, “the moral of most of [Holley’s] tales and sketches is briefly that ‘a married man must be guided in all things by his wife – otherwise he is in for big trouble.’” Moffat clearly missed the

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18 Ella Copeland, “Memories of Marietta Holley,” Undated.

moral of any of Holley’s books, but his article marked the beginning of a number of Holley tributes in the 1970s and 1980s and a resurrection of her fame.

_Watertown Daily Times_ staff writer Martha E. Bellinger wrote an article printed on June 30, 1971, titled “Marietta Holley Advanced Cause of Women’s Rights With Humorous Writings.” Bellinger took a decidedly feminist approach to Holley and her books, describing Holley as “Jefferson County’s own 19th Century edition of the liberated female,” and noting that Holley “emphasized the absurdities of what is today known as ‘male chauvinism.’” For Bellinger, Holley was “ahead of her time” in her support of women’s rights since the character of Samantha was a housewife denied any social, political, or economic voice. However, Bellinger emphasized Holley’s evenhandedness and desire to effect change within the existing political system. Bellinger stated that Holley would be displeased with “the militant approach of some current women,” and despite her non-radical attitude, “probably did as much good for the movement through her satire than some women did with their sassiness.”

J. Robert Williams, a retired St. Lawrence University registrar and reporter for the _Watertown Daily Times_ wrote “Liberties with Language Characterize Adams Native’s Prose,” for the _Times’s_ February 16, 1983, edition. Williams claimed that “Marietta Holley lives in historical memory as a feminist among the sisterhood that included Susan B. Anthony, Elizabeth Cady Stanton…and all those indomitable women who enlivened the late decades of the 19th century.” However, the main focus of his article was Holley’s use humor and language, especially cacography.²¹

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The sesquicentennial of Holley’s birth precipitated several articles in Jefferson County magazines and newspapers covering local celebrations and commemorative events. Holley biographer Kate Winter and Holley scholar, actress, and Samantha impersonator Jane Curry were the main sources of Holley information in these articles, and the two attended, spoke, and performed at many celebratory events. An unsigned article in the October 20, 1986, issue of Town and Country was titled “Celebrating the Sesquicentennial of the birth of Marietta Holley.” This article was one of the few that mentioned Holley’s views on temperance, with a two-word reference embedded in a long paragraph about how life for disfranchised women in nineteenth century America influenced Holley and gave substance to Samantha.²² The October 26, 1986, issue of The Watertown Daily Times ran an article by Norah Machia titled “Marietta Holley: Pioneer Writer, Women’s Rights Proponent Honored.” The article quoted one of the event organizers: “[Holley] was ahead of her time…talking about women’s rights at a time when a married woman gave up everything to her husband, including her wages and her property.” Curry was quoted as explaining that Holley’s books lost popularity after the passage of the 19th Amendment because the cause of women’s rights and suffrage were “no longer current.” Furthermore, Curry focused on Holley’s use of dialect as the driving force of her humor. Holley’s satirical treatment of issues that impacted nineteenth century culture and politics was not discussed.²³ This rather lengthy article did not mention temperance. In a follow-up Times article on October 30, 1986, titled “‘Birthday’ Draws Ex-Suffragette: Fans Come to Fete ‘Samantha’ Author.” Machia claimed the celebration of the 150th anniversary of Holley’s birth “proved one thing: Miss Holley and her works have not been


forgotten in Jefferson County.” Machia depicted Holley as a reform advocate on a variety of issues, but stressed Holley first and foremost as a feminist and suffragist.24

The Antiques & Collecting magazine’s January, 1987, issue ran an article by Darryl E. and Roxana Marie Matter titled “The Samantha Stories.” This article contained a picture of the cover of Sweet Cicely and the book’s dedication: “To sad-eyed mothers, who, like Cicely, are looking across the cradles of their boys into the great world of temptation and danger.” The Matters did not explain the significance of this dedication. The article went on to note that “So widely known was Samantha, ‘Josiah Allen’s Wife,’ that her name was a household word at the turn of the century.” Although both Susan B. Anthony and Frances Willard were named as friends of Holley’s, the Matters noted that “Holley’s stories are of interest today in part because of her writing on women’s rights.”25

Holley has been a recurring topic of articles published in the Watertown Daily Times since 1988. Unlike the many mentions of Holley in the Times between 1870 and 1922, which clearly and consistently portrayed her as a temperance advocate who supported women’s rights, these more recent pieces were notable for a nearly complete absence of references to temperance. Between 1988 and 2013, forty-eight Times articles mentioned Holley. Of those forty-eight articles, twenty-three linked her to social or political topics, often with overlapping references within a single article. Eight articles described Holley as a feminist. Sixteen called her “The Female Mark Twain.” Nine linked her to women’s rights and another eight linked her to woman suffrage. Two articles mentioned temperance, one in a discussion of illustrator True Williams and the other in the context of Frances Willard’s invitation to Holley to speak at a WCTU convention; neither of these articles

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specifically noted Holley’s active pro-temperance work. These articles showed how Holley’s message had been warped in the decades following her death.

Despite her fame and the lingering memory of her among close friends, relatives, and followers up to the present, the fact was that by the time Marietta Holley died on March 1, 1926, her books had already begun a descent into literary oblivion. Holley’s last book was published in 1914. The 18th amendment to the Constitution, popularly known as Prohibition, had become law in 1919. Woman suffrage had been guaranteed by the 19th Constitutional amendment since 1920. These two greatest woman-driven reforms of Holley’s life, the main focus of her reform agitation, had become reality. Holley’s books were no longer necessary, her arguments no longer pertinent, her opinions no longer sought after, her lifestyle no longer the fodder for popular magazines and

26Interestingly, two articles actually characterized Holley as an anti-slavery agitator, despite the fact that slavery had been abolished four years before she published her first major short story. Also, two mentioned her only as a humorist.

gossip columns. Of course, woman suffrage was a great and permanent achievement that was not about to be revoked. However, Prohibition had not yielded the great moral revolution that Holley and other temperance advocates had envisioned. On the contrary, Prohibition had been repealed in 1933 amidst the carnage of shocking crime, corruption, and political and legal embarrassment.

Indeed, by the time the first scholarly treatment of Holley’s work appeared in a chapter entitled “Feminists” in Martha Bruere and Mary Ritter Beard’s 1934 *Laughing Their Way*, Holley’s memory and message had faded sufficiently to be reinvented as almost exclusively, and certainly most importantly, suffragist. With the first Holley-centered doctoral dissertation in 1937, Katherine Blyley furthered the label of Holley as feminist and distanced her from temperance, placing overwhelming value on Holley’s work for woman suffrage. The construction of frames around Holley and the omission of alternative interpretations had begun.

Successive analysts, taking Blyley’s lead, enveloped Holley in an aura of feminism, choosing to study her through the success of woman suffrage and to gloss over the failure of temperance. Women’s historian and Frances Willard biographer Ruth Bordin related an anecdote that may help to put into perspective the attitude of the Holley scholars in the second half of the twentieth century. Bordin remembered her family’s visit to the U.S. Capitol in 1930, while Prohibition was the law of the land. As an adolescent, Bordin was awestruck by the statue of Frances Willard, at that time the only statue of a woman, in Statuary Hall. The statue had been sent in 1905, seven years after Willard’s death, by the citizens of the state of Illinois to honor the woman who had led the Woman’s Christian Temperance Union for twenty years and had made temperance and prohibition the largest woman-driven reform of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Bordin remembered how the tour guide extolled Willard’s work and the value of her legacy that the statue represented. In the 1950s Bordin revisited Statuary Hall with her own young family. The tour guide pointed out Willard’s statue, but this time made the derogatory remark that “Illinois, the home of Lincoln, had chosen a teetotalling woman, the president of the WCTU, as its
representative in Statuary Hall.” Willard, and by extension, the temperance cause she had championed, had become at best a punch line and at worst a national embarrassment.

Little wonder, then, that the later twentieth century women’s history and literature scholars that rediscovered Holley saw her temperance writing as not worthy of serious consideration. Although these scholars clearly had great admiration or Holley and her efforts to further the cause of women’s rights, most dismissed Holley’s temperance work in just a few sentences loaded with negative adjectives and then quickly moved on to other, ostensibly more important issues. These scholars did not seem to appreciate that underplaying Holley’s temperance books jeopardized the integrity of the academic discourse by framing her legacy into a narrow, almost single-issue perspective as an advocate for women’s rights. In the process the rediscovered Holley became a tool to support and promote a specific research objective, that while not incorrect, eliminated alternatives to result in a one-sided interpretation of her intended message. A second review of the Holley scholarship supports of my argument that Holley and her work have been framed with minimal option for alternative interpretation.

Bruere and Beard’s brief treatment of Holley’s first book, My Opinions and Betsey Bobbet’s, limited discussion to women’s rights without mentioning Holley’s other reform interests. As an interesting display of how far Holley’s memory had already faded, Bruere and Beard’s anthology, published in 1934, a scant eight years after Holley’s death, listed incorrect dates both for Holley’s birth and the publication of My Opinions.28

In her 1937 dissertation, Katherine Blyley placed Holley’s interest in temperance secondary to women’s rights rather than giving each reform an individual and equal analysis. After


a lengthy discussion of “Miss Holley on the Woman Question” that filled 33 pages of the 116 page dissertation, Blyley devoted 14 pages to “Miss Holley on Liquor Reform and Other Social Reforms.” Blyley noted the temperance message in Sweet Cecily and Samantha at the Centennial, although she was less enthusiastic about Holley’s temperance message than she was about the women’s rights focus of My Opinions and some of Holley’s other books. Whereas Blyley used the words “argument,” “persuasion,” and “forthrightness” in referring to Holley’s women’s rights stance, she used the adjectives “evangelical,” “propagandist,” and “emotional” to describe the tone of Holley’s writing on temperance.29 Blyley’s emphasis appeared to assign a greater value or esteem to Holley’s women’s rights work than to her temperance writings.

Blyley saw Holley as an important historical component of women’s ongoing struggle for equality, and Holley’s use of humor and satire as proof of women’s ability both to entertain and to make social commentary on a par with that of men. For Blyley, Holley’s work could be an inspiration to women engaged in the struggle against cultural marginalization that fueled a drive for advancement professionally, socially, and politically.30 Blyley examined the aspects of Holley’s work that lay the foundation for the frame of Holley as primarily feminist. As the first in-depth Holley scholar, Blyley originated the idea that Holley’s “role as a popularizer of the movement for liquor reform” contributed to her disappearance from the canon of American popular literature, noting that Holley’s temperance books “tempted her to excess and exaggeration, ludicrous figures and ridiculous examples, all of which alienate a modern reader.”31 Indeed, Blyley’s claim that “It cannot be said that [Holley] ever probed deeply into any subject except Suffrage” added to the feminist frame rather than the alternative that temperance was Holley’s self-identified main reform.


31 Ibid., 76.
cause. Furthermore, the events and experiences of the characters in Holley’s temperance books, while admittedly overly dramatic when applied to a small group of fictional women, were not only possible, but also reality for many women, and far from “ridiculous.”

Blyley’s dissertation was enormously influential to women historians and professors of American popular literature interested in Holley as a promoter of social reforms, particularly women’s rights and suffrage. Holley certainly advocated reforms aimed at giving American women an equal opportunity to participate in the workings of the country’s democratic system. Following Blyley’s lead, scholars almost unanimously placed Holley in a feminist role. However, in giving perfunctory attention to Holley’s efforts to cure a major social ill through the exercise of equal rights, Blyley and her successors reordered Holley’s message and reassigned her motives. The alternative interpretation was that Holley was a social feminist, and that Holley’s work may have been less about feminism for the sake of rights than about women’s rights as the means to broad and long-lasting societal reform, especially temperance.

Margaret Wyman devoted twenty pages of her 1950 doctoral dissertation to Holley’s work, focusing almost exclusively on the women’s rights message in My Opinions. Wyman referred to temperance in only one paragraph, and then only tangentially, noting that “Miss Holley waxed most sentimental on the sufferings of the wives of drunkards…the sufferings of women could indeed be great.” Wyman may have been uninterested in Holley’s temperance work, even though that work represented a significant part of Holley’s writing and personal convictions. Wyman also furthered

32Ibid., 83.

33See Introduction of this thesis for a brief definition of social feminism vs. “radical” feminism and the conflict among historians about the type of feminism in which nineteenth century women may have participated.

Blyley’s framing of Holley as a feminist author: suffrage primary, temperance secondary and possibly detrimental to Samantha’s credibility and Holley’s political and social causes.

The Holley scholarship declined after Wyman’s paper, but reemerged in the 1970s and spanned the next several decades. Researchers in women’s history and literature offered dissertations, scholarly articles, and monographs about Holley’s life, work, and message. The scholars had great enthusiasm and respect for Holley as a reformer, in the process framing her as a feminist author and advocate for women’s rights, with little alternative interpretation. Most references to temperance ranged from the mildly negative to the overtly dismissive, despite Holley’s frequent arguments for temperance as the most important social improvement. With the feminist frame the scholars blurred Holley’s vision and lessened the breadth of her goal of social reforms through female influence and political activism. As a social feminist Holley was not seeking solely or even primarily to improve the status or treatment of women as a separate or self-contained group, but to improve society for all through the power that a female political voice would provide.

The researchers approached Holley from a variety of perspectives obviously intended to convey deep regard for Holley as a successful woman author and cultural icon. However, this respect for Holley became mired in confusion about the focus of her social vision. For example, Linda Morris may have missed an alternative interpretation of Holley’s feminist convictions. Morris claimed that Holley channeled her “considerable disdain – at times contempt -- for men” through Samantha.35 However, while Holley’s support for women’s rights was obvious, her push for economic and political liberty for women was based not in contempt for men as a group, but in her support for temperance and her belief that women should have a say in ending this major source

of ruination for women, families, and communities. Morris, a scholar of women’s literature, might have underestimated the importance of temperance as a cause for nineteenth century women. For Holley the ballot was a means to many ends, among which temperance was dominant.

Gwendolyn B. Gwathmey, who claimed that “…modern critics have reconstituted Marietta Holley to suit their own political agendas,”36 ironically stayed within the popular scholarly conclusion of Holley as a feminist, but as a feminist with a sentimentalist twist. With no in-depth look at Holley’s temperance work, Gwathmey stated that Holley used her own brand of sentimentality to make palatable Samantha’s “outspoken feminis[m]” and saw in Samantha’s women’s rights stance “hints of a subversive agenda”37 In constructing her argument, Gwathmey claimed that Holley did not follow the sentimental formula of the young girl who endures hardship and heartbreak to be rescued in the end and live happily ever after with a handsome male savior. However, Holley published numerous short stories in ladies’ magazines that followed the traditional sentimental storyline to the letter, and her temperance work adhered to the genre’s formula perfectly.38

Gwathmey noted that Holley’s books were frequently panned by male literary reviewers and critics, and claimed that Holley’s feminism and the overall womanishness of her books may have been partly responsible. However, Gwathmey did not consider several alternatives for Holley’s negative notices. Holley’s books were not great literature destined to be timeless classics: she wrote popular fiction designed to deliver a time-sensitive reform message to a wide audience with varying levels of sophistication. Perhaps the reviewers did not understand that satire was often unfunny, defied in-depth character development, and could not be the sole basis of a coherent plot.

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36 See Introduction of this thesis for this quote.


38 See Chapter Three of this thesis for a discussion of sentimental and temperance literature.
As men in a society that devalued women in general, the reviewers might be unduly critical of female-authored work, particularly when that work delivered a message that threatened male social and political superiority. But most importantly, Holley’s books were saturated with messages about the two major nineteenth century reform movements that were anathema to most men: temperance and woman suffrage.

Some of the scholars probed a little deeper into Holley’s reformist attitudes by reaching beyond the generally accepted view of Holley’s goals and making a connection between Holley’s women’s rights arguments and her agitation for a broader range of social reforms. Shelley Armitage’s claim that Holley tried to rouse in her readers a sense of urgency, the conviction that women could change society for the better with the vote as the engine of change, was an expansion of the women’s rights frame, but stopped short of an in-depth look at Holley’s temperance views. Charlotte Templin came closer to an alternative interpretation of Holley’s motivations and goals when she suggested that rather than focusing exclusively on Holley as an agitator for women’s rights, researchers should investigate Holley’s deeper motives and the meaning behind her quest for female empowerment. For Templin, Holley must be examined within the context of her times and not from the perspective of women scholars nearly a century later. Indeed, Templin was one of the few scholars to identify temperance as Holley’s overarching goal that could be achieved only through political equality between the sexes.

Templin used Holley’s temperance masterpiece, Sweet Cicely, to support her assertion of the need for a different and broader rendering of Holley’s work from that adopted by most of the

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39Shelley Armitage, “Marietta Holley: The Humorist as Propagandist,” *Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature*, Vol. 34, No. 4 (Autumn 1980), 196, 200. Interestingly, Armitage offered a long quote on page 196 of her article from the work of women’s historian Ellen Dubois about the temperance movement, but then failed to connect Holley’s writing specifically to the temperance cause.

feminist Holley scholars. Templin did not pass judgment on the value of *Sweet Cicely* from a feminist standpoint, but instead noted the danger of a restrictive interpretation that might sully the scholarship if used to distort Holley’s intent and meaning.\(^1\) Jane Curry, on the other hand, offered precisely the type of analysis of *Sweet Cicely* that Templin believed misplaced Holley’s message: after noting Holley’s connection of women’s rights and temperance, Curry dismissed the book as a “maudlin melodrama,” a tear-jerker full of “moribund moralizing” that “seek[s] to manipulate emotion and point the way to justice and reform.”\(^2\) From Curry’s late twentieth century perspective temperance was outside the frame of a properly feminist cause; for Holley, temperance was a vital force and absolutely necessary to a well-ordered, equitable, and safe society.

The female-authored Holley scholarship approached and moved into the twenty-first century with the women’s rights frame intact with few alternative interpretations. Karen Lee Cole framed Holley as a feminist author. Although Cole did acknowledge that Holley also had “prohibitionist motives,”\(^3\) she did not discuss the nature of those motives or any of Holley’s temperance writing.

In painting Holley as a feminist pioneer, Carol Whitehouse stayed neatly within the frames that other feminist scholars had established when discussing Holley’s work: Samantha’s logic, her insistence that women should marry for love and not for social standing, and her belief in the family as the basis of a moral society. Whitehouse did not examine temperance as an important alternative Holley cause. For Whitehouse, temperance was not a feminist issue in the same way as suffrage and economic independence. Aside from name-dropping nods to Frances Willard and *Sweet Cicely*,

\(^{41}\)Ibid., 79, 80.

Whitehouse mentioned temperance only parenthetically: “(Temperance was also one of the issues Samantha championed.).”\(^{44}\) A more direct interpretation would have suggested that Holley saw suffrage as the means and temperance as the end.

Shelley Combs stated that “for Samantha, suffrage was the most important social change necessary to improve the lives of women politically as well as socially.”\(^{45}\) For Combs, Holley wrote to promote feminist causes. Basing her argument exclusively on My Opinions, Combs claimed that Holley wrote to battle ideology, to remind her readers that women had been “subjugated” for centuries and were victims of a male-centric social order and culture that would take persistent agitation to change.\(^{46}\) Combs mentioned temperance only once -- not in direct relation to Holley, but in quoting Templin.\(^{47}\)

Most of these Holley analysts focused almost exclusively on her as a feminist author and advocate for women’s rights, and skimmed over her temperance writing. However, the tone of the Holley analysis differed significantly depending upon the sex of the analyst. In focusing on a women’s rights message female historians and literary scholars had an overwhelmingly positive opinion of Holley’s work. For the female researchers Holley was a ground-breaking feminist author, an important female historical figure, and a role model for future generations. In contrast, the male Holley scholars appeared to have a generally negative perspective, framing Holley as a shrill and ludicrous nag, her writing tedious and not particularly funny, and her satire weak and uninspiring. These male authors seemed to miss the possibility that the difficulties women faced


\(^{46}\)Ibid., 142.

\(^{47}\)Ibid., 130.
and the frustration of living without the means or ability to exercise self-determination could spur a woman to develop a writing style that catered not to the expectations or preferences of a male-dominated culture but was designed to encourage social change.

Walter Blair, one of the earliest male Holley analysts, identified equality for women as her most important cause. Blair suggested that Samantha was more alter-ego than comic character. For Blair, Samantha represented a yearning, an “envy and admiration” in the unmarried Holley for the type of life she wanted but missed through a series of life circumstances that prevented her from finding a husband. Blair stumbled into the pitfall of assuming that a single woman must lead a life of dissatisfaction, in the process missing an alternative interpretation: that marriage was a choice, and that a woman who chose to remain single may actually lead a full and meaningful life. In a relapse into the realm of woman’s sphere, Blair judged Holley negatively for embracing one of the few options for self-determination open to women.

Alfred Habegger pointedly criticized Holley’s work and message. Never mentioning Holley’s temperance views, he called Samantha “the great nineteenth century superwoman” for whom domesticity was the foundation of feminism. Although he must have believed that Holley was important enough to merit his analysis, Habegger described Holley’s writing as “preachy,” “self-righteous” nonsense; “domestic,” “by no means…realistic,” and “preposterous.” An alternative interpretation would be that Holley was trying to excite support for reform by making fun of the reality of life for women while simultaneously showing women how to use that reality to effect change. For Holley self-righteousness was one of the few female resorts in a male-dominated

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49 Alfred Habegger, Gender, Fantasy, and Realism in American Literature (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 165.

50 Ibid., 164-166, 168.
system that viewed women as politically incompetent. Holley steeped her stories in domesticity because most of her readers were women, wives and mothers, who related to the humor in ordinary situations and saw that domestic satisfaction and liberty of choice did not have to be mutually exclusive. Samantha was unrealistic, a fictional character created to convey a message through satire in a way that the comic-novel-reading public would understand. Samantha’s travels and interactions with famous people were preposterous: the success of Holley’s message required the reader to suspend disbelief -- the more preposterous the more fun. Holley set out to expose the idiocy and moral shortcomings of a society that denied equal participation to half of the adult population. Habegger faulted Holley for failing to ground her stories in the possible; however, for Holley the satirical use of the unrealistic was an effective way to change reality.

Gregg Camfield, focusing mostly on My Opinions and Samantha at the Centennial, framed his analysis within women’s rights and what he considered to be Holley’s feminism. Camfield’s male perspective may have led him to miss the nuances in Holley’s methods. He criticized Holley for recognizing the necessity of male support for her feminist causes. However, Holley certainly knew that without the right to vote women had no recourse except “to make converts of men.”

Holley injected into Samantha an attitude of respect for male humanity and cooperation between the sexes. Holley was using her vernacular humor and satire to expose men’s lack of respect for female humanity and sexual equality.

Camfield dissected Holley’s dialect looking for a deep meaning instead of accepting the vernacular language of the books’ characters as a simple rhetorical tool. He suggested that Holley was aware that her outlandish scenarios lacked credibility and would “close the eyes of the reader,” and therefore created characters as caricatures of her own message.

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52 Ibid., 108.
was much more direct. When Holley used the vituperative harpy calling for all-out rebellion against men, she was taking a jab at the common and derogatory imagery in political cartoons and male-authored humorous sketches dealing with women’s rights agitators. When Samantha blandly admitted that men were useful and not all bad, she was mirroring society’s view of women’s usefulness within accepted limits. Samantha acknowledged male humanity; Holley’s goal was for men to return the favor. When Holley had the male community and political leaders fall asleep during Samantha’s orations, she was not lampooning Samantha’s message. Holley did not believe even slightly that her message was boring. Her purpose in these passages was much simpler. She was exposing and condemning the demeaning reaction that female reformers frequently elicited from male social and political leadership: inattention and rude dismissal.

Camfield briefly addressed Holley’s temperance views, which he considered to be bombastic, gratuitously tedious, and excessively didactic. An alternative interpretation would be that temperance was Holley’s primary motive and she placed enormous value in these passages. Furthermore, Camfield may have found Holley’s temperance message mind-numbing and overdone, but Holley’s readers clearly did not. Temperance was not passé in Holley’s time, but was a vital movement of extreme importance to large numbers of women. Didacticism was Holley’s point all along. Perhaps toward the end of her career she gave in to frustration that the causes she had advocated for over forty years remained unrealized.

Michael H. Epp framed Holley’s women’s rights message as one of female empowerment but with overtones of “megumness.” Like Camfield, Epp noted Holley’s radical “wimmen’s rights lecturer,” and her depiction of the condescending and dismissive behavior of political leaders.

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53 Ibid., 109.

54 “Megum” is Samantha’s dialectal way of saying “medium.” Throughout all of Holley’s books, Samantha advocated a “megum” approach to life, making the assessment of some scholars that Holley was subversive all the more puzzling.
However, in an interpretation that can be seen as an alternative to Camfield’s, Epp believed that Holley used these scenes to explode stereotypes and unjust attitudes toward and treatment of women in American society. The stereotypes were her satirical way of turning the criticism against the critics.\footnote{55}

While Epp effectively argued that the literal content and context of Holley’s books belonged in a specific place and time, he was overly focused on woman suffrage. In fact, although Epp did not discuss Holley’s temperance writing, to support his thesis of Holley as primarily interested in women’s rights he quoted a passage from \textit{Samantha on the Woman Question} that was filled with temperance rhetoric -- including references to drunken husbands; ill-clothed, neglected children; ruined homes and families; the moral degeneracy of intemperance -- and not a single syllable about suffrage.\footnote{56} As did the other Holley analysts, Epp fell under the allure of the successful suffrage movement and ignored the embarrassment of temperance. An alternative interpretation was that Holley’s motivation was broad social reform that could have a lasting impact on American democracy and culture.

The obvious women’s rights and temperance messages in Holley’s books grew out of the discourse among the books’ characters. This sub-textual foundation to Holley’s message also was also a focus of the Holley scholars. Both female and male researchers analyzed the relationships of Samantha Allen and Betsey Bobbet, and Samantha and Josiah Allen, constructing frames and limiting interpretation of the significance of the characters’ interactions. Interestingly, although in better agreement about the relationships between the characters, female and male analysts still


\footnote{56}Ibid., 103. Of course, a block quote in a scholarly paper does not constitute the finished argument of that paper or reflect the entire context of a scene in a lengthy novel. However, if Holley’s temperance message was outside the frame of Epp’s paper or his interest in Holley as a subject of study, he could have found a different passage to illustrate his argument.

266
seemed to misunderstand Holley’s meaning. She designed the characters to symbolize society and to highlight the need for reforms. However, she also infused the characters with emotion and compassion for one another even when events and attitudes led to conflict. Holley’s goal was to find solutions to conflict that would be socially constructive.

Margaret Wyman studied Holley’s novels through the lens of the relationship between Samantha Allen and Betsey Bobbet as the two sides of the women’s rights argument. However, the frame of Holley as feminist restricted alternative interpretations of Samantha and Betsey both as individuals and as interconnected metaphors for women in American society and culture.

For Wyman, Samantha had negative feelings towards Betsey and Betsey’s lack of intelligence. She described Betsey as Samantha’s “feather brained” foil in the arguments for women’s rights. Indeed, Betsey may have been misguided and determined to support a political and social system that was not in her own best interest, and Samantha may have expressed exasperation toward Betsey’s shenanigans. However, Betsey was hardly feather-brained. Rather, she was a conniver who would have been merely annoying if not for her single-minded pursuit of matrimony. Samantha cared about Betsey and the two had a bond which may not have been exactly friendship but also not devoid of concern. Samantha’s attitude toward Betsey was more one of frustrated pity than disgust.

Wyman did not address the strong undercurrent of allegory in Holley’s work. Samantha was a fictional device, a means to an end for Holley, and almost certainly not a window into Holley’s every personal conviction. Samantha and Betsey were not simple, one-dimensional, female characters in a comic novel. Samantha and Betsey were Holley’s satirical representation of the social, political, and cultural forces that shaped life for nineteenth century American women. The tension between these two personae symbolized the clash of women reformers seeking liberty

of choice and independent being (Samantha) and a society that marginalized women as unworthy of equality or a voice separate from domestic affairs (Betsey). Samantha’s “contempt”\(^{58}\) was not aimed at the person of Betsey, but at the society that Betsey symbolized.

Gwendolyn Gwathmey asserted that Samantha “despises” Betsey for the latter’s sentimentality.\(^{59}\) An alternative interpretation was that Samantha found Betsey misguided, pathetic, and ignorant, but not despicable. Carol Whitehouse claimed that Holley expressed her feminist convictions through the relationship between Samantha and Betsey. For Whitehouse, Samantha was the wise, all-knowing feminist for whom being a “rural country woman” living a “harsh” existence was the mark of honor and integrity and evidence of Holley’s “feminist expression.” Betsey was “desperate…foolish” and unenlightened.\(^{60}\) Indeed, Holley did use parodies of gentility as the basis of humor and Betsey as a comic embodiment of society’s marginalization of women. However, Betsey, although annoying and mistaken, was hardly weak or unintelligent. She, too, was a rural country woman. Her existence was similar to Samantha’s, and neither Samantha nor Betsey appeared to consider this existence as “harsh.”\(^{61}\) Rather, Betsey and the culture she represented

\(^{58}\)Ibid., 305.

\(^{59}\)Gwathmey, “Who Will Read the Book, Samantha?” 35.


\(^{61}\)Samantha’s life circumstances were discussed at length in the work of many Holley analysts, all of whom seemed to agree that Samantha endured Spartan living conditions and interminable toil on her farm and in her rural village. However, as part of the development of Samantha’s character, Holley frequently described life for Samantha Allen, a typical wife and homemaker in rural upstate New York, and her family. Holley’s descriptions of Samantha’s home and family did not support the thesis of hardship. Samantha and Josiah lived mortgage-free on a farm of seventy-five acres. The farm house was two stories and surrounded by numerous gardens and shade-producing, fruit-bearing trees. The interior of the house was spotless, with painted floors and home-made braided carpets. The walls were covered with flowered wallpaper and decorated with local artwork. A mirror hung over the fireplace in a living room furnished with rocking chairs and a padded sofa. The Allens had lucrative orchards and a large meadow that yielded “4 tons of hay to the acre.” In fact, Samantha and Josiah had enough money to send their son to medical school and buy a house for his wedding present. Samantha served hearty meals that included bread, meat, vegetables, pies, cakes, and coffee with honey and cream. When Josiah exclaimed,
were arrogant, ignorant, and formidable -- a combination that attempted, but failed, to overwhelm Samantha as she strove to improve society and claim a place of equality for women. The struggle for a voice in the shaping of culture, not Samantha and Betsey’s lifestyles, was the basis of Holley’s women’s rights convictions.

Shelley Combs argued that the denial of female self-determination in nineteenth century America reflected a conflict of ideologies, and that Holley constructed the tension between Samantha and Betsey to show women that ideology could be changed. For Combs, Samantha was the unshakable feminist and Betsey was “ineffectual” because of her phony gentility, husband-hunting, and anti-suffrage rhetoric. Louisa Cherciu also viewed Holley as a strict feminist. Focusing her study entirely on My Opinions, which she called Holley’s “most successful work,” Cherciu described Holley’s attitude toward Betsey as “viciously negative” and “not sympathetic.” However, contrary to Combs’s and Cherciu’s assessments, Betsey was a very effective, sympathetic, and not at all viciously negative character. Holley created Betsey as a satirical tool expressly to embody these very self-defeating female attitudes. Holley had sympathy for the

“There haint no place quite so good as home” Samantha replied, “The Cause of Right and the Good of the Human Race will be ever dear to the soul of her who was formally Samantha Smith. But at the same time that don’t hender me from thinkin’ a sight of my home, and from getting’ good suppers…there haint another such word as home in the English language.” Contrary to the harsh, colorless existence conveyed in scholarly interpretations of the Allens’ lives, Holley’s descriptions indicated a comfortable, close-knit family. Furthermore, a family living and laboring in a hardscrabble existence could hardly afford the luxury of active participation in social reforms. See My Opinions, pages 24, 25, 426, 429, and 430; and Samantha at the Centennial, 21 and 26.

62Combs, “A Humor of their Own,” 142.

63Ibid., 136.


65Ibid., 72, 77.
misguided women who lacked a sense for the value of self-determination and offered arguments using effective imagery to inspire positive change.

Lara Hernandez Corkrey’s thesis that Holley was not a feminist, but was a True Woman, was a departure from the frames of most other Holley scholars. Corkrey claimed that creating Samantha as “the model of acceptable suffragism” freed Holley to create Betsey as the vehicle for her attack on “sentimentality, True Womanhood, and anti-suffragism.” Corkrey did not explain why the True Woman Holley would want to attack True Womanhood. For Corkrey, Samantha was somewhat one-dimensional rather than the realistic, reform-minded, common sense woman, wife, mother, and friend that Holley created.

Corkrey also concluded that by using dialect and the vernacular of the book’s characters Holley intended to deflect accusations of being “radically subversive” that might alienate her readers: surely an ignorant-sounding hayseed could hardly be an oracle for a feminist movement and could pose no threat to the existing social conventions of her day. However, an alternative interpretation might be that Holley used vernacular not to ridicule her characters, but as a source of humor and a tool for her satirical reform messages. Holley exposed the ridiculous not by the manner of her characters’ speech, but by the content. Samantha may have lacked formal education and experience of the world outside of her own community, but her numerous allusions to history, literature, and religious tracts indicated that she was literate and far from stupid. Holley would not have wanted to offend her readers, of course. However, she used her books as a platform for her reform message, and her popularity would indicate that her readers were not offended.


67 Ibid., 91.
Nancy Walker also commented on Holley’s use of dialect and vernacular language; however, her assessment was the opposite of Corkrey’s. While concluding that Holley pointedly and intentionally protested women’s unequal political and social standing by having Samantha use words such as “sect” for “sex” and “spear” for “sphere,” Walker did not address the fact that Josiah, Betsey, and numerous other characters that did not advocate women’s rights and suffrage also used “spear” and “sect.” These analysts may have placed too much significance upon Holley’s word choice. Holley was direct, vociferous, and relentless in delivering her reform message. She did not mince words, and her humor, satire, and meaning were always clear. Subtle wordplay was not her style.

The other major relationship among Holley’s characters was between Samantha and Josiah. The Holley scholars did not pay much attention to the nature of the relationship between these two characters, preferring to focus on the female elements in Holley’s books. However, Holley’s reform message would have been difficult to convey without the handy device of a dissenting husband. Where Samantha went, Josiah followed, always ready to provide a platform for Samantha’s viewpoints. Josiah was consistently anti-women’s rights and anti-temperance. He believed all the anti-woman suffrage propaganda. He bought and sold votes. He belonged to the pro-license Jonesville Creation Searchin’ Society. And yet, Samantha repeatedly declared her “cast-iron devotion” to her husband, while also wondering why she loved him so. Holley’s readers may have been annoyed with Josiah. In fact, after reading Sweet Cicely, Susan B. Anthony pointed out that Holley’s readers and female reviewers “cannot stand it much longer with Josiah, it is time to


69 Other female Holley analysts including Katherine Blyley, Jane Curry, Cherie Ross, Charlotte Templin, Linda Morris, and Lara Hernandez Corkrey mention “spear” and “sect.” However, these writers do not see the hidden meaning in these words that Walker detects. Also, “spear” for spear and “sect” for sex were common malapropisms among male nineteenth century humorists, including Charles Farrar Browne (Artemus Ward) and Henry Shaw (Josh Billings).
kill him off and for Samantha to marry a smarter man.”\(^{70}\) However, Josiah was a constant thread in Holley’s books and the Allens’ marriage and home life the basis of many of the stories. Holley’s readers could relate to an exasperating and wrong-headed husband who was the perfect foil for Samantha’s arguments.

As an historical figure, Holley has been remembered almost exclusively for her advocacy of women’s rights, and most of the scholars have framed Holley as a feminist with very little alternative interpretation. Unfortunately, her lack of charisma seemed destined to envelop her in obscurity after her death. Clearly Holley was a women’s rights advocate. Feminist is a term that did not exist during Holley’s life, yet has been applied to her because of her advocacy of woman suffrage and equal political rights for women. Within the feminist frame, the nature and impact of Holley’s feminism has been the subject of much debate. She has been characterized both as a subversive radical and a supporter of social change within the culture of female domesticity. For some she was a keen observer of human nature and behavior, for others a tiresome, self-righteous nag. Holley’s use of vernacular language, humor, and satire to spread her so-called feminist views made her unique among nineteenth century women authors. Some lauded her as effective and others dismissed her as hopelessly trite and embarrassing.

Holley’s motivation has been examined. Each of the analysts may have had a different perspective based on personal opinion or the desire to make a specific point. Because Holley’s reticence to make public appearances or go on lecture circuits or make stump speeches belied her ability to promote social reform, some scholars have considered what Holley hoped to accomplish with her Samantha novels. Some have said Holley wrote because of a genuine desire to spur improvement in the lives of women, others have said was she writing only for the money. The sex of the scholars appeared to influence the assessment of the analysts toward Holley and her work.

\(^{70}\)Susan B. Anthony to Marietta Holley, January 31, 1886.
reflecting a sort of battle of the sexes that has persisted even into the twenty-first century. Some of the analysts seemed to have difficulty separating Holley from her main character, Samantha Allen, as though Holley must have agreed with everything that Samantha said or did. For others, Holley might have given Samantha idiosyncratic traits to reinforce the meaning of the message.

Although these points of debate appeared to show differences among the Holley scholars, the scholarship was remarkably homogenous: the scholarly discourse has occurred almost exclusively within the feminist frame. The researchers sought out few alternative interpretations. Of course, no one can truly know how Holley hoped to be remembered, and how or even if she wanted to be remembered. What seems certain is that Holley had a vision and mission to work for equal political rights for women. However, a careful reading of her work revealed that her driving motivation was larger than simply garnering the right to vote. Ironically, despite Holley’s numerous references to temperance in her “Story;” her hope that “my earnest talk on temperance from the time I began writing to the present time has helped a little to forward the great wave that is sweeping over this world at this time;” her steadfast commitment to end intemperance, “the system I was always warring against and writing about;” the common knowledge among her family, friends, and acquaintances that *Sweet Cicely* was Holley’s “best loved” and “favorite book;”⁷¹ the majority of Holley memoirists have at least marginalized and at worst totally disregarded what she considered to be her most important cause. In doing so these people have distorted the meaning of Holley’s message with a revisionism that called into question the motives and integrity of the Holley scholarship, and had implications for the meaning of academic discourse.

For Holley the most critical social reform was temperance. Acknowledging this fact would mean an expansion of the feminist frame beyond the limits of women’s rights and woman suffrage. A new, alternative perspective would be required.

Holley envisioned a society reformed through the activism of women. Her vision extended beyond her retirement, beyond the passage of the nineteenth amendment, and beyond even her own death. Her vision encompassed both female liberty and female independence emerging through social reform and the personal and financial security that a temperate society would foster. This vision required woman suffrage but did not end with woman suffrage. Holley had the means to deliver a message during her active years as an author, and her work was a testament to the capacity of one person to have wide-ranging influence. Despite the fact that as a woman she could have no direct impact on political affairs, if she could, through her writing, change even one person’s mind about what she considered to be the way to achieve social justice her mission was accomplished.
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