

FEMINIST SATIRE

by

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While a tradition of feminist satire can be traced back to the nineteenth century, relatively little has been written on the subject. Feminist satire, I propose, is a dialogue women have created in their quest for equal rights. Through the humorous appeal of satire, feminist writers are able to capture an audience and expose the obstacles women must face in their pursuit of equality.

The purpose of this thesis is twofold: to define feminist satire and to show how the progress of the women's movement has influenced the development of feminist satire. To do this I have chosen three women to study--Dorothy Parker, Anne Sexton, and Nicole Hollander. Each woman's work represents a different phase of the twentieth century women's movement in America, and through this contrast we can see the development of feminist satire.

'Biologically means in terms of life as God, in Her time created it: wom and manwom in the natural state. And all the animals. First She made the world, and last she made wom. Actually She'd originally intended that wom would be the final touch to crown the rest of creation, so She wouldn't create anything else. But She hadn't thought how she would reproduce herself when there was only a single example of her. The wom complained to God of her need, and then God took a limb from the wom, and from it She made manwom. That explains why wom doesn't have to bear the most exposed and vulnerable of all limbs. That has been her strength. And as things have developed, she has known how to use it.'

From Egalia's Daughters

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INTRODUCTION

For years I have endeavored to calm an impetuous tide--labouring to make my feelings take an orderly course--it was striving against the stream.

Mary Wollstonecraft

"Feminist satire," I have been told, is an oxymoron. Just like "sweet sorrow" and "jumbo shrimp," the words "feminist" and "satire" seem paradoxically coupled to some. I have been told this by men and babes, the misled and the ignorant, who mistake stereotype for truth. The discrepancy is not in the expression "feminist satire," but in the age-old clichés that propagate 'feminist equals bitch' and 'men write satire.' A male professor once told me, "We all know feminists lack a sense of humor." To reply "and we all know men think with their ..." would be tit for tat and that is exactly what we are trying to break away from.

"Feminist satire" is not an oxymoron. Feminist satire is a developing genre of literature that serves as an alternative voice for women to express their social, political, and economic concerns. The intent of this thesis is to parallel the development of satire written by women to the feminist movement of twentieth century America. Satire, I propose, is an effective tool of communication which uses comic devices to draw in an audience, to illuminate the obstacles women face trying to

secure an equal place in society. In the process of this exploration, I must analyze the terms "feminist" and "satire" in order to create a working definition that incorporates both feminist doctrine and traditional satiric conventions. To do this it is important first to define satire, and then overview the women's movement. From this stew of information the objectives of feminist satire will emerge. Following this I will review specific works of feminist satire. My primary sources include Dorothy Parker's poems and short stories, selections from Transformations by Anne Sexton, and numerous cartoons from the collected works of Nicole Hollander. In this survey I will expand the definition of "literature" to include cartoons, in order to show the wide variety of mediums that satire crosses. In the process of defining and exposing feminist satire, I will consider and discuss secondary criticism as it applies.

PART ONE
TOWARD DEFINING FEMINIST SATIRE

CHAPTER ONE

SATIRE

Arrows of satire, feathered with wit, and wielded
with sense, fly home to their mark.

C. Simmons

Satire is a genre of literature defined and distinguished by tone. It arrests the reader's attention by humoring him or her to expose or teach a moral lesson. Satire entices the reader with laughter, then cleverly twists the outburst into a grimace. The word "satire" comes from the Latin "satura," meaning medley, a dish of various fruits or a mixed salad (Higley 23). Satire borrows techniques from comedy and irony, utilizing ridicule, sarcasm, understatement, and exaggeration, but differs in its intent or moral obligation.

It is not enough to be simply funny or contemptible in satire: neither act provides the appropriate depth necessary to compel the reader into questioning that which is being satirized. Northrop Frye claims that there are two boundaries of satire--denunciation and the "humor of pure gaiety." It is the counterbalance, he explains, that constitutes effective satire:

For satire one needs both pleasure in conflict and the determination to win: both the battle and the coolness of calculation. To have too much hatred and too little gaiety will upset the balance of tone ("Nature" 16).

Satire and Comedy

Too much gaiety is the gist of comedy--poking fun to make fun, ridiculous behavior for the sake of pure entertainment. The typical comedy is characterized by two young lovers separated by an opposition (a traditional example includes Shakespeare's The Winter's Tale). Through "some twist in the plot" the lovers are reunited in the end to form a "new society" ("Spring" 84). What distinguishes satire from comedy is not only the plot structure, but also the outcome. In comedy the humorous society is laughed at but does not change, and in the end, restores the same status quo that it ridicules. Satire, in contrast, wants to change the status quo. Frye states that "we usually associate satire with comedy, but to the extent that a comedy is satiric it possesses a more than comic seriousness. A comedy is, or purports to be, a study of human behavior, and in its most concentrated forms ... we are superficially conscious of only an amiable and civilized prattle" ("Nature" 26).

In satire, however, we are more conscious of what lies behind the "prattle," and recognize that comedy is being used as a device to draw in the audience and expose the larger issue(s) at hand. In the satirist's willingness to substitute the happy ending of comedy for a situation that leads to resolution, satire resembles tragedy.

Edgar Johnson separates satire from comedy by pointing out the kind of responsibility an audience must assume: "Even laughing satire is laughing-at, not mere irresponsible laughter" (7).

Spontaneous, reckless laughter is what makes comedy both appealing and entertaining. The function of comedy is to humor and momentarily release the audience through a series of complicated events. Happy endings are characteristic of comedy not because they "impress us as true, but as desirable" ("Spring" 88). While entertainment is a part of satire, it is a secondary function. The primary objective of satire is to review, criticize, and correct unacceptable principles and practices. Applying the flexibility of comedy, satire is able to attack vigorously anything that is rigid, for the purpose of transformation and resurrection. Satire does not promise a happy ending, but suggests that one is possible through corrected behaviour.

The targets of satire are many; conservative behaviour, hypocrisies, pretensions, and "conventional respectabilities which are hidden absurdities or vices blindly accepted by thoughtlessness, habit or social custom," shape the most apparent categories (Johnson 7). In synthesizing the definition and objects of satire, Frye states that satire is "poetry assuming a special function, that is [the] breaking up lumber of stereotypes, fossilized beliefs, superstitious terrors, crank theories, pedantic dogmatisms, oppressive fashions, and all things that impede the free movement of society" ("Nature" 20).

Satire and Irony

As satire and irony are often mistaken for one another and

incorrectly interchanged, it is important to briefly discuss their differences. Irony is similar to tragedy in its plot structure--through a descending course of events the main character is destroyed--but unlike tragedy in its outcome. While good overcomes evil in the end of a traditional tragedy, irony often ends with a pointless sacrifice. Through the plot development of the story, irony manipulates the reader into developing an expectation that will most likely not be fulfilled, but results instead in the opposite or unexpected. Irony infects the reader with dissatisfaction, confusion, and misunderstanding. Although these reactions are often side effects of satire, satire demands a more thoughtful response from its audience. Satire puts the reader in a position to trace his or her response to the source, to question what is being satirized and why, and then to make the leap of faith for the advocacy of change. In its implicit claim to 'know better' satire assumes an air of righteousness. Irony lacks the gumption of satire and, in contrast, is less obvious and direct. In "The Mythos of Winter: Irony and Satire," Frye writes:

The chief distinction between irony and satire is militant irony: its moral norms are relatively clear, and it assumes standards against which the grotesque and absurd are measured. Sheer invective or namecalling ("flyting") is satire in which there is relatively little irony: on the other hand, whenever a reader is not sure what the author's attitude is or what his is supposed to be, we have irony with relatively little satire (155).

Thus conclusively and simply, satire criticizes the problems of society with the hope for correction and change. Its targets include conservative and pretentious behaviour, prevarications perpetuated by social rituals, oppressive customs and stereotypes. Satire borrows techniques from comedy and irony, employing ridicule, mockery, exaggeration, understatement, wit, farce, surprise, and distortion. Satire's own unique techniques include reduction, mimicry, and parody. Satire differs from comedy in its intent and moral obligation to educate and advocate change. Matthew Hodgart states that satire is "literature as propaganda for right action, which 'heals with morals, what it hurts with wit'" (16).

CHAPTER TWO
THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

Feminist

Having slumbered
She rose and shook
Victorian shadows from her hair

Rita Mae Brown

The Relevance of Language

In The Creation of Patriarchy, Gerda Lerner stresses the importance of redefining the English language, a current topic among certain feminist thinkers. The premise of redefinition lies in the failure of our language to represent both sexes. This inadequacy in language has a direct link to patriarchal dominance, as it is an extension of a hierarchial system that marginalizes women and supports inequality. To understand the goal of feminist satire it is necessary to acknowledge the relationship between gender defined words and discrimination against women. Feminist satire is a part of the movement to redefine how women are depicted in language, to change how they are treated in society.

The issue of language is a fundamental point of controversy for feminists. Dale Spender, author of Man Made Language, writes:

One of the basic principles of feminism is that society has been constructed with a bias which

favours males; one of the basic principles of feminists who are concerned with language is that this bias can be located in language (14).

This bias, research has shown, is apparent in the distribution of words. Throughout the development of language, more positive words have been assigned to males than to females. This imbalance (one form of sexism) further perpetuates itself in misrepresentations and stereotypes. The harm in this tradition of codes is very simple: when a woman is depicted as inferior in language she is treated as an inferior in society. Furthermore, the continued use of sex-types devalues the status of women. If a woman is defined as "feminine," "passive," "physically weak," or "emotional," her occupational and social options become inherently restrictive. As a woman tries to free herself from traditional roles, stereotypes and double standards handicap her progress. "The feminine mystique," an exalted image of the happy homemaker, is one example of how a stereotype can narrow a woman's career choices.

The misuse of the words "sex" and "gender," Lerner states, creates a false expectation for equality. "Sex" is a biological distinction, while "gender" is "a set of cultural roles." It is from gender that we derive the terms "feminine" and "masculine," labels that are attached to women and men "in a given society at a given time" (238). In feminist satire gender roles are exposed as harmful deterrents that keep women from receiving equal treatment in society.

In the fight for equality women do not want to be the same sex, but want equal opportunity and treatment among the sexes, and not to be segregated by gender. In her book Beyond Power, Marilyn French underscores the importance of understanding the feminist use of the word "equality." Equality is not assimilation. "The equality we must fight for is political and economic sufficiency: a position strong and broad enough to give us a voice in the large decisions affecting culture, a position rich and admirable enough to allow alteration of that culture through example and influence" (French 474).

Women involved in the feminist movement want equal, humanistic rights. In using the word humanistic I do not mean in terms of the Humanities (a sect of education dominated in the past by men), but in the quality of being human. Mary Wollstonecraft said that women do not want to be treated as females (as defined by gender), but as "human creatures" (7). As with other movements led by oppressed groups (people deprived of equal rights), the feminist movement has strove not to achieve a superior status for women, but to relinquish that of the inferior. Women want independence: "the inalienable rights, that among these are life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness...." It is the promise of these rights that has been the fundamental thesis and motivation propelling the women's movement.

The History Behind the Movement: 1820-1920

While Mary Wollstonecraft laid the foundation for the women's movement in her work The Vindication of the Rights of Woman (published in 1792), the movement took another thirty years to organize. In America the women's movement essentially began in the 1820s as part of the undertaking to abolish slavery. It picked up momentum in the 1830s and 1840s when working women participated in unionism. The impetus which brought women together specifically to discuss women's rights occurred in 1840 at the World Anti-Slavery Convention in London, when women delegates were denied seats. It was the outrage from this denial that compelled women to gather in Seneca Falls, New York, eight years later. At the meeting in New York women declared: "We hold these rights to be self-evident: that women are created equal" (Deckard 252). During this meeting, Barbara Sinclair Deckard writes, "the forms of social, economic and legal discrimination against women were listed and women pledged to use every means to end discrimination. The only disagreement was on whether to demand the right to vote..." (252).

A tradition of feminist satire can be traced back to this time period in the women's movement. Fanny Fern, for example, published newspaper articles in the 1850s and 1860s that attacked, with anger and wit, the way women behaved and were treated in society. In an article published in 1851, Fern encourages women to be more "sensible" in their pursuits: "It

makes me sick; it is perfectly antimonial. Love is a farce; matrimony is humbug; husbands are domestic Napoleans, Neros, Alexanders..." (Fern 220). Though other well known women of the movement, such as Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, wrote feminist articles and speeches, they were not overtly satiric.

The first organized women's group, "The Female Anti-Slavery Society," gathered in 1853 (Deckard 251). When the "Equal Rights Association"--an organization established to work for the rights of blacks and white women--split in 1869, the "National Women Suffrage Association" (NWSA) formed. The founding of this group marked the beginning of a dedicated, arduous battle for suffrage, a crusade that became the focal point of the women's movement for the next forty years. In The Grounding of Modern Feminism, Nancy F. Cott discusses the decisive link between suffrage and the development of the women's movement:

...voting appeared as a more pressing need for women, and diverse kinds of women could see the vote as a concrete goal around which to form a coalition. Since both male and female reformers had been pushing for more than a decade for government investigation and regulation of housing, factory conditions, and community health and safety, suffragists could argue that modern conditions bridged the chasm between the realm of politics and women's conventional role at home (29).

Suffrage, therefore, was the moving force that brought women together to work collectively for the cause of women's rights.

Suffragists created the environment for women to voice their discontent for women's dissatisfactory place in society. From this set of circumstances came a new kind of women: the Feminists.

The Birth of Feminism

It was during the early 1900s that the word "feminism" came into use. Up to this point, people spoke of "the advancement of women," "the cause of women," and "women suffrage" (Cott 3). The word "feminism" took on a significant meaning because it could be distinguished from the suffrage movement while--at the same time--encompassing it. Cott writes that this word was "both broader and narrower," in that it "proclaimed revolution in all relations of the sexes" while it narrowed "the range of its willing adherents" (3).

Even though the focus of the movement has shifted greatly since the granting of suffrage in 1920, the word "feminism" has retained the same basic doctrine. States Cott:

Feminism asks for sexual equality that includes sexual difference. It aims for individual freedoms by mobilizing sex solidarity. It posits that women recognize their unity while it stands for diversity among women. It requires gender consciousness for its basis yet calls for the elimination of prescribed gender roles (5).

Despite its changing methods and broadening objectives, feminism still represents women's desire for and commitment to obtaining equal rights.

CHAPTER THREE
FEMINIST SATIRE DEFINED

The heat took many forms; it showed itself in satire, in curiosity, in reprobation. But there was another element which was present and could not immediately be identified. Anger, I called it.

Virginia Woolf

Given the history of the feminist movement, and the idiosyncracies that distinguish satire from other literary genres, "feminist satire" becomes a complex phrase to define. Feminist satire is an adapted genre and language that women have cultivated in their pursuit of equal rights. Because satire targets "all things that impede the free movement of society," it is an appropriate vehicle of communication for discussing societal conditions that have restricted the progress of women.

Spender states that "we need a language that constructs the reality of women's autonomy, women's strength, women's power" (190). While satire is not the solution, it is a solution, a kind of language that allows women to speak out and be heard. Through satire women are able to express the anger they feel for being treated as second class citizens in society. To be only invective in satire misses the point; to be militant as an advocate of women's rights limits the size and interest of the audience when the militancy is perceived as

both offensive and/or extreme. Conversely, to be only humorous about women's rights belittles the issues. It is the balance of conviction and humor that attracts, keeps, and educates an audience.

The development of feminist satire reflects the evolution of the history of the women's movement in its increasing tendency to be outspoken and tenacious. Whereas the satire of Dorothy Parker's stories is found by reading between the lines of the narrative, Nicole Hollander's cartoons, created sixty years later, lack no courage in their attack and leave little room for doubt in their message. This progression in American feminist satire has moved from subtle nudges to pointed barbs as women have grown more confident with satiric dialogue.

As with traditional satire, feminist satire confronts rigid and pretentious behaviour, false fronts, oppressive customs, and stereotypes. Where satire criticizes "the problems of society," feminist satire sorts out the specific problems which directly and indirectly affect women. Feminist satire condemns the perpetuation of stereotypes and customs that oppress women and other minority groups. Any form of behaviour, ritual, or law that hinders choices and rights of women is the target of feminist satire.

The goal of feminist satire, therefore, is to expose those impediments, to point out their fundamental inequity, for the purpose of change and improvement. The objectives of the feminist movement are the objectives of feminist satire:

1. To change the negative "image of women in print and broadcast media" (Deckard 389).
2. To establish employment and education rights: equal pay, opportunity, and treatment without discrimination or sexual harassment.
3. To improve the availability of child care for persons of all income levels.
4. To upgrade the position and status of the homemaker.
5. To assure and protect lesbian and gay rights.
6. To secure a woman's rights regarding her physical welfare: health care, birth control, and abortion.
7. To eliminate violence against women: to try cases of domestic violence and rape as serious felonious crimes, to aid and educate the victims.
8. To pass the Equal Rights Amendment (ERA).

Because the subject matter of feminist satire is grave and sometimes dark, the response is often bitter laughter. While the reader may chuckle at the familiar stereotype, he or she laughs more knowingly than joyfully. Furthermore, because the aim of feminist satire is to acknowledge the discrimination against women, and men have frequently been the perpetrators, feminist satire tends to be more accessible to women than men. In the case of Hollander's cartoons, some men "don't get it" or fail to understand "what's so funny" about a cartoon that pokes fun at masculine and feminine stereotypes. Without the knowledge of being a woman, or at least a sympathetic understanding, the humor of douche commercials and the scepticism of men in relationships becomes more of a challenge.

Feminist satire is optimistic. At its best it teaches women to laugh at themselves and, in this, becomes a cathartic experience. Diana Raznovich, an Argentine cartoonist, alludes

to the potential of feminist satire when she defines humor:

Humor is always a form of intelligence, a form of distance, because when one is able to laugh at oneself, one is already able to change.... Humor is always a rupture, a transgression of how life is supposed to be. It's the power to turn over what's there and see the other side. We can see hypocrisy, vested interests, and the falsehood of such an apparently solid world (78).

Whether or not the reader recognizes the target of repudiation because of personal experience, understanding what is being satirized is the first step in understanding the need for change. Gloria Kaufman states that feminist satire "seeks to improve by demonstrating...our human folly." Furthermore, she claims that feminist satire "exposes realities not merely out of love for truth but also out of desire for reform. Whether or not reforms are achieved, they are implicit ideals. In this sense feminist satire...is founded on hope and predicated on a stance of non-acceptance" (14).

It is the "stance of non-acceptance" and the spirit of laughter, combined and directed toward action, that shapes and ultimately defines feminist satire.

PART TWO

PARALLELS OF DEVELOPMENT:

THE WOMEN'S MOVEMENT

AND

FEMINIST SATIRE

CHAPTER FOUR

TO BE OUTSPOKEN IN THE TWENTIES:
DOROTHY PARKER

Sometimes I wonder if men and women really suit each other. Perhaps they should live next door and just visit now and then.

Katherine Hepburn

Reckless but not Liberated: The Twenties

While the 1920s marked an important time for women, as they began to vote and to experiment with more liberal social behaviors, actual changes in women's rights were slow to come. Unfortunately, once suffrage was granted a women's party failed to materialize. At the polls women tended to vote like men and still were not supported in their pursuit of political careers. Women who were allowed to hold office generally assumed the position through succession of their husbands. While it was considered "fashionable for young middle-class women to work," the choices made available to them were anything but "fashionable" (Deckard 291). Furthermore, women did not enter the job market for spending-money, but because it was "a matter of economic necessity" (Daniel 23).

During this era, more women engaged in pre-marital sex and were inclined to be less discrete about their sexual relations. Deckard states that the "revolution of lifestyles," which has been characterized by the flappers, had little to do with women's changing position in society:

But greater sexual freedom for women did not

mean freedom to get an equal higher education, or to choose a career or to be paid equal wages, or to be equal in the family. Girls stressed their individual "freedom" (of sex) but showed little interest in women's rights or equal social position. The "revolution" in sexual mores was real, but superficial (294-95).

Not only did the flapper represent a small percentage of women, but also a woman interested in a different kind of progress. In truth the reckless stereotype of the twenties has disguised the fact that women's occupational and educational choices were still limited. Although women became freer in their speech and dress, they were still confined to the roles of wife and mother, and discouraged from pursuing independent lifestyles.

In contrast to the feminist objectives of the women's movement, the permissive experiments of the flapper and the "New Woman" were shallow. In the context of fashion and social trends, what this new style did reflect was a stirring attitude among a number of women. Although their place in society was governed by men and tradition, women were becoming more liberated in their appearance, social behavior, sexual practices, and dialogue. In other words, women were becoming increasingly less tolerant of roles they had assumed, but not chosen, and while they could not change their society, they began to change their behavior within the society.

Dorothy Parker in the Twenties

It was during the era of the twenties that Dorothy Parker

began to write. in 1915, at the age of twenty-three, Parker published her first verse in Vogue, and shortly thereafter was hired to write illustration captions. In 1917 she left Vogue to work for Vanity Fair, then an important magazine for introducing "avant-garde painters and writers, among them Picasso, Matisse, Marie Laurencin, Raoul Duffy, Gertrude Stein, e.e. cummings, D.H. Lawrence and T.S. Eliot" (Keats 33-34). In 1918 she was hired at Vanity Fair to fill in as drama critic, and worked there until 1920 when she was fired for "outspoken criticism" (Kinney 21).

It was during this time period, before and after Parker's stay at Vanity Fair, that the Algonquin Round Table was established. The Table was a "mutually supportive society for high standards of language," consisting of hopeful artist-types. Parker was the only woman of the original members and a key contributor within the group (Kinney 33). The biographer John Keats discusses the makeup of this influential group:

... in the beginning, most of the people, so many of whose names are now familiar, were by no means established as musicians, artists, players, producers, playwrights, and writers. Instead, most of them were then hard-working and not well-paid men and women in their middle twenties who came from the provinces to seek their fortunes on Broadway or on New York's newspaper and magazine staffs. They were, most of them, on their way up, and what they had in common was their talent, their wit, and their taste, their readiness to do at anytime anything that promised to be fun, and a kind of inner

certainty of their future successes (52).

The Algonquin Round Table represented that cavalier attitude associated with the Café Society that was especially popular among the middle-to-upper classes of New York. Parker's association with this predominately male group helped to cultivate her reputation as a wit and a clever writer.

In the practice of being outspoken and independent (despite an eleven-year marriage to Edwin Parker, she lived with him only one to two of those years), she was considered to be one of the "New Women" (Keats 50). "The New Woman," Cott writes, "stood for self-development as contrasted to self-sacrifice or submergence" (39). Parker's writing reflects this independence and was judged accordingly. In the introduction to The Portable Dorothy Parker, Brenden Gill discusses the controversial element of Parker's work:

These verse, which became something of a national rage, were thought of as strong stuff: brusque, bitter, and unwomanly in their presumed cynicism. They gave the average reader an impression of going recklessly far in asserting a woman's equal rights inside a sexual relationship, including the right to infidelity (xvi).

The significance of Parker's writing at this time lay not only in the boldness of her pen, but also the choice of her occupation. To make a living as a writer has always been a difficult occupation, especially without other financial

resources. Though women have done it, their status and the subsequent imbalance of wages has made it particularly difficult. Throughout the twenties and into the thirties Parker published verse, prose, short stories, articles and reviews in several well known magazines, among them The Saturday Evening Post, Life, Ladies' Home Journal, and The New Yorker. She also co-authored her first book, Women I'm Not Married To; Men I'm Not Married To, with Robert Benchley, collaborated on a variety of play and film scripts, and published two collections of poems, Enough Rope and Sunset Gun.

"Dorothy Parker," writes Arthur F. Kinney, "was quick to sympathize with those who suffered or were indentured--those she could pity because of misfortune in politics, money, race or sex" (Kinney preface). Parker targets in her satire the pretensions and hypocrisies that result from class and sex divisions, the relationships and roles of men and women: double standards, miscommunications, delusions of love and marriage, romantic myths, and social expectations. In her satire, Parker treats her subjects with sadness and derision, combining "the child's ambition and hope with an adult's sense of outrage and cynacism at shallowness and self-deception, at uneven and unrequited distribution of favors in this world" (Kinney preface). While Parker tends to be direct in her poems, her stories are less obvious in their campaign for correction. In her stories Parker created a scenario, often funny on the edge

of pathetic, that guides the reader into interpreting the implicit moral message. A prevalent quality of her stories is the sense of familiarity she evokes through her characters and dialogue.

The Satire of Dorothy Parker's Short Stories and Poems

I have chosen two stories and three poems from The Portable Dorothy Parker to discuss the satiric approach and themes of Parker's work. The stories specifically attack the rituals of courtship, appearances and expectations of marriage, miscommunication and misunderstanding, and perceived social poses of women. The poems, on the lighter side but nonetheless satiric, question the myth of perfect love, illusions of romance, and men's position in relationships.

Misunderstanding, a product of forced conversation inspired by ritualistic dating, is the target of satire in "The Sexes." In this story a young man and woman meet after work one evening. From their first encounter the couple's interactions are rehearsed, uncomfortable, and full of skepticism. He offers her a cigarette, she declines; he asks if she would take one if he had another kind, volunteering to run down to the store. She says thank you--but no, thanking him again. He snaps, "Will you for God's sake stop thanking me?" She recoils, offended, and here begins the first misunderstanding. As in many interactions between intimate persons, the intent to be close is genuine, but the manner and style of communication each person takes helps to shape the misunderstanding and pull the two apart.

Once the pattern of disagreement is initiated there is little hope of immediate reconciliation. She refuses to drop the pretense of being offended, and he continues to play out his role (the faultless male), inserting a pleadful "honey" when appropriate. In the following dialogue we see the level of utter childishness they have reached:

"I guess nothing I say makes a difference to you, he said.

"You seem to be sore at me."

"I'm sore at you," she said. "I can't understand what put that idea into your head. Why would I be sore at you?"

"That's what I'm asking you," he said, "Won't you tell me what I've done? Have I done something to hurt your feelings, honey?"

The way you were over the phone, you had me worried all day. I couldn't do a lick of work."

"I certainly wouldn't want to feel," she said, "that I was interfering with your work. I know there are lots of girls that don't think anything of doing things like that, but I think it's terrible. It certainly isn't very nice to sit here and have someone tell you you interfere with his business."

"I didn't say that!" he said. "I didn't say it"

(Parker 26).

This dialogue of exaggerated sentiment and over reaction fails to go beyond a superficial level of communication. The couple is caught in a game that is rooted in jealousy and played out by assuming traditional gender roles. He alludes to the office and the importance of his work, asserting a tone of professional superiority. She counters by saying that she is not the kind of woman to interfere, referring to the stereotype of the meddling woman.

Their conversation continues to digress when the woman

mentions the name "Florence Leaming." Taking his cue, the man becomes defensive when she reminds him of the time he was "making such a fuss over Florence Leaming, I thought you never wanted see anybody else." "My God," he exclaims, "this what's-her-name girl came up and began talking to me..., what could I do? I couldn't sock her in the nose, could I?" She flippantly replies that her should have at least tried. Around and around they go until she comments on the unattractive quality of Florence Leaming's nose and he readily takes the bait:

"She's got a terrible nose," he said. "You've got a beautiful nose. Gee, you've got a pretty nose."
"Oh, I have not," she said. "You're crazy."
"And beautiful eyes," he said, "and beautiful hair and a beautiful mouth. And beautiful hands. Let me have one of the little hands. Ah, look att a little hand! Who's got the prettiest hands in the world? Who's the sweetest girl in the world?"

By creating petty and repititious dialogue, Parker belittles the approach each sex assumes in courtship. Through exaggerating the dialogue she reduces the characters down to a childish level, exposing the mundane quality of their relationship. What makes the above scene feminist is the insight the reader gains on the sexist maneuvers of reconciliation. The underlying message is that women can be persuaded and manipulated through flattery. While this techniqe, reduction, is frequently used by authors, it does not always come off as satire.

In Ernest Hemingway's short story "Hills Like White Elephants," there exists a couple that carries on in a similar manner as the man and woman in "The Sexes." The difference is that their interactions are characterized by invective, without the "humor of gaiety." The manner in which the two bicker hinders their ability to communicate, and in this characterization there lacks the conviction that there is a better way to relate to one another. Hemingway accepts the complacency as an inevitable consequence of a relationship between a man and a woman. In "Hills Like White Elephants" the reader is left with the uncertainty that is characteristic of irony, "Why are they acting like this?" "What is the point?"

In "The Sexes" the couple's interactions are mundane, but humorous. By making the couple funny, Parker encourages the reader to recognize the pretense each person hides behind; the reason why the couple is behaving the way they are is because they are acting out a gender role. In Hemingway's story the characters are too mean and too passive for the reader to make the connection between destructive behavior and the need for change. Instead, the couple's interactions seem pointless and the story ends with the resignation that this is the way couples of the opposite sex will always behave. In "The Sexes" there is hope; even though the characters may not recognize why they behave the way they do, the reader realizes that it is because they are adhering to the roles of "the sexes," gender

roles that are not absolute and can be changed.

Miscommunication is a popular theme in Parker's stories. In "Too Bad" the couple is older than the two in "The Sexes," and married. Despite their graduation from dating, their interactions are more uncomfortable, worsened by years of habit. To the eye of the outsider, the Weldons are "happily married" and "so congenial." When they decide to separate, friends and neighbors are beside themselves for a reason why. The inside story tells us that for years they have had nothing to say to one another. It is an excellent satire in its mimicry and criticism of the appearances of marriage, the myth of "happily ever after," and the falseness of ready-made, easy relationships.

After pages of cheerfully forced greetings and long awkward silences, the Weldons sit down to dinner. The topic of their conversation, tomato soup, exacerbates their uncomfortableness:

"Oh, tomato soup, eh?" he said.
 "Yes," she answered. "You like it, don't you?"
 "Who--me?" he said. "Oh, yes. Yes, indeed." She
 smiled at him.
 "Yes, I thought you liked it," she said.
 "You like it, too, don't you?" he inquired.
 "Oh yes," she assured him. "Yes, I like it ever
 so much. I'm awfully fond of tomato soup."
 "Yes," he said, "there's nothing better than
 tomato soup on a cold night."
 She nodded.
 "I think it's nice too," she confided (176).

At the end of this discussion Parker tells us that throughout the course of their marriage, seven years, the Weldons have had

tomato soup "probably three times a month." This disclosure undercuts the significance of the chosen conversation topic.

This type of dialogue continues through the meal, on to the steak and into the pie. In the quiet moments they smile at each other and Grace reflects on how little they have to say. To herself she remarks:

What did married people talk about, anyway, when they were alone together? She had seen married couples--not dubious ones but people she knew were husbands and wives--at the theater or in trains, talking together as animatedly as if they were just acquaintances. She had always watched them, marveling, wondering what on earth they found to say. She could talk well enough to other people. There never seemed enough time to finish saying all she wanted to say to her friends (177).

In recollecting their years together, Grace tries to recall if they ever had anything to say to one another, even as acquaintances, and realizes they did not. Earlier, during their courtship, it had not occurred to her because "she had always heard that true love was inarticulate." Along this train of thought she muses:

Then, besides, there had been always kissing and things, to take your mind up. But it turned out true that marriage was apparently equally dumb. And you can't depend on kisses and all the rest to while away the evenings, after seven years (178).

As she grapples to find something to say, reprimanding herself for not "performing [her] duty," she second-guesses all

possible conversation topics. Their silence disturbs her, as it was not "one of those cozy, companionable silences that people occasionally fall into." Finding nothing "worth hearing" to say, she asks "vivaciously," "Like your pie, Ernie?"

The significance of Mrs. Weldon's reflections are twofold. First and foremost, the fact that the protagonist is female, introspective, and active in resolving her discontent, presents a rare alternative for a woman of the American short story of this time period. Mrs. Weldon recognizes the consequences of marrying to fulfill a social expectation, the futility of maintaining such pretenses, and terminates the relationship. In the process of doing this we see her emphatic attempts to perform her marital duties, for it is she who takes the responsibility to make conversation, however feeble it is. She also tries her hand at "touch-giving," straightening the room with "those little feminine touches" (171). While it is easy to laugh at the stereotype Mrs. Weldon represents, she is still a recognizable and familiar type of woman. Mrs. Weldon's discomfort with this occupation underscores the shallowness of her assumed gender role--to be a good wife--and reveals her aspirations for something better.

Second, by targeting marriage Parker elucidates the false belief that a woman's success lies in obtaining a good husband and being a dutiful wife. Where popular belief (perpetuated by the media) advocates love-at-first-sight and life happily-ever-after, Parker shows us the qualities of real life marriage.

Parker destroys the symbol of perfect marriage by revealing the imperfections of everyday married life. The ultimate problem of the Weldon's relationship is their misconception of marriage, their deluded belief of courtship and a happily-ever-after future.

Edgar Johnson writes that "the essential trick of satire is dexterous stripping of false fronts" (8). Employing sarcasm and ridicule, Parker strips away the facade of perfect love. Explaining that a "wife's job," is to carry out "those tiny little miracles," giving a room "those little feminine touches," Parker reduces the ideal wife down to a performer of absurd and trivial marital conventions. In describing Mrs. Weldon's attempt to be a good "touch-giver," Parker exaggerates her ineptitude and makes a sharp jab at the supposed "feminine nature" of women:

With an almost pitiable air of uncertainty she strayed over to the mantel, lifted a small vase, and stood with it in her hand, gazing helplessly around the room (171).

By showing what goes on behind closed doors, Parker successfully cuts away the false fronts of marriage, and inserts her own feminist message: women do not have to remain trapped in unhappy marriages. Through creating a character that recognizes her marital discontent and ends the relationship, Parker supports a new role model for women to emulate.

Parker reinforces the theme of false perceptions and romantic delusions by closing the story with two neighbors

discussing the Weldon's separation:

"I don't suppose," began Mrs. Ames, and hesitated. "I don't suppose," she went on, intently pressing a bit of sodden lemon in her cup with her teaspoon, "that Grace--that there was ever anyone--or anything like that?" "Oh, heavens, no," cried Mrs. Marshall. "Grace Weldon gave her whole life to that man, It was Ernest this and Ernest that every minute. I simply can't understand it. If there was one earthly reason--if they ever fought, or if Ernest drank, or anything like that. But they got along so beautifully together--why, it just seems as if they must have been crazy to go and do a thing like this. Well, I can't tell you how blue it's made me. It seems so awful!" "Yes," said Mrs. Ames, "it certainly is too bad" (181).

The message that Parker leaves us with it that it is not too bad; the Weldon's were bored stiff together. Having Grace realize, finally, that there was more to life than pleasing a man, is a powerful step forward for women in fiction and life, as they break away from the restrictive confines of a conventional marriage and pursue independent lifestyles. Furthermore, in terms of the feminist movement, a woman's understanding of her freedom plays a crucial part in changing her situation. There is more to life than marriage, Parker tells us, and marriage is not what it seems.

In her poetry Parker wraps her opinions about the promise of love into neat little packages of sarcasm. In the poem "Comment" she whimsically exaggerates love's potential:

Oh, Life is a glorious cycle of song,
A medley of extemporanea;
And love is a thing that can never go wrong;
And I am Marie of Romania.

Using hyperbole to characterize love as "a thing that can never go wrong," Parker exposes the ideal of love as an absurd riddle. the message of the poem is as simple as the logic: obviously I am not Marie of Romania, therefore love can and does go wrong. Furthermore, the clip of the rhyme scheme, as well as the short line length, accentuates the abrupt tone of the piece.

The majority of Parker's poems, when they are satiric, target relationships. The most common theme is the underlying question "are men really worth it?" In providing other choices, Parker implies that they are not. In "The Satin Dress" Parker describes the luxurious and sensuous qualities of satin, suggesting one viable alternative to a man:

Needle, needle, dip and dart,
Thrusting up and down,
Where's the man could ease a heart
Like a satin gown?

In this first verse of the poem Parker presents satin as a more permanent fixture in a woman's life than a man, and more enjoyable because of its inherent lack of conflict. Furthermore, she claims, satin is a provocative statement worn by independent women. To accentuate this point, she goes on to contrast the stereotypes of women as personified by various fabrics:

Wantons go in bright brocade;
Brides in organdie;
Gingham's for the plighted maid
Satin's for the free!

Wool's to line a miser's chest;
Crepe's to claim the old;
Velvet hides an empty breast;

Satin's for the bold!

This poem makes its point quite plainly in comparing the value of a man to the pleasure of a dress. Not only is it a great piece because of its lighthearted satiric approach, but also as a representation of the times. The lines "Satin's for the free," "the bold," and "the proud," emphasize the importance of a woman appearing independent and progressive. Furthermore, the suggestive quality of the poem--dipping, darting, thrusting--is a bold deviation from the work of the typically sentimental women poets of the time, such as Edna St. Vincent Millay.

One other poem that questions the worth of a man, reminding the reader of his adverse affects, is "Men":

They hail you as their morning star
 Because you are the way you are.
 If you return the sentiment,
 They'll try to make you different;
 And once they have you safe and sound,
 They want to change you all around.
 Your moods and ways they put a curse on;
 They'd make of you another person.
 They cannot let you go your gait;
 They influence and educate.
 They'd alter all that they admired.
 They make me sick, they make me tired.

This poem, like the stories reviewed, targets the mismatched relationships of men and women. Once again, Parker implies that women would be better off on their own, without men. Men, she asserts, want to control women's behavior, regardless of what women want for themselves. Women, she insinuates, are victims of relationships, destined to be let

down. In using the language of absolutes, Parker generalizes the condition, and through this exaggeration makes the situation between men and women humorous. The humor, accented by the rhyme scheme, allows Parker to criticize the attitude men assume in pursuing women. In explaining the techniques of satire, Johnson alludes to the disguise of gaiety: "A great aid to abusing people and getting away with it is high spirits" (15). Parker frequently employs this technique in her poetry. Leading the reader on with her humorous sarcasm, Parker gets away with criticizing not one man, but all "men."

In her criticism of men, Parker pokes fun at their egotistical, exploiting attitudes: "They cannot let you fo your gait;/They influence and educate." In her criticism of women, which is more subtle, she chides them for being so easily persuaded and passive, able to be changed and altered. A liberated woman, after all, would not be so flimsy. After making fun of the manner in which men and women get involved, Parker sadly comments "They make me sick, they make me tired." This blunt personal statement is a trademark of Parker's. She cuts away the exaggeration with a simple, honest comment, reasserting her position, one-upping the men in her final say on the matter.

While there are many poems of Parkers's that portray women as 'poor things' subject to great manipulation and distress, there are a handful of others that are full of indignation and the refusal to conform. Asserting her right to sexual freedom

she declares in "Light of Love"; "I'll never be a bride/Nor yet celibate" (80). Confessing that she, too, is just as capable of infidelity Parker brags, "What goes on, my love, while you're away/You'll never know" ("A Certain Lady" 111). In "Indian Summer" she admits that while she used to "change with every passing lad," she has since mended her ways: "And if you do not like me so/To hell, my love, with you!" (107).

It is this candid quality that captures the essence of Dorothy Parker's poetry. Although her poems are quippy and lighthearted, they are also edged with a biting, rebellious tone. Parker rejects the position society has created for her--that of the docile, agreeable woman--and through her verse expresses criticism. Her poems, in contrast to her stories, are boldly personal. In her stories she distances herself enough to allow the reader to discover for him or herself the implicit moral message. Through the allure of humor, cleverness, and sarcasm, Parker catches the reader to teach him or her a lesson. Whether the lesson pertains to the pretenses of romance and marriage, the harm of gender roles, or the outrage of relationships with men, Parker implores the reader to realize that love is not what it seems and it is time for women to change their ways.

CHAPTER FIVE
OUT OF THE DORMANT PHASE:
ANNE SEXTON

Gradually, the hot, persistent flame of anger, with which most feminists sustain their dedication, began to burn within me.

Jo Freeman

Dormant but not Dead: The Women's Movement, 1920-60

After procuring the right to vote in 1920, the women's movement downshifted. This time period, from 1920-60, has been called by feminists "the intermission" (Banks 153), and "forty years in the desert" (Deckard 282). While the focus of the movement changed, to say the movement died is a misrepresentation. The fight for suffrage was a big cause that required extensive organization; subsequent issues that women lobbied for did not draw the same kind of participation or visibility.

Although the progress was slow, women continued to fight for their rights--and have continued to do so--throughout the twentieth century. Sheila Ruth, author Issues of Feminism, states that the movement did not disappear after 1920, but changed its course; "It seems more accurate and more constructive to point out that many suffrage activists moved into divergent areas of activity, that new feminists expressed values through different models" (451).

Following the suffrage movement, suffragists dispersed into various directions. The NAWSA became the League of Women Voters and devoted its time to legislation for maternity and infant protection. Other suffragists were drawn to other causes such as the peace movement. Some women became involved in working for birth control and abortion rights, although these causes were not considered "feminist" at the time. Socialists and sexual radicals propelled these movements, and were more interested in eugenics than advancing women's sexual freedom. In the beginning of this study, women were skeptical of the progress made, fearing an increase in sexual abuse and marital infidelity. A woman's "right to her own body" did not become an active feminist political issue until the 1960s. "The concept of 'free love' was therefore used by these [individual] feminists as a personal and individual response to the social and legal constraints that a conventional marriage laid upon them" (Banks 195).

As a consequence of socialist activism and "red-baiting hysteria," many feminist groups of the twenties were accused of Bolshevik activity in their legislation for reform. Another deterrent that women had to overcome in pushing the movement forward was the nation's increasingly conservative attitude which extended far beyond the twenties, retarding the advancement of women's rights well into the fifties.

Lack of a common goal amongst women has been detrimental to the women's movement. Although the ERA has been introduced

at every congressional session since 1923, it has yet to pass. One of the biggest problems has been in organization; for years there has not been a collective group working for the ERA. In the 1930s there was greater disparity between the different women's groups: "The Women's Party argued that the ERA was necessary because of discrimination against women in wages, employment, education and numerous laws....The ERA was opposed by women connected with AFL, the Women's Bureau, and the League of Women Voters. They believed that the ERA might destroy the protective labor laws for women..." (Deckard 287).

During the Depression many women went to work to help feed their families. During World War II, women went to work to fill the jobs left behind. In 1945 the men returned and women were told to go back home and take care of their families. "Veterans were given priority and, in layoffs accompanying reconversion, women were fired at a rate of 75 percent higher than men. From 1945 to 1947, the number of women at work declined by four million! (Deckard 301).

During the 1950s the women's movement was lost in the shuffle, "buried under the avalanche of the cold war, the red scare, and the anticommunist crusade" (Deckard 302-3). The conservative bias of the times prohibited the advancement of women's rights, as well as "black's rights, civil liberties, and better labor laws" (303). "For women," Deckard writes, "the conservative reaction took the form of the "feminine

mystique"--a glorification of the traditional female role" (303).

The "feminine mystique," a phrase coined and the title of a book written by Betty Friedan, found its place in the media and encouraged women to dedicate their lives to home, marriage, and motherhood. In The Feminine Mystique Friedan discusses the subversive, "Stepford Wives" kind of influence the media had in discouraging women's pursuits outside the home. Magazines of the fifties portrayed women as happy, fulfilled homemakers, interested only in decorating their houses, sewing, cooking, shopping, caretaking, sex, and babies. This projected image of woman was the basis for Friedan's definition of the feminist mystique:

The feminine mystique says the highest value and only commitment for women is the fulfillment of their own femininity. It says that the great mistake of western culture, through most of its history, has been the undervaluation of femininity. It says that femininity is so mysterious and intuitive and close to the creation and origin that manmade science may never understand it. But however special and different, it is in no way inferior to the nature of man; it may even in certain respects be superior. The mistake, says the mystique, the root of women's troubles in the past is that women envied men, women tried to be like men, instead of accepting their own nature, which can find fulfillment only in sexual passivity, male domination, and nurturing maternal love (Friedan 37).

It is this type of propaganda, this social conspiracy, that discouraged women from pursuing higher educations and careers outside the home. The mystique of the fifties resulted

in discontent and disillusion as women began to realize the limitations of housebound opportunities. The feminine mystique, a paramount of conservative discrimination, became the impetus for revelation and revolution as women charged into the sixties ready for change.

Anne Sexton and the Feminine Mystique

Anne Sexton was an American poet, often acknowledged as a contemporary of Sylvia Plath and Robert Lowell. Between 1958 and 1959 she published her first poems in a variety of magazines, including The Herald Tribune, The Christian Science Monitor, Harper's Review, Saturday Review, and The New Yorker. In 1960 Houghton Mifflin published her first book of collected poems, To Bedlam and Part Way Back. From there she surged forward in her writing, gaining the reputation of a confessional poet, publishing six books of poetry in the next fourteen years of her life, working on two more that would be published posthumously.

Sexton's poems are comprised mostly of serious material, inspired by her own unhappiness and mental illness. Maxine Kumin, a personal friend and fellow writer, writes "The facts of Anne Sexton's troubled and chaotic life are well known; no other American poet of our time has cried aloud publicly so many private details" (Sexton xix). The subject matter Sexton chose to write about included family relations, incest, abortion, menstruation, masturbation, adultery, drug addiction,

suicide, mental illness, and death. Because many of these topics were considered taboo in the literary arena of poetry, her work was often regarded as repulsive, flamboyant, and even pathetic.

Transformations, a deviation from her usual style, exposes the flexible and humorous side of Sexton. This book contains a collection of prose poems which satirize the Grimms' fairy tales. In the preface to The Complete Poems, Kumin explains the progression from Sexton's other works to Transformations:

Thematically, Anne's concern in Transformations was a logical extension of the material within the confessional genre, but this time with a society-mocking overlay. Her attention focuses on women cast in a variety of fictive roles: the dutiful princess daughter, the wicked witch, the stepmother (xxviii).

I have chosen Transformations to represent the transition from the less to more active years of the women's movement. Despite the fact that Transformations was published in 1971, near the tail end of the radical years, its issues concern the myths that have influenced women's role and image throughout the twentieth century. These works capture the fairy tale image of the modern woman, in essence the "feminine mystique," that has restrained women over the years. Alicia Ostriker writes this about Sexton's Grimm interpretations:

The poet's effort to understand her stories in her own terms precipitates a transformed view of traditional social values, particularly those associated with feminine life patterns: love and marriage, beauty, family, and most radically, the idea of goodness and moral

responsibility, all of which she slices through like butter (269).

It is this mythical representation of woman that Sexton wants to transform, which makes her transformations decidedly feminist. Employing the techniques of reduction and parody, Sexton's work comes off as satire.

In the sense that I using the word "myth" it means a false representation, or a representation based on a truth, that has been misconstrued in translation. Roland Barthes claims that myth has its roots in "historical reality" which allows us to conjure "a natural image of its reality." With the passage of time this connection, the source of the myth, is lost. Barthes explains the deceptive link between reality and myth:

A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and filled it with nature, it has removed from things their human meaning as to make them signify human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence (142-3).

As the function of myth is to "empty reality," to believe in a myth is to substitute an image of reality--such as the exalted feminine woman--for reality.

The feminine mystique, therefore, is a myth. The source of the myth lies in the history of established roles designated by sex. The deception of the myth materializes in the

"glorification of the traditional female role." While the division of responsibilities between persons is expedient, it is not necessary to divide responsibilities according to sex. Women are capable of more than having babies, just as men have proved themselves to be worthy caretakers. The myth of male and female occupations is perpetuated not only by tradition, but also through the media and literature. Through the ages women have been portrayed as helpless creatures saved by marriage. The typical female characters of the fairy tale are either beautiful, virginal, and good, or ugly, old, and evil. Sexton imposes--in the rewrites of her fairytales--contemporary characteristics on mythical persons in order to expose the traditional expectations still prevalent in today's society. In doing this she rewrites the myth, giving back it its "reality."

The Transformations of "Cinderella" and "Red Riding Hood"

Whereas exaggeration is typical of fairy tales, Sexton tends to use understatement rather than over statement. Sexton cuts away the exaggeration to create a down-to-earth, crude caricature of human relations, and allows her characters to be good only through conscious reformation. In the transformations of "Cinderella" and "Red Riding Hood," Sexton strips away the false identities of both the heroes and the villains, exposing a more true-to-life story. In terms of technique, Sexton remains true to the original theme and plot of the stories, but distorts the appearance and dialogue. In the sense that the

fairy tale is righteous in its campaign for good over evil, satire is righteous in correcting the definition of good. Sexton satirizes these fairy tales through parody, altering the details and message, to show the deceptions of gender. "Parody," explains Hodgart, "involves the taking over and mastering of another writer's style and reproducing it with ludicrous distortions" (122). This is exactly what Sexton does: where the Grimm brothers were grim, Sexton is grimmer.

In the transformation of Cinderella, Sexton introduces the story with four vignettes of modern fairy tales, stories of common people who miraculously become rich in a day. "Prefaces (and afterwords) are a major means of 'transforming' the fairy tales into a modern psychological idiom, for here Sexton can, in her familiar voice, reflect upon the universal importance of the terror, stupidity, fear, and wonder encapsulated in these stories" (Gallagher 259).

The first preface goes like this:

You always read about it:
the plumber with twelve children
who wins the Irish Sweepstakes.
From toilets to riches.
That story.

Each vignette, following this one (excluding the third) ends in the phrase "that story," which becomes a metaphor for marriage. By reducing the expectation for a "happily ever after" ending to "toilets to riches," "from diapers to Dior," and "mops to Bonwitt Teller," Sexton cuts away all romanticism. By creating a common and familiar ground for the reader, the reader is able

to identify the degree of trust necessary for recognizing the make-believe aspects of the fairy tale, whether literary or social.

Sexton keeps Cinderella's beginnings brief and to the point. The wife of a rich man told her daughter, Cinderella, "Be devout. Be good," and died. The man remarried a woman with two stepdaughters, "pretty enough with hearts like blackjacks," who made Cinderella their maid: "She slept on the sooty hearth each night/and walked around looking like Al Jolson." The father one day brings gifts for everyone, except Cinderella, who he brings a twig. She plants the twig on her mother's grave and it grows into a tree with a white dove: "The bird is important my dears, so heed him."

As the story evolves, Sexton spices up the details, becoming increasingly sarcastic and snide, mocking marriage in her attack. She calls the ball a "marriage market" and accuses Cinderella of vanity. In telling the tale of how Cinderella prepares herself for the ball, Sexton questions the chimeric interventions of the dove:

Cinderella went to the tree at the grave
and cried forth like a gospel singer:
Mama! Mama! My turtledove,
send me to the prince's ball!
the bird dropped down a golden dress
and delicate little gold slippers.
Rather a large package for a simple bird.
So she went. Which is no surprise.

In her sarcastic treatment of Cinderella's only ambition, Sexton belittles the protagonist's dilemma. Using colloquial

language she brings the story down to earth, cutting away its glamour and mystique.

Cinderella, of course, is a hit of the ball, as the prince only has eyes for her. They dance, she flees, three nights in a row. On the last night she loses her "gold shoe" and the Prince sets out to find her. Having to go through the stepsisters first, while each cuts off a different part of her foot, the prince "began to feel like a shoe salesman." In a last-ditch effort, "Cinderella fit into the shoe/Like a love letter fits into its envelope." The story ends here, almost happily ever after:

Cinderella and the prince
 lived, they say, happily ever after,
 like two dolls in a museum case
 never bothered by diapers or dust,
 never arguing over the timing of an egg,
 never telling the same story twice,
 never getting middle-aged spread,
 their darling smiles pasted on for eternity,
 Regular Bobbsey Twins.
 That story.

Sexton's use of simile, "like Al Jolson," "like a gospel singer," "like a shoe salesman," not only creates a humorous picture, but also aids in stripping away the exaggerated pretenses of a fairy tale romance. Her similes and metaphors also "modernize" the story, drawing parallels between the fairy tale and contemporary society (Gallagher 259). The familiar image of the shoe salesman works in two ways: not only is it a comic reduction of a noble man, but also an insight into the position of women. As an extended metaphor, women are shoes,

objects, to be bought and sold. Cinderella slipping her foot into the shoe, "like a love letter into its envelope," is another suggestive image. The love letter symbolizes exalted sentiment that does not always match the love of which it boasts; it is a false representation.

Sexton's rewrite of the happily-ever-after ending cuts away all pretenses of romance. Happily-ever-after is only attainable in stories, for dolls, and is not a realistic conclusion. Diapers, dust, arguments, and middle-aged spread constitute a truer picture of marriage. "The fairy-tale ending of marriage, supposed to represent romantic and financial security ever after, becomes, ironically, 'that story'-- incredible in the first place, and, were it credible, pathetically dull" (Orstriker 269). Sexton does not say that Cinderella is unhappy, she says that she is not an authentic role model for women to emulate. Cinderella is a myth.

Through parody Sexton turns the fairy tale prince and princess into "Regular Bobbsey Twins," depriving them of their "stature and dignity" (Hodgart 115). Sexton questions the appearance of fairy-tale love and undercuts the "pretense of innocence" through reduction (Johnson 24). Rewriting the story, relying on more common depictions, Sexton leaves the reader with an altered message. Where the original ending of "Cinderella" inspires hope in its promise of perfect love, the transformed version encourages recognition and inspiration to correct this misconception.

The lesson of satire is to discriminate between fairy tale and real life. Marriage and love are targets for both Parker and Sexton, but they handle their cynicism differently. Where Parker exaggerated love, "a thing that can never go wrong," insinuating that it will, Sexton points out exactly where it does go wrong. Sexton is intent on confronting and correcting mythical portraits of women. This is not to say, in the comparison, that Parker is any less of a feminist, but instead more cautious and less blantly feminist in her satire. Whereas Parker suggests that marriage is not what it seems, Sexton openly ridicules the false assumption that marriage equals life happily ever after.

Sexton presents "Red Riding Hood" as a tale full of deception. The point of transforming this story is to uncover what lies beneath fraudulent appearances. It is a crucial mistake Red Riding Hood makes in trusting the wolf; it is also a crucial mistake to trust the shallow appearance of social expectations and stereotypes.

Opening the piece with "many are the deceivers," Sexton cites examples of modern deceits: "the suburban matron... getting ready to meet her lover...in the congregational parking lot," "An old Jenny" tricked into handing over her life savings to "two seemingly respectable women," the comedian on Johnny Carson who makes everyone laugh then "slits his wrist the next morning." From here Sexton does something that was her trademark, she makes the poem personal:

And I. I too.
 Quite collected at cocktail parties,
 meanwhile in my head
 I'm undergoing open-heart surgery.

In making this confession, Sexton conveys the message that she can be trusted to tell the truth, if the reader is willing to look beneath the surface. This disclosure sets the tone and serves as a kind of consciousness throughout the story.

The transformation of the original "Red Riding Hood" begins like this:

Long ago
 there was a strange deception:
 a wolf dressed in frills,
 a kind of transvestite.
 But I get ahead of my story.
 In the beginning
 there was just little Red Riding Hood,
 so called because her grandmother
 made her a red cape and she was never without it.
 It was her Linus blanket, besides
 it was red, as red as the Swiss flag,
 yes, it was red, as red as chicken blood...
 This one day her mother gave her
 a basket of wine and cake
 to take to her grandmother
 because she was ill.
 Wine and cake?
 Where's the aspirin? The penicillin?
 Where's the fruit juice?
 Peter Rabbit got camomile tea.
 But wine and cake it was.

Combining scepticism with humor, Sexton transforms "Red Riding Hood" into a story full of duplicity. With each detail she questions--the wolf's frills, Red Riding Hood's cape, and the basket of wine--Sexton accentuates the importance of looking beyond appearances. The wolf is not the only deceiving character of the story, she cautions. Introducing Red Riding

Hood she describes her cape with conflicting images; while the association made to Linus' blanket suggests innocence and security, "red, as red as chicken blood," contradicts that image. The effect is distrust. Questioning the appropriateness of wine and cake, Sexton encourages the reader to doubt all conventions. Why not aspirin? Sexton incites her readers, through her own questions, to challenge previously accepted gender-related customs and characters of the story.

Making her way to grandmother's house, Red Riding Hood is met by the wolf:

Good day, Mr. Wolf, she said,
thinking him no more dangerous
than a streetcar or a panhandler.
He asked where she was going
and she obliging told him.
There among the roots and trunks
with the mushrooms pulsing inside the moss
he planned how to eat them both,
the grandmother an old carrot
and the child a shy budkin
in a red red hood.
He bade her to look at the bloodroot,
the small bunchberry and the dogtooth
and pick some for her grandmother.
Meanwhile he scampered off
to Grandmother's house and ate her up
as quick as a slap.
Then he put on her nightdress and cap
and snuggled down into the bed.
A deceptive fellow.

When Red Riding Hood reaches her destination, she notes that Grandmother looked odd, "a dark and hairy disease it seemed." Unfortunately she fails to process her inclination quickly enough, "So the wolf gobbled Red Riding Hood down like a gumdrop."

The imagery of Sexton's rewrite is graphic and full of innuendo. Streetcars and panhandlers are usually safe, but not always. The "beautiful flowers" of the original story are renamed "bloodroot" and "dogtooth" to sound more threatening. The descriptions "quick as a slap" and "down like a gumdrop" are simple, but provocative images. All of these transformations, from the flowers to the wolf, add to the message Sexton is trying to convey: the world is full of deceptions.

To end the story the huntsman must rescue the grandmother and Red Riding Hood:

So he took a knife and began cutting open
the sleeping wolf, a kind of cesarian section.
It was the carnal life that let
Red Riding Hood out like a poppy,
quite alive from the kingdom of the belly.
And grandmother too
still waiting for cakes and wine.

In describing the characters of "Red Riding Hood" Sexton exaggerates their stereotypes. Sexton does not alter the naiveté or obedience of Red Riding Hood, but stretches these qualities to make her appear more stupid than innocent. The grandmother, too, is characterized as extraordinarily dimwitted. The fact that she leaves the wolf's belly "still waiting for cakes and wine" emphasizes her lack of comprehension. By overstating the female character's ignorance, the huntsman is given the advantage of appearing even more brave and heroic. Sexton parodies the traditional structure in fairy tales, that of the helpless (victim) female and the

rescuing (hero) male. The hunter, she describes, is more than just a hunter, he is a surgeon and a savior.

The story ends after they load the wolf with large stones and he, the wolf, "fell over dead. Killed by his own weight. Many a deception ends on such a note." The huntsman, grandmother, and Red Riding Hood then sit down to eat the cake and drink the wine:

Those two remembering
nothing naked and brutal
from that little death,
that little birth,
from their going down
and their lifting up.

While the wolf is indeed "a deceptive fellow," Sexton does not make him the center of attention in her rendition of "Red Riding Hood." She is more concerned with the subtle deceptions of the story, those details that are overlooked because of their seemingly insignificant appearance. There is the deception of the cape that provided a false sense of security for Red Riding Hood, further contributing to her inability to discern deception from truth. There is also the deception of innocence. In Sexton's thorough depiction of an ignorant Red Riding Hood and a clueless grandmother, she convinces the reader to examine the consequence of not questioning the misleading stereotypes of women. The exaggeration of innocence, Johnson explains, is a technique the satirist uses to stir the reader: "but complete innocence is rare: against a secret sense of of guilt the violence of the satirist is like a furious

inquisitor assaulting the conscience" (14). And finally, Sexton urges the reader to see the deception of the fairy tale. Stories that depict women as inferior in intelligence and shallow in ambition are accepted because they have been passed from generation to generation. The cultural tradition of the fairy tale subversely supports discrimination and perpetuates stereotypes harmful to women.

"What it means to be feminine--not simply to the self but to the culture and within the religion created by that culture," predominates in Transformations (Ostriker 274). In "Cinderella" Sexton dismantles the myth of marriage, exposing its imperfections, encouraging women to be more ambitious in their pursuits. In "Red Riding Hood" she strips the fairy tale down to its bare bones, revealing the deceptive stereotypes of the almighty man and the less intelligent woman that cross over into society. In "Snow White and the Seven Dwarfs" she criticizes the value our culture places on age and beauty, deriding Snow White, the "dumb bunny," for buying into that role. The false flattery of pregnancy and childbirth is undercut in Sexton's rewrite of "Rumpelstiltskin": "He was like most babies,/as ugly as an artichoke." And in "The Twelve Dancing Princesses" she comments on women's place in society, using the metaphor of a dog, referring to the princesses as a litter to choose from.

Through graphic, familiar imagery and a sarcastic, questioning tone, Sexton uncovers the deceptions of the fairy

tale. Using colloquial language and modern metaphors and similes, Sexton draws links between how women are depicted in fairy tales and treated in contemporary society. Her message is clear: look beneath the surface, beyond appearances, and question formerly accepted traditions. In her satiric transformations of Grimm's fairy tales, Sexton encourages her readers to understand the relationship between myth and reality, the discrepancy between the make believe and modern woman, and the harm in substituting images for truth.

CHAPTER SIX
CONTEMPORARY FEMINISM:
NICOLE HOLLANDER

In passing, also, I would just like to say that the first time Adam had a chance he laid the blame on woman.

Mary Astor

The Revolution of the Sixties

The 1960s marked a time of great revolt. Blacks tired of their position in society, organized their protest into the civil rights movement; once again, as in the 1800s, women were drawn to their cause. Many women joined this movement and "as they became more sensitive to the black's second class status, they became aware of their own" (Deckard 320).

In addition to the civil rights movement, people were also demonstrating for the freedom of speech and against the Vietnam War. These bold political protests of the 1960s, the emergence of the New Left, encourage dissatisfied citizens to speak out and fight for their rights. The time was right for the Women's Liberation Movement. Full of discontent, disillusioned by the traditional female image and status, women were eager for change. Deckard writes that the "widening gap between ideology and reality" was "conducive to the formation of social movements" (319). The "happy housewife heroine," though denounced by women, continued to limit their occupational

choices. "When from choice or need, women went to work, they found themselves discriminated against because of their sex" (Deckard 319-20).

Applying techniques they learned from other movements, women began to channel their discontent into reorganizing the women's movement. While the movement had not died, its progress had slowed, and its focus was ambiguous. Even though the consciousness-raising groups of the late fifties and early sixties were important in teaching women to admit their boredom, dissatisfaction, and anger, it was now time for active protest.

In 1966 the National Organization for Women (NOW) formed, with Betty Friedan as its first president. This was the first collective women's group founded, since the suffrage movement, for the purpose of gaining equal rights. NOW's statement of purpose was focused and urgent:

To take action to bring women into full participation in the mainstream American society now, exercising all the privileges and responsibilities thereof in truly equal partnership with men (Deckard 324).

The strategy of NOW was moderate and their tactics involved "setting up task forces, bringing suit, lobbying government officials" (Deckard 325). In its course of development, "more radically inclined feminists" were compelled to branch out and organize their own movement (Ruth 453).

Differences between moderates and radicals were "based in general philosophical orientation, in ethical priorities, in

interpretation of causes, in cultural vision, and even in temperament" (Carter 453-4). Differences within the radical feminist circles had to do with defining the source of discrimination against women. While some radicals believed that women's oppressed position was the result of class relationships, others believed that men were the oppressors and women were the victims of a sex-role system that has encouraged male dominance. Despite the variant opinions and the different degrees of radical protest, women of the sixties were united in agreement on one thing: their desire for and commitment to equal rights.

Since 1960 there have been a number of changes in favor of women's rights. More women work in better paid, higher status jobs. Higher percentages of women are pursuing college educations and advanced degrees. There are more laws now that discourage sex discrimination and harassment. There are more women now than there have ever been who hold political offices. Very slowly women's image in the media is changing. And yet, despite all of these improvements for women, the progress women have made in the last thirty years is minimal given how much is left to change before they are welcomed into the American society as truly equal citizens.

Given all that women have fought for in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, where they stand paints a pretty dim picture. Violence against women is worse now than ever before. Women's right to abortion is continually being challenged. The

image of women in the the media still supports sexist, unrealistic representations of women. The ERA has yet to pass. Homosexuality has yet to be accepted and integrated in society. Where child care is concerned there is great room for improvement; the goal to have twenty-four hour child care, staffed equally by men and women, accessible to persons of all income brackets, is still very much a dream.

Women of the eighties and nineties have moved into more professional jobs, and with that advancement are learning how to balance their careers and families. Even though it is common for both women to work, the responsibilities of child rearing and domestic maintenance are still expected to be fulfilled by women, and are fulfilled by them in higher percentages than not. Indeed women are moving forward, but society is changing slowly. In 1989 equal rights are still a thing of the future, not the present.

To be Outspoken in the Eighties: Nicole Hollander

Nicole Hollander started her career as a cartoonist in 1976 when she went to work for the Spokeswoman feminist newspaper. In 1979 she published her first book of cartoons, I'm Training to be Tall and Blonde. In her review of Hollander's book, a writer of Spokeswoman describes the style of her cartoons:

Occasionally the cartoons would be funnier if

they weren't so true; there is a bittersweet quality to some of them and acerbic wit to others, especially those on doctor, judges, and employers (13).

This bittersweet quality is the essence of feminist satire. It is the same quality which has impeded Hollander in her efforts to become a syndicated cartoonist. Over the years Hollander has been turned away by both publishers and newspapers because her work has been considered "too feminist" (Cantarow 24). In 1981 Field Enterprises agreed to syndicate Hollander and did so until 1982. Over the year she was reprimanded frequently for the controversial topics she brought into the strip. In 1982 Hollander quit Field and began self-syndicating her work.

"Even today, for a woman to go into serious cartooning, it's like going into the Marines" (Cantarow 24). Apart from Hollander, the only other two syndicated women cartoonists are Cathy Guisewite (Cathy) and Lynn Johnston (For Better or for Worse). Among all the syndicated cartoon strips, Hollander's is the most dedicated to making a stand for women's rights and portraying women authentically. Unlike other strips which tend to perpetuate the stereotypes of women (for example, the nebulous, buxom secretary of Beetle Baily; the happy, gossiping housewives of Blondie; and the haphazardly professional, diet-obsessed, boy-crazy Cathy of Cathy), Hollander's Sylvia portrays women, and men, complete with their imperfections, as true to life as the average person is.

The subject matter brought into Sylvia is broad and

diversified. Hollander pokes fun at many aspects of society, including relationships, television role models, disparity in employment, masculine and feminine gender roles, body image, the Total Woman, government policy, sexism, infidelity, and romance.

Hollander's style is decisively forthright. She does not hesitate to criticize social customs that she considers harmful or regressive. In her rewrite of Eden, Hollander boldly attacks a religious belief developed over thousands of years. Eve, she tells us, was not the evil temptress of her reputation, but merely an innocent bystander. Hollander is successful in her intention to have fun and represent "the part of woman that is strong and self-confident and has a humorous vision of the world" (Witowsky 222).

In her cartoon strip Sylvia, Hollander addresses contemporary feminist concerns head on. Gone is the careful, subtle approach of the early feminist satire writers. Hollander does not shy away from the word "feminist," and--despite criticism--maintains an overtly feminist tone in her cartoons. Ellen Cantarow writes this about her interview with Hollander:

Beneath Nicole's sardonic wit, on the deepest level she is true to old-style, 1960s feminist values. She assumes we're all equals in daily American life, and that we have wit, intelligence, and grace enough to laugh at ourselves when we fall for its false promises (43).

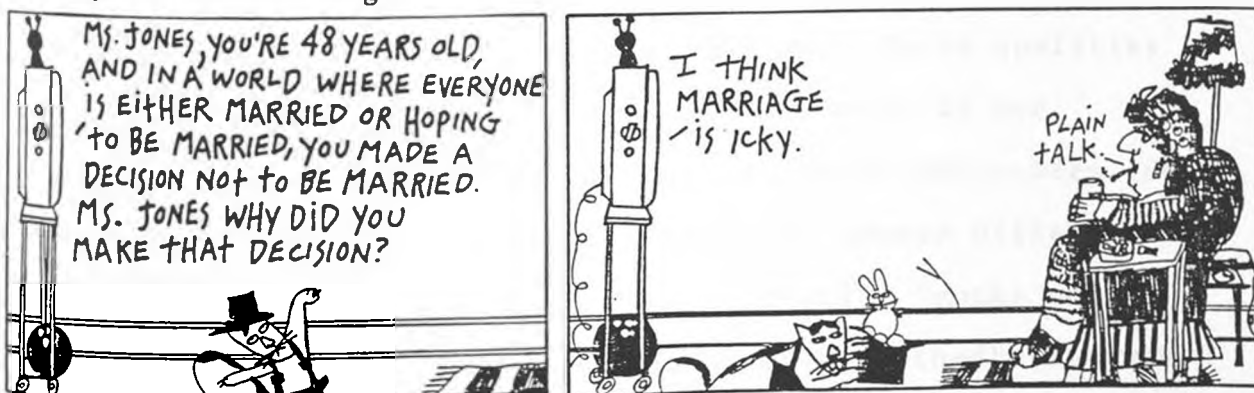
Hollander commented in this interview that she her hope is to

"make people aware of how they're manipulated" (26). It is the balance of awareness and humor that is the gist of satire, and the triumph of Hollander's cartoons.

The Sylvia Cartoons

Trying to narrow down a reasonable number of Sylvia cartoons from ten books of Hollander's collected cartoons has not been an easy task. The ones I have chosen represent the most blatant feminist satire in their exposition and correction of society's ills. Furthermore, I have tried to choose cartoons that show off the variety of topics that Hollander brings to her work.

In the story "Too Bad," Dorothy Parker questions the appearances of marriage through dialogue and reflections of the characters. In her parody of "Cinderella," Anne Sexton reduces marriage to "that story," pointing out the falseness of the happily-ever-after myth. Nicole Hollander, too, has something to say about marriage:



The setup in the above cartoon frequents Hollander's

cartoons. Using the television to introduce the topic, Hollander has the character Sylvia respond. It is fair to say that Sylvia is the voice of Hollander, that her character allows Hollander to refute or criticize those behaviors and stereotypes she, as a feminist, finds repulsive.

In the next cartoon Hollander comments on the discrimination of women in the workplace, mimicking the stereotypes of names. Sylvia finishes the sentence, surprising the reader with the unexpected, but not the unbelievable:

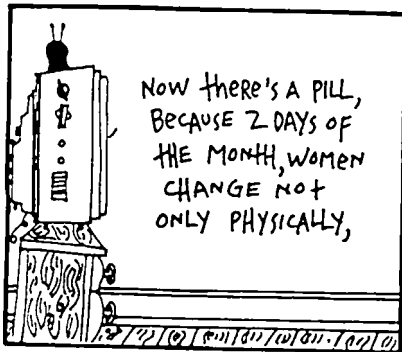


The character Sylvia is one of a kind in the present day cartoon world. She is a single, middle-aged, self-confident, assertive woman with a great sense of humor. These qualities are presented in the way she dresses, the decor of her apartment, and her interactions with the other characters. She is not afraid to say what she thinks or to appear different from the status quo. Through Sylvia, Hollander "mocks and criticises elements of society previously untouched" (Witowsky 222), such as feminine hygiene:

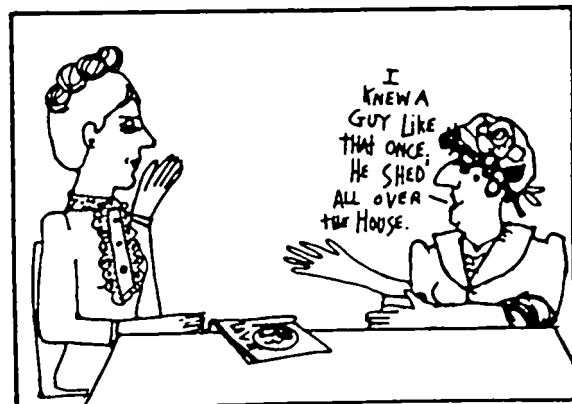


In this cartoon Hollander cuts away the mystique of the feminine. Hollander refuses to buy into the image that women need to be concerned about "that not so fresh feeling." All the beauty and mystery of women's hygiene portrayed in today's television commercials is shown by Hollander as the hoax that it really is. The issue of confidence, she tells us, has nothing to do with the gender stereotypes of douches for women and deodorant for men. "A good stock portfolio," after all, as a practical and functional asset for both sexes.

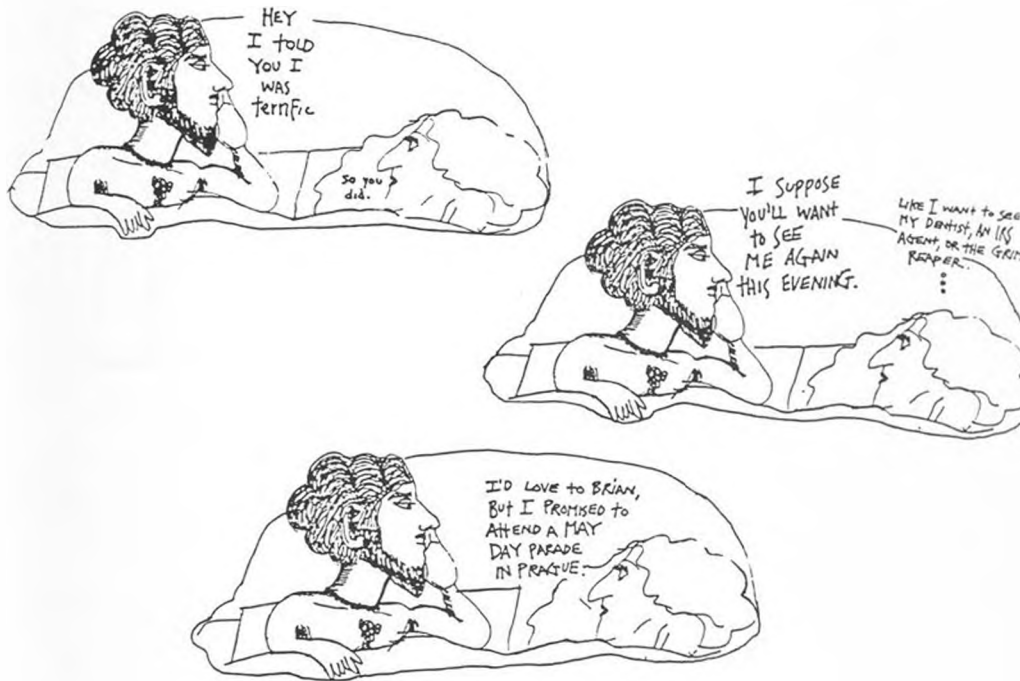
Through Sylvia, Hollander frequently attacks gender misconceptions. When the television exaggerates women's emotional stability, Sylvia takes the image one step further. The point of the cartoon is not to belittle women's state of health, but to put it into perspective. Yes, there is a percentage of women that are effected negatively by their menstrual cycles, but the temporary malady does not indispose them, or make them inferior beings.



Hollander does not limit her criticism to feminine stereotypes; she ridicules also what it means to be masculine. In one cartoon she undercuts Mr. Dark and Handsome by comparing his supposedly attractive features to that of an animal:



The macho man receives no support from Hollander. In the following scene she reduces one man's sexual bravado by comparing him the sexual experience to a trip to the dentist:



By mimicking masculine and feminine behavior, Hollander shows the superficial and misleading character of gender-defined values.

The issue of equality comes up often in Hollander's cartoons. In the following picture she strips away the romantic "I'd lay down my life for you" line to point out the real nature of commitment and responsibility in a relationship. In the end the woman maintains her independence, as is implied when she says, "watch my lips."

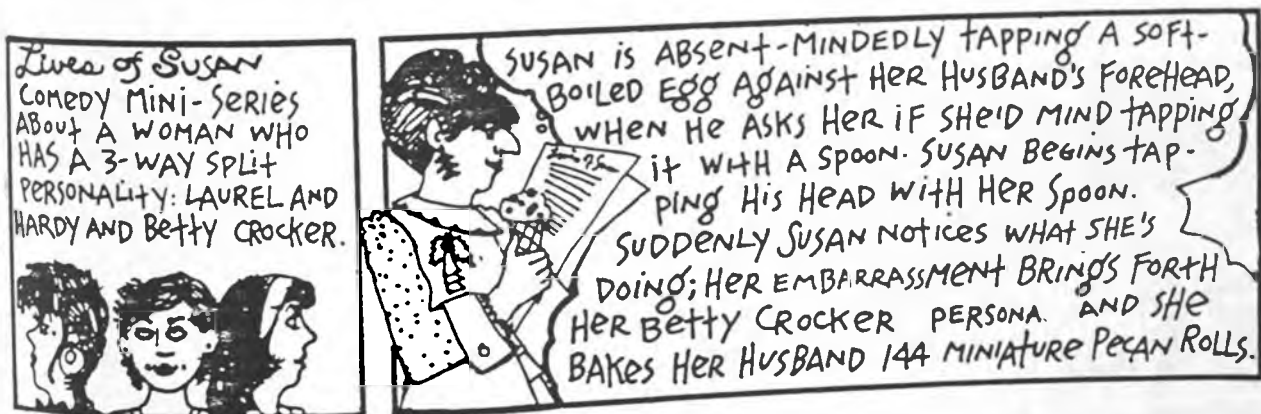


Like Parker, Hollander evaluates the mismatched tendency of relationships. The "Love Cop" character in Sylvia is responsible for keeping people apart who are not well suited for one another. The underlying message (supported by the fact that Sylvia is both single and happy), reads that it is better to be single than in a relationship that is either incompatible or harmful. This is the same theme in Parker's story "Too Bad," but the difference lies in the delivery of the message; Parker hints at the incompatibility of the couple, Hollander says

"keep away." In the next cartoon Hollander exaggerates the personalities of the man and woman to make their unsuitability glaringly obvious. She belittles the cute, commercial symbol of love (the heart), and compares the infatuation to a headache.



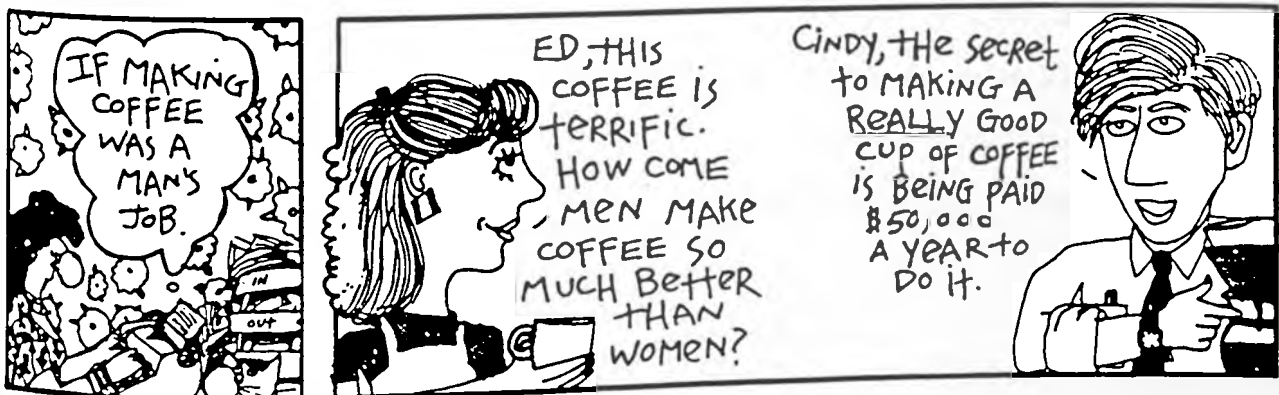
In Hollander's 'mini-series,' "Lives of Susan," the cartoonist ridicules the image of the "Total Woman." The idea of the Total Woman has its roots in the feminine mystique, which decrees that if a woman decides to pursue a career she still has the responsibility to fulfill the domestic duties of the house and husband. The three-way personality parodies the career-wife-mother (superwoman) personality, emphasizing the difficulties of juggling three occupations.



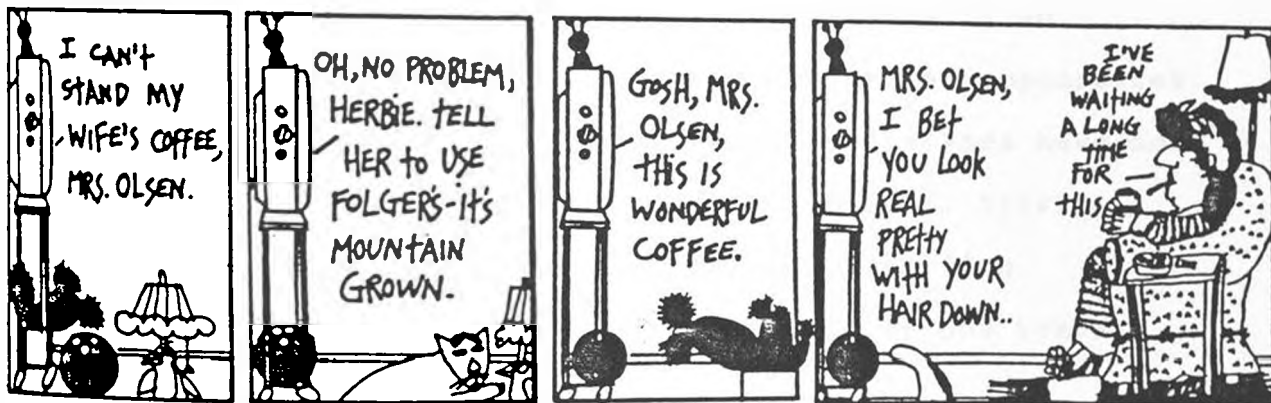
One way Hollander treats the battle for equal rights is to reverse the roles. If men had to go through what women have to in society, the laws would be different. In one cartoon a woman says "If a man had a uterus, it would be like a landmark building; you'd need a court order to remove it" (Enchilada 108). In the next cartoon Hollander jokes about what it would be like if it were men's rights and life that were endangered, instead of women's:



The above cartoon is one example of how Hollander takes a serious topic and makes it funny by reversing the roles and exaggerating the consequences. She uses the same technique in the following cartoon, targeting the sexist stereotypes and the imbalance of wages between men and women:

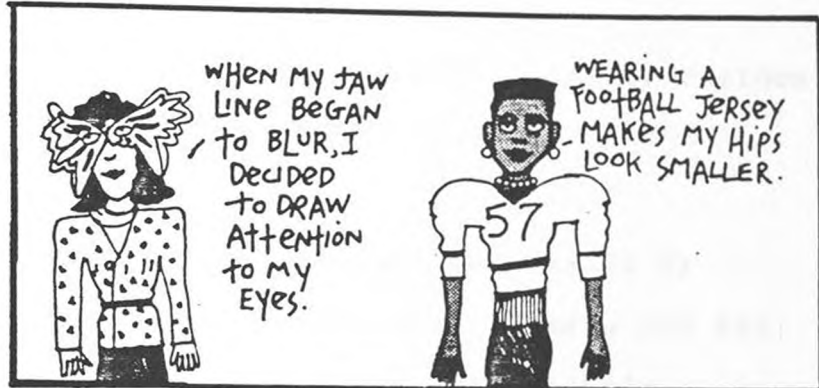
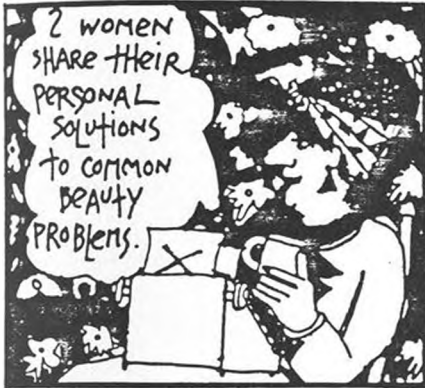


The role of the coffee maker, cast by gender in the past, assumes that because women are women they are better suited for domestic-related tasks. Hollander challenges the logic of this stereotype by coming up with a reason why men should be better coffee makers. In the next cartoon Hollander addresses this age-old sex type, along with the sexual harassment of the media:



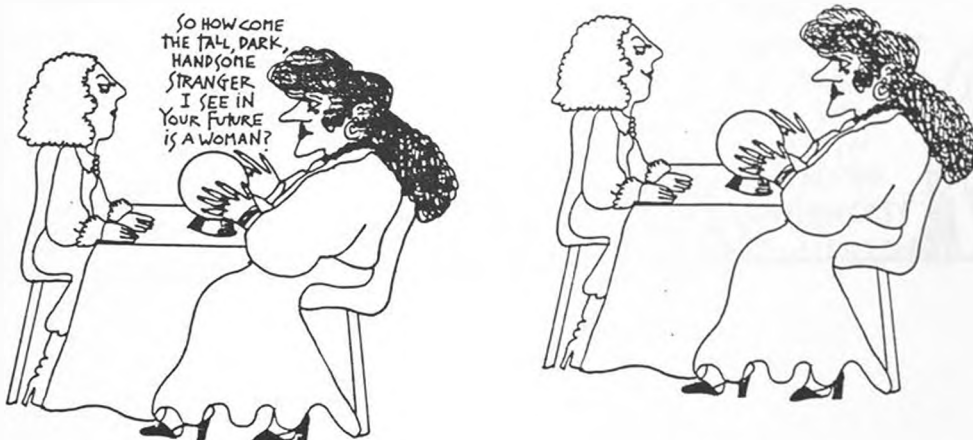
It is the familiarity of the television personality Mrs. Olsen, juxtaposed with the popularity of "sexy" images in the media, that makes this cartoon funny. Furthermore, Sylvia's comment, "I've been waiting a long time for this," reinforces the trend in television that "sex sells" regardless of social objection.

Body image is a big topic in the contemporary American society. The issue of how women look is both addressed and reinforced as important in books, magazines, and television. In the following cartoon Hollander ridicules the significance of appearance by coming up with a few of her own beauty tips:



Hollander's underlying message, that beauty is an overrated, shallow ambition, is reinforced by the appearances of her cartoon characters. Tall, skinny, model-types have no place in Hollander's strip as worthy role models. Sylvia, dressed in her robe and mule slippers, complete with "middle-aged spread," defies media portraits of how women "should" strive to look.

Not only does Hollander challenge how women perceive themselves and how society perceives them, but also the assumptions that people make about the society that they live in. For example, our society has over the years supposed heterosexuality and defined it as "normal." In the following cartoon Hollander illustrates the prudish and misleading nature of this assumption:

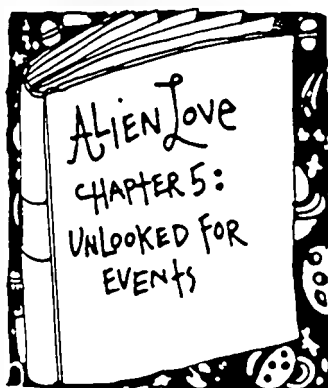


Hollander defends homosexuality by addressing it in her cartoon as an option and right deserving a status equal to heterosexuality.

One way Hollander strives to transform society is by rewriting the creation story. In the cartoons of Adam and Eve, "the way is really happened" has more to do with Adam's mistakes than Eve's. In the re-creation of man and woman's beginning, Hollander's Eve is not too pleased with her choice of companions:



In the final cartoon that serves as an example of Hollander's feminist satire, the cartoonist fantasizes about the ideal relationship with a sensitive, understanding lover. This utopian illustration is similar to Parker's poem "Comment" where she exaggerates the promises of love. Hollander laughs at the unlikely role reversal, calling the transformation "Alien Love":



Maintaining a sense of hope, Hollander insinuates that though men cannot (yet) bare children on this planet, they can make changes in behavior and attitudes to improve their relationships with women. The ultimate goal, of course, is equality.

CONCLUSION

Dorothy Parker, Anne Sexton, and Nicole Hollander have at least two things in common. First, each is sensitive to the woman of her times--her role, relationships, and rights. And second, each writer is satiric in the approach she takes to convey her thoughts about woman's position in society. How the three writers differ lies in the focus and level of criticism each woman engages in. While Parker's satire is bold for the times in which she was writing--compared to the seething tone of Sexton's Transformations and the direct attack of Hollander's cartoons--it is subtle and it is mild. Even Sexton's work seems cautiously feminist when compared to the forthright expressions of criticism made through Hollander's character "Sylvia."

As the women's movement has developed through the twentieth century, women have become more focused and determined in their fight for equal rights. In paralleling the development of this movement to the satire of Parker, Sexton, and Hollander, we can see a definite progress in the awakening of feminist satire. In her stories, Parker accentuates the mundane and unconnected interactions of couples in order to illustrate the patterns people fall into when playing out gender roles. Sexton, in Transformations, takes on the task of

rewriting traditional female characters to update how women are perceived and treated in contemporary society. Hollander blatantly lobbies in her cartoons for women's rights, addressing topics such as sexist stereotypes, abortion, and homosexuality. The level of outspoken criticism each writer engages in illustrates the time period in which she was writing. As the women's movement has progressed since the granting of suffrage in 1920, through the radical sixties, on to present day society, the shift in women's social, political, and economic status has influenced the stance each woman has taken in her writing.

Feminist satire is an alternative voice women have developed over the years in their pursuit of equal rights. Feminist satire combines the stance of non-acceptance with hopeful laughter for the purpose of correction and change. This has been the ambition and triumph of Parker, Sexton, and Hollander. Through fiction, poetry, fairy tale, and cartoons, each woman has developed her individual strategy and style in an effort to bring awareness to the importance of women's rights. As traditional satire challenges "all things that impede the free movement of society," feminist satire recognizes that society will not be free until women move freely within society.

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