

Magpie Habits: Alice Duer Miller's Suffrage Poetry and the Poetics of Quotation

by Mary Chapman

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In *Frame Analysis: An Essay on the Organization of Experience* (1974), Erving Goffman queried the assumption that “in daily life the individual ordinarily speaks for himself, speaks, as it were, in his ‘own’ character. [W]hen one examines speech, especially the informal variety, this traditional view proves inadequate” (512). This same assumption is made in the Western poetic tradition of privileging the lyric, i.e. the form T.S. Eliot said was “the poet speaking to himself or to no one at all”. Nowhere is Goffman’s observation more penetrating than in texts produced during the final decades of the American suffrage campaign (1900-1920), a period in which women writers foregrounded in their work the political and poetic impossibilities of a woman speaking in “her own character”. Denied the vote—the quintessential ideal subjective utterance of a preference, a commitment, a belief—until 1920, women also struggled to speak the self through and within literary forms and traditions established by men. In modernist suffrage literature, women’s voices sound largely through the manipulation of preexisting verbal codes and forms that put them in dialogue with more dominant utterances, for example in drama, conversation and debate, or in reactionary modes like parody, travesty and burlesque.

Taking my cue from Cary Nelson’s observation in *Repression and Recovery: Modern American Poetry and the Politics of Cultural Memory* that “the literary and social history we promulgated as sufficient in fact suppressed an immense amount of writing of great interest, vitality, subtlety and complexity” (5), this paper examines the suffrage poetry of Alice Duer Miller, a popular poet of tremendous range and skill. Specifically, I am interested in how Miller deploys strategies of quotation and ventriloquism to demonstrate women’s proscribed participation in the public sphere. A novelist, playwright, screenwriter and poet, and one of two female members (with Dorothy Parker) of the fraternal Algonquin Hotel Round Table in the 1920s and 1930s, Miller rose to prominence in 1915 when her serialized *Come out of the Kitchen* became a best-selling

novel. She was a regular contributor of serialized fiction to the *Saturday Evening Post*, *McClure's*, and *Scribner's*. By her death in 1942, Miller had published over 25 popular novels. Contemporary reviews described her as “full of the devil” and “a cross between Jane Austen and Henry James” and yet one reviewer acknowledges that it is “difficult for her contemporaries to believe that she is an important artist” (O’Higgins 25): “There is more wit, more perspicacious treatment of well-known human nature, in one of Mrs. Miller’s novelettes than in most writers’ full-length novels” (Overton 206).

Although her fictional output was significant, she was best known in her day for her poetry. *The White Cliffs* (1940)—a novel in verse depicting a love affair between an American woman and a British soldier during the Great War—sold over 700,000 copies world-wide,¹ was on the 1941 *Publisher's Weekly* bestseller list for non-fiction and earned Miller the Golden Scroll Medal of Honor awarded to the “foremost poet of the nation.” Yet today her work is largely unknown.

An active feminist—Chair of the Committee on resolutions of the National American Woman Suffrage Association, founder of the Women’s City Club of New York, lifetime member of Greenwich Village’s feminist group Heterodoxy, Trustee of Barnard College—Miller worked tirelessly for the Empire State Suffrage Campaign, giving speeches and contributing a column entitled “Are Women People?” to the Sunday *New York Tribune* between 1914 and 1917. At that time, the *Tribune* was a left-wing newspaper which drew its columnists from the Algonquin Round Table and had a Sunday readership of over 100,000 people. Miller’s column began as an edited miscellany of materials relevant to the campaign for women’s suffrage—quotations from anti-suffrage legislators and leaders, cartoons, news of international suffrage campaigns, and statistics—appearing on the Sunday Woman’s Page, but soon it began to incorporate Miller’s satirical and witty verse and to appear on other pages in the Sunday paper, such as the Leisure section and the Magazine. The poems that first appeared in the column were reprinted in suffrage periodicals such as *The Woman’s Journal*, recited at suffrage rallies, and later collected in two best-selling books published by George H. Doran, a New York publisher of other pro-suffrage materials: *Are Women People?: A Book of Rhymes for Suffrage Times* (1915) and *Women are People* (1917). According to contemporary reviews, Miller’s *Are Women People?* represented the “cleverest, funniest, sharpest collection[s] of satirical verse... since... Charlotte Perkins

Gilman's 'In This Our World'... the most delightful book of the year so far" (Floyd Dell, *Masses*. vol vi., no. 10: July 1915. p. 22.).ⁱⁱ

Miller's defiant, witty suffrage verse interests me for many reasons, but primarily because it challenges received notions about modernist aesthetics, about the "great divide" between popular and avant-garde that Andreas Huyssen claims is characteristic of discussions of literary modernism, proposing a compromise between poetry that is public and popular, and poetry that is experimental and selective in its audience. Miller's suffrage verse was published during the decade in which definitions of the function of poetry were "in considerable flux... a contested space"(Harrington 3). Often writing in traditional closed forms, particularly sonnets, quatrains, and couplets, sometimes hailing her addressee as "thee" or "thou", Miller might initially be read as epitomizing the nineteenth-century genteel poetic. However, at the same time, there is also something politically urgent and incendiary about her suffrage verse, which prompts comparison to newspaper poets such as Anna Louise Strong and propagandist-poets like Arturo Giovannitti, whom Harrington examines in *The Social Form of Public Poetry*. And, her most surprising work is formally innovative, like the humorous lists presented in "Why Women should not have pockets", "Why Women should not ride Railway trains", and "Why children should not go to school" in *Are Women People?*ⁱⁱⁱ

Although most of her verse is not what conventional critics of modernist poetry would call "modern"—indeed, for some readers, Miller's verse would not even qualify as "poetry"—, it is filled with moments of ventriloquism, quotation, parody, and dialogue, performing what modernist critic Mark Morrison calls the "speech orientation of modern poetry" (Morrison 14). Her poetry anticipates the techniques of what Leonard Diepeveen and Elizabeth Gregory call "the modern quoting poem", deploying many of the same tactics exhibited in Eliot's *The Waste Land*, Pound's *Cantos*, and many poems by Marianne Moore, e.e. cummings, Louis Zukofsky and Lorine Niedecker. Published a few years before Eliot experimented with dramatic monologue and "did the police in different voices", before Pound ventriloquized the River Merchant's wife and other Asian subjectivities, before Marianne Moore began quoting from "magazines, newspapers, essays, advertisements, travel brochures, [and] government pamphlets" (Slatin 274), Miller took language—its social form and public function—as her primary topic. In

her assemblages, particularly her lists and other unusual non-rhyming forms, she creates modernist texts that, like Moore's, qualify as poetry simply because no other term would really describe them. Poised between poetics, Miller was what one might term a poetic "crosser", one whose work must be read as "a site for articulating ideological resistance, enunciating alternative subject positions, and politicizing the masses to those positions" (Van Wienen 33-4).

For many modernists, the English language seemed threatened—by the rise of non-English-speaking immigrants, the demise of "standard English", the potential "contamination" of language by dialect, accent, and slang. However, Miller celebrates rather than fears this multivocality; in fact, enabling conversation (rather than an individual lyric utterance) and collective consensus (rather than individuated positions), particularly through the extension of the franchise to women, is the explicit goal of her suffrage poetry. Miller's central preoccupation is the operation of language in the public sphere: the relationship between language and subjectivity, between language and collectivity: how language paradoxically both produces and speaks the self—and how, as long as women are denied the vote, the operation of language in the public sphere will be compromised, ineffectual and undemocratic.

Are Women People? and *Women are People!* are explicitly about the limits and possibilities of speech, particularly female speech, in a culture that does not permit women to actively participate in the public sphere: on the one hand, they depict women's inability to speak without either being spoken through by other texts that they inadvertently quote and endorse or being spoken for by men, and on the other, they model the ways in which women can articulate their selves by the ironic, parodic, decontextualization and re-framing of these utterances. Quotation and ventriloquism are therefore defined by Miller as both conditions of feminine expression and components of women's resistance to these conditions. They are both her subject and her method. I would argue that Miller's production of an implied "speaking female self" through quotation in her suffrage poetry is sympathetic to/anticipates the project of modern quoting poetry more generally but where other modern quoting poems use quotation (particularly from culturally high forms) to establish a relationship between "tradition and the individual talent", Miller's quotations from more everyday sources work to model ideal and not-so-ideal operations of language in the public sphere.

Marshall McLuhan asserted that Picasso and Joyce's modernist methods of collage were inspired by the dialectic of voices assembled in the newspapers (Gregory 22). Alice Duer Miller, more than any other newspaper poet, takes advantage of the dialogic possibilities of a daily print organ, making a collage from the voices of the newspaper—statements from legislators, editorials, letters to the editors, and statistics. Through quotation, or what language theorists would term hypothetical “reported speech”, Miller ventriloquizes common anti-suffrage arguments. Significantly, Miller, like Marianne Moore, quotes not so much from high culture or historical, literary texts as from “common things”, overheard and imagined conversations, prosaic comments from politicians and government agencies, everyday speech from her present moment. The juxtaposition of these “common things” and literary conventions like rhyme, meter, and closed forms defines Miller's poetic method throughout *Are Women People?*

Miller's husband Henry Wise Miller notes in a memoir entitled *All Our Lives* (1945) that “Alice's mind was a reservoir of things men had said and done.... without [these quotations] it would be impossible to describe the ways she lived and talked... Alice cut out bits from the papers, ... and put them in a special place on the mantelpiece for me to see.... She had no scorn of common things... We had a sort of magpie habit that served as well [as a diary]. Anything that interested us, a clipping, a photograph, a letter was put aside.... We also made a collection of misleading proverbs—aphorisms patently not borne out by experience—and would criticize such dicta as, “The pen is mightier than the sword.”; “Do unto others.”; “Enough is as good as a feast”(34, 138, 163, 170).

Are Women People?
By ALICE DUER MILLER

*Impressions of
a Canvasser*

Scene.—A Certain State Capitol.

Characters
Suffragists. Half a dozen Legislators Opposed.

Suffragists:
Please, sir, to tell us, if you will,
How you will vote upon our bill?

1st Legislator:
Ladies, observe my easy grace,
My manners and my pleasant face:
I hope you see I bow, I smile,
I call you "ladies"—all the while
My heart is black with seething hate
That I, who am so very great,
Should have to waste a single minute
On your affairs—there's nothing in it.

Suffragists (to another legislator):
And you, sir, if we recollect,
Are much opposed. Is that correct?

2d Legislator:
Opposed! O ladies, no, indeed!
I vote against you, I concede;
I may continue so to do,
But I am not opposed to you.
To call me so is most unjust,
I make myself quite plain, I trust.

Suffragists (to another legislator):
And may we hear from you, sir, how
You'll vote?

3d Legislator: I have no option now:
I listen to my district's voice.
I voted no; I have no choice.

Suffragists:
O sir, I think there's some mistake.
Your district carried.

4th Legislator (hastily interrupting):
Let me make
His statement clear; he means that we
All come here absolutely free.

Not at our districts' beck and nod,
We vote to please ourselves and God:
And we are not in all events
The slaves of our constituents.

Suffragists (slightly puzzled, to another legislator):
And you, sir, shall you vote for it?

5th Legislator:
No, though I think you will admit

I have a very open mind:
If in my district I should find
The women want it (which they don't),
I'd vote for it. Till then I won't.

Suffragists:
And have you asked so very many?

5th Legislator (astorished):
Why, no, I don't think I've asked any.

Suffragists (to another legislator):
And what, sir, is your attitude?

6th Legislator:
I hope you will not think me rude.
If, ladies, as a friend I say
You do not work the proper way
It's time you disappeared, and let
The public utterly forget
That there are women who wish to vote.
Then at some future time, remote,
In twenty years' or twenty-five,
If you should chance to be alive,
You'd see a change—at least you ought—
A striking change in public thought
This from a friend.

Suffragists:
But are you so?

6th Legislator:
A friend? Oh, well, I voted "no."
But surely you can comprehend
That I advise you as a friend.

(Suffragists alone)

1st Suffragist:
The men in favor talk much less.

2d Suffragist:
They haven't much to say but "yes";
The men opposed explain a lot.
How they're opposed and yet they're not.
It takes some time to make that clear.

1st Suffragist:
How very bad the air is here!

2d Suffragist:
Do you refer to ventilation,
Or to the general situation?
(The reply is inaudible.)
Curtain.

"Ladies, observe my easy grace."



From Alice Duer Miller, 'Are Women People?'

from the *New York Tribune*, 16th January 1916

With thanks to Mary Chapman

The strategy of quotation and ventriloquism deployed in *Are Women People?* and *Women are People!* is so insistent, that there are very few places where Miller can be heard to speak "in her own voice" or in the voice of an identifiable "suffragist". Rather the "voice" or subject position most frequently articulated is the voice of the anti-suffragist. Yet this is not to say that Miller's positionality is ever unclear. It is established precisely through her summaries of other voices through quotation and ventriloquism. In both of these works of poetry, the voice of the suffragist is what language theorist Janet Giltrow terms a "mobile voice", one that "accumulate[s] such a dense record of movement—a network of traces, sightings, and sittings—that the speaker[] offer glimpses of [his or her] own subjectivity at each move" (94).

There is something particularly "canny" about Miller's evasion of the "lyric I". If the vote as ideal political utterance finds its poetic equivalent in the articulation of the lyric "I", then through her refusal to assert her own poetic voice Miller stages the limits of feminine poetic selfhood at the same time that she gestures toward an understanding of the vote that goes beyond the

individual utterance. She is only ever interested in the vote for what it contributes to a public conversation: for how the individual contributes to a collective.

What does it mean to quote another? to endorse, provide evidence of? to yield power to, to suppress or distort? to assume cultural authority/parity with those quoted? Edward Said notes that “quotation is a constant reminder that writing is a form of displacement. As a rhetorical device, quotation can serve to accommodate, to incorporate, to falsify (when wrongly or even rightly paraphrased), to accumulate, to defend, or to conquer—but always, even when in the form of a passing allusion, it is a reminder that other writing serves to displace present writing” (qu. in Garber 657). Yet for Miller, quotation does not function as Said suggests: to displace present writing. Rather, the unspoken woman finds speech only through the language that is already made available to her; it does not displace her—it offers her a syntax and vocabulary with which to engage with previous discussions in the public sphere, to be heard/understood. Through quotation, Miller can assert her own unique positionality. As sociolinguist Greg Myers has noted, quoting is also “part of the process by which a collection of people... [can] make itself into a group” (381). Basing his research on the behavior of participants in focus groups, Myers claims reported speech always suggests a shift in frame because it detaches the reported utterance from the reporting speaker—it is an act of thievery, perhaps?—but more importantly, “reported speech [particularly hypothetical reported speech—paraphrase, and so on]—can be seen as part of the process by which a collection of people... makes itself into a group” (381).

The first poem in *Are Women People?* introduces Miller’s quotational method and reveals the way in which an unspoken position can be articulated through the hypothetical “reported speech” of others. The poem, a dialogue between father and son, appears to function as a kind of democratic catechism except that a child rather than an authority figure poses the questions, and the answers, which conveying orthodox views on the subject, confuse rather than clarify:

FATHER, what is a Legislature?
A representative body elected by the people of the state.
Are women people?
No, my son, criminals, lunatics and women are not people.
Do legislators legislate for nothing?
Oh, no; they are paid a salary.

By whom?
 By the people.
 Are women people?
 Of course, my son, just as much as men are.

Like the volume as a whole, the poem asks questions that can be heard as both fact-finding and rhetorical. The poem's power rests on two contradictory definitions of "people": one which excludes them, thereby not permitting them to elect a legislature, and another which includes them, in order to make their tax dollars pay for that legislature. Here the father initially defines people as those who elect the legislature, a group that excludes criminals, lunatics and women—but later includes women in his definition of people, who pay for the legislature. The "mobile voice" located in the interstices between these two premises silently invokes one of the foundational slogans of American democracy—"No taxation without representation"—and quickly makes clear the positionality that the suffrage poet will assume. What is most powerful here is not what is quoted but what is missing; this is characteristic of Miller's poetic method throughout.

Are Women People?
 By Alice Duer Miller

To Chivalry.

"I wonder if fanatic feminists, male and female, ever stop to ask themselves what will happen when the romance of sex is forgotten, or lost sight of, in the furious struggle between men and women which universal suffrage is sure to bring."—*The Phoenix*]

Chivalry, I don't abuse you,
 Not at all—the only rub
 Is that those who praise you use you
 Very often as a club.
 As a club or stick of candy,
 As a punishment or prize,
 Finding you extremely handy
 When they want to sermonize.
 Chivalry, they say you'll linger
 Only where the girls obey:
 Where they show the smallest ginger
 Instantly you fly away.

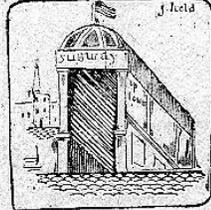


Many a stern relentless Anti
 Threatens us poor suffragettes
 As a mother tells how Santy
 Naughty children quite forgets.
 Yet in spite of all their talking,
 In a day dream, in a trance,
 Every day I see you walking,
 Arms in arms with old romance.

Woman's Place Is in the Buggy.

A little anti-suffrage magazine, called "The Phoenix," says on one page of its issue of last May that "we lead the world in a weak-minded, condescension toward women, which we are apt to dignify with the name of chivalry."

"Take
 a lesson
 from the
 subway."



A few pages further on it says: "Take a lesson from the subway of what women may expect when they throw down the gage of battle to men."
 Fancy any one treating women with condescension—weak-minded or other—when the unsexed creatures have thrown down the gage of battle by taking a public conveyance!

Why Women Can't Understand Politics.

"The Watertown Times" (Senator Brown, you know, comes from Watertown) is not in favor of resubmitting the suffrage amendment.
 "True," it says, "other constitutional amendments which were voted down last fall are proposed to be submitted next year, but the reason for it is entirely different."
 The main difference is that the suffrage amendment was defeated by a majority of 195,000 and the constitution by over 500,000.

Distinctions, Differences and Differentiations.

"The suffragists insist that the liquor interests are opposed to woman suffrage," says "The Sioux City Journal." "In all likelihood this is true. But, in the interests of fairness the suffragists must differentiate between opposition of such selfish, mercenary sort and opposition of reputable women who cannot bring themselves to favor suffrage."

Le Morte Danti.
 (By Our Own Sir Thomas Malory.)
 Chapter XXVIII. OF HOW THE FOUL DRAGON UPSET THE BROTH. Now while the broth that is called Mother's Suffrage by name was acooking, came

into the kitchen a proud orgulous princess, the which loved sweet cates and comfits. And when she smelt the broth, was she wonderly wroth, for, thought she, if this broth be set before us for to eat, then will there be legs care for sweet cates. Then saw she winding into the kitchen, a foul dragon hight Interests. And sorely it exasped with its flapper for to upset the broth, for liked it not that mothers wax strong. But it was not able to reach the pot. When the princess saw this, Marry said she, with I could hold converse with a foul dragon, I would say to it, get up on a stool, but it is not fitting for ladies to have talk with dragons. So when it heard this, Gramercy! lady, said the dragon, and it fetched a stool, and wended up on it, and upset the broth. And many ladies went hungry that day. Then said they to the proud princess, helped ye not that foul dragon? Never in my life, said she, held I converse with a foul dragon; and great shame it is to ye to say so.

Concerning Beams and Motes.

"The New York Times" has editorially advised suffragettes to be agreeable and polite.
 "I could assent," said Fortin, "to teach twenty what were good to be done than to be one of the twenty to follow mine own teachings."

Doubleless The Times is right,
 They ought to be polite,
 Polite, agreeable, temperate, suave, and gay:
 But he might be politer—
 That editorial writer—
 The Times itself, you know, might lead the way.



"She
 smelt
 the
 broth."

From Alice Duer Miller, 'Are Women People?'

from the *New York Tribune*, 2nd April 1916

With thanks to Mary Chapman

Many poems in the section of *Are Women People?* that Miller labels “Treacherous Texts” juxtapose actual quotations from anti-suffrage speeches with imagined conversations. “A Consistent Anti to Her Son”, for example, quotes from an anti-suffrage speech in its epigraph: “Look at the hazards, risks and physical dangers that ladies would be exposed to at the polls”, before Miller develops this argument to its ridiculous conclusion through the ventriloquizing of a hypothetical reported speech:

You must not go to the polls, Willie.
Never go to the polls.....
If you've a boyish fancy
For any measure or man,
Tell me, and I'll tell Father,
He'll vote for it, if he can.
He casts my vote, and Louisa's
And Sarah, and dear Aunt Clo;
Wouldn't you let him vote for you?
Father, who loves you so?

Here paradoxically, an anti-suffragist participates in the political ventriloquism that currently defines the vote, but to very different effects: i.e. if the son “tells” the mother, who will “tell Father” whom to vote for, then the assumption is that Father will supposedly vote on behalf of his disenfranchised relatives. But where the mother’s “ventriloquism” is understood as a passive yielding up of political authority, the Father’s ventriloquism is viewed as definitional exercise of democratic franchise. This revised reading of the performative function of the vote—Miller exposes it not as individuated utterance but as ventriloquising act—is explored elsewhere in her poetry, namely in two separate poems both titled, appropriately, “Representation”. The first, published in *Are Women People?*, begins with an epigraph quoting Vice-President Marshall’s comment invoking his wife’s opinion—”My wife is against suffrage, and that settles me”. The body of the poem continues, hypothetically, in the voice of the Vice President:

My wife dislikes the income tax,
And so I cannot pay it;

She thinks that golf all interest lacks,
So now I never play it;
She is opposed to tolls repeal
(Though why I cannot say),
But woman's duty is to feel,
And man's is to obey.

Here men's ventriloquism of the female voice is cast not as appropriation of that voice but as obedience to its authority. Miller exposes the impossibility of this obedience in "Representation" published in the later collection *Women are People*:

My present wife's a suffragist and counts on my support,
But my mother is an anti, of a rather biting sort;
One grandmother is on the fence, the other much opposed,
And my sister lives in Oregon, and thinks the question's closed.
Each one is counting on my vote to represent her view.
Now what should you think proper for a gentleman to do?

It's unclear to whom this "gentleman" poses his question: who might have the authority to answer his dilemma.

Of course, what all three poems point out is that if men do quote women when they vote, the exclusive granting of the vote to men causes a democratic principle—"one man one vote"—to pervert and compromise itself when the vote ventriloquizes others' preferences rather than asserts the preferences and opinions of the individual citizen. However, if men don't quote women exactly when they vote, and don't therefore represent women, then this democratic misrepresentation can only be remedied by enfranchising women. Misquoting men who misquote women then becomes a model for Miller's method.

In these and other poems in the collection, Miller articulates the suffragist voice not in the lyric "I" but in the accumulation of "mobile voices" produced by the dialogic—by parody, quotation, dialogue, travesty. Together these voices forge a knowing counter-public as Miller's implied reader hears, in the reported speech of anti-suffragists, Miller's questioning of authority.

Miller is at her wittiest when she creates “Campaign Material from Both Sides” in the form of absurd lists parodying the materials distributed to campaigners on both sides to provide ammunition for the suffrage debate. Lists like “Why We Oppose Votes for Men”; “Why We Oppose Pockets for Women”; and “Why We Oppose Schools for Children” expose the structural illogic of some of the most frequently used arguments in the anti-suffrage campaign and effectively puts anti-suffrage cant under erasure. For example, “Why We Oppose Women Traveling in Railway Trains” gives 6 reasons:

1. Because traveling in trains is not a natural right.
2. Because our great-grandmothers never asked to travel in trains.
3. Because woman’s place is in the home, not the train.
4. Because it is unnecessary; there is no point reached by a train that cannot be reached by foot.
5. Because it will double the work of conductors, engineers, and brakemen who are already overburdened.
6. Because men smoke and play cards in trains. Is there any reason to believe women will behave better?

Here this phantom “we”—an undefined collective who are united by their unwillingness to allow for change—is as insistent as the lyric “I” is absent.

The only place Miller articulates a suffragist positionality, she locates the suffragist voice not in the lyric “I” but rather in the collective, in poems like “An unauthorized interview between The Suffragists & the Statue of Liberty” (published in *Women are People*) in which a chorus of suffragists ask Liberty “Why you treat your daughters so?” Responding to Emma Lazarus’ 1883 conception of the Statue of Liberty in “The New Colossus” as a “mighty woman” who welcomes “huddled masses yearning to breathe free”, Miller’s statue exhibits a more critical self-consciousness:

I’m not she—
The winged Goddess, who sets nations free.
I am that Liberty, which when men win
They think that others’ seeking is a sin;...
Therefore they made me out of bronze, and hollow,
Immovable, for fear that I might follow
Some fresh rebellion, some new victim’s plea:
And so they set me on a rock at sea...

The interview is “unauthorized”—lacking authority—and yet the collective finds speech precisely in their statement of this unauthorized position. In this poem and throughout *Are Women People* and its sequel *Women are People*, Miller forges a knowing counter-public, who can hear in quotation and ventriloquism, a knowing audience who knows the intertext.

* * *

In his memoir Henry Wise Miller described his marriage to Alice as a conversation: “For over forty years we talked and talked; both together when the matter was not important, in half sentences when we were on ground familiar to both, and in lengthy, formal conversation” (122). This portrait of a marriage conveys, in microcosm, the utopian standard against which Miller compares men and women’s interaction in the public sphere. Miller celebrates conversation—whether it is intimate dialogue between men and women in courtship or political debate enabled by the enfranchisement of women—as the corrective to idealizations of [silent] femininity. Miller noted in a radio broadcast she did in the 1930s, that “People love to talk but hate to listen. There’s chatter, monologue but no conversation. A crowd excites us but to no social advantage” (*All Our Lives* 122). Equal, respectful conversation, particularly conversation between a man and a woman, becomes, in *Are Women People?* and *Women Are People*, the grounds upon which the public sphere should be established. Conversation is the “ideal speech situation” (Habermas): at once, the most intimate of exchanges, and, between men and women, representative of more public, necessary exchanges. The two suffrage poetry volumes Miller published are full of productive dialogue largely between men and women where the speakers arrive at new appreciation of each other’s interests and needs through conversation.

In 2004, both Alice Duer Miller and the collection of texts I am calling American suffrage literature are virtually unknown, but they have much to tell us about the cultural work performed by modernist literature in the decade before suffrage was granted: about negotiations around the primacy of the “lyric I” in the tradition that twentieth-century literary criticism, particularly New Criticism, forged, and about the erasure of the voices seeking to explore a collective alternative to a more individuated lyric functioning of language. At this point in my research, I can only

hypothesize about the reasons for the exclusion of Alice Duer Miller from the canon by noting that while the proponents of the modern quoting poem utilized the same multivocality Miller explored, their multivocality was ultimately absorbed into a masterly “lyric I” perhaps in the same way that the paradoxes of their poems could be absorbed into a well-wrought urn. Miller’s poetry resists the absorption of multiple voices, holding out for a kind of state subjectivity best represented by what is achieved through dialogue and voting.

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Mary Chapman teaches American literature at the University of British Columbia. She is the co-editor of **Sentimental Men: MAscularity and the Politics of Affect in American Culture** (U California P 1999), the editor of an edition of Charles Brockden Brown's novel **Ormond** (Broadview 1999), and the author of several essays on American literature and culture. This paper marks the beginning of a new project on American suffrage writing and modernist print culture.

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Notes

ⁱ Encyclopedia Britannica on-line.

ⁱⁱ Biographical information about Alice Duer Miller is drawn from several encyclopedia entries (in Works Cited) under her name, as well as contemporary or recent profiles by O'Higgins, Van Gelder, Schwartz, Overton, Lawton, Anonymous, and the unsigned "A National Industry". Reviews of her poetry appeared in *The Masses* (no. 1; Oct-Nov 1915: 9), *The New York Times* 17 June 1917: 234; *The Nation* 30 September 1915: 407; *The Woman's Journal* 19 May 1915: 119; and *The Masses* July 1915: 28. When *Are Women People?* was reviewed on the same page as *Spoon River Anthology* in the [Elyria OH] *Evening Telegram* 5 Oct 1915, the reviewer observed: "As campaign literature the book is first-class" (4). *The White Cliffs*, according to the author of "A National Industry", was a sleeper...and had totally unexpected success. The turning point was ...when Lynn Fontanne read [it] on an NBC hook-up...repeated two weeks later...One day in December [1940] it sold 1700 copies."

ⁱⁱⁱ Poem titles varied slightly between the column and the books. These are the titles of the poems in the column.