

Rank Ladies, Ladies of Rank: The Elinore Sisters in Vaudeville

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The Elinore Sisters, two performers who portrayed Irish women in their vaudeville sketches, are part of several overlapping histories: the history of ethnic comedy, of female performers and of vaudeville. Historians of vaudeville have already introduced us to the performers—usually male—who specialized in ethnic comedy in vaudeville. Joe Weber and Lew Fields, well-known German (also known as Dutch) comedians, spoke with thick accents and fought each other vigorously on stage. Thomas J. Ryan dressed in ragged clothes and put on red hair and whiskers in his portrayal of an Irishman always ready to drink and fight, while Julian Rose succeeded in vaudeville with his comic monologues about a Jewish immigrant's mishaps.¹ Performing with her sister May in vaudeville between 1894 and 1909, Kate Elinore should be added to this list. Through her portrayal of wild Irish women and her initiation of numerous slapstick gags, Kate Elinore was the central comic figure in her sketches. A rare female clown, Kate Elinore reveals the long-overlooked controversies that surrounded a female performer who violated the gender boundaries of ethnic comedy.

Kate Elinore, however, cannot be studied in isolation from her sister, May Elinore, because the tension between the contrasting types of characters they presented was the foundation of their comedy. Like the foils for the clowns in many other vaudeville acts, May Elinore presented feminine authority figures who attempted to suppress the clown's erratic behavior through their moral influence and their instructions on manners. Thus, while Kate Elinore was exceptional in her role as the masculine, immigrant clown, May Elinore's characters were quite conventional. May Elinore's polite, attractive Irish women demonstrate, furthermore, that the rough immigrant woman—the stereotype

from the vaudeville stage which has received the most scholarly attention—was countered by the image of an acculturated immigrant woman: the “civilizing woman.” As the contrasts between the sisters’ characters make clear, Kate Elinore’s rank ladies must be considered in relation to May Elinore’s ladies of rank.

Directing their aggressive comedy at the ladies of rank, the ethnic clowns such as Kate Elinore and the many men who dominated this performance style expressed hostility to feminine authority. This theme in vaudeville’s ethnic comedy must be added to previous interpretations of this type of comedy. The prevailing emphasis on the stereotypes of uncouth immigrants as “ethnic boundary markers” (as examples of what “veritable Americans were not”) must now make way for a fuller, more nuanced appraisal of these caricatures.² Until now scholars tended to view the immigrant clowns primarily as buffoons who allowed native-born and middle-class vaudeville patrons to feel superior to them. As the Elinore Sisters’ sketches and other vaudeville acts reveal, however, the immigrant clowns represented ethnic and working-class pride in their battles with stifling female authority figures. The “civilizing woman” was in many ways the butt of jokes in these sketches, as her repressive rules often seem ill-founded and her manners overly grandiose.

A consideration of such gender and class antagonism broadens our perspective on ethnic comedy, while also revising the current interpretation of the history of vaudeville. It forces us to account for the sometimes subtle, and always pervasive subplots of class and gender hostility in an entertainment industry increasingly preoccupied with feminine respectability. Most scholars emphasize that vaudeville earned a “respectable” reputation around the turn of the century by reforming the rowdy, working-class, and masculine atmosphere which had previously dominated variety entertainment.³ As proof, they cite that in the late 1880s vaudeville promoters such as Benjamin Franklin Keith and Edward F. Albee began to offer a series of “variety” acts, including singers, dancers and comedians, in theaters separate from the traditional setting of variety shows (in concert saloons and dime museums). To attract white middle-class women and children to their theaters, these entrepreneurs censored material they deemed offensive to women and children, silenced unruly patrons and remodeled their theaters into ornate palaces. The traditional history of vaudeville emphasizes that Keith and Albee consolidated a diverse audience of white patrons (working-class, middle-class and elite men, women, and children) under the rubric of bourgeois values and tastes by eliminating the “low” tastes and values associated with working-class masculinity. Nevertheless, the derision of the female foils, erudite and orderly, and the celebration of the clown’s rebellions in the Elinore Sisters’ routines point to the ambivalence about and rejection of the taming of vaudeville. In these ways, the Elinore Sisters provide a window on to the gender tensions in ethnic comedy as well as the simmering hostility against the feminization of vaudeville.



Figure 1: Kate and May Elinore (left to right). Billy Rose Theatre Collection. (The photograph appears here courtesy of The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts. Astor, Lenox and Tilden foundations.)

Kate Elinore's role as a slapstick clown was indeed controversial because she countered a male tradition of ethnic comedy in vaudeville, but, more broadly, her performance style raised questions about the definition of a woman's sense of humor. The debate over women's humor in the early twentieth century revolved around the question of whether the enjoyment of "low" comedy, such as slapstick routines in vaudeville, was contrary to women's nature. Constance Coquelin, for example, wrote in 1901, that "[t]he lighter, the more fantastic, the daintier the humorous fancy, the quicker it appeals to a woman."⁴ Robert Burdette reiterated Coquelin's conclusions about women's refined humor: "[T]his sense in her is delicate, sympathetic, refined to the highest culture. True humor delights her, while buffoonery, if it be brutal, shocks her."⁵ When women's humor was acknowledged it was limited to subtle, intellectual, sensitive comedy.

One result of this definition of women's comedy was that in male/female comedy teams in vaudeville the woman's role was usually the "straight" role or the "feeder" for a comic male partner. A manager on the Keith Circuit, for example, noted the reversal of traditional gender roles in Hines and Remington's comedy act: "Unusual inasmuch as the woman is not used as the 'feeder' but does most of the work and is really the life of the act."⁶ Critic Robert Speare saw Kate Elinore usurping the male comic role: the Elinore Sisters are an "absolutely novel woman act . . . the idea is that of the straight comedian and the rough comedian, only instead of its being two men now its two women."⁷ In addition, vaudeville theater manager Charles Lovenberg referred to Kate Elinore in his assessment of Earl and Wilson's musical comedy act:

This act was a great surprise for in it was found a woman who is actually funny almost as much so as the comedienne of the Elinor [sic] sisters. She makes up as an eccentric country girl and has a very funny line of talk and the novelty of the woman doing the comedy and the man, the straight work, is very acceptable.⁸

The Elinore Sisters, with Kate Elinore as a brash comedian, were indeed an odd pair in vaudeville.

The commentary surrounding Kate Elinore focused on the exceptional nature of a grotesque female comedian.⁹ A review on December 20, 1906 noted that Kate Elinore "had determined to carve out a new pathway for herself, one which women had never before trodden. 'I'm going to do something different, something grotesque,' she said."¹⁰ To make herself grotesque, Kate Elinore wore mismatched costumes, spoke in a gruff voice and highlighted awkward, often aggressive, movements on stage. In 1909 one reporter was surprised by her "low" comedy. "She is one of those marvels Heaven seldom sends us—a truly funny woman," he explained, "She is a low comedienne who does not mind making herself look ugly or ridiculous in order to make her audience laugh."¹¹ In her 1914

history of vaudeville, Carolyn Caffin remembered Kate Elinore's appearance: "Never was a woman less troubled with self-consciousness. Her face is one broad, expansive smile which seems to radiate from the top of her little nob of hair . . . and from every angle of her square built frame."¹² Another reviewer noted that "her make-up is a nightmare of the milliner's art. Her voice makes a fog horn sound like an echo."¹³ Perhaps the most striking example of Kate Elinore's eccentric appearance was her costume for a performance on November 30, 1909: "gauze draperies spangled with small kitchen utensils."¹⁴

Kate Elinore contrasted the vanity and perky sexuality expected of many female performers, cultivating instead a grotesque style and appearance that followed the traditional stereotype of a working-class Irish woman. According to theater historian Paul Distler, the Irish woman on vaudeville stages was "a little loud [and] too free spirited for the basically Anglo-Saxon stock."¹⁵ Frequently actresses portrayed the Irish woman as a maid who disrupted her employers' middle-class home with her careless mistakes and adventurous spirit. A popular scene in several early twentieth-century films involves a maid "Bridget" wreaking havoc when she tries to light a fire in a stove. *The Finish of Bridget McKeen*, an Edison film produced in 1901, shows Bridget struggling to set a fire. After several bumbling attempts, she pours kerosene in the stove; the resulting explosion vaults her into the air with a large puff of smoke. The final image of the film focuses on her gravestone, reminding viewers of the chaotic, dangerous world of Irish maids: "Here lies the remains of Bridget McKeen who started a fire with kerosene."¹⁶

Tapping into the unruliness associated with working-class, Irish women in her defiant stage performances, Kate Elinore drew on a tradition in Western culture in which the instability associated with women was also a source of rebelliousness in public displays and protests. In early modern Europe women and men, often through cross-dressing, incorporated the association between women and the lower body—including reproduction and sexuality—into their social inversions and civil disruptions. "The lower ruled the higher in women," explains historian Natalie Zemon Davis, "and if she were given her way, she would want to rule over those above her outside."¹⁷ Although many women protested against the characterization of women as "by nature more unruly, more disobedient and fickle than men," this connection was the source of popular imagery and activity which undermined gender hierarchy.¹⁸

Kate Elinore clearly carried on this tradition, but her performances also point to the ways class and ethnicity shaped the uses of the unruly woman. Within ethnic comedy in vaudeville, the definition of particular groups of women (immigrant women, working-class women) as sexually, physically and verbally excessive provided a source of female comedians' rebellions against male authority on and off stage. The women whom reformers identified as being too aggressive, too loud, and too sexual were often the fuel for female performers' comic assaults, including their adoption of male comic styles of performance in vaudeville.

Kate Elinore's chaotic characters must be considered within the plots of her sketches, particularly in relation to the orderly women presented by her sister, May. Filled with Kate Elinore's rantings and physical gags, the Elinore Sisters' sketches focus on a "low" Irish woman's excessive appetites and her repeated clashes with social authority and convention. In their sketches, as in many other vaudeville routines, the image of acculturation and propriety is an elite woman. In contrast to Kate Elinore's restless and rambunctious characters, the traditional female comic antagonist, exemplified by May Elinore's characters, is thus a "civilizing woman."

To understand the tension between order and disorder as well as the struggle against feminine authority in the Elinore Sisters' acts, it is useful to turn first to the interpretative framework established by film and vaudeville historian Henry Jenkins. The contest between an unruly clown and a comic antagonist in the Elinore Sisters' sketches resembles the "anarchistic comedy" that Jenkins has identified in vaudeville as well as in Hollywood films of the late 1920s and 1930s. Anarchistic comedy depends on the juxtaposition of an expressive, out-of-control clown and a comic antagonist who symbolizes "civilization, all that is stifling or corrupt in the social order."¹⁹ Expressing freedom and energy as they fight against the comic antagonists ("dupes, killjoys, and counterfeits"), the clowns offer the audience an escape from the restraint and control associated with civilization.²⁰ This identification with the clown corresponds to what sociologists have identified as a release from the emotional constraints of mass society.²¹ While the clown's outbursts address a desire for spontaneity and freedom, the audience's feelings toward the clown remain equivocal because the clowns are usually outsiders of some kind, representatives of the "lower orders." Jenkins thus concludes that viewers may identify with the clowns, seeking vicarious escape, but they may also distance themselves from these grotesque characters. In this light, Kate Elinore was indeed more than a negative stereotype, repulsing middle-class viewers with her mismatched costumes and crude manners; her chaotic characters also attracted vaudeville patrons as they offered moments of excitement and relief from civilizing restraints.

All of the Elinore Sisters' routines contain "anarchistic comedy." The Elinore Sisters most popular vaudeville sketch was "Dangerous Mrs. Delaney": one version was written in 1898 by George M. Cohan (a popular vaudeville performer as well as a sketch-writer); a second version was written by Carroll Flemming and William Jerome in 1902. Mrs. Delaney, played by Kate Elinore, is a working-class, immigrant Irish woman who quickly vaults into high society after winning a large financial settlement from a lawsuit. She disrupts elite social circles by spitting in public places, yelling insults at anyone who challenges her, and punching men at parties. Her daughter, on the other hand, has learned the proper etiquette for her family's social climb and attempts to reform her mother's behavior.²² But it is often Mrs. Delaney, not her daughter, who is the heroine of these routines. Mrs. Delaney is explicitly valorized in the 1902 version of

“Dangerous Mrs. Delaney.” Although her daughter’s suitor speaks with flowery language and although her daughter has tried to convince her mother of her suitor’s sophistication, Mrs. Delaney is not fooled. She realizes that her daughter’s suitor is simply trying to get to the Delaney fortune and rescues her daughter from her fraudulent beau.

Mrs. Delaney not only fails to assimilate; she also fails to attract men. She boasts, for example, that one man at the party thought she was the “sweetest woman in cremation” (47). Along with her appearance and vocabulary, Mrs. Delaney’s violent reactions are incongruous with “respectable” society. When a “little weasel of a man” requests that she “remove her mask,” Delaney explains that she “hit him so hard that I had to go to the hospital and have me fist cut out of his ribs” (47). In another instance Mrs. Delaney describes the controversy surrounding her face: “I told him [a male guest at the party] that I had shooting pains in my face he said I used too much powder. I said I thought of having it steamed he said if it was his he’d have it boiled” (82). Throughout these routines Mrs. Delaney exchanges insults and punches with other characters, chasing away anyone who does not please her and even bringing in heavy artillery to win her battles.

In “The Irish 400” (written in 1897) Mrs. Murphy, played by Kate Elinore, embarrasses her daughter May with her bad manners, her allegiance to Ireland and her “unfeminine” behavior. For example, after acquiescing to her daughter’s desire to join her in a fashionable Turkish bath, Mrs. Murphy confounds her daughter by asking for a glass of mixed ale. Then on their way home from the bath, May Murphy admonishes her mother for spitting on the floor of the streetcar, so Mrs. Murphy spits in the conductor’s pocket. They are kicked out of the car. Later May recounts how her mother interrupted a concert by a famous Polish pianist Ignacy Paderewski to ask her, “Phwat county in Ireland did Paddy Roosky come from?” Throughout the sketch, May instructs, cajoles and scolds her wild mother.²³

While these sketches focus on the relationship between a mother and daughter, others feature the struggle between employers and their maids. In “The Adventures of Bridget McGuire,” which toured on the Keith circuit in 1902, an Irish maid takes control of her husband and her husband’s employer. Bridget McGuire, played by Kate Elinore, is a recently unemployed maid who disrupts her husband’s job by pretending to be his employer’s rich aunt. Judkins, Bridget’s husband, attempts to hide Bridget in his mistress’s house, hoping to conceal his recent marriage, but Bridget’s large appetites—for food and alcohol—soon upset the household. Mrs. Rapp (Judkin’s employer) discovers Bridget as she reaches for a decanter; Bridget snaps, “That’s not the first time whiskey has been the downfall of Ireland.”²⁴

The ensuing dialogue between Bridget and Mrs. Rapp exposes Bridget’s “vulgarity” along with Mrs. Rapp’s pretensions, as Mrs. Rapp mistakes Bridget for her wealthy, eccentric aunt and flatters her in hopes of winning an inheritance.

When Mrs. Rapp offers Bridget some “refreshment,” Bridget initially demurs, in a manner that she believes fits the role of a wealthy matron, “No thank you I never drink anything.” Nevertheless Bridget soon “grabs a glass” from her “hostess” and then begins to drink out of the decanter, politely explaining, “If you insist—I don’t mind if I take a little drop” (115). As Bridget continues drinking throughout the sketch, she becomes more abusive toward Mrs. Rapp and reveals more of her “true” identity. Describing her belief in spiritualism to Bridget, Mrs. Rapp asks, “Are you afraid of spirits, Auntie?” and Bridget replies, “Not when I can get them by the neck,” holding the decanter up (116). Bridget’s thirst is matched by her appetite for food: when Mrs. Rapp suggests a light lunch, Bridget says she might be able to force down a “few pounds . . . I mean mouthfuls” (117). The confusion of identities empowers Bridget in two ways: she earns a temporary position of authority over Judkins, and her charade reveals Mrs. Rapp as a disingenuous groveller.

With Mrs. Rapp believing that Bridget is actually her aunt, Bridget is able to gain control of Judkins, barking orders at him as if she was his boss. At one point, unsatisfied with Judkin’s service, Bridget hits him with a roll, exclaiming, “He’s a bum servant” (121). Although Bridget continually errs in her imitation of a society woman, her mistakes actually intensify the impression of Mrs. Rapp’s desperation. When Mrs. Rapp shows her to her room, Bridget remarks that the sofa is “simply supercilious” and later chastises Mrs. Rapp for being “ordacious” (126). Despite Bridget’s malapropisms, Mrs. Rapp strives to please and impress her, still believing she is her wealthy aunt. Furthermore, Bridget’s common sense contrasts Mrs. Rapp’s religious beliefs. Bridget, for example, remarks that she always thought a spiritualist was called a “pocketpicker,” remaining skeptical of Mrs. Rapp’s spiritualism throughout the sketch (116). In these ways, the coincidence of mistaken identity both reinforces Bridget’s coarseness and gives her power over her husband and her husband’s employer.

Bridget McGuire seems to be the butt of jokes when she fails to fit into high society, when her rough ethnicity emerges despite her attempt to impersonate the wealthy aunt. Yet Bridget McGuire also offers relief from, and rebellion against, the comic antagonist; her unruly behavior and her ethnic identity are championed over Mrs. Rapp’s rigidity, superior airs and femininity.²⁵ Indeed, all of Kate Elinore’s maids and mothers (Mrs. Delaney and Mrs. Murphy) reveal that May Elinore’s comic antagonists are flawed—stuffy, inauthentic and bossy. These sketches thus feature the rough, immigrant clown as a hero, casting a positive light on ethnic pride and working-class allegiance. In addition, Kate Elinore’s characters depict a woman’s power to disrupt hierarchies, in contrast with the equation of femininity with corrupt or repressive social authority in May Elinore’s comic antagonists. As opposed to the “civilizing woman,” the female clown rejects the feminine role, often triumphing over the femininity, class status and acculturation associated with the “civilizing woman.”

Kate Elinore’s rejection of feminine performance codes and her characters’ assaults on elite femininity provide new insights into the uses of ethnic stereo-

types in women's comedy. Recent feminist accounts of women's comic performances hold that these routines are open to liberating feminist laughter as well as misogynistic interpretations: comic women who violate gender codes call attention to the artificiality of femininity but are also open to attack for their deviation from the norm. Critics, for example, have pointed to a long line of female characters, from Miss Piggy to Roseanne, who mock the ideal of femininity by exposing the exuberance, anger and power beneath the thin veneer of feminine charm. These women, in turn, have often been the objects of derisive laughter because of their feminine failures.²⁶

Feminist interpretations of women's comic performances have thus examined the ability of female comic spectacles to undermine gender roles, while they have often simultaneously overlooked other aspects of identity and power, such as ethnicity. The conflicted readings of women's comic performances—one supporting, and the other undermining gender hierarchies—do not, for example, capture the ways performers like Kate Elinore used ethnic stereotypes to attack femininity. Most feminist critics have been reluctant to acknowledge that female comic performers may articulate their rebellions against gender constraints through other subordinations.²⁷ Here we need to explore historian Robert Allen's argument that the cultural productions of subordinate groups should not merely be read "in terms of its resistance to the power of more dominant groups." Rather, "resistant practices might well be polyvalent, not only directed against those conceived of as 'above', but constructing yet another object of subordination"²⁸

Kate Elinore's performances were indeed polyvalent, for her rebellions against male authority emerged through her imitations of working-class, immigrant women. In this way, she relied on ethnic and class hierarchies of women to challenge patriarchy. While Kate Elinore (as Mrs. Murphy, Mrs. Delaney and Bridget McGuire) treated femininity as a mask to be manipulated and discarded to impress party guests or fool employers, she was nevertheless clear about what did not constitute femininity: working-class Irish-American women. Kate Elinore's comic performances were therefore not so much a critique of femininity as an expression of the exclusivity of femininity. Her caricatures, including rough Irish maids trying to imitate or please "ladies of rank," actually reinforced the ranking of working-class immigrant women beneath femininity.

The controversy surrounding Kate Elinore's manly role resembles other traditions in vaudeville comedy in which performers who adopted the persona of the working-class Irish woman also raised questions about gender identity. In particular, the stock characterization of an Irish maid—a tradition on which Kate Elinore drew—is linked to female impersonation. The tradition of female impersonation associated with the portrayal of Irish maids expressed, as Kate Elinore's characters also did, the notion that working-class Irish-American women are not feminine. Between 1890 and 1907 the comedy team of Daly and Devere presented an act titled "Bridget's Word Goes" or "The Janitress" in which Daly dressed as an Irish maid, "a most capacious female, pugnacious to a degree

and anxious to air her opinions on any and all subjects.”²⁹ The most famous transvestite Irish maids were, however, presented by the Russell Brothers who began their stage career in the 1870s, approximately twenty years before the Elinore Sisters. Earning their greatest success playing Irish maids in the sketch, “The Irish Servant Girls,” the Russell Brothers used mops and brooms to strike each other and emphasized their characters’ sexual wantonness by raising their skirts periodically. By 1907 Irish “watch-dog” groups such as the Ancient Order of Hibernians, attacked the Russell Brothers’ “misrepresentation” of Irish women, and some Irish organizations began to disrupt the Russell Brothers’ stage performances.³⁰ Overlapping with the last half of the Russell Brothers’ career, the Elinore Sisters were often compared with this team. In the late 1890s, for example, one reviewer remarked that Kate Elinore’s “violent method and her rawboned mimicry are as individual and likable as those of the Russell Brothers.”³¹

Although the stock character of the Irish maid is most important for understanding the roots of Kate Elinore’s portrayals of rough Irish women, particularly Bridget McGuire, her characterizations also rely on the traditional presentations of the “old maid” in vaudeville and early film. Both the “old maid” and the Irish maid lacked femininity and insulted middle-class men and women with their aggression and vigor. Despite her previous marriage, the widow Mrs. Delaney resembles the classic “old maid”—an unattractive man-hunter. While the words to the opening song for the first version of “Dangerous Mrs. Delaney” portray a delicate, desirable woman, it is easy to imagine the ways Kate Elinore’s appearance and movements would have provided sharp contrasts to the lyrics:

Who’ll have a chance at something tasty
 Not too hasty, slim of wasty [sic]. . . .
 Gentlemen you have a perfect treat on
 Something you can afford to be sweet on.
 Chance your luck. Show your pluck.
 I’m throwing myself away (45).

This caricature of the “old maid” as a woman desperately throwing herself at men was popular in vaudeville as well as in early twentieth century films. Such films as *The Old Maid and the Burglar* (1903), *The Old Maid’s Disappointment* (1902) and *The Old Maid and the Fortune Teller* (1904) feature sexually aggressive women who are rejected by men and rebuked for their ugliness. To demonstrate the “old maid’s” lack of femininity even further, a man—Gilbert Saroni—performed the “old maid” role in vaudeville and in many films, including *The Old Maid Having Her Picture Taken* (1901) and *The Old Maid and the Horse Car* (1901). As in “Dangerous Mrs. Delaney,” many of the comic gags in these films focus on the “old maid’s” face: mirrors shatter, cameras explode and, most importantly, men recoil in horror.

Kate Elinore's physically and verbally antagonistic comedy seemed masculine to observers, just as male performers often seemed most suited to the portrayal of rough Irish maids and "old maids." It is not surprising, therefore, to find Kate Elinore at the center of speculations about her "true" sex and accusations that she was a transvestite. Several observers, for example, challenged the portrait of Kate Elinore as an exceptional female performer by arguing that she was, in fact, a man. "It's quite a common thing with us to have the daily papers insist that I am a man for reasons all their own," explained Kate Elinore in one article, "and many is the letter received asking us to settle a dispute or wager."³² In one case, the comedian's dresser announced that she had won five dollars for settling a bet about Kate Elinore's "true" sex by verifying that she changed her clothes in the ladies' room. Yet the dresser confessed that she was still unsure about whether or not Kate Elinore was a woman. Another article included Kate Elinore's description of how her "masculine" voice—a voice she allegedly cultivated to replace her "singing" voice—incited debates about her gender. She recalled walking home from a performance and overhearing one man challenge another: "I tell you the big one is a man and no mistake and I'll bet you anything you like on it." Much like her popular stage characters would have done, Kate Elinore interrupted the men and announced (in a "guttural" tone), "Excuse me sir, but you are a liar."³³ With her gruff manner and voice, she thus left the men confused about her gender.

The inquiries into Kate Elinore's true gender identity demonstrate that her slapstick portrayals of immigrant women and flirtatious widows were clearly part of traditions of male performance in vaudeville. Not only did Kate Elinore play the "male" comic role in relation to her "straight" sister, but she also portrayed stock characters associated with female impersonation. In this light, the accusation that Kate Elinore was a man may have been an attempt to erase her rebellion against the norms for women's performances. Indeed the myth of Kate Elinore's hidden manhood replaced a woman's unruliness with a traditional male clown.

This rumor of female impersonation corresponds to theater historian Geraldine Maschio's claim that female impersonators in vaudeville were a misogynist response to women's power.³⁴ Maschio argues that "prima donna" female impersonators—beautiful, glamorous and fashionable—created a convincing illusion of femininity through their expensive wardrobes, make-up and manners. In Maschio's view, this type of female impersonation indicates male control over the female image and role, presenting the ideal woman as a beautiful ornament. Male performers' impersonation of Irish maids and old maids and the myths about Kate Elinore's cross-dressing also help bolster male authority, but, far from creating the feminine ideal (as the prima donna impersonators did) these manly maids expressed the antithesis of femininity. The roots of Kate Elinore's characterizations thus reveal a tradition of female impersonation in vaudeville that contrasts the ultra-feminine female impersonators. The men who impersonated Irish maids and old maids marked particular women as undesirable as they ridiculed the aggressive, sexually assertive woman.

The rumor about cross-dressing both attempted to subdue Kate Elinore's intrusion into the male-dominated field of ethnic comedy and reinforced the conception of working-class Irish women as manly. Indeed, it is important to follow the ways that Kate Elinore's "alleged" gender masquerade influenced her ethnic disguises, for the figure of the transvestite often followed and shaped the nature of other challenges to social categories such as ethnicity.³⁵ For Kate Elinore, the suggestion that she was actually a female impersonator intensified her ethnic caricature by implying that working-class Irish women were not really women. The confusion of gender in the publicity surrounding Kate Elinore thus exaggerated the manliness of working-class Irish women, reinforcing the class and ethnic limits of femininity.

Kate Elinore is indeed unusual because she occupied the traditional male role in these sketches and drew on the transvestite traditions associated with the portrayal of Irish maids. Nevertheless, the Elinore Sisters' sketches also include many of the traditional elements of vaudeville's ethnic comedy. While Kate Elinore subverted gender conventions in vaudeville, May Elinore exemplified the feminine role in vaudeville's ethnic comedy: the "civilizing woman." The comedy of many vaudeville routines with immigrant characters depended upon a woman as the clown's antagonist, representing bourgeois values. For example, in "The Mill Owner's Daughter," a vaudeville sketch written by M. S. Robinson and H. S. Gibson in 1902, an Irishman and his daughter represent different degrees of assimilation into high society. The authors describe the father as "an uneducated Irishman, who has acquired wealth, but not Polish [sic]," while his daughter "has been educated and has acquired Polish."³⁶

Here it is revealing to compare Kate and May Elinore with one of the most popular male/female comedy teams in vaudeville, Thomas J. Ryan and Mary Richfield, because Richfield, like May Elinore, played the classic civilizing woman in the long-running Mag Haggerty sketches in vaudeville. Written by Will Cressy (one of vaudeville's most prolific sketch writers) and performed by Ryan and Richfield, the Mag Haggerty sketches focus on an Irish hod carrier who must mingle in high society after his daughter Mag marries a millionaire. This successful series spanned approximately ten years and includes at least three different sketches: "Mag Haggerty's Father," probably first performed during the 1901-1902 vaudeville season; "Mag Haggerty's Daughter," produced in 1904; and "Mag Haggerty's Reception" in 1906.

In "Mag Haggerty's Reception," Mag Haggerty, reminds her father that he will be meeting a "lady of title! of rank!" at the upcoming party. Mike Haggerty responds, "Yis, a rank lady."³⁷ In "The Irish 400," the Elinore Sisters' 1897 sketch, Mamie (played by May Elinore) tries to convince her mother (Kate Elinore) that her suitor is respectable by telling her that he "comes from a family of rank." Her mother retorts, "the rankest I ever saw."³⁸ As the resemblance of these jokes suggests, both the Mag Haggerty sketches and the Elinore Sisters' routines focus on questions of rank in immigrant Irish families, following, in particular, the efforts of ladies of rank to reform the rank characters around them.

In the Mag Haggerty sketches the woman represents the successful bridging of class and ethnic boundaries; the man embodies the gulf between bourgeois society and working-class, ethnic life. Tussling with Mag's servants, performing Irish jigs, and confusing Mag with malapropisms, Mike Haggerty is the source of disorder in these routines. Yet Mag, through her campaign to uplift her father and impress her elite companions with her high-brow tastes, is also the target of ridicule. In "Mag Haggerty's Father's Daughter," written in 1905, Mag is unsuccessful in her campaign to move her father from his ramshackle house to her new home on "Cintral Park West." Mike Haggerty is often the target of jokes when he is baffled by modern technology—such as the telephone—and manners befitting a "gentleman." Mike, for example, does not understand the new telephone his daughter has installed in his "shanty." He says the voice on the line has "wrinkles in it" and, searching in vain for the voice's "body", he asks, "Where the divil is that feller?" (18). Yet the telephone later becomes a source of Mike's superiority. As Mag leaves she reminds her father that he can "call [her] up at anytime." He responds, "I'll be more apt to call you down" (20). Mike seems justified in "calling her down" as Mag often looks ridiculous when she puts on airs. For example, Mag decides to pronounce her name "Margurite" instead of Mag and calls her father her "paternal parent" in her attempt to appear "refined"(4).

In a later sketch, "Mag Haggerty's Reception," Mag tries to teach Mike the proper manners for an upcoming party. When he first refers to the party as a "deception," it seems similar to many of his other errors. But when Mag teaches him to say "I'm glad to meet you" to guests, even when he isn't "glad," Mike exclaims, "I tould [sic] you I had the name of this thing right! DE-ception" (14).³⁹ As this joke indicates, the plots of these sketches allow Mike Haggerty to preserve his pride and masculinity at the expense of the "civilizing woman."

It is important to consider the work of these two comedy teams to understand the dual images of Irish women—as both civilizers and rebels—and to see that the contrasts between masculine and feminine behavior frame both teams' comedy. Just as Kate Elinore's characters frequently triumph over and reveal the flaws of the "civilizing woman," Mike Haggerty is also heroic in vaudeville's ethnic comedy. The Mag Haggerty sketches and the Elinore Sisters' acts reveal that the ethnic clown is often valorized, while the femininity and acculturation represented by the "civilizing woman" are ridiculed. Most importantly, the Elinore Sisters' sketches, despite having a female clown, also demonstrate that the juxtaposition of masculinity and femininity reinforces the battles between the ethnic, working-class clown and the educated, assimilated comic antagonist.

Yet the Elinore Sisters, as opposed to Thomas J. Ryan and Mary Richfield, draw on the tradition of the masculine, working-class Irish woman to bring chaos and exuberance into the immigrant families in these sketches. As opposed to Mike Haggerty, Kate Elinore's characters do not simply outwit, embarrass and escape from a suffocating feminine authority. Instead, she presents an alternative version of female power that contrasts with the "civilizing woman's" attempts to

control her family through moral influence and instruction. Kate Elinore's powers lie in her physical exertions, not the physical reserve associated with the "civilizing woman," and in the expression of her own desires, as opposed to the "civilizing woman's" emotional containment. Kate Elinore's version of power, as I will show later in this paper, was often a model for female vaudeville patrons.

The attacks on the "civilizing women" were not limited to the vaudeville stage; rather, the comedy surrounding the "civilizing woman" on stage resonated with hostility toward female authority and class ascension throughout American culture around the turn of the century. The upwardly mobile and uptight "civilizing woman"—the symbol of order in these vaudeville sketches—was important to tensions within the Irish-American community as well as vaudeville's drive for respectability.

One of the central conflicts in the Irish-American community around the turn of the century was between the newly-established middle-class or "lace curtain" Irish and working-class Irish.⁴⁰ By 1880 the number of American-born Irish exceeded the number of Irish immigrants and this new generation improved their economic status. According to the 1900 census, for example, American-born Irish were succeeding disproportionately in white-collar occupations such as clerks and bookkeepers. Yet, as historian Timothy Meagher explains, the status of the new generation of middle-class Irish Americans was ambivalent: "No longer the newest of the new immigrants or the poorest of the poor, they were also not accepted by America's native stock elite."⁴¹

Irish American women were pivotal in the path of upward mobility, often leading their families from "poverty to comfort, from shanty to lace curtain."⁴² Popular Irish literature and drama reflected this phenomenon by portraying women as civilizers who attempted to control their husbands' drinking and lift their families into the middle class through hard work and saving. For example, Peter Finley Dunne's turn-of-the-century newspaper sketches focused on struggles for social mobility among the Irish in Chicago. The Donahue family's debates over such status symbols as a piano were often the features of Dunne's sketches. Mrs. Donahue and her daughter Molly were the social climbers, while Mr. Donahue resisted their rising pretensions.⁴³ In addition, Edward Harrigan's popular musical comedies, such as *Cordelia's Aspirations* (1883), frequently followed an Irish woman's attempts to assimilate into elite American society.

Many Irish men, in turn, resented Irish women's power and their attempts to reform men: "The resentment stemmed not just from being the object of an uplifting campaign," concludes historian Hasia Diner, "but that women carried on that campaign."⁴⁴ Many men were uneasy about Irish women's assertiveness and power as these women sought education, white-collar jobs and bourgeois manners. Ambivalence about upward mobility and acculturation were thus tied to fears of women's influence over men as well as their independence from men.

Just as women were identified with upward mobility in the Irish-American community, they were also linked with the Keith vaudeville circuit's attempt to improve its social status. The Keith vaudeville circuit created the image of an

ideal female spectator—moral, chaste and high brow—as the linchpin of its campaign for increased respectability. They used this ideal female patron to bolster their attempts to civilize the audiences and the entertainment. To accommodate what theater managers identified as the tastes and manners of the female patrons, Keith's managers tried to reform the rambunctious male patrons in the galleries, the cheapest sections of the theaters. One manager on the Keith circuit, for example, reported in 1911 that "riffraff in the gallery" tried to drive a Russian singer ("Princess Baranoff") off the stage, but the disturbance "was quickly suppressed . . . by house officers."⁴⁵

As this review indicates managers on the Keith circuit noted gallery patrons' resistance to the reforms associated with feminization, sometimes complaining that it was impossible to keep the boys in the gallery quiet.⁴⁶ In one case, a manager remarked that the "boys in the gallery whistled a low refrain" to one of Emma Carus's songs, apparently hoping to add some spice to her primarily classical repertoire. The vaudeville audience, a collection of varied classes and ethnic groups, as well as men, women and children, was not united behind Keith and Albee's uplift of the industry; rather, dissension and hostility surrounded the Keith circuit's celebration of the female spectator's authority.

It is important to acknowledge that female patrons as well as male patrons challenged the feminization of vaudeville. While managers often granted female patrons moral authority by defining their tastes as the respectable standard of Keith's vaudeville, many women in the audience defied this characterization. They were interested in more than classical singing and fashion shows; and they were not always models of decorum in the theaters. Women in Keith theaters surprised managers by shouting encouragement for a boxing match on stage and also cheering singer Ethel Levey when she announced her divorce from the famous showman, George M. Cohan, on stage.⁴⁷ In addition, managers reported that women were particularly impressed with a futuristic play, "In 1999," which reversed gender roles. "The idea of social conventions, customs. . . applying to the man instead of the woman is the nucleus from which are evolved any number of laughs," wrote W. W. Prosser, the manager of a vaudeville theater in Columbus, Ohio, in 1912, "The act seemed to find instant favor with both sexes, and the women were especially delighted."⁴⁸ Women, it seems, were not content to influence vaudeville through their alleged moral superiority and refined tastes—the primary role vaudeville administrators assigned for them. Instead, they often celebrated the excitements associated with masculinity and applauded the unconventional women who claimed masculine prerogatives on stage.

While Keith managers celebrated feminine tastes in their publicity, they continued to offer entertainment that focused on resistance to female authority, such as the Elinore Sisters' sketches and the Mag Haggerty series. The popularity of Kate Elinore and the Mag Haggerty series ran counter to Keith's well-publicized attack on low comedy, a rough style of comedy that managers assumed would insult middle-class women's fine tastes. The manager of the Bijou Theatre

in Woonsocket, Rhode Island, for example, revealed his distaste for low comedy in his description of Gwynne and Gosette's sketch in 1916: "There were moments during the action of the piece when many persons laughed, seeming amused at the 'comedy'? Personally I was at a loss to discern any. If setting upon a pan of moist dough and upon arising having the mass adhere to one's anatomy constitutes comedy, then I'll take tragedy."⁴⁹ Yet many acts with ethnic comedy and slapstick gags succeeded in vaudeville by playing to the gallery's adventurous spirit, while ignoring the patrons in the higher-priced seats in boxes and on the orchestra floor. One Keith manager reported in 1904 that an Irish cross-fire act was a "good gallery act . . . very lively talking act but the orchestra and box patronage here will never be able to 'see' acts of this style. They don't understand them at all."⁵⁰

In particular, the exuberant, often violent comedy of Ryan and Richfield and the Elinore Sisters demonstrates the on-going power and popularity of low comedy, despite some managers' complaints. Will Cressy, author of the "Mag Haggerty" sketches, was known for writing for the gallery. On February 3, 1908, the manager of Keith's theater in Philadelphia remarked on the performance of a Will Cressy sketch: "Will Cressy knows what the gallery wants and gives it to them. This sketch is a little rough in spots and at times just escapes being objectionable."⁵¹ It is not surprising then to find Cressy playing to the gallery as masculine, working-class heroes. Mike Haggerty's rebellions against his daughter parallel the gallery's resistance to the ascendance of the feminine spectator in vaudeville.

While most historians have focused on vaudeville's unequivocal appeal to middle-class women, managers' unpublished comments about low comedy and the enduring popularity of the Elinore Sisters as well as the Mag Haggerty sketches demonstrate that vaudeville administrators approached the ideal female spectator and their impression of middle-class feminine taste in contradictory ways. They tried to uphold their vision of feminine standards, but, at the same time, they championed working-class masculinity on stage. This contradictory approach, in turn, challenged the definition of femininity as primarily reserved, delicate and family-oriented, as managers, in some ways, questioned the feminization of vaudeville.⁵²

Central to the questions about women's "lace-curtain" aspirations and the moral authority of female patrons in vaudeville, these sketches address far more than nativist anxieties about the containment of immigrant masses. The ethnic humor in these routines derides exaggerated ethnic traits, while also celebrating the ethnic character's rebellion against the authority of the "civilizing woman." The Mike Haggerty sketches and the Elinore Sisters' routines articulate ambivalence about the "civilizing woman's" campaigns to tame rough masculinity and reform ethnic identities, underscoring the degree to which resistance to upward mobility and Americanization was infused with gender hostility.

The Elinore Sisters' career demonstrates the significance of rank ladies and ladies of rank to the popular dramas of ethnic upward mobility in vaudeville around the turn of the century. As foils for the exuberant clowns, the ladies of rank

were the targets of hostility and comic aggression based on resistance to and ambivalence about Americanization, upward mobility and feminization. Ethnic comedy involves gender relations, just as women's comedy often depends on ethnic hierarchies. Gender polarities shape these comic scenarios of immigrant life, just as ethnic stereotypes fuel Kate Elinore's gender transgressions. Her fist fights, insults and sexual adventure challenge feminine norms in vaudeville, but they simultaneously support the popular stereotype of working-class immigrant women as rank ladies.

Notes

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1. In his famous act, "Levinsky's Wedding," he remarks, "On the invitation it says, 'your presence is requested.' Right away presents they ask for." Douglas Gilbert, *American Vaudeville: Its Life and Times* (New York, 1940), 291. According to vaudeville historian Paul Distler, vaudeville bills included at least one and often as many as three acts with burlesques on Irish, Italian, Jewish and German characters from 1875 to 1905. Distler, "Exit the Racial Comics," *Educational Theatre Journal*, 18 (October 1966), 248.

2. James H. Dormon, "American Popular Culture and the New Immigrant Ethnic," *American Studies/AmerikaStudien*, 36.2 (1991), 191. See also his "Ethnic Caricatures of the Mind: The Harrigan and Hart Mosaic," *American Studies* 33 (Fall 1992), 21-41.

3. Robert Allen, *Horrible Prettiness: Burlesque and American Culture* (Chapel Hill, 1991), chapter 6, and John Kasson, *Rudeness and Civility: Manners in Nineteenth Century America* (New York, 1990), chapter 7. According to historian Robert Allen, Keith and Albee were careful to "separate their enterprise and themselves from the 'low'" (185).

4. Constance Coquelin, "Have Women a Sense of Humor?" *Harper's Bazaar* (January 12, 1901), 67.

5. Robert J. Burdette, "Have Women a Sense of Humor?" *Harper's Bazaar* (July 1902), 598. In addition, Arthur Bartlett defined women's humor as "wholesome". Bartlett, "Feminine Humorists," *Good Housekeeping* (January 1910), 39.

6. Report Book 0, 192, Keith/Albee Collection, The University of Iowa, Iowa City, Iowa (hereafter cited as KAC). On December 2, 1921, one Keith manager noted the failure of a male/female comedy team (Maud Muller and Ed Stanley) that reversed gender roles: "Comedy woman with man foil which did not score at all." Report Book 23, 7, KAC.

7. Robert Speare, "Plenty Doing at the Alhambra," *New Jersey Telegraph*, May 28, 1908, clipping, ser. 3, vol. 444, 65, RLC. June Sochen has mistakenly argued that female performers did not engage in rough, physical comedy in vaudeville: "Women could be in the chorus line, or the featured singer, or finally as the romantic interest in the show, but as the comic attraction, assuredly no." June Sochen, "Slapsticks, Screwballs and Bawds: The Long Road to the Performing Talents of Lucy and Bette," in *Women's Comic Visions* (Detroit, 1991), 143. Sochen not only ignores comedians like Kate Elinore, but also overlooks nuances in the relationship between gender and comedy at the turn of the century.

8. Report Book 0, 324, KAC.

9. The *New York Dramatic Mirror*, for example, described Evie Stetson as "one of the funniest women on the stage . . . [who] imitated wild Irish women, any sort of wild woman." "The Matinee Girl," *New York Dramatic Mirror*, February 20, 1904, 2.

10. "The Elinore Sisters," December 20, 1906, clipping, ser. 3, vol. 444, 61, Robinson Locke Collection, Billy Rose Theatre Collection, New York Public Library—Lincoln Center (hereafter cited as RLC).

11. "Kate Elinore without a Sister at the American," *New York Star*, September 11, 1909, clipping, ser. 3, vol. 444, RLC.

12. Carolyn Caffin, *Vaudeville* (New York, 1914), 211. Describing her appearance in "The Adventures of Bridget McGuire," one reviewer stated, "No woman ever made such a

persistent attempt to look ugly." *New Orleans Item*, n.d., clipping, box 3, vol. 3, 10, Elinore Sisters' Vaudeville Act Papers, University of Rochester, Rochester, New York (hereafter cited as ESVAP).

13. Clipping, n.d., box 3, vol. 3, 9, ESVAP.

14. Clipping, n.d., ser. 3, vol. 444, 68, RLC.

15. Distler, "Exit the Racial Comics," 52. Discussing a female performer's impersonation of an Irish maid, Charles Lovenberg, manager of Keith's Theater in Providence, commented that the "woman is decidedly coarse." Report Book 1, 52, KAC.

16. *The Finish of Bridget McKeen*, Edison, 1901. Motion Picture, Broadcasting and Recorded Sound Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C. Another film with a similar plot was titled *How Bridget Made the Fire*.

17. Natalie Zemon Davis, *Society and Culture in Early Modern France* (Stanford, 1975), 125.

18. *Ibid.*, 126.

19. Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts? Early Sound Comedy and the Vaudeville Aesthetic* (New York, 1992), 221; Henry Jenkins uses the term of anarchistic rather than anarchic to convey "a sense of the process in the texts, a movement from order to disorder" and to foreground "the active and central role of the clowns as bringers of anarchy." Jenkins, 22-23.

20. *Ibid.*, 232.

21. *Ibid.*, 217. See also Norbert Elias and Eric Dunning, *Quest for Excitement: Sport and Leisure in the Civilizing Process* (London, 1986).

22. George M. Cohan, "Dangerous Mrs. Delaney" (1898), box 1, folder 11, ESVAP. All following citations refer to this handwritten script.

The five vaudeville sketches remaining from the Elinore Sisters' career are: "The Irish 400" (written in 1897), two version of "Dangerous Mrs. Delaney" (1898 and 1902), "The Actress and the Maid" (written in 1907, performed in 1908), and "The Adventures of Bridget McGuire," (performed in 1902). The Elinore Sisters broke up in 1909 and teamed with new partners as they continued to work in vaudeville. Kate Elinore, with Sam Williams, earned far more success than May, who with several different partners, sunk into "small time" vaudeville. Kate Elinore later starred as Lizette in the musical comedy, *Naughty Marietta* in 1910-1911.

23. Maurice E. McLaughlin, "The Irish 400" (1897), box 1, folder 11, ESVAP.

24. Eugene Ellsworth, "The Adventures of Bridget McGuire," box 1, folder 10, 111, ESVAP. All following citations refer to this handwritten script.

25. In "The Actress and the Maid" (1907 copyright) Miss Geraldine de Bluff tries to establish her superiority over her Irish maid, Nanette O'Hara. As the actress and the maid are preparing for a vaudeville appearance, de Bluff emphasizes her artistic superiority and her aversion to vaudeville. The maid, on the other hand, calls de Bluff's bluff, telling the audience that she has never "got by" yet and that she will be the "big lemon."

26. See Kathleen Rowe, *The Unruly Woman: Gender and the Genres of Laughter* (Austin, 1995) and Mary Russo, *The Female Grotesque: Risk, Excess and Modernity* (New York, 1995). Rowe, for example, acknowledges that women's unruly spectacles may be read within a misogynist framework, while she also concludes that "the unruly woman can be seen as a prototype of woman as subject—transgressive above all when she lays claim to her own desire," (31).

27. Henry Jenkins, for example, celebrates Winnie Lightner's shattering of feminine codes through her awkward performance as Princess Mauna Kane in the film *Side Show*. He describes Lightner's exaggerated attempts to grasp male attention and her failure to uphold feminine beauty—she sings in a raspy voice and behaves aggressively, refuting "demure" feminine ideal. While she clearly uses grotesque imagery and behavior to undermine traditional feminine sexual spectacle, her rebellious performance draws some of its power from the "low" woman she impersonates—an "exotic, primitive" from Hawaii. Thus, Lightner's disguise permitted the critique of the social hierarchy of gender by reproducing ethnic hierarchies, particularly the notion that the low woman is overly sexual, loud and unmannered *What Made Pistachio Nuts?* (265).

28. Allen, *Horrible Prettiness*, 33. Susan Davis, in addition, shows that native-born, working-class white men participated in often-violent street celebrations in Philadelphia at Christmas in the 1840s. They expressed their class antagonism and rebellion, however, through their disguises as blacks and German immigrants. These protesters—for the most part the laboring poor—took control of streets and taverns to express class hostility but they also demonstrated racism and nativism as they attacked blacks and immigrants. Susan Davis, *Parades and Power: Street Theatre in Nineteenth Century Philadelphia* (Berkeley, 1986).

29. As quoted in Shirley Staples, *Male-Female Comedy Teams in American Vaudeville, 1865-1932* (Ann Arbor, 1984), 84.

30. Geraldine Maschio, "Ethnic Humor and the Demise of the Russell Brothers," *Journal of Popular Culture*, 26 (Summer 1991), 81-92. In addition, George Monroe, a monologist, impersonated an "Irish Biddy" in his 1905 vaudeville act.

31. "This Comedienne is Really Comic," *Newark Evening News*, n.d., clipping, box 3, vol. 3, 2, ESVAP.

32. "The Theater: Breezy Kate Elinore. She Discusses Her Unique Rigs—Wagers Made as to Whether She is Man or Woman," n.d., clipping, box 3, vol. 3, 4, ESVAP.

33. *New Orleans Item*, n.d., clipping, box 3, vol. 3,10, ESVAP.

34. Geraldine Maschio, "A Prescription for Femininity: Male Interpretation of the Feminine Ideal at the Turn of the Century," *Women and Performance*, 4.1 (1988/89): 43-49.

35. See Marjorie Garber, *Vested Interests: Cross Dressing and Cultural Anxiety* (New York, 1992). Garber argues that "the possibility of crossing racial boundaries stirs fears of crossing boundaries of gender and vice versa." (274).

36. M. S. Robinson and H. S. Gibson, "The Mill Owner's Daughter—or- She Said She Wouldn't But She Did!" Drama Deposits, Reel 52, Manuscripts Division, Library of Congress, Washington, D. C.

37. Will Cressy, "Mag Haggerty's Reception" (1905), 16. Billy Rose Theatre Collection (hereafter cited as BRT), New York Public Library-Lincoln Center, New York, New York. Two other sketches, "Mag Haggerty's Father's Daughter" and "Mag Haggerty, M. D." are also included in this collection. All other citations to the Cressy plays are from the typescript versions of these sketches.

38. Maurice E. McLaughlin, "The Irish 400" (1897), box 1, folder 11, ESVAP.

39. Mike is again triumphant when he objects to Mag's instructions for "refined" dancing, substituting his own style of dancing instead. He responds to his daughter's charge that he can't dance by offering a series of his "specialties."

40. In addition, historian Kerby Miller reports that in 1890 ten percent of Irish-born in Boston held white collar jobs and forty percent of second generation Irish ultimately joined the ranks of white-collar workers. Kerby Miller, *Emmigrants and Exiles* (New York, 1985).

41. Timothy Meagher, "Introduction," in *From Paddy to Studs: Irish-American Communities in the Turn of the Century Era, 1880-1920*, ed., Timothy Meagher (New York, 1986), 2. See also Miller, *Emmigrants & Exiles*, 495-498.

42. Hasia Diner, *Erin's Daughters in America: Irish Immigrant Women in the Nineteenth Century* (Baltimore, 1983), 9. See also Timothy Meagher, "Sweet Good Mothers and Young Women Out in the World: The Roles of Irish American Women in Late Nineteenth and Early Twentieth Century Worcester," *U. S. Catholic Historian*, 5 (Summer/Fall 1986).

43. Charles Fanning, "The Short Sad Career of Mr. Dooley in Chicago," *Ethnicity*, 8 (1981): 175. Hasia Diner points out that Dunne portrays Irish-American women as the primary status-seekers. Diner, in particular, cites one of Dunne's Christmas scenes in which an Irishman grudgingly thanks his wife for his Christmas gift: "How thought-ful iv ye Mary Ann, to give me th' essays of Emmerson. I wuz sayin' on'y la' week to a friend iv mind in th' pork pit that iv all th' fellows that iver hurled the pen, Emmerson fr me money." Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 140. Diner also adds that Catholic clergy stressed that Irish women uplifted their families despite irresponsible, volatile men.

44. Diner, *Erin's Daughters*, 140. Miller echoes Diner on this point, *Emmigrants and Exiles* 494.

45. Report Book 12, 155, KAC.

46. The manager of Keith's theatre in Cleveland wrote in 1906: "The Monday afternoon audience landed on him[Solomon] before he was on stage for five minutes. I am sorry the act is here. It was impossible to keep the boys in the gallery from guying him, and the people in the orchestra seats did not seem to enjoy it." Report Book 4, 189, KAC.

47. Report Book 9, 240; Report Book 6,26, KAC.

48. Report Book 13, 176, KAC.

49. Report Book 18, 126, KAC.

50. Report Book 2, 107, KAC.

51. Report Book 7, 207, KAC.

52. Kathy Peiss, "Commercial Leisure and the 'Woman Question,'" in *For Fun and Profit: The Transformation of Leisure into Consumption*, ed. Richard Butsch, 105-117, (Philadelphia, 1990). As Kathy Peiss explains, leisure entrepreneurs approached the "'woman question' as bricoleurs," blending recruiting strategies and performance standards that they thought would uphold women's respectability, but still trying to please a male, working-class audience," 112-113. While I agree with Peiss's point that commercial leisure addressed gender in multiple, contradictory ways, it is not clear whether they responded to or constructed women's notion's of respectability. Managers on the Keith circuit noted many instances in which female patrons disrupted managers' belief in female refinement. Furthermore, despite Peiss's description of all entertainment entrepreneurs as "bricoleurs," she oversimplifies vaudeville's approach to gender, asserting that Keith drew women into the public sphere without substantially challenging the construction of woman as delicate and family-oriented.