

Spring 2011

## Hellen Keller Does Vaudeville, 1920

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### Recommended Citation

Moolten, David (2011) "Hellen Keller Does Vaudeville, 1920," *CutBank*: Vol. 1 : Iss. 74 , Article 42.  
Available at: <https://scholarworks.umt.edu/cutbank/vol1/iss74/42>

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HELEN KELLER DOES VAUDEVILLE, 1920

*FOR SHIRA*

Anne Sullivan did the talking, her finger  
 Tapping Helen's palm with a kind of Morse code.  
 Full grown, she could have been a stranger  
 With a headset on the other side  
 Of the world. But Anne stood by her, the crowd  
 That had come to jeer if unconvinced,  
 Well in hand. Their dim faces demanded  
 Spectacle a little less, impressed  
 Upon her only later when Anne could spell  
 It out: the curtain's rise as in surrender  
 To astonished hush, then an earful  
 Of laughter with each dumb one liner  
 Helen mouthed and Anne translated. A thousand  
 People caught on as when Anne gave her water  
 As a word and let her mind drink. Reprised  
 The scene quenched a need: corny theater  
 Perhaps, but it still healed blind ignorance  
 By suggestion, like a hypnotist's shibboleth.  
 To take action was the act, the humbling chance.  
 Psychic hermaphrodites, fire eating midgets—  
 The audience had seen all, and not enough,  
 Mesmerized with what Anne drummed into her, this  
 Like every day the performance of  
 Her life, touch as common sense and witness.