

## Order-Parameter Profiles and Casimir Amplitudes in Critical Slabs

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A critical phase confined between two parallel plates, with symmetry-breaking fields  $h_1$  and  $h_2$  acting on each plate, is considered for (i)  $h_1 h_2 > 0$  (denoted  $ab = ++$ ) and (ii)  $h_1 h_2 < 0$  ( $ab = +-$ ). Using local-functional methods, we calculate order-parameter scaling functions  $\Psi_{ab}(x)$  and Casimir amplitudes  $A_{ab}$ , for *general* dimension  $d$ . At  $d = 2$ , our  $\Psi_{++}(x)$  almost coincides with *exact* conformal predictions. For the Ising universality class, we obtain expansions for  $A_{ab}$  in  $\epsilon = 4 - d \downarrow 0$  in excellent agreement with those obtained from field theory and, in  $d = 3$ , new results are presented for  $A_{ab}$  and  $\Psi_{ab}(x)$ . [S0031-9007(98)07753-9]

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The Casimir effect, occurring when either a quantum field or a thermodynamic system at its bulk critical point is confined between two plates, has generated a great deal of interest in both quantum field theory and statistical physics [1]. Consider a statistical system, at its bulk critical point at temperature  $T_c$ , consisting of a slab contained between two parallel plates of area  $A$  and separated by distance  $L$ . Let  $z \in [0, L]$  denote the perpendicular distance of a point inside the slab from one of the plates. If  $F$  is the free energy of the system, the *reduced incremental free energy*,  $f^\times$ , is defined as

$$f^\times(L) := \lim_{A \rightarrow \infty} \frac{F}{k_B T_c A} - L f_b, \quad (1)$$

where  $f_b$  is the reduced *bulk* free-energy density. Fisher and de Gennes [2] predicted that  $f^\times(L)$  takes the form

$$f^\times(L) \approx \Sigma_1 + \Sigma_2 + A_{ab} L^{1-d^*} + \dots \quad (2)$$

as  $L \rightarrow \infty$  where  $d^* := (2 - \alpha)/\nu$  with  $\alpha$  and  $\nu$  being the usual specific heat and correlation length critical exponents and  $\Sigma_1$  and  $\Sigma_2$  are critical *wall tensions* coming from the two plates. Throughout, the subscript  $a$  (respectively,  $b$ ) refers to the boundary condition on the plate at  $z = 0$  (respectively,  $z = L$ ). Assuming hyperscaling,  $d^* = d$  (i.e., the spatial dimension) for  $2 \leq d \leq d_>$  and  $d^* = d_>$  for all  $d \geq d_>$  where  $d_>$  is the upper critical dimension of the system. For the Ising universality class,  $d_> = 4$ . It was later argued that the *Casimir amplitude*,  $A_{ab}$ , is a universal number for  $d < d_>$  [3] (see also [4]), and a great deal of effort has gone into calculating this amplitude for various universality classes (see [1] and references therein). Suggested experimental approaches in, e.g., critical fluids include measuring  $A_{ab}$  *directly* using atomic force microscopes or *indirectly* from wetting experiments (see [1]).

In this Letter, we shall consider only those slabs where an external symmetry-breaking boundary field has been applied to *both* plates—i.e., a field  $h_1$  (respectively,  $h_2$ ) acting on the plate at  $z = 0$  (respectively,  $z = L$ ). It has been noted (see Ref. [1]) that if a symmetry-breaking boundary condition acts on at least one of the plates

then a field-theoretic expansion in  $\epsilon = 4 - d$  applied to the  $O(N)$  symmetric  $\phi^4$  theory (this, of course, includes Ising uniaxial ferromagnets) shows that  $A_{ab} \approx \bar{A}_{ab} \epsilon^{-1}$  as  $\epsilon \downarrow 0$ . This corresponds to a logarithmic anomaly in the large  $L$  behavior of  $f^\times(L)$  when  $d = d_> = 4$ , in which case the term  $A_{ab} L^{1-d^*}$  in Eq. (2) is replaced by  $\bar{A}_{ab} L^{-3} \ln L$ .

One can also define critical order-parameter profile scaling functions as follows. If  $m(z; L)$  is the order-parameter density as a function of  $z$  at the bulk critical point (e.g., the magnetization of a magnet) then as  $z \rightarrow \infty$  and  $L \rightarrow \infty$ , keeping  $0 < z/L < 1$ , we have for a given boundary condition  $ab$

$$m(z; L) \approx M_{ab} L^{-\beta/\nu} \Psi_{ab}(z/L), \quad (3)$$

where  $\beta$  is the usual spontaneous magnetization exponent and the scaling function,  $\Psi_{ab}(x)$ , is *universal* once its normalization has been selected by specifying the *nonuniversal* amplitude  $M_{ab}$ . Conformal invariance has yielded exact predictions on the form of  $\Psi_{ab}(x)$  in  $d = 2$  for various boundary conditions [5–7] and also, for general  $d < d_>$ , it has been seen that the short distance behavior of  $\Psi_{ab}(x)$  can be simply related to  $A_{ab}$  via the short-distance expansion [8,9].

Here we shall always set  $h_1 > 0$  and consider just two types of boundary condition on the other plate: (i)  $h_2 > 0$  denoted by  $ab = ++$  and (ii)  $h_2 < 0$  denoted by  $ab = +-$ . The nonuniversal amplitudes,  $M_{ab}$ , are chosen so that  $\Psi_{++}(1/2) = 1$  and the derivative  $\Psi'_{+-}(1/2) = -1$  [by antisymmetry,  $\Psi_{+-}(1/2) = 0$ ]. The Casimir amplitudes and profile scaling functions are then determined using a relatively newly developed method [10] based on local free-energy functionals of the order-parameter density,  $m(z)$ , suitably adapted to cope with *nonclassical* criticality (i.e., for  $d \leq d_>$ ). The method is *non-perturbative* and can be applied directly to  $d = 3$ —an advantage over field-theoretical  $\epsilon$  expansions which require extrapolating to  $d = 3$ —thus yielding new reliable results at the physically interesting dimension as well as at  $d = 2$ . But it can also be used to generate expansions in  $\epsilon$  for  $d \uparrow d_>$ . Hence, we can significantly substantiate our

$d = 3$  predictions by making detailed comparisons with the results of conformal invariance [5–7,11,12] at  $d = 2$  and with the recently derived field-theoretical  $\epsilon$  expansions for  $A_{++}$  and  $A_{+-}$  [13].

Following Ref. [10] we start by asserting that the magnetization profile,  $m(z)$ , minimizes a free-energy functional,  $\mathcal{F}[m]$ , of the following form:

$$\mathcal{F}[m] = \int_0^L \mathcal{A}(m, \dot{m}) dz + f_1(m_1) + f_2(m_2), \quad (4)$$

where  $\dot{m} := dm/dz$ ,  $m_1 := m(0)$ ,  $m_2 := m(L)$ ,  $f_j(m_j)$  for  $j = 1, 2$ , coming from the respective walls, has the form  $f_j(m_j) = -h_j m_j + \dots$  and  $f^\times(L) = \min_{[m]} \mathcal{F}[m]$ . Mean-field theory is obtained by choosing  $\mathcal{A}(m, \dot{m})$  of squared-gradient Landau type. In order to go beyond mean-field theory for dimensions  $d \leq d_>$  Fisher and Upton [10] considered integrands of the form

$$\mathcal{A}(m, \dot{m}) = \{1 + J(m)\mathcal{G}[\dot{m}\Lambda(m)]\}W(m), \quad (5)$$

where  $W(m) := \Phi(m) - \Phi(m_b)$  with  $\Phi(m)$  being the Helmholtz free energy density and  $m_b$  the bulk magnetization. By symmetry,  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  must be an even function of  $x$  with  $\mathcal{G}(0) = 0$ . Since scale invariance plays such an important role at bulk critical points one insists that the dimensionless combinations  $J(m)$  and  $\dot{m}\Lambda(m)$  be scale-free. Several possible choices for  $J(m)$  and  $\Lambda(m)$  have been considered [10], the simplest being  $J(m) = 1$  and  $\Lambda(m) = \xi(m)/\sqrt{2\chi(m)W(m)}$  where  $\xi(m)$  and  $\chi(m)$  are, respectively, the bulk correlation length and susceptibility for a homogeneous system with magnetization  $m$ . From a field theoretical point of view, the integral  $\int \mathcal{A}(m, \dot{m}) dz$  in (4) can be regarded as a *local* approximation to the vertex generating functional (or effective action)  $\Gamma[\varphi = m(z)]$  with the integrand (5) heuristically constructed, though made to satisfy numerous desiderata [10].

Although much is known about the bulk quantities  $W(m)$ ,  $\chi(m)$ , and  $\xi(m)$ , which enter the local functional, one now needs to know something of the form  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  takes. This was not the case in previous applications of this method [10,14] to semi-infinite geometries where details of  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  were unimportant. It has been established, however, that  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  must satisfy several conditions [10]. These include the following expansion:

$$\mathcal{G}(x) = x^2 + \sum_{j=2}^{\infty} G_{0,j} x^{2j} \quad \text{as } x \rightarrow 0, \quad (6)$$

which follows from standard considerations based on gradient expansions in density functional theory [15]. Also, in order that  $m(z)$  remains analytic in  $z$  as  $m$  passes through zero, such as occurs in the  $ab = +-$  boundary condition, we must have [10]

$$\mathcal{G}(x) + 1 = G_\infty x^{2-\tilde{\eta}} \left( 1 + \sum_{j=1}^{\infty} G_{\infty,j} x^{-j\tau} \right) \quad (7)$$

as  $x \rightarrow \infty$  where  $\tilde{\eta} = 2\eta/(d^* + \eta)$  and  $\tau = 2\beta/(\beta + \nu)$  with  $\eta$  being the usual critical correlation function exponent. Finally, in semi-infinite geometry, in order that critical adsorption profiles have the correct exponential

decay for temperatures away from  $T_c$  and that thermodynamic consistency holds off coexistence, it is required that [10]

$$\mathcal{G}(1) = 1, \quad \mathcal{G}'(1) = 2. \quad (8)$$

It is possible to write down expressions for  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  which *fully* satisfy all three requirements (6)–(8) [16] but the following *approximant* was found to be adequate for our purposes:

$$(2 - \tilde{\eta})\mathcal{G}(x)/2 = [1 + x^2 R_{[n/n]}(x^2)]^{(2-\tilde{\eta})/2} - 1, \quad (9)$$

where  $R_{[n/n]}(x^2) = P_n(x^2)/Q_n(x^2)$  with  $P_n(\cdot)$  and  $Q_n(\cdot)$  being polynomials of degree  $n$  (usually one needs  $n \geq 2$ ) having  $P_n(0) = Q_n(0) = 1$ . Clearly, (9) completely satisfies (6), and it captures the leading term on the right-hand side of (7). Condition (8) can be imposed by adjusting the polynomial coefficients in  $R_{[n/n]}(\cdot)$ . One requires that simple squared-gradient theory,  $\mathcal{G}(x) = x^2$ , follows when  $\eta = \tilde{\eta} = 0$ . Typical plots of  $\mathcal{G}(x)$ , for the Ising universality class (see [17]), based on this approximant are shown in Fig. 1. One notices that  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  is virtually indistinguishable from  $x^2$  when  $0 \leq x \leq 1$  even when enlarging the graph at this range of  $x$  to a much bigger size.

We now present the solution of the variational problem needed to extremize  $\mathcal{F}[m]$ . The first thing to note is that the Euler-Lagrange equations for functionals of the type in (4) [where there is no explicit  $z$  dependence in  $\mathcal{A}(m, \dot{m})$ ] have a first integral given by the following ordinary differential equation determining the profile  $m(z)$

$$\dot{m} \frac{\partial \mathcal{A}}{\partial \dot{m}} - \mathcal{A} = E(L), \quad (10)$$

which expresses an “energy” conservation law in the mechanical analog with the constant  $E(L)$  [with

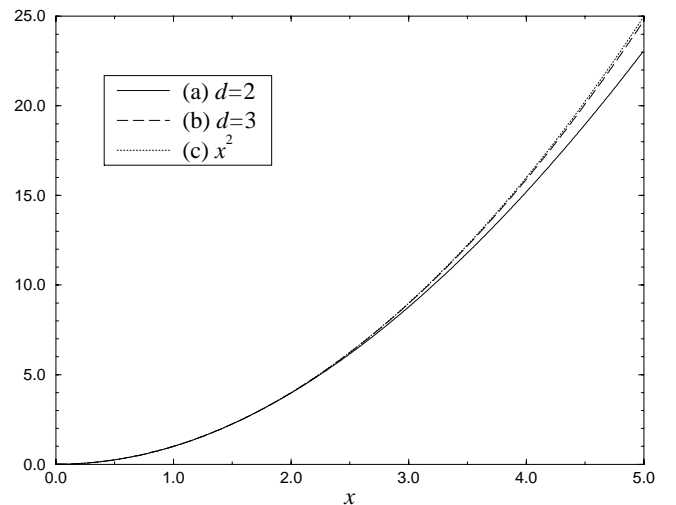


FIG. 1. Plots of  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  based on approximant (9) with  $n = 2$  for (a)  $d = 2$  and (b)  $d = 3$ . Here, the polynomials  $P_2(y) = 1 + p_1 y + p_2 y^2$  and  $Q_2(y) = 1 + q_2 y^2$  were used and  $(p_1, p_2, q_2)$  determined by imposing (8) and fixing  $G_\infty = 1$ . The curve  $x^2$  is plotted as (c) for comparison.

$\lim_{L \rightarrow \infty} E(L) = 0$ ] corresponding to the energy. From the boundary (and other) conditions,  $E(L)$  can be determined and hence the profiles  $m(z; L)$ . When determining  $f^\times(L)$ , and therefore the Casimir amplitudes, the calculations are greatly simplified by noting the relation [18]

$$\frac{\partial f^\times}{\partial L} + E(L) = 0, \quad (11)$$

which corresponds to a Hamilton-Jacobi-like equation in the mechanical analog which, we stress, is true for quite general  $\mathcal{A}(m, \dot{m})$  provided it has no explicit  $z$  dependence. Thus, when taking scaling limits,  $z \rightarrow \infty$ ,  $L \rightarrow \infty$ , at the bulk critical point,  $E(L)$  for large  $L$  plays a pivotal role in determining both  $\Psi_{ab}(x)$  and  $A_{ab}$ .

The results will be expressed in terms of the function  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}(x)$ , defined as  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}(x) := x\mathcal{G}'(x) - \mathcal{G}(x)$ , and its inverse  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}^{-1}(x)$ , i.e.,  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}[\hat{\mathcal{G}}^{-1}(x)] = x$ . Also, we define the functions  $J_{++}(y)$  and  $J_{+-}(y)$  by

$$J_{\pm\pm}(y) := \int_y^\infty \frac{|u|^{-(1+\nu/\beta)} du}{|\hat{\mathcal{G}}^{-1}(1 \mp |u|^{-d^*\nu/\beta})|}, \quad (12)$$

where  $y \geq 1$  for  $++$  and  $y \in (-\infty, \infty)$  for  $+-$ . Applying the scaling limit to (10) at the critical point determines the scaling functions,  $\Psi_{\pm\pm}(x)$ , which can be expressed as

$$\Psi_{++}(x) = J_{++}^{-1}[2J_{++}(1)x], \quad (13a)$$

$$\Psi_{+-}(x) = c_1 J_{+-}^{-1}[2J_{+-}(0)x], \quad (13b)$$

where  $J_{\pm\pm}^{-1}(\cdot)$  are the inverse functions and the constant  $c_1$  is given by

$$c_1 = [(1 - \tilde{\eta})G_\infty]^{1/(2-\tilde{\eta})}/2J_{+-}(0). \quad (14)$$

Note that, given  $\mathcal{G}(\cdot)$ ,  $\Psi_{\pm\pm}(x)$  depend *solely* on  $\beta/\nu$  and  $d^*$ . Similarly, taking the large  $L$  limit and using (11), we obtain the Casimir amplitudes

$$A_{\pm\pm} = \frac{\mp R_\xi^c [2\delta(\delta + 1)]^{d^*/2}}{(d^* - 1)(\delta + 1)} \times \begin{cases} [J_{++}(1)]^{d^*}, \\ [J_{+-}(0)]^{d^*}, \end{cases} \quad (15)$$

where, if along the critical isotherm in the bulk ( $T = T_c$ ,  $h \neq 0$ ) we have, as the bulk field  $h \rightarrow 0$ , the usual relations  $h \approx D|m|^{\delta-1}m$  and  $\xi \approx \xi_c |h|^{-\nu/\beta\delta}$ —thus defining the exponent  $\delta$  and the critical amplitudes  $D$  and  $\xi_c$ —then the *bulk* universal amplitude relation,  $R_\xi^c$ , is defined as  $R_\xi^c := \xi_c^{d^*} D^{-1/\delta}$ . The quantity  $R_\xi^c$  arrives from hyperscaling and is therefore only universal for  $d \leq d_>$ . It can be expressed in terms of the more standard bulk amplitude relations [19,20] for which, in the Ising universality class, there exist estimates in  $d = 2$  [19] and  $d = 3$  [20] and also expansions in  $\epsilon = 4 - d$  [19].

Observe, from (12), for the  $++$  case that  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}^{-1}(x)$ , and therefore  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  [by its monotone property together with (8)], is only ever evaluated for  $0 \leq x \leq 1$ , whereas for the  $+-$  case  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  is required only for  $x \geq 1$ . Now recall that for all  $x \in [0, 1]$ ,  $\mathcal{G}(x) \approx x^2$  to a very good approximation. Thus, putting  $\hat{\mathcal{G}}^{-1}(x) = \sqrt{x}$  into (12) for  $J_{++}(y)$  gives via (13a)

$$\Psi_{++}(x) = [\psi_{d^*}(x)]^{-\beta/\nu}. \quad (16)$$

Although, of course,  $\beta/\nu$  (the bulk scaling dimension) depends on the bulk universality class of the particular

system under study, the function  $\psi_{d^*}(x)$  is universal in a more general sense in that it depends only on  $d^*$  *regardless* of the values of the bulk exponents—a property known to hold for  $d = 2$  as a result of conformal invariance [5]. Below, we give expressions for  $\psi_{d^*}(x)$  for  $d^* = 2, 3, 4$ ,

$$\psi_2(x) = \sin \pi x, \quad (17a)$$

$$\psi_3(x) = \frac{(\sqrt{3} + 1) \operatorname{cn}[K_3(1 - 2x); k_3] - \sqrt{3} + 1}{\operatorname{cn}[K_3(1 - 2x); k_3] + 1}, \quad (17b)$$

$$\psi_4(x) = \frac{\operatorname{sn}(2K_4x; k_4)}{\sqrt{2} \operatorname{dn}(2K_4x; k_4)}, \quad (17c)$$

where  $\operatorname{sn}(\cdot; k)$ ,  $\operatorname{dn}(\cdot; k)$ , and  $\operatorname{cn}(\cdot; k)$  are the standard Jacobian elliptic functions with modulus  $k$ ,  $k_3 = (\sqrt{3} + 1)/2\sqrt{2}$ ,  $k_4 = 1/\sqrt{2}$ ,

$$K_3 = \operatorname{cn}^{-1}\left(\frac{\sqrt{3} - 1}{\sqrt{3} + 1}; k_3\right) \approx 1.845375\dots, \quad (18)$$

and  $K_4 = \mathbf{K}(k_4) \approx 1.85407$  where  $\mathbf{K}(\cdot)$  is the complete elliptic integral of the first kind. Strikingly, (17a) substituted into (16) gives the *exact* expression for  $\Psi_{++}(x)$  as obtained by conformal invariance at  $d = 2$  [5]. This is remarkable as one might have expected these local-functional methods to get less reliable the further one reduces  $d$  away from the mean-field dimension  $d_>$ . It is therefore not unfeasible to suppose that (17b) substituted into (16) yields the exact  $d = 3$  result for a given  $\beta/\nu$  or, if not exact, then it should give, for the first time, an accurate prediction for  $\Psi_{++}(x)$  for general (not just Ising)  $d = 3$  critical slabs. For the Ising model, (17c) substituted into (16) gives the mean-field result obtained by Krech [13] from Landau theory.

In what now follows, we shall restrict ourselves to the Ising universality class [17]. Results for  $\Psi_{\pm\pm}(x)$ , obtained by numerically integrating (12) and (13) and using (9) for  $\mathcal{G}(x)$ , are plotted in Fig. 2 for  $d = 2$ ,  $d = 3$ , and  $d \geq 4$ . Since  $\Psi_{++}(x)$  [ $\Psi_{+-}(x)$ ] is (anti)symmetric about  $x = 1/2$ , results are presented only for the range  $0 \leq x \leq 1/2$ . For the  $++$  case, the curves plotted here are indistinguishable from those obtained using  $\mathcal{G}(x) = x^2$ , leading to near exact agreement with the conformal results at  $d = 2$ . However, our  $\Psi_{+-}(x)$  at  $d = 2$  no longer agrees quite so well with the exact conformal result [6,7]. This reflects the greater uncertainty in the form of  $\mathcal{G}(x)$  for  $x \gg 1$  which enters in calculations involving the  $+-$  case only. In particular, it is uncertain what value  $G_\infty$  should take although we found that  $G_\infty = 1$  seems to work best. In any case, we expect greater accuracy in  $d = 3$ .

As for the Casimir amplitudes, Eqs. (15) for  $d = 2$  give  $A_{++} \approx -0.06667$  and  $A_{+-} \approx 1.586$ , and these should be compared with the exact conformal results [11,12] which are  $A_{++} = -\pi/48 \approx -0.06545$  and  $A_{+-} = 23\pi/48 \approx 1.505$ . Again, agreement is less good

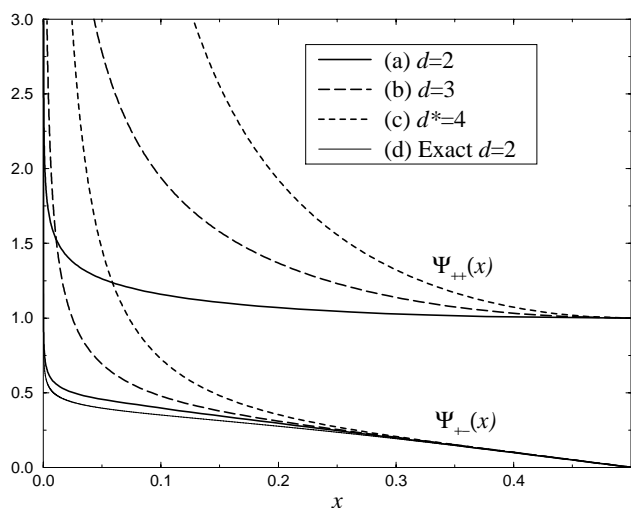


FIG. 2. Plots of  $\Psi_{++}(x)$  and  $\Psi_{+-}(x)$  for the Ising universality class at (a)  $d = 2$ , (b)  $d = 3$ , and (c)  $d \geq 4$  (mean-field theory). For comparison, plotted as (d) are the exact  $d = 2$  profiles,  $\Psi_{++}(x) = (\sin \pi x)^{-1/8}$  [which coincides exactly with (a)] and  $\Psi_{+-}(x) = \pi^{-1}(\sin \pi x)^{-1/8} \cos \pi x$ , both obtained by conformal invariance.

for the  $+-$  case and the (small) error in the  $++$  case may well reflect deficiencies in estimates for the bulk quantity  $R_\xi^c$ . For  $d = 3$ , we obtain  $A_{++} \approx -0.428$  and  $A_{+-} \approx 3.1$  which should be compared with the Monte Carlo results of Krech [13] who quotes  $A_{++} \approx -0.35$  and  $A_{+-} \approx 2.45$  but one should be wary of large finite-size corrections in the Monte Carlo data. One can also use Eqs. (15) to generate expansions in  $\epsilon = 4 - d$  and thus obtain

$$A_{++} = \frac{-3K_4^4}{2\pi^2\epsilon} [1 - 2.1035\epsilon + O(\epsilon^2)], \quad (19a)$$

$$A_{+-} = \frac{6K_4^4}{\pi^2\epsilon} [1 - 1.6647\epsilon + O(\epsilon^2)]. \quad (19b)$$

On comparing with the field-theoretical expansions of Krech [13], one finds *exact* agreement in the  $O(\epsilon^{-1})$  prefactors of (19) and hence exact predictions for the contribution  $\bar{A}_{\pm\pm} L^{-3} \ln L$  in  $f^\times(L)$  at  $d = 4$ . As for the  $O(\epsilon)$  terms, Krech gets 2.0987 instead of 2.1035 in  $A_{++}$  (i.e., agreement within 0.23%) and 1.6956 instead of 1.6647 in  $A_{+-}$  (agreement within 1.9%). Again, the discrepancy, although small, is larger for the  $+-$  case.

To conclude, two important achievements have been reported here. First, local-functional methods have been applied to yield new quantitative predictions for critical

slabs in  $d = 3$ . Second, by comparing with exact results in  $d = 2$  and with the  $\epsilon$  expansion near  $d = 4$ , we have demonstrated the remarkable accuracy of these methods. This adds confidence to our  $d = 3$  predictions. One should also note that local functional theory has the advantage of being easily extendable to situations slightly away from the critical point.

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