

**Spectacle, Performance and New Femininities in the Plays of Suffrage
Playwrights between 1907 and 1914**

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Abstract

This thesis examines plays written by four playwrights in the context of Edwardian suffragism between 1907 and 1914. It aims to demonstrate that suffrage drama is much more versatile in its subjects, representations of women and dramatic strategies than previously thought. It argues that suffrage plays were not only an imitation of Edwardian social drama with a political message. Instead, it suggests that suffrage playwrights exploited a large variety of sources and strategies in the construction of their female characters and plots. To do so, they appropriated theatrical and dramatic strategies of popular theatre genres of the Edwardian age such as melodramas, musical comedies, *tableaux vivants*, history plays and farces. The method used in this thesis is first to look at the play structures and textual representations of femininities constructed in these plays. Second, the play is analysed through its text, photographs and illustrations produced about the production or in relation to the construction of female characters. Third, representational strategies used in the stage performances are examined whenever there is available information. Finally, the plays' success is assessed by interpreting their critical and popular reception.

This thesis is divided into four chapters. These chapters explore plays written by four dramatists: Elizabeth Robins, Cicely Hamilton, Christopher St John and George Bernard Shaw. In examining and identifying these playwrights' strategies and representations of femininities, archival sources such as manuscripts, production bills, leaflets, photographs, newspaper articles and reviews published during Edwardian age have frequently been used as complementary and contextual materials. The principal collections, archival materials from which have been used in this study, are British Library Manuscripts and Ellen Terry Collection, Victoria &

Albert Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, and The Women's Library
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Introduction

In a search for anthologies of women's literature written in the early twentieth century, it was rather unexpected to find that women's literary efforts during this period have mostly been overlooked except in a few genres such as fiction and biographies. Despite the acknowledgement of women's status in mid- and late-Victorian literary canons, particularly in fiction and short stories, by recent scholars, there has apparently not been enough research carried out on women's theatrical efforts during the late-Victorian and Edwardian eras. Even those claiming that women's contribution was substantial to the theatre of the time seem to have missed the chance to note women's political struggle for equal existence, experience and contribution to social and political life, as well as the echoes of these aspirations in the most creative and organised effort by theatrical women up to this time: namely, Edwardian women's suffrage theatre.

My initial contact with women's stories of the late nineteenth century was through three books: *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle*, edited by Elaine Showalter, *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women 1890–1914*, edited by Angeliqe Richardson, and *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin De Siècle*, written by Sally Ledger.¹ These works left me with an irresistible urge to research more about women's stories, and it was enlightening to discover that women, politically minded or not, were at the forefront of the Edwardian art and literary scenes as musicians, artists, novelists, playwrights, players and even theatre producers and managers. While theatre managers such as Granville Barker, Beerbohm Tree and Henry Irving and playwrights such as Arthur Wing Pinero, Oscar Wilde, Henrik Ibsen, George Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker and J. M. Synge have generally been acknowledged as the influential personalities of the

turn-of-the-twentieth-century British stage, the lack of canonical status of Edwardian female writers meant they have mostly been excluded from critical research on the theatre of the era.²

This thesis, first and foremost, seeks to contribute to the recent interest in and exploration of women's theatrical works in the Edwardian period. The chosen era, a time of transformation and political tension ahead of the Great War, engendered an environment where many actresses and female writers could engage with different theatrical endeavours, and a culture of theatrical women flourished in an unprecedented way. A number of studies have attempted to scrutinise these women's works in the eye of contemporary feminist and theatrical theories, and some others have tried to bring archival materials to light in the last decade, yet comparable studies on Edwardian women's literature are still limited, which makes this area still understudied. Asserting that these plays were not marginal and negligible attempts made by uninspiring artists, this thesis is positioned to make a contribution to the recent surge of interest in the debate on women's place in the creation of theatre history.

Historical, Political and Literary Context

John Stuart Mill's election to Parliament in 1865 and the bill he presented against Benjamin Disraeli in 1867 for women's inclusion in the elections marked a historic moment for British women, which encouraged them to look for new ways to raise awareness about their political demands. Although the petition in 1867 ended in failure,³ women's disenfranchisement became a political campaign for women to assert their rights in British politics. Consecutive Married Women's Property Acts (1870, 1874 and 1882) legislated for a woman's right to retain her property, saving her from surrendering it to her male relatives or protectors, though they had still to

prove adultery as well as cruelty or desertion to get divorced, while for men adultery was recognised as a sufficient reason for separation.⁴ In such a context, Edwardian women's enfranchisement in England was the result of a long and tough battle against antagonistic public opinion against women's rights. In 1906, and again in 1907 and 1908, the liberal government of the time rejected the parliamentary bills that proposed to enfranchise women.⁵ In 1910 the first conciliation bill was also refused by the government. Likewise, in 1911 the second conciliation bill was introduced, but it did not receive support from the prime minister, Herbert Henry Asquith, who declared himself to be in favour of universal male suffrage.⁶ Suffrage societies such as the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) and the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) supported these bills from 1906 to 1913 and other political campaigns on women's suffrage by campaigning on the streets, publishing newspapers, sending their members to attend hearings at Parliament, organising meetings and public speeches, and celebrating their campaign by creating carnival-like pageants and demonstrations in London.⁷ Although these efforts did not seem to have an immediate effect, women's determination and unremitting efforts to change the public's mind on the need for equal rights brought about a partial acknowledgement of women's contribution to society before and during the Great War – especially with the start of the war, as these women joined Britain's war efforts by performing many different roles and contributing entertainment, health services or manufacturing required for the war efforts of the nation. However, the most organised and spectacular period of the women's movement started with the formation of WSPU in 1903. It was in 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst, the founder and president of WSPU, adopted militant tactics by attacking Sir Edward Gray, the foreign secretary, in Manchester.⁸ This unexpected

move was followed by militant and highly publicised events to catch the attention of supporters, which continued until the start of World War I. It is still controversial how successful suffragettes' militant tactics – attacks on houses, shop windows or post boxes and their struggle against police confrontations – were, yet all these made significant contribution to the half a century of the 'quiet' and peaceful campaigns: they brought sensationalism to suffrage events, opened a path for women to seize the streets of London, and enabled thousands of supporters to gather at public spaces such as meeting halls, parks, bazaars, entertainment halls and other theatrical venues. In 1906, for instance, WSPU drew favourable press comment on the grounds that men themselves had won the vote only by pestering for it. Even Millicent Fawcett, the leader of the non-militant NUWSS, conceded at this stage that WSPU had brought suffrage back onto the political agenda.⁹ In a sense, WSPU and its affiliated societies founded a means to alter public opinion on women's willpower and decisive actions. This also caused some controversy among the prominent figures in the campaign, leading some to break away from WSPU in order to found the Women's Freedom League (WFL).

The literary campaign was mostly carried out by societies affiliated with WFL, such as the Women Writers' Suffrage League (WWSL) and the Actresses' Franchise League (AFL).¹⁰ During the height of the controversy on women's emancipation, the representations of women with political and feminist aspirations in the popular press were mostly negative, insulting and exaggerated. Suffrage writers first and foremost attempted to reveal what they called 'the real femininity' – women's sufferings and triumphs – which were often sidelined by or misrepresented in mainstream literature and media. They offered an insight into these women and

gave them an opportunity to display their concept of the new femininities, which offered alternatives and contrast to the conventional roles given to women.

Although the plays supporting the movement in their themes and arguments have been called in recent studies ‘Edwardian suffrage drama’, the tentative canon is still not defined or categorised strictly as has been done for other plays written by prominent playwrights who lived in the same era. This is partly due to some unanswered questions about the literature of the movement and its scope. Though it is not a main goal of this study to determine the canonicity of these dramatic efforts, it is still intriguing as to whether these plays share corresponding representative strategies. The term ‘suffrage theatre’ is thus used in this study as an umbrella term denoting all theatrical efforts and theatre-related literature by female and male playwrights as well as actresses and members of other professions who were purposefully involved in the theatrical representation of women’s political rights and gender equality under the Edwardian suffragists’ campaign between 1907 and 1914.

From New Women to Suffragists

The term ‘the New Woman’ was used to describe defiantly non-conventional, ‘modern’ and single women in the rapidly changing Victorian society, especially in the last decade of the nineteenth century. According to Angelique Richardson, ‘the hallmark[s] of the New Woman’ were images of her, among other things, smoking, riding bicycles, and dining out alone or with a female companion in masculine clothes, which were traditionally seen as the signs of degeneration.¹¹ These women were described as deviant and non-conformist as well as a menace to society. Expectedly, the dailies and magazines published degrading and contemptuous caricatures and took an antagonistic attitude towards the outfits, manners and

lifestyles of these women and their presence in public life. This was especially apparent in the attitudes of periodicals and dailies such as *Punch* and *The Times*.¹²

In Ann Heilmann's words, 'the New Woman became a battleground for contesting viewpoints'.¹³ This controversy about her was partly due to the representations of New Woman in literature and art, which started to redefine her characteristics and identity. Richardson notes that

[E]ndlessly debated in fiction and the media, New Women took many forms, both in fiction and fact, and cannot be characterized by a single set of ideas. Nonetheless, New Women were united in their belief in the autonomy of women and in the need for social and political reform.¹⁴

A distinction should be made to understand women involved in the suffrage movement more accurately. The most noteworthy difference seems to be what was 'new' in the term 'New Woman' and how and to what extent this newness incorporated the goals and actions of politically active women at the turn of the twentieth century. It seems to be quite practical to use Sandra Stanley Holton's 'the ethos of the women's suffrage movement' here.¹⁵ Heilmann partially supports the assumption that the existence of New Woman was a late-nineteenth-century phenomenon and it ceased to exist just before the turn of the century.¹⁶ However, Heilmann goes on to declare that the New Woman was not just 'passé' and that the beginning of the twentieth century was the sign of 'a second peak of the movement'.¹⁷ Taking these arguments into consideration, I am inclined to counter Heilmann's statement and instead claim that 'New Woman', as a term, is too generalised, ambivalent and, to an extent, misrepresentative to describe female suffragists at the turn of the century. My initial justification is that the suffrage movement dated back to the mid-nineteenth century, which was much earlier than the popular use of the term 'New Woman' in the 1890s, considering the existence of political activists and reformists such as writer Josephine Butler, politician John

Stuart Mill and his wife Harriet Taylor, who actively pursued reformist and suffragist agendas in the 1850s to change laws and raise public awareness of the woman question.¹⁸ Second, Edwardian women's suffrage created a distinct and politically motivated movement and featured supporters who deliberately chose to use terms such as 'suffragists' and 'suffragettes' to define themselves. Some suffrage societies and prominent middle-class activists were also wary of being associated with New Women and being described as unfeminine, wild, marginal and dangerous in the literature and media.¹⁹ Moreover, unlike their late-Victorian peers, Edwardian suffragists were well organised and active in campaigns, in verbal and pictorial propaganda and in the production of theatrical shows and other visual arts. These organised efforts are the single most important characteristic of the suffrage campaign, which makes it unique among women's feminist and political movements. They also provided a rich source for literature, which transformed the suffrage movement into a lively and fascinating literary movement.

A Reassessment of Critical Literature

The drama produced in the context of the Edwardian suffrage movement has attracted some interest from scholars in the last two decades. Although this interest seems to have been relatively modest in comparison to the research and books published on Edwardian socio-political life and literature by male writers, the new perspectives offered on the advancement of women's theatre have been an invaluable source for this study. This section will discuss the most substantial existing critical perspectives and explain in what ways this study engages with the discussion of individual plays and re-evaluates some of the premises the arguments were founded on, particularly regarding the meanings and limitations of women's drama produced during the height of the campaign.

To start with, Penny Farfan, in her article titled ‘From “Hedda Gabler” to “Votes for Women”: Elizabeth Robins’s Early Feminist Critique of Ibsen’,²⁰ offers a notable argument on the criticality and possible contradictions of Robins’s production of Henrik Ibsen’s *Hedda Gabler* as a possible catalyst for her growing feminist and political consciousness and her later dramatic contribution to the women’s literary campaign. According to Farfan, Robins embraced Ibsen’s plays for their challenging and exciting female characters such as Hedda at a time when she had little prospect of finding interesting roles in London as an American-born actress.²¹ Farfan maintains that ‘[w]ith *Hedda Gabler*, the quality and quantity of the critical attention that Robins attracted changed radically’.²² This confirms that Robins’s particular interest in Ibsen stemmed from her professional unfulfillment and this venture brought her success in the early years of her stage career. Also, by staging *Hedda Gabler* in a theatre that was rented with very limited financial means and by performing Ibsen’s characters on stage, two popular actresses, Robins and Marion Lea, provoked considerable controversy about an actress’s capacity for transgressing the ‘accepted standards of femininity as Ibsen’s title character’ Hedda did in the play.²³ Considering that they radically undermined the authority of powerful actor-managers and the arrogance of established theatre critics, they took on a monumental task in the creation of feminist consciousness and female alliance in Edwardian theatre. On the other hand, Farfan observes that Robins’s later criticism and her gradual transformation into an independent feminist author is a possible outcome of her disillusionment with Ibsen’s ability to fully grasp the true nature and ambitions of women, particularly in the case of independent women such as actresses. Farfan here makes a valid point as to the real motive behind Robins’s

decision to become involved in the theatrical efforts of a political campaign. She notes that

Hedda hardly qualified to marshal feminist followers toward their goal of emancipation, since she lacks the courage and conviction of the many suffragists who endured such hardships as jail sentences and forced feedings. She does, after all, opt to commit suicide rather than to confront in a more constructive manner the circumstances of her life that she finds so intolerable.²⁴

It is partially true that Ibsen's drama provided Robins with the exciting possibility of playing an innovative female role in a plot constructed around radical themes such as infidelity, deception, egotism and suicide, as well as the opportunity to explore the psychological intensity of the heroine, Hedda. The challenge of impersonating a radical character like Hedda is especially apparent in the scenes in which she provokes her ex-lover Eilert to commit suicide by handing him a pistol, then kills herself upon realising that her involvement will be revealed in the end.²⁵ That is, Ibsen's drama offered Robins, as an ambitious actress, new and extraordinary possibilities of acting, by helping her escape from the orthodoxy, dullness and predictability of the late-Victorian melodramatic stage. Nevertheless, Robins's actual realisation of her independent status in Edwardian theatre was as a result of her decision to write a play that treated women's roles and experiences in a unique and personal way. As John Temple puts it, 'Ibsen [believed] that he had experienced the "real" Hedda, the "real" Tesman, the "real" Tante Julie, then determined to give to the world his own mirror of it'.²⁶ I argue that Ibsen's claim of realism in his female characters and his failure to understand female psychology, desires, ambitions and, most importantly, potential disappoint Robins in her gradual transformation into a liberated actress. It is through this deep belief that Robins's pioneering role seems to culminate in her writing and production of *Votes for Women!*, which depicts a new a stage for women and foreshadows new roles for them, uniquely in the realm of

political activism. This study takes up Farfan's argument of Robins's reworking of Ibsen's heroines in this new drama and asserts that the playwrights championing women's suffrage politics carried out a revisionist project by refusing the femininity described in male writers' works and constructing ambitious female characters. Female activism, self-fulfilment and potential were key characteristics of these new and progressive femininities.

Another significant study on suffrage drama is Sheila Stowell's *A Stage of Their Own, Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era*. Stowell argues that what the notable writers of the movement such as Robins, Elizabeth Baker and Githa Sowerby achieved in their plays was their own version of dramatic realism.²⁷ She maintains that plays such as Baker's *Chains* (1909) and Sowerby's *Rutherford and Son* (1912) 'demonstrate how women (and certain men) are made to suffer at the hands of a tyrannical social and economic patriarchy'.²⁸ Furthermore, in her article 'Rehabilitating the Realism', she asserts that 'while dramatic and theatrical styles may be developed and adopted to naturalize or challenge particular positions, dramatic forms are not in themselves narrowly partisan'.²⁹ This argument is certainly valid in reference to the abovementioned plays. However, what Stowell, intentionally or not, ignores is that dramatic realism and naturalism as used by Edwardian male playwrights was highly ideological and partisan. Ibsen advanced Emile Zola's naturalism in his psychologically heightened drama, in which his heroines exist in a pessimistic realism against the backdrop of an oppressive society. George Bernard Shaw's adoption of the genre features an argumentative medium to further his anti-capitalism, Fabianism and rejection of conventional morality.³⁰ Edwardian suffrage dramatists' engagement with various dramatic forms to devise their complex and highly individual methods can be rationalised by the assumption that their drama is

constructed to be popular, interesting and free of formal concerns. In the most basic terms, most prominent plays were written to inspire, entertain, enlighten and transform audiences and the general public whenever possible. To this end, a single dramatic tradition, which was often criticised as being masculine and ideological, should not be considered the general approach. The experimental nature of suffrage drama can clearly be seen in the more established and mature works by writers such as Robins, Hamilton and St John. Namely, Robins's *Votes for Women!*, Hamilton's *A Pageant of Great Women*, and St John's *The First Actress* demonstrate a departure from Edwardian social drama and the structure of the 'well-made play'.³¹ They obscure and redefine the confines of various dramatic genres among which are melodrama, comedy, farce, heroic and historical drama, metatheatre and allegorical plays. A further validation of this departure also comes in the form of farcical and satirical suffrage plays written by George Bernard Shaw, who was a staunch supporter of realism in social drama, which is undoubtedly astonishing and justifies that no single form was the most successful and dominant in suffragists' dramatic works.

Apart from the issues of form and canonicity, a significant point of investigation is the representation of women in suffrage drama. At this point, it would be helpful to cite Lisa Tickner's comprehensive study, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14*,³² in order to understand the dynamics of the concept of 'spectacle' created by women through visual imagery, representation and femininity at the intersections of theatre and feminist politics. She underlines particularly the role of art groups in the formation of an exceptional art movement during the women's campaign, which enriched female creativity and collective consciousness. Also, there is no doubt that Tickner's work is one of the

most detailed studies presenting the many images of femininity and discussions on the representations of it. Tickner argues that suffrage art and discourse invented its own female identities with respect to how different groups of women interacted with each other in the campaign by positioning themselves for and against the woman rights. She puts forward that suffrage art (and thus its literature) represents women as ‘stereotypes’ and ‘social types’.³³ She broadly categorises the women represented in suffrage discourse and representation as ‘the modern woman’, ‘the middle-class woman’, ‘the working-class woman’, ‘the hysterical woman’, ‘the womanly woman’ and ‘the militant woman’.³⁴ These femininities are further represented in drama under revised and more precise categories.

In this sense, this thesis does not only draw upon Tickner’s suggested female subjects but puts forward that the plays examined constructed their own particular heroines, some of which overlap Tickner’s categories, whilst the others are a revision of these femininities. A pioneering example of these is Robins’s *Vida Levering*, who embodies a classless female activist. Similarly, Hamilton’s *Diana of Dobson’s* narrates the story of a working-class girl while the professional women in *How the Vote Was Won* and the celebrated women in *A Pageant of Great Women* create a tension between the discourse and purposes of middle-class writers in their representational strategies. The critical role of professional women in a political movement is epitomised by the actress, who was one of the most liberated femininities of her time and played an active role in the creation of the overall spectacle. Finally, the women referred to as ‘suffragettes’ do not only embody a militant identity but also a new form of female resistance in the public sphere. As Lisa Tickner puts it, the term ‘suffragette’ was coined by the *Daily Mail* to distinguish ‘the militants’ from the constitutionalists in 1906.³⁵ It was initially used

in a derogatory way, but quickly gained acceptance from suffragists within the ranks of WSPU in order to demonstrate their unique identity in the movement.³⁶ It is clear that suffragettes comprised a large number of female activists, some of whom had never been involved in militant actions, but expressed solidarity with the women involved in these forms of action. Therefore, in this study, the term ‘suffragette’ is preferred over ‘militant’ to define the identity of women who were either supporters or initiators of street activism and spectacular resistance.

Katherine Cockin’s contributions, both critical and archival, to suffrage drama and theatre are worthy of a close reading. In her article ‘Cicely Hamilton’s Warriors: dramatic reinventions of militancy in the British women’s suffrage movement’, she discusses the meanings and representations of ‘the Heroic Women’ in Hamilton’s *A Pageant of Great Women*. She asserts that the play was appropriated for audiences, such as the members of ‘the Women’s Freedom League, for whom militancy was an unacceptable political strategy’.³⁷ She also adds that the female warriors section ‘normalises combat and the justification for loss of life, [...] especially for their country’,³⁸ which signifies that women’s self-sacrifice and dedication for their cause is seen as a higher purpose and *The Pageant* is thus distinguished as a celebratory piece. Cockin also underlines some possible contradictions in the play in its construction of female heroism as a historical phenomenon by ignoring contemporary examples. However, perhaps her most important remark is made about the conclusion of the play when she writes, ‘the ending appears to contemplate unrestricted possibilities for women’.³⁹ This is a primary concern addressed later in this thesis in the chapter on Hamilton to explore further the possibilities and potential of women in terms of class politics and the

status of ordinary women in a dramatic movement which was dominated by middle-class authors and actresses.

In terms of archival research, Cockin's invaluable anthology *Women's Suffrage Drama*,⁴⁰ which is part of a five-volume anthology, is the single most comprehensive source of suffrage plays, including those that have been retrieved from unpublished manuscripts. Cockin's anthology features prominent suffrage writers such as Robins, Hamilton and St John, as well as a number of one-act plays written by various female and male writers. Cockin's anthology has been invaluable as it includes the scripts of privately published plays such as St John's *The First Actress*, the original script of which proved to be very difficult to retrieve from archives. In addition, her biography of Edith Craig elucidates how Craig was central to the creation of St John's plays and to what extent this allowed a fruitful collaboration with St John as an intellectual and dramatic contributor to women's political and feminist theatre.

The Rationale and Purpose of the Study

The plays chosen for this thesis portray Edwardian political women in many roles and diversities as they staged women's struggle for participation in professional and public life in an age when the political system vetoed them as equal citizens. They feature a number of highly varied individual, socio-political and literary themes, which suggests the richness of the aspirations and motives of women who participated in the dramatic campaign. The majority of the plays analysed in the course of this study were staged by two theatre societies established and managed by women, whose members had close affiliation with Edwardian suffrage societies. Popular examples such as *How the Vote was Won* and *A Pageant of Great Women*, in particular, were among a large portfolio of plays produced by the Actresses'

Franchise League, the single most important women's theatrical society, which encouraged and employed actresses to write and stage original plays. Its propagandist roots are palpable from its dramatic portfolio which comprises various political plays as well as from the political declarations of its members such as Robins and Hamilton. According to the AFL's booklet summarising its events between 1912 and 1913, its main objectives were stated as follows:

1. To convince members of the theatrical profession of the necessity of extending the franchise to women.
2. To work for women's enfranchisement by educational methods, such as
 - I. Propaganda Meetings
 - II. Sale of Literature
 - III. Propaganda Plays
 - IV. Lectures
3. To assist all other Leagues whenever possible.⁴¹

Defining 'propaganda plays' as educational activities, AFL was positioned to organise theatrical events in order to disseminate political arguments. Also, an interesting point is that AFL's booklets list its play repertoire under the title of 'Entertainments'.⁴² As Carolyn Tilghman puts it, 'theatre was one of the major arenas for public entertainment in Edwardian Great Britain'.⁴³ I argue that suffrage plays should be considered a substantial contribution to the theatrical scene of the age. These entertainments constituted an opportunity to raise the profile of suffragists, so venues such as meeting halls, bazaars and fairs became theatrical sites. Moreover, a number of suffrage plays, some of which have been selected for this study, were also staged successfully at reputable theatres, confirming their popularity and critical position in the creation of publicity and controversy. The Royal Court, the Kingsway, the Royalty, the Scala, the Savoy and the Little Theatres were only some of those that opened their doors for the performances of suffrage plays and to their audiences.

The second theatre society whose plays have been selected for examination is Craig's the Pioneer Players. Plays such as *The First Actress* and *The Paphnutius* by

St John and *Press Cuttings* by Shaw as well as previously mentioned plays by Hamilton were staged in matinees by the society's members under the direction of Craig between 1911 and 1914. The inclusion of these plays in this study is not an uninformed or random choice, as these plays are among those featured under the title of 'Propaganda Plays' in the society's correspondences sent by Craig to its members and prospective authors on the issues of payments, copyright, cast selections, production details and matinee performances.⁴⁴ It is apparent that despite being called 'propaganda plays', some works selected for this study feature stories shaped by individual experiences and motives and thus may represent non-suffrage-related topics and characters on the surface. Nonetheless, considering the wide-ranging female identities and subjects in these works, it is clear that suffrage drama should not be considered a homogeneous genre. Likewise, the decision to exclude other plays written and performed at the height of the campaign was taken essentially to produce a more cohesive and more focused argument on how these playwrights deal with the issues of new female identities, class, women's potential, activism and theatrical achievements.

My analysis of women's political theatre takes account of two distinct but interrelated premises: the representative strategies and dramatic constructions at textual level and alternative readings engendered by performance, collaborations and critical reception which is based upon the concept of the theatrical event. In the former case, the central concern is to understand to what extent popular drama influenced and guided individual authors by common dramaturgical tactics and how these associations create a new understating of suffrage drama. In other words, the idea that suffrage drama is not merely a collection of propaganda pieces or political pamphlets is substantiated. It is argued that the playwrights created versatile and

original plays both in form and content, which opposes the idea of an imitative and monolithic drama. In the latter case, new meanings created by performance and its visual and written records add an additional layer of analysis to contribute to the textual meanings created in the first place. In this sense, this research has extensively used archival materials such as photographs, leaflets, playbills, letters and play reviews as instruments of theatrical analysis. They have particularly been helpful in comprehending the staging of plays and their production by theatre companies, which generated further theatrical and dramatic possibilities.

The Edwardian suffrage movement brought about a significant change in women's roles in the theatre which in turn played a very crucial role in women's emancipation efforts. It was an arena where women had already attained some freedoms as actresses. Theatre was also one of the most powerful tools for women to use to raise their arguments and showcase their talents. Perhaps the biggest contribution to this promotion was the involvement of famous actresses and female writers in the ranks of the campaign. With the emergence of a theatrical movement, they moved from acting to playwriting as exemplified by the lives of Robins, Hamilton and St John. In this sense, this study will discuss how and to what extent the idea of women's theatre were achieved by the theatrical groups formed and will attempt to shed light on the possibilities of theatre as a collaborative art for women in the context of Edwardian suffragism and thus in general efforts of women's professional and creative liberation.

Chapter Summaries

This thesis will explore representative and theatrical strategies of plays written and produced by female and male playwrights to raise the status of Edwardian women's political struggle for female empowerment. It will mainly investigate the works of

three Edwardian actresses-turned-playwrights and writers: Robins, Hamilton and St John. A final chapter will be concerned with the prominent polemicist and playwright Bernard Shaw and his role in the publicity of political femininity, militancy and its representations.

Chapter I examines the earliest and most successful example of all suffrage plays, Elizabeth Robins' *Votes for Women* (1907). It is a play based on Robins' popular novel *Convert*, published in the same year. The play version shows how the first representations of a politically-minded female activist can create a great uproar by initiating debate on women's place in public life, with alternative roles represented through the main character's identities as a middle-class single woman, an adamant suffragist, a free woman who explores the city on her own to discover the lives of other members of her sex, a public speaker, and finally a prototype for a modern, politically-minded femininity. Vida Levering takes the initiative to show that change should first take root in the individual herself before gradually spreading to others, as the philosophy behind her actions and arguments is seen to be both morally justified and worth fighting for. Vida portrays a classless but enlightened woman, whose own regrets and experiences and subsequent struggle to do the right thing stand for the potential of a single woman to influence others and help to mitigate inequality. She was a fresh alternative to uninspiring feminine models of her time and a reaction to the widespread stereotyping of women by the anti-feminist, anti-suffragist and mostly misogynist media.

This chapter also aims to show how this play proved that drama by women could be both serious in arguments and popular through characters, representations and theatrical strategies by combining the features of popular and political stages of the age. Therefore, it is defined as a foundational piece for the emergence of suffrage

drama and one that encouraged female theatricals to establish their own ventures. Robins' play is also a confirmation that theatres for women by women were vital if they aspired to produce their new and at times experimental plays in a liberated atmosphere.

Chapter II explores three plays by Cicely Hamilton: *Diana of Dobson's*, *How the Vote Was Won* and the most popular suffrage pageant play of the time, *A Pageant of Great Women*. It becomes evident that the representation of ordinary women was previously ignored, especially with regard to working women's ability for self-sufficiency and personal development. However, in *Diana of Dobson's*, Hamilton takes a shop assistant further than the familiar trope and characterises her as both an unhappy worker and also an adventurous woman, who turns the traditional roles of an ordinary working-class woman into a new mode of femininity through her desire to discover other lives while rejecting the marriage proposal of a rich captain due to his self-centredness and the impossibility of her having an equal role in their marriage. Although the play closes with a very common comedy ending – a marriage between two lovers – Hamilton offers a self-conscious decision to subvert the plot: the captain loses his inheritance and comes across Diana unexpectedly near the Thames where a romantic intimacy sparks and the play concludes with the promise of equality between the two characters in their marriage.

This is followed by another popular suffrage play, *How the Vote Was Won*, in which a group of mostly middle-class independent women gather together to occupy the home of their nearest male relative, Horace, to protest the government's proposal to force women to be taken into care by their male relatives. These women exemplify a cross-section of women from different professions, and their strong personalities and powerful arguments force Horace to change his ideas on women's self-

sufficiency, their professional careers and their place at home. These accomplished women are comparable to the historical female characters featured in Hamilton's spectacular play *A Pageant of Great Women*. This play features fifty-one women of different ages, professions and nationalities. It showcases rich costumes, a large stage and a very large cast, and its first production was performed by famous Edwardian actresses who represent the exceptional qualities of femininity they promoted on the stage. Hamilton's plays reveal a tension between the ordinary and the exceptional and to what extent ordinary women could be attracted to her arguments through her representation of exceptionality. However, *The Pageant* juxtaposed this with the provision that ordinary amateur players were to be part of further productions of the play across England and Wales, which proved to be very popular among suffragists and other audience members.

Chapter III focuses on Christopher St John's plays and her relationship with Ellen Terry and Terry's daughter Edith Craig. This chapter investigates the emergence of the actress as a political woman and an iconic figure who transforms herself and initiates a larger transformation of women in the profession. The predominant trope in popular theatres of the early Edwardian era was the actress as an attractive but dependent woman, who is portrayed as someone easily seduced, prone to men's influence and intellectually incapable. St John, on the other hand, constructs her alternative interpretations of heroines in three plays examined in this chapter: *The Wilson Trial*, *The First Actress* and her translation/adaptation of Hrotsvit's *Paphnutius*. *The Wilson Trial* is the story of a lawyer's interrogation of a musical comedy actress in order to find her brother, Edmund, who is the key witness in an investigation. She portrays a very distinct woman through her persuasive explanations and arguments, countering the lawyer's insistence on finding Edmund.

St John appears to offer the audience a revision of the musical comedy actress, turning her into a single, charismatic woman with qualities such as intellect and aesthetic appreciation. *The First Actress* narrates the story of Margaret Hughes, who was the first professional actress on the Shakespearean stage in the eighteenth century. This play chronicles a large number of actresses over centuries and their struggle to be acknowledged as a part of the theatrical profession. The play was performed at the first matinee of Craig's the Pioneer Players, thereby creating considerable publicity for the society.

The third play is an adaptation of *Paphnutius* by Hrotsvit, a German nun (935–1002). Hrotsvit's similarity to the Edwardian suffrage writers may seem impalpable at a first sight. However, the reason behind St John's choice of a tenth-century nun's play as a part of Craig's experimental theatre series is still intriguing. Christabel Marshall's adoption of the name of St John the Baptist and her conversion to Catholicism indicate her desire to transform herself, although, in her case, to a male identity, and one that is reputedly famous for his commitment to and sense of duty in his religious life. It can also be likened to a general effort of the suffrage women's efforts to transform their identities by asserting their presence in society in different ways, some under disguise and some by constructing a powerful persona as the leader of or as a member of a political society. Hrotsvit's celebration of the spiritual and committed female figure symbolises the commitment and idealisation of women to a cause in which they deeply believed. She celebrates her characters who acknowledge higher ideals of femininity as moral and exemplary women, which resonates in St John's female characters who work for the good of their sex by asserting new roles in the theatrical space she conquers.

The thesis concludes with a final chapter that traces the impact of the women's suffrage campaign and its arguments on one of the most respected writers of the age, George Bernard Shaw. As a playwright and polemicist, Shaw excelled in portraying his socialist views and constructing very persuasive but unconventional heroines in his plays.⁴⁵ This chapter analyses two of Shaw's plays: *Press Cuttings* and *Fanny's First Play*. Shaw's situation in Edwardian theatre was complicated due to his support for female emancipation and also due to censorship by the Lord Chamberlain's Office, which banned some of his plays, including *Mrs Warren's Profession* and *Press Cuttings*. Shaw's plays contributed largely to the public debate about the suffragettes and the militant ranks of suffrage women, although he had tense relationships with some of these political women. The complex relationship between suffragists, actresses and Shaw especially creates an intriguing web of connections and differences. This chapter thus intends to show Shaw's contribution not only to intellectual debates on the issue but also to the constructions of female characters, stagecraft and theatrical strategies, which fed and were fed by the creation of popular and similarly successful theatre endeavours by women around him.

All in all, this thesis seeks to make an important contribution to the existing discussion on the function of women's theatre and its drama in the creation of free space for women's self-expression and exploration of new roles. Its original contribution can be summarised as follows: first, it counters the assumption that suffrage dramatists simply emulated or reworked the realism championed by Edwardian male writers and offers a new reading of plays in connection to Edwardian popular drama. By looking at the formulation of characterisation and discourse surrounding the female characters, I want to demonstrate the selected plays' dramaturgical overlaps, which, in turn, may elucidate Edwardian political

feminist drama and reposition it among established genres. It thus not only seeks to show the foundations of originality and artistic value, but also discloses the textual and contextual interconnections. Second, by exploring how the possibilities for women to achieve their potential emerged in the theatrical realm, this thesis will show how theatre was distinctive in its representations and possibilities as one of the earliest examples of a collective theatre movement actively funded, maintained and promoted by women in search of social and artistic freedoms. In doing so, I take up the challenge of retrieving and interpreting new archival materials such as manuscripts, production bills, leaflets, photographs, newspaper articles and reviews published during the Edwardian age as complementary and contextual materials and thus show that women's drama in the age was not merely a radical and isolated effort. On the contrary, I assert that it should be regarded as an early example of women's sensational and artistically successful ventures in literary history.

¹ Elaine Showalter, *Daughters of Decadence: Women Writers of the Fin-de-Siècle* (London: Virago, 1993); Angelique Richardson, *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women 1890–1914* (London, Penguin Books, 2005); Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin De Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997).

² For example, a relatively recent book, *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880–2005*, spares only one chapter for women's suffrage plays while examining male playwrights who lived between 1900 and 1939 such as Ibsen, Shaw, Barker and Yeats in separate chapters (Mary Luckhurst, ed., *A Companion to Modern British and Irish Drama 1880–2005* (London: Blackwell Publishing Ltd, 2006)). Similarly, *English Drama of the Early Modern Period, 1890–1940* only mentions one Edwardian female playwright, Elizabeth Robins, very shortly in one of its chapters (Jean Chothia, *English Drama of the Early Modern Period, 1890–1940* (Essex: Longman Group Limited, 1996)). *Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance* does not include any woman's plays during the Edwardian period in its timeline of theatrical events provided at the end of the book (Dennis Kennedy, ed., *Oxford Companion to Theatre and Performance* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011)). Luckily, *British Playwrights, 1880–1956: A Research and Production Sourcebook* features Elizabeth Robins and Cicely Hamilton among thirty-two playwrights for whom it provides research information (William W. Demastes and Katherine Kelly, eds., *British Playwrights, 1880–1956: A Research and Production Sourcebook* (London: Greenwood Press, 1996)).

³ See June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton, 'Introduction', in *Votes for Women*, ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 1–13 (p. 1).

⁴ Martin Pugh, *Women's Suffrage in Britain 1867–1928* (London: The Historical Association, 1980), p. 6. Also see Ben Griffen, 'Women's Suffrage as Class Representation', in *The Politics of Gender in Victorian Britain: Masculinity, Political Culture and the Struggle for Women's Rights* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), pp. 215–288.

⁵ Pugh, p. 6.

⁶ Ibid, p. 26. Also in Constance Rover, *Women's Suffrage and Party Politics in Britain* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1967).

⁷ NUWSS was founded in 1897 and included several suffrage societies under the leadership of Millicent Fawcett. It was not officially allied with any party, although Fawcett was a liberal in political thought. It was the largest suffrage society and campaigned in support of individual election candidates who supported votes for women. WSPU was a militant organisation campaigning for women's suffrage in Great Britain from 1903 to 1917. It was controlled by Emmeline Pankhurst and her daughter Christabel. It gained a reputation for hunger strikes, postbox attacks, window breaking, arson of unoccupied houses and churches as well as minor assaults on MPs and other political leaders.

⁸ Pugh, p. 22.

⁹ Ibid, p. 23.

¹⁰ WFL was a suffrage society established in 1907 by the leaving members of the WSPU including Charlotte Despard. WFL was against WSPU's militant tactics, so it suggested peaceful tactics such as tax resistance, boycotting censuses and public meetings as effective methods for the campaign. *The Vote* was its main newspaper.

¹¹ According to Ann Heilmann, the term was first used in its specific meaning in the *Westminster Review* in 1865, which described her as 'the subversive heroine of the new sensation novels' (Ann Heilmann, *New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 22). Angelique Richardson, on the other hand, states that the first real examples of New Women start with Olive Schrenier's publication of *The Story of an African Farm*, which is one of the first instances of the women's feminist 'revolt'. She adds that the term 'New Woman', on the other hand, entered into transatlantic currency thanks to Sarah Grand's *The New Aspects of the Woman Question*, which was published in *The North American Review* in 1894. *The North American Review* also published articles such as Grand's 'The Modern Girl' and 'The Man of the Moment' as well as Ouida's 'The New Woman' (Angelique Richardson, 'Introduction' in *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women, 1890–1914* (London: Penguin Books Limited, 2005), p. xxxiv). Heilmann also describes the intellectual argument between Grand and Ouida as 'a defining moment' for the term's gaining wider currency in the media and intellectual circles (p. 23).

¹² *Punch* was a British weekly magazine publishing humorous and satirical articles, commentaries and drawings. It was established in 1841 and very popular during the mid-nineteenth century. It was a pioneer in modern humorous cartooning. After long years of struggle due to circulation numbers after World War II, it closed in 2002. Particularly during the last decade of nineteenth century and in the early twentieth century, it took a stance against feminist and suffragist movements. *The Times* is a British daily national newspaper, which started in 1785. It was a popular daily at the turn of the century. It was less satirical about and resistant to women's enfranchisement but contributed to anti-suffrage propaganda extensively. Diana Atkinson asserts in her *Funny Girls: Cartooning for Equality* that '[the] selection of cartoons [in her book] is just the tip of a mountain of drawings'. She adds that '[w]ith an average of ten daily papers coming out every year, each featuring sometimes as many as five cartoons, and countless weeklies, monthlies and other periodicals being published, there must have been very roughly half a million cartoons produced during this time'. Diana Atkinson, *Funny Girls: Cartooning for Equality* (London: Penguin Books, 1997), p. 2.

¹³ Heilmann, p. 23.

¹⁴ Richardson, 'Introduction' in *Women Who Did: Stories by Men and Women, 1890–1914*, p. xxxiii.

¹⁵ Sandra Stanley Holton, *Feminism and Democracy: Women's Suffrage and Reform Politics in Britain 1900–1908* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 9–29.

¹⁶ Heilmann claims that 'the New Woman ceased to signify the British feminist and became a term of reference for Continental women's movements [and] she began to disappear from the pages of feminist periodicals[.] [I]n 1898 the mainstream press followed suit. It was only after the turn of the century, in the wake of suffragette activism, that the concept underwent a revival.' (p. 23)

¹⁷ Heilmann, p. 23.

¹⁸ See Holton, p. 13.

¹⁹ Eliza Lynn Linton's deviant female characters such as the tomboy, the sentimental romantic, the man-hater and the neurotic decadent in her *The One Too Many* (1894) are examples of these

negative attributes frequently associated with the New Woman. See Heilmann for a further discussion of this. (*New Woman Fiction: Women Writing First-wave Feminism* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2000), p. 25.)

²⁰ Penny Farfan, 'From Hedda Gabler to Votes for Women: Elizabeth Robins, Early Critique of Ibsen', *Theatre Journal*, 48(1996), pp. 59–78.

²¹ Farfan, p. 61.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 62.

²³ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

²⁴ Farfan, p. 59.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Joan Temple, 'Genre, Representation, and the Politics of Dramatic Form: Ibsen's Realism', in *Ibsen's Selected Plays*, ed. by Brian Johnson (New York and London: W.W. Norton and Company Inc., 2004), pp. 587–602 (p. 593).

²⁷ Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), p. 4.

²⁸ Stowell, p. 4.

²⁹ Stowell, 'Rehabilitating Realism', *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* (1992), pp. 81–88 (p. 87).

³⁰ Stowell, in 'Rehabilitating Realism' asserts that suffrage drama predominantly exploited Edwardian realist drama originated by Henrik Ibsen and followed by Bernard Shaw, Granville Barker, and Githa Sowbery in their plays.

³¹ The well-made play was a genre invented by Eugene Scribe (1791–1861), who 'devised plots which had a coherence and causality missing from melodrama, and which worked to maximize suspense'. In general, 'the plays began with exposition and progressed [highly structurally] through crisis and complications to reach logical, plausible endings.' It was 'often belittled as formulaic and unartistic', and it was most strikingly adopted by Ibsen, Wilde, Shaw and Barker in their plays. John Lennard and Mary Luckhurst, *The Drama Handbook: A Guide to Reading Plays* (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2002), p. 96.

³² Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

³³ Tickner, p. 172.

³⁴ See the chapter "Representations" in Tickner, pp. 151–226.

³⁵ Tickner, p. 9.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Katharine Cockin, 'Cicely Hamilton's Warriors: Dramatic Reinventions of Militancy in the British Women's Suffrage Movement', *Women's History Review*, 14(2005), pp. 527–42 (p. 530).

³⁸ Cockin, p. 534.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 535.

⁴⁰ Katherine Cockin, ed. *Women's Suffrage Literature, Volume III* (London: Routledge, 2007).

⁴¹ 'The Actresses' Franchise League Booklet 1912-1913', The Women's Library Collections, Document No: GB/106/2/AFL/A3/1, p. 3.

⁴² Thirty-three play performances are recorded in addition to forty concerts, numerous single matinees, meetings and lectures in its 1912-1913 booklet. *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁴³ Carolyn Tilghman, 'Staging Suffrage: Women, Politics, and the Edwardian Theater', *Comparative Drama*, 45.4 (2011), pp. 339–360 (p. 339).

⁴⁴ See Appendix I for a letter sent to Shaw by Craig as the director of the Pioneer Players, which includes a list of propaganda plays within the society's repertoire.

⁴⁵ Among the most significant female characters by Shaw were Eliza Doolittle in *Pygmalion*, Ellie Dunn in *Heartbreak House*, Barbara Undershaft in *Major Barbara*, Fanny O'Dowda in *Fanny's First Play* and Vivie Warren in *Mrs Warren's Profession*.

Chapter 1. The Spectacular Performance on the Political Stage: Elizabeth Robins's *Votes For Women!*

Probably not since Mary Wollstonecraft's "Vindication of the Rights of Woman," written more than a century ago, has the subject been dealt with so forcefully by one of her sex. Indeed one cannot leave the perusal of its pages without something of the contagious belief of the author in the dawn, in the civilized world of to-day of "the New Spirit" out of which will be evolved a political revolution resulting in a wiser and more perfect adjustment of the relations between sexes.¹

The *New York Times* critic praises Elizabeth Robins for her powerful representation of feminist arguments in her novel *The Convert* (1907), which, according to him, awakens 'the New Spirit' in feminist politics. Robins's novel was an adaptation of her play *Votes for Women!*, which had been successfully staged in London in the same year. As these two works have an organic bond, it is easy to draw a parallel between their themes, characters and plot. But, whilst *The Convert* was aimed at extending Robins's theatrical aspirations further in the written form, which was comparatively more lucrative and would have helped establish her career as a writer, the play principally promoted the spectacular suffrage campaign and its feminist ends. Remarkably in the play, her advocacy of women's suffrage involved a new mode of feminist publicity, and the play's first performance fulfilled the aim of a far-reaching promotion and exhibiting the glamour and pride of suffrage women on stage. The publicity was, first and foremost, to counterbalance the derogatory images of female suffragists in popular magazines and newspapers. Robins's strategy, thus, not only included political advocacy, but designated a new form of dramatic art as well, through which a spectacular effect would be ensured within the theatrical space.

Robins's first-hand acquaintance with late-Victorian theatre evinces the difficulty of securing ambitious roles for women. Her struggle to prove herself to a

number of renowned managers of her time helped develop her as both an adamant feminist campaigner and clever playwright. Her suffrage play *Votes for Women!* shows her clear sense of theatre. It exhibits an amalgamation of her support for the movement and her desire to generate a play that feeds off existing dramatic forms but ultimately represents a departure from the conventional. Kerry Powell describes her as ‘the woman who, more than any other, resisted the masculinist theatre of the Victorian period and imagined a revolutionary alternative.’² Robins’s instinctive defiance, as an actress, against the male hegemony over the theatre of the era, as well as her reformist vision of exploiting the performance as a form of publicity and female transgression, is what will be referred to in this chapter as the novelty of her dramatic art. Her strategy was far ahead of the existing notions, and functions, of the theatre of her time and was an illuminating signpost for the members of her sex in their attempt to establish ‘a stage of their own’.³ In this work Robins blends her deep knowledge of the stage and its particulars with her experience in various dramatic genres. In an attempt to clarify her scheme, this chapter will scrutinise the processes by which Robins synthesises different forms and dramatic strategies in order to carry the movement’s spectacularity and feminist ideas to the stage. It will track down the sources Robins utilised and seek to unveil the ways in which Robins constructed her female characters as a new group of activist women at the centre of spectacularity. Furthermore, this chapter aims also to show the ways in which the subjects of Robins’s spectacular strategies – suffragist characters – diverge or unite with their predecessors the New Women of the 1890s.

1.1. Subversive Beginnings: The Actress as an Ibsenite

Elizabeth Robins’s relationship with the conventional West End theatre and her unrelenting support for Ibsen plays played a major part in shaping her dramatic

genius and feminist posture in her later works. The period starting with her introduction to the London stage as an actress in the 1890s to her departure from acting at the end of the century demonstrates how Robins was influenced by ‘the New Drama Movement’,⁴ and to what extent she reworked and reinterpreted these influences in the construction of her iconic suffrage play *Votes for Women!*. Two factors were formative in Robins’s theatrical maturation and her contribution to suffrage drama: her discovery of Ibsen’s plays as a form of rebellion against the conventional stage, and her collaboration with William Archer, traces of which can clearly be tracked in her first play *Alan’s Wife* (1983) and later in *Votes for Women!*.

In her autobiographical work *Both Sides of the Curtain* (1940), Robins makes clear that an actress’s ability to find even a minor role in the West End depended very much on personal connections and engagement with the leading theatre managers of London, especially, in her case, with Herbert Tree, George Alexander or Henry Irving.⁵ Robins stated that ‘actresses who by some fluke had proved their powers[, didn’t have] any choice as what they should act. [...] The only one who had a choice was the Actor-Manager or [if any] the Actress-Manager...’.⁶ It was often ‘a limited freedom and a certain power’ that was allowed to the actress,⁷ and it was hardly possible for her to make her decision on a role. She recorded her early years in theatres as ‘a trial to the soul – both of audience and actor’ since she could only get limited opportunities,⁸ – nothing better than ‘understudying, drawing-room performances and second rate plays’, and these were merely for financial support rather than professional fulfilment.⁹

After a number of demoralising experiences in minor roles and inconsequential accomplishments, added to the uncertainties of employment and underpayment for long hours of rehearsals and matinee performances, Robins

remained disillusioned with the conditions of women in their theatrical ventures. Success was beyond sheer hard work and dedication to the theatre *per se*, as Henry Irving told Robins in their discussion of a potential role for her; the success of a woman on stage was intimately related to her pleasant appearance and so-called womanly traits: ‘Women don’t seem to do that with the success men do [...] but women have an easy road to travel on the stage. They have but to appear and their sweet feminine charm wins the battle –’.¹⁰ In her very own account of this meeting, she writes that

the brief passage with Henry Irving added gently to the general pressure that would confine women of the stage to the old province outside the stage. The rare exceptions, the great actresses, some of them, had escaped – with the result that lesser women or less fortunate, had been misled. What was wanted of the women of the stage was, first and mainly, what was wanted of women outside – a knack of pleasing.

Much as I myself loved pleasing – (and more than most) – it didn’t seem enough. Besides, where did it get you – outside the purely sexual limit?¹¹

Clearly, Robins was revolted by the idea of women being exploited and oppressed even in a profession that prioritised high intellectual, social and artistic capabilities. Her criticism targets the common objectification of women in visual entertainment and theatre, which implies that actresses were still to act within the confines of a system of exploitation guarded by the theatre managers. It was true that the actress was accustomed to a reasonably freer status which generally gave her ‘indefatigability, worldly knowledge, self-sufficiency, mobility, and freedom to interact with men’.¹² They were vastly admired and, in many cases, more privileged than other members of their sex, and acting as a profession had grown more widely reachable to women of different classes. According to the official census results, the increase in the number of actresses on stage was 1,029 per cent between 1861 and 1911.¹³ However, the prevalent attitude towards actresses, seeing them as the ‘objects of desire’ owing to their physical attractiveness and relatively liberal

lifestyles, was an exemplary case of women's status in Victorian society and a form of women's collective subjugation under an oppressive culture, which was stigmatising women through their sexuality.¹⁴

Ibsen's emergence on the London stage signified the transition from conventional theatre to modern British theatre, marking an epoch which, for the first time, represented the liberated 'New Woman' on stage. Ibsen's plays *A Doll's House* (1879), *Ghosts* (1881), *Hedda Gabler* (1890) and *The Master Builder* (1892) were all thematically subversive, as they fashioned a new paradigm of rebellious women, and gave way to a steadily flourishing feminist stage, attracting more women to the women's cause.

Specifically speaking, for Robins, who sought a way out of the status quo in theatres, 'Ibsen's plays gave the chance to show her acting talent' on stage,¹⁵ and so these performances assisted Robins's eventual pursuit of a fulfilling career as a feminist actress. She points to 'the power of [Ibsen's] truth and the magic of his poetry' as a freeing agent, which, she maintains, 'gives the actor an impetus, but an impetus in a right direction. And I do not say the right direction. Whatever direction the individual gift and temper of the actor inclines to.'¹⁶ Here, what Robins implies is the power of Ibsen's dramatic creation and its theatrical expediency for the actress. Frustrated with the conditions of Victorian theatres, Robins embraced Ibsen's plays as a breakthrough in the era for their new possibilities for the actress, and those possibilities were certainly emancipatory. In her speech, which was later published under the title of *Ibsen and the Actress*, she points out that

Ibsen had taught us something we were never to unlearn. [...] Events, after *Hedda*, emphasised for us the kind of life that stretched in front of the women condemned to the "hack-work" of the stage. That was what we called playing even the best parts in plays selected by the actor-managers.¹⁷

What Ibsen offered to Robins and other prominent actresses such as Marion Lea was for a rare opportunity to undermine conventionality on stage. Penny Farfan highlights that ‘at a time when the standard theatrical fare was melodrama, [...] Robins was struck by the unprecedented realism of the characters peopling Ibsen’s plays’.¹⁸ It was Ibsen’s portrayal of oppressed women, insistence on the psychological effect of the play on an audience and his avant-garde approach to drama that distinguished his plays from the melodramatic formula of stock characters and unrealistic plots. However, the most discernible impact of Ibsenite drama on the women of theatre was to channel them into a new female collaboration in order to bring his plays to the stage. In one such collaborative initiative, Marion Lea passionately ventured into a production of *Hedda Gabler* with Robins which was anything but straightforward. Robins recalled those discouraging times: ‘we undertook to see the managers; but they were more difficult to access, so we wrote them [...] and their indifference and their loathing were equally mistaken. We failed.’¹⁹ In a similar attempt, Robins’s persistence on a production of Ibsen’s *Ghosts* was hampered by Herbert Tree, who promised to lend his theatre – the Haymarket – and scenery on the proviso that Robins and her benefactors would pay the bare incidental expenses of a trial matinee of *Ghosts*, and Tree would have a voice in the cast, casting himself as Mrs Alving’s son, Oswald.²⁰

All these and other troubles made the case that the autocratic system and its reverberations harnessed the prominent actresses within a sort of female, and an almost feminist, union and collective consciousness. According to Kerry Powell, it induced figures such as Robins, Lea, Florence Farr, Janet Achurch and Eleonora Duse to organise their own productions and afford themselves more challenging parts and their preferred roles.²¹ Without doubt, Robins’s struggle constitutes an essential

part of her conversion into an intellectual activist and ardent feminist writer in service of the women's suffrage campaign, and it better clarifies why Robins asserts that 'no dramatist has ever meant so much to the women of the stage as Henrik Ibsen'.²²

1.2. William Archer and Experimenting with the New Woman in *Alan's Wife*

William Archer was the most formidable and dedicated adherent of 'the New Drama Movement' and had radical ideas on the nature of theatre.²³ To him, 'the theatre which provides no adequate representation and criticism of contemporary manners and thought is in a parlous state, and does not fulfil the most vital part of its natural function'.²⁴ As Peter Whitebrook puts it, in the 1890s 'the theatre was pungent with gas, greasepaint and escapism. Archer was no killjoy, but he wanted a theatre to be pungent with life as it was lived.'²⁵ He was campaigning for a theatrical revolution that would contribute to actors' professional abilities, and he encouraged more experimental works dealing with political, social and daily matters. Whitebrook maintains that he was enthusiastically drawing plans for his inspirational model of the National Theatre for a freer stage and evaluating the theatrical environment:

The dominant form of the modern repertoire would be realism. Archer defined this not as an attempt by the dramatist to photograph and present it in its entirety upon the stage, but to observe life and select moments from it in order to present complex, essential truth within a dramatic framework.²⁶

His support for the advancements in theatre, and even in music halls, was indicative of his willingness to back any step that would help establish a modern theatrical environment. He, in different times of his career, showed his support for provocative, creative and intellectual drama, encouraging playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw, Arthur Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones and actresses such as Elizabeth Robins, Jane Achurch, Marion Lea and many others.²⁷ His contributions and his advocacy of

an avant-garde stage could be seen as the first steps towards the establishment of the early-twentieth century feminist theatre.

Archer was a key figure in Robins's theatrical venture. She recorded that, in her campaign for the Ibsen productions, Archer was the sole authority:

I have been struck all through this little history by evidences that no one went far towards an Ibsen project with any sense of assurance even at that early day, without trying to find out "What does Archer think?" The Independent Grein was no exception.²⁸

Their collaboration started in the 1890s with the aim of translating, producing and elevating Ibsen plays on the English stage, but it subsequently turned into a close partnership and, as hinted at by his biographer Peter Whitebrook, a secret but passionate relationship.

Archer's influence can clearly be seen in Robins's first experiment with realist drama and a New Woman character in her play *Alan's Wife* (1893). The play chiefly questions a young woman's role and moral responsibility as a mother and human being. It opens with a scene in which Jean Creyke, the heroine, waits for her husband Alan's return from the factory. She is startlingly portrayed as a 'womanly woman' that was extensively exploited by Victorian literature.²⁹ Her desperate keenness for her husband and particular eagerness to create an ideal home evidently refer to an exaggerated sense of domesticity at the beginning, which invites repeated references of criticism from her mother, Mrs Holroyd:

Mrs. Holroyd: Yes, she's in the kitchen, I believe. (Calls) Jean, Jean! What are you doing, honey? Here's a neighbour come to see you.

Jean: (from within room to the L) I'll come directly. I'm getting Alan's dinner ready. I can't leave the saucepan.

[...]

Mrs. Holroyd: Yes, it's always Alan's dinner, or Alan's tea, or Alan's supper, or Alan's pipe. There isn't another man in the North gets waited on as he does.³⁰

However, as the act unfolds, it becomes clear that Mrs Holroyd is the real construct of a stereotypically conventional mother, who sees marriage as a means of social advancement for her daughter. Mrs Holroyd does not hide her displeasure about Jean's choice of a poor husband in preference to other potential suitors. She complains to her neighbour that 'there was a time when [a] young man was after our Jean, and she might have been the mistress of yon pretty house near the chapel, instead of living in a cottage like this' (p. 3). In her opinion, Jamie Warren, the new minister of the nearby church, stands for everything Mrs Holroyd looks for in a suitor; he is 'a man who is looked up to by everybody [...] go[ing] up to the big house last Christmastide, to dinner with the gentry' (p. 7). Though she would be economically and socially advantaged, Jean discards and even ridicules her mother's idea of the 'ideal man', reminding her of New Woman's eugenicist construction of marriage:

I want a husband who is brave and strong, a man who is my master as well as other folks'; who loves the hills and the heather, and loves to feel the strong wind blowing in his face and the blood rushing through his veins! Ah! to be happy – to be alive! (p. 9)

The dialogue between Jean and her mother foretells Jean's distinct character, which is revealed further in the later scene. She is much more complex than the stereotypes of the domestic woman. She speaks out intently for her emotional and sexual desires, though not explicitly, in that her sense of marriage rejects the idea of muted female sexuality.

It is disclosed at the end of the scene that Alan is late returning home as he has been killed by machinery at work, a tragic event that intensifies Jean's isolation and the suppression of her feelings. In the second act, Jean is left alone with her newborn son, who is physically deformed and is bound to live an agonising life. Her soliloquy displays her apprehension about the sufferings awaiting ahead in life for

him: ‘I seem to see you in some far-off time, your face distorted like your body, but with bitterness and loathing, saying, “Mother, how *could* you be so cruel as to let me live and suffer”’ (p. 36). Her dilemma as a mother is whether to let her child suffer for the rest of his life or to free him from his pain, which is raised as the central question in the play. Jean cannot stand seeing her child’s life taken from him and makes a deliberate choice to smother him. In the third act, unlike a conventional or predictable ending which would show Jean as apologetic for her actions, she is portrayed proudly as a woman who has cast aside her infant’s pain and her own mental suffering. She defies the dictates of a society that punishes her by labelling her as ‘mad’ and ‘incapacitated’. A reviewer from *The Speaker* on 6 May 1893 criticised the play harshly on the grounds that ‘it presents no ethical thesis, no crux, not even any development of character. A poor wretch, maddened by horrible misfortune, her brain still dizzy with the pangs of childbirth, kills her child.’³¹ Nevertheless, contrary to the reviewer’s accusations, Jean undergoes an evident development from being a naive girl, who asks her mother, ‘We shall be happier than we are now even. [...] Shall I be happier when I have my baby in my arms?’ (p. 16), and reveals her excitement about her unborn child that ‘he’ll be just such another as his father’ (p. 17), to a mature woman in the end, who, despite all attempts of her mother to deny accusations, refuses to distort the reality about what she has deliberately done and daringly accepts to be punished by an institution of an oppressive society.

It is difficult to extrapolate whether Robins’s initial plan was to cause a controversy over the expediency of such a subject in theatre, but, as its director J. T. Grein observed, being a deviously provocative play, ‘it was either mercilessly condemned or highly praised’.³² *The Speaker*’s reviewer credits, though negatively,

the profound impact of the infanticide scene, saying: ‘This spectacle shocks me, it tears my very heartstrings.’³³ Archer advised Robins to set the play in Sweden where the story was originally set, in an attempt to prevent any harsh criticism about the play by the reviewers. In his introduction to the play, Archer reveals that ‘keeping the scene in Sweden [was] based, not upon any artistic advantage, but upon mere cowardly expediency. I thought the episode would be less likely to shock people beyond endurance if the scene were removed from their own doors.’³⁴ That would have helped audiences and reviewers distance themselves from the character’s actions, which could be found hard to tolerate by English audiences. It was certainly a daring act for Robins to reject Archer’s advice and stage a play in which an act of infanticide was represented, though not explicitly shown, on the stage. Nonetheless, Robins was successful in causing a stir and sensation about her play in the media, which helped demonstrate her growing feminist stance and upcoming theatrical plans. It was certainly unconventional, and it was a positive way forward for an actress to establish herself as a staunch defender of women’s dramatic pursuits.

Alan’s Wife should not merely be thought of as a New Woman play on the late Victorian stage, but it was decisive act of an actress who wanted to challenge the orthodoxy regarding the representations of women in drama. As Catherine Wiley argues, the play ‘subverts Cixous’s proposition that “it is always necessary for a woman to die in order for the play to begin”’.³⁵ Jean is not a heroine under-constructed to a melodramatic effect; on the contrary, she is certainly a daring figure, who, at the end of the play, unhesitatingly accepts the consequences of her acts in the court, saying that, ‘I’ve had courage just once in my life – just once in my life I’ve been strong and kind and it was the night I killed my child!’ (p. 47), and she maintains turning against her mother: ‘I had to do what I did, and they have to take

my life for it. Maybe I shall find him up yonder made straight and fair and happy in Alan's arms' (p. 48). Jean represents a reaction to the female stereotypes of melodrama and takes her place among the daring women of the New Drama such as Lona Hessel in Ibsen's *The Pillars of Society* or Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House*.

In his biographical account of Archer, Peter Whitebrook shows that Robins's theatrical endeavour was supported by Archer, and she was encouraged by him for her decisive representation of the new femininity on stage,³⁶ as it constituted the precedent to her matured and evolved construction of a new model of suffragist heroine, almost more than a decade later. Even in the period between 1906 and 1907 when Robins was drafting *Votes for Women!*, Archer offered her assistance and suggestions to her though they were separated in the late 1890s. Whitebrook records that Archer offered to cut some of the parts to ensure that the play could exert its ultimate impact on the audiences and he offered the title *Votes for Women!*,³⁷ which signifies the play's symbolic undertaking of transferring the realism and the obvious statement of the movement to the stage.

1.3. Votes for Women: Spectacularity and the New Femininity on Stage

... VEDRENNE - BARKER MATINEES ...

On April 9th, 12th, 16th, 19th, 23rd, 26th, 30th, and
May 3rd, 1907, at 2.30.

Votes for Women!

A Dramatic Tract in Three Acts,
By ELIZABETH ROBINS.

Lord John Wynnstay ...	Mr. ATHOL FORDE
The Hon. Geoffrey Stonor ...	*Mr. AUBREY SMITH
Mr. St. John Greatorex ...	*Mr. E. HOLMAN CLARK
Mr. Richard Fareborough ...	Mr. P. CLAYTON GREENE
Mr. Freddy Tunbridge ...	Mr. PERCY MARMONT
Mr. Allen Trent ...	Mr. LEWIS CASSON
Mr. Walker ...	Mr. EDMUND GWENN
Lady John Wynnstay ...	Miss MAUD MILTON
Mrs. Heriot ...	Miss FRANCES IVOR
Miss Vida Levering ...	Miss WYNNE MATTHISON
Miss Beatrice Dunbarton ...	Miss JEAN MacKINLAY
Mrs. Freddy Tunbridge ...	Miss GERTRUDE BURNETT
Miss Ernestine Blunt ...	Miss DOROTHY MINTO
A Working Woman ...	Miss AGNES THOMAS

*The Management is indebted to Mr. Charles Frohman and Mr. Frederick Harrison for allowing Mr. Aubrey Smith and Mr. E. Holman Clark to appear.

Act I. - Wynnstay House in Hertfordshire.
Act II. - Trafalgar Square, London.
Act III. - Eaton Square, London.

The Entire Action of the Play takes place between Sunday noon and six o'clock in the evening of the same day.

There will be Intervals of 15 Minutes between the Acts.

PROGRAMME OF MUSIC.

1. OUVERTURE ... "Lodoïska" ... Cherubini
2. SYMPHONY No. 2 in D major (Scherzo and Finale) ... Beethoven
3. (a) MOMENT MUSICAL, Op. 94, No. 2 ... Schubert
- (b) SERENADE, Op. 31 ... Schöler
- (c) VALSE, Op. 48 ... Tschikowsky

At these Matinees, Ladies are earnestly requested to remove Hats, Bonnets, or any kind of head dress.

This rule is framed for the benefit of the audience, and the Management trusts that it will appeal to everyone, and that Ladies will kindly assist in having it carried out.

Opera Glasses, by Negretti & Zambra, can be obtained from the Attendants, price 6d.

Prices of Admission: Private Boxes, £2 2s. and £3 3s. Stalls, 10s. 6d.
Dress Circle, 7s. 6d. and 5s. Upper Circle, 4s. Pit, 2s. 6d. Gallery, 1s.
Doors Open at 2
BOX OFFICE (Mr. H. P. Towers) OPEN 10 to 10.
Telephone 48 Westminster.

NO FEES.

The Management beg to announce that the Refreshment Bars are under their sole control, and all Wines, Spirits, Tea and Coffee are of the best quality.

Extracts from the Rules made by the London County Council:—The name of the actual and responsible Manager of the Theatre must be printed on every play bill. The Public can leave the Theatre at the end of the Performance by all exit and entrance doors, which must open outwards.

Where there is a fireproof screen to the proscenium opening, it must be lowered at least once during every performance to ensure its being in proper working order. Smoking is not permitted in the auditorium. All gangways, passages and staircases must be kept free from chairs or any other obstructions, whether permanent or temporary.

Stage Manager ...	Mr. WILFRID FRANKS
Musical Director ...	Mr. THEODORE STIER
Business Manager ...	Mr. E. TAYLOR PLATT

The Last Performance of the Season will take place on Saturday, June 29th next.
The Vedrenne-Barker Performances will be resumed on Monday, September 16th, 1907, at the Savoy Theatre.

COURT THEATRE
MAT
 9/4/1907
 Dress Circle, 7/6
13

Figure 1: *Votes For Women!* programme, showing the matinee details and cast of the performances on 9, 12, 16, 19, 23, 26, 30 April and 3 May 1907 (*Votes for Women!* production file, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Elizabeth Robins's *Votes for Women!* first appeared at the Court Theatre on 9 April 1907, at a time when 'suffragists were questioning what theatre was by redefining what constituted the theatrical space'.³⁸ Robins's collaboration with the Granville Barker–J. E. Vedrenne management bears a symbolic importance, seeing that among Barker's motives in establishing a new stage at the Court was his wish 'to encourage a vital national drama, in preparation for the long hoped for National theatre, to create a class of intellectual play-goers and to offer more challenging opportunities to actors'.³⁹ To this end, the Court stage, between 1904 and 1907, accommodated numerous plays by the originators of 'the New Drama Movement', such as George Bernard Shaw, and other significant representatives such as Granville Barker, John

Galsworthy and St John Hankin as well as European drama, particularly avant-garde plays and Ibsen's *Wild Duck* and *Hedda Gabler*.⁴⁰ Jan McDonald explains the fundamental idea behind the Court initiative:

The activities of the Court actors, both during and after the Court seasons, show them to be a group of actors dedicated to the "new drama", to the non-commercial theatre, to working with serious-minded directors rather than with autocratic actor-managers, preferably in repertory or short-run system with emphasis on the text of the play and on acting rather than on expensive settings.⁴¹

In all commercialism of the Edwardian theatrical enterprises, the Court Theatre stood for a novel endeavour, encouraging new non-commercial and experimental drama rather than highly profitable adaptations of Greek and Shakespearean dramas, and conventional melodramas. Securing such a stage, which was a pioneering step towards the intellectual theatre, Robins definitely broke new ground for her successors inasmuch as her suffrage play did not only represent a visual and highly sensational means of propaganda, but was also a catalyst for artists to prove their presence in a domain where male supremacy had long been assured. This engagement would not necessarily mean *carte blanche* for Robins. Granville Barker and William Archer assisted (but did not manipulate) Robins in both the writing and directing stages of *Votes for Women!*, and it was an important opportunity for her to liberate herself from the actor-manager system and to rationalise her ambition to represent the real faces of the changing women who had awakened from their idleness and were seeking new identities.

Robins saw the stage as a powerful space for women to promote their cause. To her, plays were meant to be performed, not just read in private meetings. Robins points at the key role of the stage in an interview, noting that public performance is indispensable for a feminist artist to pass her ideas to the audience:

“Have I not always told you?” answered Miss Robins, “that in this lies the power and the glory of the Stage – its direct overwhelming appeal to the intellect and the emotions by all the channels of sense. You read a book or a play. It knocks at the door, but you may not let it in to the house of your understanding or the temple of your heart. You see it on the stage, and it storms an entrance. It may not compel you to welcome its ideas as gracious guests. It may, on the other hand, incite you to eject them as lawless intruders. But you cannot be apathetic. Ideas force their way in.”⁴²

Her idea of theatre is apparently of an intellectual nature, which could creatively be exploited to a political end. Robins here defines performance art as a persuasive instrument. More than any other literary form, theatre benefits from the possibilities of visuality and action, so ultimately Robins’s metaphor of ‘lawless intruder’ should be attributed to the fact that, maybe controversially, the playwright is endowed with a special power of creating his or her own visual world on stage, which helps him or her provoke or shape the mindset of masses. In that sense, Robins appears to adopt a more modern appreciation of theatre as an intellectual endeavour. The visual quality of theatrical space was used in popular spectacular theatre in the Victorian age, and clearly serious drama was in need of this visual power to attract more audiences and to promote itself as a popular form. The real significance of *Votes for Women!*, as a milestone for political theatre, lies in Robins’s exploitation of a powerful combination of performance, popular imagery and visual representation of the suffrage movement to the audience. The play appears to employ a familiar strategy, ripened by the suffragists, to divert their political campaign from silent meeting rooms to public spaces such as streets, parks and halls so that they would be able to penetrate and redefine the so-called masculine sphere. Rather distinctively, this new phase in the women’s suffrage movement ensued after the WSPU took the lead as of 1903.⁴³ According to Maroula Joannou, ‘imaginative tactics adopted by the WSPU, who organized rallies, processions, and demonstrations of a size and scale that was unprecedented, succeeded in arousing public interest in the vote where petitions and

letters written by three generations of constitutional suffragists had failed'.⁴⁴ This was a fresh start for feminist activism and, though at times problematic, most feminist artists and women's suffrage campaigners put in an intentional effort to promote sensationalism in raising public awareness through the use of art. Lisa Tickner explains that

In the organisation of an impressive and unprecedented sequence of public demonstrations between 1907 and 1913, the suffragists developed a new kind of political spectacle in which they dramatised the cause by means of costume, narrative, embroidery, performance, and all the developing skills of public entertainment at their disposal.⁴⁵

The 'spectacle' thus included rallies and pageantries along the streets, deliberate and sensational tactics used to draw public attention to the cause,⁴⁶ and any other means of visual propaganda including sensational performances at theatrical venues or in meeting halls.⁴⁷ In these ways, female artists, including painters, writers and performers, sought to play their parts in the creation of spectacularity in order to convert or simply convince the general public.

More than any other form of art, theatre, being a popular means of entertainment that could attract a substantial number of spectators and with its possibilities of manipulating audiences' opinions and judgements by means of its performative and transformative power, should be situated at the heart of the whole spectacle. Robins's intention can be better assessed through an analysis of her spectacular strategies, so it is essential to look at the elements of this strategy. To this end, the play's dramatic form, characterisation and its stage performance as a spectacular event will be examined.

Votes for Women! was originally constructed as a four-act production, but subsequently, at Granville Barker's suggestion, it was condensed into a three-act form, which keeps a clever balance of propagandist strategies of acting and staging.

The play, in the most basic terms, combines a number of characteristics of different popular dramatic forms. The first act starts in an interior setting of Wynnstay House in Hertfordshire, which is a large mansion with ‘a majestic port’ and ‘French windows’.⁴⁸ This basically introduces a drawing room setting and portrays a group of middle-class characters having a discussion about the play’s heroine Vida Levering, a female suffragist, who is described as ‘the Elusive One’ and ‘such a nice creature’ (p. 31), which indicates her physical charm and an air of mystery about her unknown past. The second act, on the other hand, carries the arguments to an exterior setting of a suffrage meeting surrounded by a crowd in Trafalgar Square. The act is peopled with a large number of male and female watchers, whom the female speakers address and with whom they inevitably have verbal arguments. This outdoor scene gives a panorama of the suffrage meeting and creates a scene full of discursive verbal exchanges. The last act is again set in an interior drawing room of a flat in Eaton Square. Unlike the other acts, this act adopts the form of intellectual drama, revealing Vida Levering’s sorrowful past with Geoffrey Stonor, a liberal MP and a powerful political figure, who has deserted Vida and her unborn child. In this act, the play sheds light on women’s sexual oppression, and the play ends with Stonor’s fiancé Jean’s conversion from a naive middle-class girl to a mature woman. Jean accuses Stonor of his weakness and wrongdoings against Vida and symbolically against all members of her sex. He proposes to Vida as a compensation for her sufferings, but Vida instead directs him to support other women, declaring that ‘I’m one [...] who has got up bruised and bleeding, wiped the dust from her hands and the tears from her eyes [...] here is a stone of stumbling to many. Let’s see if it can’t be moved out of other women’s way. But [...] if many help, Geoffrey, the thing can be done’ (p. 104).

As an essential strategy, Robins seemingly bases her play in some measure on the melodramatic tradition of the previous decades. Nonetheless, the real triumph of the play owes very much to its departure from the traditional melodrama and drawing-room genres via its realistic subject matter, feminist arguments and innovative characterisation. Melodrama was specifically influential given that Robins was acquainted with this immensely popular form, which was pervasive equally on the Victorian and Edwardian stages. Melodrama inherently accommodates internalised sensationalism in order to deliver a thrilling, exciting or surprising impact. Michael R. Booth, in his book *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910*, highlights how ‘the heavy reliance on emotional semiology to carry content and moral point of view meant that from the beginning melodrama was strongly and stereotypically visual; the eye and not ear was the organ of appeal’.⁴⁹ To this end, exaggerated displays, large numbers of actors, animals and even plants, picturesque scenes, catastrophes and conflicts by land and sea or extraordinary personal troubles were common. The main problem in effect was the lack of a serious central argument and the authenticity of real life. In addition, the spectacular effect is delivered through artificial gestures, elaboration and exaggerated tale-like plots rather than creative staging, authenticity and powerful acting. As to these deficiencies of the genre, William Archer asserts that ‘melodrama is illogical and sometimes irrational tragedy [...] It aims at startling, not at convincing, and is little concerned with causes so long as it attains effects.’⁵⁰ Moreover, characterisation is not among the strengths of the melodramatic tradition and, unfortunately, as always was the case in the era, female characters are unexceptionally degraded to naivety, helplessness or subordination to the other male characters. Though the melodramatic formula could mean a popular play, what Robins attempts in her ‘political tract’ is chiefly to

communicate her political message to her audiences via its characters and a combination of powerful acting and performance resembling the ambiance and soul of the suffrage rallies and crowded processions parading through the London streets.



Figure 2: *Votes for Women!*, Hyde Park scene (*Votes for Women!* production file, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

The spectacularity of the play is the most striking in Act II, and closer attention is essential for a better grasp of this effect and its critical reception. Differing from common melodramatic performance with expensive tricks, the spectacular effect in *Votes for Women!* is achieved through innovative staging. The act starts with a lengthy description of the people gathered in Hyde Park, witnessing a public suffrage speech:

The crowd, which suddenly increases, is composed of chiefly of weedy youths and wastrel old men. There are a few decent artisans; a few 'beery' out-o'-works; three or four young women of domestic servant or Strand restaurant cashier class; one aged woman in rusty black peering with faded, wondering eyes, consulting the faces of men and laughing nervously and apologetically from time to time; one or two quiet looking, business-like women, thirty to forty; two middle-class men, who stare and whisper and

smile. A brisk-looking woman of forty-five or so, wearing pince-nez, goes around with a pile of propagandist literature on her arm.⁵¹

Robins's descriptive ability is an effective dramatic tool here in that she mirrors a life-like scene of a suffrage meeting, but the actual force of the scene lies in the power of observation and her intimate knowledge of suffrage rallies and speeches. A critic records that 'most successful of all, however, was the crowd on the stage, comprising every type of a Trafalgar Square audience, and overflowing with the usual impromptu comments – earnest, sarcastic, approving, flippant, intoxicated'.⁵² Robins was quite familiar with such meetings, as 'she attended eight public meetings about women's suffrage between July and October 1906, and in November accompanied a WSPU organizer, Mary Gawthorpe to Huddersfield in Yorkshire'.⁵³ Thus, the characters are drawn to personify the real individuals from the different layers and backgrounds of Edwardian society, through which a sense of authenticity is aimed at. Likewise, being a dramatist and a former actress, Robins adeptly crafts an exceptional stage packed with a crowd of actors and actresses, which contributes to 'the stunning verisimilitude' of the scene.⁵⁴ Also, in order to bring about an overall effect, as Samantha Ellis notes, the stage is visually decorated with 'a painted backdrop of the square, a plaster cast base of Nelson's column and two vast "Votes for Women!" banners'.⁵⁵ The reviewer from *The Glasgow Herald* attested to the success of this act following the play's performance on the Court stage:

The second act of "Votes for Women,"[...] is one of the most ingeniously contrived stage achievements seen in the West End for a long time, the speeches of the different orators being so skilfully interwoven with the interruptions of the surrounding crowd that the tragedy and comedy of the thing held the audience for something like three-quarters of an hour.⁵⁶

This theatrical spectacle on stage can closely be compared to the suffragettes' performative acts on streets. In Leslie Hills's words, 'it is a new hybrid art'.⁵⁷ It both records a documentary-like event and stands for the theatrical recreation of the

suffrage performativity. *Academy* observes that ‘the result is a picture of a London mass meeting that thrills us, and amuses us, and irritates us, and delights us, as a mass meeting does; and that saves the play’.⁵⁸ Obviously the scene is based on a real suffrage demonstration or meeting, with the intention of bringing recognition and sensationalism to the campaign. In real life, these meetings and pageantries succeeded in receiving very widespread attention from the popular newspapers and other periodicals and excited public interest in the cause. *The Times*’ correspondent records a typical WSPU demonstration in Hyde Park, approximately a year after the play’s appearance, in 21 June 1908:

It was a curious spectacle that now met the eye, – in every direction the level flood of human faces, and above it, in every attitude of animated gesticulation, the white-robed figures of 20 lady orators. [...] But it is impossible not to be struck by the skill and resource with which the speakers held the attention of this restive, heterogeneous, crowd [...]. Most of them were quite young women, and the ordeal of facing that crowd must have been tremendous; but not one of them was in the least dismayed.⁵⁹

The account signifies the fact that streets and theatre were new spaces for women’s political speeches, theatrical performances and public discussions. The audience here played the most important role as the primary element of these performances, and thus femininity constituted both the subject and object of performance as a sign of a female presence in a public sphere which had never been thought suitable for ‘the gentle sex’. This would subsequently contribute to the growing public appearance of Edwardian feminists.

Particularly in Act II, Robins creates a confrontational stage on which the audience can watch a stirring and technically sophisticated discussion of suffragist and anti-suffragist arguments. The scene is constructed on interdependent question-answer style dialogues, and in this way a large number of issues are addressed rather than merely focusing on enfranchisement. The scene also cleverly displays the

diversity of opinions that existed for and against, in both groups, so that Robins could evince that the suffrage movement is not one of a narrow-minded pursuit of the vote. Instead, issues such as working conditions, unequal share of family life, middle-class women's ignorance about the plight of lower-class women and education all come up for discussion. To illustrate, a belligerent young student has an argument with Vida on women's intellectual capabilities:

A Shabby Art Student: (his hair longish, soft hat, and flowing tie) They study by thousands – where's their Beethoven? Where's their Plato? Where's the woman Shakespeare?

Another: Yes – what 'a' they ever done?

Miss Levering: (steadying and raising her voice) These questions are quite proper! They are often asked elsewhere and I would like to ask in return: Since when was human society held to exist for its handful of geniuses? How many Platos are there here in this crowd? (p. 76)

[...]

Miss Levering: Not one. Yet that doesn't keep you men off the register. How many Shakespeares are there in all England today? Not one. Yet the State doesn't tumble to pieces. Railroads and shops are built, homes are kept going, and babies are born. The world goes on! (bending over the crowd) It goes on by virtue of its common people. (p. 77)

Women's fitness for literary, educational and political endeavour was a constant matter of discussion in Victorian and Edwardian societies, as women were not considered to be sophisticated or talented enough for serious engagements. However, particularly middle-class women frequently attempted to take on literary and political careers. Robins here states that women's contribution to society cannot be evaluated by the fact that they were not represented in intellectual spheres, which was taken advantage of by anti-suffrage groups.

In Act III, on the other hand, Robins reassures the audience with a prospect of an optimistic future for women. The act comes to an end with Vida's cry for female collectivism: 'We must get the conditions of life made fairer. We women must organise. We must learn to work together. We have all, rich and poor, happy and unhappy, worked so long and so exclusively for men, we hardly know how to work

for one another. But we must learn.’ (p. 80) Her claim is an essential part of the suffrage movement as women were mostly in need of a united campaign to achieve a more egalitarian society. In this sense, Vida’s personal experience makes her a stronger woman. The last act reveals that Vida has unwillingly to abort her illegitimate child by George Stonor, and this experience ultimately enables her transformation into a feminist, defining herself as ‘belong[ing] to the little class of armed women’ (p. 42). Her frustration and disillusionment become a transformative power which turns her into a feminist agent in the end, convincing Stonor and Jean to join the ranks of women’s suffrage cause. Thus, Robins ‘does not kill the angel but direct the angel’s energies into service to a cause for the sake of her sex’.⁶⁰ Channelling the individual cause to a common good is here suggested by the author as a higher purpose for her sex.

In the formation of spectacularity, Robins creates a body of characters who are ostensibly taken from ordinary life and who symbolically represent the larger Edwardian society. Act I demonstrates an archetypal example of the sexist mindset of a patriarchal society. The male characters – ‘wealthy county magnate’ Greatorex (p. 33); ‘self-important’ Richard Farnborough; ‘the honourable’ Mr Geoffrey Stonor (p. 28); and ‘a benevolent, silver-haired despot of sixty-two’ Lord John Wynnstay (p. 28) – are specifically drawn or, more accurately, caricatured to represent middle-class masculinity with their manifest bias towards women’s call for egalitarian rights in private and public life. Greatorex, an old misogynist, openly despises Vida’s support of women acting outside their ‘proper sphere’.

Greatorex: I protest! Good Lord! What are the women of this country coming to? I protest against Miss Levering being carried off to discuss anything revolting. Bless my soul! What can a woman like you know about it?

Miss Levering: (smiling) Little enough. Good morning.

Greatorex: (relieved) I should think so indeed. (p. 33)

And in another conversation, Lord John discloses that the women who seek direct involvement in politics are the ones who should be avoided most:

Lord John: (with genial affection) My dear child, he doesn't hate the charming views and sweethearts who help to win seats. [...]

Miss Levering: Mr Greatorax objects only to the unsexed creatures who – a –

Lord John: (hastily covering up his slip) Yes, yes, who want to act independently of men.

Miss Levering: Vote, and do silly things of that sort.

Lord John: (with enthusiasm) Exactly. (pp. 34–35)

Vida clearly mocks Greatorax and Lord John for their open 'sex antagonism', a term on which Robins wrote an article later in her career. Their ideas on femininity are allusively directed to women's intellectual weakness. This anti-suffrage accusation was predominantly based on the assumption that women 'were not fit for [the vote] (by reason of their inferior capacities, lack of education, physiological frailty and economic dependence); and society would not benefit from it'.⁶¹

Robins is inclined to destabilise these unreasonable portrayals of women and guide them to the public spaces of the masculine bourgeois society. Nevertheless, towards the end of the nineteenth century, the solid status of male supremacy started to be tested, and even harshly damaged, by women's desire for emancipation, which emerged alongside socio-economic and political developments. Elaine Showalter underlines the fact that

the redefinition of gender took place at the turn of the century [and] was not limited to women. Gender crisis affected men as well as women [...]. It is important to keep in mind that masculinity is no more natural, transparent, and unproblematic than "femininity." It, too, is a socially constructed role, defined within particular cultural and historical circumstances, and the fin de siècle also marked a crisis of identity for men.⁶²

It is critical to see that a pervasive fear over the survival of the 'separate spheres ideology' was perceivable in the subconscious of Edwardian masculinity. The idea of gendered spheres relied on the argument that woman was an inferior form to the

‘normative’ male sex, which was continually raised by medical and social scientists, intellectuals, politicians and even ordinary men in the late-nineteenth century and was still valid and ubiquitous in the Edwardian age. It was predictably a strong element of the anti-suffragists’ claims against women’s enthusiasm for public and political life. Furthermore, female characters as dependable wives, devoted mothers, domestic workers or helpless females in mainstream literature were inseparably portrayed in the social and cultural construction of ‘home’ as women’s proper sphere. Brian Harrison observes that sexual and subsequently social boundaries were created to distinguish two sexes on biological and social terms. To clarify,

antis were much more ready than suffragists to emphasise that at least half the female population are at one time reacting – through menstruation, pregnancy, breast-feeding and so on – to stimuli not present in the male body at all. [...] Man, with his ‘katabolic’ energies, creates and spends, said the Antis: woman, with her ‘anabolic’ force, stores, endures, accumulates.⁶³

He also maintains that ‘the anti-suffragist view of woman was governed entirely by concentration on her childbearing role’⁶⁴ and it was argued that women were not capable of pursuing a career outside their domestic homes. They were in agreement with the conservatives on the issue that women are biologically different from men, and so there must be a distinction between their functions and roles in society. Bearing that in mind, the masculine scientific and sociological discourse laid a significant basis for anti-suffragism, as shown by Greatorex and Lord John’s aversion to the suffragist women, who want to demonstrate women’s fitness for social interaction and to normalise their public existence. This aversion is also influenced by the suffragists’ or suffragettes’ stereotypical portrayals as single and autonomous shrieking women and the assumption that ‘childless women were [...] unfortunate and prone to neurosis’.⁶⁵ The anger of the Edwardian anti-suffragists towards the untameable suffragist is due to her violation of strictly defended gender

boundaries. In *Votes for Women!*, these fears and anger are repeatedly addressed by the male characters, who cannot stand the idea of women as political campaigners. Robins's humorous portrayal of these men indicates her desire to show the absurdity of omnipresent discussions about women's place in family and society.

Situating women at the centre of the main argument constitutes a spectacular strategy Robins seeks to realise in *Votes for Women!*. She believed that women would need to have a larger stake in public affairs for a greater change to come, but this is more than just a straightforward conversion; it entails a new notion of womanhood outside the existing gender definitions and masculine taxonomies. Her design of the modern woman is thus depicted in stark contrast to the existing middle-class women who were diminished to decorative objects and obedient beings. In this sense, one of the important functions of Robins's suffrage play is to substantiate the fact that women urgently need more support from the public, particularly from lower- and middle-class women. The play aims to fulfil the critical task of winning over audiences, particularly women from different social strata. Throughout Act I, Vida wants to make Lady John and Mrs Heriot, two married middle-class women, see how they are ignorant or apathetic towards other women's circumstances in the comfort of their confined lives:

Miss Levering: Ah, then you'll be interested in the girl I saw dying in a Tramp Ward a little while ago. Glad her cough was worse – only she mustn't die before her father.

[...]

Mrs Heriot: She should have gone to one of the Friendly Societies.

Miss Levering: At eleven at night?

[...]

Miss Levering: (reflectively) 'Twenty years!' Always arriving 'after the train's gone' – after the girl and the Wrong Person have got to the journey's end ... (Mrs Heriot's eyes flash.) (p. 39)

Women's sexual subjugation is a powerful image in the suffrage spectacle. Vida's criticism is here directed to her own sex, some of whom ignore the problem of sexual

exploitation. It is true to say that sexual oppression was not only a matter of lower-class femininity, but women of all classes were under the control of sexual politics. Here, Robins shows that middle-class femininity could have a certain influence on social life, but middle-class women pursue an idle domestic life, remaining insensitive in the face of a common trouble.

As a counterbalance to this idle lot of women, Robins strategically places Vida Levering as a central middle-class suffragist and sets other women's personal stories in the play as a link to the mid-twentieth century feminist motto of 'personal is political'. Vida is mostly portrayed as an outsider, an unmarried middle-aged woman, actively supporting women's political causes and observing the difficulties before other members of her sex. She says, 'I was on a pilgrimage [...] into the Underworld' (p. 40). In reply to Jean's question about how she travels through the different parts of the city, she reveals that 'I put on an old gown and tawdry hat – (turns to Lady John) You'll never know how many things are hidden from a woman in good clothes. The bold, free look of man at a woman he believes to be destitute – you must *feel* that look on you before you can understand – a good half of history' (p. 40). It is striking that Vida is an intimidating adventurer, who freely travels through the public spaces of the city alone to discover what is hidden from her and other women of 'the respectable classes'.

Barbara Green explains modern women's role in public spaces as a double-faceted phenomenon, defining activist women both as a part of female spectacle appearing in a newly discovered social life and also a curious observer of this spectacle of modern life:

Virginia Woolf was emboldened to streetwalk because the suffragette marched first, that the suffragette's activism provides the missing link between the *passante* and the *flâneuse*, between woman-as-spectacle and woman-as-spectator.⁶⁶

The separation between these two roles of the modern woman is embodied in Vida. She is not restricted by the invisible fences of social expectations through her ambiguous status in society as a political activist. However, there is here a danger of attaching artificial meanings to Vida's public appearance. Green borrows the term *flâneuse* from Janet Wolff's article *The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity*, which conceptualises the modern man as a male *flâneur*, or observer of modern suburban life.⁶⁷ She attests that 'the *flâneur*, the stroller, is characterised by his "freedom to move about in the city, observing and being observed, but never interacting with others"⁶⁸ But this definition is rather limited to explain suffragist women's purposeful strategies of intruding into social scenes of Edwardian society, making the city an open theatre and a space of transgression and counter-representation. The suffragists did not embrace the New Woman's private and fragmentary experiences in new discovered spaces. As Ledger puts it, 'the New Woman [...] wanted the streets of metropolis to herself, free from the constraints imposed by the impropriety associated with appearance of unaccompanied women in the public spaces of the city'.⁶⁹ In this sense, the New Woman was a lonely and free adventurer who wanted to learn more about freedoms, excitements and experiences that were exclusively available to men in her time. On the other hand, suffragists were more than mere observer *flâneuses*. They had an overt political identity and their participation in public life could not be explained as only being female spectator-observers. Beyond that, they were intentional public intruders and campaigners, and, more importantly, they were not just indistinct individuals but, as Vida represents, they were admired, feminine and adamant figures of their age. Considering popular culture as an exhaustive source for any artist, who either adopts or rejects its paradigms, it may be argued that in her creation of the female subject,

Robins's approach is somewhat eclectic but deliberate rather than imitative or purely derivative. As she was an artist, it is inconceivable to claim that she was unaware of the popular perception of women in Edwardian culture, and it is arguable that Green's traveller type can only represent one of the various qualities Vida possessed as a new type.

It is imperative to find out what sources Robins's female suffragists might have been derived from. The image of a glamorous, witty and decorous woman who is endowed with implicit or unexaggerated sexual allure was not new to the suffrage theatre. The glamorisation of women, according to Peter Bailey, finds its roots in the popular entertainment venues of the Victorian age, namely in bars, music halls and ultimately on the musical comedy stage.⁷⁰ Bailey tries to explain the rise of the popular image of actresses, dancers and other female performers through the term 'parasexuality', or the "'middle" ground of sexuality'.⁷¹ In his book *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City*, he intriguingly puts forward the argument that late-Victorian popular culture encouraged an ambiguous appearance of sexuality. This implicit sexuality displaced the more explicit and rough forms of popular entertainment of the mid-century. This redefinition of female sexuality determines 'the woman as bearer of glamour' rather than 'the woman as sex object'.⁷² He also states that the plays popularising this notion were so popular that *The Shop Girl*, for instance, ran for nearly six hundred performances in 1894 and 1895,⁷³ and in its redefinition, the most familiar usage of the word can be seen in its description of the Hollywood stars of the 1930s.⁷⁴ This was a new interpretation of sexuality on the popular stage where women were described as pretty with a contained sexual appeal. Bailey replies to the question 'What was the appeal of musical comedy for women [...]?' as follows:

Women's adulation of women-as-stars suggests a ready response to newly fashioned consumerist ideals of feminine beauty and success which reinvigorated traditional motifs of social mobility and happiness. [...] musical comedy cast women as active and competent adventurers, which delighted them as an audience, for on Archer's evidence they were as flattered as the men in assuming the worldly identity conferred by knowingness.⁷⁵

The stage in this sense is a liminal space representing not only a phenomenon of popular culture but also women's increasing presence in public spaces, as it was the case that feminine charm, which was on display in shop windows, in department stores, on streets, in halls and on theatre stages, was an undeniable part of ordinary Edwardian life. Female shop assistants, customers, feminist protestors, public speakers and, surely and most popularly, artists and stage performers were all new participants in social life.

Clearly, though, Robins does not adopt this popular image in its crude form. Her notion of the modern woman appears to be of an intellectual and dignified kind, one who is physically attractive, intellectually intimidating and individually self-sufficient. In a way, she is an idealised woman who is part of the masses of other people in spaces of social interaction and also outside it, observing and learning its role in this structure. She thus epitomises Robins's modern woman, who is neither middle class nor working class, neither an angel nor an ugly spinster, but moves both outside and within the public spaces, promoting her feminist values and guiding her own out of the exploitative system. Her elusive position gives her the possibility to go beyond the boundaries of society.

In this reformulation of femininity, Robins's New Woman constitutes an essential part of the construction of 'woman as spectacle'. Here, the female body is fashioned to situate woman in the centre of modern life. Lisa Tickner claims that

The Victorian and Edwardian public expected to see the virtues and vices of femininity written on the body, [and] were couched [...] in the detailed interpretation of physiognomy, gesture and pose. Since this was a visual

matter it was of particular concern to suffrage artists. [...] The image, striking and condensed like a slogan, could cut through the fine detail of political argument and impress itself directly on even the illiterate, the uneducated or the casual passer-by.⁷⁶

Robins's women represent beauty along with dignity and individuality; they are not the simple imitations of female characters drawn to be performed as sexually attractive and simple-minded beings. Vida Levering and Miss Ernestine Blunt, the platform speaker, and to some extent the anti-suffragist politician Stonor's wife-to-be Jean as a new convert, collectively embody the new modern woman of their age. All are depicted as physically appealing, smart in feminine clothes, and intellectually cultured. The new feminine look is a part of constructing women on the notion of physical attractiveness which is mostly to frustrate the masculine rhetoric rather than exemplify the traditional middle-class refinement. Patricia Marks maintains, at the end of nineteenth century, 'the New Woman's dress was, for the most part, a representation of the ideas she stood for. The outfit that announced subliminally that a man was in control carried the same message when a woman wore it.'⁷⁷ However, Robins did not opt for masculine fashion or appearance, which was repeatedly exploited by the press. The depiction of the suffragist speaker Miss Ernestine Blunt is given at the opening of Act II amidst the crowd watching the suffrage meeting or passing by as follows: 'one better turned out than the rest, is quite young, very slight and gracefully built, with round, very pink cheeks, full scarlet lips, naturally waving brown hair' (p. 59). Likewise, Vida is introduced to the play in a similar way: 'She (parasol on her shoulder) is an attractive, essentially feminine, and rather "smart" woman of thirty-two with somewhat foreign grace; the kind of whom men and women alike say, "What's her story? Why does not she marry?".'⁷⁸ Here the heroine's attractiveness is not to earn the hearts of admirers, but her prettiness is an essential part of her unique and dignified identity. As Barbara Green puts it, 'the

reference to [Vida's] own maternity and sexuality places her in direct relation to the sexual and material bodies of other women in the audiences and upon the stage.⁷⁹ This portrayal of Vida as the modern heroine is an example of Robins's New Woman, who is not afraid of her sexuality, but instead Vida's overt sexuality and charm do not prevent her from a commitment to other women, and they are an inseparable part of her identity as a free spirit and strong female activist. Robins's suffragists are thus representatives of a new group of women who dare to challenge the fossilised ideals of masculine imagination.

The most essential function of this female subject in the play is to destabilise the widespread image of the suffragettes in Edwardian literature and the media as spinsters or masculinised figures and to create an attractive, well-dressed and activist woman. Lisa Tickner notes that 'the suffragist artists were obliged to negotiate a set of inherited images of their own sex created by male artists, journalists and novelists: the womanly woman, the fallen woman, the shrew, the slut, the strong minded woman, the hysteric or the shrieking [activist] of the period'.⁸⁰ In Act I, suffragists are harshly accused of being 'manly'. Mrs Heriot claims that 'no decent woman will be able to say "Suffrage" without blushing for another generation' (p. 35), and Greatorix describes them as 'the sort of woman who smells of India rubber and the typical English spinster' (p. 34). These accusations establish a possible allusion between the masculine 'New Woman' of the late nineteenth century and female suffrage campaigners of the early twentieth century. Clearly, Robins's heroine, Vida Levering, reflects the playwright's reaction to a middle-class mentality that sees the activist women as 'unwomanly'. Levering is constructed to challenge the strength of stereotypes of her time,⁸¹ but at the same time she stands for the real suffragettes in the public arena, many of whom were middle class, well educated and elegant

figures. The critic from *The Times* asks the question: ‘Why, by the way, does Miss Levering take such care to make the best of her good looks and pretty figure and wear such charming frocks? Is it to please other women?’⁸² He himself responds to these charms, significantly validating Robins’s triumph in creating the image of a new femininity: ‘but what is not doubtful is that the cause would make much more headway than it does if all its advocates were as fair to look upon, as agreeable to hear, and as beautifully dressed as Miss Wynne Matthison [who played Vida in the production]’.⁸³ This femininity is the new spotlight of a whole spectacle, which signifies the emergence of modern woman as a dramatic character, whom the spectators can witness, interpret and identify with.

1.4. Suffrage Performance as a Spectacular Event

Robins desired a theatrical performance that would be an event for women to gather under the same roof and prove their support for their cause, as their enthusiasm was repeatedly questioned by the social and political circles of her time. She recalls one of these demands:

A member of the present Cabinet asked me, in an interval when there was no by-election to enlighten him, why Suffragists did not hold meetings. One society alone had held throughout the length and breadth of the kingdom over a thousand Suffrage meetings in the preceding month. [...] They had been quite orderly, and the Press will not report women’s political meetings unless something sensational happens.⁸⁴

Despite many efforts to make the general public take notice of women’s arguments, there was still a hesitant reaction to the overall campaign. Thus, *Votes for Women!* contributed to the general publicity of the movement and created a new momentum in the inventive space of performance art. The production, as a spectacular suffrage performance, was a successful event given its critical reception in the press.

The Observer credited the escalating popularity of the play after its initial appearance on the Court stage: ‘the promotion of “Votes for Women” to the evening bill at the Court is largely due, and it is certainly upon this that must mainly depend for popularity with that wider playgoing public [...]. Whatever it may be as an argument, it is certain that as an entertainment Miss Robins’s play is a distinct popular success.’⁸⁵ The play actually was scheduled as matinee performances particularly for female spectators, but as its popularity rose, the producers extended the play’s run for more matinees and eleven evening performance until the Vedrenne–Barker management permanently ceased their own Court Theatre operations.⁸⁶ It was also recorded by *The Observer*’s critic that the Court Theatre performances of the play attracted a substantial number of female spectators:

The ladies in their generous enthusiasm enjoyed a great field day at the Court Theatre on Tuesday afternoon. On the stage, with their demand, unconsciously ironical, of “Votes for Women!” they revelled in that eloquence of heart to heart sentiment which pours from dainty lips so much more persuasively than would anything like the stern logic of cause and effect. In the front of the house with their eager applause they hailed as a feast of reason what was really perhaps only a flow of soul. On both sides of the curtain, in fact, they were their dear, delightful, inconsistent, contradictory selves, and in their own unmistakable pleasure they gave pleasure, as is their want, to everyone else.⁸⁷

The anti-feminist and overwhelmingly misogynist sentiment of the critic implies that Robins’s theatre was becoming a meeting place for women. This phenomenon became the centre of the press’s attention, and the new habit of women packing into this newly found territory was harshly condemned by critics. Citing Elin Diamond’s definition that ‘performance [either theatrical or not] is a cultural practice that conservatively reinscribes or passionately reinvents the ideas, symbols, and gestures that shape social life’,⁸⁸ the play might be thought of as the culmination of Robins’s theatrical and political experiences in a new artistic and performative act, which redefines the purpose of the theatre as a radical and transformative space. For further

clarification, Max Herrmann's theoretical concept of theatre seems useful. As a pioneering contributor to the modern theory of performance, he states in his writing that

the original meeting of the theatre refers to its conception as social play – played by all for all. A game in which everyone is a player – actors and spectators alike [...] The spectators are involved as co-players. In this sense, the audience is the creator of the theatre. So many different participants constitute the theatrical event that its social nature cannot be lost. Theatre always produces a social community.⁸⁹

As Erika Fischer-Lichte notes, Herrmann defines the theatrical event as the co-presence of actors and spectators who constitute the performance by their bodily co-presence, which creates a relationship between co-objects.⁹⁰ Here, the performance suggests not a theatrical artificiality of dramatic presentation, but an event that comprises performers and spectators creating a communal event. Robins, through *Votes for Women!*, reinterprets what the matinees (of Ibsen and other plays) had realised and meant to women about a decade earlier. Namely, matinees functioned as a space for the observation of performed femininity. They encouraged the development not only of a new drama but also of a new feminist self-consciousness.⁹¹ In this inventive space, Robins re-conceptualised theatrical space with the glamorous effect of the spectacular performance and its reception by women. What Robins did was essentially to translate the argumentative power of drama and the persuasive acting of performers into the powerful space of theatre, to transform its spectators and, in a wider sense, the society by shocking them with suffragist arguments and attracting them through physical presentation. Though in *Votes for Women!* the performance does not include the spectators' direct involvement, at a symbolic level it creates a female collective by transforming the individual identities into a new unison and redefining the normativity of popular entertainment.

Accordingly, this effort proved to be fruitful considering that the realisation of Robins's long-wished-for suffrage performance prompted other respected figures to follow her lead, and it gave some significant momentum to the suffrage theatre movement. As a result of this triumph, *Votes for Women!* proved its authenticity and efficacy as a theatrical production and gave way to a number of theatrical initiatives whose designers followed Robins's strategy of visibility and spectacularity on stage. These in return brought about a wider admiration and encouragement for the theatricalisation of suffrage politics and subsequently for the suffragist/feminist cause. Edith Craig, for example, started the Pioneer Players initiative, which helped emerging playwrights stage their plays. Similarly, the Actresses' Franchise League was founded to offer a political platform for actresses and other women who 'espoused performance as a means of drawing public attention to female disenfranchisement'.⁹²

1.5. Afterword

In Lisa Tickner's words, 'The Edwardian years were not simply those of the afterglow of Empire, but in essential respects the years of the formation of modern British culture.'⁹³ It is obvious that, during these years, actresses were the 'symbols of women's self-sufficiency and independence', and they were the ones 'who advocated and embodied hard work, education, culture [...]';⁹⁴ furthermore, they were unquestionably role models for women struggling through the economic and social barriers of the age. In this context, Elizabeth Robins's career, initially as a working woman and subsequently as a female writer and enthusiastic suffragist, exhibits the enormous effort of a great woman who was unsatisfied with the limitations of the social and literary milieu in which she lived. In the most exasperating years of her acting career, she showed her unique character by taking a

path that was hardly preferred by her contemporaries. It is difficult to assert that her Ibsen production was whole-heartedly appreciated or entirely understood in intellectual spheres, which led her to ask ‘how should men understand Hedda on the stage when they didn’t understand her in the person of their women friends?’⁹⁵ However, still for Robins, playing Hedda, Nora or Hilda on a private stage or in public matinees was a unique opportunity to display her ability and feminist stance.

As Cicely Hamilton asserts in her book *Marriage as a Trade* (1909) ‘any woman who has maintained even a small measure of success in literature or art has done so by discarding, consciously or unconsciously, the traditions in she was reared, by turning her back upon the conventional ideas of dependence that were held up for her admiration in her youth.’⁹⁶ Charlotte Canning, in her article *Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography*, echoes a similar statement that the feminist tradition was ‘a disavowal of history [that] released [feminists and feminist artists] from being inhibited by the past’s oppressive and discriminatory traditions and allowed them to create new forms of knowledge and new practices emerging out of women’s experiences’.⁹⁷ Considering that Robins acted in popular Victorian drama and passionately campaigned for a stage that would allow women to show their theatrical ambitions and social strife, her suffrage play *Votes for Women!* is an eclectic but well-formulated fusion of different dramatic genres, which were exploited to a new end. Justifiably, Robins fed off her own theatrical experiences and the ‘New Drama Movement’ of her time. On the other hand, it is clear that her feminist drama is quite innovative in style and strategy, creating sensation and inspiration for the suffrage cause.

A major element in *Votes for Women!* is its strong condemnation of the oppressive system of politics, which clearly stemmed from similar systems prevalent

in the masculine culture of the Edwardian era. In such a social system, women could not escape from being silenced creatures who were assigned to be auxiliary entities in society. Robins's ultimate purpose was thus to undermine the subjugation of her sex under masculine codes of bourgeois morality and an autocratic system of control in literary and social life. To do so, she takes on the more stimulating but daunting task of staging a feminist performance stemming from an actress's very personal experiences.

It is true that the main purpose of the suffragist artist was to dilute anti-suffragist and anti-feminist rhetoric regarding the fitness of women for political affairs by creating an image of modern femininity.⁹⁸ Her femininity is a reply to the accusations of masculine intellect concerning the originality of literature produced by women. Through her heroine, Vida Levering, Robins shows that she has turned her back on purely imitative attempts of her sex in order to attest to the genuineness of their literary creations. She offers a new female portrait as a response to the masculine drama riddled with stereotypical representations and inevitably reacts to the state of the culturally and economically handicapped middle-class femininity of the theatrical profession under masculine authority. Robins's *Votes for Women!* embeds the imagery and arguments of suffrage and anti-suffrage discourses, employing a clever strategy of utilising the possibilities of spectacular and visual tactics.

Her efforts on the early-twentieth-century stage validate the politicisation of women's campaign for emancipation in the new age. Jane Marcus claims that 'Robins's real genius was in her voice and power as an actress, a power [that] she [would] use on platforms [and particularly on the stage] all over Edwardian England to convert women to the cause of feminism'.⁹⁹ Robins herself argued that 'one of the

most important and most indispensable services to Social Reform would have to be undertaken by the writers'.¹⁰⁰ That is, *Votes for Women!* is in a way the sublimation of Robins's deep desire for 'public usefulness';¹⁰¹ it signals her sense of duty as a female artist, underpinning 'the conviction, widely shared at the time, that artists and intellectuals had a key role to play in bringing about the cultural change'.¹⁰²

Votes for Women! is of emblematic significance in the launch of political feminist theatre in two crucial aspects. First, Robins struggled to stimulate the construction of a new culture of theatrical reaction among women, not only among playwrights and actresses but also among the female audiences who came to watch the representations of their own problems, desires and demands; seeing themselves on stage encouraged women to choose theatre as a new platform and space for the articulation of their desire for emancipation. Secondly, Robins should be thought of the herald of the modern feminist stage. In a radical move, she not only wrote in favour of women's emancipation, but also put women at the forefront of a public movement, making them agents of change. Her drama guided her own sex towards liberation from the paradigms of conventionality both on and off stage.

¹ 'Stirring Appeal for the Suffrage in Elizabeth Robins's Book: "The Convert" – A Tract in Fiction', *The New York Times*, November 16, 1907.

² Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. xii.

³ This term was earlier used by Sheila Stowell as the title of her book, which sheds light on the tradition and the common discourse created by female playwrights and their arguments in their plays between 1900 and 1915. See Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992).

⁴ Peter Whitebrook, *William Archer: A Biography* (London: Methuen, 1993), p. 379–380. 'The New Drama' was a summation of Archer's campaign for a realistic theatre. In his book *The Old Drama and the New* (1923), Archer suggests that the non-naturalistic, lyrical strands of Elizabethan and Jacobean verse drama slowly disappeared during the eighteenth century, eventually finding a new life in opera and operetta. Simultaneously, a realistic undercurrent had developed with the rise of prose writing and the realistic novel, and in the theatre it reached its height in Ibsen and contemporary writers such as Barker. The overwrought passions and rhetoric of the past had been replaced by a cool, rational, psychological awareness, creating a modern theatre where contemporary life could be objectively portrayed, analysed and criticised.

⁵ See Elizabeth Robins, *Both Sides of the Curtain* (Surrey: William Heinemann Ltd, 1940). In the chapters 'Tree's Promises' and 'I Take My Bearings', Robins confesses that her perseverance to break

through the actor–managers’ indomitable and inflexible stature against new actresses for the sake of their profession and financial enterprises proved inadequate, leading her to desperation and even to think of travelling back to America in the early 1890s.

⁶ *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p. 250.

⁷ Powell, p. 3.

⁸ *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p. 223.

⁹ Angela V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862–1952* (London: Routledge, 1995), p. 52.

¹⁰ *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p. 241.

¹¹ *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p. 242.

¹² Tracy C. Davis, *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991), p. 16.

¹³ *Ibid*, p. 40.

¹⁴ Tracy C. Davis uses this term in her *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) to elucidate the association between the two professions of acting and prostitution. She argues that whilst the actress acquired a more respectable position in society in the second half of the Victorian era, the women of independent lives and careers unfortunately could not escape from the social stigma of being sexual objects of popular entertainment in theatres and music halls.

¹⁵ John, p. 53.

¹⁶ Elizabeth Robins, *Ibsen and the Actress* (London: Hogarth Press, 1928), p. 55.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 33.

¹⁸ Penny Farfan, ‘From “Hedda Gabler” to “Votes for Women”’: Elizabeth Robins’s early feminist critique of Ibsen’ in *Women, Modernism and Performance* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), pp. 11–33 (p. 13).

¹⁹ Robins, *Ibsen and the Actress*, p. 15.

²⁰ *Both Sides of the Curtain*, p. 260.

²¹ Powell, pp. 66–67. The author gives a number of cases in which actresses were subordinate to the actor–managers’ rule and, in a reactionary attempt, ‘Florence Farr produced Rosmersholm and played the leading role of Rebecca at the Vaudeville Theatre, only weeks before Elizabeth Robins, despairing of playing a woman’s role of depth and power in a regular West End production, produced and starred in Hedda Gabler at the same theatre’.

²² Robins, *Ibsen and the Actress*, p. 55.

²³ Whitebrook, pp. 379–380.

²⁴ William Archer, *The Theatrical World of 1893* (London: Walter Scott Limited, 1893), p. xxviii.

²⁵ Whitebrook, p. 30.

²⁶ *Ibid*, p. 65.

²⁷ Whitebrook shows that in the 1890s, Archer wrote articles in favour of Arthur Pinero and Henry Jones’s serious plays. Likewise, he was the wholehearted supporter of his ‘marvellously astute friend’ George Bernard Shaw.

²⁸ Quoted in Thomas Postlewait, *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign* (Connecticut: Greenwood Press, 1986). For the original text, see Elizabeth Robins, ‘Whither and How’ unpublished autobiography, chapter 43, typescript in the Elizabeth Robins papers, Fales Collection.

²⁹ ‘Womanly woman’ is a term used to describe a woman who has or demonstrates the accepted feminine qualities of the Victorian society. Patricia Marks argues that the most obvious role model was the queen in the nineteenth century. According to Marks, the ‘womanly woman’ was ‘often compared to a flower, a kitten, or a child; she was modest and pure minded, unselfish and meek. She knew her place well; naturally fitted to the common round of household duties, she could make a home of a hovel by ministering to the needs of her husband, either uncomplaining drudge or angel on the hearth. Nothing in herself, the littlest and the least of all creation, she achieved greatness not in her own right but in her relatedness as daughter and wife and, if she survived the rigors of childbirth, as mother and grandmother. This Victorian Iphigenia, the “womanly woman,” was one of the nineteenth century’s most memorable myths, not only because she was fashioned after a Queen who ruled both house and country but because rapid social changes made her existence untenable.’ See Patricia Marks, *Bicycles, Bangs and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press* (Kentucky: The University Press of Kentucky, 1990), p. 1.

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- ³⁰ Elizabeth Robins, *Alan's Wife* (London: Henry and Co., 1893), pp. 4–5. All subsequent references to this play will henceforth be given in parentheses in the text.
- ³¹ William Archer, Introduction to *Alan's Wife* (London: Henry and Co., 1893), p. xxx.
- ³² J. T. Grein, The editor's preface to *Alan's Wife* (London: Henry and Co., 1893), p. vi.
- ³³ Archer, Introduction to *Alan's Wife*, p. xxx
- ³⁴ *Ibid*, p. xiv.
- ³⁵ Catherine Wiley, 'Staging Infanticide: The Refusal of Representation in Elizabeth Robins's "Alan's Wife"', *Theatre Journal*, 42.4 (1990), pp. 432–446 (p. 432).
- ³⁶ See Whitebrook, pp. 128, 129, 133, 136.
- ³⁷ Whitebrook, p. 264.
- ³⁸ Katharine Cockin, 'Women's Suffrage Drama', in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), pp. 127–139 (p. 134).
- ³⁹ Jan McDonald, *The 'New Drama' 1900–1914*, (Hampshire and London: Macmillan, 1986), p. 11.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid*, p. 11.
- ⁴¹ *Ibid*, p. 32.
- ⁴² 'XVIII. -- Miss Elizabeth Robins: At the Play', *The Review of Reviews*, November 1904, p. 488.
- ⁴³ WSPU was founded by Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst in 1903 in Manchester. The group had split from the non-militant and conservative National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies. WSPU brought sensation to the campaign through militant tactics, pageants and street campaigns.
- ⁴⁴ Maroula Joannou, "'Hilda, Harnessed to a Purpose": Elizabeth Robins, Ibsen, and the Vote', *Comparative Drama*, 44.2 (2010), pp. 179–200 (p. 183).
- ⁴⁵ Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign: 1907–14* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 56.
- ⁴⁶ For a further discussion, see the chapter 'Spectacle' in Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign: 1907–14* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1988), pp. 55–150.
- ⁴⁷ Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905–1938* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1998), p. 7.
- ⁴⁸ Elizabeth Robins, *Votes for Women!*, in *Votes for Women and Other Plays*, ed. by Susan Croft (Twickenham: Aurora Metro Press, 2009), pp. 22–105 (p. 24). Henceforth, all quotations from the play will be taken from this edition.
- ⁴⁹ Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre 1850–1910* (London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981), p. 60.
- ⁵⁰ Quoted in Alan Reynolds Thompson, 'Melodrama and Tragedy', *PMLA*, 43.3 (1928), pp. 810–835 (pp. 815–816). See also William Archer, *About the Theatre* (London: T. Fisher Unwin, 1886).
- ⁵¹ Robins, *Votes for Women!*, p. 59.
- ⁵² *The Court Theatre*, Untitled review, p. 35.
- ⁵³ Joannou, "'Hilda, Harnessed to a Purpose"', p. 183.
- ⁵⁴ Claire Hirshfield, 'Suffragettes Onstage: Women's Political Theatre in Edwardian England', *New England Theatre Journal*, 2.1 (1991), p. 15.
- ⁵⁵ Samantha Ellis, 'Votes for Women!, Royal Court', April 1907, *The Guardian*, 19 March 2003.
- ⁵⁶ 'Women's Suffrage in Drama', *The Glasgow Herald*, 10 April 1907.
- ⁵⁷ Leslie Hill, 'Suffragettes Invented Performance Art', in *The Routledge Reader in Performance and Politics*, ed. by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane De Gay (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 150–156 (p. 150).
- ⁵⁸ St J H, 'Realism at the Court', *Academy*, April 13, 1907, p. 369.
- ⁵⁹ 'Woman Suffrage: Demonstration in Hyde Park', *The Times*, 22 June 1908.
- ⁶⁰ Jane Marcus, 'Art and Anger', *Feminist Studies*, 4.1 (1978), pp. 68–98 (p.74).
- ⁶¹ Tickner, p. 154.
- ⁶² Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (London: Virago, 2009), p. 8.
- ⁶³ Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition To Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), p. 60.
- ⁶⁴ *Ibid*, p. 60.

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- ⁶⁵ Ibid, p. 63.
- ⁶⁶ Green, p. 38.
- ⁶⁷ Janet Wolff, 'The Invisible Flâneuse: Women and the Literature of Modernity', *Theory Culture Society*, 2.37 (1935), pp. 37–46.
- ⁶⁸ Sally Ledger, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1997), p. 155.
- ⁶⁹ Ibid, p. 155.
- ⁷⁰ See Peter Bailey, *Popular Culture and Performance in the Victorian City* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).
- ⁷¹ See Bailey, pp. 151–174. In his definition of the term, he explains that 'the prefix [para] combines two [...] discrete meanings: first in the sense of "almost" and "beside", denoting a secondary, or modified form of sexuality (cf. paramedic); second, the counter sense of being "against", denoting a form of protection from, or prevention of sexuality (cf. parachute). However [...] the function argued is conceived somewhat differently, as an inoculation in which a little sexuality is encouraged as an antidote to its subversive properties. Parosexuality then is sexuality that is deployed but contained, carefully channelled rather than fully discharged; in vulgar terms it might be represented as "everything but".'
- ⁷² Ibid, p. 156.
- ⁷³ Ibid, p. 184.
- ⁷⁴ Ibid, p. 156.
- ⁷⁵ Ibid, p. 192.
- ⁷⁶ Tickner, p. 152.
- ⁷⁷ Marks, p. 148.
- ⁷⁸ Robins, *Votes for Women!*, p. 33.
- ⁷⁹ Green, p. 48.
- ⁸⁰ Tickner, p. 167.
- ⁸¹ Stowell, p. 22.
- ⁸² 'Court Theatre', *The Times*, 10 April 1907, p. 5.
- ⁸³ Ibid, p. 5.
- ⁸⁴ Elizabeth Robins, 'WHY' in *Way Stations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p. 180.
- ⁸⁵ 'Court Theatre', *The Observer*, 12 May 1907, p. 5A.
- ⁸⁶ Stowell, p. 36.
- ⁸⁷ 'At the Play', *The Observer*, 14 April 1907.
- ⁸⁸ Elin Diamond, 'Performance and Cultural Politics' in *The Routledge Reader in Politics and Performance*, ed. by Lizbeth Goodman and Jane de Gay (London and New York: Routledge, 2000), pp. 66–70.
- ⁸⁹ Erika Fischer-Lichte, *The Transformative Power of Performance: A new aesthetics*, trans. by Saskya Iris Jain (Oxon: Routledge, 2008), p. 32.
- ⁹⁰ For further discussion, see Fischer-Lichte, p. 32.
- ⁹¹ Susan Torrey Barstow, "'Hedda is All of Us": Late-Victorian Women at the Matinee', *Victorian Studies*, 43.3 (2001), pp. 387–411 (p. 387).
- ⁹² Susan Croft, "Introduction" in *Votes for Women and Other Plays*, ed. by Susan Croft (Twickenham: Aurora Metro Press, 2009), pp. 7–20 (p. 9).
- ⁹³ Tickner, p. xii.
- ⁹⁴ Davis, p. 69.
- ⁹⁵ Robins, *Ibsen and the Actress*, p. 20.
- ⁹⁶ Quoted in Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: From Charlotte Brontë to Doris Lessing* (London: Virago Press, 1999), p. 225. Originally taken from Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (London: The Women's Press, 1981), pp. 110–117.
- ⁹⁷ Charlotte Canning, 'Feminist Performance as Feminist Historiography', *Theatre Survey*, 45.2 (2004), pp. 227–233 (p. 228).
- ⁹⁸ See Tickner, p. 151.
- ⁹⁹ Marcus, p. 72.
- ¹⁰⁰ Elizabeth Robins, *Way Stations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), p. 110.

¹⁰¹ Quoted in Joanne E. Gates, *Elizabeth Robins, 1862–1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist* (Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1994), p. 37. Originally in Juliet Blair, 'Private Parts in Public Places: The Case of Actresses', in *Women and Space*, ed. by Shirley Ardener (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1981), pp. 200–320 (p. 221).

¹⁰² Maroula Joannou and June Purvis, 'Introduction: The Writing of the Women's Suffrage Movement', in *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives*, ed. by Maroula Joannou and June Purvis (Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press), pp. 1–14 (p. 11).

Chapter 2. Cicely Hamilton's Women: From the Ordinary to the Exceptional

Cicely Hamilton, an actress, author, playwright and one of the founders of the WWSL, wrote some of the most celebrated plays of Edwardian suffrage.¹ In particular her three plays *Diana of Dobson's* (1908), *How the Vote Was Won* (1909) and *A Pageant of Great Women* (1909) brought her publicity and success, making her a sought-after member of the suffrage movement. These three plays differ considerably in their plots, characterisation and theatrical strategies, and yet each functions as a medium for the playwright to raise Edwardian women's political awareness, encourage female activism and demonstrate 'exceptional' examples of womanhood to attract and inspire ordinary women.

Diana of Dobson's raised awareness of the labouring conditions of working women and showed how they could transform and enjoy their lives if opportunities existed. It was a decisive moment in Hamilton's writing career, establishing her as a respectable playwright and helping her to overcome her pessimism about her career prospects.² *How the Vote Was Won* is a farce aimed at entertaining the audience with a comic portrayal of an anti-suffragist husband and his docile wife. *A Pageant of Great Women*, on the other hand, perhaps true to its iconic title, stages a glorified image of eminent women in history to enthuse ordinary women with their sex's past accomplishments and future potential. As soon as it opened at the Scala Theatre, London, in 1909, *The Pageant's* representation of female exceptionalism paved the way for further performances at other suffrage meetings such as those at the Royal Albert Hall and other halls outside London. *The Pageant* offered alternatives to ordinary women by showing the diversity of successful women and capturing the imagination of the public (or at least the participating or contributing spectators) through a spectacle of exceptional femininities. This chapter thus aims to shed light

on Hamilton's constructions of ordinary and exceptional women, two ranks of seemingly separate but reconcilable groups. It will examine Hamilton's strategy of presenting 'exceptional' women to attract 'ordinary' audiences. To do so, it will also look at Hamilton's theatrical strategies and the play's productions in different settings.

2.1. *Diana of Dobson's*: An Ordinary Girl's Adventure

Hamilton's *Diana of Dobson's*, subtitled 'A Romantic Comedy in Four Acts', premiered at the Kingsway Theatre, London, on 12 February 1908. It provided a significant breakthrough in Hamilton's theatrical career. It is worth noting that Lena Ashwell, the famous actress and the play's producer, who was central to success of the play, encouraged Hamilton to write *Diana of Dobson's* after seeing Hamilton's one-act play *The Sixth Commandment* in 1907.³ This collaboration evinced the possibility and fruitfulness of female collaboration to achieve more than a single woman could by her own means. It was an exemplary partnership: Hamilton authored the play while Ashwell chose the title and the play debuted under her management.⁴

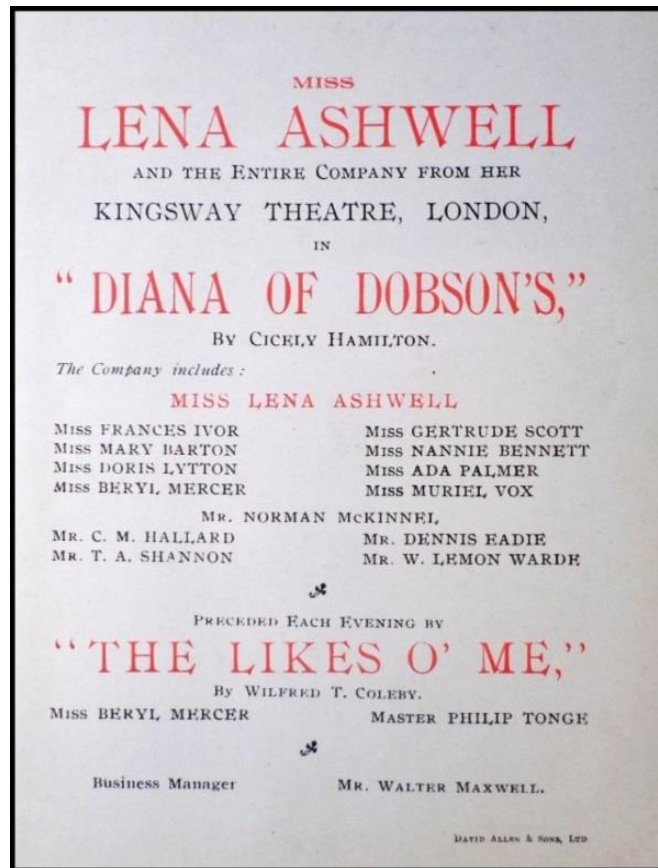


Figure 3: *Diana of Dobson's* production handbill, Kingsway Theatre, 1909 (*Diana of Dobson's* production file, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

After an astounding 143 performances in 1908, it had a further thirty-two performances in 1909 before Ashwell decided to take a break due to exhaustion caused by her hectic theatrical schedule at the Kingsway.⁵ The play was also later revived with seventeen performances at the Savoy Theatre in New York.⁶ The winning formula was a balance of courage and the vision of two women: Ashwell proved that, as a female manager, she was capable of managing a profitable theatrical venture, and Hamilton showed that she could write a play that would appeal to the public and critics despite being advised earlier to write under the gender-ambiguous pseudonym 'C Hamilton' to thwart undesirable reviews.⁷ The result was a success that brought the necessary financial support and critical attention to Ashwell's Kingsway repertoire, which was only her second production after *Irene Wycherley*.⁸



Figure 4: *The Sketch* magazine cover dated 19 February 1908, showing the photo of the dormitory scene from *Diana of Dobson's* at the Kingsway. It features (from left to right) Nannia Bennett as Miss Smithers, Lena Ashwell as Diana Massingberd, Christine Silver as Kitty Brant, Doris Lytton as Miss Morton, Muriel Vox as Miss Jay. (*Diana of Dobson's* production file, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Diana of Dobson's opens with a portrayal of female shop assistants who have returned to their dormitory after an exhausting day. The heroine, Diana Massingberd, is one of these women who scrape a living at a drapery store owned and regulated by rich businessman Dobson. In the first act, Diana learns that she is to inherit £300, her share of an unexpected legacy from a distant cousin who dies suddenly without leaving a will behind. She instantly makes up her mind to set off, initially for Paris to buy new, elegant, and fashionable dresses, and afterwards for Switzerland to spend a one-month holiday by herself. She does so in spite of all the protestations and advice

from other shop girls sharing the shop's 'live-in' dormitory, who believe that the money should be invested sensibly in a bank to provide her with a small income. However, nothing can persuade Diana as she is resolute in experiencing, in her words, 'a royal time' once in her life.⁹ The second act takes place in a hotel in Switzerland, where Diana meets Captain Victor Bretherton, a young officer, who earns a £600 a year and is apparently in need of a well-to-do wife to maintain his lavish lifestyle. The Captain's aunt, Mrs Cantelupe, cross-examines Diana to find out if she is a suitable, namely affluent and respectable enough, match, and she eventually gets the false impression that Diana's monthly income would mean £3,600 a year, which would make her a suitable wife for her nephew. In the third act, the Captain proposes to Diana, but she turns him down by declaring she is not the person he has been looking for. She also criticises him for being a metaphorical parasite who is solely dependent on his social standing and family fortunes and who has not even tried to stand on his own feet. The fourth act is set on the Thames Embankment on an early morning, approximately three or four months later. The scene begins with a policeman forcing the homeless poor to vacate the benches they rest upon. To his surprise, one of those poor is Captain Bretherton, the policeman's former senior. He has been trying to make a living for the last three months, but has become disillusioned by his inability to find a proper job. He runs into Diana, who has also been despondent after losing her job due to an illness. They are equally desperate and Diana gains respect for the Captain after hearing of the challenge he has taken on. Their acquaintance seemingly develops into a new-found love between the two, and the play concludes with a prospect of their marriage.

Diana of Dobson's focuses on the potential and possibilities of ordinary working women in the Edwardian age who were fascinated by new opportunities but

controlled by the despotic institutions of mass consumption and occupation. The play questions the extent of freedom for women without stable financial means in their private and public lives. This section of the chapter will thus be concerned with *Diana of Dobson's* portrayal of an ordinary woman who dreams of a life that can offer her the freedom to achieve her potential. It will also explore the possible complications of the play's central theme and its strong connection with the strategies of the popular stage.

In the construction of *Diana of Dobson's*, Hamilton creates a modern version of the 'Cinderella' tale, which was introduced to English readers by the Brothers Grimm in the 1890s. The essence of these stories was the rise in social position of a girl who makes a fortunate marriage. In 1906 *The Observer* confirmed the popularity of these plays stating that 'people have scarcely ever missed a Christmas without seeing a "Cinderella"'.¹⁰ Similarly, a pantomime *Cinderella* opened at Drury Lane in 1904 and at the Adelphi Theatre in 1905. *The Era Almanac* also records that *Cinderella* achieved its one hundredth performance on the Drury Lane stage in 1906.¹¹ Among all contemporary and revised versions of these stories, the Edwardian musical comedy was the one that successfully modernised the transformation of an ordinary girl story by generically featuring a working-class girl who becomes an exceptional lady by marrying a wealthy man. The genre was originally popularised by George Edwardes at the Gaiety Theatre in the 1890s through plays such as *The Shop Girl* (1894) and *Our Miss Gibbs* (1909). According to Len Platt, the genre

was a celebration of feminine performance in more ways than one, establishing what it understood to be the new qualities of the female actor – a 'bewitching' personality, 'dainty' singing, 'piquant' acting and an 'exquisite sense of humour' – and mapping these against what it took to be the essential feminine characteristics – 'grace', 'charm' and 'fascination'.¹²

It could be said that musical comedies of the era feminised the popular stage and provided a reformulation of female performance. They combined two seemingly contradictory qualities. On the one hand, musical comedy was concerned with ordinary working women. Rappaport states that ‘instead of being portrayed as a hapless victim, she becomes an actress whose femininity acknowledges, glorifies, and masters performance’.¹³ The musical comedy heroine is thus an ordinary working-class woman who has exceptional qualities that will open to her a completely new life. Although the male characters are generally stereotypes of Edwardian society – a self-made businessman, a store owner or a young son of a wealthy family – women are diverse, clever and attractive members of the working class, who are not satisfied with what is offered to them in their professional and private lives. The ordinary heroine is empowered through her individual qualities, which are enhanced by the spectacle of feminine charm and comic performance. In this way, musical comedy accommodates both ordinariness and exceptionality, suggesting that a clever woman could improve her circumstances by making herself distinctive among members of her sex. They thus offer a modernised version of the almost universally known transformation of an ordinary girl story.

Hamilton, intentionally or not, reconstructs the popular shop girl of the musical comedy stage in her heroine, Diana. She is a free-spirited and venturesome girl revolting against her mundane and unrewarding life and yearning for a change. In *Marriage as a Trade*, Hamilton attacks the stereotyped, or in her words, ‘single-type[d]’ womanhood of her age, which she characterises with such qualities as

home-loving, [...] submissive, industrious, unintelligent, tidy, possessed with a desire to please, well-dressed, jealous of their sex, self-sacrificing, cowardly, filled with burning desire for maternity, [...] and capable of sinking their identity and interests in the interests and identity of identity of a husband.¹⁴

Hamilton's original intention to name the play 'The Adventuress' also demonstrates that Diana is an antithesis to stereotypically passive and submissive women.¹⁵ The title makes reference to what Rappaport calls the 'innocent libertinism' of women of a new age promoted in the form of sensations more readily available in the commercial and entertainment areas of public life.¹⁶ This also signifies the heroine's keenness to try new experiences: having a holiday abroad, shopping for new clothes, pretending to be a middle-class lady and flirting with men freely as a single woman. In a general sense, Diana's entire experience is constructed as an extended metaphor of transformation. In the first act, her personality is exposed further by her protest against the idea of staying in the same occupation and making a sensible investment for a secure future. She reveals that she is 'feeling murderous' about 'first and foremost Dobson and the Pringle woman' (p. 79). She is articulate about her discontent with the unexciting and exhausting 'routine' of her job and repeated 'fining and nagging' (p. 79) by the boss and his forewoman, whose job is to ensure that female workers are managed and strictly controlled. Thus, as an untamed soul, Diana is not frightened to show her frustration with her mundane and unrewarding life.

Hamilton provides a representation of her ideas on marriage through Diana. Marriage is an important theme of musical comedy plots. Peter Bailey observes that musical comedy, as a 'typical apotheosis of the working girl [,] represents marriage above her station as the due reward for her own inherent virtues'.¹⁷ The genre suggests that a working girl could better her position in life by taking work in a department store, so she could meet a match from a higher class and her life could be transformed. In this sense, the ambition of a girl to 'marry up' is often fulfilled and the girl is rewarded with a new status. For example, *The Shop Girl* (1984), a very

popular example of the genre, debuted at the Gaiety Theatre and achieved extraordinary success, having 546 performances. The play tells the story of a millionaire, John Brown, indebted to a friend from his poorer years. He comes to London to find his friend's daughter, Bessie Brent. He assigns a young medical student, Charles Appleby, the task of finding the girl. He discovers she is working as an assistant in Hooleys Royal Stores. He finds her after a long search among all the shop girls in the store. She eventually becomes Appleby's fiancée and the play ends with a promise of a happy marriage. Marriage here is constructed as a process or a 'freeing' agent that releases the heroine from her shop labour and other problems of the life of a single working girl.

Hamilton, on the other hand, conceptualises 'marriage' as the result of women's universal suppression within and outside their private lives. In her polemic *Marriage as a Trade* (1909) she argued that women are obliged to approach matrimony in a 'business-like' manner as they are left with no other options to maintain a life on their own.¹⁸ She explains this by claiming that 'the present constitution of woman including her temperament and her instincts are mainly induced and artificial and marriage has been a choice of "profession" to improve their social circumstances'.¹⁹ Hamilton thus makes many allusions to marriage defined by the language of trade and economy. In the Dobson's dormitory, Kitty, one of the shop girls, confesses that she is happy that she 'shan't have to stand [long hours of work] for so very much longer' (p. 75) as her prospective husband 'has been careful and steady [with the money] and he has got a good bit put by' (p. 76). When Diana gets a marriage proposal from Sir Jabez, who describes himself as a very popular and suitable bachelor with an impressive yearly income, he tells Diana that he earns forty thousand pounds a year. He also claims that 'most women would

consider it a good offer – an offer worth considering’ (p. 118). However, Diana rejects the idea of a mercenary marriage. He implies that Diana’s rejection of his proposal shows her failure to understand the ‘trade’. Similarly, in Act II, Mrs Cantelupe hopes for ‘a sensible marriage’ for her nephew Captain Bretherton, which means that he would need to find someone with the financial resources to support his lavish habits (p. 94). Here, marriage, as it is constructed in *Marriage as a Trade*, is an attempt by women to help stabilise or improve their financial conditions. In Diana’s case, her rejection of ‘marriage as a livelihood’ shows Hamilton’s feminist revolt against the convention of constructing marriage as a natural activity for women, bringing emotional and financial security. Turning down Sir Jabez’s proposal, Diana describes his drapery business as ‘heartless to grind a fortune off underpaid work-girls’ (p. 119), indicating that ‘the drapery trade’ is a new form of oppressive home for young single women that replaces the exploitation of women in marriage.

Hamilton seems to advocate that even an ordinary shop girl has the potential to realise her dreams if equal economic opportunities exist. It is a recurring theme in the play that Diana’s potential could not be maintained without necessary financial circumstances. Diana, in her complaint about the Dobson’s Drapery, points to shop girls’ lack of options for professional opportunities. She is critical about the manipulative atmosphere and gloomy prospects, especially in large commercial establishments. She says, ‘Oh, I shan’t be here much longer – I can see that. But when I am fired out I shall only start the same old grind somewhere else – all over again’ (p. 83). She goes on to sum up what Dobson’s Drapery and other similar shops offer to girls: ‘[a] starvation salary’, ‘[a] stuffy dormitory’, ‘mean little rules to obey’ and ‘the same tough meat in the same gloomy dining-room’ (p. 83). Thus, her

money allows her to try a new life that would normally be out of her reach, if only for a month. In response to Miss Smithers' advice that Diana 'should invest [the money] in something really safe' (p. 87), she says she can 'get nine or ten pounds a year'. But, Diana rejects the idea and says,

No, thank you – not good enough. Now I've got three hundred pounds [...] – three hundred pounds to do as I like with – I intend to have some fun out of it. (p. 87)

It is obvious that, for Diana, receiving ten pounds in interest for her money would neither make a big difference to her position nor help her break free from her present situation. She gets a unique opportunity from 'the power of money' to explore the world. She describes money as 'the power to do what you like, to go where you like, [...] to say what you like' (p. 87) in her conversation with the girls. In the second act, her character becomes someone completely transformed, released from her frustrations and full of enthusiasm. She calls it 'a new sensation' (p. 101). This new sensation is provided to her through her temporary financial freedom.

To maximise the impact of the first act, Hamilton exploits the expressiveness and theatricality of a scene where a group of women talk privately about their discontent with their life at the drapery shop.



Figure 5: *The Sketch*, the dormitory scene in *Diana of Dobson's*, 12 February 1908. (*Diana of Dobson's* production file, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Hamilton's tactic of presenting the shop girls' bedroom in the first act can be interpreted in two ways. On the one hand, they are women who are empowered by promoting femininity as part of and facilitator of visual and commercial activities. On the other hand, they might pose as victims of the system, by becoming stigmatised or undervalued as a result of those same activities. Peter Bailey argues that late-Victorian and Edwardian girls recruited in entertainment and commerce acted as 'femininity as spectacle' in front of the public as they were also 'considered as an article for purchase and consumption'.²⁰ The girls' private conversation and undressing in their dormitory can also be linked with the Edwardians' growing fascination with appearance and the voyeuristic pleasure of watching a scene that would normally be unacceptable outside the theatrical context. The almost undecorated walls and inadequately furnished room present a half-empty stage where the focal point of the audience is directed towards the girl's bodies, movements and gestures. Considering what these girls' bodies signify in the role of female shop

assistants, an allusion to the commodification of female spectacle can also be made. The commodification of femininity works in counteracting ways: femininity is exposed to audiences as 'the bearer of spectacle' and alternatively takes part in the creation of it as 'the object of spectacle'. The theatricality of the shop-work profession helps working women to camouflage their actual social status. Diana's complaints indicate a reaction to the shallow perception that shop assistants were a part of the 'respectable' middle class thanks to the theatricality of their roles, which is enhanced by smart dress, genteel manners, communication skills and middle-class attitudes that do not belong to the working classes.

The scene also demands the audience's collective sympathy towards the girls' circumstances. The stage direction in Act I reads that 'the light reveals a bare room of the dormitory type[.] Very little furniture except five small beds ranged against the walls – everything plain and comfortless to the last degree' (p. 75). The scene indicates the mental and physical strain that is put on girls in a commercial establishment. Considering these girls are supposed to earn their living, conform to rules and stay healthy despite inhumane conditions, late-hour work, indoor living, malnourishment and inadequate salaries, the confined setting seems to have limited access to the outside world and does not even offer minimal comfort, signifying a prison for the women, which simply reinstates 'domestic servitude' in the public realm. In reality, the depressing portrayal of the Dobson's establishment affords Edwardian spectators a behind-the-scenes look at 'living-in' or the 'live-in' system, which remained controversially widespread in the era's department stores and West End shops. According to Hosgood, 'because of the living-in system, assistants had few opportunities to escape their master's influence outside the workplace'.²¹ This tough system was common to many commercial institutions, a heavy blow to

working women's independence and dreams of cultivating and investing in their individual potential. The images of underpaid assistants are certainly intended to strike a sentimental note with the audience as well as portray a spectacle of femininity, which was a successful strategy in attracting audiences.

The change of settings relates to Diana's altering identity throughout her adventure. The first act's dreary dormitory mirrors Diana's misery. The second act, however, opens at a luxurious hotel abroad where Diana is released from the confines of her poor working-class life. Diana, as a middle-class character, performs a meta-theatrical role-play, exploiting the power of performance to convince people around her. She transforms herself by changing her dresses and adapting her behaviour to the new environment and its social codes. This provisional self-transformation gives her a chance to transcend class barriers and other characters' prejudices. But after Captain Bretherton's proposal, Diana reveals her true self so as not to deceive him. Thus, her performative revelation reinstates the real person, cruelly reminding the audience that women can only gain true emancipation through financial independence.



Figure 6: *The Sketch*, the Thames scene in *Diana of Dobson's*, 12 February 1908. (*Diana of Dobson's* production file, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

In the last act, on the other hand, the characters are released from their confinement and encounter each other on a bench on the Thames Embankment. Although Hamilton does not offer a convincing finale, the disappearance of physical and material barriers give the characters a sense of freedom and equality. Accordingly, Diana and Bretherton can now reunite as they start to empathise with each other. The last act shows that Diana has to return to her tough life, in an even worse-off state after she loses her job at Dobson's due to illness. Despite Hamilton's hint that she could prevent this if she had not spent all of her money, this would not still change Hamilton's central argument that women need to have financial freedom. Diana indicates her regret by saying, 'if I hadn't played the fool with my little fortune, [...] I shouldn't have been turned out of my lodgings' (p. 141). However, she also rejects the idea of continuing her miseries in the drapery job, confessing, 'But, after all, I don't regret it [...] I had my good time – my one glorious month' (p. 141). From a feminist perspective, Hamilton's solution to the problem of marriage is the need for women to reject marriage, and there is no immediate possibility of equality within

marriage. But the material resolution of the play indicates that only a marriage based on love could be possible for Diana. Hamilton comes to a compromise between her feminist stance against marriage and her awareness of the requirements of a popular play.

However, there still remains an ambiguity as to what extent Diana embodies a modern and non-traditional heroine and what the play's resolution suggests in this sense. A reason for the ambiguity is that her unexpected and temporary transformation from a simple shop girl to a middle-class lady is as a result of sheer coincidence. The not-very-convincing source of Diana's inheritance is revealed as someone who 'was in some sort of business' and 'died suddenly a while ago, without leaving a will' (p. 85). This melodramatic turn of fate is not an ordinary transformation, but for Diana, it is an extraordinary gift that creates a pretext for her exploration of the opportunities and hardships of 'the new order' of commercialised life. The play concludes with a marriage that might be appealing for ordinary audiences, but Diana's decision to marry as her redemption should not have been a satisfactory and agreeable resolution for feminists and suffragists. The fairy-tale finale leaves the problems of working women unresolved. According to Sheila Stowell, 'Hamilton argued that women as a class were both socially and economically handicapped in a culture that privileged men [as suggested in *Diana of Dobson's*']'.²² Hamilton indicates that women were still not free from their subjugation, which has partly been transferred from a 'private' realm to the despotically managed institutions of the public sphere. Nonetheless, as an interesting note, it is not only Diana who experiences the overwhelming effects of rapid commercialism, but Captain Bretherton's inability to secure any form of daily work is also suggestive. He confesses to Diana that

You have told me that I wasn't man enough to find myself a place in the world without money to bolster me up – that I was a poor backboneless creature and that I should go to the wall if I were turned out to earn my bread for six months. I didn't believe you then, but I've found out since that you were right, though I set out to prove you wrong. (p. 143)

Diana's eventual decision to marry Bretherton can still be interpreted as a justifiable action. It is only after he makes this confession and she is convinced that he has made enough sacrifices to have the same experience of hardships and that their marriage could now depend on a mutual appreciation and influence that she takes such a step.

Diana of Dobson's was successful in appealing to mainstream theatre-goers and stimulating enough critical attention to spread Hamilton's message about the troubles and potential of ordinary women. It is a unique example of its kind and largely benefits from Hamilton's concepts of female potential, marriage and female employment in shops borrowed from representations in Edwardian popular culture. However, it defies clear classification and definition since it occupies a gap between ideologically freighted serious drama and the popular Edwardian stage. One critic notes, referencing Hamilton's position within Edwardian suffrage theatre, that *Diana of Dobson's*' success is a 'breath of fresh air' compared to the theatrical endeavours of her female contemporaries:

[o]ne has been told that women have no humour until one almost came to believe it, but the women's movement has now developed a bright and lively side, and Miss Hamilton takes a foremost place as a woman suffrage humourist.²³

The play also directly and indirectly deals with ideas that shaped society in a new age of consumerism, modernity and liberalism, but it had a light and witty approach to increase its likelihood of success. Hamilton's humorist presentation of a serious issue made the play suitable to mainstream audiences and brought positive reviews on the instant success of the play. In addition, Ashwell's clever decisions were certainly a

reason for the play's easy and quick progress. The Kingsway Theatre, which was managed by Ashwell at the time, offered a complete theatrical event to audiences. The plays were presented in matinees, in which four new plays were staged, and at the intervals, a string orchestra played well-known classics and songs from modern composers such as Glazomov, Frank Bridge and York Bowen.²⁴ *The Times* writes that Ashwell's Kingsway Theatre and the Vedrenne–Barker Court Theatre were two venues presenting plays and entertaining audiences with music, and praised Ashwell by saying, '[her] venture certainly deserves every success'.²⁵ *The Musical Standard* also argued that

it's somewhat of a novelty at a theatre to hear, instead of the usual musical comedy selections, an excellent performance of a string quartet, and then a piano trio, and later on maybe a violin solo. Miss Lena Ashwell is to be warmly complimented on the innovation.²⁶

Namely, Ashwell's matinees become a mainstream entertainment that introduced new plays to the public and served a large section of English society. *Diana of Dobson's* production thus becomes more than just a performance. Considering Ashwell's modern approach, it is possible to claim that a modern theatrical event is created as the musical intervals strengthen the play's relation to the popular stage and contribute to overall theatricality of the event. *Diana of Dobson's*, at the Kingsway, thus attracted ordinary women in large numbers to experience an original and highly sensational event, representing not only those in the suffrage movement but also any ordinary woman who shares the same difficulties, dreams and disappointments as Diana.

2.2 *How the Vote Was Won*: Women United for Action

How the Vote Was Won, the second of Cicely Hamilton's plays that featured a suffrage theme, was a co-production with her friend and suffragist Christopher St.

John (Christabel Marshall). Its director was Edith Craig, Ellen Terry's daughter and the director of *A Pageant of Great Women*. On its debut at the Royalty Theatre on 13 April 1909, the cast included Winifred Mayo, actress and member of Actresses' Franchise League (AFL); Maud Hoffman, who played Madame Roland in *A Pageant of Great Women*; Nigel Playfair, the actor-manager of the Lyric Theatre; and Auriol Lee, a popular British stage actress who later became a successful West End and Broadway director. After its initial success, the play was selected to be performed by the theatrical department of the WFL, of which Hamilton was a committee member.

The play features a farcical plot that attracted substantial audiences. One critic expressed his appreciation of this by saying, 'when the Woman Suffrage movement dies, whatever we may gain, we shall be the poorer by a great deal of honest fun'.²⁷ To describe its popularity, he also added that 'at the dress rehearsal of it, [...] at the Royalty Theatre, the house was possibly "packed"'.²⁸ It was this popularity that made the play an indispensable part of both suffrage events in London and its tour of provincial stages along with other popular suffrage plays in the WFL repertoire.²⁹ The play promotes Hamilton's contention that women's status needs to be empowered, within and outside marriage, in order for them to pursue their aspirations. The plot is constructed around a women's strike initiated by suffragettes as a response to Parliament's refusal of women's enfranchisement on the basis that women do not need votes since their male relatives legally function as both their financial supporters and public representatives.

In one of her speeches about the significance of the suffrage movement, Hamilton remarked that 'one of the big causes that lie behind the Suffrage movement is the new consciousness in woman that she is free to think for herself'.³⁰ In connection with her belief in this 'new consciousness', she shows that ordinary

women who long to become exceptional members of society could seize the opportunity to be heard and promoted by joining the suffrage movement. It offers them a chance to stand up for themselves, make their talents recognised and have a status that would allow them to be equal members in public life. In this sense, the play celebrates the diversity and individual talents of a group of professional women. The author also underscores the illogicality of the anti-suffrage argument that women do not require financial self-sufficiency, for they are supported and accommodated by their male relatives. In this context, this section will attempt to investigate what Hamilton offers as a possible resolution as to the removal of ordinary women's troubles, which she has partially succeeded in exhibiting in *Diana of Dobson's*. It will also look at how the farcical element helped resolve the tension between the play's moral note and the need for reaching ordinary theatre-goers.

The play begins with a conversation between two women, Ethel Cole and her sister Winifred, a suffragist, about the latter's claim that all working women will go on a strike organised by suffrage societies. Furthermore, women are to give up their jobs and descend upon their closest male relatives and demand to be accommodated. Ethel is contemptuous of the likelihood of women's participation in such an action whilst Winifred confidently asserts that women, including Ethel's female servants, will join in the strike. Winifred is proven correct and Ethel is left on her own to wait for her husband, Horace. Slightly after Horace's arrival, a group of women, who seem to be suffragists from all different walks of life, arrive at Horace's house one after another to ask for support from him. What these women have in common is that they are all professionals and economically independent personalities. They are also the relatives of Horace, an anti-suffragist. He, from the beginning of the play, expresses his disdain and antagonism towards these women due to their

‘unconventional’ lifestyles and exceptional personalities. The women ridicule Horace, who sees female self-sufficiency and activism as signs of degeneration and lack of moral integrity. They demand for him to fulfil his responsibility as their closest male relative and hence the legal protector and supporter of his female relatives. The women smartly invalidate Horace’s legally and ‘traditionally’ determined role as a carer and breadwinner by evidencing that he is neither able to deliver what he claims, nor can he support or control the women around him. They suggest that working women have the capacity to take care of themselves. A twist in the plot comes about towards the end of the play. After having realised the futility of arguing against women’s rights, Horace does not carry on his refutation of the women’s demands any more. Consequently, he and his friend William, as many other men in the streets, set out to join the strike in front of Parliament in support of the women’s demands.

The play presents a new class of professional women and the diversity of their achievements, which evinces the possibility that women should assume an exceptional role to bring change to their as well other women’s status. Hamilton, in a speech at the Bijou Theatre in 1891, said on the nature of the suffrage movement that

[v]ariety means progress, and we should never get on without it. We must learn to encourage it in other people, and learn to tolerate in other people – in other women especially, because they are not used to the process – the thinking for themselves.³¹

These remarks, first and foremost, suggest Hamilton’s belief in the authenticity and diversity of female potential. She stresses that the first step towards the realisation of this potential in the service of initially personal, and consequently, collective progress, is to accommodate a large variety of women in the suffrage movement and create a channel for them to express themselves. In connection with Hamilton’s emphasis on the diversification of femininity, the play indicates how women of

different classes and capacities can be persuasive and powerful agents when they act in unison. Horace acknowledges that his female relatives are self-supporting and comparatively better-off than him in their professional lives, though he despises this. His niece Molly, for example, is a witty middle-class writer. According to Horace, she has ‘written the most scandalous book’ and so she deserves to be called ‘sexless’ (p. 18). Agatha, on the other hand, is a spinster who works as a governess. His cousin Christine runs a profitable dress-making business in Hanover Square. Maudie is an actress from the music-hall stage. His aunt Lizzie is a ‘comfortable, middle-aged’ woman who provides lodging for the poor in the east of London. Although ‘she is not very well-educated’, ‘she has got good deal of native knowledge’ (p. 18). All these women appear to have diverse qualifications that make them exceptional. They all outshine Horace through their professional achievements and audacious characters. Just as Hamilton exemplifies the exceptional attainments of her sex as artists, scientists, graduates or queens in *A Pageant of Great Women*, here she prefers to promote a more ordinary and credible group of women, who are not privileged in their lives but whose collective act facilitates the attainment of the status they have thus far been denied.

How the Vote Was Won suggests that the Edwardian suffrage movement offers a long-needed platform for ordinary working-class women to assert their existence outside the responsibilities that are conventionally attributed to them. Winifred claims that ‘the servants’ bedroom will be empty’ once the women start their strike, though Ethel protests this saying, ‘Not ours’ and claiming that ‘Martha is simply devoted to [her]’ and ‘poor little Lilly [...] has no home to go to’ (p. 5). This can be compared to a similar case at the end of *Diana of Dobson’s* when Diana is left with the bleak prospect of an independent life after she has been dismissed from her

job at the Dobson's Drapery Emporium. She has no option other than an opportunistic marriage with Captain Bretherton. This finale is unfortunately no more than a predictable and deficient solution to a woman as strong and adventurous as Diana. Nevertheless, the working-class characters in *How the Vote Was Won* set to give, as Lilly's remarks, 'an objick lesson' to their masters. She insists, 'I've got to be recognised by the State. I don't think I'm a criminal nor a lunatic [...]' (p. 9). Ethel protests, 'You poor simpleton. Do you suppose that, even if this absurd plan succeeds, you will get a vote?', to which Lilly gives a confident response: 'I may – you never know your luck; but that's not why I'm giving up work' (p. 9). Hamilton this time gives a self-assured portrayal of working-class women who have more options as they gather strength from the movement. The author also appears to say that the real change to working women's lives would take place outside the realm of politics, namely in their professional lives.

There is also an overt criticism of women who succumb to a state of dependency or, in Hamilton's words, domestic 'parasitism'. Ethel Cole takes her share of this criticism, as a woman who denies herself a life outside her peaceful middle-class home. Ethel is introduced in the play as 'sitting in [a] comfortable armchair putting a button on to her husband's coat. She is a pretty, fluffy little woman who could never be bad-tempered, but might be fretful.' (p. 4) She does not have a personal identity apart from her role as Horace's wife. She is simply against the women's movement because her husband reproaches it. She repeats her husband's words, 'Horace says you'll never frighten the Government into giving you the vote' (p. 5). She thinks that the exceptional women are 'unwomanly' as they reject being 'common' and 'ordinary' (p. 5). Her subordination of herself to her husband's will is what Hamilton argues against in *Marriage as a Trade*. As Hamilton

puts it, the lives of women [... are] a constant struggle between the forces of nature endeavouring to induce in them progress [...]. Her vices, like her virtues, were forced and stereotyped.’³² Women had clearly been denied their natural progress and status; therefore, creating new models out of this class and presenting it to suffragists and the society in general would necessitate a convincing basis for further discussions of women’s intellectual capacity. Molly claims that ‘since this morning Suffragettes have become women’ (p. 158). She says this to point out that women are only regarded as women in their domestic lives. Indeed, the scientific discourse of the age enforced the belief that women’s energy should be channelled more to reproduction and less to other physical and mental endeavours. Winifred, unlike Ethel, symbolises the potential in the movement. She is promoted as a public speaker and an activist who devotes her energy to work ‘with [the] great army of women who have no male relatives’ (p. 7). She can be compared to Vida Levering in Elizabeth Robins’s *Votes for Women*. They are both women whose contributions are directed towards other people more than themselves. Hamilton puts forward that, ‘I do not think there are any conditions under which a woman, with a certain amount of determination, cannot make herself worthwhile in the Suffrage Movement to-day.’³³ Women have a large number of unique opportunities on offer to them as they make public speeches, advertise their achievements, campaign in the streets for political aspirations, produce and exhibit artistic works, take part in rallies, perform in theatrical performances and write books to increase the extent and reach of their ideas, or, as Hamilton puts it, ‘the opportunity of speaking the truth about themselves and of choosing their own way to live’.³⁴



Figure 7: The finale of *How the Vote Was Won*, performed for the WFL (photo from The Women's Library, Actresses' Franchise League documents, Special Collections, London School of Economics, London).

How the Vote Was Won did remarkably well in terms of public reception. After its first performance, *the Pall Mall Gazette* expressed that

all that really matters is that it is clever and witty, and that it kept yesterday's audiences brimming with excitement and in roars of laughter. It is, in fact, a long time since we have seen nearly so amusing a one-act play, and if some London manager does not snap it up for his theatre we shall be rather surprised.³⁵

The play provided genuine entertainment for the audience. It amused suffragists and other viewers and, as *The Times* notes, its first matinee performance 'was full and the audience was delighted'. The reviewer credits the performance and sums up that 'the *denouement*, conceived and carried out in the finest spirit of farce, reflects the highest credit on the authors'.³⁶ The play clearly captivated its audience through its portrayal of the inverted order of Edwardian society. The idea that women were already free and self-governing reverses gender roles between the female suffragists and Horace. It seems that Hamilton here adopts a similar tactic that was used against

suffragists by the anti-suffragist media. The play thus aims to present a satirised image of anti-suffragists in response to their distorted representation of suffragists. Hamilton turns the humorous approach to her advantage by mocking and overturning male dominance in public life. The following two caricatures are examples of circulated anti-suffrage propaganda at the height of the Edwardian suffrage campaign:

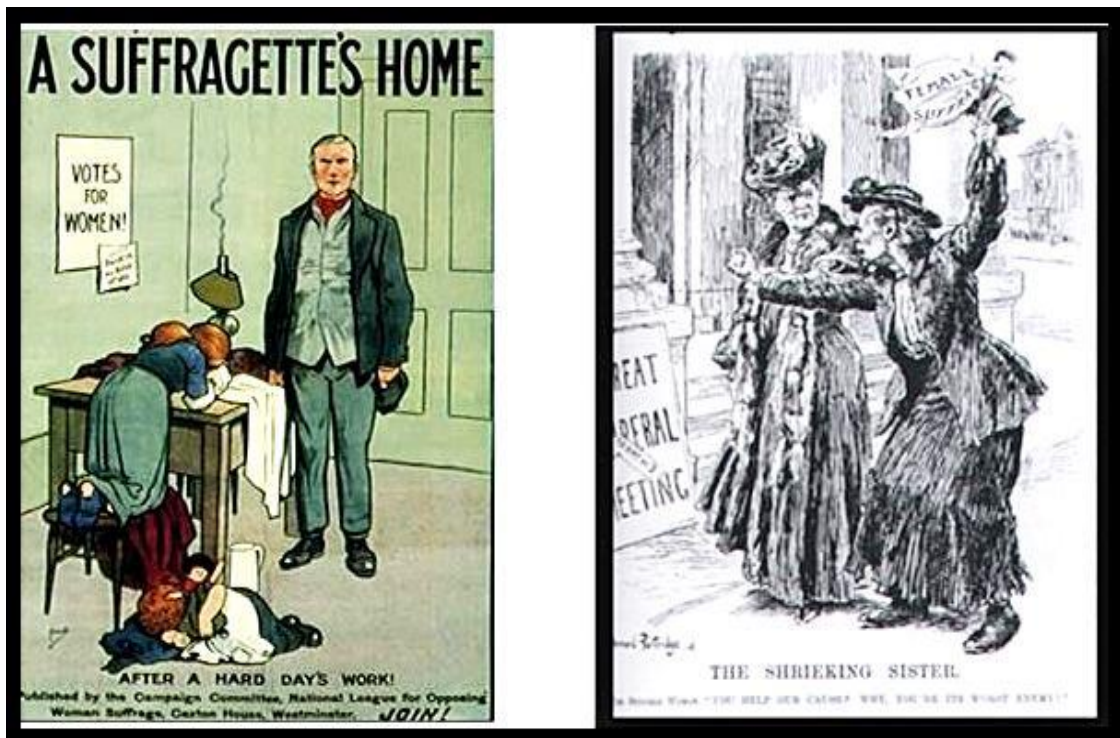


Figure 8: A Suffragette's Home: After a Hard Day's Work, postcard, John Hassall, 1902.

Figure 9: The Shrieking Sister by Bernard Partridge, *Punch*, 17 January 1906.

The first postcard was published by the National League for Opposing Suffrage Movement in 1912. It was described as ‘the turning of the order of nature upside down’ as it portrays a man who returns home after a long day to see that his wife has not fulfilled her ‘expected’ role as a mother and wife. The man stands in front of his wife, who puts her head on the table, possibly after being made to feel guilty due to her negligence of her domestic tasks. It criticises the woman who exceeds the boundaries of ‘acceptable’ femininity. The second picture, on the other hand, was

published by *Punch* in 1906. It portrays two frightful, middle-aged women, in front of Parliament, waiting to attack the Liberal party meeting. According to Lisa Tickner, the anti-suffragist discourse largely used the claim that ‘feminism and hysteria were [...] forms of irregularity, disorder and excess, [...]and] the women’s movement was made up of hysterical females’.³⁷ In this sense, it implies that these women represent a possible danger to society as ‘aberrant femininities’.³⁸ Their physical descriptions highlight the likelihood of their insanity and unwomanly nature.



Figure 10: Cartoon, *The revolt of woman*, *Pick-me-Up*, 3 October 1903 (British Library Newspaper Collection, London).

Similarly, the third cartoon (above), which was published by *Pick-me-Up* in 1903, demonstrates a man’s surprise at the sight of his young and attractive wife holding heavy dumbbells with ease. The title ‘The revolt of woman’ gives a clue about the man’s possible feeling of emasculation and the woman defying her gender role with her ‘masculine’ behaviour. All three of these postcards show the context in which

Hamilton promoted the concepts of femininity and its roles and where her idea of reversed gender roles must have been initiated.

In such a context, *How the Vote Was Won* shows how its female characters' growing assertiveness turns Horace into an emasculated man. Horace is initially an ordinary man whose economic state only allows him to live in a reasonable house in Brixton, in which 'the [sitting] room is cheaply furnished' with a 'modest, and quite unpleasing [taste]' (p. 4). He is simply described as 'an English Master in his own house' (p. 10). On the other hand, Hamilton gives great importance to the construction of her suffragettes. Molly, for instance, is described as 'a good-looking young girl of about twenty. She is dressed in well-cut, tailor-made clothes, wears a neat little hat, and carries some golf-clubs and a few books.' (p. 18) Horace's cousin Christine is 'dressed smartly and tastefully. [She is] about forty, manners elegant, smile charming, speech resolute.' (p. 14) Maudie is 'a young woman with an aggressively cheerful manner, a voice raucous from much bellowing of music-hall songs, a hat of huge size, and a heart of gold' (p. 154). The women are deliberately constructed to dictate to Horace by making him realise that his macho ways are a result of his anxiety of being dominated by women. Throughout the course of the play, he develops into a new character, from an antihero at the start to a stubborn chauvinist, and later into a character who hides under the table when confronted by his aunt. His stereotypical anti-suffrage sentiment also changes to a pro-suffragist one as he realises that he cannot provide for these women. Therefore, the story of the women's strike becomes a parody of an anti-suffragist's incapacitated manhood. The play ends on an optimistic note in which Horace's transformation is ensured and he regains his self-confidence by converting to the right side, along with his reinstated self-assuredness: 'you many depend on me [...].When you want a thing done, get a

man to do it! Votes for Women!’ (p. 29). Accordingly, *How the Vote Was Won* makes a strong statement, mitigated by a farcical plot, and also put special emphasis on characterisation. Certainly, a successful farce aims to entertain by mocking the normal, the expected or the acceptable. It was also the play in which she shows how women of different abilities, classes and professions could unite under the umbrella of a common cause.

2.3. *A Pageant of Great Women: Female Exceptionality Redefined*

Cicely Hamilton’s *A Pageant of Great Women* is a unique example of a suffrage pageant play, in which Hamilton experiments with the theatrical representation of ‘female exceptionalism’. The play was first produced by Edith Craig at the Scala Theatre on 10 November 1909 with a large number of eminent actresses and other female artists as a part of the cast.³⁹ Although it was a play, and not a procession or a street pageant, it had the capacity to attract enough people to fill the (now Royal) Albert Hall.⁴⁰ It is a theatrical version of the increasingly popular pageants of the Edwardian suffrage movement that were repeatedly performed in the streets of London between 1906 and 1915 and, like them, it exemplifies and celebrates the richness of female attainments.⁴¹ As a strategy, it presents new ideals of femininity to ‘the ordinary woman’. The notion of ‘exceptional femininity’ is a central theme that is represented in and presented by the play.

The play creates a spectacle of women, targeting a large heterogeneous group of the audience, mainly from various suffrage societies; however, this spectacular play excludes ordinary women from its representations. The Edwardian suffrage movement, as a mass movement, had to appeal to a large section of Edwardian society in order to draw the much-needed support for its campaign. The spectacle of women, created by suffrage theatricality on and off stage, was to establish an

atmosphere of attraction, celebration and belonging. Even so, Hamilton's relying solely on the exceptional, hence the minority, for mass appeal, suggests an elitist method. It is elitist due to its exclusive idealisation of exceptionality, but her strategy has limitations in elucidating the scope and the range of exceptionality and how it could be applied to the ordinary. The rest of this section will examine the tension between the represented and the object of representation in the construction and production of the play and will attempt to show how this tension is partly resolved through a unique solution.

The popularity of the play shows that Hamilton and Craig were successful in their experimentation with a blend of civic pageantry and theatrical allegory in a contemporary context. Glynne Wickham elucidates that civic pageantry, the origins of which go back to medieval times, was 'devised specifically to welcome distinguished and powerful visitors in to the city'.⁴² Due to its size and number of participants, pageants transformed their settings, city landmarks, gates and market-crosses into temporary stages. These performances generally fulfilled different functions such as celebration, legitimisation or glorification of its subject. Deborah Sugg Ryan claims that the Edwardian pageantry was a result of 'a taste in events combining chivalry, patriotism and imperialism and Pre-Raphaelite's or Arts and Crafts movements' interest in reviving pre-industrial traditions'.⁴³ She also argues that 'whilst the subject matter of [the Oxford pageants in 1907] was drawn from the past, they embraced modernity'.⁴⁴ According to Ryan, the episodic nature of pageants and the long duration of their performances meant the emphasis was on visual spectacle and temporality rather than narrative effects.⁴⁵ Given the virtually overlapping strategies of presentation, it is also possible to assert that Hamilton created her own interpretation of the stage bordering on the *tableaux vivants* of the

Edwardian era.⁴⁶ *Tableaux vivants*' transgressive presentation of working-class women is translated into another transgressive strategy in the play through Hamilton's mostly famous and middle-class cast, which highlights the grandeur of the pageant and the photographic quality of characters.

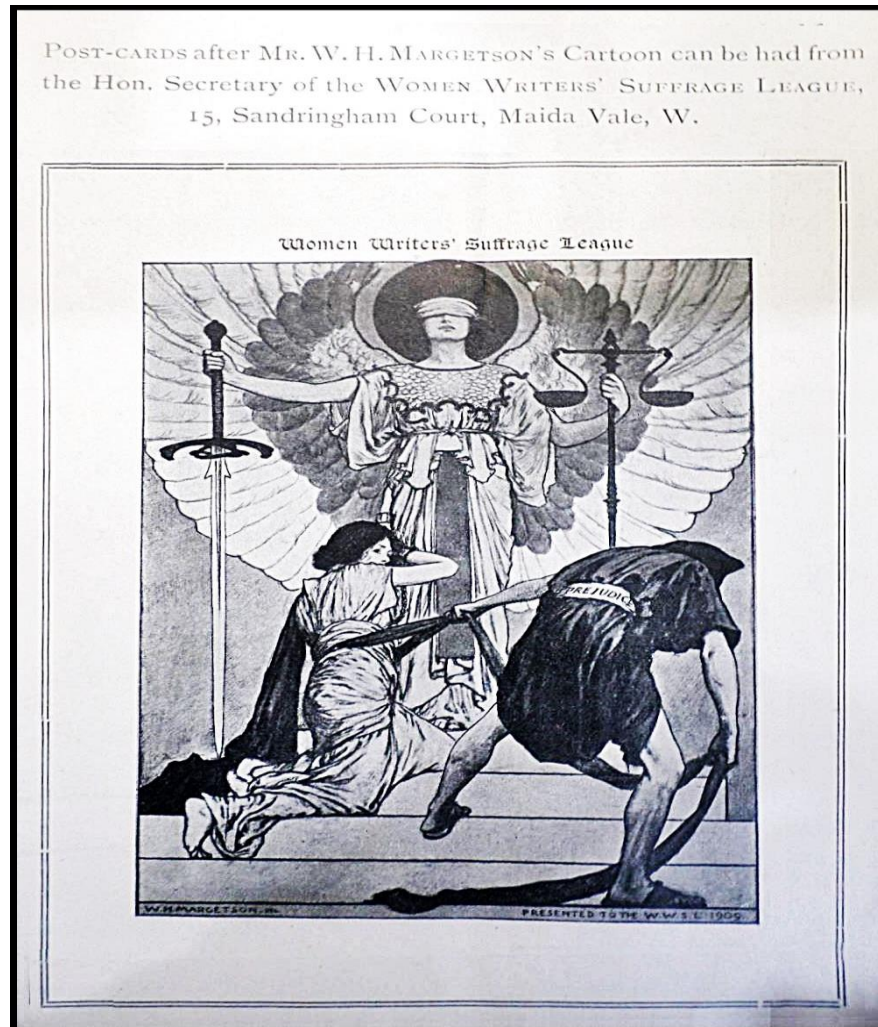


Figure 11: A suffrage cartoon by W H Margetson featuring allegorical Womanhood, Prejudice and Justice.

Regarding the play's bond with contemporary art, Hamilton acknowledged that her pageant was inspired by W H Margetson's suffrage cartoon, which showed a portrait of pro- and anti-suffrage sides as allegorical figures of Womanhood, Prejudice and the arbitrator, Justice.⁴⁷ The cartoon showed Woman being dragged with a rope by Prejudice away from the presence of Justice (possibly whilst pleading for liberties for her sex).

The actual play has a short one-act structure and is constructed in the form of a dramatic allegory. It presents a conventional story of triumph of the moral over the immoral or the right over the wrong. It opens with a scene in which two characters, Woman and Prejudice, argue heatedly about women's worthiness. Prejudice, the villain, is affiliated with masculine authority and the script says that he 'only saw [women] as a sex', 'praised a simper far above a thought' and 'prized a dimple far beyond a brain' (p. 25). He describes Woman as 'a very child in the ways of the world' who 'speaks [...] stammering foolishness' (p. 23). After the initial confrontation between these two characters, Woman sets out to introduce examples of famous women from the pages of history and narrates how they have become agents of progress. Seeing this large number of women, Justice acknowledges their justifications and pronounces: 'I give thee judgement – and judge you worthy to attain thy freedom', but also warns that Woman wants to take 'an untried path' and she 'hast very much to learn'. The play closes with Woman's words: 'I laugh [...] feeling the riot and rush of crowding hopes [...] knowing this – 'Tis good to be alive when morning dawns' (p. 49). The denouement draws a picture of optimism with the 'crowding hopes' at a 'morning dawn'. Woman happily foresees that the realm of independent femininity is certain to expand for the better and she sounds assured on women's potential and future gains on gender equality.

The selected women are distinguished and mostly elite specimens of their sex. The examples of exceptionality are presented in the play, in categories based on the common virtues and merits of accomplished women.



Figure 12: *The Daily Mirror* cover, dated 13 November 1909, shows scenes from *A Pageant of Great Women*, at the Scala Theatre, 12 November 1909 (British Library Newspaper Collections, London).

As *The Daily Mirror* presented on the cover page of its issue dated 13 November 1909, female characters were staged under the titles of ‘The Learned Women’, ‘The Artists’, ‘The Saintry Women’, ‘The Heroic Women’, ‘The Rulers’ and ‘The Warriors’.⁴⁸ In a way, they are inspirational individuals who exemplify the potential for self-progress and achievements in women. These famous women are borrowed from the pages of history and are those who have repeatedly appeared in the suffrage street pageants and spectacles. In the Women’s Coronation Procession in 1911, for

example, *The Historical Pageant* illustrated ‘the great political power held by women in the past history of [the] isles’ by featuring symbolic women such as the Abbess Hilda, Joan of Arc and Boadicea, who are embodied by women of different societies.⁴⁹ The procession also included a pageant of queens, featuring Bertha, Boadicea, Ethelflead, Eleanor, Anne Boleyn, Jane Seymour, Lady Jane Grey, Mary Queen of Scots and Henrietta Maria.⁵⁰ These women were respected examples of their sex in respect of their ranks, attainments, genius and potential.

This type of classification and promotion of popular personalities as eminent individuals and geniuses was not a new approach for Edwardian suffragists nor, in this case, was it for Hamilton. Its origins date back to the early Victorian period. Edwardian suffragists were appropriating a masculine tradition of heroism, evident in Thomas Carlyle’s *On Heroes, Hero-Worship and the Heroic in History* (1840). Carlyle identifies six ideal types of heroes: ‘heroes of the divine, prophetic, poetic, priestly, literary and kingly orders’.⁵¹ He defines the Great Men as ‘the leaders of men, [...] the modellers, patterns, [or] creators, of whatsoever the general mass of men contrived to do or to attain’.⁵² Though Carlyle’s notion of men’s greatness as the only guiding factor for human achievement is contradictory and exaggerated, it reveals a fundamental strategy of placing celebrated and gifted individuals as role models for the masses. A similar strategy is shared by Edwardian suffragists, who desired to demonstrate the diversity of female accomplishments and, at the same time, the existence of ‘common potential’ among them. Hamilton’s dramatic pageant, hence, exemplifies exceptionality in the carefully selected women to suggest that it is a tangibly evident, widespread and universal quality, available to those who recognise their own potential.

An important element of female exceptionalism in the play is the significance of talent and its public recognition. The Learned Women have potential for self-progress and their publicly accepted status is evidence of their success. Prejudice reproaches Woman, saying, 'Yet she cries for freedom!' (p. 25). He questions the legitimacy of her claim to equality without first earning it in the eye of public. This claim is similar to the one against Elizabeth Robins's Vida Levering when, during a public meeting, she is confronted by spectators who ask, 'they study music by thousands – where is their Beethoven? Where's their Plato? Where's the woman Shakespeare?'⁵³ In turn, Hamilton chooses to construct the worthiness in middle- and upper-class femininity as role models for the rest, namely 'the ordinary women', the majority of whom have not 'fought their achievement and to fame' (p. 27). In *The Pageant*, this potential is epitomised in The Learned Women such as St Teresa, Manon Roland, Jane Austen and Marie Curie. They set great examples for the ordinary woman. St Teresa is defined as 'the only woman upon whom the title of Doctor of the Church has ever been confirmed' (p. 53). She is certainly an inspiration for others by earning a recognised title from the church, a patriarchal institution, a realm in which women were underrepresented.

Jane Austen, equally, as an eminent English author, is a romantic artist and stands for the existence of middle-class female genius. Lisa Tickner notes that

suffragists were [especially] interested in the woman artist because she was a type of the skilled and independent woman, with attributes of autonomy, creativity and professional competence.⁵⁴

Female artists are unique examples of 'creative genius' in women.⁵⁵ They are accessible, visionary and highly valued members of their sex, so they maintain a crucial link between the elitist paradigms of exceptionalism and the prospects for the ordinary woman. A similar association can be maintained with the female graduate

who is promoted as one of the middle-class characters in the ranks of The Learned Women. It is noteworthy that Graduate embodies a dual identity. On the one hand, she is regarded as exceptional as she possesses an institutional, hence publicly recognised, title; on the other hand, she is an anonymous woman, 'the girl graduate of a modern day', who has fought to obtain this privilege. The author, in this way, defines education and artistic endeavour as viable paths to the recognition of women's public status. Graduate and a more inclusive group, The Learned Women, have the freedoms traditionally denied to women: 'free thought', 'free act' and 'free word' (p. 29). Accordingly, these are two categories of modern femininities that develop the potential for self-expression, creativity and advancement.

The author's presentation of queens as paragons of 'exceptional' femininity is, though, a more problematic and complicated choice. The monarchs are Elizabeth I, Victoria, Zenobia, Philippa of Hainault, Deborah, Isabella of Spain, Maria Theresa, Catherina II of Russia and the Empress of China Tsze-Hsi-An. Besides Elizabeth and Victoria who are well-known and highly esteemed queens of England, all these featured female monarchs are from different countries.⁵⁶ The universality and constancy of female achievement seem to be intended in these selections. However, more remarkably, the 'titles' of these women put them in the role of exemplary femininities. Their titles signify the cultural acceptance and official recognition of their roles. Despite that, their status is problematic since it is acquired through inheritance or marriage (ironically enough) rather than hard work, so what the queens represent complicates the very purpose of the play. Whilst prominent women such as queens empower the play's statement that women have achieved success and fame throughout the centuries and, hence, deserve the acknowledgement of their public

rights, the way in which these women earn their ranks obfuscates the boundaries of female exceptionality and its implications for the ordinary woman.

The language used to describe these women denotes reconciliation between femininity and authority. Regarding Maria Theresa and Catherine the Great, *Woman* asks, 'Who stood more high than they, who rules more kingly?', whereas there was no one 'in the Flowery land that dared to its cunning Empress to outface' (p. 38), referring to China's Tsze-Hsi-An. However, *Prejudice* asserts that ''Tis man's to reign, 'tis woman's to obey. The steady outlook, the wide thought are man's. So Nature has ordained – she cannot rule' (p. 37). The queens' existence, accordingly, undermines *Prejudice's* claim and validates the compatibility of femininity with authority. They represent authority, esteem and femininity. This bond is certainly strengthened by the selection of queens such as British monarch Elizabeth I, Palmyra's Zenobia, 'a courageous and accomplished woman; defeated by the Emperor Aurelian' (p. 63), and Catherine II, 'Empress of Russia in her own right – the right of the strongest' (p. 63). Elizabeth especially has a special status among the others.

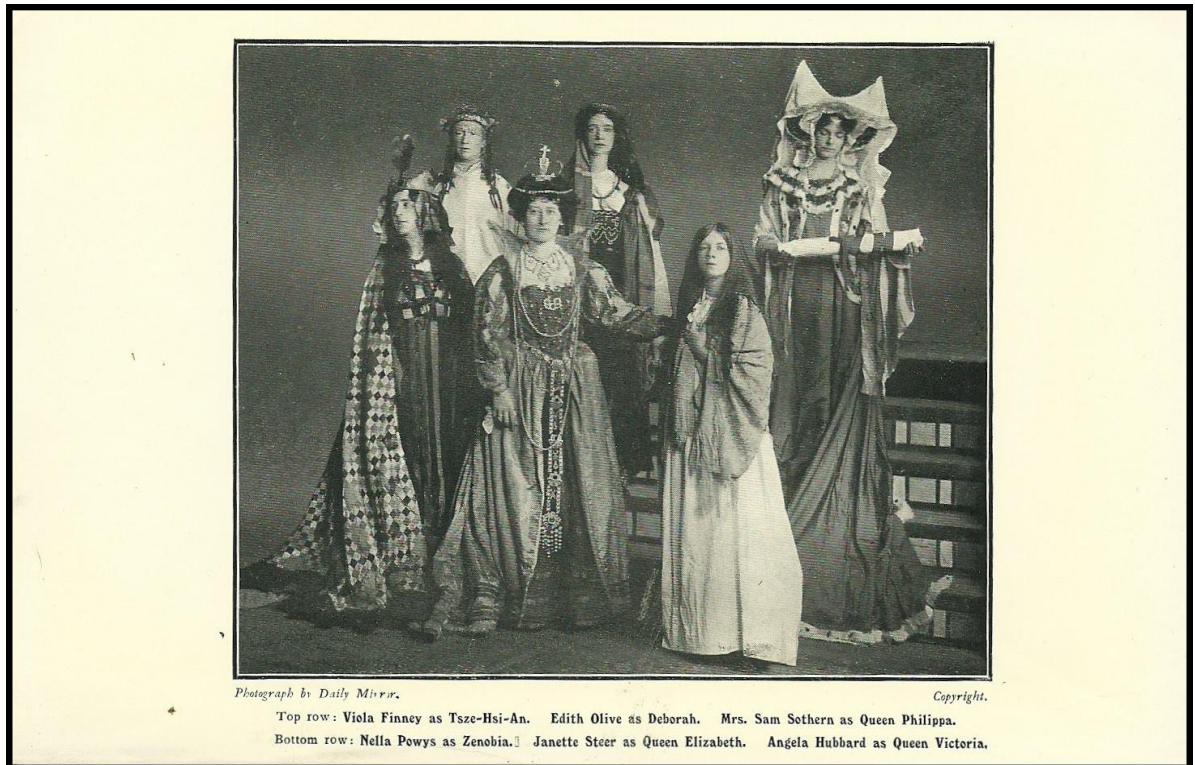


Figure 13: *Daily Mirror* photo of the Queens scene from *A Pageant of Great Women*. It features (top row) Viola Finely as Tsze-Hsi-An, Edith Olive as Deborah, Mrs Sam Sothers as Queen Philippa, (bottom row) Nella Powys as Zenobia, Jannette Steer as Queen Elizabeth and Angela Hubbard as Queen Victoria (Cicely Hamilton, *A Pageant of Great Women* (London: Suffrage Shop, 1910)).

In the *Daily Mirror*'s photograph of the play's first performance, Jannette Steer as Queen Elizabeth is shown standing in the centre of the image accompanied by the other queens. She is standing by the princess Victoria in an elevated and dignified stature and queenly costume, and has her hand on young Victoria's shoulder. She bears the emblems of her royal position with her crown, ornate dress and jewellery. Elizabeth's portrayal as the 'paradigm of queenly greatness' produces two different subtexts. In the script, she is the one whom Prejudice 'had not dared to speak to her face' (p. 37): an authoritative ruler and an alternative to male rule. She fulfils an important function of the Queens, who are chosen to personify female dominance over a realm of masculine authority. Conversely, her pose in the photo conveys an alternative meaning, which is embedded in her femininity and maternal posture. In her life, Elizabeth I remained unmarried and was believed to be a virgin. According

to Margaret Homans, 'Elizabeth needed to remain unmarried in her "body natural" in order to remain autonomous as Queen, and so used the spiritual marriage of her "body politic" to her kingdom'.⁵⁷ Elizabeth's unmarried state thus resulted in a mythical public persona. Hamilton's portrayal of Elizabeth is conceivably derived from her symbolic state as a virgin goddess and the maternal ruler of a nation. Elizabeth on stage emanates pride and greatness as though a motherly figure to Victoria, and her textual character helps argue against the disassociations between a female ruler and a masculine role.

A particularly distinct approach is employed in the construction of Queen Victoria in the play. Woman describes her as a young girl who is on a par with Elizabeth:

And see, the little maid of eighteen years
Who, on a summer morning, woke to find
Herself a queen, to reign where Bess had reigned.
You shall not put her, nor shall you put Bess,
Below the wisest of our line of kings. (p. 37)

The metaphor 'little maid' implies an inexperienced and young girl perplexed in the face of an unanticipated change in her social and public roles as the new ruler of a domain where 'women [were] never meant to be [...] monarchs [as] the throne is patrilineal'.⁵⁸ Victoria plays a significant and privileged role in representing her sex at the highest station of politics and, as Helen Rappaport puts it, '[her] long and successful reign proved that women had a peculiar fitness for governing'.⁵⁹ The image of Victoria as a respectable and admired woman is allusive, though. Hamilton accentuates the young heir's accomplishment to turn her into a prominent source of inspiration for other women. The princess's progression into queenhood 'on a summer morning' is romanticised to indicate that Victoria has gained public approval and, hence, eminence all by herself. Consequently, she is equally worthy of a rank of

her male equivalents, 'the wisest' kings. This inclusion of eminence in exceptionality reminds the reader of Carlyle's criteria of ideal types who came from the elite members of the society. There is also a fundamental paradox in Hamilton's image of self-made Victoria and the actual princess who obtains this privileged role by accident of birth rather than through her innate potential. The paradox starts with both Victoria's physical presentation on stage and the actual queen. The Queens, apart from Victoria, are presented lavishly adorned in their gowns and crowns with details such as gloves, sleeves, neck and wrist ruffs, diamonds and various other accoutrements. Highlighting their stations, they all stand upright in a proud manner,⁶⁰ which implies the criticality of these women's public image and exhibits the associations of their sphere, such as prosperity, allure and influence. On the contrary, the young Victoria stands at the centre of the scene in a white nightgown, representing domesticity and ordinariness as opposed to her exceptional status.

A fundamental contradiction arises in the author's portrayal of Victoria and the popular images of the Queen that became the basis for middle-class domesticity, which acts against the play's critical goal of presenting Victoria as solid evidence for female potential. She, as the queen, relentlessly cultivated her image as the epitome of conservative middle-class women. According to Homans, the queen's portraits and popular images established her as an obedient wife and dutiful mother in her marriage with Prince Albert, and in *"To the Queen's Private Apartments": Royal Family Portraiture and the Construction of Victoria's Sovereign Obedience*, Homans shows that there were deliberately produced royal portraits by both the monarchy itself and the media to cement Victoria's obedient and homely roles. Some of these drawings and photographs exemplify 'the typical Victorian marital portraits', in

which ‘the husband stands while the wife sits, [and sometimes] she leans [...] against the back of his chair’.⁶¹



Figure 14: Portrait, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert, Osborne, 26 July 1859.

In a royal portrait taken in 1859, Prince Albert stands in an elevated position leaning on a wall whilst Victoria is seated and looking upwards to catch his eyes.⁶² As Homans puts it, these images signify Victoria’s bodily weakness and deference as well as Albert’s more authoritative role and bodily strength.⁶³ Similarly suggestive, her family portraits function as a means of domestication of her public persona through the presence of her children. As well as being an effort to dispel Victorian society’s anxiety about female rule,⁶⁴ these portraits also give an insight into her unmistakable stance against the increasing self-sufficiency of politicised Victorian women. In one of her letters, she states that she was

the most anxious to enlist everyone who can speak or write to join in checking this mad, wicked folly of ‘Women’s rights’ [...] Feminists ought to

get a good whipping. Were woman to ‘unsex’ themselves by claiming equality with men, they would become the most hateful, heathen and disgusting of beings and would surely perish without male protection.⁶⁵

Victoria’s labelling of the feminist struggle as ‘mad’ or ‘wicked’ shows her strong denunciation of any efforts to destabilise her self-built images of middle-class domesticity. Although she was in a privileged position unlike any woman of the era, as Rappaport puts it, ‘she was a great hindrance to the movement, for she constantly reiterated her own opposition to women’s rights’ and ‘[her] journals and letters resound[ed] with such regularly made protestations of her sex’s inferiority and intellectual inadequacy’.⁶⁶ Victoria’s assertion that women would become ‘unsexed’ if they were to challenge male protection signifies the queen’s conservatism and accords with her determination to cultivate the image of ‘the submissive wife’.



Figure 15: Portrait, Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Ball, 1842.

In an 1842 portrait called *Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Ball*, Albert is presented in full armour, and he and the queen are dressed as Edward III and Queen

Philippa.⁶⁷ This image underpins a sense of masculine authority and chivalric love, depicting the kindness of a warrior towards his lover, expecting her to acknowledge him as her superior. The power of spectacle created by Victoria – in Homans’s words, the ‘royal spectacle’ – on stage is significant, as she is, at the time of the play’s writing, the most recent queen.⁶⁸ Victoria, among all her peers, had a deep impact on the Victorian and Edwardian subconscious through the circulation of her images in popular culture. Rappaport notes that ‘Victoria’s mere presence on the throne was itself sufficient to encourage many of her female subjects to call for improved civil and political rights for women’.⁶⁹ Hamilton’s selection of queens, in this sense, is clearly justifiable. Nevertheless, this choice, particularly in the case of Victoria, conflicts with her primary goal and results in a constant tension between the promotion of exceptionality and its implications on the ‘ordinary’ masses.

The remaking of popular cultural figures as exemplary exceptional women continues in *The Heroines*, *The Warriors* and *The Saintly Women*. Margaret Marshment calls these fictional female characters, who have been constantly portrayed in contemporary popular culture, ‘substantial women’. She argues that these women have ‘positive qualities culturally defined across gender boundaries’ and the positive masculine attributes, such as ‘intelligence, courage, strength, independence, resourcefulness, perseverance, wit’, are possessed by these women ‘in abundance’.⁷⁰ Hamilton’s Joan of Arc, whose legend was also the source for George Bernard Shaw’s late play *Saint Joan* (1923), was an iconic example of such kind of woman, whose story was revived and reconstructed in turn-of-the-century popular British literature. In *The Pageant*, she is defined as ‘the deliverer of France from the English’, and an image in the *Daily Mirror* shows that she embodies a masculine warrior posing in armour with a sword, which suggests her heroic and intimidating

character.⁷¹ Karyn Z Sproles describes that, in its historical context, ‘Joan’s dress, like her behaviour, challenged the male-dominated power structure of army, church, and state [...]. Joan usurped male power when she dressed for battle.’⁷² She rejects the life of an ‘ordinary’ village girl and breaks with the traditional female norm by inventing a dramatic character and constructing a new identity on qualities such as bravery and freedom. She, in Ellis’s expression, sublimates her ‘vital energy’ into heroism and her aspiration of being an autonomous woman.⁷³



Figure 16: Cicely Hamilton as Christian Davis in *A Pageant of Great Women* (Cicely Hamilton, *A Pageant of Great Women* (London: Suffrage Shop, 1910)).

Similarly, Hamilton herself appeared as Christian Davis, a female soldier, in the Scala production. In a stark contrast to what the Queens embody on stage, the cross-

dressed female fighters such as Joan of Arc or Christian Davis connote ambiguous messages about the function of masculine bodies among other women. The photo shows a self-assured and almost pompous image if her body language through her dark uniform, crossed arms and stern look is simply read. But, perhaps more than her looks, the connotations of gender ambiguity she conveys complicate her intent to portray a cohesive message on the attainability of female exceptionality. In her autobiography, Hamilton records that

A curious characteristic of the militant suffrage movement was the importance it attached to dress and appearance, and its insistence on the feminine note. [...] in the [WSPU] the coat-and-skirt effect was not favoured; all suggestion of the masculine was carefully avoided [...]. This taboo of the severer forms of garment was due, in part, to dislike of the legendary idea of the suffragette, as masculine in manner and appearance –many of the militants were extraordinarily touchy on that point.⁷⁴

Accordingly, what was the reason for Hamilton to play a woman in a masculine role? The theatrically devised disguise and cross-dressing aim to pervert the traditional representation of women as fragile and needing protection. However, the image of a masculine female in disguise also counters the traditional boundaries and duality of the gender performance. Hamilton's conscious decision to play a man seems to be a feminist choice as well as a suffragist one. The theatricality of her role enables her to freely construct a masculine woman to indicate the fluidity of identity on stage. The fixed gender roles can easily be contested through the act of remaking by performance, and her act is clearly performative. Whilst she portrays an exceptional woman, her cross-dressing transforms her into an exceptional woman among all other characters as she actively resists the restrictions forced on her during the performance. Hamilton seems to be rejecting 'the taboo' of women's obligation to stay in the lines drawn out of her control by an ideology that does not recognise her as a legitimate member of public life. Thus, the theatricality of her role legitimises

her presentation of alternative images of exceptional womanhood. She also reinstates the place of women in performance, who were barred from theatres until the end of Renaissance when female roles were exclusively played by men, and the genre of civic pageantry was not an exception to this exclusion.

The play's interaction with popular cultural elements is not strictly exclusive to the characters and their representations. The measure of success of Hamilton's argument lies in the play's ability to fascinate a significant crowd of Edwardian women and, when possible, men. A successful example of this is the suffrage event *The Green, White, and Gold Fair*, which was organised by the WFL in 1909.⁷⁵ The event at Caxton Hall, Westminster, was designed by Edith Craig, 'who was responsible for the entire decorative scheme' and she was openly appreciated by the speakers for her 'skill, invention and artistic genius' and for the 'beauty' and certainly the artistic quality of the event.⁷⁶ *The Times* notes that, like all the women at the event, 'Ellen Terry [the famous actress of the popular stage] was dressed in the costumes of a lady of rank of the 15th century'.⁷⁷ This can be better understood by considering suffragists' insistence on visibility, which, in Lisa Tickner's words, is related to the age's politics of 'seeing as believing'.⁷⁸ According to Tickner, 'if carefully attuned to the sensibilities of the watching crowds, [visual performances] could be a powerful instrument in winning their sympathies'.⁷⁹ In this context, Hamilton and Craig put celebrated, hence exceptional, women on stage such as Ellen Terry, Lena Ashwell, Lila McCarthy, Marion Terry and themselves. Terry, who played Nance Oldfield, 'one of the earliest and most celebrated English actresses', posed in front of a mirror, possibly getting dressed for a stage performance. Her garment is finely adorned and accompanied by a silk or satin white bonnet, which was a popular style for women in the mid-nineteenth century.⁸⁰ Her appearance

emphasises the femininity and propriety of a famous middle-class actress and she, as a popular actress, signifies how Hamilton and Craig care about the visual power of femininity on display. Terry had a stable image in Edwardian popular culture as the leading Shakespearean actress who portrayed Imogen, Beatrice, Cordelia and Margaret of Anjou throughout her career. It is vital to note that these women on stage were self-fashioning, making the play fashionable through their celebrity identities. This marks the desire to theatricalise the exceptional past of women as well as the involvement of popular theatre actresses in a spectacularly self-fashioned and self-defined way. Katherine Cockin notes that the *Daily Mirror*'s front page photos of the play showed 'the new photojournalism, its minimal captions and the implication the picture-says-it-all depoliticized the play as a gathering of famous and beautiful women in fancy dress'.⁸¹ Therefore, the play substantiates 'exceptionality', which, as a concept, closely relates to individual potential as an essential female quality, through evidence of the living examples.

1909.
Saturday, December 11. — Yuletide Festival, Albert Hall, 4-10.

The Storming of London -

The magnificent **WOMAN'S PAGEANT** presented at the Scala Theatre last Friday under the Management of Miss Edith Craig has taken London by storm.

The *Daily News* says:
"Never has such a magnificent apotheosis of the heroines of history been seen on the London stage."

This Pageant will be repeated, by arrangement with Miss Edith Craig, at the

ALBERT HALL ON DEC. 11th.

Miss **ELLEN TERRY** will appear as **Nance Oldfield**, Mrs. Langtry, Mrs. Brown-Potter, Miss Pauline Chase, and Miss Margaret Halstan will also take part.

Come to the **Albert Hall** to see the
"Dream of Fair Women!"

"PRESS CUTTINGS," by G. Bernard Shaw.

NEW PLAYS by Cicely Hamilton, Christopher St. John, Hester Hatton, Mrs. Alice Chapin.

SPEECHES by Mr. Israel Zangwill, Mrs. Despard, Mrs. Billington Greig, Mrs. Arnold-Liffé Sansoni!

Take your tickets early to prevent disappointment.
Tickets **2/6, 1/-.** Children **6d.**

Figure 17: Woman's Pageant playbill for the Albert Hall performance on 11 December 1909.

Producing very large events like the one at the Albert Hall on 11 December 1909 served the purpose of attracting people to the suffrage meetings and bringing interest and publicity. The impact of theatricality for such an event is difficult to ignore. The Albert Hall was an emblematic stage for women to present themselves. It was true for both the actresses and largely female audiences. A striking aspect was the overall theatricality created by their participants, which meant a more powerful and spectacular effect than the large productions of the late-nineteenth-century West End stage.⁸² *The Vote* records about the first performance at the Scala ‘the audience were representatives of every form of suffrage society, [...] united by the same kindly intention – to help these two leagues [...]’.⁸³ The account clearly emphasises the diverse, collective and participatory nature of the first performance. Similarly, the larger scale of the Albert Hall performance stresses the intention of Edwardian suffragists to make a statement as exceptional, increasingly visible and strong women. The suffragists’ use of spectacle through large events was intended to make their demands more difficult to ignore and to make a statement through their presence and celebration in large numbers. This both encourages the act of publicising and popularising women and exploits ‘the tension [and the possibilities] between art and entertainment [...] in the female body’.⁸⁴ Hamilton’s play specifically created an event of the exceptional women – live, stimulating and extremely popular among Edwardian suffragists, due to the prevalent fashion for being not only a spectator but also a part of the spectacle. This suited the soul of the commercialised and increasingly theatricalised Edwardian public life.

The play was also performed in different venues outside London such as Middlesbrough, the Grand Opera House in Sunderland, the Victoria Hall in Ipswich, and the Public Hall in Portsmouth all in October 1910.⁸⁵ Julie Holledge notes that

'*The Pageant* proved so popular that suffrage societies all over the country performed it'.⁸⁶ One reason for this was the minimal requirement of speaking parts, stage directions and few rehearsals; that is, other than the three allegorical characters, Justice, Woman and Prejudice, and a small part originally played by Ellen Terry, no other characters contribute to the dialogue. Its minimal requirements of stage decoration, theatrical effects and the abstract staging offer a sense of universality and timelessness of female exceptionalism and indicate the play's abundance of different times and locations. It is also important that Edith Craig, who possessed the production rights to the play and 'wanted to encourage women to express themselves through theatre, directed local productions in Eastbourne, Southport and Bristol. The AFL, of which Craig was a member and the director of its theatre endeavours, 'provided the costumes and leading performers and the Great Women were cast from the local suffragists'.⁸⁷ The performance at Beckenham Town Hall in Harrogate on 24 September 1910 was one of the examples of this quality of the play. *The Vote* reported that

The Pageant of Great Women was very impressive [...]. The Pageant aroused the sympathy of the whole audience. There was manifestly a vivid, eager interest in every word of the contest between Woman and Prejudice, and a wave of agreement and appreciation passed through all the auditors when Justice pronounced her decision – a sense of unity expressed as strongly by the tense silence that followed the words of justice as by the hearty applause that broke forth at the conclusion of the performance.⁸⁸

The performance in Harrogate shows how women watched, celebrated and contributed to the overall atmosphere enthusiastically, being a part of the performance. Their reaction to Prejudice's lines and their celebration of the women's words show both their psychological and physical involvement in the performance. It was also important that local performances of *The Pageant* prioritised participation and involvement over reputation. In these performances, female roles were played by

ordinary society members or amateur actresses. In a document on the arrangements necessary for these performances, Craig requires

1. That I myself stage and manage the performance.
[...]
3. That the three speaking parts are played by professionals. The other characters (numbering from 53 to 72 required) can be played by amateurs.
[...]
7. That your society is responsible for getting together the cast, with the exception of the professionals, and for all expenses incurred by the performance.⁸⁹

Craig clearly opened the play to amateur involvement and encouraged women to participate in the performances. The relationship between the exceptional and the ordinary is thus rebuilt. Whilst the glory of the past is still created on stage as an instrument of romanticising women's accomplishments, collectivism in production suggests the possibility of this potential for the simple woman, contributing to the play's main purpose of defining exceptionality as an accessible status. The play celebrates eminent women but also allows ordinary women to take part, embody and model themselves on the figures promoted on stage. Especially in the performances outside London, its production included collaboration, and thus Hamilton and Craig seem to offer a material and practical solution to the play's elitist nature. They allowed women to collaborate and thus promote themselves in the performance. Accordingly, the play achieves to fulfil its primary and the most important function, by raising their feminist arguments in every part of the country and attracting and recruiting women to the production.

2.4. Afterword

Cicely Hamilton presents the limitations and possibilities of independent femininity in Edwardian society in her three plays, *Diana of Dobson's*, *How the Vote Was Won* and *A Pageant of Great Women*, which helped spread her belief in the movement's

significance for both exceptional and ordinary women. Her suffrage plays were a success in establishing the link between women's political theatre and mainstream Edwardian theatre, as the former needed strategies used on the popular stage to draw new participants from the different ranks of Edwardian public life. The success of these plays was also decisive in reassuring and opening a new realm for other actresses and artists to write their own feminist or political plays.

Diana of Dobson's represents Hamilton's conceptions of marriage as an insincere trade between sexes. Although the play is constructed in a genre where shop girls are glamorised, attractive and adventurous, it also criticises the idea of marriage as a financial haven for women. The popular ending of musical comedies offers an optimistic solution to women's woes in a ruthless economical system in which they are forced to work as single women. Hamilton, on the other hand, rejects the idea of a happy mercenary marriage. Therefore, Diana accepts Captain Bretherton's marriage proposal only after she is assured that he genuinely loves her and he could understand Diana better as he struggled to secure a job without spending his money for three months. Even so, the play's resolution shows a compromise between Hamilton's feminist views on marriage and female self-sufficiency and her desire to produce a successful play in both theatrical and financial aspects.

Diana of Dobson's is mainly concerned with the potential and possibilities of ordinary women in the new commercial age. Her aim seems to be to provide a snapshot of an ordinary woman's role and miseries in the midst of mass consumption and employment. Starting off as an inexperienced drapery worker, Diana experiences a hard life in a shop-assistant dorm that she calls 'the beastly den' (p. 87). Although her inheritance provides her with a provisional status as a middle-class lady in the

Swiss Alps and allows her to enjoy physical luxuries, the play questions the extent of freedom available for a woman without stable financial means and the possibility of female self-sufficiency in public life.

Hamilton's second suffrage play, *How the Vote Was Won*, is another examination of the ordinary woman's place in the suffrage movement. *How the Vote Was Won* has a farcical plot that offers an optimistic view on the future of women's rights and independence. Specifically, it portrays two sides of femininity, one in which women still live a life without their own identities and desires for self-sufficiency and the other in which women choose activism and a dignified life while having professional identities. Hamilton urges women to participate in the suffrage movement in order to make their own choices and attain exceptionality by developing, promoting and demonstrating their capacities in various forms. Horace's initial emasculation and subsequent transformation from a so-called anti-suffragist 'macho' into a supporter of the women's strike also suggests that collective action of femininity is the only way for women to achieve recognition of their public status and personal achievements.

Hamilton, in *A Pageant of Great Women* particularly, puts well-known and highly respected actresses on show and devises a performance to promote exceptional women and their various achievements throughout history. As a presentational strategy, the play achieved huge success by staging well-known and exemplary femininities. Nevertheless, the author's selection of characters who are overt opponents of women's enfranchisement contradicts the original purpose of the play as an artistic piece of political propaganda. This contradiction is especially obvious in the characters such as Queen Victoria, who fiercely opposed contemporary feminism and promoted her image as the epitome of 'respectable'

middle-class femininity through her images and writings during her reign. Yet the play's significance was its success in imitating the strategies from popular forms of *tableaux vivants* and historical pageants and presenting a large number of eminent women, such as actresses, writers and public speakers, to the public as supporters of the movement. Hamilton's clearly conveys her message that women's demands cannot be ignored thanks to the presence and contribution of the 'exceptional' women.

The promotion and recognition of women's individual progress and self-sufficiency are critical in Hamilton's drama. What Hamilton criticises are the restrictions imposed on ordinary women that limit their ability to stand up for themselves. In *Diana of Dobson's*, Diana's inheritance gives her a chance to reclaim her personal freedom. With the help of financial security, social classes become temporary boundaries that can be easily transcended. However, the prevalence of a system that offers no opportunities for women outside matrimony hinders their capacity to progress further. It was on this basis that the suffrage movement was able to bring a variety of women together and to forge such strong links with the broader reform movements of the day. However, Hamilton's representational strategies do not suggest a completely straightforward solution to this. In *The Pageant*, on the other hand, an alternative solution is devised. On the one hand, the representation of famous women creates a number of oppositional and sometimes contradictory images of femininity, which interact with the already circulating images of these women. Also, the richness and plurality of character meant a whole new idea of exceptional women guiding the ordinary women, which, though it seemed to be elitist, still worked to unify women around the performance. This is also in line with the suffragists' goal of attracting masses to the movement to persuade the majority of

Edwardian society of the legitimacy and importance of political rights for women. Finally, the revival of the play in different settings by different casts and for different audiences, generally from within the ordinary ranks of English women, offers both a material and theatrical solution to the recurring question of how to link the ordinary and the exceptional, temporarily resolved in suffrage performance. This also suggests that, despite the contradictions and fragmentations in strategies and ideas, the suffrage movement still offered women roles that they could experiment with as public speakers, newspaper editors, columnists, feminist theoreticians, committee members, political activists, writers and playwrights, which allowed them to pursue an exceptional life, of which Hamilton's career and life was clear evidence.

¹ See Appendix 3 for Hamilton's portrait kept in the production file of the Pioneer Players, V&A Museum Theatre Collections, file number THM/384/27/11.

² Hamilton says that 'I set to work and wrote one or two plays – so far as I remember, with very little hope that I should ever see any of them staged' (p. 59) and adds that 'I should call myself a pessimist – I have too much capacity for enjoyment; but perhaps as the result of an unhappy, frightened childhood, I am apt to expect very little – certainly I never count on success' (Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1935), pp. 60–61).

³ Lena Ashwell, *Actress, Patriot and Pioneer* (Hertfordshire: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2012), p. 74.

⁴ *Ibid*, p. 78.

⁵ Lis Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton: Actress, Writer, Suffragist* (London: The Women's Press, 1990), p. 39.

⁶ *Ibid*, p. 39.

⁷ Hamilton, *Life Errant*, p. 60.

⁸ See Ashwell, *Actress, Patriot and Pioneer*, p. 60.

⁹ Cicely Hamilton, *Diana of Dobson's: A Romantic Comedy in Four Acts* (Peterborough, Ont.: Broadview Press, 2003), p. 88. This edition will hereafter be used as the primary text and any further quotes will be provided with page numbers in the body of the text.

¹⁰ "'A Serious "Cinderella": Clement Princess', *The Observer*, 23 December 1906.

¹¹ The List of Plays staged in London Theatres, *The Era Almanac*, 1906.

¹² Len Platt, *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890–1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 104.

¹³ Erika Diane Rappaport, *Shopping for Pleasure: Women in the Making of London's West End* (Princeton, N.J., Chichester: Princeton University Press, 2001), p. 198.

¹⁴ Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade*, p. 53.

¹⁵ Sheila Stowell observes that 'although Ashwell required few alterations to the script, she did request a change of title'. (Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1992), pp. 76–77.

¹⁶ Rappaport, p. 195.

¹⁷ Bailey, p. 44.

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- ¹⁸ Maroula Joannou, in *The Dictionary of National Biography*, states that *Marriage as a Trade* offers ‘a robustly forthright, witty, and uncompromising outburst of indignation against the Edwardian family and the tyranny of marriage which women were often compelled to enter because it was the only trade for which they had received any training’.
- ¹⁹ Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade*, p. 115.
- ²⁰ Peter Bailey, ‘Parasexuality and Glamour: the Victorian Barmaid as Cultural Prototype’, *Gender & History*, 1.2 (1990), p. 150.
- ²¹ Christopher P. Hosgood, “‘Mercantile Monasteries’: Shops, Shop Assistants, and Shop Life in Late-Victorian and Edwardian Britain’, *Journal of British Studies*, 38.3 (1999), pp. 322–352.
- ²² Stowell, p. 96.
- ²³ ‘A Witty Suffragette’, *Star*, 28 August 1909, p. 3.
- ²⁴ ‘Music At The Kingsway Theatre’, *The Times*, 7 January 1909, p. 8.
- ²⁵ *Ibid*, p. 8.
- ²⁶ ‘At the Theatre by S. H. Strong: Kingsway Theatre’, *The Musical Standard*, 23 January 1909, p. 62.
- ²⁷ ‘Woman Suffrage’, *The Times*, 16 April 1901, p.8.
- ²⁸ *Ibid*, p. 8.
- ²⁹ Katherine Cockin notes that the play was performed in venues from the modest Corn Exchange, Stratford-upon-Avon, in 1909 to the Caxton Hall in London, where the WFL’s Green, White, and Gold Fair was held in April 1909. Craig also acted in *How the Vote Was Won* as Aunt Lizzie. (Cockin, p. 84.)
- ³⁰ ‘The Spirit of the Movement: Miss Cicely Hamilton’s Speech at the Bijou Theatre on Jan. 3’, *The Vote*, 1911, p. 140.
- ³¹ *Ibid*, p. 140.
- ³² *Marriage as a Trade*, p. 14.
- ³³ ‘The Spirit of the Movement’, p. 140.
- ³⁴ ‘Their Own Way to Live: Miss Cicely Hamilton on the Women’s Movement’, *The Manchester Guardian*, 1914, p. 13.
- ³⁵ *Pall Mall Gazette*, 1909. Also quoted in Whitelaw, p. 84.
- ³⁶ *Ibid*, p. 8.
- ³⁷ Tickner, p. 194.
- ³⁸ *Ibid*, p. 194.
- ³⁹ Whitelaw, p. 86.
- ⁴⁰ Katherine Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869–1947): Dramatic Lives* (London: Cassell, 1998), pp. 97–98.
- ⁴¹ Lisa Tickner claims that pageants as well as processions were hugely popular among the Edwardian suffrage societies, among which The Pageant of Women’s Trades and Professions, organised by the Artist’s Suffrage League and The London Society, took place in London on 27 April 1909. Similarly, the Women’s Coronation Procession was organised on 17 June 1911 by WSPU, which included different pageant groups such as *The Prisoner’s Pageant*, *The Historical Pageant* and *The Pageant of Empire*. For more details, see the chapter on ‘Spectacle’ in Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), pp. 55–151.
- ⁴² Glyne Wickham, *A History of the Theatre* (London: Phaidon Press Limited, 1992), p. 94.
- ⁴³ Deborah Sugg Ryan, “‘Pageantitis’: Frank Lascelles’ 1907 Oxford Historical Pageant, Visual Spectacle and Popular Memory’, *Visual Culture in Britain*, 8.2 (2007), pp. 63–80, (p. 64.)
- ⁴⁴ *Ibid*, p. 69.
- ⁴⁵ *Ibid*, p. 67.
- ⁴⁶ According to Rosemary Barrow, the *tableaux vivant* was a theatrical form that classicised popular theatre with a focus on authentic historical settings and female subjects. It normally included a group of costumed actors who pose without speaking or moving throughout the performance. It marries the art forms of the stage with those of painting or photography. For a further discussion, see Rosemary Barrow, ‘Toga Plays and Tableaux Vivants: Theatre and Painting on London’s Late-Victorian and Edwardian Popular Stage’, *Theatre Journal*, 64(2010), pp. 209–26.
- ⁴⁷ Whitelaw, p. 86. In addition, in the 1910 edition, there is an acknowledgement of Mr W. H. Margetson’s inspirational role in the creation of the play. (Cicely Hamilton, *A Pageant of Great Women* (London: The Suffrage Shop, 1910), p. 11.)
- ⁴⁸ In the 1910 version, the female characters are listed as follows: *The Learned Women*: Hypatia, St Teresa, Lady Jane Grey, Madame de Stael, Madame Roland, Madame de Scudery, Jane Austen,

George Sand, Caroline Herschell, Madam Curie, Graduate; *The Artists*: Sappho, Vittoria Colonna, Angelica Kauffman, Vigee le Brun, Rosa Bonheur, Margaret Van Eyck, Nance Oldfield; *The Saintly Women*: St Hilda, Elizabeth Fry, Elizabeth of Hungary, Catherina of Siena, Charlotte of Siena; *The Heroic Women*: Charlotte Corday, Flora Macdonald, Kate Barlass, Grace Darling; *The Rulers*: Victoria, Elizabeth, Zenobia, Philippa, Deborah, Isabella, Catherine the Great, Tsze-Hsi-An; *The Warriors*: Joan of Arc, Boadicea, Agnes of Dunbar, Emilie Plater, Ranee of Jhansi, Maid of Saragossa, Christian Davies, Hannah Snell, Mary Ann Talbot, Florence Nightingale. (Cicely Hamilton, *A Pageant of Great Women* (London: The Suffrage Shop, 1910), pp. 16–17.

⁴⁹ Tickner, p. 126.

⁵⁰ *Ibid*, p. 128.

⁵¹ P. David Marshall, *Celebrity and Power: Fame and Contemporary Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), p. 8.

⁵² Henry David Gray, ed., *On Heroes, Hero-worship, and the Heroic in History* (New York and London: Green and Co., 1906), p. 1.

⁵³ Elizabeth Robins, 'Votes for Women: A Play in Three Acts', in *Votes for Women and Other Plays*, Susan Croft, ed. (Twickenham: Aurora Metro Press, 2009), pp. 21–107, p. 76.

⁵⁴ Tickner, p. 14.

⁵⁵ Tickner writes that 'the question of woman's cultural creativity was constantly raised by their opponents as a reason for denying them the vote'. (p. 14)

⁵⁶ In the 1910 edition, an appendix that gives brief historical accounts of the characters is available. It tells us that Zenobia was the queen of Palmyra from 267 A.D. to 273 A.D.; Philippa of Hainault, who lived between 1314 and 1369, was the wife of Edward III; Deborah is described as the one to whom the children of Israel came for judgement; Isabella of Spain (1450–1504) was the queen of Castile in her own right and the joint ruler of Spain with her husband; Maria Theresa (1717–80) was the queen of Hungary and the empress of Austria by marriage; and Tsze-Hsi-An, who was born in 1834 and died in 1908, was the empress of China.

⁵⁷ Homans, p. 4.

⁵⁸ *Ibid*, p. 1.

⁵⁹ Rappaport, p. 363.

⁶⁰ Top row: Viola Finney as Tsze-Hsi-An, Edith Olive as Deborah, Mrs Sam Sothern as Queen Philippa. Bottom row: Nella Powys as Zenobia, Janette Steer as Queen Elizabeth, Angela Hubbard as Queen Victoria. Photograph by the *Daily Mirror* (*A Pageant of Great Women*, p. 36).

⁶¹ Homans, p. 15.

⁶² See Homans, p. 32. Photograph by J. J. E. Mayall, Queen Victoria and Princess Albert, 15 May 1860.

⁶³ Homans, p. 15.

⁶⁴ Homans explains this as a dual anxiety: 'being a Queen may grant improper power to a woman, [...] and also, a proper woman may be too weak to be a monarch even of a parliamentary democracy' (p. 8).

⁶⁵ A letter to Sir Theodore Martin by Queen Victoria, 1870. Quoted in A. C. Grayling, *Towards the Light: A Story of the Struggles for Liberty and Rights That Made the Modern West* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), p. 194.

⁶⁶ Rappaport, p. 426.

⁶⁷ Homans, p. 16. See the image by Sir Edward Landseer, *Queen Victoria and Prince Albert at the Ball of 12 May 1842*.

⁶⁸ Homans puts forward that, during Victoria's reign, 'the monarchy's success arose from its transformation into a popular spectacle during the nineteenth century; it was during that time that the association between royal spectacle and middle-class practices and values came to seem the permanent hallmark of the royal family. This spectacle depended for its effectiveness on Victoria's gender. At any historical period a woman is perhaps more readily transformed into spectacle than a man.' (Homans, p. 4.)

⁶⁹ Rappaport, p. 426.

⁷⁰ Margaret Marshment, 'Substantial women', *The Female Gaze* (1988), pp. 27-43 (p. 33).

⁷¹ Pauline as Joan of Arc, Elizabeth Kirby as Boadicea, Munci Capel as Ranee of Jhansi, Frances Wetherall as Agnes Dunbar. Photograph by the *Daily Mirror* (*A Pageant of Great Women*, p. 46).

⁷² Karyn Z. Sproles, 'Cross-Dressing for (Imaginary) Battle: Vita Sackville-West's Biography of Joan of Arc', *Biography*, 19.2 (1996), pp. 158–177.

⁷³ Delap points out that “vital force” or “vital energy” was a prominent trope in the plays of G.B. Shaw and many modernist writers, and was seen as an alternative “engine” of evolution to the survival of fittest postulated by Darwin. Evolutionary theory had been influential in encouraging ideas of “higher types”.’ (Delap, p. 105).

⁷⁴ Hamilton, *Life Errant*, p. 61.

⁷⁵ ‘Woman Suffrage: Green, White and Gold Fair’, *The Times*, 16 April 1909, p. 8.

⁷⁶ *The Times* records that ‘[the] hall was tastefully decorated with the colours of the league, and suspended from the ceiling were the 57 banners for those who have been imprisoned in Holloway’. (Ibid, p. 8.)

⁷⁷ ‘Woman Suffrage: Green, White and Gold Fair’, *The Times*, 16 April 1909, p. 8.

⁷⁸ Tickner, p. 56.

⁷⁹ Ibid, p. 56.

⁸⁰ A bonnet was a common accessory and symbol of middle-class femininity in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries; it was an indispensable part of feminine attire through its different shapes and styles. For further discussion, see Cecil Willett Cunnington, *Fashion and Women's Attitudes in the Nineteenth Century* (Courier Dover Publications, 1937).

⁸¹ Cockin, p. 94.

⁸² Melodrama, historical dramas and comedies were popular plays of Victorian and Edwardian theatres such as the Gaiety Theatre, the Lyceum (Strand) and St James's Theatre. The theatres' use of spectacular stage effects was common and attracted scores of audiences to these companies. See Michael R. Booth, *Victorian Spectacular Theatre, 1850–1910* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981).

⁸³ *The Vote*, 1909.

⁸⁴ Barrow, p. 225.

⁸⁵ *The Vote*, 1 October 1910.

⁸⁶ Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press, 1981), p. 71.

⁸⁷ Ibid, p. 71.

⁸⁸ *The Vote*, ‘The Pageant at Beckenham’, 1 October 1910, p. 275.

⁸⁹ ‘Expenses and arrangements for a production of A Pageant of Great Women’, by Edith Craig, British Library Ellen Terry Collection.

Chapter 3. Fashioning the Actress in the Plays of Christopher St John

3.1. Introduction: St John, Her Circle and the Pioneer Players

Christopher Marie St John, whose birth name was Christabel Marshall (1871–1960), was a writer, actress and translator who brought extraordinary productions to life with her lifelong companion Edith Craig, the daughter of famous actress Ellen Terry and a theatre director as well as an actress. She initially performed in Henrik Ibsen's *The Vikings* in 1903 and also appeared in a play titled *The Mistress of the Robes* by Clo Graves. In addition to her articles in Pamela Colman Smith's magazine, *The Green Sheaf*, she wrote Ellen Terry's biographies.¹ Nevertheless, she was secretive about her own life, refusing to write her autobiography. Despite being a prolific writer and translator at the time, no biographical source is available today to reveal the exact details of her life, literature and private writings.

Some of her noteworthy works emerged through her literary collaborations. She was the co-writer of Hamilton's *How the Vote Was Won* and *The Pot and the Kettle*, and she produced *The Coronation* with Charles Thursby in 1911. Her *The First Actress* and *The Pageant of the Stage* were particularly popular pieces, performed by the Pioneer Players and received well by spectators and critics. Katherine Cockin notes that she contributed to the Pioneer Players, Craig's theatre society as dramatist, translator and actor.² Among St John's numerous productions, her translation-adaptation of Hrotsvit's *Paphnutius* and her own play *The First Actress* were emblematic, with their representations of pioneering theatrical women who were well respected due to their contribution to the liberation of women in theatre. These women were an inspiration to St John and her contemporaries in their struggle for rights and freedom.

To appreciate St John's contribution to suffrage theatre, it is critical to understand the function of the Pioneer Players (1911–25), a theatre society controlled by women, through which Craig and St John transformed the stage for actresses. The Pioneer Players, in this sense, was the 'embodiment of the woman's theatre' and aimed to provide space for both male and female playwrights, suffragists and actresses from different theatrical genres.³ Craig had been 'a managing member of the Stage Society from 1899 to 1903'.⁴ She prepared all the costumes for *Robespierre*, which was performed at the Lyceum under the direction of Irving in 1899.⁵ She launched a costume shop and hired costumes to many London productions.⁶ Her talent in costume and stage design gave plays a distinctive aesthetic and brought admiration from both her collaborators and audience. After she left the Actresses' Franchise League, she became a central figure in the production of suffrage plays as well as other experimental drama by lesser-known writers.

Craig founded the Pioneer Players in 1911. Terry was president of the society while St John was a writer, translator and producer. Bernard Shaw and Laurence Housman were on the advisory committee providing guidance and support to Craig and St John.⁷ Cockin notes that the subjects most frequently examined in plays performed by the Pioneer Players were 'women as workers; women's position in, and especially out of, marriage; prostitution; and women's history'.⁸ This was apparent in productions such as *How the Vote Was Won*, *A Pageant of Great Women*, *A Pageant of Stage* and *The First Actress* and productions of European drama such as *The Good Hope* and Bernard Shaw's *Mrs Warren's Profession*, as well as the Pioneer Players' Shakespeare productions.⁹ Fisher asserts that Craig was indebted to Irving for her vision and knowledge of theatre as she 'learned the same lesson her brother had, – all the elements of theatrical production, no matter the scale, must be

carefully planned and integrated to achieve the desired unified effect'.¹⁰ This appears to be why most plays produced by Craig feature meticulously prepared costumes, acting, music, lighting and theatrical effects depending on the play's requirements. This is especially obvious in her detailed prop lists, expense sheets, notes on staging, characterisation and actors that she prepared as a director for the Pioneer Players.¹¹ In a letter sent to prospective authors by the society, it is clearly explained that the society was not one of the independent private theatres of the time. The letter reads that 'the society is responsible for the cost of production. No fees are paid to authors', and it adds that 'the producer is instructed to consult with the author or his representative, and, as far as thought advisable, to carry out his wishes in details of production'.¹² It is apparent that Craig's vision of the Pioneer Players was to create a theatre that rebuffed financial revenues in traditional terms; instead, her stage was intended to serve amateurs, new playwrights and women in addition to renowned writers when their plays merited production.

Actresses played a key role in the formulation of the policies of theatrical societies established by Edwardian women. Kerry Powell, in her book *Women and Victorian Theatre*, notes that 'a life in the theatre offered women a voice – the ability to speak compellingly while others, including men, sat in enforced silence, waiting in suspension for the next word'.¹³ For women, especially those desiring to be in the limelight, wanting to be listened to and admired by others, acting was undeniably a matchless profession in Victorian and Edwardian times. This is perhaps due to the fact that it 'permitted the actress a limited freedom and certain power' over things and people concerning her within the limits of her role in public.¹⁴ Edwardian actresses went beyond social and cultural margins by participating in and pioneering a literary and artistic movement within suffrage politics.

Ellen Terry was one of these women, perhaps the most well-known and appreciated throughout her career, which stretched over more than three decades until war broke out, when most theatrical efforts stopped. St John's relationship with Terry went beyond co-operation, though. St John admired Terry because of her gifts as a performer and her position as one of the greatest actresses of her time. Given that suffrage theatre was dominated by actress-writers more than any other profession, the images and representations of actresses are pivotal in the text, performance and staging of these plays. St John wrote plays exalting the status of the actress, which is exemplified by her contributions to the suffrage pageants. Three of her plays, *The Wilson Trail* (1909), *The First Actress* (1911) and her adaptation of Hrotsvit's *Paphnutius* (1912), will be examined in order to discuss female acting, actresses' roles and their image in the light of St John's arguments for women's political and professional emancipation. The next section will discuss St John's revision of the image of the actress as a working woman in relation to their representation on the popular stage and in realist suffrage plays.

3.2. St John's Revision of the Working-class Musical Comedy Actress in *The Wilson Trial*

The Wilson Trial was St John's first attempt to write a play about the actress and her image in the Edwardian public eye.¹⁵ The copy of the play kept in the Lord Chamberlain's Manuscript Collections shows that the play was submitted for licence in 1909, but there is no information or date regarding its licence, and it also was not included in *The Era Almanac 1909*, which lists the major theatrical productions in London at the time. However, *The Stage Year Book 1910* shows that the play was performed at the Court Theatre in London, on 14 December 1909.¹⁶ There is no available information about its further performances at the Court nor at other London

or provincial theatres. Regarding her other productions, the records show that St John also submitted another play titled *Eriksons' Wife* in 1904. According to *The Stage Year Book 1909*, she staged *On the East Side* at the Court Theatre in 7 July 1908.¹⁷ Her request for a public performance of *Coronation* (1911) was rejected by the Lord Chamberlain on the basis that its subject matter was the monarchs and the representation of the members of the British monarchy in drama was forbidden at the time; however, the play was performed privately in 1912.¹⁸

The Wilson Trial is a comic one-act play with an undertone of serious polemic. It portrays a meeting between a well-known musical actress and a lawyer who wants to ask questions about the whereabouts of her brother. He is thought to be the only witness to the murder of Monty Wilson's wife's secret lover. The play is constructed on the dialogues between three characters: the actress, Violet Trench; her brother and actor, Edmund Trench; and a lawyer, Sir Leslie Roberts, who is seeking Edmund for his testimony as evidence in order to break Wilson's wife's silence on the killing. The play is set in the living room of a London flat belonging to the heroine, Violet. She is presented as a musical comedy actress or, as Sir Leslie calls her, 'a chorus girl', who has acted and is still an active player at the Gaiety Theatre, London. Edmund comes covertly to visit his sister from Scotland, where he has been sent into hiding. He tells her that he will be going abroad in order to avoid giving his testimony against Wilson's wife, Pamela, with whom he apparently had a previous relationship, and he tries to protect Pamela and Monty as he calls her deceased lover 'a monster'. Violet questions her brother's plans and tells him that the lawyer has sent her a letter about the case and has stated his desire to visit her before the last day of the trial. Edmund violently protests this idea and tries to prohibit his sister from meeting the lawyer, but he apparently has no control over or influence on his sister as

he appears to be totally dependent on her financially. Violet reprimands him for his reckless spending and for the money he has lost playing bridge, but she still agrees to finance his journey abroad. Edmund tells his sister that Pamela was a mischievous girl and he was not the only one having an affair with her. He is not the only one of these men with influential connections but he believes he has been singled out because he is an actor. He also resents her meeting with the lawyer and describes her discussing such a subject ‘unwomanly’. However, Violet dismisses all her brother’s protests and meets Sir Leslie. The lawyer is surprised to meet a young, elegant and intelligent woman; her demeanour is opposite to his expectations. At the end of the play, he admits he is surprised by Violet’s adamant character and personal charm, and he leaves her home conceding that she has changed his thoughts on the murder case during their brief encounter.

The meeting between Violet and Sir Leslie was used to provide context to a more central debate concerning the reputation of actresses. Violet and Edmund Trench are both actors from the musical comedy stage; the former is described as a famed actress. The reputation of the theatrical profession is raised implicitly throughout the play, and St John offers her notion of a liberated and self-supporting actress as an alternative to the popular images of women from the stage. The reason why Edmund has been wanted in connection with the murder case despite the existence of other witnesses explains how the respectability of the theatrical profession is subordinate to other ‘respectable’ occupations and social roles exclusively available for men:

Edmund: Oh, aren’t they! One of these chaps is a public man – another – well he has what they call “friends in higher quarters”. A third is very rich. The fourth is a “bulwark of the Church.” (p. 8)
[...]

Violet: And they knew Pamela before you did?

Edmund: I'm only on the stage – not even in serious drama. “There’s the fellow to go for,” they naturally said. “It won’t hurt him, and it’ll benefit the picture post-card trade.” (p. 9)

Edmund is worried about his being branded as the prime witness as the case concerns a number of other people whose status and personal relationships give them immunity. Their involvement could, in its simplest terms, cause a public scandal as the reputations of these ‘respectable’ men are at stake. It appears that St John’s criticism is directed at the cornerstones of a conservative society. When St John wrote the play, one of the serious obstacles to women’s enfranchisement was key conservatives in Edwardian politics and the aristocracy. This is perhaps best illustrated by the tense relationship between the suffragists and prominent Edwardian politicians. Sophia A. van Wingerden records that, in 1905, when the Liberals won a majority in the British parliament, they gave assurances about the improvement of women’s rights. However, campaigning women were misled by the Liberal leadership of Herbert Asquith.¹⁹ In the same way, aristocrats such as George Nathaniel Curzon, or Lord Curzon of Kedleston, used their positions in Parliament and in public to denounce Edwardian suffragism harshly, which could clearly be seen in Lord Curzon’s notorious speech titled ‘Fifteen Good Reasons against the Grant of Female Suffrage’.²⁰ He rejected the idea of women having political rights, saying that this would ‘take away women from their proper sphere’; if married women got the vote, this would result in the demands for adult suffrage. Furthermore, the ‘vote was not desired [...] by the large majority of women’ and ‘no precedent exists for active share in the Government of a great Country and Empire [...]’.²¹ The play, in this context, echoes the suffragists’ bitter resentment towards Edwardian statesmen and aristocracy. A male politician, a member of the aristocracy and someone

protected by the Church are all accused of being corrupt as they misuse their positions to deny responsibilities.

The other aspect of Edmund's denunciation is that, as an actor in musical comedies, he constitutes an easy target for the legal authorities. This suggests the negative public impression of musical comedy actors and actresses of the age. Len Platt argues that '[m]usical comedy toyed with gender boundaries and visualized a mixed economy that included weak men and stronger women'.²² It is arguable that musical comedy formulated its own images of women and men to create a pleasant, amusing and popular theatre experience for a mainstream audience. It deliberately avoided subverting the gender division, but it also used a strategy of fashioning female stars, while the presence of male characters was mostly to enhance the image of these women. Bearing in mind that the public opinion of the Edwardian actor was closely connected to his stage persona, an emasculated male figure is personified by Edmund. A similar prejudice is aimed at the actress. Sir Leslie, who visits Violet's flat hoping to persuade her to encourage her brother to testify before the jury, appears rather astonished to meet a woman who he cannot describe as 'an ordinary actress' (p. 15). He cannot hide his surprise in his introductory conversation with her, seemingly being overwhelmed by her 'nonconforming' character:

Sir Leslie: I know you by reputation of course.

Violet: How nice of you.

Sir Leslie: But I haven't been fortunate enough to see you yet.

Violet: It doesn't need a startling stroke of luck. I have been at the Gaiety for three years.

Sir Leslie: So you are a Gaiety girl.

Violet: You seem surprised.

Sir Leslie: You are not exactly the type.

Violet: Do you know the type? You haven't studied it on the spot. For you just let out, you don't go to the Gaiety.

Sir Leslie: No, but one's idea of the ordinary chorus girl. (p. 15)

Violet seems to enjoy undermining Sir Leslie's ideas of a stereotypical actress; he seems to have serious misconceptions of the Gaiety girls. St John's main concern seems to be standing up against the prejudice towards popular stage actresses and discussing the realities of the profession, of which she had first-hand experience. Although the play does not feature a plot about an actress' difficulties on the Edwardian stage, it still addresses some of the delusions about theatrical women, especially those on the musical comedy stage.

Indeed, the chorus girl in Edwardian musical comedies, particularly those performed at the Gaiety, was often a young, beautiful and spirited feminine type. As Len Platt puts it, the Gaiety girl has 'the essential feminine characteristics – "grace", "charm" and "fascination"', and she was a part of the appealing vision of femininity created on stage for audiences.²³ The connotations of the chorus girl changed considerably with the genre's transformation at the turn of the century. George Edwardes, a revisionist theatre manager and the most prominent appropriator of the genre in the Edwardian age, asserted that 'musical comedy, the Cinderella of drama, was better cared for, better housed, and better dressed than in the old days'.²⁴ Also, according to Peter Bailey, the genre was becoming free from its associations with late-nineteenth century musicals, which were riddled with overly sexualised female images and dances.²⁵ The role of chorus girls was to entertain the audience by singing and displaying an appealing femininity with their controlled cheekiness and chicness.²⁶ However, their place within respectable theatre was still hotly debated. A *Manchester Guardian* reporter wrote ironically in his defence of the genre that 'musical comedy is not "art" enough to take [...] liberties, [...] we get a well-mounted, well-dressed, more or less musical, more or less coherent entertainment which is all the average intelligent man out for entertainment asks for'.²⁷ The

respectability of the entertainment stage was still a matter of debate and there was a lot of stigma attached to musical theatre actresses. Violet protests, saying, ‘Ah, that’s legal ignorance! There are distinctions in my profession as in yours’ (p. 15), which suggests how she deliberately differentiates herself from common stereotypes of her profession. Leslie’s presumption of a Gaiety girl, in this sense, is most probably an easy-going, naive and glamorous girl in line with the fabricated image in his mind.

As very popular examples of musical comedy, the Gaiety plays attracted a lot of coverage from theatre magazines. One such example, *The Sunshine Girl*, was staged at the Gaiety Theatre in 1911 and featured an extraordinary display of chorus girls in a spectacular performance.²⁸ It starts with a picturesque scene of a soap factory in front of a view of Port Sunshine. The chorus girls start by telling their story of hard labour in the factory as workers, but with a twist: their story is accompanied by an exuberant dance. Vernon Blundell has inherited the factory from his uncle, who has written a clause in his will stating that Vernon must not get married within five years. However, Vernon is in love with Delia Deil, an assistant in the perfumery department. He does not want her to notice that he is affluent now and decides to swap roles with one of his friends. But this makes everything more complicated. Vernon is recognised by his fiancée, Rosabelle Merrydew, and his cabman, Floot. This puts the hero in a difficult position. After a number of hilarious complications and misunderstandings, the play ends with a note that laws should not and cannot obstruct two loving people’s marriage, and so Vernon and Delia plan to marry with the prospect of a happy life ahead of them.



Figure 18: 'Chorus Girls', *The Sunshine Girl*, *The Play Pictorial*, No. 118, December 1911, p. 6 (V&A Museum Theatre Collections).

In the expository scene, the stage is populated by pretty working girls, a spectacle of amiable working-class femininity that tells a sympathetic story by drawing an agreeable picture of supposedly hard-working girls. As *The Play Pictorial* writes, they should 'get a move on' or they will lose their job in the factory. However, it also asserts that '[the girls] didn't appear to work very many hours. But they're most attractive to look upon' and it adds that 'the costume is exceedingly pretty and the colours are tastefully combined'.²⁹ Seemingly, *The Play Pictorial's* description of working girls is more focused on their image than their working-class identities. The chorus girl, in reality, was an appropriated image for the mainstream audience, and their merry personalities and lively songs helped feminise the stage. These appealing women were the most important feature of the staging of musical comedies during the Edwardian era.³⁰ Therefore, the scene is in stark contrast to the image of hard-working women who were being exploited through low wages and long hours, which

was a much-debated topic for suffragists. In reaction to low wages and labour exploitation, *The Vote* published the following cartoon on its front page in 1912:



Figure 19: A Living Wage, *The Vote*, 16 November 1912.

It is clearly criticising the fact that most Edwardian women were not paid fairly and, moreover, they were exploited by their employers. The suffrage movement promoted itself to working women as the true platform by which they could raise their concerns and resist exploitation and inequality in the workplace. *The Vote* clarified what suffragists asked for, declaring that 'we decline, by and by, to be drudges to do hard and monotonous work continually without hope and reward. We mean to be independent in our work so that it shall yield us joy and have use and beauty as its result.'³¹ This also created complex images of working women, as a number of plays by suffragists, such as Margaret Nevinson's *In the Workhouse* (1911) and Edith Lyttelton's *Thumbscrew* (1911), failed to elaborate on the opportunities created by the movement while they were describing the troubles of working-class women in sweatshops.³²

St John's approach here seems to be rather distinct from the aforementioned suffrage discourse on working-class women. Borrowed from the musical comedy

stage, St John's Violet is a character who displays a changing image of working-class femininity, especially considering the possibilities that the stage offered to women to advance their lives. Violet's character is initially signified in the description of the living room she lives in, which is the primary setting of the play: 'A room indicating good taste in books and furniture. No photographs, except one on the writing table, which ought to be placed conspicuously' (p. 2). St John seems to react to the image of a stereotyped Gaiety girl. Instead, her imagined type shows signs of intellectuality and aesthetic appreciation, reading books by 'Darwin, Nietzsche, Balzac, Meredith –' (p. 12). The stage directions that narrate her meeting with Sir Leslie describe her in detail: '[S]he goes straight to the gramophone and turns it off. She is about twenty-six. Has a charming, rather serious face, and is dressed very plainly, yet well' (p. 2). Although she is more than an ordinary Gaiety girl, she bears all the stereotypical feminine qualities and an interest in books, music and the design of her home.

Her distinct character is not only based on her outlook and tastes. Whilst defending her brother, she reveals that her work as an actress is not just a personal choice but also it is necessary for her to support her family, her father and her brother:

Why – why? I love him – Our mother died when we were all quite young. Our father! I have been father and mother to them both. [...] I have brought them up, protected them – got them out of hole after hole – I have never even thought of marrying – for fear a husband should interfere with them [...] I wanted to keep Eddy out of this terrible case, because he isn't fit to go through it. He isn't at all strong – he's not like other boys ... and, yes, I do value our good name. My mother was one of the best women who was ever on the stage. And Eddy was only eighteen when he had this affair with Pamela Wilson ... He shall keep out of it. (p. 21)

It is apparent that the image of the Gaiety girl is re-envisioned by the writer to appropriate it for her plot. Her heroine goes beyond the image of a self-sufficient

woman. While her life is glamorous and attractive, the reality of an actress as a working woman requires a complex reading of different characteristics of Violet. St John strives to show beyond the stage persona of glamorous actresses. One of Violet's main motives for acting is to provide for her family financially. As she has lost her mother, she seems to have taken on a number of different roles in her family. She performs the role of a modern working woman as well as taking care of two men in the family. She also assumes an authoritarian role by providing for the family financially and protecting them personally. The writer thus gives the actress a moral function, whose occupation, with its connotations of immorality, turns into a means of maintaining her moral roles. Violet stands for a potent and credible figure in her family, just as suffrage actresses did in their theatrical campaign as the most emancipated group of women in Edwardian society.

Her influence on Sir Leslie is obvious up to the end of the play. His question to the servant upon his entry to the flat – ‘One minute. Does Miss Trench live alone?’ – and his subsequent protest to the servant's response – ‘You misunderstood me ... I thought perhaps that her brothers – she has brothers, I believe?’ (p. 12) – indicate his surprise that Violet lives an unrestricted life without support and protection. St John may have constructed her heroine based on actresses in her close circle. St John knew a number of actresses supporting themselves, as she did. Her friend Cicely Hamilton, her companion Craig and mother Terry were only three of them. The denouement of the play does not offer a definitive answer to the prominence of a single actress in the discussion of the actresses' public image and their public perception. However, Violet's influence on Sir Leslie causes him to change his opinions. Edmund reveals himself, declaring his will to testify in court, but Sir Leslie this time declines the idea and advises him to go abroad before the trial ends. He also

confesses that Violet has ‘taught [him] more in twenty minutes than [he] should have found out for [himself] in twenty years’ (p. 25). With this moral confession, he acknowledges his feeling of guilt as he has not pursued other witnesses involved in the case, which he describes ‘as being obliged to sacrifice one’s conscience to the public good’ (p. 22).

The Wilson Trial, overall, is St John’s endeavour to represent theatrical women with whom she had first-hand experience. St John constructs Violet as the embodiment of a collective identity created on the Edwardian popular stage, and she targets the parodies and misrepresentations of this identity. Her subsequent endeavour was to tackle the issue of the actress in *The First Actress*, which was staged by the Pioneer Players in the honour of the pioneering Restoration actress, Margaret Hughes. The next section will discuss *The First Actress* against a background of historical and contemporary discussions of actresses and their role in the theatre.

3.3. The Actress as the Pioneer in St John’s *The First Actress*

Some time during the last months of 1660, a professional English actress appeared in a play on the English stage for the first time – a historic moment for English Theatre.³³

In her description of the entrance of the first professional actress in English theatre, Elizabeth Howe rightly declares that it was ‘a historic moment’, which changed the common practice of boy actors impersonating female characters with the help of costumes, cosmetics and artificial manners on the Restoration stage. St John’s play, *The First Actress* (1911), a one-act propaganda play, narrates this astonishing transition of women from spectatorship to domination of the English stage. This signified a historic turning point for women, who disrupted the common practice of being excluded from creative and intellectual endeavours. As an Edwardian

feminist's reaction to the construction of artificial histories of women, St John offers her own account of the emergence of the most vivacious and liberated group of Edwardian political women: actresses.

The First Actress was staged by Craig as the first performance of the Pioneer Players' repertoire as soon as its formation was announced. The play was part of a three-play matinee that opened at the Kingsway Theatre in London on 8 May 1911. The other two plays of the afternoon were *Jack and Jill and a Friend* (1911) by Cicely Hamilton and *In the Workhouse* (1911) by Margaret Wynne Nevinson. The performances were followed by the Aeolian Ladies Orchestra's complementary music recital.³⁴ It was certainly a major event for Craig, Terry and St John, as well as performers in the Pioneer Players, as it marked the society's introduction to the public. This was the single most important opportunity to publicise the society's future events and to appeal to more subscribers and theatre critics.

Although some reviewers straightaway criticised the choice of the plays in the matinee due to the female-orientated subject matter, Craig's effort was a bold one and attracted a lot of interest. As one critic suggested, the Pioneer Players '[might] turn out to be a second Stage Society' with its 'first class rendering of three one act plays'.³⁵ *Votes for Women* highlighted the interest in the society by noting that they 'gave their first subscription performance before a crowded and representative audience in the Kingsway Theatre on Monday afternoon'.³⁶ It is obvious from the majority of the printed reviews of the event that *The First Actress* was the pivotal performance and drew the most attention during the matinee. It was justly called the 'piece d'occasion' and a 'semi-Pageant' by *The Stage*³⁷ as its presentational strategy was comparable to Hamilton's *A Pageant of Great Women*. Still, it was distinctive due to its examination of the lives of actresses by chronicling them in a self-

referential performance. This section, therefore, will attempt to find an answer to the question of how suffragist actresses, as the most prominent accomplices to and promoters of the suffrage campaign, promoted their own influence on stage and substantiated their presence in the general issue of women's rights by evidencing their individual and theatrical power in *The First Actress*.

The play tells the story of Margaret Hughes, who was according to the author, 'the first actress' on the English stage in the time of Charles II. The opening scene shows backstage at the New Theatre on Drury Lane, where Thomas Killigrew's Company of Kings' Players is giving a performance of *Othello* by Shakespeare in 1661. This marks a time when women were still not permitted to play female parts in theatrical productions; instead, female characters had only been impersonated by boy actors. Peggy (Margaret) Hughes completes her part in the play and returns backstage. She has to face both cheers and insults as the first English actress who has performed to an audience that is unaccustomed to seeing women on stage. She is not sure if she has been booed because she has acted badly or for the sheer fact that her sex is not welcomed by the audience. Even so, she is encouraged and congratulated by Sir Charles Sidley, the director of the company, who deeply desires to dismiss the extremely popular leading boy actor Kynaston, his arch rival, by introducing actresses to the stage. After the initial self-doubt and regret about her performance in *Othello*, Hughes starts to realise that she is disapproved of due to her desire to act and finds herself in a heated conversation with Griffin, a male actor in the company, about a woman's fitness for acting and her natural limits. She disputes with the opinionated Griffin, and rejecting the idea of going out for a celebration dinner with Sedley and his close friend Lord Hatton, falls asleep due to exhaustion from the performance. In a dream, she is heartened by visions of her great female successors

who narrate their stories of confronting male dominancy on stage and winning the hearts of the public despite having endured great adversities. Among these famous women are Nell Gwynn, Elizabeth Barry, Anne (Nance) Oldfield, Kitty Clive, Frances Abington and an anonymous Actress of To-day, who cite how their will has triumphed in face of the stubbornness of the managers of entertainment for centuries. The play thus implies that great difficulties have always been there for women to cope with, but actresses have pioneered opportunities for their sex by opening a once-closed realm to them, just as Edwardian suffragists have taken up a similar fight to lead women to new liberties.

The play functioned as a promotional piece for the Pioneer Players and its future productions in a self-referential way, but also made the crucial point that female actors have faced great troubles in employing their agency. Hughes' performance as the heroine marked a first for her sex to be accepted in an art form from which they were barred. At the beginning of the play, Hughes asks Griffin what was shouted to her from the audience in reaction to her performance:

Hughes. Griffin – what did that fellow in the pit call out when I went on to speak the epilogue?

Griffin. I think it was: “Call yourself a woman! You ought to be ashamed of yourself.”

Hughes. But. Why? There have been female actresses before to-night?

Griffin. Only French hussies.³⁸

Hughes seems unable to understand the reason for the reaction or the implications of her appearance as the first actress in the role of a well-known heroine such as Desdemona before a live audience. In regards to Griffin's emphasis on the abnormality of women acting, which was seemingly only acceptable for foreign women, it would be correct to assume that foreign women were regarded as a less significant threat to English society. Hughes is accused of being 'unwomanly' or shameless by trying to break the control of the representation of women on stage.

Her unparalleled venture would have a liberating impact on those following in her footsteps. The antagonism against Hughes' Desdemona in *Othello* thus should be taken as a symbolic reaction towards all women. *The First Actress* is a celebratory piece honouring the actresses who opened the door for women's aesthetic and creative activity. Griffin's reaction also bears an implied reference to the respectability of the theatrical career at the time. Howe notes that public play houses of the time were catering for 'pre-dominantly lower-class audiences' while 'more elite "private" theatres [were] attended mainly by members of upper and professional classes',³⁹ and she adds that this structure was scrapped by the newly crowned Charles II, who gave Sir Thomas Killigrew and Sir William Davenant exclusive rights to produce plays for the court.⁴⁰ This consequently raised the status of theatre and encouraged and normalised the representations of femininity on stage.

It is essential to understand the metamorphosis of society during the Restoration. Griffin's phrase 'French hussies' relates to this transformation of strict divisions of gendered places and the definitions of sexuality and respectability. Whilst St John stresses her heroine's relevance for the modern woman's emancipation efforts in professional life and, in this specific case, in the theatre, the actress' first emergence on stage also signifies a historic alteration in gender relations: English actresses replaced foreign actresses and redefined the theatrical profession for women. This can be better understood by the symbolic link between the Restoration and Edwardian ages in terms of women's theatre and gender roles. The possible allusions between respectable woman/whore and female spectator/actress were redefined in the late nineteenth century. According to Howe, 'during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries female sexuality and theatrical representation were both subject to vigorous attack', and the degrading

allusions were evident in the age's theatrical accounts such as William Prynne's *Historiomastix* (1633), in which Prynne attacks female actors as 'notorious whores'.⁴¹ It is clear that the division of male/female spaces in the Restoration theatre was the social norm in line with the strict Puritanism and gender division.⁴² In this context, St John's role in the making of woman's theatre was a clear answer to this degradation and separation.



Figure 20: Nancy Price as Mrs Margaret Hughes in the first performance of *The First Actress* at the Kingsway Theatre on 8 May 1911 (from the Pioneer Players' Scrapbook, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

The photo from the play's initial performance at the Kingsway in 1911 depicts Hughes (in the role of Desdemona) who comes to a realisation of the barriers before the first female theatrical performance. Hughes' questions to Sir Charles, such as 'How did you like my willow scene, Charles?' and 'Were you pleased with my performance?' (p.8), reveal her initial disbelief in the power of her own ability to influence others through her performance. Her discontented and thoughtful

expression is due to her initial naivety about the prospects of a career that is strictly regulated by the absolute patriarchal authority, the King. She appears to have been discouraged by the backlash and unable to see the cultural implications of her bold choice. However, this self-contradiction dissolves in the face of Griffin's accusations of women's lack of creative capacity. Griffin argues that '[women] certainly have not the creative imagination. What artistic creation have women to their credit in history?' (p. 13). He also tries to validate his point by making an assumption, which is called the 'famous Paradox' by *The Stage* magazine.⁴³ To invalidate Desdemona's reasoning, Griffin argues,

that is as much as to say that acting is not an art. By that show of reasoning we must import negroes to play Othello – we must go to the gaols to find the impersonators of our villains – must bribe noblemen to play our stage dukes [...] Acting, Mistress Hughes, is the art of assuming a character, not the accident of being it. [...] I will even go so far as to say that his trained powers enable him, when he dons a woman's habit, to look lovelier than you all – to speak with a sweeter voice – to walk with greater grace – to express the very quintessence of the female soul.⁴⁴

Griffin indirectly accuses women of degrading the art through their involvement. His notion of art, especially referring to the stage, suggests that women's 'lack of creative ability' makes them unfit for acting. He draws a parallel between the exclusion of women and that of other segments of society such as Africans and criminals. As Dympna Callaghan points out, '[n]either Africans nor women performed on the public stage of Elizabethan and Jacobean England, although both were present in other forms of cultural display' and refers to Africans in civic presentations and women in court masques.⁴⁵ Callaghan highlights that women and Africans were two alienated 'others' of the mentioned eras and were not allowed on the theatrical stage, although Africans were contradictorily a part of public performances outside theatres. She explains the exclusion of blacks from the stage in the discussion of two concepts: 'exhibition' and 'mimesis'.⁴⁶ This seems to be very

useful to explain why female players were also banned from performing in public theatres. Considering that theatrical mimesis requires an active agency and the manipulation of a role by players, female as well as African characters' presence and exclusion depended on their active and passive participation in the making of the play. In Callaghan's words, 'negritude' was only permissible as a part of 'exhibition' in public performances.⁴⁷ In terms of femininity, the threat of female transgression of social codes was considered immanent through the mimetic representation of diverse and possibly subversive roles. That is, women were not allowed to be different from what they were already allowed to be.

It is also quite possible to read the photograph in a different way: Hughes may be identifying with Desdemona while backstage, in both her costume and temperament. What place does an oppressed heroine of a famous Shakespeare play have in the discussions of women's agency and its implications in a wider debate of female emancipation and politics? Shakespeare's Desdemona is by no means a simple character and, actually, she is more than what her name stands for: 'the unfortunate' in Greek.⁴⁸ According to Michael Neill, Shakespeare gave Desdemona 'a more vocal power' than she had been given in the original source of *Othello*, Giraldi's *Disdemona*.⁴⁹ Desdemona passionately displays her agency and determination in her speech and her choice of an interracial marriage with Othello despite all the objections of her father, Brabantio, a Venetian senator. She speaks out before the Venetian town council about her resolve to go with Othello to Cyprus, which he has been assigned to defend against the Turks' invasion.

Desdemona: That I did love the Moor to live with him
My downright violence and scorn of fortunes
May trumpet to the world.
[...]
So that, dear lords, If I be left behind
A moth of peace, and he go to the war,

The rites for why I love him are bereft me,
And I a heavy interim shall support
By his dear absence. Let me go with him.⁵⁰

The rhetorical strength of the speech underlines Desdemona's determination to stay with Othello, even in a foreign country in war, and signifies a liberated woman who can challenge the town council, the very institution of the patriarchal control of the city. Her way of showing commitment to 'the Moor' Othello rejects a reading of the heroine as a victim of society or a husband. She refuses to stay as 'a moth of peace', an idle person, while Othello fights far away. What she wants is to be free to join Othello even though a relationship between a woman of her status and a black soldier would be regarded as unreasonable in early English society. Ellen Terry, who played Nell Gwynn in *The First Actress*, and who was referred to as one of 'the greatest living actresses' and 'a leading Shakespearean actress' in the Edwardian era,⁵¹ supported the idea of a Desdemona as an independent heroine after her performance with Henry Irving in *Othello* in 1898.⁵² Terry insists that 'a great tragic actress, with a strong personality and a strong method, is far better suited to [the part], for she is strong, not weak. [...] By nature she is unconventional.'⁵³ Though Desdemona is slain by Othello at the end of the play after Iago falsely accuses her of infidelity, which he fabricates in order to exact his revenge on the envied 'outsider', Desdemona shows her independence and strength especially in her actions and decisions, even up to the point where she is murdered.



Figure 21: The featured actresses are Nancy Price, Auriol Lee, Ellen Terry, Lilly Brayton, Suzanne Sheldon, Henrietta Watson, May Whitty, Dorothy Minto, Saba Raleigh, Mona Harrison, Lillian Braithwaite and Lena Ashwell and unidentified actresses in the first performance of *The First Actress* at the Kingsway Theatre on 8 May 1911 (from the Pioneer Players' Scrapbook, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

In the second photo from the same performance (above), Hughes is shown asleep presumably due to her physical and psychological 'fatigue' after her first appearance as Desdemona. During her sleep, other actresses, as 'the visions of the future', take to the stage and transform Hughes' story into a meta-theatrical one, in which they tell their stories which they symbolically were a part of. They cite how Desdemona paved the way for 'great actresses of ages', referring both to their predecessors and themselves. It is not startling that critical reviews of the play mostly focused on these actresses and their performances. A common feature of the play's reception highlighted Ellen Terry's contribution to the popularity of the play. For example, the printed programme leaflet of the event also advertised a second performance of *The First Actress* to be arranged on 11 June 1911, accompanied by Ellen Terry's famous lecture series on Shakespeare's heroines.⁵⁴ Additionally, due to an uncertain reason, the second performance of the society became a matinee of Terry's remarkable

lecture called *Some of Shakespeare's Heroines: The Triumphant Women*, excluding *The First Actress*.⁵⁵ In newspapers such as *Morning Post*, *Westminster Gazette*, *Daily Express*, *Votes for Women*, *Globe* and a number of others, the same statement was used to advertise the event: 'Ellen Terry [...] will make her first appearance in London since her return from America.'⁵⁶ This further indicates the criticality of a famous actress' involvement in suffrage theatrical publicity efforts. Her role, as Nell Gwynn, was noteworthy and created a buzz about her return to acting.

Along with the self-promoting femininity embodied in the celebrity cast, St John constructs amusing dialogues to balance the serious discussion on the actresses' role in leading liberation in the theatre. Particularly, Kitty Clive, a famous comic actress from the eighteenth-century English stage, leaves the stage without being able to introduce herself due to interruptions by another actress, Peg Woffington:

Clive: And that's enough to Peg! I, Kitty Clive –

Woffington: (ignoring Clive) Peg the Second will teach the pit to presume! She will not forget that they would have none of Peg the First.

Clive: Mrs. Woffington – I have a line here.

Woffington: Unmannered dogs! I'll teach them to doubt a women's intellect – a woman's grit. Nature has given me a harsh, unpleasing voice – but that shall not daunt me – I'll learn to use it. A defect shall become a grace. And as for intellect –

Clive: They don't want to her all that! I Kitty Clive – (pp. 18–19).

St John constructs the dialogue between two rival actresses as a subtext to her primary message in the play: actresses, as the epitome of liberated women and pioneers in the profession, should put aside their differences to unite for women's good. Felicity Nausbaum claims, referring to eighteenth-century actresses, that '[their] battles [...] erupted over the ownership of a leading role, profits, and reputation as well as lover'.⁵⁷ Clive and Woffington were accomplished actresses and rivals in their time. This rivalry is matched by two other actresses, Bracegirdle and Nance Oldfield, in the play to show that that rivalry and competition were always a

part of an actress' glamorous life, but the writer approaches this lightly. The humorous tone in the argument is a reminder of St John's intention to portray a positive image of actresses, making them more human than their stage personas could display. Moreover, these actresses were role models for their Edwardian counterparts in their theatrical endeavours. As Nausbaum claims, the celebrity status of these women was not accidental: '[these] women players struggled to achieve equity in training, compensation, choice of roles, benefits, and theatre management.'⁵⁸ In this sense, they are the creators of the reality that actresses were the most visible femininity among all professional women in the Edwardian era. Woffington's fury about the discrimination she experienced due to the masculine tone of her voice and the claims of woman's inferior intelligence is also why prominent actresses such as Terry, Nancy Price, Auriol Lee, Lillian Braithwaite and Lena Ashwell participated in such a production.

The play concludes with a note of women's unity and Ashwell's pronouncement as 'the Actress of To-day': 'Brave Hughes – forgotten pioneer – your comrades offer you a crown' (p. 21). Ironically, a pioneering actress of the past is thus honoured by a pioneer Edwardian actress and entrepreneur, Ashwell. She was perhaps one of the most liberated among her fellow Edwardian actresses.⁵⁹ It can be argued that she constitutes a link to Hughes, as an pioneer actress and theatrical women in the suffrage movement. The Kingsway Theatre, her repertory venue, also stands for Hughes' struggle against the prejudice she faced in Restoration theatres. Ashwell's biographer, Margaret Leask, notes that the Theatrical Managers' Association and the Society of West End Theatres, two theatre associations directed by men, excluded women as members.⁶⁰ Although Ashwell declares that Edwardian women were allowed to be actresses and 'people have forgotten that acting was once

considered a man's affair' (p. 2), she symbolically carries the battle against sexism and unfair treatment in the area of theatrical management. But perhaps more interestingly, the photograph of the finale shows that one of the characters, Madame Vestris, appears to be cross-dressed.



Figure 22: Lena Ashwell as an Actress of To-day (on the right) and Auriol Lee (on the left) as Madame Vestris in the first performance of *The First Actress* at the Kingsway Theatre on 8 May 1911 (from the Pioneer Players' Scrapbook, V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

A female embodying a male persona is certainly worth discussing. Madame Vestris was a popular performer of Italian operas and the manager of the Olympic Theatre in London in the early nineteenth century.⁶¹ Rachel Cowgill notes that Vestris' role as 'the female Giovanni' in William Thomas Moncrieff's *Giovanni in London* (1817) at the Drury Lane Theatre, London, in 1820 was a huge success and she later performed at Covent Garden, Manchester, Birmingham and Dublin.⁶² This role was comic in its

nature as a part of a burlesque performance, which was titled ‘a comic extravaganza entertainment’ and Vestris as a woman in breeches appears to have distorted the acceptable feminine image in a Victorian comic opera.⁶³ This is, first of all, a validation that the stage permitted women to assume roles that would have never been permissible in daily life. Nussbaum argues that it was a very common practice on the Restoration and later English stage for women to impersonate male characters.⁶⁴ Actresses were women who had experienced the freedom of behaving ‘unwomanly’ and were allowed to blur gender distinctions, which was acceptable to the society they lived in. Vestris’s Giovanni image also permits another interpretation. Auriol Lee, the actress playing Vestris, does not portray a strictly masculine figure despite her masculine outfit. Her femininity is visible through her bodily and facial features and symbolically in her character as a pioneer actress. Vestris seems to be presented to respond to the criticism against Hughes, in her performance as Desdemona, losing her femininity by working in the theatre.

This is also a reminder that suffrage writers frequently undermined the status quo. One could also read Vestris’ cross-dressed image as gender performance, denoting gender as an unstable notion that St John distorts and appropriates in her play to show that actresses possess the power of reforming the strict rules of society. The image connotes defiance against the roles actresses can play in theatre and society. In this sense, suffrage theatre offered a variety of femininities, not a single notion of femininity. Tilghman asserts that

A direct and active transgression of received ideas was needed if suffrage playwrights were to write effectively against deeply entrenched assumptions about the nature of women and the roles they should perform in society.⁶⁵

Namely, suffrage playwrights subverted the idea that all women share the same nature, roles and personalities. Suffrage theatre presented this through female

characters on stage. Robin's Vida Levering in *Votes for Women*, Hamilton's Joan of Arc in *A Pageant of Great Women* and St John's Margaret Hughes in *The First Actress* are all representative of the diversity of femininities. They simply personify different values and different purposes in their struggle for emancipation and advancement of their sex. In the case of *The First Actress*, the denouement draws a portrayal of Edwardian actresses who were liberated, in many ways as a result of their predecessors' determination and struggle. It also reaffirms that actresses signify both individuality and diversity through their charisma and stage personas.

The critical reception showed that the play was a success, fulfilling its purpose as promotion of the Pioneer Players and attracting attention to Edwardian actresses performing in an event designed and organised by women. The play was not only a historical account of or a memory of actresses' achievements, but it was a contemporary comic polemic by a suffrage writer discussing the role of Edwardian actresses in the theatre. *Reynolds* supported this, noting that Edmund Gwenn's arguments on 'why women could never hope to play female parts as well as boys [...] sounded familiarly modern'.⁶⁶ There was some confusion about the first and second performances of the play as a number of newspapers reported that the first performance would be at the Court Theatre. *Morning Post* even mentioned '[t]he artists who appear at the Pioneer Players' matinee at the Court Theatre (or is it the Kingsway? Both theatres have been named)'.⁶⁷ *The Stage*, regardless, welcomed the performance, declaring that the play 'received all possible effect from the interpretation given by a very strong body of popular performers, headed by Ellen Terry'.⁶⁸ The responses also support Craig's idea that an independent women's theatre was possible and could be quite fashionable. *The Standard*, in this sense, claimed that 'it seems [...] there is to be a series of secret societies formed to turn the

playhouses into temples of propaganda in which the password is “Votes for Women””.⁶⁹

The focus on the artistic and appealing femininity, combined with powerful reasoning behind it, contributed to the play’s success, which was comparable to Robins’ *Votes for Women* and Hamilton’s *A Pageant of Great Women*. The heroine, Hughes, as the first actress to appear on an English public stage, is described as emblematic in the emergence of feminist sensibilities in her time. The play suggests that theatre played an important role in women’s search for creative space, self-fulfilment and public support. The suffrage movement’s focus on pioneering women brought actresses and their publicity to the campaign. Hughes, as a pioneering actress, thus portrays the first successful woman-in-the-making in the profession, who allowed her sex new freedoms and possibilities.

3.4. Championing the Female Commitment: the Representations of Medieval Nuns in Hrotsvit’s *Paphnutius* by the Pioneer Players

St John’s involvement in the Pioneer Players was not limited to the staging of her plays. Her translations and adaptations of European drama and historical plays were staged by Craig as part of the Pioneer Players’ repertoire at regular intervals and even long after the Edwardian suffrage campaign lost its intensity due to the country’s war efforts.⁷⁰ One of her significant translations/adaptations was Hrotsvit’s (c.935–c.1002) or, in her version, Roswitha’s *Paphnutius* (1914),⁷¹ which was staged under the direction of Craig at the Savoy Theatre, London, on 11 January 1914.⁷² According to Sue-Ellen Case, as St John had produced *The First Actress* in 1911, this could be ‘an indication that her interest in the text of Hrotsvit probably came from an interest in a woman playwright’.⁷³ The play’s subject matter has been found too conservative to be labelled feminist, and Sue-Ellen Case notes that ‘critics have

traditionally ignored [the] feminist aspect of [Hrotsvit's] project and concentrated on the Christian context for it'.⁷⁴ However, the play was instrumental in promoting the Pioneer Players' theatrical efforts. It also marks the final phase of stage propaganda in the context of suffrage theatre as the war triggered a change of public sensibilities on women's politics. Thus, the play should be noted as a part of St John's attempt to recover women's literature from a male-dominated literary history at the height of the suffrage movement. It simply conveyed the message that Hrotsvit offers a unique perspective into her time, depicting a woman's chastity and commitment to a cause in a story constructed on the life of a tenth-century Christian nun. *Votes for Women* noted the event was 'a timely inclusion into the theatre of the day'⁷⁵ as the play's representation of Thais as a moral convert constituted a very evocative metaphor for women's conversion into the suffrage movement. *Paphnutius* thus suggests more than its plot and historical context reflect at first glance.

The play narrates Thais' conversion into Christianity and a virtuous life, as she abandons prostitution in medieval Egypt. St Paphnutius sees, to his dismay, Thais maintain an extravagant life financed by prostitution, the very sign of degeneracy in his consideration. He thus decides to visit Alexandria to speak to and persuade Thais to renounce her past and ask for repentance. Pretending to be a young man, Paphnutius approaches Thais and speaks to her about God's forgiveness and the need to make sacrifices in return for eternal life. As Thais describes herself as a believer, she is convinced by Paphnutius to denounce her past. She arranges an assembly for her lovers to witness her determination and salvation, leaving them in bewilderment. Following this revelation, Paphnutius and Thais set out for a monastery where they are welcomed by the Abbess. She listens to Thais' account of her former life. Thais knows that she must repent and wait for a sign of her salvation

in solitude. The Abbess is concerned about the harsh conditions of Thais' custody, but Paphnutius pronounces that it is the only way for her to hide from her ex-lovers and sin. After three years of Thais' seclusion and an agonising wait for salvation, Paphnutius is troubled that her chastisement has taken too long. He asks his brother Anthony to pray for a sign about Thais' fate. In the prayer, Anthony's disciple Paul sees a vision and presages a pleasant fate for Thais. Thais' repentance seems to be acknowledged, and so Paphnutius informs her that God has forgiven her and that she is now free. Thais confesses her wish to forget her past and is granted admission to an eternal life. The play's denouement depicts Paphnutius at Thais' deathbed praying to God for her to be taken into Heaven.

In her introduction to the play, St John defines *Callimachus*, *Abraham* and *Paphnutius* as the three significant plays of Hrotsvit, which are translated by St John in the same volume and feature a common theme. She states that 'Roswitha sets out to describe the war between the flesh and the spirit, and the long penance which must be done by those who allowed the flesh to triumph'.⁷⁶ It is ostensible that these plays were written to address the religious sensibilities of a Christian community of Gandersheim, Germany, where Hrotsvit lived in the tenth-century. The religious tone and the heroine's personal sacrifice make it problematic to analyse the implications of the writer's arguments in the context of suffrage theatre. However, the archaic argument and representation of woman's religious sacrifice in medieval times make symbolic allusions to the images constructed in the theatrical propaganda of the suffrage movement. Cockin asserts that '[s]uffrage activism was frequently represented in terms of religious commitment'.⁷⁷ She also says that '[n]ew recruits were subject to "conversion", deployed on a "mission" for "the Cause"'.⁷⁸ Namely, the religious imagery used by Hrotsvit is translated into St John's reconstruction of a

medieval nun/dramatist as a pioneer. She sets this as a role model for modern female dramatists and appropriates Thais' conversion story for the factions of the Edwardian suffrage movement. Noting this, this section will look at the associations between Hrotsvit's *Paphnutius* and St John's reconstruction of herself as a modern Hrotsvit. It will also discuss how St John's *The First Actress*, *Paphnutius* and her collaborative work *Four Lectures on Shakespeare* substantiate Terry as the greatest actress of the Edwardian suffrage stage.

Paphnutius presents two entirely dissimilar portrayals of women in accordance with its Christian moral grounding. This binary representation first gives a conflicting message and later turns into a commendation of the heroine, Thais, due to her character and commitment. In the two expository scenes, Hrotsvit draws a rather degrading portrayal of Thais as a woman driven by pleasure and material comfort. Paphnutius discusses with his disciples his revulsion at Thais' 'sinful' life. He accuses her of using her influence and the power of sexuality on the men around her:

Paphnutius: Brothers – there is a woman, a shameless woman, living in our neighbourhood.

[...]

Paphnutius: Her beauty is wonderful: her impurity is horrible.

[...]

Disciples: Thais! Thais, the harlot!

[...]

Disciple: Everyone has heard of her and her wickedness. (p. 102)

The description of Thais by Paphnutius reveals that he perceives her sexuality and feminine influence on men as a degrading power and a menace to society. Paphnutius alleges that '[s]he is not satisfied to ruin herself with a small band of lovers. She seeks to allure all men through her marvellous beauty, and drag them down with her power.'⁷⁹ Not only her sexual encounters but also her covetousness towards men make her decadent in Paphnutius' eyes. Thais's initial image is

delineated by her sexuality, which is perceived as powerful, intimidating and corrupting. It is not just Thais as a woman who is deliberated as a menace here; she possesses power through her sexuality. As Cockin explains, ‘the play reinforces the image of the prostitute as deadly, redeemed only through bodily privation, religious conversion and death’.⁸⁰ It is arguable that female physicality and sexuality are thus defined as financially profitable and a manipulative power. This is the main reason why she is labelled straightaway as ‘harlot’ by Paphnutius’ disciples, although the writer refrains from elucidating on the details of her life and personality. In other words, Paphnutius’ discussion with his disciples implies that Hrotsvit constructs a dichotomy of sinner/saint femininity, two completely opposite sides. This is suggestive as the denunciation of Thais as a ‘fallen woman’ is dictated by Hrotsvit’s Christian posture and there is no conciliation offered between an angelic Thais or a harlot.

Hrotsvit’s stance clearly makes it problematic to read the play as a feminist work in the first place and difficult to situate it in Edwardian suffragism. Nevertheless, Thais shows some signs of agency when approached by Paphnutius as she is not merely converted by him; she also makes a decision to reform herself. When Paphnutius is astonished to hear she confesses she is a Christian, he asks, ‘What do you think, then? That [God] is indifferent to the actions of the sinner, or that He reserves judgement?’ (p. 108). Her answer underlines her self-confidence: ‘the merits of each man are weighed in the balance, and that we shall be punished or rewarded according to our deeds’ (p. 108). Her decision to follow Paphnutius is mostly a voluntary act.

Also, she is remarkably attributed with feminine influence. The writer insists on the extraordinariness of Thais with Paphnutius’ description of her femininity as

‘wonderful’ and ‘marvelous’ (pp. 102–104). She is correspondingly described by a young man in the city during Paphnutius’ search for her house as ‘the flame of this Land [, who is] the most exquisite woman of her kind’ (p. 105). This influence is particularly perceptible in the descriptions made by male characters. Men are described as a jealous, corrupting and oppressing power in Thais’ life. This becomes particularly clear in Paphnutius, as a paternal and authoritarian force. His admonishments of Thais are driven by his convictions. He admonishes Thais when she declares the cell she will be staying in would be inhabitable if it were closed to other people’s access. He asks, is ‘it not right that you should now be confined in this narrow, solitary cell, where you will find true freedom?’ (p. 118). It seems that Hrotsvit constructs men as antagonistic beings, encouraging Thais’ moral degeneration and later imprisoning her for redemption. Paphnutius’ assertion and method of protecting Thais are inhumane, and he shows no sign of concern apart from his religious arguments. Paphnutius therefore epitomises an oppressor as much as he is Thais’ saviour in the patriarchal social order of a medieval society.

However, the most tangible change in Hrotsvit’s tone is felt in the second part of the play, from the fourth to the final scene.⁸¹ These scenes display Thais’ conversion, her silent performance of repentance and her moral triumph after a long wait in solitude.



Figure 23: A photo of the monastery scene from *Paphnutius* by the Pioneer Players, titled ‘Miss Ellen Terry in a Play of 960 A.D.’, *Nottingham Guardian*, 6 January 1914. (from the Pioneer Players’ Scrapbook, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Nottingham Guardian’s photograph of the monastery scene taken during the rehearsals features Paphnutius, Thais and the Abbess, who was played by Terry. Thais is welcomed by the Abbess to the monastery, a sight that evokes compassion rather than condemnation, as exemplified in Paphnutius’ discourse. By portraying Thais in a sympathetic light, the play idealises her plight, resituating her as an example of saintly virtue and female celibacy. This idealisation is not new to suffrage imagery. Lisa Tickner notes ‘allegorical imagery of angels, virtues and goddesses’ as one of the sources for the representation of womanliness in suffrage works.⁸² The saintly and heroic stance of Thais was also a recurrent representation of heroic female characters such as Joan of Arc or St Hilda in *A Pageant of Great Woman*. To illustrate this, Joan of Arc in *The Pageant* is addressed as the ‘brave

saint, pure soldier' with masculine connotations;⁸³ the latter is described as 'stainless in her humility', which denotes her dutiful and committed femininity.⁸⁴

Correspondingly, Thais' image underlines that her consent to be confined in a chamber for three years 'no wider than a grave' gives her a saintly status. The conversion of a female character is thus narrated and staged as deeply sympathetic, suggesting that it was staged to celebrate the sacrifices made by women in their struggle for emancipation. Although Thais' imprisonment was not performed on stage, the intensity of her suffering is silently suggested: as *Sphere* noted, the play was 'one of painful self-suppression'.⁸⁵ Hrotsvit constructs her female characters with the intention of creating saints out of them. In the context of Edwardian women's theatre, the play's religious theme can be reinterpreted as an allusion to the righteous struggle of women for the conversion of Edwardian society into a moral and egalitarian one.

St John's choice to translate and produce *Paphnutius* for the Pioneer Players is possibly due to the medieval playwright's unique position as an authoress in an age when plays written by women were without precedent. A pioneer playwright was an important inspiration for Edwardian suffragists. Hrotsvit fulfilled a very critical role as a predecessor of modern female dramatists; she reimagined and revised the femininity constructed in the plays written by Terence, Hrotsvit's role model.⁸⁶ However, this modelling was not to mimic Terence's world in her plays. Instead, Hrotsvit's plays would have mostly been derived from her experiences at the court of Gandersheim, and thus she constructed her idea of exemplary and chaste female characters as embodied in Thais. Sue-Ellen Case also supports this assumption by arguing that 'her project was to change the roles for women on the stage from negative ones to positive ones'.⁸⁷ In this sense, she takes a similar route to suffrage

artists who reimagined and appropriated art and images of women, exploiting the literary inheritance of their predecessors. In addition, Hrotsvit's plays were most probably produced to be read in the court of the German emperor, Otto II, not to be performed.⁸⁸ Seemingly, during Hrotsvit's lifetime, the public performance of drama written by a woman was not permissible. Indeed, for the Pioneer Players, this was a very good opportunity to stage a play by a pioneer female dramatist for Edwardian audiences as this would be a validation of the primary purpose of the society: giving a chance for unpublished works written by literary women to be staged. Another point to note is that removing her construction of femininity from the context of Christianity and repositioning it as a part of suffrage theatre's goal of creating positive representation was suggestive in various ways. St John states in her introduction to the play that the girls martyred in Hrotsvit's *Sapientia* 'defy "law and order" [...] much as in our own day youthful suffragettes used to defy British magistrates'.⁸⁹ St John's effort to indicate the connection between Hrotsvit's courageous heroines and Edwardian suffragettes is further evidence of her intention to adapt the authoress' plays as a part of her feminist agenda for the suffrage stage. St John also defends her choice by saying '[Hrotsvit] is deserving of extra ordinary honour, for she continued [...] the dramatic traditions', even writing plays 'during the long period that passed between the disappearance of the Pagan dramas and the rise of the Miracle plays'.⁹⁰ St John appears to have respected Hrotsvit as a pioneer and a courageous woman who wrote plays at a time when only men were acknowledged and respected as writers.

3.5. Afterword: The Resurrection of Ellen Terry as the Iconic Actress

St John's efforts to elevate the role of actresses in Edwardian theatre culminated in her construction of images of Terry as the greatest actress on the Edwardian stage.

Nina Auerbach argues in her biography of Terry that

[a] self-named John the Baptist, the mission on which she collaborated with Edy [Craig], was the redemption of Ellen Terry from the prison of her charm, forging her into a woman who could inspire a militant generation.⁹¹

In light of Auerbach's words, it could be argued that St John's and Craig's performances including Terry were not only devised for their theatrical society, but they symbolically revered Terry's long commitment to acting, which was highlighted by her iconic roles on stage. Craig's four performances were pivotal in the resurrection of Terry's iconic persona after her extraordinary Jubilee in 1906.⁹² Her noteworthy appearances in Craig's productions were in *A Pageant of Great Woman* in 1909, *The First Actress* in 1911, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare* in the same year and *Paphnutius* in 1914. Terry played Nance Oldfield in *The Pageant*, the only speaking part and a salute to the Edwardian actress. In the same fashion, her Nell Gwynn in *The First Actress* honours the great actress for whom, according to St John, St Martin's bells rang every week.⁹³ In response to a male spectator shouting at her 'We don't want women on the stage', Gwynn shows St John's defence of the role of actresses in the dynamism and popularity of the theatre. She self-confidently replies that 'You mayn't want 'em, but by the Lord Harry, you've got to have 'em' and adds 'they'll do your damned dull stage a power of good'.⁹⁴ Her reaction also paints Terry's image as an important contributor to the spectacular performances of Shakespearean heroines such as Ophelia, Cordelia, Portia and Beatrice.⁹⁵ In *Idler Magazine's* 'Who is the Greatest Living English Actress and Why?' published in 1895, W Davenport Adams writes that

What the younger generation may yet do in poetic drama and high comedy remains to be seen; but, as matters stand, Miss Ellen Terry still over-tops, by the head and shoulders, all living English female practitioners in the highest forms of acting.⁹⁶

In the same article, another critic explains his reason for nominating Terry as the greatest actress: ‘unfailing charm [...] absolute sincerity and utter obliteration of self’.⁹⁷ Her status as the most celebrated actress of her own time was revived in *Four Lectures on Shakespeare* performed in 1911, giving her an air of authority and pride in her work on the Lyceum stage at the turn of the century.

In the creation of these lectures, St John defines herself as Terry’s ‘literary henchman’. Though it is true that St John actively assisted with the preparation and publication of Terry’s biography, *A Story of My Life* (1908), and her lectures on Shakespeare, she describes herself as a ‘collaborator’, whose role is defined as a convenience rather than a necessity. She also regards herself as ‘the apprentice’ and Terry as ‘the master craftsman’, emphasising the latter’s theatrical experience and her literary style in her correspondences.⁹⁸ As St John puts it, in response to her suggestion of publishing Terry’s lectures, Terry’s stress was always on the power of acting.⁹⁹ Terry seems to have aimed to show her identification with Shakespearean heroines in these lectures. In a way, St John’s collaboration with Terry generated a mutually beneficial product where Terry’s theatrical persona was resurrected as an established and knowledgeable Shakespearean expert who did not refrain from revising the women she portrayed as ‘triumphant’.¹⁰⁰

Regarding her appearance as the Abbess in *Paphnutius*, it would not be wrong to assert that the interest in Terry in the handbill and in reviews confirms the centrality of her image for the promotion of the play and the society.¹⁰¹



Figure 24: Three central characters in *Paphnutius*: Miriam Lewes as Thais, E Harcourt Williams as Paphnutius and Ellen Terry as the Abbess. The photo titled 'Paphnutius' featured in *Sphere* on 17 January 1914 (from the Pioneer Players' Scrapbook, Victoria & Albert Museum, Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Terry the Shakespearean actress seems to be transformed into a maternal and mystical figure in the role of the Abbess in *Paphnutius*. As mother to Craig (and also figuratively to St John) on and off stage her role seems to have been solidified by the Abbess. The Abbess was already an authority in her monastic community of women. Her reply to Paphnutius' request for the best care for Thais during her imprisonment confirms this. She assures Paphnutius by saying, '[h]ave no anxiety about her, for I will cherish her with a mother's love and tenderness' (p. 120). The elegant and mystical presence of Terry in photos of the production was hailed by reviewers, one of whom described the play as 'the drama with grace and purity and tenderness'.¹⁰² *Queen*, in this respect, noted that 'Terry made a perfect Abbess'.¹⁰³ Terry's presence also served to inspire attendance at the performance and validity for the concepts that her acting troupe was attempting to promote, with the aim of the acknowledgement of the actresses' virtues and thus women in reality.¹⁰⁴ *Umpire* also validated Hrotsvit's connection with modern suffrage theatre. It said that '[p]erhaps I may be

misled by a sort of likeness I find in her to our suffragists, who, while leading model lives, occupy their minds, their conversation, and much of their literary effort with libertine ideas'.¹⁰⁵ Terry's symbolic role as the Abbess seems to allude to her role in Craig's efforts for the suffrage theatre. As the president of the Pioneer Players, her role was overseeing and helping her daughter to be independent while constructing a subscription-based theatre society that granted privilege and freedom of expression to actresses, much as the nuns in Gandersheim enjoyed in the tenth century.¹⁰⁶ The review was also validation of Craig's motives as quoted in her interview with *Votes for Women* in 1909: '[i]t is strange to go out of the world, where women are fighting for freedom and showing unparalleled courage [...], into the theatre where the dramatist appears unaffected by this new Renaissance'.¹⁰⁷ *Gazette* was supportive of Craig's agenda in its coverage of the performance: '[the play] would seem to illustrate the progressive view of the times, as something that starkly displays the oppression and injustices done to women over the centuries'.¹⁰⁸ Perhaps the best response summarising the motivation behind Craig's performance was *Queen's* comment: "'Paphnutius" was a daring experiment, but the Pioneer Players have proved it was well worth the labour expended on its production.'¹⁰⁹ In retrospect, the play was another success validating the trio's (St John, Craig and Terry) contribution to the Pioneer Players and to women's theatre.

¹ Katharine Cockin, 'St John, Christopher Marie (1871–1960)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004 [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/57057>, accessed 5 January 2013]. *Ellen Terry's Memoirs* was revised and edited by St John with the help of Craig. St John also compiled *Ellen Terry's Four Lectures on Shakespeare* using Terry's notes and writings in 1932. Likewise, she was the editor of a book featuring the letters between Shaw and Terry in 1931.

² Cockin, 'St John, Christopher Marie (1871–1960)'.

³ Cicely Hamilton hails the prominence of a theatre controlled by women for its opportunities, declaring 'Now – who worries about the sex of a writer of plays?' referring to her difficulties in writing and publishing her plays in the past. She describes Inez Bensusan's the Woman's Theatre as a 'natural and inevitable result of woman's increasing part in the running of drama'. She also adds that 'it exists for the presentation of what is known as the Woman's Point of View'. Cicely Hamilton, 'The

Woman's Theatre – What it means', Women's Theatre Inaugural Week Souvenir Booklet, 8–13 December 1913.

⁴ James Fisher, "'The First Woman Stage-Manager": Edy Craig and the Pioneer Players', *New England Theatre Journal*, 8 (1997), pp. 73–94 (p. 77).

⁵ In this production, Henry Irving appeared as Robespierre, Ellen Terry played Clarisse and Craig was Madame de Lavergne. All costumes were designed and made by Craig. See Appendix 5 for the costumes, a photograph of Terry and a drawing of a scene from the play.

⁶ Fisher, p. 77.

⁷ Fisher, p. 81.

⁸ Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players 1911–25* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 6.

⁹ St John's translation of Saint Georges de Bouhelier's *Children's Carnival* was staged by the society in 1920. Shakespeare's *Hamlet* was performed in 1914.

¹⁰ Fisher, p. 82.

¹¹ Ellen Terry's manuscripts in the British Library comprise a large number of files, including these notes, photographs and production details of plays such as *A Pageant of Great Women*, other theatrical pageants, Terry's spectacular jubilee and Pioneer Players productions such as Norrey Connell's *The King's Wooing*, *Children's Carnival*, Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul*, Herman Heijermans' *The Good Hope*, Laurence Housman's *Pains and Penalties*, Bernard Shaw's *Mrs. Warren's Profession*, Antonia R. Williams' *The Street* and Susan Glaspell's *The Verge*.

¹² Letter to Authors, the Pioneer Players, British Library Ellen Terry Archive, Box 12, Document C67.

¹³ Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 3.

¹⁴ *Ibid*, p 3.

¹⁵ Christopher St John, *The Wilson Trial*, The Lord Chamberlain's Theatre Manuscripts, British Library Manuscripts Department, 1909, pp. 1–25.

¹⁶ L. Carson, *The Stage Year Book 1910* (London: Carson and Comerford Limited, 1910), p. 159.

¹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 167.

¹⁸ Cockin notes that the play was staged on 28 January 1912 in a private performance. For more details see Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, p. 96.

¹⁹ Sophia A. van Wingerden, *The Women's Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1866–1928* (Hampshire, Palgrave, 1999), p. 75.

²⁰ Lord Curzon (1859–1925) was the president of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage. His anti-suffrage speech in 1909 was published under the title *Fifteen Good Reasons Against the Grant of Female Suffrage*. See Appendix 6 for a copy of the original pamphlet.

²¹ Lord Curzon, 'Fifteen Good Reasons Against the Grant of Female Suffrage', 1911, pp. 1–2.

²² Len Platt, *Musical Comedy on the West End Stage, 1890–1939* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), p. 119.

²³ *Ibid*, p. 104. The inventor of this conceptual femininity was George Edwardes, who was the owner and manager of the Gaiety Theatre.

²⁴ 'Mr George Edwardes on Musical Comedy', *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1911, p. 10.

²⁵ Peter Bailey, 'Musical Comedy and the Rhetoric of the Girl', *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage*, ed. Michael R. Booth and Joel H. Kaplan (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), pp. 36–60 (pp. 37–38).

²⁶ For a more detailed discussion on the formulated 'naughtiness' of the chorus girl, see Len Platt, p. 114.

²⁷ 'A Defence of Musical Comedy', *The Manchester Guardian*, 17 December 1910, p. 11.

²⁸ The play was produced by George Edwardes and J. A. E. Malome, the music was by Paul Rubens and the lyrics were by Rubens and Arthur Wimperis. *The Play Pictorial* argues that the play's title was justified as 'all is sunshine and brightness from the rising of the curtain on the picturesque view of the famous soap factory by the seaside'. *The Sunshine Girl*, *The Play Pictorial*, No. 118, December 1911, p. 2. V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections.

²⁹ *Ibid*, p. 2.

³⁰ Len Platt argues that 'musical comedy was supposed to be youthful and exhilarating, but its joie de vivre had to be kept within the bounds of public acceptability as generally understood by middle-class society and implemented by theatre censorship'. (p. 110)

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- ³¹ 'The Great Devorce', *The Vote*, 16 November 1912, p. 46.
- ³² Margaret Nevinston's *In the Workhouse* was staged by Edith Craig's Pioneer Players at the Kingsway Theatre with St John's *The First Actress* in a triple bill in 1911. Edith Lyttelton's *Thumbscrew* was also produced by the Pioneers in the same year.
- ³³ Elizabeth Howe, *The First English Actress: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. 19.
- ³⁴ See Appendix 4 for a copy of the original programme of the performance on 8 May 1911.
- ³⁵ 'Three Plays: Productions of the New Stage Society', *Sheffield Daily Telegraph*, 9 May 1911, The Ellen Terry Theatre Collection, Victoria & Albert Museum, London. It will hereafter be referred to as 'V&A Ellen Terry Collection'.
- ³⁶ 'The Pioneer Players', *Votes for Women*, 9 May 1911, V&A Ellen Terry Collection.
- ³⁷ 'London Theatres: The Kingsway', *The Stage*, unknown date, V&A Ellen Terry Collection.
- ³⁸ Christopher St John, *The First Actress in Women's Suffrage Drama: Volume Three, Women's Suffrage Literature*, ed. Cockin, Katharine, Glenda Norquay and Sowon S. Park (London: Routledge, 2007), pp. 5–21 (p. 5). This edition will hereafter be used as the primary text.
- ³⁹ Elizabeth Howe, 'Introduction' to *The First English Actress: Women and Drama 1660–1700* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), p. i.
- ⁴⁰ *Ibid.*
- ⁴¹ Howe, p. 21.
- ⁴² *Ibid.*
- ⁴³ *The Stage* simplifies this 'famous Paradox' as follows: 'if a woman ought to play a woman, so ought a father play a father, a lord a lord, a Moor a Moor and so on'. *The Stage*, London Theatres: The Kingsway, unknown date, V&A Ellen Terry Collection.
- ⁴⁴ St John, *The First Actress*, pp. 13–14.
- ⁴⁵ Dymna Callaghan, *Shakespeare Without Women: Representing Gender and Race on the Renaissance Stage* (London: Routledge, 1999), p.77.
- ⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 77. Callaghan defines them as follows: 'in exhibition, people are set forth for display as objects, passive and inert before the active scrutiny of the spectator [...]. Mimesis, on the other hand, entails an imitation of otherness, and its dynamism results from the absence of the actual bodies of those it depicts, whose access to the scene of representation, therefore, needs no further restriction or containment.'
- ⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 77.
- ⁴⁸ Michael Neill, 'The Introduction', in William Shakespeare, *Othello: The Moor of Venice*, ed. Michael Neill (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), p. 28.
- ⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.
- ⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 230–231.
- ⁵¹ Various published reviews of the plays in which Ellen Terry acted celebrated her unique status among Edwardian actresses. She was the first actress on the English stage to receive the title of 'Dame'. Additionally, in *Idle Magazine's* survey article on actresses, Terry was named as one of two 'greatest living actresses' with Marion Terry. 'WHO IS THE GREATEST LIVING ENGLISH ACTRESS AND WHY?', *The Idler; An Illustrated Magazine*, November 1895; 8 (46) British Periodicals, pp. 393–400.
- ⁵² 'Miss Ellen Terry as Desdemona at the Grand Theatre Fulham', *The Illustrated London News*, 27 August 1898.
- ⁵³ *Othello: The Moor of Venice*, p. 103.
- ⁵⁴ The Pioneer Players' programme leaflet for the first subscription matinee performance at the Kingsway Theatre in London on 8 May 1911, V&A Ellen Terry Collection.
- ⁵⁵ The Pioneer Players' programme for the Ellen Terry Shakespeare lectures at the Garrick Theatre, 11 June 1911. British Library Manuscripts, Ellen Terry Archive.
- ⁵⁶ *The Stage*, 27 April 1911; *Morning Post*, 26 April 1911; *Westminster Gazette*, 26 April 1911; *Daily Express*, 6 May 1911; *Votes for Women*, 28 April 1911; *Weekly Playgoer*, 3 May 1911; *Weekly Dispatch*, 7 May 1911; *Daily Graphic*, 5 May 1911; and *Globe*, 27 April 1911 focus on Terry particularly, reporting her return to the British stage.
- ⁵⁷ Felicity Nussbaum, *Rival Queens: Actresses, Performance, and the Eighteenth-century British Theater* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2010), p. 58.
- ⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁹ Ashwell was a theatre manager as well as an actress and this allowed her unprecedented freedom in acting in the productions at the Kingsway Theatre. For a further discussion of her theatrical life and contribution to the suffrage theatres, see Margaret Leask's chapter titled 'Pioneer, 1908–1914' in her biography *Lena Ashwell: Actress, Patriot, Pioneer* (Hatfield: University of Hertfordshire Press, 2012), pp. 71–116.

⁶⁰ Leask, p. 71.

⁶¹ James H. Butler argues that 'Vestris's years at the Olympic Theatre were extremely important in helping shape some of the newer trends in the 19th century English theatre'. James H. Butler, 'An Examination of the Plays Produced by Madame Vestris during her Management of the Olympic Theatre in London from January 3, 1831 to May 31, 1839', *Theatre Survey* 10.02 (1969), pp. 136–147, p. 147.

⁶² Rachel Cowgill, 'Re-gendering the Libertine; or, the Taming of the Rake: Lucy Vestris as Don Giovanni on the Early Nineteenth Century London Stage', *Cambridge Opera Journal*, 10.1 (1998), pp. 45–66, (p. 46.)

⁶³ *Ibid*, p. 45.

⁶⁴ Nussbaum, p. 59.

⁶⁵ Carolyn Tilghman, 'Staging Suffrage: Women, Politics, and the Edwardian Theater', *Comparative Drama*, 45.4 (2011), pp. 339–360, p. 344.

⁶⁶ 'The Pioneer Players at the Kingsway', *Reynolds*, unknown date. V&A Ellen Terry Collection.

⁶⁷ Untitled, *Morning Post*, 1 May 1911. V&A Ellen Terry Collection.

⁶⁸ 'London Theatres: The Kingsway', *The Stage*, unknown date. V&A Ellen Terry Collection.

⁶⁹ 'Pioneer Players. Women's Suffrage Matinee at the Kingsway', *Standard*, 9 May 1911. V&A Ellen Terry Collection.

⁷⁰ Aside from the plays included in this chapter, the Pioneer Players staged the following plays written or translated by St John: *Coronation* (1912), *The Theatre of The Soul* by Nikolai Evreinov (translation, 1915), *Macrena* (1912), *The Hired Girl* (translation, 1917), *The Rising Sun* by Herman Heijermans (translation, 1919), *On the East Side* (1919), and *The Children's Carnival* by Saint Georges de Bouhelier (translation, 1920).

⁷¹ Although *Paphnutius* was translated in 1914 by St John, the collection of Hrotsvit's plays was published in 1923. The original manuscripts were burned in a fire in the publishing house where St John had sent them.

⁷² *The Times* notes that, for an unknown reason, The Kings Hall at Covent Garden, London, was denied for the performance, so it was staged at the Savoy. 'A Medieval Drama: "Paphnutius" Produced by the Pioneer Players', *The Times*, 12 January 1914. Also see Appendix 7 for a copy of an advert of the first performance.

⁷³ Sue-Ellen Case, 'Re-Viewing Hrotsvit', *Theatre Journal*, 35.4 (1983), pp. 533–542 (p. 540).

⁷⁴ *Ibid*, p. 535.

⁷⁵ 'The Nun Dramatist: "Paphnutius" Produced by the Pioneer Players', *Votes for Women*, 2 January 1914.

⁷⁶ Christopher St John, 'Introduction' in *The Plays of Roswitha* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1923), p. xx.

⁷⁷ Cockin, p. 127.

⁷⁸ *Ibid*, p. 127.

⁷⁹ St John, *The Plays of Roswitha*, p. 102.

⁸⁰ Cockin, 'Working Women', in *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players 1911–25*, p. 111.

⁸¹ *Paphnutius* comprises thirteen scenes. After the conversion of Thais in the third scene, the rest of the play displays her being taken to solitary confinement to wait for her salvation, and the events related to her punishment are narrated by *Paphnutius*.

⁸² Tickner, p. 220.

⁸³ Cicely Hamilton, *A Pageant of Great Women* (London: Suffrage Shop, 1910), p. 41.

⁸⁴ *Ibid*, p. 35.

⁸⁵ "'Paphnutius"', *Sphere*, 17 January 1914

⁸⁶ Marla Carlson writes that 'she modelled her six plays on the comedies of Roman playwright Terence (c.195–159 BC)'. He also argues that 'Terence's comedies were themselves imitations of

Menander and Apollodorus, with plots revolving around the love affairs of young men with courtesans or with seemingly inappropriate (poor) young women who turn out in the end to be appropriate (wealthy) after all, so that the father's opposition to marriage is overcome. The choice of Terence as a model is not surprising. Latin was learned by reading classical texts and Terence, admired for his style, continued to be read, copied, and illuminated throughout the medieval period.' Marla Carlson, 'Impassive Bodies: Hrotsvit Stages Martyrdom', *Theatre Journal*, 50.4 (1998), pp. 473–487, (p. 482.)

⁸⁷ Case, p. 535.

⁸⁸ Carlson notes that Hrotsvit's plays may have been performed in her lifetime. Alternatively, they may have been read with the roles given to readers at King Otto's court. Seemingly, this is still controversial as there is not enough evidence to support either theory. See Carlson, p. 482.

⁸⁹ St John, 'Introduction', p. xix.

⁹⁰ 'The Plays of Hroswitha: Miss Christopher St. John's Translation of "Paphnutius."', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 30 December 1913. (*Pall Mall Gazette* used the name Hroswitha instead of Hrotswitha or Hrotsvit.)

⁹¹ Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry, Player in Her Time* (Ontario Canada: Penguin Books, 1987), pp. 403–404.

⁹² Terry's Jubilee on 12 June 1906 was to mark her fiftieth year on stage and took place at Drury Lane. According to Michael R. Booth, this was an important financial event for Terry, contributing £6,000 towards her retirement. A large host of leading actors, actresses and entertainers performed in the Jubilee. Booth also adds that 'Terry appeared on the stage in an act of *Much Ado about Nothing* to the worshipful plaudits of a packed house'. Michael R. Booth, 'Terry, Dame Ellen Alice (1847–1928)', *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography*, Oxford University Press, 2004; online ed., January 2011, [<http://0-www.oxforddnb.com.wam.leeds.ac.uk/view/article/36460>, accessed 20 August 2014].

⁹³ *The First Actress*, p. 16.

⁹⁴ *Ibid*, p. 16.

⁹⁵ Terry's most appreciated roles were in the Shakespeare plays staged with Henry Irving at Drury Lane. For further discussion of Terry's roles, see the chapter titled 'Our Lady of Lyceum' in Nina Auerbach, *Ellen Terry, Player in Her Time*, pp. 175–266.

⁹⁶ 'Who is the Greatest Living English Actress and Why?' *The Idler, an illustrated magazine*, November 1895; 8, 46, *British Periodicals*, p. 397.

⁹⁷ *Ibid*, p. 398.

⁹⁸ Christopher St John, 'Introduction to Four Lectures on Shakespeare', in Ellen Terry, *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, ed. Christopher St John (London: Martin Hopkinson, 1932), p. 9.

⁹⁹ St John records that 'Ellen Terry appealed to [her] as her literary henchman for advice, and [she] agreed that without the improvisations [Terry] made when she was lecturing, without the illumination of her views and ideas provided by her acting of the interpolated scenes, her lectures would be only half themselves'. *Four Lectures on Shakespeare*, p. 8.

¹⁰⁰ Terry called Shakespeare's female characters, such as Desdemona, Beatrice and Celia, 'The Triumphant Heroines' in her lecture.

¹⁰¹ 'Paphnutius: The Conversion of Thais', *Handbill Programme*, 1914.

¹⁰² Egan Mew, 'The Pioneer Players in 'Paphnutius' at the Savoy Theatre', *The Academy*, 17 January 1914, p. 2176.

¹⁰³ "'Paphnutius" by the Pioneer Players', *Queen*, 17 January 1914.

¹⁰⁴ 'Paphnutius', anonymous review, 1914.

¹⁰⁵ Untitled review, *Umpire*, 18 January 1914.

¹⁰⁶ St. John, 'Introduction' to *The Plays of Roswitha*, p. ix.

¹⁰⁷ Edith Craig, *Votes for Women*, 12 November 1909. Also quoted in Joy Melville, *Ellen and Edy: A Biography of Ellen Terry and Her Daughter Edith Craig, 1847–1947* (London: Routledge, 1987), p. 214.

¹⁰⁸ 'The Plays of Hroswitha', *Pall Mall Gazette*, 10 December 1913.

¹⁰⁹ "'Paphnutius" by the Pioneer Players', *Queen*, 17 January 1914.

Chapter 4. Suffragettes Conquer George Bernard Shaw's Stage

4.1. Introduction: The Rise of Suffragettes and Edwardian 'Anti-suffragetism'

The Pankhursts' formation of WSPU in 1903 in England heralded a new phase in women's political campaigns. A group of suffragists chose street activism as the most potent method of articulating their demands and they proclaimed their motto as 'Deeds and Words'.¹ This new effort of space-making and confrontational politics fashioned a new form of resistance, a spectacle of militant femininity.² WSPU, headed by Emmeline Pankhurst, stressed that women had to emulate working-class men's tactics within the public sphere as they had to confront a male-dominated Edwardian society, and their political language was shaped by these power relationships.³ With a sincere dedication to their ideals, militant suffragettes took to the streets and slashed art, interfered in political meetings, burned post office boxes, and defaced the prime minister's doorway, which garnered them plenty of press and transformed them into a media magnet.⁴ Such civil disobedience developed as the central goal of the militant suffragette movement in Edwardian England, which deeply radicalised women and resulted in a surge in the representations of 'suffragettes'. Caricaturists replaced suffragists in their work with fictional characters from Edwardian literature and media.

As such, the representation of the suffragette retained much currency during both the nascent and latter stages of the suffragette movement as it became more militant. The suffragette had a long tradition of signifying dissidence and rebellion in Edwardian culture.⁵ Indeed, women as political subjects made their bodies the focus of ideological conflicts throughout various campaigns in the fight for enfranchisement. Female corporeality thus formed a central feature of female subjectivities in suffrage imagery.⁶ Since the inception of the WSPU, the image of

the suffragette had been both reinvented and mythologised for a variety of purposes.⁷ Its persistence in popular culture, however, reduced suffragettes to merely their names and fatal actions. Emmeline Pankhurst was time and again represented and memorialised during Edwardian England, which established the suffragette as a trope for modernity and ‘a symbol of women's political activism more generally’.⁸ Militancy functioned as a critical aspect of how suffragettes engaged with discourses about democracy, citizenship and womanhood. The constructive nature of suffragette representation predicated on this particular understanding of militancy thus locates Pankhurst as a signifier of the suffragette.⁹

Without a doubt, the representations of suffragettes as radical militants who followed the Pankhursts generated a war of fictional constructions authenticating and de-authenticating the images of radical femininity as harridans, hysterical women and masculine characters.¹⁰ There was a discursive struggle to construct suffragettes as a barbaric, non-normative femininity on the one side and a rightful, committed and progressive one on the other. These representations functioned as mechanisms to consolidate radical women as a threat to and conversely reformers of the political order. Suffrage theatre was unique in its age and helped playwrights to construct suffragettes as non-conformist, smart and appealing in their comic plays. This chapter will attempt to examine the representation of suffragettes and parodies of anti-suffragettes in the suffrage-related and underrated plays of George Bernard Shaw, the most controversial political dramatist of the age: *The Press Cuttings* (1909) and *Fanny's First Play* (1911).

4.2. Anti-Suffragettes as a Parody of Militant Femininities in Shaw's *Press Cuttings*

George Bernard Shaw was a lifelong supporter of women's political equality, and his suffrage plays reflect his concern about this struggle. His position in Edwardian feminist movements has long been a matter of contention, but, as Philip Graham puts it, 'Shaw played a significant but not a leading role in public debates on female suffrage from an early stage'.¹¹ A reason for this appears to be his reluctance to be a public face for suffrage societies. In defence of his stance, he clarified his reasoning as follows:

the vote will never be won by speeches made by men on behalf of women. [...] I have taken every possible means in my power to make public my strong conviction of the enormous social importance of not only giving women the vote, [...] Therefore if my support is any value, it can be claimed without fear of contradiction by the speakers in your movement. But the speaking must be done by the women themselves.¹²

Shaw's statement shows his belief in women's activism for equality, but he also notes that his contribution should not extend to lecturing the public in the name of women. Instead, his suffrage plays and his advisory role for suffrage writers proved to be his significant contribution.¹³ A critical concern of his was to raise the profile of suffragists' public image. In this sense, his suffrage play *Press Cuttings* can be considered as an attack on the misrepresentations of suffragette femininity. The play emerged upon a request from the respected actor Sir Johnston Forbes-Robertson, whose wife was a founding member of the Actresses' Franchise League.¹⁴ He requested *Press Cuttings* be staged as part of a suffrage matinee organised for the vote campaign. Consequently, the play was staged in a private matinee at the Court Theatre, which was organised by the London Society for Women's Suffrage, twice on 9 and 12 July 1909.¹⁵ The programme also included a performance of *A Fair Arabian* by Sydonie Colton and a reading of *The Ancient Mariner* by Forbes-

Robertson.¹⁶ It appears that the matinee was simply afternoon entertainment rather than a serious propagandist assembly. Though it was primarily thought an entertaining piece, the Lord Chamberlain imposed the immediate censorship on *Press Cuttings* on the grounds that it satirised prominent figures of anti-suffragist leadership and Edwardian politics by featuring their parodies as the main characters.¹⁷ This argument can be justified as the play is a farcical account of press news and comments accompanied by hilarious portrayals of anti-suffragettes.¹⁸ However, the play was largely constructed to counter the misleading representations of suffragettes in the press via a role-reversal between suffragettes and anti-suffragettes. Shaw presents a lampoon of two central male characters, Balsquith as a personification of Prime Minister Asquith and conservative leader Arthur Balfour, as well as General 'Mitchener' who supposedly represents army general Redvers Buller.¹⁹

Press Cuttings opens in the war office in London, where General Mitchener gives orders to the Orderly, a conscript soldier, that any woman chaining herself to the railings in the Parliament street must immediately be removed. At this point, a suffragette enters the room in rush. Before Mitchener attempts to cast her out, she reveals that she is indeed Balsquith, the prime minister, disguised as a suffragette. Balsquith defends himself asserting that 'the only way the Prime Minister of England can get from Downing Street to the War Office is by assuming this disguise [and] shrieking "VOTES FOR WOMEN"'.²⁰ He also explains Mitchener the home secretary Sandstone's (Herbert Gladstone) plan of cordoning off the two miles around Westminster. Mitchener finds this '[a] master piece of strategy' (p. 4) and suggests that if suffragettes do not evacuate the area, soldiers should '[s]hoot them down' (p. 4). According to Mitchener, the use of force is the only solution to the

problem, but Balsquith dismisses this as it would mean the use of force against women, which could consequently result in a political backlash. Meanwhile, the Orderly comes in and informs Balsquith and Mitchener that two women from the Anti-Suffragette League are waiting outside to see Balsquith. The ladies, the president of the league, Lady Corinthia Fanshawe, and the secretary, Rosa Carmina Banger, meet Balsquith and Mitchener. In their meeting, the women declare that the 'Anti-Suffragettes are going to fight' against the suffragettes (p. 24) and further, they can no longer trust men in their fight (p. 24). Mitchener protests this idea, suggesting instead that they should leave the task to men. Seemingly unimpressed, the women confess that they have been arming themselves for some time. Mitchener demands that they hand over any weapons they are carrying as it is his duty to take possession of the weapons (p. 25). The women rebuff the general's move, point their pistols at him and ask if he really wants to confiscate them. Mrs Banger also intimidates him by telling him how she slew five men by sword in her years as a soldier in Egypt. She also asserts that suffragettes' demand for the vote is nonsense as 'men have the vote' and 'men are slaves' (p. 25). She even goes on to say that '[a]ll the really strong men of history have been disguised women' (p. 26), asking if 'Napoleon [would] have been so brutal to women, [...] had he been a man' (p. 26). Unable to persuade the women, Mitchener takes his revolver out of drawer and claims he is 'the master of the situation' now (p. 27). Mrs Banger is taken outside by the Orderly and Lady Corinthia accuses Mitchener of making unnecessary romantic advances towards her, which, she says, are futile attempts. Claiming to be the greatest musician who ever lived, Lady Corinthia says she will not accept Mitchener's treatment of her as an ordinary woman. She declares that the country should only be governed by charming women who have influence over men. Meanwhile, Mrs

Banger locks herself in a room to convince Sandstone to allow women to serve in the army. The play concludes with Sandstone's proposal to Mrs Banger as he sees in her a match for himself. Mitchener, on the other hand, calls Mrs Farrell, the charwoman, and proposes to her to compete with Sandstone's engagement. Finally, Balsquith and Lady Corinthia commit themselves to a relationship, suggesting men's conversion and a promising future for the women's cause.

In his first play dealing with suffrage politics, Shaw takes on the prejudice against anti-suffragettes by statesmen as an opportunity to burlesque their characters in a farcical plot. He exploits the representations of women's militancy in popular Edwardian culture, which painted these women as shockingly violent, uncontrollable and hysterical.



Figure 25: “Sermons in Stones”, *Punch*, 29 November 1911.

In the *Punch*'s suffragette cartoon titled ‘Sermons in Stones’, which was published in 1911, John Bull is depicted in a room talking to a non-militant suffragist when the window of the room is broken by a brick, conceivably thrown by a suffragette outside his office. He appears to be complaining that the suffragettes’ stones interrupt

his meeting with the woman, so that he is literally unable to help her. This is an exemplary cartoon published by anti-suffragette and conservative magazine *Punch*, which often illustrated suffragettes as an obstacle to the working of the Parliament and a threat to the imperial image of Britain. The character, John Bull, is a symbolic persona, who, according to Miles Taylor, ‘has usually been recognized as both the personification of England and a timeless reminder of Englishness’.²¹ He represented a multitude of identities embedded in English culture and was widely used in the Edwardian era as a nationalist, an imperialist, a commoner and a harsh critic of women’s emancipation, emerging in different media. The image had loose and unfixed connotations. Iain McCalman notes that, even from the eighteenth century, ‘[t]he heightened national awareness of patriots [were] displayed in the xenophobic iconography of John Bull [and] Britannia’.²² He is a signifier of British imperial and political power and symbolically of masculinity and authority. As such, the *Punch*’s sketch draws on the images of John Bull as a political figure and suggests that he, as the embodiment of the collective conservative politics, is disrupted by female militancy. In this respect, *Punch*’s anti-suffragette caricatures were a rich resource for the characterisations in *Press Cuttings*. Supporting this assumption, Shaw defended himself against the censorship of the Lord Chamberlain by stating that there is ‘[n]othing [in the play] you do not see in any pantomime or in any number of “Punch”’.²³ The characterisations in the play are mostly witty reworkings of popular images of politicians and suffragettes. The rest of this section will explore Shaw’s constructions of anti-suffragettes as a representation of powerful femininities embodied in the rebellious suffragettes.



Figure 26: Photos of Bernard Shaw and male characters in *Press Cuttings* from the 9 July 1909 performance at the Court Theatre, London, *Sketch*, 21 July 1909. Shown are Shaw (left), Balsquith (middle) and Mitchener (right) (from the *Press Cuttings* production file, V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

The play's opening scene introduces two male characters, Mitchener and Balsquith, who are nervous about the imminent threat from women waiting outside. Mitchener's response to the noises, which is also illustrated in another scene in the photograph by *Sketch*, is quite suggestive:

The General starts convulsively; snatches a revolver from a drawer; and listens in an agony of apprehension. Nothing happens. He puts the revolver back, ashamed; wipes his brow; and resumes his work. (p. 1)

Mitchener's instinctual gesture of defence and embarrassment is a sign of his self-consciousness about his image and masculine role as an army general. Although there are no real suffragettes represented on the stage, their noise and the power of their numbers create a comic tension, turning Mitchener into an absurd parody of threatened manliness, enabling the writer to mock the real politicians whose inaction is linked to their paranoia about these new and daring femininities.

This self-consciousness is also manifest in his uptight boldness inspired by the perceived horror of the suffragettes, which reveals itself in his repeated order: '[s]hoot them down'. Despite his intimidating persona, his words become an absurd catchphrase as he is gradually emasculated by the threat from the suffragettes. His explanation enhances the farcicality of his attitude: 'if you point a rifle at a woman and fire it, she will drop exactly as a man drops' (p. 4). This order to kill women is repeated by Mitchener a number of times in the play especially when he feels unable to find a logical answer to his worry of powerlessness.

Similarly, this diminished manhood is also signified in the character of Balsquith. He appears to be impersonating a multitude of characters among conservative and liberal circles in Parliament. Despite the clear association of characters with politicians, Shaw rebuffed any likelihood of staging a real person in the play. Instead, he defended his decision to use the name Balsquith as 'a well-worn Punch name', exhausted in many contexts by the magazine to satirise politics.²⁴ Shaw's biographer Holroyd suggests that Asquith, the prime minister of the time, is unmistakable in the role of Balsquith.²⁵ He was also the highest-profile anti-suffragist in the Liberal government in 1909. This justifies why Shaw reimagined Asquith as a comic antihero by deflating his despotic image, mostly enhanced by the public confrontation between him and prominent suffragettes at the time.²⁶ As Sandra Stanley Holton puts it, 'men's failure to exercise [...] control was represented as a major factor in the pathology of Edwardian Britain, [so] women's militancy became a symptom of that failure [for the male politicians]'.²⁷ Shaw's farcical characterisation, in this way, indicates that, as a collective power, suffragettes had an impact greater than just as a nuisance for men. They were a clear cause of public

humiliation, and Shaw's two characters are the theatrical caricatures of the apprehensions of the Edwardian political elite about their masculinity.

The narrative of women undermining men's authority in a comic plot was not new to suffrage discourse, and it was already very popular in Edwardian suffrage drama before *Press Cuttings* was written. Indeed, suffragist writers deployed a similar humorous language, juxtaposing this alongside images of dangerous and hysterical suffragettes.²⁸ Three short farces named *The Suffragette*, by George Dance, E.A. Crawley and Lavinia King were published successively between 1907 and 1908. King's one-act *The Suffragette: A Farce* was published in *The New Age* magazine on 30 May 1908.²⁹ The play demonstrates how comic literature recast suffragettes in a sympathetic nuanced fashion. The narrative focuses on Mr Asterisks, a politician who decries the feminist in a heinous manner. At the outset, a suffragette named Miss Belloney enters the study of the home secretary in order to articulate her desire to procure the vote. After calling her a dog, he throws the 'elderly and hideous female' out of the window and then goes back to work as if nothing had transpired. Such disregard for life depicts male politicians as callous, unfeeling and grotesque in a highly ludicrous and comical fashion.

Asterisks views radical and politically conscious women as nuisances who disrupt his political work through their riots, hawkishness and persistence. Indeed, the women in the play exercise their political agency through protest. Just to be seen and heard by one of the most politically powerful officials, Miss Belloney must disguise herself as a man because her gender renders her incapable and unworthy of physically and symbolically encroaching on the political sphere. Despite the willingness of suffragettes to subject themselves to physical violence, male hegemony persists in the world that is depicted. King portrays Mr Asterisks as an

absurd and comical character who paints men as the victim of these ‘terrible women’ who could attack them and harm them at any moment out of desperation. It is almost comical how perverse the logic Asterisks articulates regarding women is, as he conveys sheer ignorance and sophistry. Women are portrayed as the victims of an oppressive society that is governed by the sheer absurdity inherent in male hegemony. Shaw’s adaptation of a similar narrative is critically disguised in the anti-suffragette female characters, who are embodied by Lady Corinthia and Mrs Banger.

In *Press Cuttings*, the visit of the president and secretary of the Anti-Suffragette League is used by Shaw to point out how suffragettes were perceived by male conservatives. Balsquith sees the anti-suffragettes as the epitome of ‘womanly’ beings. Lady Corinthia was brought up in a respectable upper class house; she is well connected (her father had donated a quarter of a million pounds to the Conservative party funds), musical, romantic and, above all, known to hate politics. She is described as a beautiful thirty-year-old woman (p. 23). Her description perfectly matches the portrait of a woman as she should be, at least according to Balsquith, the opponent of women’s enfranchisement.



Figure 27: *Press Cuttings*, the anti-suffragettes scene from the 9 July 1909 performance at the Court Theatre, London, *Sketch*, 21 July 1909 (from the *Press Cuttings* production file, V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

However, the scene photographed by *Sketch* featuring the two women's meeting with Mitchener hardly fits Balsquith's description of amiable femininities. Mrs Banger is described as 'a masculine woman of forty with a powerful voice and great physical strength' (p. 23): not by body, voice or physical strength does she qualify as gentle or timid. Similarly, Lady Corinthia is also, despite her feminine and romantic appearance, very brave and forthcoming in her demeanour. She clearly states that '[they] can no longer trust the men' (p. 24) and for this reason, '[t]he Anti-Suffragets [*sic*] have resolved to take the field' (p. 24). The Anti-Suffragette League ends up defying the acceptable womanliness. Shocked by Lady Corinthia's behaviour, Mitchener resorts to his already worn-out reasoning that women's fighting would be unwomanly and unnatural, echoing the most fundamental reasoning behind the anti-suffrage condemnation of Edwardian militant feminist.³⁰ The anti-suffragettes appear to be just as radical and unwavering as the suffragettes. Lady Corinthia symbolically takes this argument one step further to prove that women are superior to men. The irony is two-fold here. It is suggested that suffragettes constitute a very powerful

identity that even notorious anti-suffragettes find petrifying and untameable. It also indicates the inconsistency in the anti-suffrage rhetoric: simply that anti-suffragette women position themselves inferior to male politicians.

Another important female character in Shaw's *Press Cuttings* is the colourful Irish charwoman, Mrs Farrell. She comes across as wise, although uneducated, and a dutiful but strong and confident character. While she believes that certain male activities should be indulged, as a form of showing some sort of compensatory respect for their brave deeds, Mrs Farrell points out that her equivalent achievements are not considered worthy of a rewarding concession. She therefore asks the general: 'Would you put up with bad language from me because I've risked my life eight times in childbed?' (p. 18). The general's response encapsulates his belief concerning the general rapport between men and women. He says: 'My dear Mrs. Farrell, you surely would not compare a risk of that harmless domestic kind to the fearful risks of the battlefield?' (p. 18). He remains true to his conviction that public life is more serious than private life, which is mostly identified with women. However, Mrs Farrell plays another important role as the one who converts Mitchener at the end of play. The play closes with the working-class women's triumph in male politics, which also alludes to the working-class roots of the suffragettes in militant societies such as WSPU.

Press Cutting's critical reception reveals two important functions of the play and its stage productions. With his other political work, *The Shewing-up of Blanco Posnet* (1909), Shaw started a public campaign against censorship. The censorship of *Press Cuttings* was on the basis that '[n]o representations of living persons [are] permitted on the stage'.³¹ The initial reviews of the first production put censorship in the headlines, instigating a very public battle of words between Shaw and the Lord

Chamberlain. This began with Shaw's defence of the independence of playwrights in front of a tribunal, where his evidence was largely ignored and a decision to maintain the censorship of the play was taken. This led Shaw to publicise the controversy of state control over theatre via his letters to *The Times*.

Later reviews, on the other hand, were diverse and mostly focused on the play's entertaining side. The *Manchester Guardian* confessed that 'brief spasms of action open and close whole sessions of static talk, and nearly all the action and talks are good fun'.³² The farcical effect was especially heightened by the swift comebacks of women responding to Mitchener and by unexpected moments where the Orderly frequently opens the door to give bad news to Mitchener in the middle of his conversations with either Balsquith or the anti-suffragettes. The noise of the Orderly rolling over the steps to the entrance door of the building was noted; about this entertaining scene, the *Manchester Guardian* stated, 'one begins to think of the second Mrs Tanqueray's remark that future is only the past entered by a different gate',³³ alluding to the play's conclusion of a positive future through the compromise from the male politicians. It is also interesting that Shaw later changed the character names for a public performance, to avoid the characters' connection to their real-life counterparts. The play's stage performance at the Gaiety Theatre on 27 September 1909 featured Johnson (replacing Balsquith) and Bones (instead of Mitchener), causing one critic to remark '[t]he country has now been saved for good'.³⁴ Another critic called it a 'quintessential comedy' and 'the best thing of the evening', comparing it to George Moore's *The Dove Uncaged*, which ran alongside *Press Cuttings* in the third week at the Gaiety.³⁵

In retrospect, considering Shaw's commitment to suffrage politics, *Press Cuttings* seems to be an entertaining but rhetorical play, which achieved success in

its public performances. Even though Shaw had described *Press Cuttings* as harmless, it was an attack on the opponents of the suffrage movement. The play also caused one of the biggest controversies in Shaw's career through its censorship, which was similarly a matter for suffrage writers.

It is ironic that no suffragettes represented in *Press Cuttings*. However, every line of conversation between characters was a satire of anti-suffragettes and justified the points of suffragettes. The imaginary suffragettes and their parodies, two anti-suffragettes, Lady Corinthia and Mrs Banger, humorously undermine the authoritarian image of male characters and the play paints a picture of powerless men, juxtaposing the masculine portrayals of suffragettes in the press.

4.3. Creating Sympathy for Suffragettes in *Fanny's First Play*

Shaw's second play featuring a suffrage theme was *Fanny's First Play* (1911). The author's style is highly satirical and his main intention seems to be to satirise the conceptions of class, female respectability and morality, offering a sympathetic and unpretentious portrayal of a young woman who personifies the temperament of a suffragette. It puts forth a highly radical vision of the relationship between men and women. Social customs and norms are systematically undermined in order to portray a more authentic relationship of men and women both within their genders in the disguise of a farcical plot. The play promotes this femininity portrayed in a meta-theatrical plot which features an inset play written by Fanny about suffragettes.³⁶ It can be structurally compared to St John's *The First Actress*, which also presents Hughes' performance in *Othello* as a pioneering step in women's theatre history. However, *Fanny's First Play*, as a farcical comedy, features a distinct plot and strategies. An interesting feature of the play is an element of self-referential irony.

Near the end of the play, when the critics are discussing the play, it is suggested that it could not have been written by Shaw, due to the fact that it was not susceptible to the usual criticisms that Shaw's works have generally encountered. This was enhanced by the play being published anonymously, giving it an air of secrecy. The play proved to be a success and became the most popular work Shaw had thus far written, with 622 performances in both the Little and the Kingsway theatres.³⁷

Fanny's First Play was first staged at the Little Theatre, London, in the afternoon of 19 April 1911 and continued every Wednesday and Friday in the following month with a notable cast, including Harcourt Williams as Count O'Dowda, Christine Silver as Fanny O'Dowda, Dorothy Minto as Dora Delaney, Cicely Hamilton as Mrs Knox and Lillah McCarthy as Margaret Knox.

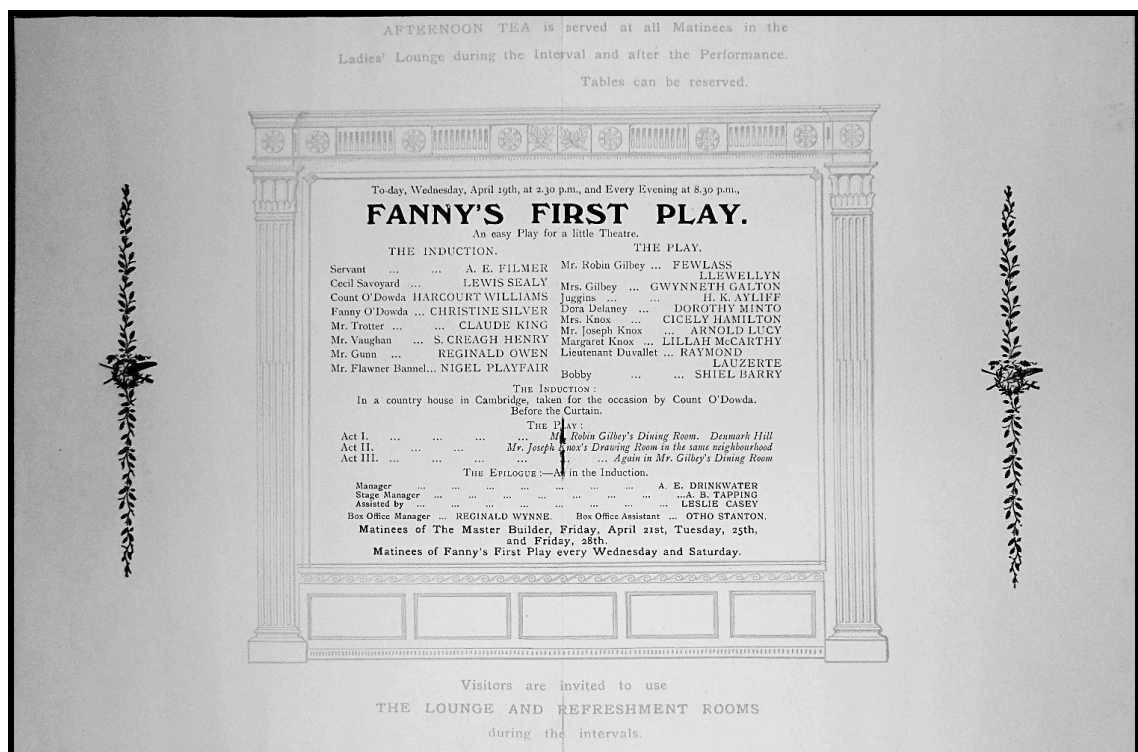


Figure 28: *Fanny's First Play* at the Little Theatre, 21 April 1911 (George Bernard Shaw bibliographical file, V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections).

The play was to provide an introduction to Lillah McCarthy's newly established management of the Little Theatre, London in 1911 with a £2,000 loan from Lord Howard de Walden.³⁸ According to Michael Holroyd, when asking Shaw for a play

for her theatre, McCarthy told him proudly, ‘I am going to be an actress-manager, with my own theatre, and here is the beginning capital!’³⁹ The play, in this sense, was both Shaw’s assistance to an actress–manager’s career and also a chance to counter some critics’ condemnation of his plays as unpopular. The play consists of an induction, an inset play and an epilogue, which made it long enough for an evening performance without needing to arrange accompanying performances on the same day.⁴⁰ This seems to be a decision dictated mostly by financial considerations in order to make McCarthy’s venture at the Little Theatre more sustainable.

One of the main themes that emerge is Shaw’s vision of new femininity that is rather at odds with Edwardian moral norms. Shaw states in his short preface to the play that

Fanny’s First Play, being but a potboiler, needs no preface. But its lesson is not, I am sorry to say, unneeded. Mere morality or the substitution of custom for conscience was once accounted a shameful and cynical thing: people talked of right and wrong, of honor and dishonor, of sin and grace, of salvation and damnation, not of morality and immorality.⁴¹

The discussion of morality is especially examined in the relationship between Fanny and her father, Count O’Dowda, and the characters of the inset play, Margaret and Bobby, both in terms of the ideas and perspectives expressed by female characters and in terms of the relationships that female characters within the play engage in with male characters. The play, in this sense, presented a vision of a woman as an autonomous, powerful human being who is not distinguishable from a man in her nature, desires and actions. That said, the purpose of this section is to reflect on the representations of femininity and allusions made to the Edwardian suffragette’s imprisonment in *Fanny’s First Play*. This section will try to address two main questions: the first pertains to how different femininities are constructed in the text and what these different constructions represent; and the second pertains to the

relationship that the play has with Edwardian suffragettism. It will also discuss the performance of the play on the basis of critical reviews and published photographs in *The Play's Pictorial* during its initial production at the Little Theatre.⁴²

Fanny's First Play is essentially a comedy of manners. The prologue to the play portrays a girl named Fanny wanting to put on a play and her father, who is against the idea, but is a wealthy man so he can acquire the resources to produce it. Most of the body of this play is presented as if it were written by Fanny. This becomes especially interesting and convoluted when one bears in mind that Shaw published his play anonymously. Thus, the main body of the play was written by Shaw's character Fanny; the contemporary critics would not have known that Shaw was the voice behind Fanny; and the play itself sought to lampoon the way that critics generally tended to respond to plays, as is made clear by the epilogue of the play. This would have made it difficult for contemporary critics to quite know how to respond to the play, which, of course, would have been part of the purpose of Shaw's framing devices.

The inset play features Bobby and Margaret, a young couple in a romantic relationship, who have each ended up in jail as a result of having independent misadventures. The first act of the play primarily focuses on Bobby and his family, while the second act focuses on Margaret and her family. The parents of both of these young people are completely mortified by the fact that their children have ended up in jail. The third act then centres on the social fallout of these events, including the consequences for Bobby and Margaret's relationship. As a result of their independent adventures, these two characters come to the realisation that they are probably not meant for each other. One of the plotlines of the play consists of Bobby and Margaret breaking off their engagement, presumably on the social pretext

that an engagement need not be valid after both parties have spent time in jail, but actually based on the perceived inauthenticity of the relationship. Both Bobby and Margaret have liaisons of sorts during their adventures. Bobby encounters a Cockney girl named Dora, while Margaret meets a Frenchman named Duvallet. By the end of the play, Bobby is romantically involved with Dora, and Margaret is involved with a footman named Juggins. In short, over the course of the play, the social relationships between the different characters change in quite a dramatic way. The general trajectory of these changes consists of Bobby and Margaret arriving at better understandings of themselves and forming new relationships that are more congruent with their true personalities, as opposed to acquiescing to artificial social norms regarding who they should be and with whom they should associate. This critique of society's values is reinforced by the fact that Shaw's play is largely a play within a play, with the epilogue of the work consisting of a satire against literary critics and Act Three making allusions to a suffragette's imprisonment.

Considering the representations of femininity in Shaw's play, what becomes clear is that the main female characters are in fact the most spirited ones in the entire work. Two characters, in particular, Dora and Margaret, must be discussed in this context. Dora is the girl with whom Bobby gets into trouble with the police. Within the play, it actually becomes clear that Dora may have taken the lead in getting Bobby involved in this situation. As she says to his parents, 'Don't you be afraid: I've educated Bobby a bit: he's not the mollycoddle he was when you had him in hand.'⁴³ This deflates the idea of women as being frail or passive beings. Through Dora's spirited recklessness, Shaw shows that there is nothing about a woman that stops her from taking the lead in getting into stereotypically 'masculine' trouble, such as getting thrown into jail, as suffragettes did repeatedly. This also contributes

to the comic nature of Shaw's play. As Gladys Margaret Crane has written, in Shaw's plays, comedy often emerges as a result of 'such plot devices as reversal of roles or inversion'.⁴⁴ In this case, the gender roles in the relationship between Bobby and Dora are inverted, but, to put it more correctly, normalised. While Bobby's parents seem to have brought him up as a 'mollycoddle', Dora seemingly has no concerns at all with the fact that she has been in jail; indeed, she seems to accept the experience as ordinary.



Figure 29: The scene in which Bobby learns that Margaret was also in jail ('Fanny's First Play', *The Play Pictorial*, No. 114, Vol. XIX. V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections).

Similarly, Margaret's engagement with Bobby is itself emblematic of the artificiality of gender norms. In the scene when Bobby learns of Margaret's experience of going to jail, he does not respond in a sympathetic way as someone who has gone through the same experience. Indeed, he is rather astonished by Margaret's responses:

Margaret: Do you feel you couldn't marry a woman who had been in prison?

Bobby: [Hastily] No. I never said that. It might even give a woman a greater claim on a man. Any girl, if she were thoughtless and a bit on, perhaps, might get into a scrape. Anyone who really understood her character could see there was no harm in it. But you're not the larkly sort. [...]

Margaret: I'm not; and I never will be. [She walks straight up to him] I didn't do it for a lark, Bob: I did it out of the very depths of my nature. I did it because I'm that sort of person. [...]

Bobby: Well, I don't think you can fairly hold me to it, Meg. Of course it would be ridiculous for me to set up to be shocked, or anything of that sort. I can't afford to throw stones at anybody; and I don't pretend to. I can understand a lark; I can forgive a slip; as long as it is understood that it is only a lark or a slip. [...]

Margaret: Bobby: you're no good. No good to me, anyhow.

Bobby: [huffed] I'm sorry, Miss Knox.

Margaret: Goodbye, Mr. Gilbey. [She turns on her heel and goes to the other end of the table.]

Bobby's moral stance dictates that it is not right or proper for a woman to feel as Margaret does about her experiences. She appears to be a different kind of girl from that which he initially believed. The fact that Margaret breaks off her engagement with Bobby and decides to become involved with the footman Juggins can be understood as a representation of femininity shifting away from a modality of being determined by the social convention Bobby represents in his arguments. He indicates that while he could only forgive her if she did in fact do it for a lark, he cannot understand how she could possibly have done it as a matter of principle. Shaw makes this moral point here: Margaret is what an actual woman should represent. A woman is no less worthy of respect than a man. Indeed, she may even be worthy of considerably greater respect, insofar as the audience intrinsically sympathises with Margaret's spiritedness and is naturally repelled by Bobby's conventionality and lack of empathy. The break between Margaret and Bobby is symbolic of the broader principle of breaking away from social artificiality in the Edwardian age.

This representation of femininity in *Fanny's First Play* is clearly congruent with Shaw's broader political perspective. As Michael Holroyd has indicated, Shaw

argued against the 'reactionary idealism' that insisted that women were pure and selfless creatures who should be protected from the real world; he believed that 'society changed only when women wanted it to', and he affirmed that 'men tended to be idealists; women were more practical: a combination of idealism and practicality made for reality'.⁴⁵ In the work under consideration, Bobby would seem to have held misconceptions regarding Margaret as a result of his own ideology regarding what was and was not proper for the personality and actions of a woman; Margaret violates such expectations through her concrete, unapologetic actions. Moreover, she is capable of processing her experiences in a more lucid and meaningful way than Bobby. She clearly affirms that she gained greater insight into herself as a result of her stay in jail. In a sense, Shaw tries to give the reader an impression that Margaret, a young woman, has a level of practical wisdom that Bobby seemingly lacks.

"FANNY'S FIRST PLAY"

MARGARET AND BOBBY COME TO BLOWS.



DORA: "Juggins! Juggins! they'll murder one another!"

Figure 30: The fight scene between Margaret and Bobby ('Fanny's First Play', *The Play Pictorial*, No: 114, Vol. XIX. V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections).

The fight scene between Margaret and Bobby shows that Margaret displays her natural personality rather than playing a pretentious or manipulative role. The fading gender roles become more pronounced in this scene. As Sally Peters has noted, Shaw has been famously quoted as saying that a woman is merely a man in petticoats, and that a man is merely a woman in petticoats.⁴⁶ Shaw's point is that the distinction between the genders is a relatively superficial one and can be eliminated easily. The reversal of power roles between Dora and Bobby as well as the breaking of Bobby and Margaret's engagement both affirm the main idea of Shaw's aphorism: the 'life force' within women compels them to be who they are, irrespective of social and family expectations. This 'life force' is no different from the life force that is also within men. This clearly had implications within the context of Edwardian suffragism of Shaw's time as a feminist movement. If Shaw's idea that men and

women are essentially the same is accepted, then there would no longer exist any logical or conceptual foundations for any argument against women's suffrage or feminism. *Fanny's First Play* serves the purpose of undermining these foundations by portraying the independent and empowered Margaret.

There has been considerable debate and disagreement over the extent to which Shaw could be called both a socialist and a suffragist. He clearly had radical proclivities, as is made evident by the social satire that permeates *Fanny's First Play* as well as the fact that assaulting a police officer constitutes a crucial element of the plot of the play. As Nicholas Greene has indicated, though, 'in advancing the theory of the Life-Force, the religion of creative evolution, [Shaw] abandoned the underlying materialist ideology of socialism'.⁴⁷ In this context, it could be said that representations of femininity within Shaw's play are in fact subversive, but in a somewhat indirect way. Margaret assaults a police officer not on any explicitly ideological grounds but, even so, she exemplifies the idea that a woman's non-conformist disposition can break through artificial social norms in order to affirm itself in a more full and authentic way rather than complying with societal norms as would be expected.

In addition, the point should also be noted that Shaw's play (as its name suggests) is framed as the creation of a female playwright, who is interested in the controversial issue of suffragettes. In the context of Edwardian society, which witnessed an unprecedented surge in the number of female playwrights (particularly in the theatre societies such as Shaw's Stage Society, the AFL, The Pioneer Players and the Woman's Theatre),⁴⁸ Shaw makes a clear allusion to the flourishing female. In the play, the presence of a female playwright introduces this new role of femininity as an Edwardian phenomenon: the emergence of female playwrights. The

play was of course actually written by Shaw, who uses Fanny's play as a pretext for introducing his conviction on the roles and changing nature of women. In one way, he makes his point that women are capable of producing serious plays and constructing new femininities, such as that embodied by the free-spirited Margaret. Shaw's chosen medium, the stage, reinforces the characterisation of women as fundamentally independent, empowered, and the same as men in all meaningful respects. The actress of Shaw's time was a living example of the principle that a woman essentially had the same competencies as a man. She was able to maintain an independent lifestyle and pursue a career in the public sphere, during a time when this was highly uncommon for ordinary women. In addition to Shaw's play being a play within a play, one further level of analysis could be included: the stage itself at least partly served as a framing device for *Fanny's First Play* and helped reinforce its key themes regarding the nature of femininity and the social ideals of gender equality. This is yet another way in which Shaw mocks the theatre conventions of his age: this is a clear satire on manners.

Interestingly, one of the news articles that reviewed *Fanny's First Play* makes the argument that it must have actually been written by a woman. The play was produced anonymously; although there are hints in the play and especially in the epilogue that the author was Shaw, this would have by no means been evident to the audience. *The Manchester Guardian* wrote, '[b]ut the internal evidence is all too clear that the piece is the work of a lady, and a lady who has made a careful study of Mr. Bernard Shaw's published plays' and maintains that '[t]here are innumerable touches in the women's parts which betray assumptions, prejudices, limitations, and a point of view all patently feminine.'⁴⁹ This is obviously as comical as it is flattering, and it indicates that Shaw apparently did have an excellent understanding

of the female mind, to the point that a reviewer could be convinced that his play must have been written by a woman.

Other reviews focused on the socially critical elements in Shaw's play. For example, *The Observer* reflected on the denouement of the play: 'Then, on two households whose ideas of the Fit and Proper already lie in ruins, comes the final thunderbolt of Juggins' avowal.'⁵⁰ Likewise, the *Academy* wrote that 'the epilogue was the most exquisite piece of impudence of which Shaw can boast, and boast he will'.⁵¹ The deeply satirical nature of *Fanny's First Play* was clearly not lost on the reviewers. However, the reviewers seemed to take this in good spirit: perusing the articles, one does not get the impression that Shaw's play was controversial *per se*; rather, it simply did an exemplary job of fulfilling the socially accepted function of a satirical comedy of manners.

The *London News* reviewed the play when it was put on a decade later, in 1922.⁵² One point that is made in this article is that even after only a decade, some of the specific ideas found in Shaw's play were becoming dated. It would seem that although the suffragettes were quite topical in 1911, this was no longer the case in 1922.⁵³ However, the article also observed that this kind of phenomenon may simply be inherent to the art of the playwright; in any event, the aesthetic and conceptual significance of the work clearly has not suffered from any kind of degradation.⁵⁴ It was clear that, for modern readers, a background in Edwardian suffrage politics and popular theatre was crucial in order to fully appreciate the humour and subtleties of the play, or that the most comical and witty lines of the play were inaccessible for a modern reader.

Across the different review articles, there would seem to be no explicit comments on the representation of femininity *per se*. In part, this may be simply

because such analysis would have been beyond the scope of the review articles. In addition, though, there are some oblique references to the characteristic philosophy or world view that inspired much of Shaw's work.⁵⁵ Namely, his irreverence toward social conventions and belief in a common humanity that attempts to realise itself in an increasingly coherent and authentic way. This would then include some awareness of his characterisation of femininity within the play, which essentially consists of the view that women are first and foremost human and have the same capacities for authentic self-realisation that men possess.

Finally, it is worth examining the comment made by Langton regarding the general stagecraft of Shaw. He asserts that '[i]f you changed a word, you changed the *pulse* of the whole scene. Unless you stressed the right words in the right places and captured the 'tune' [...] you made it more difficult for the audience to understand what is being said.'⁵⁶ Therefore, while Shaw's plays, including *Fanny's First Play*, are philosophically and conceptually profound, Shaw seems to have taken almost a 'musical' approach when writing his plays in terms of unity and overall effect. This is unsurprisingly congruent with his philosophy of common humanity and creative unfolding, insofar as the musicality of his scenes would have helped draw viewers into the kind of mindset from which his philosophy would begin to make greater intuitive sense. In the case of *Fanny's First Play*, the effect appears to have been almost an entertainment in full, while making the audience forget the serious reasoning behind the playwright's witty lines.

4.4. Afterword

In summary, this chapter has aimed to examine the representation of femininity within *Press Cuttings* and *Fanny's First Play*. One of the main points that has been

made is that Shaw implicitly advocated the suffragettes' struggle to have political rights by making the issue of violence, imprisonment and reversal of gender roles a subtext to his discussion. He portrays female characters first and foremost by their spiritedness and independence. This is clear in *Fanny's First Play*, in which it is exemplified mostly by Margaret's affirmation that she discovered important things about herself beyond the bounds of social conventions.

Ultimately, then, Shaw's suffrage plays are subversive on multiple levels. They attack caricatures and misrepresentations of women, the absurdity of social conventions and morality. *Fanny's First Play* even implicitly attacks ideologues of all stripes by failing to advocate for feminism and suffragettes in any explicitly political terms. The young women in the play enjoying themselves, and this demystifies much of the ideology that Shaw's society had constructed regarding the nature of women. The general principle of seeking a deeper and more authentic femininity that is ignored by the social conventions of the time makes a timeless point. This principle is at the core of Shaw's representation of femininity and its wishes and demands in *Fanny's First Play*.

¹ June Purvis, 'Deeds, not Words': Daily life in the Women's Social and Political Union in Edwardian Britain', in *Votes for Women*, ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 135–158 (p. 135).

² This phenomenon was especially related to large demonstrations around Parliament and women going on hunger strikes in jails. The two most significant events were 'the Rush to the House of Commons', which was organised by WSPU in October 1908 (p. 353) and 'the Siege of Westminster' by WFL in 1909 (p. 360). According to Laura E. Nym Mayhall, the former was an exhibition of WSPU's militant feminism and the latter was WFL's show of dignified and lawful womanhood in protest. (Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'Defining Militancy: Radical Protest, the Constitutional Idiom, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1908–1909', *Journal of British Studies*, 39.3 (2000), pp. 340–371).

³ Lisa Tickner notes that the labour movement constituted an inspiration for WSPU, especially through 'its symbolic tradition', 'outdoor meetings' and 'tactical imprisonment'. (Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 57).

⁴ Katharine Cockin, 'Inventing the Suffragettes: Anachronism, Gnosticism and Corporeality in Contemporary Fiction', *Critical Survey*, 16.3 (2004), pp. 17–32 (p. 18).

⁵ Christine Bolt argues that 'militancy could be seen as an unavoidable adaptation of the masculine justification of force – including violence – to advance a stalled political cause'. She maintains that

'militants disposed of anti-suffragist claims that women were incapable of deploying physical force, and sought to put their commitment to it into an international context and a revolutionary tradition.' (Christine Bolt, 'The Ideas of British Suffragism', in *Votes for Women*, ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 34–56 (p. 45)).

⁶ For a discussion of women's corporeality in the suffrage campaign, see Katharine Cockin, 'Inventing the Suffragettes: Anachronism, Gnosticism and Corporeality in Contemporary Fiction', *Critical Survey*, 16.3 (2004), pp. 17–32.

⁷ According to Lisa Tickner, abstract and mythologised female characters symbolised new femininities. They were not domesticated; conversely, they were heroic and independent as well as an 'idealised representation of militant movement'. (Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907–14* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), p. 207.)

⁸ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, 'Domesticating Emmeline: Representing the Suffragette, 1930–1993', *NWSA Journal*, 11.2 (1999), pp. 1–24 (p. 1).

⁹ Hilda Kean, "'Searching For the Past in Present Defeat": The Construction of Historical and Political Identity in British Feminism in the 1920s and 1930s', *Women's History Review*, 3.1 (1994), pp. 57–80 (p. 57).

¹⁰ Tickner notes that the representation and idealisation of militant women went against the images of violent activities portrayed as hysterical and futile and performed by incompetents and screaming viragos. (Tickner, p. 207.)

¹¹ Philip Graham, 'Bernard Shaw's Neglected Role in English Feminism 1880–1914', *Journal of Gender Studies*, 2.23 (2014), pp. 167–183 (p. 176).

¹² Dan H. Laurence, ed., *Shaw, The Letters of George Bernard, Vol 2* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1985). Also quoted in Graham, p. 177.

¹³ Shaw was one of the supporters of 'Men in Support for Women's Suffrage' and signed their declaration on 23 March 1909. This men's group, according to the declaration, 'was formed for the purpose of enrolling the names of eminent men as supporters of the demand of women to be admitted to the Parliamentary Franchise'. Among its eminent members are Arthur Wing Pinero, William Archer, H. Granville Barker, George Grossmith, J. Forbes-Robertson, H. G. Wells. ('Declaration by Men in Support of Women's Suffrage', 23 March 1909, *The Women's Library*, 153/4.). In addition to this, he was on the advisory board of Craig's *The Pioneer Players* and Bensusan's *The Woman's Theatre*.

¹⁴ Forbes's wife Gertrude Elliott was an actress and one of the founders of the AFL in 1908. (Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide, 1866–1928* (UCL Press: London, 1999), p. 4.)

¹⁵ George Bernard Shaw, *Press Cuttings* handbill, 9–12 July 1909. *Press Cuttings* production file, V&A Theatre Collection.

¹⁶ See Appendix 8 for a copy of the original handbill of *Press Cuttings*.

¹⁷ Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw: The Pursuit of Power 1898–1918, Vol. 2* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1989), p. 233.

¹⁸ The published edition in 1913 and the handbill of the first performance subtitled the play 'a topical sketch compiled from the editorial and correspondence columns of the Daily Press'. (*Press Cuttings* handbill, 9–12 July 1909 and George Bernard Shaw, *Press Cuttings: A Topical Sketch Compiled From the Editorial and Correspondence Columns of the Daily Papers* (London: Constable and Company Ltd., 1913)). This edition will henceforth be used as the main text.

¹⁹ Margot Peters, *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday & Company 1980), p. 315.

²⁰ *Press Cuttings*, p. 3.

²¹ Alan W. Bower and Robert A. Erickson, 'Preface' in John Arbuthnot, *The History of John Bull* (London: Oxford University Press, 1976), p. vii. Also cited in Miles Taylor, 'John Bull and the Iconography of Public Opinion in England c. 1712–1929', in *Past and Present*, 134 (1992), pp. 93–128, (p. 100).

²² Iain McCalman, *An Oxford Companion to the Romantic Age: British Culture 1776–1832* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999), p. 639.

²³ 'Banned Play: Censor's Objection to "Press Cuttings"', Special Interview with Mr. Shaw – A Barrie Precedent', a reprint from *Observer*, 27 June 1909, p. 4 (V&A Theatre and Performance Collections).

²⁴ Balsquith was a popular name used in the *Punch* caricatures to portray politicians. Shaw states he used a name already in use at the time, so censoring his play due to the characters' connection to real counterparts was invalid. 'The Censor's Ban: Mr. Shaw's Political Play', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 June 1909, p. 8.

²⁵ Holroyd, p. 233.

²⁶ According to June Purvis, after Asquith's resistance to meet any suffragette deputation despite repeated attempts, WSPU performed a number of 'eyecatching' events to attract media and prove that they were not a marginal movement. However, Asquith's resilience brought about 'more aggressive forms of action[s] [...] especially from 1912. Thus in this second stage of militancy, mass window-breaking, especially of well-known shops in London's West End, became common'. (Purvis, p. 137).

²⁷ Sandra Stanley Holton, 'The Making of Suffrage History', in *Votes for Women*, ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 13–33 (p. 23).

²⁸ Tickner argues that in the representation of suffrage women, 'men used [the notion of hysteria] as a weapon to define women's place, and women used it as a mode of resistance'. (Tickner, p. 197.)

²⁹ Lavinia King, 'The Suffragette: A Farce', in *The New Age*, 30 May 1908, pp. 91–92. See Appendix 9 for the script of the play.

³⁰ Women's physically healthy and muscular image was considered to be against their nature in the Edwardian age and in the war years. According to Johanna Alberti, young women's androgynous and confident looks were seen to be threatening to men's employment and masculinity, especially through their contribution to the war efforts. Johanna Alberti, 'A Symbol and a Key': the Suffrage Movement in Britain, 1918–1928' in *Votes for Women*, ed. by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), pp. 267–290 (p. 274).

³¹ 'Banned Play: Censor's Objection to "Press Cuttings"', Special Interview with Mr. Shaw – A Barrie Precedent', a reprint from *Observer*, 27 June 1909, p. 4 (V&A Theatre and Performance Collections).

³² 'Gaiety Theatre: Mr. Shaw's "Press Cuttings"', *The Manchester Guardian*, 28 September 1909, p. 7.

³³ Ibid.

³⁴ Ibid.

³⁵ J E A, 'Gaiety Theatre: "Press Cuttings" and Two New Things', *The Manchester Guardian*, 19 October 1909, p. 8.

³⁶ 'Inset' or 'play within a play' is a dramatic feature where the play shows the construction or performance of another play in its plot. For further details, see the related pages in John Lennard and Mary Luckhurst, *The Drama Handbook: A Guide to Reading Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), pp. 74, 82, 85, 215, 216, 340.

³⁷ Margot Peters, *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday & Company, 1980), p. 321.

³⁸ Peters, 320.

³⁹ Ibid, p. 320.

⁴⁰ Ibid, p. 320.

⁴¹ Preface to *Fanny's First Play: An Easy Play for a Little Theater* (London: Constable and Company, 1911).

⁴² 'Fanny's First Play', *The Play Pictorial*, No: 114, Vol. XIX (V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections).

⁴³ George Bernard Shaw, *Fanny's First Play: An Easy Play for a Little Theater* (London: Constable and Company, 1911), p. 127. This edition will henceforth be used as the main text.

⁴⁴ Gladys Margaret Crane, *The Characterization of the Comic Women Characters of George Bernard Shaw*, doctoral dissertation (Indiana University, 1968), p. 17.

⁴⁵ Michael Holroyd, 'George Bernard Shaw: Women and the Body Politic', *Critical Inquiry*, 6.1(1979), p. 22.

⁴⁶ Sally Peters, 'Shaw's Life: A Feminist in Spite of Himself', in *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, ed. by Christopher Innes (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), pp. 19–20.

⁴⁷ Nicholas Greene, 'Bernard Shaw: Socialist Playwright', *The Crane Bag*, 7.1(1983), p.135.

⁴⁸ Katherine Cockin states that 'The Pioneer Players was competing with the Stage Society and other organisations but found on different principles, with a gendered perspective on what freedom in the

theatre might entail. The Stage Society, like many of its predecessors, was formed with no explicit agenda; concept of a free theatre was based on liberal notions of freedom. The Stage Society was larger than any other theatre society, was formed on 8 July 1899 with more than 300 members and all-male management council.' Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players 1911–25* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), p. 36.

⁴⁹ 'Fanny's First Play: Ridicule of Dramatic Critics', *Manchester Guardian*, 20 April 1911.

⁵⁰ 'Fanny's First Play', *Observer*, 23 April 1911.

⁵¹ "'Fanny's First Play" at the Little Theatre', *Academy*, 29 April 1911.

⁵² "'Fanny's First Play", at Everyman's', *London News*, 1922.

⁵³ The suffrage movement came to an halt at the outset of the England's preparations for a war with Germany in 1914.

⁵⁴ "'Fanny's First Play", at Everyman's', *London News*, 1922.

⁵⁵ "'Fanny's First Play": at the Everyman', *Bookman*, March 1922.

⁵⁶ Basil Langton, 'Shaw's Stagecraft', *The Annual of Bernard Shaw Studies*, 21(2001), pp. 1–26 (p. 12).

Conclusion

This thesis set out to examine the plays written by a select group of playwrights who were involved in an Edwardian women's suffrage campaign in one of the most vibrant and organised eras in terms of the association between female politics and dramatic creativity. The four playwrights whose works feature in the chapters of this study made a considerable contribution to suffrage theatre and the political movement it was based on. Suffrage theatre was ingenious in its socio-political context, participants and theatrical applications, and hence, the most appropriate way to decipher the reasons behind its distinctiveness and impact was to examine it by looking at two different aspects: the theatrical scene generated by its web of connections and its possibilities at individual and organised levels and the dramatic/artistic contributions made by its authors in their representations as well as the reinterpretation of the available dramatic forms in an effort to produce successful plays.

As has been shown in the previous chapters, a direct and significant outcome of the theatrical suffrage campaign was the establishment of two significant theatre societies and their affiliations whose groundwork was laid upon and repertoires were authored and performed by suffrage actresses and authors predominantly from within the ranks of organisations associated with the Women's Freedom League. The Actresses' Franchise League's theatre department was managed by Inez Bensusan, and the Pioneer Players was founded and directed by Edith Craig, both of whom staged a substantial number of suffrage-related and other female-orientated plays, trained amateur players, and assisted suffragists and other activist alliances of women outside London from 1907. Apart from these, an authors' society, the Women Writer's Suffrage League, of which Cicely Hamilton was a founding

member, and independent theatres founded and managed by women such as Lena Ashwell's the Kingsway Theatre, Inez Bensusan's the Woman's Theatre and Lillah McCarthy's venture in the Little Theatre, London engendered a theatrical culture encircling women on an unprecedented scale. Although suffrage theatres produced a large portfolio of plays, some of which were not in the specific domain of suffrage politics, they were the most important centres of theatrical activity and they significantly contributed to the actresses' organisation and collective works. In addition to the aforementioned theatre societies, some actresses' bold decision to take roles in the management of theatres such as Robins's collaboration in the Court, Ashwell's management of the Kingsway and McCarthy's taking over of the Little Theatre provided opportunities for more neglected plays centred on women's related subjects. A natural consequence of this phenomenon was that all the dramatists examined in this study were either members/supporters or played an active role in the production and staging of plays written by themselves and other dramatists under the auspices of these groups and theatres.

An important feature of the theatrical groups set up in the centre of the suffrage movement was the free artistic and social environment that allowed women to have a voice, test their creative and artistic visions and re-experiment when their works failed to deliver individual satisfaction or dramatic and theatrical expediency. In other words, the theatre that originated from the movement was both a political and creative platform for different segments of female theatricals. Within its grounds, women expressed themselves freely by writing and producing their own aspiring plays without the control of a patriarchal authority such as actor-managers, examples of which can be seen in the early careers of Elizabeth Robins and Cicely Hamilton. This study evidenced that these theatrical structures were instrumental in the

realisation of the idea of a woman's theatre, where women could exploit the synergy as a way of articulating their personal troubles and aspirations as well as portraying their common woes and exceptional talents.

This is especially noticeable in Robins's initial disappointment with the parts she played in 'drawing rooms and second-rate plays' in the last decade of the nineteenth century. Noting Robins's recollections in her *Both Sides of the Curtain* on the criticality of personal connections with influential actor-managers (as demonstrated in Robins's stage career under the autocratic managements of Henry Irving and Beerbohm Tree), it would be right to assert that the theatre movement accompanying the suffrage campaign enabled her to establish herself as a successful writer. Robins was well aware of the constraints imposed on the representations of women and actresses' acting prospects in the well-established London theatres. Therefore, what she achieved was to pioneer a new role for women by writing and staging *Votes for Women!*, which marked a life-changing and history-making moment both for her and other organised women who came to the realisation that theatre could be a powerful medium for the vocalisation and visualisation of their political assertions and, subsequently, could set the groundwork for an independent theatre movement to inspire and sponsor more works concentrating on women. In a similar fashion, the second chapter concluded that Hamilton's initial dramatic experiment in the popular theatre, through her melodramatic yet still innovative *Diana of Dobson's*, which was staged under the management of Lena Ashwell, a female theatrical entrepreneur led Hamilton to a writing career in accordance with her feminist stance. Her experience partly corresponds to Robins's struggle for financial and personal fulfilment and a network of women surrounding her proved influential in the emergence of her highly popular plays such as *How the Vote Was*

Won, *A Pageant of Great Women* and others, which were not included in this study due to their off-topic storylines.

The influence of these connections has been observed on all four playwrights featured in this study as they were connected to each other in various ways. Hamilton and St John were friends as well as collaborators in works such as *How the Vote was Won* and *A Pageant of Great Women*. Edith Craig was a lifelong companion of St John. Her assiduous and successful work in both the Actresses' Franchise League and the Pioneer Players evidences that she made a huge contribution to the successful staging of many suffrage and feminist plays, including *The Pageant*, *The First Actress*, *Paphnutius*, and various plays by Shakespeare and Shaw in the context of woman's theatre. Similar collaborations have been identified in Shaw's involvement in suffrage theatre as an eminent male author of his time who gave support to actresses in their original plays as well as their roles in Shavian plays. Robins and Shaw were acquaintances thanks to Shaw's supervisory role during Robins's translations and struggle in the establishment of Ibsenite drama on the English stage. Also, in the production process of *Votes for Women!* in collaboration with William Archer, Robins was in contact with Shaw to receive advice about her play and its production at the Court Theatre. Shaw's close and flirtatious relationship with Ellen Terry, which carried on via correspondence for years, permitted another notable acquaintance of him with Craig and St John. As stated in Chapter 4, Shaw was the power behind Lillah McCarthy's management season of the Little Theatre, during which Shaw's *Fanny's First Play* achieved to be his most successful and longest performed piece in his writing career.

Moreover, the theatrical spectacle created by these organisations, participants and incessant performances until World War I, proved to be a unique quality invented by suffrage theatricals. The celebrity cast of *A Pageant of Great Women* and other theatrical suffrage plays, including *Votes for Women*, *The First Actress* and even *Fanny's First Play*, proved that suffrage plays were not as unpopular as previously assumed. Craig's mother Terry played a central role in the creation and production of a significant number of suffrage plays. Terry was a leading Victorian actress, whose career had newly come to an end after her glorious Jubilee in 1906 when suffrage theatre was about to materialise with the first performance of *Votes for Women*. In the theatrical events created by suffragists, Terry had a chance to begin a new career through her daughter's productions with the Pioneer Players. Terry's celebrity status was transferred to the promotion of women's plays as it was a new medium that promoted liberties for actresses. In this sense, St John's promotion of Edwardian suffragism focuses on the actress as a central figure and makes references to the actress's reputation and pioneering role in history. *The First Actress* is the most distinctive play that constructs the actress as the epitome of pioneering femininity with an undertone of comedy. The symbolical significance of the actresses' role in the emancipation of women in theatre is embodied by the famous actresses of the Edwardian age, which reveals St John's primary goal in the performance as the self-fashioning of the actresses.

All these confirm that the concept of a woman's theatre was a liberating experience for actresses and female writers as it gave them a medium of self-sufficiency, secure employment and artistic sovereignty. Thus, the model brought about its own players, directors and theatre managers, especially amongst famous women. These attempts feminised the stage and provided actresses with

opportunities to create self-fashioning performances. This was an unprecedented challenge to the established structure and organisation of Edwardian theatre and its predecessors. This also indicated a revolution and the modernisation of the directorial and participatory roles of women in theatre history. This theatrical milieu facilitated women to enjoy greater success than they could as single working women.

With regards to the dramatic merit, the plays served Edwardian women as an area where femininity and its roles could be contested and reformed. Therefore, they were interested in dramatic representation as a way of exploration. A very notable method was constructing a new type of activist femininity characterised by female autonomy and political conscious. This study has established that suffragists constructed a set of thriving and diverse female images. Although their common strategy was to promote a triumphant kind, they represented a large spectrum of femininity rather than a specific and limited concept of female activism that strictly concentrated on women's enfranchisement as was once believed. They constructed activism, in both the social and artistic sense, as an inherent characteristic of the new femininities they constructed, which was a direct reaction to the victimized or suicidal heroines that featured in the plays of male playwrights at the turn of the century.

Suffragists' heroines were observed to function in specific ways. A primary aim of the suffrage writers and theatricals was to weaken anti-suffragist/feminist discourse by offering images of modern femininities. Conservative and anti-suffragist newspapers were rich in caricatures portraying women as selfish, uncontrollable, masculine or hysterical, thus defining them as a nuisance to Edwardian social and political life. Thus, the strategy of idealisation was used in Robins's *Votes for Women*. Levering, as an archetype of a modern female activist,

sets a model for Edwardian suffragists with her self-confidence, free-spirit and true dedication to the woman's cause. Likewise, Hamilton's Diana, as a working-class woman, candidly shows that she was not happy with the prospects offered to her as a shop assistant. She embodies the dreams of Edwardian female workers in her brief adventure, making a valid point that working-class women need representation in public life, so suffragists must appeal to these women who constitute the majority in Edwardian society.

Another representational strategy was romanticizing a history of female attainments. Women characters were thus constructed as important actors in the making of history. The select women in *A Pageant of Great Women*, as could be inferred from its title, tried to validate why women deserved the vote. The women in the play declare that they played an important role through their contributions to literature, science and socio-political life over centuries. In a corresponding strategy in *The First Actress*, the actresses maintain that they were one of the most persevering groups of women in women's emancipation journey. They were the ones who were mistreated and constrained in the theatres, but their Edwardian counterparts set out to show they could organise their own independent theatres successfully to show the rationality of the autonomous artistic ability of women.

These plays make frequent references to both historical and contemporary personalities and events. They especially focus on the issues of diversity and richness of womanhood, by featuring various heroines from different backgrounds and exploring the potential roles of women in the conception of a democratic and enlightened society. In Robins's *Votes for Women*, Ernestine Blunt declares that women's involvement in politics would reduce the likelihood of wars as it was their contribution as nurses not fighters that was proudly remembered. However, she adds

this is not because they cannot fight; they could, as their Russian peers showed in the Boer War. In another instance, an art student asks ‘where are the examples of women’s Beethoven, Plato or Shakespeare’, underscoring the centrality of historical evidence supporting contemporary women’s equality claims. This echoes the anti-suffragist arguments against women’s lack of a credible past with accomplishments. A straight response to this accusation comes in the forms of the spectacular staging of the accomplished women of the past in Hamilton’s *A Pageant of Great Women*. The most striking aspect of the play is its social constructionist reaction to the religious and scientific arguments of a patriarchal history. Hamilton’s refashioning of the women of exceptionality offers a new reading of history, making it a history of women’s own. This play compliments the women’s courage, as Joan of Arc displays; appreciates her love for knowledge, as Madame Curie evidences; repositions her sex as queens and empresses such as Elizabeth and Victoria; and shows respect to female artists such as Nance Oldfield. Citing the achievements of these women was a statement of pride, and Hamilton chooses to celebrate women on stage, turning her face away from Edwardian social drama. Shaw’s two plays, likewise, examine a very controversial topic: the suffragettes. His role as a guide to various actress–writers seems to have been solidified in the inclusion of these women in the productions of his plays. His *The Press Cuttings* and *Fanny’s First Play* also show that, although they were once taboo, the suffragettes seize the popular theatre in their comic personas.

The Edwardian suffrage theatre was a well-organised and rich medium, in which a stage was formed for women to allow for self-expression as well as offering professional women, in particular actresses, an opportunity to challenge the status-quo in their profession and in Edwardian society. The drama of this era offers a

unique view of the progress and re-evaluation of women's roles in both political and artistic contexts. The most essential functions of this platform and genre have appeared to disseminate women's opinions, counter the negative and stereotypical representations and exploit the synergy created by the inclusive and cooperative community in the service of women's self-expression. Suffrage plays thus created a genre in which art and socio-political propaganda intersected and generated new modes of dramatic representation in theatrical forms such as one-act dramatic polemics, tableau vivants, pageants, history plays and comedies. The keen public interest in these new forms and the femininities fashioned within them was particularly discernible in the reception of plays such as Robins's *Votes for Women*, Hamilton's *A Pageant of Great Women*, St John's *The First Actress* and Shaw's *Fanny's First Play*. These plays confirmed that a play about the woman's cause could be staged at a West End theatre and be received positively by a public audience and critics, encouraging many other prominent actresses to get into the business of dramatic writing and form their own theatrical networks. In this sense, this study showed the popularity of the idea of a feminised theatre and substantiated that women's intellectual and artistic endeavours thrived in a collective and encouraging environment. That is, drama is conceptualised as a platform for social change and revolutionised the way women were represented in their time. Considering the significance of the plays as unique examples of an unprecedented woman's theatre movement in British theatre history, this study shed further light on the suffrage dramatists' collectivism and its implications for themselves and their sex in the profession, and likewise, it revealed the features of the dramatic Renaissance these women initiated through their representation of femininity, their unprecedentedly rich imagery and innovative dramatic strategies, which proves that drama by

Edwardian suffragists deserves to be considered as an important contribution to the history of theatre.

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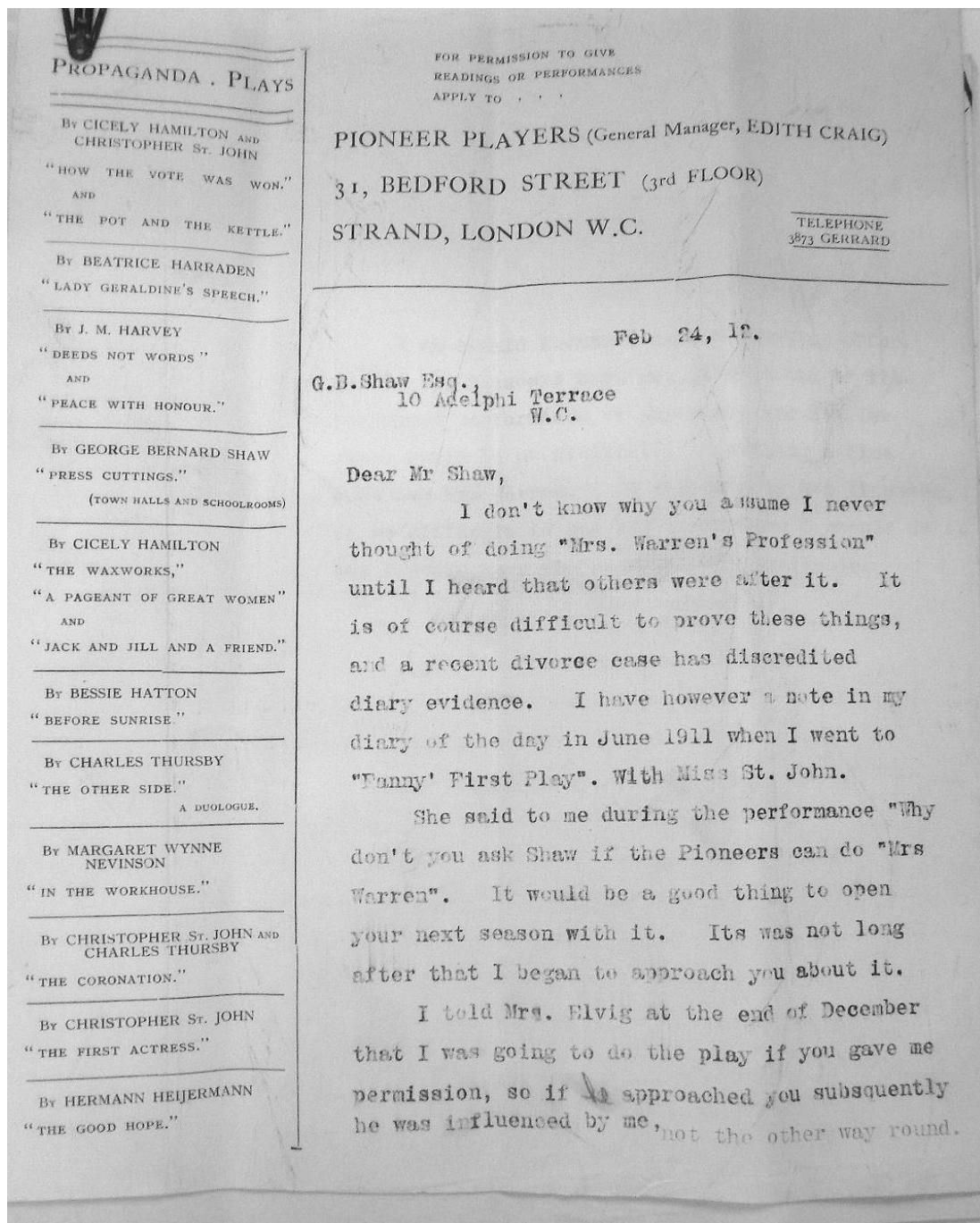
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Appendices:

Appendix 1:



A letter sent by Edith Craig to George Bernard Shaw about her intention of staging Shaw's Mrs Warren's Profession, dated 24 February 1912, which shows a list of 'Propaganda Plays' in the repertoire of her theatre society, The Pioneer Players.

Appendix 2:



The Sketch cover page featuring Elizabeth Robins's *Votes For Women*, 17 April 1907 (V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Appendix 3:



A Portrait of Cicely Hamilton, (Ellen Terry Theatre Collection, V&A Museum
Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

Appendix 4:

PLAYERS.
THEATRE.
 1911. at 2.30. Sole Lessee & Manager - **MISS LENA ASHWELL.**

THE FIRST ACTRESS.
 . . BY . .
Christopher St. John.

Griffin (of Killigrew's Company of King's Players)	EDMUND GWENN <small>(by kind permission of Messrs. Vedrenne & Badie.)</small>
Margaret Hughes (of Killigrew's Company of King's Players)	NANCY PRICE
Sir Charles Sedley	BEN WEBSTER <small>(by kind permission of Oscar Asche.)</small>
Lord Hatton	TOM HESLEWOOD

Visions of the Future.

Nell Gwynne	ELLEN TERRY
Mrs. Barry	LILY BRAYTON
Mrs. Bracegirdle	SUZANNE SHELDON
Nance Oldfield	HENRIETTA WATSON <small>(by kind permission of Lawrence Irving)</small>
Peg Woffington	MAY WHITTY
Kitty Clive	DOROTHY MINTO <small>(by kind permission of Lillah Mc Carthy.)</small>
Mrs. Siddons	SABA RALEIGH <small>(by kind permission of Oscar Asche.)</small>
Mrs. Abington	DECIMA MOORE
Mrs. Jordan	LILIAN BRAITHWAITE
Madame Vestris	AURIOL LEE <small>(by kind permission of Vedrenne & Badie.)</small>
An Actress of to-day	LENA ASHWELL <small>(by kind permission of Vedrenne & Badie.)</small>

SCENE: The Stage of Killigrew's Theatre.
TIME: 1661.

Dresses by Miss EDITH CRAIG & Mrs. FRECKNALL, Hanover Square, W.
 Wigs by CLARKSON. Limes by DIGBY.
 The Plays produced by EDITH CRAIG.

THE CHARACTERS ARE PLACED ON THE PROGRAMME IN THE ORDER OF
 THEIR APPEARANCE.

NEXT PERFORMANCE: Sunday, June 11th, 8.30.
Lecture by - Miss ELLEN TERRY.
on Shakespeare's Heroines.

Future arrangements "PAINS & PENALTIES" by Laurence Housman.
 "THE GOOD HOPE" by Christopher St. John from the Dutch Herman Heijermans.

For particulars of Membership and Terms of Subscription apply to:
 The Secretary--PIONEER PLAYERS, 2 Adelphi Terrace House, Strand, W.C.

*The First Actress at the Kingsway Theatre on 8 May 1911, Production Programme,
 (V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London).*

Appendix 5:



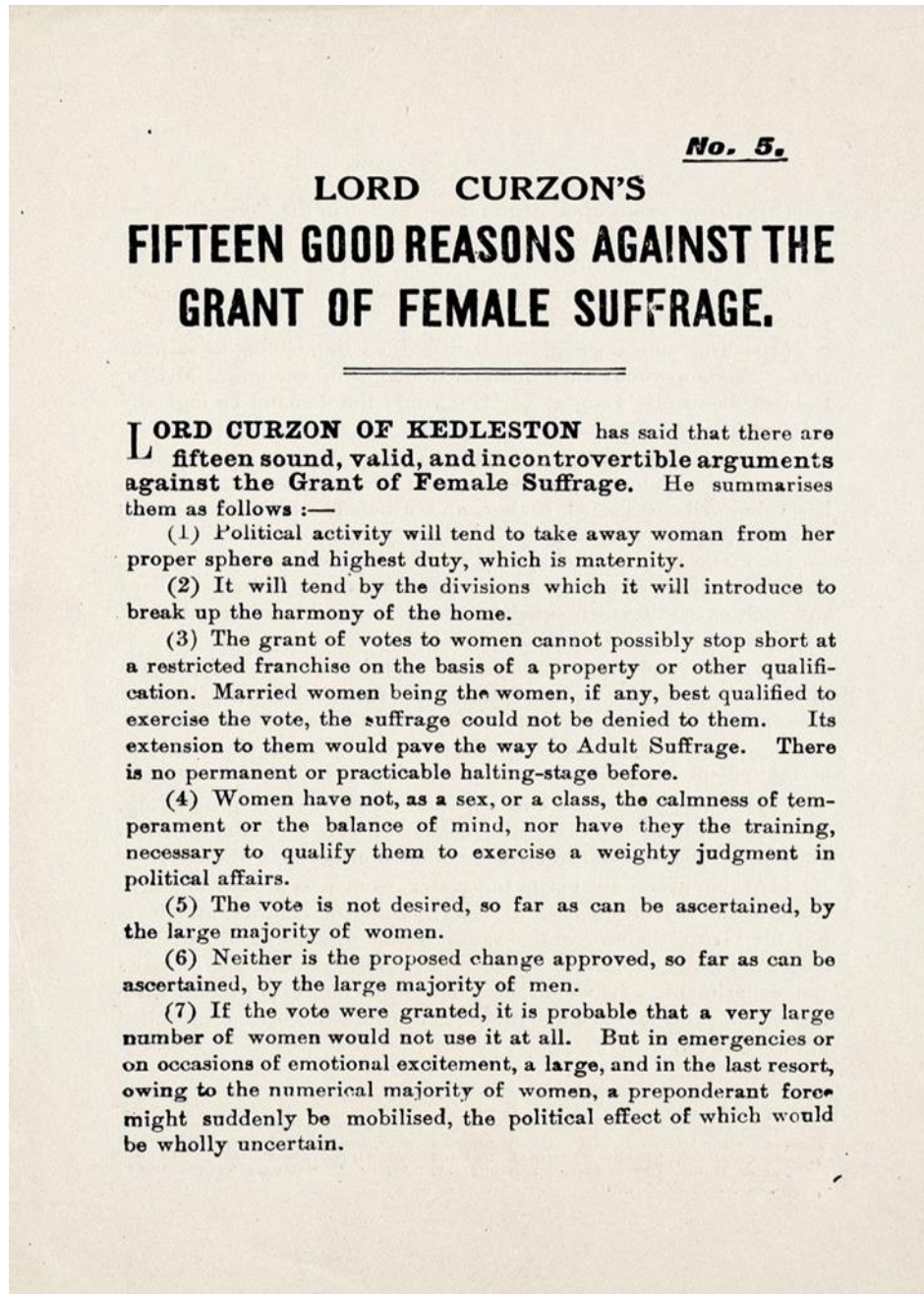
A scene featuring Ellen Terry in the *Robespierre*, the Lyceum Theatre, London, 1899. (*Robespierre* Production File, V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London .)

Appendix 5: Continued



The Court Scene from *Robespierre*, the Lyceum Theatre, London, 1899.

(*Robespierre* Production File, V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections,
London.)



Women's Library, London School of Economics, London and also available at National Library of Scotland. Accessible at <http://suffragettes.nls.uk/sources/source->

24 and [NLS Shelfmark: 1937.21(82).])

Appendix 6: Continued

(8) The presence of a large female factor in the Constituencies returning a British Government to power would tend to weaken Great Britain in the estimation of foreign Powers.

(9) It would be gravely misunderstood and would become a source of weakness in India.

(10) The vote once given, it would be impossible to stop at this. Women would then demand the right of becoming M.P.'s, Cabinet Ministers, Judges, &c. Nor could the demand be logically refused.

(11) Woman, if placed by the vote on an absolute equality with man, would forfeit much of that respect which the chivalry of man has voluntarily conceded to her, and which has hitherto been her chief protection.

(12) The vote is not required for the removal of hardships or disabilities from which woman is now known to suffer. Where any such exist, they can equally well be removed or alleviated by a legislature elected by men.

(13) Those persons ought not to make laws who cannot join in enforcing them. Women cannot become soldiers, sailors, or policemen, or take an active part in the maintenance of law and order. They are incapacitated from discharging the ultimate obligations of citizenship.

(14) The intellectual emancipation of women is proceeding, and will continue to do so, without the enjoyment of the political franchise. There is no necessary connection between the two.

(15) No precedent exists for giving women as a class an active share in the Government of a great Country or Empire, and it is not for Great Britain, whose stake is the greatest, and in whose case the results of failure would be the most tremendous, to make the experiment. It would not, indeed, be an experiment, since if the suffrage were once granted, it could never be cancelled or withdrawn.

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As the President of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, Lord Curzon (1859-1925) was an influential conservative figure in Edwardian national and imperialist politics. This is a summary of his anti-suffrage arguments made as a part of his speech. It was published under the title of 'Fifteen Good Reasons Against the Grant of Female Suffrage' in 1909.

Appendix 7:

PIONEER PLAYERS

President Miss ELLEN TERRY.

Offices: 139, LONG ACRE, W.C.

*The Second Performance of the present season will
take place on JANUARY 11th, when*

“ PAPHNUTIUS, ”

a Play by the Benedictine Nun, Roswitha, who lived c. 950, will be produced. The Pioneer Players wish to draw special attention to this interesting dramatic event. “PAPHNUTIUS,” which relates the story of the conversion of Thais, well known to modern readers through Anatole France’s novel, belongs to a group of plays which may be described as the solitary flowers which bloomed in the dramatic desert stretching between the decay of the Latin theatre and the rise of the medieval Christian drama. The play has been translated from the original Latin by CHRISTOPHER ST. JOHN. The chief characteristics of “PAPHNUTIUS” being simplicity and sincerity, the Pioneer Players will endeavour to make their production as simple as possible. Music of the best period of plainsong, carefully selected by a living member of the same ancient monastic order to which Roswitha belonged, will be sung during the action of the play.

Terms of Subscription for the Season:
Stalls, £1 11s. 6d. Balcony Stalls, £1 1s.
Balcony, 10s. 6d.

· All Applications for Membership should be sent to :
The HON. SECRETARY, 139, Long Acre, W.C.
Telephone- 4086 REGENT.

An advert on *Paphnutius* performance by the Pioneer Players, at the Savoy Theatre,

London on 11 January 1914.

Appendix 8:

ROYAL COURT THEATRE
Proprietor Mr. J. H. LEIGH
Under the Management of Messrs. J. H. Leigh & R. T. E. Neeves.

TWO SPECIAL MATINEES:
Friday, July 9th and Monday, July 12th,
At 2.30 p.m.

In aid of THE LONDON SOCIETY FOR WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE.
When will be produced an Original Play
... BY ...

GEORGE BERNARD SHAW
ENTITLED
"Press Cuttings"
A Topical Sketch, compiled from the Editorial and
Correspondence columns of the Daily Press.

Preceded by a Comedy in One Act—
"A FAIR ARABIAN,"
An Old Story,
By SYDONIE COLTON.

Mr. FORBES ROBERTSON
Has kindly consented to give a reading
from "THE ANCIENT MARINER."

PRICES—Boxes, £5/5/- & £3/3/-; Orchestra Stalls, £1/1/-; Stalls, 10/6;
Dress Circle, First Two Rows, 10/6; Other Rows, 7/6; Upper Circle,
5/-; Pit Stalls, 5/-; Gallery, 2/6.
Doors Open at 2. Commence at 2.30.
Tickets may be obtained at Box Office, Court Theatre, and Usual Agents.
W. T. HAYCOCK & Co. (1909), Ltd., 69-70, Dean Street, London, W.

The playbill of *Press Cuttings* by George Bernard Shaw, performed on 9 and 12 July 1909 at the Court Theatre, London. (V&A Museum Theatre and Performance Collections, London).

The Suffragette: a Farce.

By Lavinia King.

MR. ASTERISKS Home Secretary.
 JAMES His Valet.
 MISS BELLONEY A Suffragette.
 A Policeman, played by B.
 Duke of Portland, played by B.
 Field-Marshal Lord Ovea, played by J.
 False Minister, played by B.
 A Constable, played by J.

SCENE: The Home Secretary's Study.

(Enter Asterisks, ushered by James—Asterisks has a very large red hooked nose and a drooping fair moustache.)

Asterisks: I shall be writing all the morning, James.
 James: You're always right in everything, sir.
 Asterisks: True, James. Bring up the Monster Petition from the Associated Bottle-Washers when it arrives, James.

James: Yes, sir. (Goes.)
 (Asterisks goes to cupboard and searches in it.)
 (Miss Belloney climbs through window, unnoticed, and runs into the well of the table.)

Asterisks: Ah, well, a Secretary of State has a dog's life. (A growl.) Dear me, and there's the dog! (Looks round.) Owch! it's bitten me. (Jumps up, and hops about, holding his leg.) It's under the table! (Miss Belloney crawls out.) What in the name of heaven do you want?

(Miss Belloney displays placard.)
 Belloney: The Vote!
 Asterisks: You've got it. I vote you a public nuisance. How did you get here?
 Belloney: Up the spout.

Asterisks: Where your clothes came from. Well, I thought you were a dog; it seems you're a . . . Never mind, I'm going to see if you're a bird. (Throws her out of the window. Rings.)

(Enter James.)
 Asterisks: James, you will find the mangled remains of an elderly and hideous female on the lawn. Inter them decently.

James: Indecently; yes, sir. (Exit.)
 Asterisks: Now for my letters. (Settles down.)
 (Enter James.)

James: The Monsters' Petition, sir.
 Asterisks: Put it down!
 (James does so—it is an immense brown-paper parcel, tied with string. Exit James.)

Asterisks: There'll be a hot time in the old House to-night. Hum! hum! (Bending to his work.)
 (The parcel rises, bursts, and clasps hands over his eyes.)
 Belloney: Guess who it is.

Asterisks: Oh, there's only one person it can be—you, my own darling.

Belloney (Mimicking): Oh, yes, it's me, my own darling. But who's "you, my own darling"?

Asterisks: Not my wife. Surely it isn't Flossie Slapdash!

Belloney: No, it isn't, you old sinner! Now, you've given it away a bit.

Asterisks: Gertie, by Jove! I wouldn't have had you guess—I mean, it isn't what you think it is.

Belloney: Nor am I what you think I am—oh, your Gerties and Flossies!

Asterisks: Who are you then?
 Belloney: I'm Votes for Women! (Releases him.)

Asterisks: Oh, you . . . (Rings.)

Belloney: Hush! hush! What would Flossie think if she heard you?
 (Enter James.)

Asterisks: James, this isn't the Monster Petition; it's the Monster itself. Remove it!

James: Yes, sir. This way, Monster! (Pushes her out.)

Asterisks: Dear, dear, these interruptions are very trying. To work, to work!

(The door opens, James gives a series of little discreet coughs, then withdraws.)
 (Enter a bearded spectacled gentleman.)

Asterisks: Hullo, Druce, the top of the morning to

you (Advances to door, and holds out his hand.) Oh, my mistake. Portland, of course. How de do?

Belloney: How de druce?
 Asterisks: What can I do for your Dru . . . grace?

Belloney: A trifle, a mere trifle.

Asterisks: We are quite alone—won't you take your beard off?

Belloney: I will. (Does so, and is discovered. Asterisks startled.) All I want is Votes for Women.

Asterisks: I suppose you came through the Underground Passage! Good morning; just a word. I'm going to send for a constable, and if you come in here again—Hollow way—the other one.

Belloney: So that's what Highgate (I get). (Exit.)

Asterisks: This sort of thing really does take one's mind off one's work. (At telephone.) James, let a constable come up and guard the door, please. Now to my letters!

(A knock at the door.)
 Asterisks: Come in!

(Enter Constable.)
 Asterisks: Just stand at the door, please, officer, and if any aged and decrepit female of gigantic size and murderous disposition . . .

Constable: I understand, sir. (Draws his truncheon, and whacks at an imaginary Suffragette. Asterisks buries himself in his letters. The constable whistles "God Save the King." Asterisks looks up as he stolidly goes through the tune. Constable sings:

"Confound their politics!
 Frustrate their knavish tricks!"

(Seeing Asterisks listening.) That's the women, sir?
 Asterisks: Yes it is, I'm sorry to say, constable. But I am very busy this morning, and I must really ask you . . .

Constable: Begging your pardon, sir, there's only one way to do it—(Sings:

"On thee our hopes we fix"—

and that is to give them Votes. (Throws off helmet and tunic, and is disclosed. She thwacks the Minister with truncheon, still humming:

"And make them fall.")

(Knocks down Asterisks, and runs out.)
 (Asterisks slowly rises.)

Asterisks: God save us all!
 (Enter James hastily.)

James: Oh, sir, such a awful riot in the square. There's a lady with a shot-gun and two loaders, and she's bagged a hundred and thirty-three and a half braces of specials before lunch, and—well, sir, the millinery was to fire on her, sir . . . but they couldn't bear to look at her, sir!

Asterisks: Peace, James; be a man!

James: I'm sure I'd be a woman if I could, sir. O the awful—

Asterisks: Peace, James. We are not without resource. You may go now, and—be very careful not to enter the room again. But you may allow anyone else—*anyone* else, James—male or female—

James: What about herumfrodites, sir?

Asterisks: *Anyone* else, James, is to be allowed to pass unchallenged.

James: Very good, sir. (Exit.)

(Asterisks goes to cupboard, takes out a drawer and a very large stone bottle of ink. He pours this into the drawer, and poises it deftly on the door, which he leaves ajar. Executes a dance round the room, rubbing his hands, nearly knocks the door and drawer over himself; returns to desk.)

Asterisks: Now, we await the assault. For (declaims)—

"In the hands of men supremely great
 The Ink is mightier than the sword."

(Bends to his work.)
 James (Off): Walk straight in, my lord, I pray you.

(The door opens, and the drawer falls. A mass of ink, partially concealing a Field-Marshal in full uniform (played by James) rushes into the room.)

Asterisks: (squaring up): Now, Votes for Women! Come on!

Field-Marshal: My dear Asterisks, a joke's a joke,

I dare say, but I must say that when I call on official business upon one of His Most Gracious Majesty's Principal Secretaries of State, it is highly unbecoming and indeed indecorous, partaking, almost, I might almost say, of the nature of aw— (Very pompous, to contrast with his absurd appearance. Asterisks, who has been shrieking with laughter, recognises that this is the real man, is struck with the most dreadful apprehension—collects his wits . . .)

Asterisks: My dear Lord Owen, this is a most dreadful business. That you should suspect me of playing you such a schoolboy trick! We are both victims of these terrible women, I fear. That trap was meant for me, I make no doubt. Come along, I must give you a bath and a change of clothes. See! I'm a good deal splashed myself!

Field-Marshal: Well, I suppose—

Asterisks: No supposing; come along. (Exit.)

(Belloney disguised as the Minister re-enters almost immediately, and starts busily writing letters, humming cheerfully in a shrill falsetto. After him—)

Enter a real Constable (played by James) and salutes.)

Minister: Constable, I expect to be attacked by a most desperate female woman. Destroy her instantly when I give the signal!

(The Policeman exhibits a brace of revolvers and three toy cannon, which he trains on doors and window.)

James: Ready, sir, ready!

(Enter, wildly, a man in a bath-towel, with his hair full of soap (played by Asterisks); starts at seeing the presentation of himself in the chair.)

Asterisks: By heaven, I'm going mad! Constable (grasping his arm), you're solid anyhow! Tell me, before I rave—is there anybody sitting in that chair, or is there not?

James: Ho, yus, La Mito. That's Mr. Hasterisks, the 'Ome Sekertury.

Asterisks: It's the devil! It's the woman! And she's got my clothes!

Belloney (rising with dignity): Constable, arrest that woman!

(A struggle. They go out. Belloney gives a short dance of triumph, comes forward and bows, removing the false nose and moustache.)

Books and Persons.

(AN OCCASIONAL CAUSERIE.)

I HAVE had great joy in Mr. Nowell Charles Smith's new and comprehensive edition of Wordsworth, published by Methuen's in three volumes as majestic as Wordsworth himself at his most pontifical. The price is fifteen shillings net, and having regard to the immense labour involved in such an edition, it is very cheap. I would sooner pay fifteen shillings for a real book like this than a guinea for the memoirs of any tin god that ever sat up at nights to keep a diary; yea, even though the average collection of memoirs will furnish material to light seven hundred pipes. We have lately been much favoured with first-rate editions of poets. I mention Mr. de Selincourt's Keats, and Mr. George Sampson's amazing and not-to-be-sufficiently-lauded Blake. Mr. Smith's work is worthy to stand on the same shelf with these. A shining virtue of Mr. Smith's edition is that it embodies the main results of the researches and excavations not only of Professor Knight, but, more important, of the wonderful Mr. Hutchinson, whose contributions to the "Academy," in days of yore, were the delight of Wordsworthians.

Personally, I became a member of the order of Wordsworthians in the historic year 1891, when Matthew Arnold's "Selections" were issued to the public at the price of half a crown. I suppose that Matthew Arnold and Sir Leslie Stephen were the two sanest Wordsworthians of us all. And Matthew Arnold put Wordsworth above all modern poets except Dante, Shakespeare, Goethe, Milton, and Molière. The test of a Wordsworthian is the ability to read every line that the poet wrote. I regret to say that, strictly, Matthew Arnold was not a perfect Wordsworthian; he con-

fessed, with manly sincerity, that he could not read "Vaudracour and Julia" with pleasure. This was a pity and Matthew Arnold's loss. For a strict Wordsworthian, while utterly conserving his reverence for the most poetic of poets, can discover a keen ecstasy in the perusal of the unconsciously funny lines which Wordsworth was constantly perpetrating. And I would back myself to win the first prize in any competition for Wordsworth's funniest line with a quotation from "Vaudracour and Julia." My prize-line would assuredly be:

Yea, his first word of greeting was,—"All right . . .

It is true that the passage goes on:

Is gone from me . . .

But that does not impair the magnificent funniness.

From his tenderest years Wordsworth succeeded in combining the virtues of Milton and of "Punch" in a manner that no other poet has approached. Thus, at the age of eighteen, he could write:

Now while the solemn evening shadows fall,
On slowly-waving pinions, down the vale:
And fronting the bright west, yon oak entwines
Its darkening boughs . . .

Which really is rather splendid for a boy. And he could immediately follow that, speaking of a family of swans, with:

While tender cares and mild domestic loves
With furtive watch pursue her as she moves,
The female with a meeker charm succeeds . . .

Wordsworth richly atoned for his unconscious farcicalness by a multitude of single lines that, in their pregnant sublimity, attend the Wordsworthian like a shadow throughout his life, warning him continually when he is in danger of making a fool of himself. Thus, whenever through mere idleness I begin to waste the irrecoverable moments of eternity, I always think of that masterly phrase (from, I think, the "Prelude," but I will not be sure):

Unprofitably travelling towards the grave.

This line is a most convenient and effective stone to throw at one's languid friends. Finally let me hail Mr. Nowell Smith as a benefactor.

There seems to be some chance of Stendhal becoming relatively popular in this country. I have been asked about editions. I should like to recommend, as a commencement, the singularly agreeable volume of selections issued by the "Mercure de France" at 3½ francs, or, bound in half-calf in a style that does not offend a bibliophile, 6 francs (less dis.). This book, of over five hundred pages, is a model. The selector has taken no thought for the *jeune fille*; he has simply chosen the best. The book ends with eight appendices, some learned, including a biography and an exhaustive list of Stendhal's numerous "flittings," compiled by that arch-Stendhalian, M. Paul Léautaud. It begins with a portrait.

JACOB TONSON.

The Rev. R. J. CAMPBELL,

M.A. (of the City Temple).

WILL LECTURE AT THE

St. James's Hall,
GREAT PORTLAND STREET, LONDON, W.

On Wednesday next, JUNE 3rd.

Subject:

PRACTICAL HOUSING.

SIR JOHN DICKSON-POYNTER, Bart., M.P.,
will take the Chair at 8 p.m.

Admission 1s. Reserved seats 2s. 6d.

Applications for tickets, and for the programme of the visit to the Rt. Hon. JOHN BUENS, M.P., to the estate of the Ealing Tenants, Ltd., on Whit Monday, to be made to

Mr. F. LITCHEFIELD, 6, Bloomsbury Square, W.C.