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Jokes for Women: Suffrage and the Sense of Humour on the Stage

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Abstract

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This thesis investigates the works of the London-based suffrage theatre group, the Actresses' Franchise League (AFL). Examining the period between 1907 and 1914, it considers the immediate influences on its foundation in 1908 up to the start of the First World War, when the League changed its focus from that of women's enfranchisement to the entertainment of troops. It analyses in particular the influence of the contemporary debate concerning the sense of humour, and women's supposed lack thereof, on the focus and style of the playwrights' work. In contextualising the AFL's negotiations with ideas of women's sense of humour, this thesis represents a shift from the prevailing critical caution shown towards the politicisation of literary humour and laughter. I challenge distinctions between offstage political activity and laughter in the theatre, as well as definitions of radical suffrage action and the privileging of the tragic or violent within feminist discourse. The League displayed a sensitive and, sometimes, angry understanding of the impact of anti-suffrage humour. In a politically motivated move, playwrights consciously rejected the narrative of the tragic and bitter woman both to emulate and defiantly invert such jokes, in order to assert the strength of women's humour. Not without debate within the League's own circles, the AFL and the wider movement's various politics are manifested in this construction of women's sense of humour. These theatrical negotiations impacted on the internal strength of the suffrage community and on its political reception.

In uncovering suffrage humour as a critical area in its own right, this thesis reinvigorates the categories by which this theatre has been defined and challenges the demotion of its political contribution. Bringing together little known, unpublished, and formerly lost plays into dialogue with each other, it also contributes to the ongoing recuperation of suffrage theatre, such as Cecil Armstrong's staging of jujitsu. Setting this in conversation with more established playwrights such as George Bernard Shaw and with suffrage playwrights who have already received considerable attention, such as Cicely Hamilton, this thesis actively resists the isolation of suffrage theatre within critical discourse. In addition, its reconsideration of Shaw's relationship with the suffrage movement challenges prevalent deprecation of his playwriting contribution that invites further re-evaluation of his literary politics, while the survey and application of humour theory contributes to the evolving and exciting area of literary humour studies. Overall, through the close documentation of the AFL's alliances with offstage debate, a fuller conception of this political theatre is detailed in ways that also capture the variety of its membership, as indeed of its humour too.

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Contents

1. Introduction 1

2. "I don't wonder you laugh": women's emancipation and the "honourable occupation" of oppositional laughter on stage 9

3. "Firm in reliance, laugh a defiance": suffrage laughter in the Actresses' Franchise League 62

4. Making a mockery: women's jeers and the anti-suffragists 99

5. Farce and the fallacy of Physical Force 131

6. Making yourself ridiculous: the AFL and the politics of self-derisory suffrage 172

7. Conclusion 212

8. Appendix 221

Introduction

The suffrage sense of humour

The New Age declared Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John's 1909 play *How the Vote Was Won* "the most rippling piece of fun which has been put on the boards for a long time, and the sooner it is put on for a regular run, the better for the public gaiety."[1] The humour of the plays produced by the Actresses' Franchise League (AFL), a suffrage theatre group founded in London in 1908, has been much acknowledged, then as now. Julie Holledge points out that, although "serious dramas [...] dominated the early AFL repertoire," it was Hamilton and St. John's farce that proved to be their first "smash hit".[2] Susan Carlson notes that the AFL repertoire was dominated by the comic, Viv Gardner describes the popularity of these "comic plays" relative to "straight" plays, and Claire Hirshfield discusses the range of farcical and satirical offerings.[3] Yet, while the topics of suffrage and suffrage theatre, and indeed of literary humour, have attracted growing academic interest, the AFL's keen relationship with humour and entertainment has not been extensively investigated. It has been set instead within wider discussions of suffrage theatre or within the allied yet distinct focus of the genre of comedy. Considering laughter and the comic, Katharine Cockin has described the "destabilising force of comedy" in relation to the Pioneer Players, as well as to other suffrage media.[4] Carlson has looked at the "persuasive tool" of the genre of comedy with regard to journalistic suffrage plays.[5] Although the specific role of humour sits on the outskirts of discourse here, these observations add value to its analysis.

Literary humour studies is emerging into a dynamic field of critical enquiry, exampled in the work of, for example, Sophie Blanch (modernism), Indira Ghose (Shakespeare), and Margaret D. Stetz (nineteenth- and twentieth-century literature).[6] It draws attention to the matter of humour as an important critical entity. Stetz's study highlights, for instance,

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[1] Quoted in Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John, *How the Vote was Won* (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1909), ii.
[2] Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press, 1981), 66.
[3] Susan Carlson, "Comic Militancy: The Politics of Suffrage Drama" in Maggie B. Gale and Viv Gardner (eds.), *Women, Theatre and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 201; Viv Gardner (ed.), *Sketches from the Actresses' Franchise League* (Nottingham: Ramoth Prints, 1985), 60; Claire Hirshfield, "The Suffragist as Playwright in Edwardian England", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women's Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2 (1987), 3-4.
[4] Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 2001), 54.
[5] Carlson (2000), 212.
[6] See Sophie Blanch, "Women and Comedy" in Maroula Joannou (ed.), *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920-1945: Volume Eight* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013). Blanch has recently set up the British Institute of Humour, promoting interdisciplinary work in humour and comedy (paralleling that of the International Society of Humor Studies); Indira Ghose, *Shakespeare and Laughter: A Cultural Study* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008); Margaret D. Stetz, *British Women's Comic Fiction, 1890-1990: Not Drowning But Laughing* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2001).

laughter as a problematic issue for women, which is reflected in literary relationships between the two. Similarly, a consideration of early twentieth-century English society and theatre into which the AFL launched its plays uncovers the contemporary social value of laughter from which women were often excluded. The dominance of patriarchal humour that made of women a laughing stock, as well as the patriarchal prejudice surrounding the enduring cliché that women had no sense of humour, contributed to the exclusionary nature of the laugh at this time. Meanwhile the women's suffrage movement, which had gained momentum in the previous century, was concerned, alongside women's political and economic position, "with a struggle for meaning in representational […] practices where definitions of femininity were produced and contested."[7] Their concern spoke directly to the contemporary debate surrounding the sense of humour and the prejudiced representations it impacted. This contextual approach, the importance of which Carlson has stressed in the study of theatre, reinvigorates and complicates categorisations and locations of the laugh and the humorous shown in analysis of suffrage theatre.[8] Also highlighting the fact that they are not simply or solely the product of the comic genre, this exposes laughter and humour as important areas of critical analysis in their own right.

This thesis seeks to uncover the AFL's portrayal of women's relationship to laughter and humour as a politically motivated negotiation with the contemporary conception of the sense of humour, invigorated and complemented by the wider activities of the suffrage movement. As Daniel Wickberg details, by the 1870s, the sense of humour had become a valued personality attribute, defining one's capacity to perceive the humorous in the external world as well as within oneself.[9] Chapter One aims to show how the AFL's representation of humour and laughter highlights the suffrage understanding of the political power possessed by those endowed with a "good" sense of humour, and the way many within the League believed its exclusionary definition was integral to the disqualification from the political sphere experienced by women at this time. Chapter Two details the ways the AFL consciously reconfigured women's theatrical relationship to laughter in order to challenge their exclusion from the sense of humour. Chapter Three shows how the League's representation of women's mockery towards the anti-suffrage position borrowed directly from patriarchal humour in order to undermine this exclusion, as well as that within the wider political sphere. The way in which the AFL, furthermore, challenged the parameters of the humorous is highlighted as an attempt to validate this claim to the sense of humour as well as

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[7] Lisa Tickner, *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1987), 161.
[8] Susan Carlson, *Women and Comedy: Rewriting the British Theatrical Tradition* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 35.
[9] Daniel Wickberg, *The Senses of Humor: Self and Laughter in Modern America* (London: Cornell University Press, 1998), 8-9.

to women's space in politics. Chapter Four extends this challenge with a specific focus on the way the AFL employed farce to mock one of the most significant obstacles to the progress of women's suffrage: the argument of Physical Force that considered women's apparent weakness as an ultimate barrier to full citizenship. Audience reception is reviewed in both of these chapters to evaluate the extent to which women's sense of humour was acknowledged and accepted and what impact the AFL believed this could have on the perception of women's political status. To this end, the AFL embraced both sides of the definition of the sense of humour, with that concerning one's perception of the humorous in oneself the subject of the final chapter. Chapter Five reviews the AFL's negotiation with the value of laughing at oneself as a means of asserting the legitimacy of women's political emancipation.

Analysing the politically motivated nature of the AFL's public reconfiguration of women's relationship to the sense of humour, this thesis seeks to explore early feminism's conception of humour as joyously and powerfully subversive, thus far unsubstantiated and largely neglected. The impact of the extremes of scepticism and zealous optimism on later twentieth-century understandings of humour's utility for feminism have informed literary discourses of suffrage comedy – the genre in which much, but not all, of this humour is found – that caution against notions of, and therefore relegate, its political consequence. By contrast, by exploring the defiance of the publically validated female laugh towards the contemporary conception of the separate spheres, this thesis seeks to call into question the distinction between comic and political activity that informs such discourses and, therefore, to challenge suffrage histories that demote the political contribution of theatre.

Methodological explications

While the unification of laughter with humour in a study of the sense of humour is not always self-evident, an exploration of the tone of the suffrage laugh justifies this coupling. Demonstrating the point that the two are not necessary coterminous, Chapter Two explores how suffrage laughter arises from many non-humorous situations. The way that the suffrage sense of humour derives from and is inspired by laughter that is "sour" emphasises that the discussion of even non-humorous laughter is instrumental to the attempt to comprehensively define the League's portrayal of the sense of humour. The resulting cheerful and cheeky laughter affirms the contextual validity of laughter and humour's critical union in this study. Just as laughter is not always humorous, humour is not always set within the genre of comedy. The thesis considers the nature and dynamic of this mode where this supports or is necessitated by the main focus. However, the thesis also aims to show that the humorous transcends the comedic frame, an important distinction that draws attention to the tonal variety of laughter and humour the thesis seeks to reflect.

The definitional complexity and ambiguity of categories of both laughter and humour call for caution and explication ahead of their analysis. Theories of both laughter and humour abound; in, for example, the work of Sigmund Freud and Henri Bergson, the early twentieth century hosted a renewed interest in these phenomena that historically have attracted many thinkers.[10] The theories, as Ghose has stated, elucidate less their subjects and more the social concerns of the time, also emphasising the fact that humour and laughter, and understandings of them, are what Wickberg calls "elements of a cultural reality".[11] According to this, the shape of a society – including its gendered distribution of power – is revealingly reflected in the ways humour and laughter are used, including their representation in literature.

This observation emphasises the importance of a historicist approach in this study. The writings of members of the suffrage movement and, specifically, of the AFL will be invaluable in the assessment of the contextual meanings of both humour and laughter. The ways these relate to or depart from other contemporary thinkers, particularly Freud and Bergson, will help to define suffrage's understanding within the wider debate. In particular, it is necessary to distinguish between Freud's definitions of humour and the joke, and the way the two are frequently united in suffrage discourse. Freud's 1928 article on humour differentiated it from jokes, a subject on which he had written in 1905.[12] Serving the purposes of pleasure in the service of aggression, jokes lack the dignity of humour, particularly in terms of the way the latter incorporates the ability to laugh at oneself. The various distinctions Freud makes of the comic have, however, been criticised as artificial.[13] The ways writers in suffrage periodicals detail humour and jokes do not coincide with Freud's distinction. In 1912, Charlotte Despard, for instance, wrote about the House of Commons that "dearly loves a joke."[14] The joke is an expression of a speaker's "sly [touch] of humour", the appreciation of which provokes laughter in the House.[15] This correlates with Wickberg's own observations in his study of the late nineteenth-century conception of the sense of humour, in which jokes are understood as expressions of the humorous and stimuli for amused response.[16] Integral to it, jokes are therefore crucial in the configuration of the contemporary definition of the sense of humour, as well as in the negotiations with it that comprise the subject of this thesis.

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[10] Freud, *Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious* (1905); Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (1900).
[11] Ghose (2008), 9; Wickberg (1998), 3.
[12] Sigmund Freud, "Humor", *International Journal of Psychoanalysis*, 9 (1928).
[13] See Joseph Newirth, "Jokes and Their Relation to the Unconscious: Humor as a Fundamental Emotional Experience", *Psychoanalytic Dialogues*, 16 (5), 2006.
[14] Charlotte Despard, "Laughter in the House", *The Vote* (6 July 1912), 192.
[15] Ibid.
[16] Wickberg (1998), 9.

Analysing laughter and humour

As suggested by its definitional complexity, laughter presents itself as an ineluctable problem of literary study. Its ephemeral nature perhaps accounts for the paucity of literary studies of laughter; it seems to evade attempts at codification. As Ghose has written, "ambiguity lies at the very heart of laughter," an ambiguity that presents itself all the more when the complexity and multiplicity of dramatic performance are acknowledged.[17] The fact that, as Wallace Chafe has shown, the performance of laughter is only inadequately conveyed in stage directions like "hee hee hee" highlights the vagueness of such descriptions.[18] This ambiguity is further enhanced when studying a theatre group for which there are limited performance records. Theatre histories have "tended to overlook" suffrage drama, as Cockin states.[19] Omitted from the historical canon, the narratives surrounding the playwrights, performances, actors and key players of the AFL continue to be researched and constructed. Some plays were published by the AFL themselves, or by other publishers, at the time, and the same and others have been brought together more recently by Gardner, Susan Croft and, during the writing of this thesis, Naomi Paxton, respectively.[20] These latter anthologies have brought a variety of plays that were either out of print or never previously published to new audiences.

However, this thesis makes mention of several that remain missing, likely owing to the private nature of some performances that meant that the Lord Chamberlain's permission was not required; therefore, they were not stored with the collection at the British Library. J. P. Wearing's *The London Stage* includes only theatre-based performances, so records of the performance and location of many of the AFL plays remain disparate or lost. In bringing together reviews of these plays from suffrage periodicals and the wider press, and analysing performance detail, this thesis seeks to contribute to the ongoing recuperation work of suffrage theatre of which, as Carlson points out, there remains a significant amount to do. A proportion of the background research for this thesis included a search within online and physical archives (those of the Women's Library, the British Library and the Bodleian Library) as well as consultations with librarians and researchers, to attempt to locate the missing plays or, at least, to confirm their missing status. While this search largely corroborated Croft's own of 2009, the appendix details the process by which I located one

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[17] Ghose (2008), 182.
[18] Wallace Chafe, *The Importance of Not Being Earnest: The Feeling Behind Laughter and Humor* (Amsterdam & Philadelphia: John Benjamins Publishing Company, 2007), 22.
[19] Cockin (2001), 44.
[20] Gardner (1985); Susan Croft (ed.), *Votes for Women and Other Plays* (Twickenham: Aurora Metro Publications Ltd, 2009); Naomi Paxton (ed.), *The Methuen Drama Book of Suffrage Plays* (London: Methuen, 2013).

play and offers justification for the reason why this is likely to be the previously unlocated play by Cecil Armstrong, *Physical Force*, which informs the discussion in Chapter Four.[21]

Women's laughter in particular presents additional obstacles. The idea that women's laughter is tricky to read is presented not only by the obstacle created by the elusive manuscripts and materials that concern these plays, but indeed by the very notions offered by the plays that are available. The history of women's laughter, according to Ernestine Blunt in Elizabeth Robins' 1907 suffrage novel *The Convert*, is characterised by stifling due to the patriarchal prohibitions to which it was subject, the impact of which Stetz has detected in literature.[22] Constraints have meant that women have learnt to disguise their laughter; the way that suffrage theatre positions itself as the pioneer of a conscious and defiant departure from this imposed silence necessarily implies that this study lacks a critical history by which an analysis of suffrage's self-defined distinctive laugh might be inspired and on which it can be based. Emphasised by its frequent union with laughter in the plays, there is similarly a difficulty in defining humour; the idea that the act of doing so inherently kills it speaks to the complex and subjective nature of humour. In the words of Despard, "To define a joke would be difficult."[23] Our disorientation parallels that of Harry in J. M. Barrie's AFL play *The Twelve-Pound Look*, first performed on 28 February 1911, which concerns the accidental meeting of Kate, in the services of a typist, and her former husband Harry. Kate had left her oppressive existence, but Harry's pride has meant he has never been able to comprehend that he, rather than another man, was the motivation for Kate's departure. The stage directions indicate that Kate's mocking smile looks like that of "Monna [sic] Lisa".[24] This reference to one of the world's most debated paintings – certainly pertaining to a woman's smile – elaborates Harry's interpretational confusion. The rejection of women's role to please is indicated by the gently sardonic calm in both the painting and in Kate's performance, but Harry has no historical reference point to orientate him; seeming to vanish and reappear simultaneously, it seems ever impossible to capture this smile.

Stetz's reminder that the desire to fix meaning onto the feminine smile is a masculine impulse calls for interpretational wariness that does not deny the multiplicity of laughter's significance.[25] Hélène Cixous' essay "The Laugh of the Medusa", which has proven important for the theorising of feminist laughter, acknowledges the way critical history has failed to observe women's laughter and, showing that our critical gaze needs retraining, offers

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[21] Croft (2009).
[22] Elizabeth Robins, *The Convert* (Leipzig: Berhard Tauchnitz, 1908 [1907]), vol. ii, 98. Stetz (2001), viv.
[23] Despard (1912), 192.
[24] J. M. Barrie (1911), *The Twelve-Pound Look* in J. M. Barrie, *Half Hours* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, [n.d.]), 60.
[25] Stetz (2001), 43.

the means of doing so in a way that does not fix but, rather, opens up this laughter.[26] Like Perseus, we have been guilty of deflecting Medusa's laughing-looking gaze back onto herself so that notice of her laughter has been subsumed by the laugh aimed at her. By calling us to return to the material burst of laughter by looking at Medusa straight on, Cixous invests in the legitimacy of this recuperation. Anca Parvulescu theorises that Medusa's laughing death in Cixous' essay reminds us that she left a laughing "crack" in her body's stone, through which her laughter resonates.[27] The accumulation of the relics of manuscripts and their marginalia, as well as of venue and performance details in the press and periodicals, interviews, relevant songs, photographs and other contextual materials, offers a compelling way back into the plays' laughter and how it was interpreted onstage. Methodologically, Stetz's work, and that of Merle Tonnies in the theatre, offer starting points and ways in towards the analysis of such materials.[28]

By drawing attention to the variety of performance and audience reception, the use of these resources seeks to shed light on this contemporary laughter in ways that do not limit but embrace laughter's ambiguity. Forming part of this aim, they also help to delineate and capture the tonal variety of laughter in order to emphasise the political and individual diversity within the AFL. While comprehensive introductions to the AFL have been detailed elsewhere, for these purposes it is necessary to highlight that the League's commitment to political neutrality attracted a wide range of suffrage denominations. Responding to Carlson's concern that dominant narratives of suffrage activism highlight the "commitment to violence and potential for tragedy" and to radical politics in general, a detailed contextualisation seeks to emphasise how the study of humour can elucidate the stylistic and political diversity represented by the AFL.[29] Where it refers to or summarises the League's humour and laughter, this thesis seeks to inform this categorisation with reference to and investigation of trends, common tactics, as well as important deviations, to avoid the erroneous conflation of affiliation with homogeneity.

This elucidation of diversity also calls into question definitional boundaries of political and literary categories. As well as contributing to ongoing redefinitions of women's relationship with modernism, this thesis also aims to add to the important work, articulated by Maroula Joannou and June Purvis, of challenging and complicating assumed categories of

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[26] Hélène Cixous with Keith Cohen and Paul Cohen (transl.), "The Laugh of the Medusa", *Signs* Vol. 1, No. 4 (Summer, 1976), 875-893.
[27] Anca Parvulescu, *Laughter: Notes on a Passion* (Cambridge, MA: Massachusetts Institute of Technology, 2010), 110.
[28] Merle Tonnies, "Laughter in Nineteenth-Century British Theatre: From Genial Blending to Harsh Distinctions" in Manfred Pfister (ed.), *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: Rodopi, 2002).
[29] Carlson (2000), 200.

suffrage politics.[30] By considering the political significance of the AFL's negotiations with the sense of humour and its role in wider suffrage discourses, the categorisation of "serious" and "radical" activities, and the hierarchical distinctions between on and offstage political contributions, are brought into review. By investigating their use of humour, therefore, it will be possible to provide a more complete account of the AFL's political endeavours than currently acknowledged. While Carlson has drawn attention to the less studied areas of suffrage theatre as important research areas, which Cockin, Glenda Norquay and Sowon S. Park's anthologies have also facilitated, these observations both invite and validate the reinvestigation of the AFL's work.[31]

A note on the text

Citations of plays are, upon their first mention, fully referenced in footnotes. Thereafter, owing to the frequency of citation, quotations are referenced in the text by an accompanying page number in parenthesis. This relates only to plays; all other material is referenced in footnotes.

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[30] See Maroula Joannou and June Purvis, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: New Feminist Perspectives* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998).
[31] Carlson (2000), 200. See also Katharine Cockin, Glenda Norquay, Sowon S. Park, *Women's Suffrage Literature* (London, Routledge, 2007), 6 volumes.

Chapter One

"I don't wonder you laugh": women's emancipation and the "honourable occupation" of oppositional laughter on stage

Introduction

During a suffrage rally in Elizabeth Robins' 1907 novel *The Convert*, the suffragette Ernestine Blunt emphatically declares what she perceives to be laughter's distinctive presence in the political campaign of anti-suffrage: "We have read how every struggle towards freedom has met with opposition and abuse. We expected to have our share of those things. But we find that no movement before ours has ever had so much laughter to face."[1] By the time of the publication of the first histories and autobiographies of the movement, laughter as a ubiquitous response to the demands for women's suffrage had been widely recognised and recorded.

In his 1935 account in *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, George Dangerfield – the "first 'historian' to treat the movement seriously" – detailed the laughter that spanned the early twentieth-century movement.[2] This ranged from that which "drowned" the proposed Private Member Bill in 1903 to the laughter of the police during Black Friday (18 November 1910) – the confrontation between suffragettes and police during the protests that followed the rejection of the Conciliation Bill.[3] Vera Brittain's 1953 account highlighted a pre-twentieth-century legacy of laughter and the continued widespread jocund treatment of the suffrage topic into the new century.[4] More recently, Lisa Tickner has considered the role of suffrage-themed political and popular caricature in reflecting and generating anti-suffrage laughter.[5] Krista Cowman has looked at the "public lampooning" of the campaign, focusing on the laughing reception of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU).[6] In the autobiographies and writings of suffrage members such as Mary Richardson and Lena Ashwell, anti-suffrage laughter is frequently referenced, from the intimate, private laughter at home, to that of the "mocking, jeering crowds."[7] By pro-suffrage campaigners and historians

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[1] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 97.
[2] Jane Marcus, *Suffrage and the Pankhursts* (London: Routledge, 2001 [1987]), 2-3.
[3] George Dangerfield, *The Strange Death of Liberal England* (New York: Capricorn Books, 1961 [1935]), 152. Regarding Black Friday, Dangerfield writes, "As the women advanced into Parliament Square, the police pushed them back: gently at first, and with laughter. […] The laughter of the crowd, and it was large, took on a coarser note […]." 159.
[4] Vera Brittain, *Lady into Woman: A History of Women from Victoria to Elizabeth II* (London: Andrew Dakers, 1953), 18.
[5] Tickner (1987).
[6] Krista Cowman, " 'Doing Something Silly': The Uses of Humour by the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914", *IRSH* 52 (2007), 261.
[7] Mary Richardson writes of the "mocking, jeering crowds" in Mary Richardson, *Laugh a Defiance* (London: George Weidenfeld & Nicolson, 1953), 53. Of the 1910 celebratory procession, sparked by the announcement that the government would return to the question of the Conciliation Bill, theatre

alike, laughter is understood to have been tenaciously central to the lamentable indifference or fierce opposition with which the movement was received.

Some of the research cited above has made reference to the ways in which contemporary theatre reflected such laughter onstage. For example, Cowman has briefly considered the way "theatre audiences were offered suffragette characters for comic effect."[8] She references in particular James Sexton's 1914 *The Riot Act* and Will Letters' 1909 music hall song "Put Me Upon An Island" (performed by Wilkie Bard).[9] In addition, the plays of the Actresses' Franchise League frequently referred to and captured the laughter directed at their cause. However, despite both laughter's renowned centrality within the movement and the AFL's concomitant preoccupation with it, the pro-suffrage theatre's response to laughter – in its off and onstage incarnations - has not previously been considered. According to Manfred Pfister, "the representations of laughter reveal the faultlines of the anxieties and the social pressures at work at a given historical moment more distinctly than actual laughter does."[10] Employing this observation, this chapter is motivated by an understanding that a study of the AFL's interest in representing such laughter might expose the perceived reasons for laughter's prevalence in the on and offstage movement according to pro-suffrage campaigners, in terms of the anxieties it communicates and even the social and political impact it is believed to have.

This chapter first explores the AFL's representation of the prevalence of laughter directed at the suffrage campaign. "Oppositional" and "anti-suffrage" are terms used throughout this chapter to denote this laughter. This is not to say that political intent should be presupposed; this laughter is driven by a range of forces, including commercial and financial, as well as by resistance. The descriptions derive, rather, from the contemporary suffrage conviction to be explored that all laughter that uses the movement for comedic purposes could have politically hostile consequences, as well as the way that the plays often display an attitude that does indeed presume politically hostile intent. Considering the contemporary value of laughter, this chapter then investigates social motivations proposed by the AFL for its centrality. Analysing plays, performances and the wider movement, a strong critique of oppositional laughter is explored in conjunction with the widespread notion of its political impact.

To begin with an analysis of anti-suffrage laughter in a study seeking to explore the

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manager Lena Ashwell noted in the crowds the "curious and contemptuous people. Well-dressed men with ridicule in their eyes and the smile of superiority on their sneering lips, stared as we passed along." Lena Ashwell, *Myself a Player* (London: Michael Joseph, 1936), 160.

[8] Cowman (2007), 263.

[9] James Sexton, *The Riot Act* (London: Constable, 1914). "Put Me Upon An Island", *The Blaze of Day: The Suffragette Movement* (Pearl, 1999), track 17.

[10] Manfred Pfister, *A History of English Laughter: Laughter from Beowulf to Beckett and Beyond* (New York: Rodopi, 2002), vii.

suffrage sense of humour on the stage has its rationale in the understanding that the ideas explored and methods used by any political movement necessarily function in dialogue with its opponents, if they are to be in any way accepted, useful or successful. As articulated by suffrage historian Martin Pugh, political adversaries "emulate each other's methods […] and implicitly corroborate their claims to success."[11] In assessing anti-suffrage laughter and its perceived political utility, this chapter seeks, therefore, a greater understanding of the significance of suffrage negotiations with the sense of humour and of the reasons why laughter was to become such an important weapon in the AFL's own armoury.

In recognition of the way both Robins' suffrage play and novel were influential in the foundation of the AFL, these are discussed in this chapter as evidence of an early literary – including theatrical – suffrage preoccupation with laughter that preceded and informed the AFL. Robins' 1907 play *Votes for Women!,* first staged by the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre on 9 April 1907, and her novel, *The Convert*, are treated together in this chapter as an allied representation and means of dissemination of the campaign's early suffrage preoccupations. This approach, which takes its precedent from the work of Jane Marcus, derives from the observation that, in conception, content, reception, and subsequent influence, one cannot be extricated from the other. [12] Eager to capture the contemporary spirit of the suffrage campaign and publicize its ideas, Robins had written the play "at white heat" in two months. [13] Its performance, according to Katharine Cockin, "could be said to mark the beginning of women's suffrage drama."[14] Methuen offered Robins an advance of £1000 for a novel based on the play, the last five chapters of which closely parallel the three acts of the play in which Vida Levering, already committed to the cause, confronts her past in the figure of Geoffrey Stonor and demands reparation in the form of political support.[15] Published in the same year, it is likely that the novel reached the same intrigued and dedicated audience as that of the play, described as it was somewhat facetiously by St. John Hankin as a "congregation" full of "stalwart propagoose[s] (if that be the correct feminine of propagander)," assembled "in the missionary spirit."[16] In fact, the play was not published until 1909 so, for those not able to see it or those who wished to study its ideas afterwards, the novel was the first text available.

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[11] Martin Pugh, *The March of the Women: A Revisionist Analysis of the Campaign for Women's Suffrage, 1866-1914* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 145.
[12] Her introduction to *The Convert* treats both the play and novel together. Jane Marcus (ed.), *The Convert* (New York: Feminist Press, 1980), v-xvi.
[13] Letter from Robins to Millicent Fawcett (1 November 1906) in Joanne E. Gates, *Elizabeth Robins, 1862-1952* (London: University of Alabama Press, 1994), 154.
[14] Katharine Cockin, "Women's Suffrage Drama" in Joannou and Purvis (1998), 128.
[15] Emelyne Godrey, *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence in Victorian Literature and Society: From Dagger-Fans to Suffragettes* (London: Macmillan, 2012), 70.
[16] St. John Hankin, *The Academy* (13 April 1907), 370.

Speaking of Robins' novel, Joanne E. Gates says that its value "for today's historians is that it documents a very early phase of campaign tactics and the responses to them."[17] For the purposes here, *The Convert* provides a depth of insight that closely elaborates the notions touched upon in Robins' play about one of those responses – oppositional laughter – allowing for such remarks as Blunt's above pertaining to the quantity of laughter the cause has "to face". As will be demonstrated, Blunt's observation strongly resonates in the play's dramatisation. Therefore, if Jean Chothia describes *Votes for Women!* as "a force behind the foundation the following year of the Actresses' Franchise League," Robins' novel must, then, equally be considered an important impetus towards the establishment of the League. [18] Blunt's assertion founds the significance of the AFL's preoccupation with laughter and the importance of its subsequent analysis.

Suffrage and the laughing tradition against women

According to Alice Meynell – essayist, poet and suffragist – writing in 1896, laughter is "everywhere"; it "has become to-day a more important thing than it ever was before […]."[19] Within even the serious sphere of Victorian politics, laughter occupied a vital place, the presence of which was not considered antithetical. In fact, into the twentieth century, cracking jokes as a politician was professionally advantageous. In 1912 Charlotte Despard described how the "House of Commons dearly loves a joke. Speakers who, by sly touches of humour, or witty interludes, can provoke laughter will always be popular in Parliament."[20] More often than not, of course, this laughter was directed at the opposition and was paralleled in the public sphere. Into the early twentieth century, heckling, mockery and cartoon caricature were staples of political life. [21] Indeed, in *The Convert*, Member of Parliament Stonor is used to "looking at caricatures of himself and all his dearest friends."[22]

The political campaign of suffrage was a perfect target for laughter; in both *The Convert* and in *Votes for Women!*, Robins represents a thorough range of political laughter directed at the movement by professionals as by the public, several instances of which are closely based on laughter Robins witnessed offstage. Robins' depiction of the middle act's suffrage rally in *Votes for Women!*, repeated in *The Convert*'s own crowd scenes, has its origins in her detailed notes of speeches and heckling which she made during a trip to the Huddersfield by-election

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[17] Gates (1994), 165.
[18] Jean Chothia, *The New Woman and Other Emancipated Woman Plays* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1998), xxi.
[19] Alice Meynell, "Laughter", *Pall Mall Gazette* (3 January 1986), 5.
[20] Despard, "Laughter in the House", *The Vote* (6 July 1912), 192.
[21] See J. Seymour Lloyd's advice manual, *Elections and How to Fight Them* (London, 1909).
[22] Robins (1908), vol. i, 94.

campaign in 1906, accompanying the Pankhursts.[23] Just as Robins experienced in Huddersfield, the speeches of Blunt (modelled on suffragette Teresa Billington-Greig) and others are interrupted by the crowd with, at turns, "a derisive roar", "jeers", "ironic laughter", and silencing laughter ("Ha, ha! Shut up!").[24] Sue Thomas explains that George Bernard Shaw advised Robins to include this banterous interjection; given her diligent notes it seems Robins was perhaps already so disposed.[25]

Another laughing episode that Robins recorded in her diary finds expression in both play and novel. During a dinner held by her friends the Lewises, Robins heard the radical MP Henry Labouchere regaling guests with stories of women demanding the vote. In her diary, Robins recalls Labouchere's "jaded jibes about women in politics being old maids or having short hair."[26] In *Votes for Women!*, Labouchere becomes "that old cynic" (i.8) St. John Greatorex, with "small, twinkling eyes and a reputation for telling good stories after dinner when ladies have left the room" (i.11). He talks derisively about "a few discontented old maids and hungry widows" (i.13). In *The Convert*, Robins embodies this caricature in the figure of Mrs Townley, a politically fervent spinster, at whom others laugh. Even if she could not personally witness it, it is clear, too, that Robins was acutely aware from news reports of oppositional laughter rife in the political sphere. She references this laughter in Vida's challenge towards Greatorex in *Votes for Women!* when Vida asks "how many years is it you've kept the House in roars whenever Woman's Rights are mentioned?" (i.13). As these examples show, Robins' literary representation of oppositional laughter closely derives from her acute experiences of it in the real-life suffrage campaign.

If such laughter was an integral part of the normal political experience, Robins suggests that laughter aimed at the women's suffrage movement was politically unique. Blunt's distinction in *The Convert* between the laughter of other political movements and that of women's suffrage lies in her perception of the quantity and nature of the laughing rebuffs that the movement attracts. As well as asserting that "no movement before ours" has experienced so much laughter, Blunt emphasises the peculiar extent of this: "Against no revolt has there ever been such a torrent of ridicule let loose as against the Women's Movement."[27] The profession of this allegedly unprecedented state of political affairs contains no doubt something of the provocative; as an experienced suffrage speaker, Blunt is adept at employing

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[23] See Wendy Mulford, "Socialist-Feminist Criticism: A Case Study. Women's Suffrage and Literature, 1906-14" in Peter Widdowson (ed.), *Re-Reading English* (London: Methuen, 1982), 188.
[24] Elizabeth Robins, *Votes for Women!*, ii. 2, 3. LCP 1907/6, Lic. No. 222.
[25] Sue Thomas, *Elizabeth Robins: A Bibliography*, Victorian Fiction Research Guides 22 (Department of English: University of Queensland, 1994), 9.
[26] Diary excerpt (1905) in Angela V. John, *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life* (Stroud: Tempus, 2007), 200.
[27] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 96.

rhetorical and emotive devices to sway her gathered crowds.

Yet several points regarding the idiosyncratic nature of this political movement support Blunt's statement. Regarding its political position, it is noteworthy that, unlike party-political candidates who expected derision from opposing parties, the suffrage movement had to face "persistent criticism from across the political spectrum."[28] As the abundance of historical accounts affirm, suffrage's opposing parties were numerous, and therefore suffrage members experienced a profusion of anti-suffrage laughter. Perhaps more importantly – certainly as presented by Robins – the majority gender composition of the movement and the controversial goals for women for which it stood opened the suffrage movement to particularly strong and widespread derision, based on longstanding prejudice and a well-established laughter tradition. Robins demonstrates a strong subscription to this influence when, in *The Convert*, the narrator tells us that it is the "bare idea of women pretending to concern themselves with public affairs" that makes "the soberest sides shake with Homeric laughter."[29] In a society still influenced by the beliefs propagated by Victorian figures such as Coventry Patmore and John Ruskin regarding women's need for protection from the public, masculine sphere, the notion that women should take up political vocations, have equal voting rights, or that the political world be filled with "feminine" topics, was ridiculous. Susan Kingsley Kent has written extensively about the way this separate spheres ideology "informed virtually every aspect of life in the nineteenth century."[30]

Her exploration of the widespread influence of the division of the spheres on sexual and social relationships and the impact of any subsequent deviance or transgression from this arrangement on the woman as an "unsexed" being, is helpful in understanding the motivation behind this laughter. Pfister has described gender transgression (with a particular emphasis on women) as a widespread and long-standing source of laughter, stretching across cultures "otherwise far apart from each other."[31] As early as Plato and Aristotle, the perception of woman as a comic object stemmed from an apparently innate fault in achieving full human functionality. In other words, her comic transgression required no activity; her existence itself and the "pretence" it entails was the comic "fault" which attracted laughter when audiences perceived the "illegitimacy of the object's power-claim" to full functionality.[32] Biologically and subjectively, the very act of being a woman entails a pretence towards complete humanness. Therefore, being a woman is sufficient in itself to provoke this perception of humorous transgression in an audience. As women attempted further "transgression", this

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[28] Cowman (2007), 267.
[29] Robins (1908), vol. i, 166.
[30] Susan Kingsley Kent, *Gender and Power in Britain, 1640-1990* (London: Routledge, 1999), 154.
[31] Pfister (2002), vi.
[32] Susan Purdie, *Comedy: The Mastery of Discourse* (London: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), 67.

laughter persisted.

From the later years of the nineteenth century onwards, this "hilarious" transgression derived from the perceived incongruity between a masculine political forum and the introduction into it – by women and men – of supposedly "feminine" topics from the domestic and private sphere. Millicent Fawcett, in her 1927 biography of Josephine Butler, describes that in 1871 and beyond, Members of Parliament would respond with "roars of laughter" to mentions of women or childbirth.[33] Shaw would later recall the hilarity amongst a London Health Committee in a discussion of maternity and child welfare, during which "the whole Committee burst into a roar of laughter, as if the speaker had made a scandalous but irresistible joke."[34] The apparent incongruity of "feminine" issues being discussed in the masculine political sphere provoked laughter, which prompted Shaw to assert the necessity of female participation on such committees.

Although women were later represented on some municipal and council boards, as Robins shows the idea of women's participation was not received without laughter. When, increasingly, women sought more changes in their political representation, the supposed gender disparity redoubled laughter, with anti-suffrage laughter latching onto residual anti-feminist laughter. Writing at the turn of the century, James Sully described how the longevity of the "not unnatural" tradition of laughing at women's various attempts at emancipation justified the continuation that he noted in the present day.[35] Sully was a psychologist who wrote the 1902 *An Essay on Laughter,* a book interesting for this brief yet insightful diversion when Sully digresses from his compilation of laughter theories to mention anti-emancipation laughter, itself suggestive of integral pervasiveness. Sully states that the laughing criticism contemporary women receive is "not unnatural when one remembers how many times before men have laughed at something like ['the modern 'emancipation of women'']; and not so unreasonable to one who perceives the droll aspects of the spectacle of a sex setting about to assert itself chiefly by aping the ways of the rival sex."[36] Sully's joviality here emanates from an ideology which assigns a sense of goodness to the laughter of authorities, dismissing the laughter of malice as belonging to a time less evolved than his. It had, in fact, become easier to laugh at women because the very joke construct – that perceived gender norm transgression – was now embodied and emphasised in the public behaviour of suffrage women. Indira Ghose has written of theories of laughter that "they seem to shed less light on laughter than mirror the obsessions of their period of origin."[37] Grounded in a perception of the apparent

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[33] M. G. Fawcett, *Josephine Butler* (London: The Association for Moral and Social Hygiene, 1927), 74.
[34] *New York Times* (19 March 1927) in Michael Holroyd, *Bernard Shaw* (London: Vintage, 1998), 233.
[35] James Sully, *An Essay on Laughter* (London: Longmans, Green and Co, 1902), 419.
[36] Sully (1902), 419.
[37] Ghose (2008), 9.

incongruity between existing gender norms and their absurd copycat transgression, both the enlightening presence and content of Sully's digression testify to the inevitability of laughter towards the activities of politicized women at this time.

In *The Convert*, Robins demonstrates a deep understanding of the inevitability and supposedly natural quality of this established laughter tradition. Robins' narrator sardonically assumes the voice of the laugher, about women "pretending to concern themselves with public affairs," to highlight this prejudiced and yet widely accepted assumption of women's political incapacity.[38] With an age-old notion of women's shortcomings in terms of achieving full human functionality, the idea that these incapacitated, unsuitable, even frivolous women might partake in the serious political sphere was deemed ridiculous; they could therefore only ever attain copycat status. Even schoolboys sense the unfeminine in the notion of "demanding" a vote, as when an Eton boy, laughing at the "fatuity of the female creature", declares, "Fancy! They 'demand' it. What awful cheek!"[39] The widespread nature of this position is captured in its later ridicule in Alison Garland's 1913 popular suffrage play *The Better Half* in which the world is turned upside down: only women have the vote and men are campaigning for theirs. Lady Louise Harewood expresses dismayed astonishment at the idea that men "demanded" an audience: "The unenfranchised commanding the masters of the situation. It is altogether too ridiculous. The next thing will be children demanding holiday from parents and teachers."[40] Here, laughter is presented as a logical response of superiors – the "masters" or, as Robins infers, the Homeric gods who work within a pre-ordained hierarchy, a departure from which is nonsensical. Furthermore, this "fatuity" to which Robins refers captures the supposed silliness of all womankind, who innately lack a purpose, making their qualification for and requirement of a vote entirely and even naturally redundant.

Robins thus rationalises Blunt's remark about the unprecedented quantity of laughter directed at the campaign by showing that suffrage politics are a clear target of time-honoured derision, based on a strong tradition of prejudice against women; even those not so disposed to laughter are helplessly moved to it. When Vida in *Votes for Women!* complains how throughout women's forty years of petitioning parliament men have "only" laughed, she is capturing an early twentieth-century frustration with this "torrent" of laughter emanating from across the political, public, and popular spectrum (i.32). When, thirty-seven years earlier, the Bill reached a second reading, Vida describes how the "men laughed rather louder" (i.33). Vida communicates here the grave lack of any other political action than that of the way anti-suffrage jokes moved Parliament to laughter.

Her frustration with the stalling effects of laughter reflects that of other suffrage players.

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[38] Robins (1908), vol. i, 165.
[39] Robins (1908), vol. i, 168.
[40] Alison Garland, *The Better Half* (Liverpool: Daily Post Printers, 1913), 10.

Friend to Robins, Emmeline Pankhurst, had been "disgusted at the way in which the Suffrage Bill was laughed down in Parliament in 1904."[41] In 1905, laughter was entirely displaced from suffrage onto other political issues so as to prevent Parliament ever reaching the subject, constituting indirect ridicule of a subject deemed not worthy of political discussion. In a speech given to the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), Geraldine Lennox described how the second reading of the suffrage bill was "talked out" by Members of the Commons "spinning out the debate on the Railway Lighting Bill with silly jokes and foolish stories."[42] This "insulting performance" was listened to with "laughter and applause."[43] Laughter also prevented the adequate address of subsidiary yet important issues relating to women's suffrage. When faced with campaigns against force feeding, Shaw described the way "the House of Commons listened to the Home Secretary's account of such proceedings with bursts of laughter," which might recall contemporary cartoons such as "Force Feeding a Suffragette," that likewise dismissed in laughter the physical violence forced upon many incarcerated women.[44] Mirroring on and offstage activity, Robins sets up oppositional laughter as a barometer of early resistance to suffrage, demonstrating the overwhelming lack of sympathetic engagement the campaign faced in its early years.

The "silencing" of laughter

However, compelled by these concerns of laughter's naturalisation, Robins also offers her audience some contemporary optimism regarding the positive influence of women's political advances on oppositional laughter. Although Robins does not specifically date this, it is, in particular, the new activities of the militant suffragettes that, in both works discussed here, silence this laughter, bringing her writing up-to-date with the movement's events. In *The Convert,* the narrator explains that recent political advances of the cause had sidelined the possibility of ridicule amongst "general society": "The thing couldn't be laughed at any longer, but it could still be pretended it wasn't there."[45] We are told how this was an observed occurrence throughout England. In the place of laughter and "merriment" now stood "silence and constraint", and the occasional change of conversation by the "quickest-witted".[46] Where men did talk rather than disregard suffrage, this serious turn took some getting used to: Jean Dunbarton explains "it was rather odd to hear two men like my uncle

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[41] Godfrey (2012), 74.
[42] Speech given by Geraldine Lennox (WSPU; 1932), "The Suffragette Spirit" for The Suffragette Fellowship. "Speeches by Members of the WSPU", The Women's Library at LSE, 7VJH/1/1/01, 14.
[43] Ibid.
[44] Barbara Bellow Watson, *A Shavian Guide to the Intelligent Woman* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1964), 181.
[45] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 153.
[46] Ibid.

and Mr. Stonor talking about the influence of the Suffrage women really quite seriously."[47] In *Votes for Women!*, Vida notes how women swapping polite behaviour for the "fun" antics of militancy has paradoxically forced men to take them seriously. Following militant disturbance, "the men had stopped laughing at last" and sent the women "to gaol in pretty sober earnest" (i.34). Just like in *The Convert*, the influence of women's activity is widespread as Vida assures us that "all the world was talking about it" (i.34). Dale Spender refers to this paradox when citing the recognition by twentieth-century militants that the polite policy of the past had meant that women were not taken seriously. So-called good behaviour had allowed "men to sneer and jeer at women" who became "figures of fun".[48] By contrast, militancy has supposedly put an end to this. Notably, the dwindling of laughter does not entail in either work a guaranteed sudden improvement in the political chances of women (who could still be ignored or imprisoned) but, rather, a change in the perception of women's political seriousness, which itself is celebrated as a step towards progress.

From an analysis of the suffrage progress over the first decade of the twentieth century, it is easy to see why people might have had cause to be optimistic about oppositional laughter's decline and the concomitant new seriousness with which the debate might now begin. Pugh draws attention to the importance of taking into account the dynamic nature of the progress and perception of suffrage in the early part of the twentieth century. He states, "It is […] important to analyse the debate over time, for to present it as a static dialogue of the deaf is to oversimplify enormously."[49] With the first decade's various advances in women's politics, the disparity between women's demonstrations of political credibility and the stereotypes on which anti-suffrage laughter were based had widened. As AFL member Laurence Housman observed, "More and more it became difficult to belittle a Movement which could hold up the traffic of London with processions two or three miles long […]."[50] Indeed, Pugh shows that contrary to common misconception, women's suffrage gained a great deal of serious support, and thus momentum, from the 1890s onwards. In fact, Pugh goes so far as to write, "The *principle* of women's enfranchisement had largely been won" as early as the turn of the century.[51] Increasingly, women worked at elections and progressively participated in more politics at the municipal level from the 1890s onwards, for which men increasingly admitted women's worth and ability (although the implicit subjugation and any exploitation were often far from naively accepted by the women).[52] Gertrude Moillot's play *The Master*, first

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[47] Ibid.
[48] Dale Spender in Candida Lacey and Carole Hayman (eds.), *How the Vote was Won and Other Suffragette Plays* (London: Methuen, 1985), 8.
[49] Pugh (2002), 33
[50] Tickner (1987), 58.
[51] Pugh (2002), 59
[52] Dangerfield (1961), 152-3.

performed at the Scala, London on 12 November 1909 and concerning one family's plight against male ineptitude and female albeit powerless capability, staged such women canvassing for their husbands.[53] Pro-suffrage majorities were recorded consistently in 1897 and 1904 (and again in 1909, 1910 and 1911) and, significantly, Prime Minister Henry Campbell-Bannerman received a deputation of suffragists in May 1906. In the face of this, anti-suffrage arguments, and the concomitant laughter, ostensibly became less and less tenable. It was perhaps this feeling of optimism that Robins in 1907 was reflecting.

While it is important to note this optimism, the strength of these assertions regarding the decline of anti-suffrage laughter is markedly diminished by Robins' own demonstration of its tenacity and proclivity for renewal in her works, both in private conversation and public altercation. After the narrator's declaration regarding the substitution of laughter for silence, *The Convert* goes on to examplify the unceasing ridicule of the comic papers and of the crowd.[54] Likewise, in *Votes for Women!*, even after the publication in the newspapers of the women's protest in the House, Greatorex continues to find amusement in the very "silly scenes" of militancy which Vida purported to be sobering for politicians like himself (i.29). The laughter towards the political woman was based on a tenacious idea of incongruity, which the disparity between stereotype and achievement could not displace. Robins' portrayal thus indicates a premature optimism held by her narrator and protagonist regarding suffrage's ability to alter attitudes as to the serious worth of the movement. If Robins also holds some of this optimism, it is betrayed by her own wavering stance. Just like her attitude to militancy itself, Robins reveals herself to be more than equivocal about suffrage's ability to put a permanent stop to its laughing critics. Vida and, to a greater extent, the narrator of Robins' novel thus function more as an encouraging, even propagandist voice to suffrage supporters on this topic than Robins herself could confidently be.

Beyond 1907: tenacious laughter and the AFL

Analysing the debate over time reveals an early optimism and reasons for an enduring concern with oppositional laughter onstage. In Alice Chapin's 1909 play *At the Gates*, which stages a suffragette's picketing efforts outside the House of Commons and the subsequent derision she experiences, the Suffragette's attitude towards such laughter is one of weary astonishment, highlighted by her emphatic stress on "still": "Some still find it amusing to see a woman standing at these gates," just as Robins had described such jibes in her diary as "jaded".[55] However, if the Suffragette is fatigued by this enduring prejudice, this laughter

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[53] Gertrude Moillot, *The Master*, 22. LCP 1909/25, Lic. No. 199/25.
[54] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 172, 181.
[55] Alice Chapin, *At the Gates,* 9. LCP 1909/29, Lic. No. 352.

shows no sign of abating. Although this play was “crowded out of the programme” at the Albert Hall in December 1909, when its author was in prison, an abridged version appeared in the same month’s *The Vote* (the Women’s Freedom League’s periodical, WFL) in which various passing figures (a man, a group of boys, a drunk) represent this public act of derision.[56]

An analysis of subsequent plays by those who followed in Robins’ footsteps confirms a continuing interest in this laughter beyond the dawn of militancy, demonstrating that at the birth of the AFL, oppositional laughter was of key concern to these playwrights as it was to Robins. The plays existed dynamically with the movement they expressed, responding to the political concerns and events around it. Far from silencing it, the evidence both off and onstage suggests that the distinctive characteristics of militant women as well as their behaviour might have even intensified such laughter. Cowman discusses the WSPU’s “strangeness when compared with other political bodies” which “made it an easy target for humour,” in terms of its female and bohemian composition.[57] The unusual and “unfeminine” tactics of the violently militant section attracted ridicule, as shown in *At the Gates*. The Suffragette explains how Members “[conjure] up the scene” of women protesting in the House, thus provoking “merry laughter” (16). The vicious and sneering nature of these crowds are pointed out in the writings of Ashwell and Richardson, for example, further substantiated in Garland’s *The Better Half* when Mrs Campbell laughs about “the procession last Saturday” (18). She dismisses the “theatrical display” as that of a “stage army”, motivated by “amusement” rather than by politics. For Campbell, the theatricality is suggestive of exaggerated performance, put on for frivolous show rather than for serious substance. Repeatedly enacted, they merely give an illusion of plentiful support, when in fact the same people “would take part in similar processions all over the country” (18).

Evidence shows that militant activity was frequently used as the excuse for politicians’ refusal to regard suffrage with any seriousness, drawing attention to some important qualifications that need to be made about women’s political success in the early twentieth century. Ostensibly showing support, in spite of or even because of women’s political advances, few politicians actually believed in suffrage as a serious project, or disregarded it (ostensibly) due to the bad behaviour of women. Garland ironically reflects the prevalence of this phenomenon in the figures of Mrs Addington, Mrs Burnett, Mrs Peppard, and the playwright Mr Gunning in *The Better Half*, the lack of discipline shown by men having caused these people to withdraw support. As Miss Hope says of Mrs Addington, “She used to be with us, but since the Liverton dock strike […] she has gone over to the enemy” (6).

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[56] See AFL Secretary Report 1909-10 in WL, 2AFL 1990/NoAccNo05; “*At the Gates*”, *The Vote* (16 December 1909), 94.
[57] Cowman (2007), 261.

Politicians were pressured into supporting bills by female activists or due to party political expediencies, and undertook to do so for party advantage or because they did not believe in the cause's chances anyway. If the prospect looked imminent, support would sometimes be withdrawn or re-directed for personal and political gain, to which Robins ironically refers in her reference to the "four hundred and twenty members" who have pledged allegiance only to withdraw it (iii.23). Garland draws attention to this latter point in the character of Mrs Booth of Hillery who has been swayed to the other side by a dinner invitation (6). At the time of Robins' writing, these anti-suffrage organisations (including anti-suffrage plays), with their concomitant laughter, were yet to properly mobilise, which they would do from 1908.[58]

Garland's play – in an altercation between Claude and Mrs Campbell – also highlights the way that women's canvassing work was not necessarily rewarded with promised support, a topic later returned to by Second Man who laments Miss Rowena Flower's lack of aid despite his tireless canvassing in the "slums of Hopetown" during her election (47). It is the Prime Minister, Lady Diana, in this play who demonstrates that the political experience at the municipal level, far from a stepping stone, was frequently utilised as a political appeasement to women. She describes men's involvement on Town and County Councils as "satisfactory in every way" (15). In Jean Dugdale's *Clowning Street,* first performed on 19 December 1913 and concerning the Prime Minister's attempt to put an end to supposedly "bored" women's protests by providing them with work, all political parties are "one at bottom on Woman Suffrage, you know; don't want it at any price."[59] Therefore, they prevaricate ceaselessly by way of delays and reworded amendments.

Alert to these attitudes, the plays widely demonstrate that the prejudices and generalisations regarding women's frivolity and inability to undertake serious things were, as Tickner describes, "resilient beyond the point of evidence or consensus."[60] L.S. Phibbs' play *Jim's Leg*, published in the WSPU's suffrage periodical *Votes for Women* on 29 January 1911 and "typical of the monologues" performed at suffrage meetings from 1909, deals with the subject of gender prejudice in the workplace.[61] After Jim loses his leg, his wife has to go to work in his place. Even when Esther does "as much work as [men] do," she is still greeted with their laughter as they state, "Women can't do men's work".[62] Even the village vicar, in Arthur M. Heathcote's *A Junction* laughs at the Young Person's suffrage views. Dated 1 December 1909, AFL reports show this appeared in a November performance at Holloway and in Battersea in 1910. It is a brief duologue in which two women from different

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[58] Pugh (2002), 152. The Women's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage was established in July 1908 with a majority membership of women. A Men's League was established in December 1908.
[59] Jean Dugdale, *10 Clowning Street* in Julie Holledge (1981), 180.
[60] Tickner (1987), 173.
[61] Holledge (1981), 168.
[62] L. S. Phibbs, *Jim's Leg* in Holledge (1981), 169.

generations meet at a waiting-room at a country junction, their beliefs about women humorously clashing. Young Person recounts to Mrs Daubeny Clark, who happens to be the vicar's sister, that the vicar also "roared with laughter" when she told him her "great ambition was to be a quack."[63] Clark agrees it is "A most unfeminine ambition!" (9). Of note is the fact that the Young Person is clear on the point that the vicar was not shocked by her views; his laughter emanates from the unshakeable laughing tradition which even evidence and experience cannot destabilise.

Despite women's political endeavour, they are unable to escape the prejudice regarding their unsuitability, remaining instead absurd imitations of men. Tommy tells his sister Grace in Mouillot's *The Master* that her suffrage activities are "ridiculous pretensions" which cause "a great deal of amusement" (7). Sensing a transgression from women's "true" self (which logically does not incorporate a politicized self, because that is masculine), for Tommy such behaviour can be nothing more than hilariously incongruous and nonsensical copycat, rather than logical and rightful appropriation. This attitude was, in fact, reflected in the prisons' treatment of incarcerated women, as explored in Leslie Morton's *Deeds not Words*. Played at the Hampstead Conservatoire on 7th February 1910, it concerned a father and son's reaction to Marjory's militant activity and subsequent imprisonment. Marjory laments having been put in second class when she should have been put in first, for political offenses.[64] The WSPU pointed out that, had they been men, the women would have been treated as political prisoners (and therefore subjected to less ill-treatment).[65] For the WSPU, this was the authority's way of indicating that, while the women's activities were taken seriously as crimes, they could not be taken seriously as political crimes.

In P. R. Bennett's 1911 play *Mary Edwards* (published by the AFL although not performed by the League), Mary's husband is able to laughingly dismiss his wife's suggestion that women might make laws alongside men, not as unwomanly ambition like Grace's "pretensions" but as a very feminine trait that is rather endearing to him. Lord Anne responds, "Ha, ha, ha. A pretty whim truly."[66] Based on a historical incident, Mary was "one of the richest heiresses of the early eighteenth century"; an extremely capable businesswoman, her husband's remarks are all the more ridiculous.[67] Dismissed as mere pretence or capricious fancy, both *Mary Edwards* and *The Master* depict women's departure from gender norms as mere playacting. Men's choice of language promotes the scene before them as humorous, firmly establishing such behaviour as farcical performance, a momentary and incongruous

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[63] Arthur M. Heathcote, *A Junction* in *English Plays* (London: Actresses' Franchise League, 1913), 9.
[64] Leslie Morton, *Deeds not Words,* 20. LCP 1910/4, Lic. No. 243.
[65] Regarding the arrest of suffragette and hunger striker Marion Wallace Dunlop in July 1909, see Godrey (2012), 78.
[66] P. R. Bennett, *Mary Edwards,* 17. LCP 1911/14, Lic. No. 121.
[67] See Gardner (1985), 23.

transgression. Recalling Robins' and Sully's own discussions of women "pretending" and "aping", these portrayals suggest very little progress in terms of the regard with which the political endeavours of women were held. In fact, in *At the Gates*, the Suffragette's description of the political import of such laughter is strikingly similar to Robins' own in *Votes for Women!* in which Vida asserts men have "only laughed". The Suffragette describes the politicians' response to her requests: "I am only worth jibing at when I demand my right as a thinking creature" (5). The "only" in both plays emphasises the laughing tradition that diminishes all other active response.

The movement was used to being treated with laughing prevarication; Prime Minister Herbert Asquith frequently facetiously and deceptively reassured the WSPU that the Government would provide facilities for the Bill 'in the next Parliament'. By 1912, suffrage workers fully understood that the Government sought to dupe and mislead for their own purposes, much to the politicians' amusement. According to one suffrage account, the Prime Minister and his colleagues "chuckle when by means of motors in waiting at back doors [...] they escape from the unwelcome attentions of Suffragists."[68] Behind Asquith's tightly closed disposition, which reminded Ashwell of the iron curtain in the theatre, was a laughing chorus at work in the wings, inventing "hilarious" misdirection.[69] Even into the war, when women interrupted Prime Minister David Lloyd George during a deputation with "we want the vote", he replied amid laughter, "Yes, but we want you in the shell factory first."[70]

Laughter and the media

As well as demonstrating the dominance of this laughter tradition in suffrage politics, these playwrights also highlight the variety of sources that inspire and are inspired by the tone of people's jokes and laughter, including the visual and written press. In *Votes for Women!*, the crowd's laughter – the "derisive roars" which drown out the suffrage arguments – reflects a complex matrix of received stereotype and learned prejudice as they hoot and jeer about injured policemen and female hooliganism. In *The Convert*, Lady John's description of the impossibility of taking women's political protesting seriously conjures up the caricatures depicted in contemporary cartoons: "a woman in a scrimmage can never be an heroic figure". Similarly, Farnborough's response parallels the cartoon readers' reaction: "She's just funny, don't you know!"[71]

Plays also show the influence of derisive newspaper reports, a medium that as early as the general election of 1906 mocked the movement, when the *Daily Mail* diminutively renamed

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[68] "Our Point of View", *The Vote* (30 November 1912), 74.
[69] Ashwell (1936), 168.
[70] Deputation (9 July 1915). *The Observer* in Tickner (1987), 233.
[71] Robins (1908), vol. i, 103.

the members of the WSPU the "Suffragettes". In Chapin's *At the Gates*, the documentation by the press of the laughter of public figures advertises to the Suffragette as well as to the wider readership the politicians' derisory attitude towards suffrage. The Suffragette laments, "I've read the papers – of course. – I've read of the laughter of – of – fools. (*With a gesture of contempt towards the House*)" (5). In their play *How the Vote Was Won*, first performed at the Royalty Theatre on 13 April 1909, Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John demonstrate how the comic manipulation of suffrage events in the press served to reflect and encourage the laughing attitude towards these women. They cite a humorous newspaper report about an incident in which a group of women, including suffragette Winifred, attempted an invasion of the House of Commons in submarines, only to be inadvertently landed on the Hovis wharf, "By accident, on purpose!" as Horace, her brother-in-law, declares. The referenced article leaves Horace in a state of perpetual laughter "all the evening".[72] He enjoys the hilarious drama recounted by the paper, including the implications suggested by the article that this was a deliberate stunt to make a mockery out of women, which allows Horace to laughingly declare: "She asked for a vote, and they gave her bread" (144). The events are consciously and deliberately embellished and joyously communicated by the paper for the purposes of promoting laughter, propagating the suffragettes as the butt of a joke. Essentially, such stereotypes function in the same way as jokes by using cliché to short-circuit critical judgment and thus provoke a derisory response. A humorous creation in itself, this invented story serves to highlight real journalistic manipulation to which suffrage stories were contemporarily subjected in the promotion of laughter and entertainment amongst the populace on both a public and private level. As these plays show, the prejudices and commercial motives upon which the stereotypes were built assured the continual thriving of oppositional laughter in a complex matrix of multidirectional influence. Indeed, in *At the Gates*, the stereotyped figure of the suffragette has entered so deeply into public discourse that the very sight of the Suffragette simply standing at the gates of Parliament is enough to provoke laughter amongst the public.

The onstage and wider literary laughing tradition

Among these cited sources is an awareness of the onstage laughing tradition. Penny Griffin remarks that theatre is "the most immediate of literary forms, reflecting the up-to-minute concerns."[73] Following Pfister's assertion about the "faultlines" of laughter, the representation of this laughter onstage testifies to the way in which the stage reflected, commandeered and elaborated this much-enjoyed phenomenon for its own commercial

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[72] Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John, *How the Vote Was Won* in Croft (2009), 144.
[73] Penny Griffin, *Arthur Wing Pinero and Henry Arthur Jones* (London: Macmillan, 1991), 3.

success. That the stage was a popular source and reflection of anti-suffrage stereotype is alluded to in the figure of Mr Gunning – playwright, novelist and "chief anti-suffragist in the country" – in *The Better Half*. In this play, to be an anti-suffragist means to be against male suffrage instead of women's, yet Garland's satire on the importance of anti-suffrage theatre in the real suffrage movement is reflected in her expansive use of this type. As he declares, he attends deputations only because the "creatures" there "give me capital ideas for my plays or novels" (9).

Gunning is a 1913 creation, yet the theatrical tradition of treating suffrage humorously was already firmly established by this period, evidenced when a reviewer in *Votes for Women* writing about Netta Syrett's 1909 play *Might is Right* describes the treatment of suffrage "from a humorous aspect" to be "[i]n accordance with modern stage tradition."[74] In fact, such was this the case that Max Beerbohm initially dismissed Robins' own *Votes for Women!* as a satire which had only last minute been passed off as a tract. To Beerbohm, this seemed likely, particularly given the perceived aesthetic failures of this play, a point to which I later return.[75] By "dismiss[ing] Elizabeth's feminism as a joke", Beerbohm reinforces the stage stereotypes of suffrage towards a play that actively sought to counter that tradition.[76]

When in *Votes for Women!* Greatorex derides suffrage campaigners as "old maids", he invokes a matrix of representation which includes contemporary cartoons as well as theatre and music hall, a link which is further emphasised by the theatrical language associated with Greatorex's response to suffrage (finding "joy" in the "silly scenes" of suffrage), a nod not only to notions of women's pretence (as above) but also to onstage representations of the movement which are explored here. Although her biographers do not confirm this, it seems quite possible that Robins was aware of such works as George Dance's musical *The Suffragette* which debuted just a month before Robins' own play, at the Shakespeare Theatre on 13 March 1907. The action takes place in Harry's house near Madrid, which has been taken over by his wife and mother-in-law as the Head Quarters of the Continental Divisions of Suffragettes. Around him work a group of ardent suffrage supporters whose "puritanical" passion, promising to "give comfort to every fainting and world-worn spirit," is comically juxtaposed with Harry's disinterestedness: he falls asleep and promises himself a "few days duck shooting" for the endurance.[77] In this group of puritans, Dance stereotypes the political woman as antithetical to conventional romance; her passions are taken up by politics alone, the implication being that this will never be matched by romantic love and she will become

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[74] "Militant Suffrage on the Stage", *Votes for Women* (19 November 1909), 117.
[75] Max Beerbohm, "Miss Robins' Tract," *Around Theatres* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1930), vol. ii, 590-595.
[76] Margot Peters, *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses* (New York: Doubleday and Company, 1980), 308.
[77] George Dance, *The Suffragette,* 3. LCP 1907/6, Lic. No. 219.

something of an "old maid". In addition, Lady Priscilla is the interfering mother-in-law suffragette. Harry's visiting friend, the Captain, describes her "as stiff as a ramrod, and as grey as an overall", whose puritanical ways have been imposed onto the stricken Harry who now neither smokes nor drinks and has become "a new edition of 'The Pilgrim's Progress'" (6).

These characters are all stock figures of the stage – the old maid, the interfering mother-in-law, the hen-pecked husband – that have been given a suffrage makeover. The success of a joke relies, of course, on the recipient understanding its reference points. Indeed, nothing is inherently funny so humorous expectation must be established through an interplay between that which has been conventionally considered funny within a culture, and the collective values and meanings of a community. Tickner has described how this worked within comic illustration, on postcards, and in newspapers. To promote laughter, the comic draughtsman relied on long-standing stereotypes from a well-established misogynist iconographic tradition, which acted as an "indispensable" shorthand to evoke types.[78] In an act of representational manipulation, for example, the image of the nagging wife or embittered spinster popular in the nineteenth century was often "overprinted with an anti-suffrage slogan to give them a more topical and political gloss."[79] Recognising these all-too-common tropes, member of the AFL and of the non-violent Women's Freedom League Maud Arncliffe-Sennett was able to drily and wearily state of the popular comic postcard, "must be a – woman – must be old and must be ugly and there you have it. Real solid British Humour catered for."[80]

The stage and the New Woman

On the stage, the most recent successful stereotyping of women had occurred in the figure of the New Woman. In the late nineteenth century, the theatre world to which Robins and many actresses of the AFL were being first introduced showcased a propensity of stage satire surrounding this forerunner to the suffragette. Profiting from the interest in plays about progressive women, by those such as Henrik Ibsen and Arthur Wing Pinero, as well as from contemporary debates (and derision) about female emancipation, playwrights were quick to satirise in their drama the emergence of the New Woman, with her emphasis on political and sexual autonomy. Typically this involved shrewd stereotyping which audiences could instantly recognise and laugh at. In his 1894 play *The New Woman*, Sydney Grundy's feminist characters are strongly caricatured figures: their age is mocked, the titles of their feminist tracts are opportunities for punning, their failed adoption of masculine behaviours is ridiculed (smoking from the wrong end of a cigar, for instance), the integrity of their

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[78] Tickner (1987), 52.
[79] Ibid.
[80] In Tickner (1987), 109.

feminism belittled, and their anti-patriarchal stance ridiculously embellished. In this way, they are modern humours figures, given a New Woman revamp, each responding "in an exaggerated and predictable way" before the audience.[81] As well as the women, men who are their victims are also ridiculed as weak and put-upon. As a writer of popular, largely conservative East End comedies, it is unsurprising that, rather than trying to give a fair depiction, Grundy resorts to successful stereotype, drawing "shamelessly on the conventions of old-fashioned Victorian Comedy."[82] According to Clement Scott, Grundy's "audience tingled to the fun and were exhilarated by [the play]," its success allowing today, as Jean Chothia says, a "fascinating insight into the popular response to contemporary ideas."[83] The laughter regarding emancipation offstage seems mirrored by an onstage counterpart, and the delight in it reflected in the audience's reaction. Sylvester's comment about the theatre showing "signs of repentance" for being, according to Victoria, "Woman's greatest foe", is nothing more than further opportunity for Grundy's facetious and profitable humour; the audience enjoyed the play so much as to dissuade theatrical change. [84]

As Chothia describes, it was with the success of Grundy's play that the "pace quickened and the stereotyping [of such women] hardened."[85] Similar satire can be detected in Elaine Shrimpton from Henry Arthur Jones' play *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, which appeared in the same year as Grundy's. For Russell Jackson, she "has features familiar in anti-feminist humour of the period: she is severe, arrogant, mannish, argumentative and graceless."[86] Jones poked fun at Shrimpton's political notions (such as her new society, the lengthily named "The Clapham Boadicean Society for the Inculcation of the New Morality among the Women of Clapham") and her political behaviour (the strike and the consequential comic outcome of her activities – her husband's black eye).[87]

Reflecting the influence of such humour on the wider literary scene, the heavily stereotyped portrayal of the suffragettes in H. G. Wells' novel *Ann Veronica* recalls the plays of Jones and Grundy, as well as Dance's portrayal. Recounting Ann's rebellion against the patriarchy and her trajectory through suffrage towards romance, during Ann's suffragette phase Wells draws upon the "comic" ideas about unkempt, hysterical, aggressive and misandrist suffrage women. So unruly is Miss Miniver, for instance, that even her "straight hair was out demonstrating and suffragetting upon some independent notions of its own."[88]

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[81] Chothia (1998), xv.
[82] Chothia (1998), xiii.
[83] Clement Scott, *Illustrated London News* (8 September 1894), 296; Chothia (1998), xiv.
[84] Sydney Grundy, *The New Woman* (London: Chiswick Press, 1894), 71.
[85] Chothia (1998), xi.
[86] Russell Jackson, *Plays by Henry Arthur Jones* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 17.
[87] Henry Arthur Jones (1899), *The Case of Rebellious Susan* in Jones and Russell Jackson (ed.), *Plays by Henry Arthur Jones* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), 134.
[88] H. G. Wells, *Ann Veronica* (London: Adelphi, 1909), 134.

Her exaggerated, fervent revolutionary spirit is as comic as it is dangerous: " 'The dawn!' said Miss Miniver, with her glasses reflecting the fire like pools of blood-red flame."[89] Consistent with other portrayals, in this novel, protagonist Ann abandons her suffrage whim in favour of romance. The notion of suffrage as a caprice that proves fickle upon romantic involvement was a favoured means by dramatists to poke fun at women's foray into politics, as shown in, for instance, Inglis Allen's duologue *The Suffragette's Redemption* (performed for the first time on 17 August 1909 at the Royalty Theatre, Glasgow) and the anonymously authored *A Woman's Vote* (staged on 13 January 1909 at the Corn Exchange, Thrapston). Robins reflects this in *Votes for Women!* when Lord John declares, "Philanthropy in a woman like Miss Levering is a form of restlessness," the solution to which is marriage (i.5).

When Robins challenged Wells' portrayal (as later discussed), he replied, "There's absolutely nothing in *Ann Veronica* against the suffrage and only a gentle kindly criticism of the suffragette side of it."[90] In his statement, there is the same sense of laughing inevitability towards suffrage members that is demonstrated by Capes in Wells' novel. After Ann's tirade about men's mockery of women, much to the chagrin of Ann's suffrage friends, Capes' response is to jest. Capes later excuses himself and men's "habitual" tendency to "take women a little too lightly" by also blaming women and their supposed eccentricities: "I don't think we're altogether to blame if we don't take some of your lot seriously."[91] For Capes, the perceived inevitable humour within the activities of suffrage women exonerates men in their mocking response. This is further substantiated by the romantic ending: it is only when Ann rejects suffrage and marries him that Capes is able to single out Ann as exempt from men's smirks. Suffrage itself remains non-serious, merely the laughable and trivialised phase through which his reformed protagonist journeys. Capes' justification of laughter towards women as inevitable is somewhat echoed in Wells' own justification of his depiction of suffrage: the possibility of an alternative response is dismissed in the superior exclusivity that is simultaneously implied by Wells' use of the qualifier "only". Ostensibly demoting his ridiculing intent, this serves, in fact, to assert his laughing response as the inevitable outcome.

Hostile laughter in the theatre

The success of Jones' and Grundy's plays highlights, of course, the commercial and financial impulse behind such portrayals. The tone of their representation has also suggested to some a particular hostility driving this impulse. Gardner claims that the depiction of the

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[89] Wells (1909), 136.
[90] H. G. Wells, letter to Elizabeth Robins (mid-January 1910) in David C. Smith (ed.), *The Correspondence of H. G. Wells: 1904-1914* (London: Pickering and Chatto, 1998), vol. ii, 276.
[91] Wells (1909), 262.

four women in Grundy's play is underlined by hostility rather than "general satirical intent".[92] This is strengthened by contemporary reviews of the play which, as well as remarking upon its extreme farce and "pungent"[93] satire, give a sense of this hostile tone, noting "caustic" criticism,[94] "merciless satire",[95] and "contemptuous gibe".[96] Merle Tonnies confirms that the depiction of such women on the stage was, in fact, marked out from previous comic representations of women by a sharper hostility within laughter at this period. In her survey of nineteenth- and early twentieth-century laughter on the stage, Tonnies demonstrates that "the intensity of the antipathy the spectators were invited to express and their resultant distance from the character […] were on the whole much greater than in earlier examples from comic genres."[97] The derisory tone of the laughter promoted in the audiences at both Grundy's and Jones' plays differs from the more amiable laughter directed at strong women in the theatre prior to this period, a laugh which mixed superior laughter (ridicule) with admiration.

This amiable laughter derived from the early nineteenth-century recognition of the incongruous laugh as distinct from Hobbesian superiority, the former of which implied, unlike the latter, some sympathy with the laughter object. Derived in part from Plato and Aristotle's theories of scornful laughter, Hobbes described laughter as an integral part of one's drive to improve one's position in society and become superior, thus informing the seventeenth- and eighteenth-century notions of laughter as an unjust expression. Frances Hutcheson had found Hobbes' account of laughter (aggressive self-assertion) disturbingly antisocial, so he began work to socialise and aestheticise laughter, incorporating sympathy and feeling into it. According to Tonnies, such amiability towards women was encouraged because these types were not simply relegated to comic genres, meaning that sympathy was encouraged along plotlines. Conversely, the laughter directed at women by the end of the nineteenth century rejected sentimentality and presented a much harsher tone. In these portrayals, sympathy eluded women because of their relegation to comic genres, encouraging a distancing from the laughter target. If theorists such as George Meredith and, before him, Hutcheson, called for an intellectual rather than sentimental or idle laughter, this intensely satiric laughter "seems to have gone beyond what many theoretical writers considered

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[92] Viv Gardner in Gardner and Susan Rutherford (eds.), *The New Woman and Her Sisters: Feminism and Theatre, 1850-1914* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1992), 3.
[93] "The New Woman Under Fire", *The Review of Reviews* (November 1894), 451.
[94] Ibid.
[95] "The New Woman", *Saturday Review of Politics, Literature, Science and Art*, 78. 2028 (8 September 1894), 264.
[96] Ibid.
[97] Tonnies in Pfister (2002), 112.

desirable, especially as a didactic effect can hardly be said to have been prominent in most cases."[98]

Hostile laughter and the AFL

In rejecting the presence of a "didactic effect", Tonnies draws attention to the way such drama deliberately appealed to feelings rather than to the intellect, asserting that this theatre "was specifically designed to cause extremely hostile laughter of derision."[99] Susan Purdie points out that the physical presence of represented characters, as occurs on stage, enhances this hostile response. Unlike with narration, which mitigates the "Symbolic transgressions", on stage these are more likely to be "genuinely produced."[100] In other words, the theatrical dynamic of facing physical actors provokes a response offstage that is legitimate within the joking realm: the audience actually identifies with and subsequently dissociates itself from the joke's target. Towards the strong woman in the "New Drama" of the 1890s were thus directed genuine feelings of aggression. According to Tonnies' definition of this laughter, these feelings towards women were widespread, informing and informed by such representations. In fact, reflecting this hostility, in her investigation of late nineteenth-century New Woman comedy Margaret D. Stetz says that there was a "vicious and sadistic undercurrent running through laughter in general" at this time, particularly directed at women.[101] Affirming that such laughter prevailed into the twentieth century, now directed against the suffrage movement, this chapter shows how and why Tonnies' and Stetz's assessment matches that of a number of AFL members who noted the hostility within laughter towards them in general at this period. Drawing attention to the subjective nature of humour reception, it should be noted that to a lesser extent, within the AFL and wider movement, disagreement surrounded the idea that such laughter was necessarily all or always hostile in impulse and/or hostile in impact; Chapter Five returns to this point.

The hostility within contemporary laughter, which in 1912 Despard described as "redolent of contempt", was widely acknowledged.[102] Robins saw in Wells' stereotyped portrayal in *Ann Veronica* evidence of how "meanly" he thought of the movement.[103] For all the denunciation of Wells' controversial free love advocacy and the implicit rejection of age-old morality, the *Nation* was one journal to point out that Wells had in fact directed most of his "extraordinary ironic power" to the "savage, destructive criticism" of "modern

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[98] Tonnies (2002), 112.
[99] Tonnies (2002), 111.
[100] Purdie (1993), 74.
[101] Stetz (2001), 16.
[102] Despard, *The Vote* (6 July 1912), 192.
[103] Smith (1998), 276.

emancipators".[104] This idea that the laughter directed at the cause was "savage" mirrors the Suffragette's comparison of it to humankind's violent cruelty to animals in *At the Gates*. She likens being laughed at to being "baited, insulted" in the way that "wild beasts on show" would be (5). This savage laughter clearly falls into Sigmund Freud's category of the tendentious – aggressive, satiric, obscene – as distinct from innocent laughter, described in his 1905 *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious.* According to Freud, in tendentious laughter, the psychic energy used to inhibit emotions such as aggression, anxiety or sexuality is released and, in turn, pleasure is derived from the relief of repression through laughing at jokes:

> Since we have been obliged to renounce the expression of hostility by deeds – we have […] developed a new technique of invective. By making our enemy small, inferior, despicable or comic, we achieve in a roundabout way the enjoyment of overcoming [her] – to which the third person, who has made no efforts, bears witness by his laugh.[105]

The way that, in *The Convert*, the crowd derives "pure pleasure" from the jeers and howls they direct at Miss Scammell reflects this Freudian notion of enjoyment acquired through aggressive laughter.[106]

Hostile laughter and fear

According to Freud, behind this pleasure is a hostile fear, here relating to the crowd's anxiety concerning women's political advancement. Pejorative stereotypes and jokes tend to occur when power shifts are perceived as threatening. Just as Tonnies attributed theatre laughter to the fear surrounding the figure of the New Woman (the theatre enabled such threats to be enjoyably "laughed off" by audiences as unthreatening diversions), Tickner similarly draws on Freud's theory to explain the preponderance of laughter surrounding suffrage.[107] She has written, "Nothing was more fundamentally unnerving, and therefore more productive of the laughter by which tension is released and anxiety transformed into pleasure."[108]

Some works within the AFL reflect Tickner's idea that this laughter derived from fear. Robins draws attention to this dynamic in *Votes for Women!* when Blunt asks rhetorically "who cartoons people who are of no importance?" (ii.6). As Purdie points out in her

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[104] *The Nation* (25 October 1909), 167-70.
[105] Sigmund Freud (1905), *Jokes and their Relation to the Unconscious* in Anna Freud (ed.), *Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud* (London: Vintage, 2001), vol. viii, 103.
[106] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 78.
[107] Tonnies (2002), 112.
[108] Tickner (1987), 163.

conception of joking as a claim to occupied identity spaces, there would be no point in joking about those who do not constantly reinforce their power or their threat to the dominant group.[109] It appears likely that Robins, like Blunt, adhered to this idea about fearful laughter, drawing on it in a speech in which she describes the nineteenth-century male reception of George Eliot into the literary world: "some of the most distinguished men […] were disturbed at finding her an object of general homage. They came away joking nervously about the High Priestess, the Oracle, the Sibyl."[110]

Robins demonstrates a strong conviction that ridicule can derive from men's fear towards women's evident political, and literary, ability. Freud's 1905 work was not translated into English until 1916. To detect similarities with Freud's own conception of laughter is to suggest less that Robins was aware of his ideas (although a possibility) and more that general twentieth-century attitudes to laughter increasingly incorporated moves to understand its wider social function, such as hostile laughter's role here in exorcising one's fear or aggression. At this time, there was something of a revival in the interest in laughter as an interesting yet complex subject that was far from exhausted. This cognitive impulse was no doubt compelled by the earlier widespread intellectual influence of Darwin's research pertaining to laughter in his 1872 book *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals*, which included an investigation of the physiological and evolutionary importance of laughter in social relations, among other topics.

It is fear of women's impact on men's professional position that similarly explains the laughter in Eugène Brieux's play, which exposes the prejudice women face when they try to make an independent living. First performed in Paris on 22 December 1912, *Woman on Her Own* was translated by Charlotte Shaw and presented in the December 1913 Woman's Theatre project at the Coronet Theatre, a project to be run entirely by women that Ines Bensusan hoped would become "a permanent part of the life of the Metropolis."[111] (The war was to interfere with that plan). Described alongside Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson's *A Gauntlet* as a play of "special interest", it featured the "stars" Hamilton, Nancy Price and Suzanne Sheldon and was met by a "large and enthusiastic audience".[112] Suffrage members, according to K. Douglas Smith, "hail M. Brieux as a champion in our battle."[113] In this play he criticised prejudiced attitudes to women's education and work, evidenced in the men's reaction to women working in the bookbinding ateliers. Men use the medium of pranks to laugh off their fear and dissuade women, such as when they leave rats in women's work desks. They gain

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[109] Purdie (1993), 66.
[110] Elizabeth Robins (Criterion, 28 May 1911), "The Women Writers" in Robins, *Way Stations* (London: Hodder and Stoughton, 1913), 251.
[111] "The Women's Theatre", *The Vote* (28 November 1913), 74.
[112] "The Women's Theatre", *The Vote* (12 December 1913), 115.
[113] K. Douglas Smith, "Three Plays by Brieux.", *Votes for Women* (23 June 1911), 626.

pleasure from the amusement caused, happily relived again and again, as Thérèse testifies when she remarks "you're laughing about it still!"[114] They also temporarily ward off the threat as women succumb to illness and injury.

Also reflecting the idea that anxiety motivates prejudice, in Vera Wentworth's *An Allegory* Prejudice and Fear move in unison together. First performed at the Rehearsal Theatre on 25 April 1911 at an event dedicated to trials of propaganda plays, it stages Woman's battle against these figures as she journeys towards freedom, helped by Courage. Wentworth uses allegorical characters to extend experience from the personal to the general, affiliating fear with all who are prejudiced.[115] If Robins initially hoped that laughter would cease as women's politics progressed, these plays show that anti-suffrage laughter stood firm *because* of such progress and the concern it provoked. Precisely because of its seriousness, people anxiously withdrew their support for the cause, and laughed.

Since Tickner's analysis of anti-suffrage laughter represents the most comprehensive performed in this field, it has been important to investigate her interpretation's reliance on Freud. Focusing on the laugher and the social motivation to laugh, Freud offers a degree of insight into the reasons for oppositional laughter. However, his bias towards the playful and benign laughter of the socially rebellious towards their superiors means that his idea of hostile laughter is, in fact, very different from that presented by the AFL – a conservative force against those who transgress social norms. Freud focuses on the socially rebellious laugher, the inferior or reformer, over and above any mention of aggressive laughter directed against social inferiors or reformers. He does not sufficiently acknowledge how the impact of laughter can be differently perceived depending on its target (the hegemonic majority or disenfranchised minority). Freud is able to suggest an ideological promotion of laughter that playfully transforms hostility and aggression and satisfies these instincts through acceptable and pleasurable expression, without recourse to anti-social activity.

The inadequacy of this theory for analysing laughter as presented by the AFL is highlighted by the difference between Freud's conception of violence within the laughter dynamic and that shown by Chapin in *At the Gates*. For Freud, this socially acceptable and even valued laughter innocently stands in place of violence, which is socially unacceptable and which, so the implication goes, might come into play if these innocent impulses were not available. Conversely, by bringing into focus the effect on the disenfranchised targets of conservative laughter, Chapin shows that anti-suffrage laughter does not replace violence but *is* violent and, indeed, can be even worse than violence: as discussed, in this play laughter is akin to the violent cruelty towards animals, a weapon with which to "bait" its victims. This is

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[114] Eugène Brieux, *Woman on Her Own and Other Plays* (London: Herbert Jenkins, 1916), 112.
[115] Vera Wentworth, *An Allegory*. WL 7AMP/D/2/4 Box 08.

reminiscent of Robins' own portrayal of laughter. In *The Convert*, the "comic laugh" is described as the "most dreaded of all the weapons in the social armoury."[116] At the first suffrage meeting Vida attends, "spasmodic laughter" flies like "spent bullets".[117] Likewise, confirming the tone with which the men's pranks are presented onstage in Brieux's play, the review in *The Vote* described "the violence of working-men" who were in performance as "brutal as Brieux could have wished".[118]

This laughter, therefore, does not replace violence but is an integral part of the violence shown to these women. In fact, it is worse than violence because it is more insidious. Unlike violence, its ambiguous and ostensibly harmless nature made it socially acceptable and meant that it went un-criminalised; as such, it could be performed openly in the Houses of Parliament where real decisions were made, as well as in the streets. Such was its insidious hostility that Christabel Pankhurst went so far as to declare her preference for violence to "jeers, sneers, or silent contempt."[119] In asserting laughter's very real violent impulse, these writers draw attention to the political inflection inherent in the perception of laughter. While the hegemonic majority can describe oppositional laughter as mild and harmless "amusement" because of the way it conservatively sustains the social order, its targets demand recognition of the biased complacency on which this harmlessness is asserted. Recognising that his approach means that Freud does not take the motive and impact of laughter sufficiently seriously compared to the portrayal by suffrage women, Freud's theory is limiting for understanding this laughter.

Bergsonian laughter and the AFL

Chapin's portrayal of anti-suffrage laughter – and, as will be shown, the depiction in other AFL plays – more adequately reflects the theory of laughter presented by Henri Bergson in 1900, who put ridicule and its potential social disciplinary function, rather than the individual's laughing pleasure and relief, at the centre of his ideas. In a reversal of the philosophers' appellation of humans as "the laughing animal", Bergson defined humans as the animal "which is laughed at".[120] This transformed the focus of laughter as the expression of primitive joy and pleasure into an investigation of its ridiculing potential. In her comparison of the Suffragette in *At the Gates* to a derided animal, Chapin similarly explores this feature of laughter, highlighting what Bergson noted as the "momentary anaesthesia of

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[116] Robins (1908), vol. i, 126.
[117] Robins (1908), vol. i, 133.
[118] *The Vote* (12 December 1913), 115.
[119] Christabel Pankhurst, *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote* (London: Hutchinson, 1959), 51.
[120] Henri Bergson, *Laughter: An Essay on the Meaning of the Comic* (New York: Macmillan, 1914), 3-4.

the heart" or the unsympathetic detachment which laughter requires (which Freud had also noted but did not make a central feature).[121] This was recognised by suffrage members offstage, too, as shown when Richardson writes disparagingly of the laughers as those who "possessed an unfeeling heart which is at all times a more depraved thing than an unthinking head."[122]

Although his theory suggests that laughter can be used both conservatively and radically (the latter of which is explored in Chapter Three), Bergson gives "theoretical priority" to the disciplinary, conservative functions of laughter.[123] For Bergson, laughter functions as a social corrective of errant behaviour: it "unconsciously pursues a utilitarian aim of general improvement."[124] Unlike Sully and Freud, who promoted laughter as non-serious rebellion, Bergson depicted humour "to be essentially negative, while at the same time he was suggesting that it possesses useful functions" in so much that it socially facilitates behavioural consensus.[125] That his social theory fits the AFL's notion of anti-suffrage laughter better than Freud's can be illustrated here. In fact, Bergson himself suggested that his ideas might be helpfully combined with Freud's: Freud's ideas about the hidden psychological motives behind laughter, which Bergson stopped short of investigating as uncomfortable, can be helpfully added to Bergson's approach about the social significance of laughter, which Freud's account does not fully explore.

The depiction of the function of laughter in *At the Gates* closely parallels Bergson's theory. In this play, the Suffragette describes the experience of mockery as she protests outside Parliament as a "kind of modern pillory" (17). By making this comparison, Chapin interestingly suggests that this is a torturous laughter with similar social aims to medieval pillory. Like pillory, this laughter exposes and castigates by making a spectacle of the suffrage body, understood to be errant in its unconventionality and subsequent unsociability, in terms of political women's conscious departure from conventional femininity. This "laughing gaze", to use Frances Gray's description from her study of women and laughter, also pleasurably relieves a community of a feared threat and of individuals' hostile aggression towards this figure.[126] While this play acknowledges the Freudian motive for such laughter, crucially it goes further to note its social impact by prioritising the target's response and revealing laughter to be itself a torturous activity, rather than the means of circumventing such an activity. This scene constitutes the unsympathetic and disciplinary response that

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[121] Bergson (1914), 5.
[122] Richardson (1953), 53.
[123] Michael Billig, *Laughter and Ridicule: Towards a Social Critique of Laughter* (London: SAGE, 2005), 132.
[124] Bergson (1914), 20.
[125] Billig (2005), 125.
[126] Frances Gray, *Women and Laughter* (Basingstoke, Macmillan, 1994), 9.

Bergson recognises in laughter, working in an anti-separatist way to promote cohesion and punish errant behaviour.

In her play *A Pageant of Great Women* – the idea for which originated with Edith Craig and featured her mother, Ellen Terry – Hamilton also presents the violently repressive effects of this laughter on women's "unconventional" behaviour.[127] First performed at the Scala Theatre on 10 November 1909 no less than two months after Gladstone had ordered forcible feeding in prisons, this play was extremely popular – unusually for the AFL's touring work, it was not ignored by the national papers – and was performed far wider than London.[128] It stages Woman's confrontation with Prejudice, who each pleads to Justice for women's freedom and women's repression respectively. Woman, often played by Hamilton herself, complains to Prejudice that the latter "blew a jeer at the leap and glimmer of [our intellect] / And smothered it with laughter!"[129] The review in *The Vote* for its performance on Saturday 24 September 1910, at Beckenham Public Hall, states that there "was manifestly a vivid, eager interest in every word of the contest between Woman and Prejudice."[130] A sense of this captivating performance is communicated in the angry energy of the script. Woman's use of the casual verb "blew" displays a sense of callous destruction on the part of Prejudice as women try to intellectually assert themselves beyond their assigned sphere. Jokes attempt to knock the intellect off its path, their murderous power signalled by the effects of the resultant laughter. The optimistic, energetic and vivacious joy conveyed by "leap" and "glimmer" is cleanly flattened by the deadening verb "smothered". In her description, Hamilton suggests that the emergent intellect has not even left its infancy before it is extinguished by the laughter of its immediate surroundings. The symbolic proportions of this allegorical figure serve to enlarge and intensify the disciplinary effect of its laughter on women's accomplishments.

While the laughter is the same in repressive aim and consequence, *A Pageant* and *At the Gates* importantly highlight two different results of this laughter. While the women in the former are disciplined into submission, laughter stops short of achieving its deterrent goal in the Suffragette. Laughter certainly imposes dark moments on her throughout the play; even at the end her rhetoric implies the strain that such laughter causes by highlighting her perspective as laughter's disenfranchised target: "Do you suppose that it is funny standing here in a kind of modern pillory? Do you suppose that we women who do this are enjoying it?" (17). Yet, she is not deterred by it. These two figures symbolise the AFL's two-pronged

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[127] For an informative account of the origin of this play, see "Miss Edith Craig", *The Vote* (12 March 1910), 232.
[128] Eastbourne, Swansea, Cardiff, Liverpool. Ibid.
[129] Cicely Hamilton, *A Pageant of Great Women*, 2. LCP 1909/26, Lic. No. 301.
[130] "The Pageant at Beckenham.", *The Vote* (1 October 1910), 275.

representation of laughter's effects. While those whose strong endurance does not deny but manages to override the discouraging aims of anti-suffrage laughter are the subject of the next chapter, here I consider the way that the AFL drew attention to the repressive consequences of laughter amongst those who were not as resilient.

For, if this laughing pillory aims to punish and deter suffrage members, it also seeks to deter the rest of society by making an example out of the ridiculed suffrage body. In stigmatising its object, ridicule teaches the community the need and means of negotiating and avoiding it; to be associated with it in any way was to incur hostile laughing attention. In Morton's *Deeds not Words*, when George's work colleagues find out about his sister Marjory's suffrage activity, the joke is on him as his room is decked out according to the suffrage theme, "all decorated in purple, green and white and "Votes for Women" written up all over the show" (5). For George, this is not simply a friendly prank but a calculated and painful punishment that makes a spectacle of him. To be associated with the suffrage colours was to be subjected to the concomitant stereotypes of the popular imagination, and the harsh, ostracising ridicule it entails. His ordeal is "just as bad" as that which his father suffers due to his daughter's behaviour (5).

The AFL shows that the fear of such ridicule was so great that people would dissociate themselves from the movement. Just as George urges his sister to cease suffrage activity to protect himself, in Wentworth's *An Allegory*, Man's fears for the jeers and scorn of others prevent him from helping Woman on their joint journey on the road of Progress. Man starts out initially pleased for his female companion, but is deterred by the sudden intrusion of the "mocking laughter" (10) from the Slave Woman and "scorn of his fellow men" (7). Woman vaguely explains the reason for this, saying it is "because God hath made men so", referring to a man's innate distaste for and fear of becoming laughter's target (7). It is only with the help of Woman herself that men will have the courage to "no longer care for the jeers of his fellow men" (8). This idea about men and women's different response to ridicule is a common theme running throughout the plays. It became an important gendered distinction, to be explored, in terms of the way suffrage theatre used humour. In this play, Woman is undeterred by ridicule, unlike Man. Blunt in *Votes for Women!* similarly states that whereas ridicule "steels a woman", it "crumples a man up" (ii.6). Likewise, in *Mary Edwards* Lord Anne is afraid to be "the butt and laughing-stock of every coffee-house in the town" whereas his wife simply states, "And what are coffee-house lies to me?" (19-20).

Complicit laughter and the value of the sense of humour

One important means by which people express their distance from the cause is by joining in the laughter against it. We might term this "complicit laughter"; as Alan Partington has pointed out, such laughter does not necessarily express explicit alignment with the joke –

rather than voluntary, it might be embarrassed or coerced through perceived social obligation.[131] This laugh can be evidenced in a reinvestigation of Horace's previously mentioned laughter in *How the Vote Was Won* and the social force that is at work behind it. His laughter, laughing all the evening, seems in disproportion to the one instance of journalistic humour which provoked it, calling into question this laughter as spontaneous and highlighting a laboured and performed quality distinctive of coercion. Ethel fails to believe she can convincingly convey to Winifred the strange intensity of her husband's laughter: "you can't think how funny he was about it!" (144). Yet Winifred demonstrates a facetious and interesting understanding: "I know my dear brother-in-law's sense of humour is his strong point" (144). It is this importance of the sense of humour that can explain Horace's laughing complicity.

On this subject, and in the same year as Hamilton and St. John's play was first performed, Meynell asserted in an essay entitled "Laughter":

> Laughter is everywhere and at every moment proclaimed to be the honourable occupation of men, and in some degree distinctive of men, and no mean part of their prerogative and privilege. The sense of humour is chiefly theirs, and those who are not men are to be admitted to the jest upon explanation. […] And there is little upon which a man will so value himself as upon that sense, "in England, now.[132]

Meynell, in fact, first wrote this piece in an article for her column "The Wares of Autolycus" which appeared in the *Pall Mall Gazette* on 3rd January 1896. The tactical replacement, upon its revised appearance in a 1909 essay anthology, of "vain" for "value" emphasises the firm status acquired by the sense of humour in the intervening years. Originally she wrote, "There is, perhaps, nothing of which a man is more justly vain than he is of his sense of humour, 'in England, now.'"[133] In his analysis of the cultural meanings of the sense of humour, Daniel Wickberg argues that it was not until the 1870s onwards that the sense of humour became a valued personality attribute, having first been used as a descriptive term as late as the 1840s.[134] Writing in 1875, Geo Vasey perceived his opposition to laughter as an isolated case amongst universal admiration.[135]

Meynell also asserts that this sense is strongly men's. Tracy Seeley explains that, as a

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[131] Alan Partington, *The Linguistics of Laughter: A Corpus-Assisted Study of Laughter-Talk* (London: Routledge, 2006), 18.
[132] Alice Meynell, "Laughter", *Ceres' Runaway and Other Essays* (London: Constable, 1909), 29-30.
[133] Meynell (1986), 5.
[134] Wickberg (1998), 8-9
[135] See Geo Vasey, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Smiling* (London, J. Burns, 1875).

trend, Meynell's revised essays were more "tightly focused."[136] This is certainly true of "Laughter" which is less rambling, more structured, and more eloquent in its latter form. Laughter is no longer "a more important thing than it ever was before" but is pithily transformed into the confident declaration: "laughter never was so honoured as now." Yet, the interesting point about Meynell's revisions of "Laughter" is that her portrayal of laughter is tellingly more heavily gendered in the latter version. Those who are left out of the joke, but who can be admitted upon explanation, are no longer "other people" but are "not men". In establishing the importance of the sense of humour for men, gone is the weak "perhaps" which undermines the strong certainty suggested by "nothing". In its place Meynell asserts with steadfast conviction that "there is little upon which a man will so value himself as upon that sense, 'in England, now.'"[137]

Meynell, Wickberg, Hamilton and St. John all testify to a contemporary and high valuing of the sense of humour, the rules of which Meynell says are dictated by men. By considering the contemporary cultural meaning of the possession of a sense of humour, Wickberg describes on what this value was based. The sense of humour relates to one's capacity for perception of the self (interiority) within the social world (exteriority). Its value was founded on the way it evidenced one's ability to regulate one's interiority based on one's perception of and identification with external extremes which attracted suspicion on account of an implied lack of sociability. This valuing derived from a definition of humour established during the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries in which superior laughter increasingly gave way to incongruous laughter. Where, before this period, the eccentric was an external being at which one laughed, this development saw a collapse of the object and subject, making room for (supposedly) non-derisive laughter that laughed with rather than at another person. This entailed both a sympathetic identification with extremes – a desire towards unconventionality that one might recognise in oneself – and a distancing from them. Purdie describes this from the perspective of the butt, explaining that before the abjection or distancing from the butt, it must first be accorded the power of defining our subjectivity: "Every figure that makes an effective joking target can be found in some way to be (at least at that moment) invested as a projection of the Law which embodies the capacity to 'recognise' our subjectivity and to annihilate us when we transgress its psychically demanding restrictions."[138]

In the contemporary consciousness, the suffrage movement constituted an eccentric extreme. Ambitiously political, publically defiant and outspoken, the movement's women were people who consciously sought to depart from conventional femininity. Men who

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[136] Tracy Seeley, "Alice Meynell, Essayist: Taking Life 'greatly to heart'", *Women's Studies* 27 (1998), 117.
[137] Meynell (1896), 5 compared with Meynell (1909), 29, 30, 30.
[138] Purdie (1993), 59.

supported it ran the risk of being charged with holding eccentric views about femininity. To join in the laughter against the movement was thus to demonstrate the possession of a socially important balance and one's capacity of "seeing and acting from multiple perspectives without succumbing to the extremism inherent in any particular point of view" or, as Lord Borrodaile in *The Convert* says, "It means we have a sense of proportion – the mental suppleness that is capable of the ironic view; an eye that can look right as well as left."[139] In this case, to identify with women might imply one's sympathy for the cause or one's own desire to step outside the limiting parameters set by one's own gender. Any laughter produced, then, is based on a paradox: identification with the unconventionality of suffrage members motivates the laughter but the aim of the laughter is alienation from these figures. It is this pleasurable oscillation between awarded and withdrawn power, and the subsequent marking of power and transgression between oneself and the object, which feels funny as well as achieves and maintains the socially important sane and balanced personality evidenced by the sense of humour.

When Winifred declares Horace's sense of humour to be his "strong point" she demonstrates a facetious understanding of the importance of exhibiting this valued assertion. Given the status afforded by the possession of a sense of humour and the way it was intrinsically linked to laughing at the movement, it can be seen why Horace would pride himself on this commodity and want to show it off in front of his wife. In her essay on laughter, Meynell theorises why we laugh: "we must confess that we laugh oftenest because – being amused – we intend to show that we are amused."[140] As reflected by the laboured quality of Horace's, Meynell describes laughter not merely as a leisure activity but as a serious and "honourable occupation", suggesting devoted time in a respected pursuit.[141] The social imperative of joining in with this laughter is also evoked by Robins' likening of suffrage bashing to a competitive sport in *The Convert*: "After receiving a few preliminary kicks, the subject had fallen, as a football might, plump into the very midst of a group of schoolboys. […] Everyone must have his kick at this Suffrage Ball, and manners were for the nonce in abeyance."[142] The use of the imperative "must" shows the importance of demonstrating one's participation; less a leisurely pastime and more a duty, the competitive necessity of this game is evident.

The humour that is reflected and promoted by Horace's paper is dictated, according to Meynell, by rules set out by men, evidencing the construction of a patriarchal humour hegemony and community that lays down for conservative purposes what is funny. In

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[139] Wickberg (1998), 96; Robins (1908), vol. i, 249.
[140] Meynell (1909), 31.
[141] Meynell (1909), 30.
[142] Robins (1908), vol. i, 102.

Freudian terms, the hegemonic laughter reinforced by the press for commercial and/or hostile political purposes unconsciously or consciously works on an ideological level to draw Horace enticingly into a pleasurable public commune of ridicule against suffrage members in which he becomes complicit. Colluding with this humour, Horace thus associates himself with the dominant community of hostile amusement. The strong community that laughter forms and ballasts is evoked in other plays, too. Like Robins' reference to schoolboys' football, this laughing community is largely a men's club, as in Bjørnson's *A Gauntlet* and Brieux's *Woman on Her Own*, which provides men with comfort, power and mutual support. In Bjornson's play, which concerns one family's negotiations with the sexual double standard as their daughter prepares to be married, men actually retreat from women's company in order to laugh, forming a group that lends them self-assurance. Of the exclusive company of men, Mr. Riis tells his wife and daughter, "Conversation becomes more pointed, more actual, more robust and laughter more full of zest."[143] In Brieux's play, the men's trickster community lends them a bravado that would not occur on an individual basis. As Purdie argues, solo laughing is nothing compared with the reinforced sense of validation that comes amid a chorus of laughing audience members.[144] Their actions confirmed by those around them, the men continue to delight in women's discomfort and, in so doing, afford for themselves protection from similar ridicule.

Also in recognition of the value of the sense of humour, laughers go further to borrow the approved and successful jokes of the hegemony to impress in their own environments, as evidenced by Greatorex. When he keeps the House "in roars" he is recycling the jokes that circulated in popular culture. Highlighting the influence of hegemonic humour, in this is evidence of Bergson's observation that "the art of the comic poet consists in making us so well acquainted with the particular vice [...] that in the end we get hold of some of the strings of the marionette with which he is playing, and actually work them ourselves."[145] As with Horace, there is a sense of performance here that establishes the importance of proving that one possesses a specifically anti-suffrage sense of humour. On the political stage, this was a not uncommon occurrence. As Pugh describes it, politicians used such occasions both to show off and "sharpen their wit and humour."[146]

The political impact of laughter

Whether the complicity of this laughter is conscious or not, the effect on its targets is the same. Purdie states that a laughing audience does more than just confirm an already

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[143] Bjornstjerne Bjornson (transl. H. L. Braekstad.), *A Gauntlet* (London: Samuel French, 1891), 45.
[144] Purdie (1993), 74.
[145] Bergson (1914), 16.
[146] Pugh (2002), 189.

constituted joke; in Freudian terms, jokes with an aggressive tendency transform even initially indifferent audiences into accomplices in hatred and scorn.[147] This is further emphasised by the Bergsonian conception of laughter. As the comparison of Freud's theory with Bergson's has shown, the consequent laughter is violent in impact. Through Greatorex, Robins demonstrates the Bergsonian impact of this laughter on the movement. When he comes to react politically, Greatorex responds not as a politician but as an audience member, with damaging consequence. For Greatorex, suffrage women are merely old stereotypes reincarnated – a light, passing diversion – and they should be treated as such. His political sway is such that Greatorex encourages others to likewise see the spectacle as light humour rather than serious endeavour. As he boasts in *Votes for Women!*, "Only I am able to point out to the people who lose their heads and seem inclined to treat the phenomenon seriously that there's absolutely nothing new in it" (i.13). Purdie explains the way that being the Butt of laughter denies the target any discursive potency in the world, ex-communicated from the group of masterful jokers: the Teller and the Audience.[148] This finds very literal expression here as the supposedly laughable women are ex-communicated from political as well as dramatic dialogue. Vida's sarcasm about Greatorex's joking abilities betrays a sad acknowledgment of the power that he holds in maintaining this laughing legacy over a minority group; to keep the House in laughing ignorance about suffrage is also to stop them considering it (and women) seriously.

Robins' portrayal of Greatorex's laughter is consistent with Tickner's own thesis regarding anti-suffrage visual material, which she claims "obviously informed the 'higher' levels of political debate and was certainly cited in them".[149] Asserting that the clichéd New Woman "remained a spectral presence to haunt the arguments of feminists and inflect their public reception," Tickner draws attention to the dynamic relationship between representation and reality, which reflected as well as encouraged the attitude of amusement and hostility towards these women. [150] Referring to cartoons, Tickner outlines how ideologically and commercially informed representation serves to construct a reality, the evoked types developing and confirming their "visual symptomatology".[151] Robins shows how the cliché to which Tickner refers was widely and effortlessly recycled for suffrage and how it continued to impact upon the way these women were received in public, and in Parliament, demonstrating an awareness of how representations can reflect, amplify, distort, and impact upon realities.

Emphasising the longevity of this impact, in July 1910 the wide abundance of oppositional

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[147] Purdie (1993), 6.
[148] Purdie (1993), 59.
[149] Tickner (1987), 162.
[150] Tickner (1987), 184.
[151] Tickner (1987), 169.

laughter was proposed by the House of Commons as acceptable invalidation against women's suffrage. During a suffrage debate, Member of Parliament Hilaire Belloc declared to the House: "the great weight of popular opinion is utterly against the proposal. Members must know it. In the songs of the populace, in their caricatures, in their jokes, in their whole attitude towards the movement, the populace dislike it." [152] He drew special attention to the "particularly close relation between women and humour in the music hall, in illustrated journalism and in comic postcards."[153] Offstage, it was not long before the humour of music hall was being reused in direct reaction to suffrage work as a testimony to its popularity and claim in the public imagination. The song "Put Me Upon An Island" was a favourite to sing during suffrage rallies to cause disturbance. Belloc deemed the stereotypes, clichés, jokes, and the audience reception of these as self-evident proof that the public does not want women's suffrage. The way that Garland in *The Better Half* has Gunning confidently assert that "the playwright is the forerunner of Parliamentary legislation" is particularly pointed in this context (10). To Gunning, drama is more powerful than possessing a vote due to the way it "[influences] the thought of the age" (10). This directly reflects the way the stage was utilised so successfully for anti-suffrage means.

In this light, Blunt's description of the "torrent of ridicule" denotes not only the quantity of laughter but also its power. This also draws attention to an important point that might challenge the arguments of some who have dismissed these notions of hostility, such as Pugh who states that music hall was not a hostile medium. This position ignores the fact that the reception of humour is a subjective one and that, even if the hostility was not significantly more hostile than that which was directed elsewhere (such was the importance of laughter in Victorian politics), many in the movement felt its effects to be more considerable. Jure Gantar draws attention to this when discussing the way that the ethics of laughter depends not on the extent of its satirical content but on its target.[154] This was a political endeavour seeking real representation, yet already lacking widespread support, so there was a significant amount at stake. In addition to its unprecedented quantity, this laughter is not simply a normal corollary to political activity as it is for well-established political parties who, from an already relatively powerful position, can survive (and even enjoy it). According to Robins' portrayal, the laughter directed at this emergent and largely unsupported movement acts as a powerful and decisive shutdown to all activity.

Such were Robins' feelings about the hostility of this humour, in fact, that she banned

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[152] House of Commons Debate (11 July 1910), Col. 99, in Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Croom Helm, 1978), 138.
[153] Ibid.
[154] Jure Gantar, *The Pleasure of Fools: Essays in the Ethics of Laughter* (Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), 38.

Wells from speaking at a Women Writers' Suffrage League (WWSL) meeting (of which she was President) following the publication of *Ann Veronica*. She was angry at his public "ridicule" of the cause and, specifically, his misrepresentation of its members.[155] Just as his reviewer in *The Vote* scolds Wells' 'shameful' inability to portray the modern woman in a fair manner, Robins' cancellation of his talk is demonstrative of a furious attempt to protest against Wells.[156] For her, his talk was entirely inappropriate and contrary to the League's aims. This was an organisation, after all, set up to employ the written form to protest for the vote as well as to, in the words of Robins herself, "correct the false ideas about women which many writers of the past have fostered."[157] Unlike amorous Ann, who excuses Capes' jesting response by citing her own unreasonable behaviour (brought on by a headache), Robins could not forgive the damaging resort to topical humour deployed by Wells. To write about this is to suggest a real concern about the impact of ridicule on the promotion of the cause. The effects of deterrent laughter were, indeed, shown even long after the vote was won. In his history, Dangerfield invokes one "famous story" in which two "effeminate" men offered to help women hoist their suffrage banners. Their involvement makes of them a target for laughter when the legend they are carrying is revealed as "MEN HAVE VOTES, WHY CAN'T WE?"[158] Dangerfield's retelling is at once an incitement of renewed laughter and a warning against becoming a similar, derided target in women's next political cause.

The suffrage critique of laughter

Understood even in the House as a political force, it is evident why this laughter had to be taken seriously by suffrage. Like Robins, Meynell also showed "acute sensitivity" to "the role of masculine comedy in supporting and maintaining unequal power relations between men and women and a moral revulsion against the infliction of pain through laughter."[159] The comparison of her 1896 essay with hers of 1909 draws attention to an intensification of this "moral revulsion" as well as to the concomitant feminist – and, specifically, suffrage – critique of laughter that was gaining pace at this time, in which the AFL also played a keen part. The editorial changes between Meynell's 1896 and her 1909 essay demonstrate an unacknowledged feminist bite in the latter which existed merely as a hint in its original format. Her 1896 piece is characteristic of much of Meynell's work throughout 1893-1898

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[155] See letter from Robins to Bessie Hatton in Marcus (1980), xii.
[156] "Mr. Wells […] ought to be ashamed of himself." E.T. "Book of the Week", *The Vote* (23 December 1909), 103.
[157] Elizabeth Robins (Waldorf Hotel, London, 4 May 1909), "To the Women Writers' Suffrage League" in Robins (1913), 116.
[158] Dangerfield (1961), 153.
[159] Stetz (2001), 12-13.

when she wrote for "The Wares of Autolycus" which were "rarely polemical."[160] Talia Schaffer attributes this "oblique prose" to the "richly complicated new form of identity" women experienced at this time.[161] Just like herself, Meynell's work straddles the Victorian gender ideology which held her up as the epitome of Angelhood, as well as the more contemporary energized revolutionary consciousness developing amongst women.

This may go some way to explain Meynell's overlooked feminism, which included a commitment to suffrage. The tone of her 1909 essay reflects a confidence as well as renewed motivation, attributable to the suffrage fight and her involvement in it. In the twentieth century, Meynell's already existent opinions about women were harnessed to this movement. Meynell had previously written about the ignored, unjust and damaging nature of, particularly sexist, caricature in her 1893 "Penultimate Caricature", deploring the "habit by which some men reproach a silly woman through her sex, whereas a silly man is not reproached through his sex."[162] By the early years of the twentieth century, Meynell was "consciously positioning herself as a spokesperson for women."[163] As her daughter, Viola, explains in reference to suffrage, her opinions now were energised and expressed "by the machinery of that movement."[164] She took part in suffrage societies, wrote articles for the suffrage papers, marched in processions, and sat on the platform at the Hyde Park demonstration on 14 July 1912.[165] It was as Vice-President of the WWSL, founded in 1908, that Meynell met Hamilton and Robins. She would later join them, on 18 June 1910, behind the WWSL Scriveners's banner in a procession along the Embankment, fondly and excitedly recalling in a letter to her daughter Madeline how she stood with such icons of the movement as "Evelyn Sharp, May Sinclair, and the author of *Diana of Dobson's*."[166] Moreover, the suffrage movement was proud to call her one of their own, as when suffragist S. Gertrude Ford writes of her "thrill of pride" when Meynell walked in the procession. Ford describes Meynell a "modern woman, alive to all the new needs, dignities, and responsibilities of her sex."[167] Through her suffrage work, Meynell experienced oppositional laughter first-hand. Regarding the Embankment

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[160] Seeley (1998), 112.
[161] Talia Schaffer, "Writing a Public Self: Alice Meynell's 'Unstable Equilibrium'" in Leslie W. Lewis and Ann L. Ardis (eds.), *Women's Experience of Modernity, 1875-1945* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2003), 14, 15.
[162] Alice Meynell, "Penultimate Caricature", *The Rhythm of Life* (London: Elkin Mathews and John Lane, 1893), 106.
[163] Schaffer (2003), 14.
[164] Viola Meynell, *Alice Meynell: A Memoir* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1929), 264.
[165] See, for example, her article "The Vote for Duties", *Votes for Women* (26 June 1914), 601. "[Women] are claiming not emancipation, but a burden to be sustained, a cause to be carried, a responsibility to be faced, and by these means a score of cruelties to be abolished by comprehensive justice."
[166] Meynell (1929), 267. Letter to "My darling Dimpling" (n.d.).
[167] S. Gertrude Ford, "Alice Meynell, Poet and Suffragist", *The Vote* (6 June 1913), 95. A review of Meynell's *Collected Poems*.

procession, Meynell reported back to her daughter about the crowd's laughter directed towards the spectacle of women. She recalls the crowd's "three jokes – poor little Evelyn's sufferings; the name Scriveners, which it changed to Scavengers; and the presence of Careless [Meynell's dog]."[168]

Indicative of renewed motivation and confidence instilled by the movement, her critique of laughter in 1909 is significantly angrier, more urgent, and more directly challenging. Not only does she make the masculinity of the sense of humour more explicit but she also renders her comparison of men's pursuit of laughter to prostitution more overt in her 1909 essay, with its addition of the Shakespearean references "vagrant encounterer" and "daughters of the game".[169] She also more strongly emphasises the sinister ubiquity of the relationship between laughter and the sense of humour by borrowing more from the language of prostitution: instead of the sense of humour "cruising about" to catch attention, the 1909 essay employs powerful rhetoric to capture the sense of humour's dangerously prowling behaviour: it "wanders, watches, and waits to honour the appeal."[170] Instead of "vaguely willing", the sense of humour is "vaguely but perpetually willing", suggesting an intensification of this unrelenting business.[171] Where, before, she ambiguously excuses men as "justly vain", she now writes: "there is little upon which a man will so value himself as upon that sense."[172] Emphasising the partisan bitterness that infuses the later essay, the juxtaposition of the diminutive "little" with the importance conveyed by "value" betrays Meynell's disapproval towards this misplaced merit and marks her own conscious distancing from this valuation.

Considering the contemporary resonances of prostitution, this is a wholly damning analogy for men. In 1886, just ten years before Meynell wrote the original "Laughter", the Contagious Diseases Act had been repealed thanks largely to the work of Josephine Butler on the matter of child prostitution, who also worked in 1885 with William Thomas Stead, the campaigning editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, in which "Laughter" was originally published. But, in 1896, it remained an important matter in political discussion, as the contentions surrounding Shaw's 1893 play *Mrs Warren's Profession* showed. The censors would not license the play for public performance until 1925.[173] Into the early twentieth century, feminists including Christabel Pankhurst (particularly in her 1913 publication *The Great*

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[168] Meynell (1929), 268.
[169] Meynell (1896), 5 compared with Meynell (1909), 29.
[170] Ibid.
[171] Ibid.
[172] Meynell (1909), 30.
[173] Christopher St. John, "The Morality of 'Speaking Out'", *Votes for Women* (7 June 1912), 543. However, it was performed earlier, privately, by the Stage Society on 5 and 6 January 1902 and by the Pioneer Players on the 16 and 18 June 1912 with Gertrude Kingston as Mrs Warren, as eagerly announced here by Christopher St. John who anticipated this "immoral" play "to be profoundly interesting to all Suffragists." 543.

Scourge and How to End It) and Hamilton remained engaged with the problems of the double standard and "male vice".[174]

By intensifying the comparison with prostitution in her 1909 essay, Meynell opportunistically profits, emotively and persuasively, from a well-established and important feminist campaign, thus elevating her own. With its contemporary resonances, Meynell's use of this conceit introduces masculine laughter as an important feminist issue. With the contemporary fight of feminists seeking to "overturn the image of the prostitute as the seducer of men and the personification of disease, and to assign to men the role of destroyer of women," Meynell's comparison of jokes with prostitutes would have implied clear connections for her contemporary audience between men's use of women for their own sexual as well as laughing pleasure.[175] Employing references to prostitution, she performs a moral critique of masculine behaviour which exposes the "great immorality" of sexist ridicule.[176] Laughter is lustfully enjoyed, largely exclusively, by men; it serves men's sense of humour just as prostitution satisfies their sex drives, dictating, validating and protecting the male construction of their rapacious sense of humour. The intensification of Meynell's argument in 1909 which, unlike her anonymous articles, she now chooses to sign, should no doubt be attributed to her suffrage confidence and motivation in terms of the very real political impact of laughter evidenced in the intervening years. By 1909, there was more at stake for women as the political advances they had made were ever threatened by ridicule. Meynell's "acute sensitivity" had transformed into an emergent suffrage project which sought to provide a critique and to raise consciousness about the effects of laughter.[177]

The theatrical critique of laughter

As well as the close links and mutual admiration between Meynell and suffrage playwrights, both show themselves at this period to be consumed by a critique of laughter. While Meynell's specific conceit was probably best left off the stage (prostitution remained a contentious subject of discussion for the theatre), the thrust of her denunciation and her shaming of laughers is keenly paralleled on the stage.[178] If in *The Convert* Blunt speaks of the "members of Parliament" who do not know what women "*really* think when we hear men laugh", Robins' works importantly communicate exactly those thoughts to their respective

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[174] See Susan Kingsley Kent, *Sex and Suffrage in Britain 1860-1914* (London: Routledge, 1990 [1987]).
[175] Kingsley Kent (1990), 70.
[176] Stetz (2001), 21.
[177] Stetz (2001), 12.
[178] See Sos Eltis, *Acts of Desire: Women and Sex on Stage, 1800-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2013).

audiences.[179] Specifically, in her play, Robins demonstrates the beginnings of what would become a wider theatrical suffrage critique of laughter. Pugh discusses the way that, from the 1890s, theatre was viewed as a "valuable vehicle" for transmitting feminist ideas to a wider audience.[180] Ibsen had, indeed, been so influential to Robins' own feminist consciousness, and theatre was Robins' preferred mode of communicating her suffrage method; it is indeed swifter than a novel, not to mention communal and live. With regards to laughter, it is also an exciting and apt mode for exploring its function and impact: like humour, the theatre is a socially oriented activity and is dependent on a responsive audience for its success. The means by which jokes are transmitted and received can be dynamically evidenced in the theatre, the performance and reception of which can dramatically and critically implicate the audience. The acknowledged tenacity and power of this laughter, far from rendering such a critique futile, necessitated and optimistically motivated it in terms of highlighting to audiences the servile and ugly mechanics that existed behind it.

Prefacing her play as a tract, Robins was unambiguous on the matter of her playwriting's political content and motivation. When the AFL was founded, the League was similarly transparent about its propagandist goals. Its first objective aimed to "convince members of the Theatrical profession of the necessity of extending the franchise to women."[181] One or two plays were often presented alongside debates at AFL meetings (which were largely the At Homes based at the Criterion Restaurant) while larger theatrical programmes were reserved for suffrage events such as fêtes. The secretary in the 1910-11 annual report details the attendance of "the most obstinate of Antis" at the At Homes, but it is difficult to assess the real balance, especially because few plays were performed to the general public.[182] *Votes for Women!*, pre-AFL, is a notable exception, as are *A Pageant of Great Women*, *The Better Half* and *How the Vote Was Won* that received wide audiences (Ellen Terry called *A Pageant* "The finest practical piece of political propaganda").[183] Given that they distributed plays to other societies, the locations and audiences of which have not yet been fully documented, assessments of audience composition are inconclusive. It seems fair to say that the AFL's propaganda was aimed primarily but not exclusively at members of the theatre world and the unconverted in general constituted a significant motivation for performances.

Through Vida's subtle questioning of Greatorex in *Votes for Women!*, Robins reflects the widespread distaste for such humour and the emergent desire to challenge it. As she facetiously enquires about his skills with parliamentary laughter, Greatorex is only half-aware

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[179] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 99.
[180] Pugh (2002), 86.
[181] Propaganda leaflet, "The Actresses' Franchise League" in The Women's Library at LSE, 2AFL 1990/NoAccNo05.
[182] Ibid.
[183] "Actresses' and Writers' Suffrage Matinee", *Votes for Women* (19 November 1909), 117.

of Vida's critique: he is "flattered but not entirely comfortable" (i.13). In the rally scene, Working Woman is more overtly condemnatory as she belittles and shames the laughers by showing the superiority of her children's attitude over that which is shown by the crowd: "I've got boys o' me own and we laugh at all sorts o' things, but I should be ashymed and so would they if ever they was to be'yve as you're doin' to'd'y" (ii.1). Likewise, Blunt impassionedly declares a moral judgment on laughter by ironically alluding to its pervasiveness in order to highlight the plight of those laughed at: "Yes, I don't wonder you laugh. We laugh. (*Bending forward with lit eyes.*) But the women I found at the Ferry Tin Works working for five shillings a week – I didn't see them laughing" (ii.7). Her dramatic rhetoric seeks to shock and stir the crowd into a pensive silence on which to reflect the seriousness of her appeal. She answers the sniggering superiority of the crowd's questions with a moral superiority befitting of an ardent suffragette whose ideals emanated from the keenly held contemporary notion of women's moral supremacy and consequent leadership over men. Self-possessed and unafraid of utilising a rather brusque "off-hand manner", *The Convert* states she "has the most complete lack of any dependence upon 'wiles' that platform ever saw."[184] In this sense Blunt lives up to her name, not trying to seduce or trick the audience with simpers or ingratiating humour. Unlike Greatorex, the crowd is under no illusions as to the critique to which they have been subjected; similarly, given the dramatically experimental nature of the rally scene in which the audience is part of the crowd, this critique was also delivered directly to the theatregoers.

Hamilton and St. John achieve the same theatrical confrontation in *How the Vote Was Won* when the fanciful submarine scenario invites the audience to laugh with Horace at Winifred. The idea of merely wishing to entertain their audience at the expense of the suffragettes might seem counter-intuitive to the values of Hamilton and St. John; it would make them complicit in the public derision of the suffragettes that they condemn in Horace's reaction. This suggests that by implicating the audience in Horace's private laughter, the playwrights aimed to draw attention to the easy complicity in which the public at large is engaged, and highlight the potential impact of laughter on women. As well as criticising laughers more generally, these playwrights target the public, theatrical response. Despite Hamilton's characteristic self-deprecation in her tract *Marriage as a Trade*, her autobiography betrays a sensitivity to audience laughter befitting her profession. In the former, she "confesses" to judging works of art "simply and solely by the effect" they produce upon themselves, "with still less inquiry as to whether such means be legitimate or the reverse."[185] In the latter she notes, "on the stage one learns to recognise different types of laughter and applause; that which is spontaneous

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[184] Robins (1908), vol. i, 192.
[185] Cicely Hamilton, *Marriage as a Trade* (London: The Women's Press, 1981 [1909]), 111.

and cannot be withheld, that which comes because it is asked for or because it is customary to laugh or applaud at such a juncture."[186] As demonstrated by her portrayal of Horace's laughing performativity, Hamilton was more than adept at discerning the laugh of "custom" or of what Meynell calls the laugh of audiences "who perhaps first fell into the habit in the intention of proving that they were not gloomy."[187] Audiences know they must laugh at that which is conventionally funny, in order to prove their comprehension and possession of the valued sense of humour. This expectation means people laugh regardless of the quality of humour, just as such playwrights will produce this material to satisfy them. This commercial drive of humour was something Garland mocked in the personage of Mr Gunning in *The Better Half* who pre-constructs stereotypes which he lists as "The Professor, the working man, the lady-member…" When Mrs Campbell says Gunning attends deputations in order to look out "for good copy", Garland draws attention to the notion of "good" which carries commercial overtones (9).

By forcing the expression of the audience's laughter, the playwrights replicate the powerful corrective laugh and the concomitant self-affirmation that arises. The audience is thus wrong-footed by the playwrights' supposed laughing complicity, in the same way that Greatorex is made to feel uncomfortable by Vida's false complicity in the laughter of the House. Like Meynell's essay, the play thus consciously evidences the insidious effects of this valued commodity which, encouraging collusion with a dominant ideology, controls both private and public instances of laughter. When Winifred wonders if her brother-in-law will still be laughing later, or helping the cause instead, this character and her actions compel the audience to ask the same of itself (144).

Further similarities between Robins' critique and that in *How the Vote Was Won* can be seen in the use of children's laughter to emphasise the infantile ignorance of laughers. Winifred likens the men who have refused to take women's arguments seriously to "the little boy in the street who cries 'Yah – Suffragette!' when he sees my ribbon" (145). Given some of the reported childish exploits of the antis offstage, such a depiction is unsurprising. Maud Arncliffe-Sennett, in her article entitled "The 'Anti' Meeting" on 23 July 1910 in *The Vote*, describes how antis "employed their time sticking specially prepared and gummed discs with 'Votes for Women – Never!' on the backs of prominent Suffragists."[188] Referring to "this type of argument", Arncliffe-Sennett condescendingly attacks the lack of sophistication and intelligence behind the actions of such "guttersnipes", cleverly and rather triumphantly demoting them as "unworthy" even within their own movement, "which professes to have the

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[186] Cicely Hamilton, *Life Errant* (London: J. M. Dent & Sons, 1935), 88.
[187] Meynell (1909), 31.
[188] M. Arncliffe-Sennett, "The 'Anti' Meeting", *The Vote* (23 July 1910), 153.

benediction of Lords Cromer and Curzon, to say nothing of Mrs. Humphry Ward."[189] Whereas for Meynell the laughter of children is innocent and pleasant, for these playwrights it is ignorantly cruel and serves as a shaming putdown towards those who continue to laugh in such ways into adulthood.

If the strength of Meynell's critique is in the very subtlety of her conceit, in these plays the power is carried by angry emotion that is much more overt than Meynell's prose, intensified no doubt by the medium used. In the theatre, insults, whether direct or imaginatively aimed, carry with them the sense of confrontation created by face-to-face interaction. In *At the Gates*, the Suffragette refers to "the laughter of fools" as she glares towards the House (5). In so doing, she seeks to undermine the intelligence and wisdom of these figures and bring them into disrepute, as Meynell does regarding her own laughers. In fact, the way the Sympathiser denotes this as "vulgar abuse" recalls Meynell's own portrayal of sordid laughter (4). Reviews do not recount the way the Suffragette's insult was performed but the dramatic effect of a sideways glance at the audience might achieve something akin to Hamilton and St. John's own audience challenge. Similarly, those who inhabit the "City of Soul's Bondage" in Wentworth's *An Allegory* are demoted to "puny fools," once again belittling these figures and denouncing their behaviour as ignorant (7). Replacing the rather jolly figure of Greatorex by anonymous laughers, Chapin and Hamilton intensify the portrayal of this laughter's inherent aggression and attendant impact.

Likewise, in Hamilton's *A Pageant*, her targeted attack towards Prejudice is palpably spat across in contempt and pitiful frustration: "Who did your worst and best to quench in us / The very spark and glow of the intellect: / Who blew a jeer at the leap and glimmer of it / And smothered it with laughter!" (2). Woman's verse is unrelenting in its accusations; its angry and emotive quality set up by the employment of oppositional personal pronouns is heightened by the heavy use of enjambment and the cumulative effect of exclamation. Woman is furious and desperate, spilling her words quickly in one breath for fear that this powerful enemy might further stifle her. Certainly it was this mix of emotions that was evidenced in Mary Webb's performance as Woman at the 1909 Yuletide Festival. In a review in *The Vote*, the "beautiful voice" of Woman was "raised in sorrow or anger or pleading" and "seemed like the spirit of womanhood crying through the ages."[190] E.T.'s review testifies to the complex emotional melange of this piece, which swiftly passes through this emotive range. Hamilton also played the part of Woman herself, to great acclaim.[191] Reporting on

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[189] Ibid.
[190] "The Pageant of Women", *The Vote* (16 December 1909), 89.
[191] Her performances as Woman included 24 September 1910 (Beckenham Public Hall), reported in *The Vote* (1 October 1910), 275 and in a 1910 Pageant (Ipswich), reported in *The Vote* (29 October 1910), 3.

"The Pageant at Ipswich", Constance E. Andrews exclaimed that "Everyone knows that Miss Cicely Hamilton as Woman cannot be surpassed."[192] Hamilton's close connection to her own script suggests, alongside her writings elsewhere, a personal, heartfelt passion for that which Woman expresses, which she was also able to inspire in her audience, whose "sympathy", as one reviewer wrote regarding the Beckenham performance, was widely aroused.[193] Popular throughout the years of the AFL and amongst audiences of suffragists and suffragettes alike, the "sympathy" and "hearty applause" suggest solidarity and a shared anger. Emphasising its popularity, *Votes for Women* proudly advertised the publication of the play in 1910, dedicated to Craig.[194]

Given this critique of laughter, it is poignant, yet unsurprising, that in *The Better Half*, Garland has the Prime Minister Lady Diana ban "mere scoffers" such as Gunning at the deputation. She declares sympathetically, "I cannot allow that. It would be unfair to them to have mere scoffers present" (11). In a story of surely satisfying reversals, which sees women do to men as they are having done to themselves offstage, Garland chooses to withhold this one privilege. Her portrayal speaks to the unjust frustrations endured by women due to the oppositional laughter directed at them. This is an angry and condemnatory assertion of superiority that says that, if women were in the position of men, even then they would not submit men to such indignities.

Women's complicit laugh

In these plays above and according to Meynell's own conception of the sense of humour, it is men who are shown to be the influential figures setting the humour agenda, and their laughter features heavily in the plays. However, as indicated by their audience critique above, the AFL's is far from an essentialist portrayal of laughter. As well as recognising men's support, the League also acknowledged women's oppositional complicity. The movement, in fact, benefited from the support of many men: Housman and Henry Nevinson were particularly active (both wrote for the AFL) and Housman was passionate about the "morally free and enlightened" men who "are rallying to the side of women."[195] Reflective of men's support, in Chapin's *At the Gates*, the Sympathiser is male and is a good friend and ally to the Suffragette. Moreover, powerful men within the theatre industry frequently pledged their support.

AFL plays show that not all men laughed at suffrage (and, as is the subject of Chapter

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[192] Constance E. Andrews, "The Pageant at Ipswich", *The Vote* (29 October 1910), 3.
[193] *The Vote* (1 October 1910), 275.
[194] "Two New Books", *Votes for Women* (19 August 1910), 765.
[195] Laurence Housman, "Anti-Suffrage and Sex-War", *Votes for Women* (19 August 1910), 767. See also Henry Nevinson, "An Impression", *Votes for Women* (24 June 1910), 629, and "The Great Demonstration: An Impression", *Votes for Women* (29 July 1910), 725.

Five, that not all those who did necessarily had hostile or conservative intentions but potentially supportive motivations) and that women were also participants in complicit laughter. In fact, from the very origin of suffrage theatre, it is shown how women like men display laughing prejudice towards and dissociate themselves from the movement. While in both *An Allegory* and *A Pageant* the laughing Prejudice is referred to as "he" throughout the script, for at least one performance of Hamilton's play a different gendered dynamic was introduced. Although the character of Prejudice was played more by men than by women (Kenyon Musgrove at the Scala; Leonard Craske at Beckenham; Henry Ainley at the Aldwych Theatre; Nigel Playfair at the 1909 Yuletide Festival), at the Ipswich Pageant Maud Leyson apparently "made a very effective Prejudice"[196]. Her performance was praised in review rather than singled out as unusual or controversial. This arrangement (by necessity or deliberate) seems fitting with Hamilton's own characterisation of allegorical figures that communicate the pervasiveness of this laughter. Although the plays suggest prejudice is man's making, its laughing execution at least is not confined so easily to one gender; it is possessed and utilised to deathly effect by all who are enemies to women's progress.

Robins explores this laughter at length in *The Convert* through Vida's character. Unlike in her play, in which Vida is an established suffrage supporter from the outset, the novel follows her conversion story. Her level of suffrage resistance is in direct proportion to her laugh; her trajectory towards suffrage parallels her journey away from laughter. Before her conversion to suffrage, Vida is a keen participant in oppositional laughter. At the opening dinner party, she happily "heaps" ridicule on Mrs Townley and her fervent interest in suffrage politics, manifested by her "steady and pitiless fire" of questions at unwitting victims.[197] She later laughs at Mrs Freddy for "[taking] it all quite seriously – this Suffrage nonsense" and laughingly reports back to her joking companion Lord Borrodaile that "it's a much odder world than I had suspected!"[198] This disposition continues when attending her first suffrage meeting. On arrival, Vida laughs as she reads the legend, "We demand VOTES FOR WOMEN," demonstrating her oppositional stance.[199] Although curious, her pre-determined position is one of a critiquing *flâneuse*, actively seeking humorous meaning in order to deride and discredit the movement: "'They've had to get men to hold up their banners for them,' laughed Vida, as though she saw a symbolism in the fact, further convicting these women of folly."[200] This account of Vida's first suffrage meeting is, in fact, very similar to Robins' own, recounted in an article for *Collier's Weekly* on 29 June 1907. In it, she recalls her "head full

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[196] Constance E. Andrews, *The Vote* (29 October 1910), 3.
[197] Robins (1908), vol. i, 42.
[198] Robins (1908), vol. i, 101.
[199] Robins (1908), vol. i, 129.
[200] Robins (1908), vol. i, 134.

of masculine criticism as to women's limitations" and admits, "I am one of those who, until comparatively recently, was an ignorant opponent of Woman Suffrage." [201] She had, indeed, been invited to take part in a debate as an anti-suffragist in November 1905.

Pleasing complicity

Robins' reference to "masculine criticism" shows awareness that her affiliations are prefigured by forces that she retrospectively identifies as not her own. Vida begins to realise this too as she recognises that her behaviour is shaped by what Lord Borrodaile in *The Convert* reminds her as "woman's part to be pleasing to men."[202] Just like a good "well-to-do woman", Vida subsequently tailors her conversation to flatter Borrodaile's sense of humour.[203] Elsewhere, Robins asserted this idea that women's laughter belonged to the patriarchy; a need to please men has meant women have learned to laugh at themselves and their own. In her article "Woman's Secret", Robins employs an analogy to show how woman has prostituted herself, offered herself up as the joke in order to satisfy the male sense of humour, revealed by the suggestive allusion to sexual submission and pleasure: woman has offered "her own breast; or, to modify the figure, she made her contribution to the domestic cheer by submitting herself to be the target for [man's] pleasantry."[204] This notion of woman as man's plaything is reminiscent of Mary Wollstonecraft's critique of manners, in which she talks of women as "the toy of man" who "must jingle in his ears whenever […] he chooses to be amused."[205] Women are the tools for men's amusement, reminiscent of Meynell's prostitution conceit. In recognition of the dominant gender of both prostitutes and a joke's subject, and in a strikingly similar analogy to Robins' own, Meynell implies that, in acquiescing to men's demands for pleasure, women become complicit in a sordid laughing affair. While she makes clear men's fault as well as, elsewhere in the essay, drawing attention to the joyous innocence of women's laughter, Meynell nonetheless highlights the lamentable coercion suffered by women within this relationship. Both writers portray how, like prostitution itself, women become active participants in this laughter due to the unfortunate reality of social and domestic necessity which prioritises men's pleasure. While Robins is keen to emphasise women's participation in this laughter, she makes an important distinction between involvement and ownership. Their laughter is that of the subservient class, proposed

[201] Elizabeth Robins (29 June 1907), "The Feministe Movement in England" in Robins (1913), 40.
[202] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 46.
[203] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 42.
[204] Elizabeth Robins (1908), "Woman's Secret" in Robins (1913), 10.
[205] Mary Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* (New York: Dover Publications, 1996 [1792]), 33.

by Robert Provine as a "vocal display of compliance, subordination, or solidarity" with a more dominant group.[206]

Etiquette and women's artificial laugh

This distinction is further emphasised in Robins' discussion of the artificiality of women's laughter. As she reassures Borrodaile of her frivolousness, Vida reflects on the similarity between this boast and "the painted smile on the cruder face."[207] Both, according to Vida are "mirthless" and "pitiful".[208] The reference to the "mirthless […] painted smile" draws attention to the learned artificiality of women's social laughter of which Vida is increasingly conscious. It is juxtaposed with Vida's assurance regarding her "inclination" to be frivolous, underscoring the effortful self-persuasion behind Vida's supposedly natural disposition. Just like her laughter at the suffrage rally, the "soft gaiety" that Vida displays here reveals fragility and malleability; it is not her own. In Hamilton's *A Pageant,* Woman shows the same awareness as Vida, complaining of how her sex is "bred for dimples" and "trained to simper" (2). Like Robins, Hamilton emphasises that women's laughter must be pretty so that it is ingratiating to men, also highlighted in her tract *Marriage as a Trade*, a copy of which she sent to Robins and to which Robins would later refer in her own writings. In this book, Hamilton explores how, amongst other things, a particularly pleasing smile is more likely to secure women a job than any true connection with fitness for their work.[209]

In the chapter "Learning to Laugh", Charlotte Eliza Humphry's 1897 etiquette manual *Manners for Women* echoes the notion of breeding to which Hamilton refers. The well-bred, perfect laugh pleases and flatters a man, ballasting his own valued sense of humour: it "makes the person who evokes it feel pleased with himself, and even invests what he has said with a charm of wit and humour which might not be otherwise observed."[210] This is exactly that which Meynell warns women against: "What she must not do is laugh a laugh of instruction, and as it were retrieve the jest that was never worth the taking."[211] The idea of breeding and etiquette seems outdated for the period during which Robins and Hamilton were writing but, as will be shown, their influence endured beyond the demise of the manuals themselves, due to the continued benefits afforded by their advice. As Andrew St George explains, such manuals were extremely popular in the nineteenth century; the rules they advocated became

[206] Robert Provine, *Laughter* (London: Faber, 2000), 29.
[207] Robins (1908), vol. i, 42.
[208] Ibid.
[209] Hamilton (1981), 110.
[210] Charlotte Eliza Humphry, *Manners for Women* (London: James Bowden, 1897), 13.
[211] Meynell (1909), 32.

the "cornerstone of mid-Victorian thinking."[212] In particular, in the midst of social change, women were held up as the "stable centre".[213] Manuals about women's conduct and appearance thrived, such as Frederick Warne's 1871 *Modern Etiquette*. By the 1890s, however, the influence of science called into question the advocacy of such artifice. Increasingly, etiquette manuals adopted "scientific" terms to make them relevant in a world where the successes of human advancement, which set us apart as a species, were understood to be the product of refinement, or of what Alfred Russel Wallace described as Darwin's now universally accepted order of nature, "descent with modification", in his 1889 *Darwinism: An Exposition of the Theory of Natural Selection, with Some of Its Applications*. If Darwin had discovered a reiterated sound made by anthropoid apes when tickled, and a quivering jaw in baboons produced when pleased, etiquette manuals such as Humphry's suggested that human laughter could advance beyond these primitive origins, and that this laugh may even become "natural".[214] Here, "natural" connotes behaviour that has become assimilated because it is deemed agreeable for the best functioning of society. To break social codes was to act against nature. Mrs Humphry's book thus lent itself perfectly to the science of adaptive change by adopting this scientific terminology and suggesting that modification is natural.

Despite the etiquette manuals' own adaptive change, the sales of such books were dwindling by the 1880s and 1890s: "the writer who opted for the etiquette genre was buying into a tired, if not failing market."[215] By the early twentieth century, etiquette books (as distinct from their modernised equivalent) were no longer popular. However, despite their demise, their influence endured. Of course, such restrictions applied to men as well, as Lord Chesterfield's nineteenth-century advice demonstrates: attributing laughter in general to folly and ill-breeding, Chesterfield (whom Meredith quite possibly would have called misogelastic, or laughter-hating) said silent cheerfulness was far more becoming for all.[216] However, the benefits of etiquette for a subservient group go some way to explain why, according to Robins and Hamilton, women were particularly beholden to etiquette's grip. As Robins explains in her autobiography, the "old restrictions" they recommended held sway because of the advantages they afforded women, composing "woman's Art of survival".[217] Where Vida's complicity is "rewarded" with smiles and flattery, Mrs Townley is Vida's feared reminder of the dangers of charmlessness. She is dismissingly referred to as "the political woman",

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[212] Andrew St. George, *The Descent of Manners: Etiquette, Rules and The Victorians* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1993), 113.
[213] St. George (1993), 113.
[214] Humphry (1897), 13.
[215] St. George (1993), 286.
[216] See Philip Dormer Stanhope 4th Earl of Chesterfield, *Lord Chesterfield's Letters to His Son and Others* (London: Dent, 1929).
[217] Elizabeth Robins, *Both Sides of the Curtain* (London: Heinemann, 1940), 171.

emphasising her anonymity to men.[218] For Kate in *The Twelve-Pound Look*, her attempts to find her husband's "ignoble views of women" funny was the only way she could prosper in a society where an estranged wife suffers a very bad reputation: "Oh, I clung to you to save myself" (75). To laugh was to pretend to subscribe to her husband's humour and, subsequently, to survive; to start challenging her husband was to step out on a slippery slope where life would have become unsustainable.

Conforming to etiquette was not only self-protective but also powerful and influential, as humorously explored in Shaw's 1909 satire *Press Cuttings*, in which several AFL members played and which was performed at, for example, their Yuletide Festival on 11 December 1909 at the Royal Albert Hall. Set in a time of martial law, the suffragettes present a severe threat to the state, which has mobilised against the movement. Lady Corinthia and Mrs Banger, the President and Secretary of the Anti-Suffrage League, are parodies of those who joined Mrs Humphry Ward's Women's National Anti-Suffrage League. According to Pugh, in anti-suffrage organisations the role of male leaders was "almost decorative".[219] They were led by several powerful, influential and capable women, some of whom were well-respected feminists. Understanding the beguiling power of the adherence to the pretty laugh, Lady Corinthia uses her feminine wiles to charm and dominate the men around her. She shows how men can be ruled by beauty, and thus by beautiful women. Her smiles are graceful and coquettish as she elegantly positions herself and her draperies around the stage and wins Balsquith – and his policies – over with her flirtatious smiles. Seductively her smiles gain her men's power as she smilingly tells General Michener, "It is easy to read your thoughts."[220] Lady Corinthia seizes upon the rules of etiquette and, by virtue of their very artifice, employs them or acts them out for her own uses: by ostensibly keeping strictly to the appropriate forms of laughter for women, she is able to get away with this cynical project regarding men's naivety about women's subscription to the laughing etiquette.

Lady Corinthia reflects those who understood feminine duty and influence to be pleasurable and powerful, as also explored by Gertrude Jennings in *A Woman's Influence*, performed at the WSPU Women's Suffrage Exhibition, 13-26 May 1909. This concerned the idea that "sweet womanly influence" was worth far more than votes, as demonstrated by Mrs Perry and Herbert, who is susceptible to her wiles.[221] According to women such as Mrs

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[218] Robins (1908), vol. i, 42.
[219] Pugh (2002), 153.
[220] George Bernard Shaw, *Press Cuttings: a Topical Sketch compiled from the editorial and correspondence columns of the Daily Papers by Bernard Shaw, as performed by the Civic and Dramatic Guild at the Royal Court Theatre, London, on the 9th July 1909* (London: Archibald Constable, 1909), 30.
[221] Gertrude Jennings, *A Woman's Influence* in *English Plays* (London: Actresses' Franchise League, 1913), 5.

Humphry Ward, the adherence to "feminine" ideals allowed them the beautiful task of upholding their religious and moral duty and afforded them important political influence. Housman wrote extensively about the "misdirection of sex influence" that includes also "a corresponding and more carefully concealed subjection of men to women."[222] He referred to this as the methods of "the iron hand in the velvet glove." For Housman this constituted dishonest and unprogressive "sex-war".[223]

Women at this time expressed concern that this apparently beautiful and powerful duty would be lost should women gain the vote. *An Allegory* and Evelyn Glover's 1912 *A Chat with Mrs Chicky* show how women adopt ridicule as their own in order to deter women and to actively preserve this state for themselves. Reminiscent of the portrayal of the viciousness shown by some women in the plays of Jones and Pinero towards those who try to escape their prison, the Slave Woman mocks Woman as a "poor fool to leave thy home with all its pleasures for the sake of this Freedom City of thine," pointing her finger "mockingly" and degrading both the man and woman as "mad and ugly ones" (10). Reflecting the pull of romantic protection, she does not want to leave Prejudice whom she – like her sisters – loves. Reviewing the April 1911 Rehearsal Theatre performance, *Votes for Women* noted the "hearty applause" that this play received and described the Slave Woman aptly as someone who "openly glories in her gilded chains."[224] This is also clear in *A Chat with Mrs Chicky* when Mrs Holbrook persistently laughs and ridicules Mrs Chicky. Performed at the Rehearsal Theatre on 20 February 1912, this dramatises a conversation between a charwoman, Mrs Chicky, and her employee's sister, busy collecting anti-suffrage signatures. Mrs Holbrook's desire to maintain the status quo is revealed in her "annoyed little laugh" when she declares of the vote, "My good Mrs Chicky, all that I don't understand is why any woman should be so ridiculous as to want it!"[225]

The dangers of complicit laughter

Reflecting the protection and manipulation afforded by etiquette, Robins testifies that "those old restrictions […] had their uses […] such obvious uses, that I learned to impose those restrictions on myself, and – the point is – *to do this instinctively.*"[226] Robins' emphasis on instinct suggests that even though the prescriptions of etiquette were outdated, their impact lived on. For Woman in *A Pageant*, learned behaviour has become naturalised to the extent that the patriarchal and affected ideal of the pretty and coquettish laugh has profoundly

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[222] Housman, *Votes for Women* (19 August 1910), 767.
[223] Ibid.
[224] "Three Suffrage Plays", *Votes for Women* (28 April 1911), 430.
[225] Evelyn Glover, *A Chat with Mrs Chicky,* 14. LCP 1912/18, Lic. No. 487.
[226] Robins (1940), 168.

informed who women are today: "So were we bred for dimples, not for brains! / Not souls, but foolish flesh – so you desired us / And, God have pity, made us!" (2). Indeed, if this laughter is initially protective and powerful, its full impact is shown to be degrading and destructive. While it affords the Slave Woman in *An Allegory* material protection, her existence is subsequently a servile one: her freedom, like the jewels that cover her chains, is merely a veneer. In *The Twelve-Pound Look*, upon her escape from her husband, Kate realises that her former, conformist self was a "dull, inert thing" (78). Likewise, Lady Corinthia's supposed power is mere bribery and intimidation. This is a fragile and disempowering state to inhabit, as Brieux shows in *Woman on Her Own* through Madame Chanteuil. She laments how learning the "parlour tricks" of smiling and dancing leaves women in a vulnerable position if they do not find the patronage of a man: they can thus never own the "key of the prison door" (71). In women's laughter can be detected signs of frustration associated with this unsatisfactory and fragile state. Mrs Holbrook's "satirical little smile" towards Mrs Chicky belies her desperation (14). Likewise, Slave Woman's increasingly frantic taunts show that she, like her laughter, is not free; women's supposed powerful laughing position is revealed to be a pitiful, marginal and deluded space. These plays show that while women are laughing at each other, their own position can never be safe from degradation.

Laughter and women's conversion

Sowon S. Park has written, "Vida's interest in suffrage grows in direct proportion to the amount of suffrage-bashing amongst the guests."[227] Her exposure to and, indeed, own involvement in suffrage-bashing gradually leads to a growing awareness of her own enslavement and the real power that could be hers in its place, afforded by women and for women. In *The Convert,* she tells Borrodaile that she used to be proud of his compliment about her decent (and "rare", for women) sense of humour: "it's been a piece of hidden, intellectual pride with me that I could smile at most things."[228] Now, she renounces this laughter: "I've seen something to-day that I don't feel I want to smile at."[229] Vida has been confronted not only by the servile reality of her smiles but also by the reality of the movement: formerly cloaked in stereotype and ridicule, for the first time she hears about it seriously. It is only by confronting these two realities that Vida stops laughing and converts to the cause. This is likewise the case in the play which, mirroring Vida's in the novel, concerns Jean Dunbarton's conversion story. She begins by laughing in a complicit manner against suffrage. She "*gaily precipitates herself into the conversation*" to recount an occasion when

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[227] Sowon S. Park in Cockin, Norquay, Park (2007), xxxiv.
[228] Robins (1908), vol. i, 250.
[229] Ibid.

Mrs Freddy's friend came for tea and declared "women would never be respected" until they get the vote (i.15). Her story makes the assembled group snort with laughter, to which Jean rejoins: "It was such fun. He was flat as a pancake when we'd done with him" (i.15). In turn, it is the "talk against the wicked Suffragettes" which propels Jean, in her words, to "go and hear what they've got to say for themselves" (i.36). By the end of the play, Jean offers her support to the cause.

As the parallels between the texts and Robins' autobiographical writings have shown, in *Votes for Women!* and *The Convert* Robins records as much Vida and Jean's as her own realisation of the patriarchal control of laughter and its impact on women's suffrage conversion, showing that complicit oppositional laughter is the final obstacle that must be removed to allow women to work in strength together and against a laughing opposition. Her playwriting conviction, emanating from the importance of persuading the "women of influence to understand what is at stake," crucially includes raising awareness about women's role in laughter.[230] The play, in fact, converted the leading lady Edith Wynne-Matthison to the cause, and the two were key founding figures amongst the four hundred who attended the inaugural meeting of the AFL at the Criterion Restaurant on 10 December 1908. Thus at the heart of the origin of AFL suffrage playwriting is a personal awareness of laughter's function in deterring, disengaging and distancing women from suffrage. As seen, this spurred a subsequent project throughout the AFL to convince others of their enslaving complicity, to unveil to them the movement that exists behind the laughter, and to urge them to join the campaign of resistance against it. Emphasising this focus, the 1910-11 annual report deemed the "women who take no interest at all" to be amongst the most important to attract to the At Homes.[231]

Conclusion: using oppositional laughter

In 1912, Despard wrote the following in response to the "Laughter in the House": "We must […] seek not only to understand but to use all the events, incidents and forces that are thrown out in our mighty struggle."[232] The AFL plays evidence a suffrage exploration of the powerful torrent of laughter provoked by this struggle, the result of which Blunt in *The Convert* deems useful. For her, "open laughter" is "a guide; it helps us to find out things some of us wouldn't know otherwise."[233] Angry but not discouraged, Blunt uses this laughter as a means of political navigation: not only does it helpfully suggest to her the standing of the movement in the eyes of the authority but its discoveries are also central to women's

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[230] Sowon S. Park in Cockin, Norquay, Park (2007), xxxiv.
[231] The Women's Library at LSE, 2AFL 1990/NoAccNo05.
[232] Despard, *The Vote* (6 July 1912), 192.
[233] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 98.

understanding of and conversion to the cause. Indeed, the knowledge and manifestation of oppositional laughter offer hope: the fact that many women have already proven to be resilient in the face of ridicule, especially when apparently men are not, strengthens Blunt in the efforts to fight against such obstacles. In its powerful centrality within the anti-suffrage campaign, laughter also taught suffrage about its utility as a weapon. In 1902, Sully wrote, "Perhaps when the story of the modern 'emancipation of women' comes to be written, it will be found that the most helpful feature of the movement was the laughing criticism poured upon it."[234] While Chapter Five considers more literally Sully's idea of laughter's monitoring value, in a way wholly unintended by him the next chapter explores how such laughter proved inspirational and important for suffrage's own.

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[234] Sully (1902), 419.

Chapter Two

"Firm in reliance, laugh a defiance": suffrage laughter in the Actresses' Franchise League[1]

Introduction

The dawn of twentieth-century militancy marked an attempt to force suffrage into the political consciousness as a serious campaign. The AFL's work was a similar expression of commitment, with tactics which shared the same enthusiasm, confidence, and daring as the offstage politics. It also shared the same struggle of making suffrage convince as a serious political issue and, as observed, even risked provoking more laughter. On the League's stage, as we have seen, characters campaigned against the way the opposition "only" laughed, seeking also to convince others of such laughter's damaging impact. In acknowledgement of laughter's tenacity, this chapter begins by showing how, by challenging anti-suffrage humour, the AFL sought to assert suffrage – and women – as no laughing matter. It then explores how, to strengthen this assertion, the AFL aimed to draw explicit attention to the often deeply tragic reality of what politicians only deemed funny, seeking to emphasise women's plight and thus reinforce the importance of the suffrage cause. Despite such staged suffering, evidence from the plays and their reviews strongly suggests a conscious distancing within the AFL from the spectacle of the tragic woman. Observing the political disadvantages of the theatrical portrayal of the unlaughing woman, this chapter proceeds to evidence suffrage laughter as a calculated project upon which the AFL wittingly embarked. Drawing on its plays and its involvement in the wider movement, I show how the League consciously established its theatre as a communal laughing space for its propagandist potential.

To commence with a consideration of the contemporary significance of the laugh for women prior to establishing the AFL's portrayal and elaboration of the suffrage sense of humour is to acknowledge the complex entity of laughter. In her study, Parvulescu advises, "We need to start from laughter, rather than from the joke."[2] Whereas theories of laughter tend to consider it only in terms of laughter's response to stimuli, Parvulescu draws our attention to the laugher him or herself and shows how triggers are not prerequisites. While laughter as an (amused) response remains critical in this suffrage analysis, beginning with a focus on that material burst and the feminine body from which it occurs cautions against the elision of material context. It addresses the points that laughter and humour are not necessarily coterminous and that the laugh is not static: as a product of its historical milieu, it

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[1] Lyrics from suffrage anthem *The March of the Women* in Glenda Norquay, *Voices and Votes: A Literary Anthology of the Women's Suffrage Campaign* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1995), 94.

[2] Parvulescu (2010), 118.

has also been culturally gendered. Both acknowledgements will help delineate between laughter types and establish where laughter and existing understandings of it informed and reflected the suffrage sense of humour. By exploring contemporary ideas about the relationship between (suffrage) women and laughter, and drawing on the assumed correlation between the masculine laugh, humour and power, I will show how women's stage(d) laugh necessarily embraced and elaborated the humorous, thus validating and informing a subsequent exploration of the suffrage sense of humour in the following chapters.

Undermining the joke

The AFL's rebellion against the enduring tendency to dismiss tragedy in fun, in order to assert its necessary seriousness, took two forms. One of these consisted of the moral denunciation of such humour. Leading by example, throughout several plays women refuse to laugh and, in so doing, challenge the supposed humour on which anti-suffrage laughter was based. Given the value of the sense of humour at this time, this was both a damning insult and a daring move on the part of the instigator. When discussing the story recounted by a Liberal Whip who witnessed a key politician delivering a pro-suffrage speech, only to be dismayed and appalled by the powers of his rhetoric in terms of the subsequent support colleagues declare to the campaign, Vida announces it as "a funny story – he said it was funny" (i.33). Distancing herself from this definition, Vida implicitly critiques this politician's notion of humour. Similarly, in *The Convert*, the quality of parliamentary jokes is so low according to Blunt ("such poor little feeble efforts") that if it were not for the strong propensity to laugh at women in the House of Commons, there would be no laughter at all.[3]

Demonstrating both an early presence and enduring relevance of such a pronouncement, Brieux and Bjørnson's plays also announced a judgment on joking. Discussing the tricks the men play on the women factory workers in *Woman On Her Own*, one of them – Berthe – proclaims, "Beastly things like that ain't jokes" (112). Acknowledging and highlighting the harm and gross cruelty of the men's tricks, Berthe refuses to admit any humour in their actions. Similarly, Mrs Riis in Bjørnson's play declines the supposedly laughable trivialities suffered by women due to the moral double standard. While Christensen dismisses the suffering with an attempt at a humorous analogy as "more acute than serious, something like sea-sickness," Mrs Riis laments the "powerlessness" of women to "put an end to that horrible privilege or to make themselves independent of it," declaring it with something of a shout as "nothing to make fun of!" (40). This is again emphasised shortly afterwards when she emphatically states it is "not a laughing matter" (41). For Mrs Riis, to dismiss such problems as a joke is to ignore the severity and tragedy of the wrongs women suffer and, moreover, to

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[3] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 99.

prevent helpful action.

Similarly, in *At the Gates*, the Suffragette refuses to laugh at the stereotyped spectacle of herself and her fellow suffragettes. In a move that demonstrates the pervasive anti-suffrage sense of humour even amongst suffrage members themselves, her otherwise close friend the Sympathiser "wickedly" suggests that MPs going into the House had not bowed at them but had in fact "only ducked," alluding of course to violent militancy (9). The Suffragette responds "indignantly" by enquiring, "I don't throw things?" (9). We know her response is to be delivered angrily, as the stage directions note that the sympathiser's response is hasty, "as fearing another outburst" (9). Her point of anger rests on the lamentable and damaging disparity between her own comportment and that of her public stereotype. Significantly, the late addition Chapin made to her manuscript here invokes contemporary debate as the Sympathiser's attempts to reassure her: "I only said that in fun. You used to be able to take a joke" (9). Pointedly, her response is curt and marks a remove from Vida's gentle subtly above: "And I can now" (9). By simultaneously refusing to laugh while asserting her enduring ability to do so when a joke is in the offing, the Suffragette passes judgment on the quality and use of the joke in question. This is a degrading and cutting remark to make towards her friend and, more widely, a significant insult against the laughter of the patriarchy.

The tragedy of women

Accompanying this rejection of the humorous within anti-suffrage insults was the earnest staging of women's tragic existence, which also sought to emphasise the serious validity of the cause. Emotively attributing the cause of tragic circumstance to the powerlessness of women in their political, social, and financial reliance on men for protection, this depiction implicitly suggests the necessary improvements that gaining the vote would achieve. In *Votes for Women!*, Vida's personal tragedy – the loss of a baby, the actions of a lover and his high-status family, and the subsequent pitiful fall-out – has directly inspired her political endeavours. The melodramatic tones of the fallen woman plot reach a climax in the final act during Vida and Geoffrey's confrontation, in which Vida seeks to enlist Geoffrey to help put "an end to the helplessness of women" (iii.14). By extension, Robins seeks to convince the audience of the imperative for facilitating women's suffrage. Despite the personal nature of her tragic motivation, Vida realises the wider plight of women. She is a woman who has "said to herself not merely, 'Here's one luckless woman! but – here is a stone of stumbling to many'" (iii.22).

Like Vida, subsequent plays by the AFL function to highlight this widespread pain, ranging from that of the marginalised individual through to the abstract collective. In *Votes for Women!*, Vida explains how women endure worse suffering compared with men when they both transgress social or moral laws: "they go down [to Hell] together, but the man

comes up alone."[4] Just as Geoffrey in this play is able to enjoy a successful political career despite his previous sexual transgressions, Gould Traverson in 1912's *Brass and Clay* is a celebrated Labour M.P while Lucy Leigh, with whom he had a relationship, suffers indefinitely. Marked "Anonymous" but, according to *The Vote*'s speculation, possibly written by "our old friend and co-worker, [suffragette and former co-editor of *The Vote*] Marion Holmes," this play bears several similarities to *Votes for Women!*.[5] Both deal with the subject of the double standard, presented in a tragic manner. In its mention of infanticide, it is also reminiscent of Robins' 1893 play *Alan's Wife*, co-authored by Florence Bell. In *Brass and Clay*, Lucy, played by Adeline Bourne on 20 February 1912 at the Rehearsal Theatre, is poor and deserted. Initially condemned to death for infanticide, she was instead sentenced to imprisonment at Holloway and is newly released at the play's opening. On her way home, she recognises Traverson who is responsible for her sufferings. Sobbing and exhausted, she indicts him, according to this review, with "poignant intensity" and communicates a "passionate, half-frenzied description of her terrors in the dock and the agony of the condemned cell."[6] This gave Miss Bourne "an opportunity for a piece of splendid acting, in which she showed almost epic dramatic power."[7] Traverson, in turn, explains to his fiancée, Katherine, that "The woman must always pay – on certain lines […] After all, *we* didn't make nature's laws," to which Katherine responds vehemently and pointedly: "Women have no quarrel with nature's laws but men have scored them under with a finger dipped in cruelty and bitterness. See how it has worked out! Cheer and crowds for you – the condemned cell for her; and the contrast will last all your lives."[8]

This is the eloquent speech which, but for a little more experience, Jean in *Votes for Women!* might have made to her own fiancé. In Katherine's lines alone it is possible to see why *The Vote* praised the piece as "a powerful indictment of the existing double moral code and of the unjust and cruel laws which make possible such a tragic episode as the play depicts."[9] Comparing this "pathetic human tragedy" to "that which was recently brought before the country in the case of Daisy Lord," *The Vote* finds in this tragic depiction clear resonance amongst women's offstage existence.[10]

Other plays address the difficult realm of women's employment, an environment of such inequality that their suffering encompasses the physical, financial and sexual. The

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[4] This is a post-manuscript addition; the ending in the published version is much extended. See Croft (2009), 97.
[5] "Suffrage Propaganda Plays", *The Vote* (2 March 1912), 226.
[6] Ibid.
[7] Ibid.
[8] *Brass and Clay*, 22. LCP 1914/13. Lic. No. 2561.
[9] *The Vote* (2 March 1912), 226.
[10] Ibid.

hardworking and underpaid sweated labourer, the Seamstress in *At the Gates* is, in her own words, "poor and wore out" (10). Drawing wider attention to her plight, this is the main scene on which the abridged published version in *The Vote* focused. In Gertrude Vaughan's *The Woman with the Pack,* performed at the Portman Rooms on 8 December 1911, Fanchette is mistreated at work by her male employer, a situation from which her move to Britain is pointedly unable to afford her protection, as the stage centres on her sobs and desperation.[11] Likewise, in St. John Ervine's *Compensation*, performed at the Rehearsal Theatre on 20 June 1911, Working Girl cries desperately as she is unable to secure sufficient financial protection following an injury at work, meaning that she will have to return in significant pain and, without the compensation, will be unable to set up her own, safer business. Seeking help, the Assessor tells her, "Nothing the matter with that, eh? I should think you'd be able to go back to work in a week or two."[12] That her hand injury is sustained by a falling crate of beer is consistent with the contemporary and widespread suffrage denunciation of male drinking habits as immoral and expensive (male drunkards also appear, for example, in *The Master* and *At the Gates*).

Further up the social scale, typist Helen in Inez Bensusan's *The Apple*, at the Court on 14 March 1909, is a victim of sexual harassment at work. She is, moreover, unable to secure her own independent future because the money her boss offers her father acts as a bribe for her own silence and her brother's social protection. Highlighting her powerlessness, such is the reputation of typists that Helen's story is apparently barely credible to her brother, who laughs at her.[13] Following its performance at the Portman Rooms at the WSPU fair in 1911, *Votes for Women* reported on 8 December that this play was a "little bit of real life" and had an "enthusiastic reception".[14] Reviews also acknowledge another play that dealt with the figure of the city typist, Miss M. Slieve McGowan's "powerful and tragic" 1911 *Trimmings*.[15] I have been unable to locate this in my research, and researcher Susan Croft confirms this to have been unpublished. However, reviews inform us that it was somewhat similar to *The Apple* in content and even more tragic in tone: scorning her employer's advances who then consequently ends her contract, the impoverished typist realises that suicide is preferable to physical degradation; the play apparently ends with this dread outcome.[16]

The AFL shows that life within the home is barely more sufferable than the workplace. In H. Arncliffe-Sennett's *An Englishwoman's Home*, first performed at the 1910 Glasgow Suffrage Exhibition, Maria's domestic existence is as trying as that of external employment,

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[11] Gertrude Vaughan, *The Woman with the Pack* (London: W. J. Ham-Smith, 1912).
[12] St. John G. Ervine, *Compensation* in *The New Statesman* (24 January 1914), 499.
[13] Inez Bensusan, *The Apple*. LCP 1911/12, Lic. No. 103.
[14] "Entertainments at the Fair", *Votes for Women* (8 December 1911), 159.
[15] "Three Suffrage Plays", *Votes for Women* (28 April 1911), 430.
[16] See ibid. and *The Vote* (15 April 1911), 294.

in which she is also engaged. She feels "done", yet the masculine demands on her time never cease as both a lazy lodger and husband create more work.[17] Her vocabulary here is reminiscent of *At the Gates*' Seamstress who, tragically, is a victim of domestic violence, beaten by her husband. The Seamstress' use of irony heightens her pitiful declaration of how "I'm […] knocked out by a beauty I married." The pathos of her repetitive existence is underlined when the audience is told how the law lets her husband off "with a fine" (10). As Mrs Riis is aware in *A Gauntlet*, women's sorrow is passed from generation to generation "[a]s long as women are powerless" (36). Even attempts to surpass this existence are fraught with pain; lamenting the difficulty of her political task, the Suffragette in *At the Gates* has to "[gulp] down the lump in her throat" (5). Given women's experience, it is no wonder that Woman in *The Woman with the Pack*, an allegorical spirit who as both mother and leader denotes all woman, is a "sad woman" and named "Mother-of-Sorrows" (21). As shown in two photographs, the burden she carries is, in performance, indicated by a loom she holds on her back, purposely made to look like a cross.[18]

The political endeavour of earnestness

This tragi-realist portrayal that seemingly rejects humour seeks to expose what Gertrude Colmore (author of 1911 novel *Suffragette Sally*) in *The Vote* called the "facts of suffering and of sin."[19] Greatorex says it is "unsavoury" for Vida to involve herself in the plight of women in the form of sanitary projects (ii.11). Despite the cultural notion of women's morally rightful place, these playwrights (comprising of women and those standing up for women) necessarily rejected so-called respectability, in order to reveal the true state of women's suffering. In so doing, the suffrage movement showed up the idea of feminine respectability as an irresponsible sham. Epitomised by the figurative Mrs Grundy (originating from Thomas Morton's 1798 play *Speed the Plough*), her supposed priggishness was understood by suffrage to actually reinforce the status quo as well as her own complicity with it. In his dedication to this figure in the published copy of *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, Jones recognises the way the promotion of respectability is artistically repressive.[20] In one reviewer's response to this play, it is believed also to halt social progress and licence "immoral" behaviour. Thanks to the protective downward cast of her fan, Mrs Grundy can "with perfect safety" giggle at the "suggestiveness" of the play.[21] Her prudish behaviour is a patriarchally-imposed mask behind which lies a laughing complicity.

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[17] H. Arncliffe-Sennett, *An Englishwoman's Home*, 11. LCP 1910/11, Lic. No. 494.
[18] Photograph: "AFL – performing btwn 1909-1914 (?)" in WL TH/003 and T/005.
[19] Gertrude Colmore, "Hell and Mrs. Grundy", *The Vote* (30 May 1913), 77.
[20] "To Mrs Grundy" in Jones (1982), 105-107.
[21] "The Dramaphone", *Fun* 73. 1881 (1 June 1901), 262.

Rejecting this mask of respectability, these playwrights write with a frank and revealing earnestness. This tone was, in fact, already recognised as a distinctive trait of feminine writing. In the 1890s, H. G. Wells discerned “a rebel undertow of earnest and aggressive writing and reading supported chiefly by women and supplied very largely by women.”[22] According to its OED definition, “earnest” refers to that which is “intensely serious”, suggestive of a solemn intention or conviction, which is often conflated with a sense of humourlessness. The AFL’s writing here seems to mirror Wells’ observations in terms of its denunciation of the masking or distorting nature of laughter as well as the characters’ propensity to preach in order to right social ills, both of which can be aggressive in their fervour. Preaching is also suggestive of a moral, even religious, project. As Melanie Phillips has written, by the mid-nineteenth century, evangelicals presented women as morally superior to men, the former expected to demonstrate a positive moral influence on wider society.[23] While Mrs Grundy in part reflects this affiliation, her behaviour is not distinguished from that of the patriarchy. Conversely, the suffrage movement – most explicitly in the rhetoric of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst – widely pitted itself against men as morally superior, also reflected in the AFL’s own work. The stagey morality at the origins of this drama is exemplified by the inspiration for Wentworth’s play *An Allegory*. The allegorical painting, “Suffrage Cartoon”, by W. H. Margetson depicted a masculine Prejudice forcing Woman away from Justice, capturing the sense of morality in epic battle also conveyed by Wentworth.[24] The AFL’s writing, in fact, reflected a wider literary tradition amongst women; Ellen Moers has noted how moral seriousness and ethical angst are the “strongest bulwarks” in the history of women’s fiction.[25] For the AFL, this serious tone is reflective of a subject matter that sought to stage a moral rebellion against “immoral” patriarchal flippancy.

In these examples of earnestness, this theatre seemingly rejects laughter. A complicit mask for social ill, a show of laughter would be possibly counterproductive in seeking to reveal the true extent of women’s hardships. This notion is evidenced in an exchange between Maria and her husband John in *An Englishwoman’s Home* in which laughter is made impossible by Maria’s hard life, a fact that emphasises her pain. Maria is unable to “look on the bright side” as her husband John urges (12). “But if there aint none?” she asks pitifully and resignedly as she faces endless toil (12). Maria’s unlaughing state is, according to John, an affliction suffered by all women. Finding it a pity women have not got a “sense o’ humour,” John explains this lack: it “aint their constitutions” (12). Here, John finds women’s physical or

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[22] H. G. Wells, *An Englishman Looks at the World* (London: Cassell and Company Ltd, 1914), 150.
[23] Melanie Phillips, *The Ascent of Women: A History of the Suffragette Movement and the Ideas Behind It* (London: Abacus, 2003), 25.
[24] Reprinted Gardner (1985), 95.
[25] Marcus (1980), v regarding Ellen Moers, *Literary Women* (London: The Women’s Press, 1978).

mental state naturally incompatible with a sense of humour. Although John's motivation here is merely derogatory, rather than sympathetic, and reflective of a wider prejudice that I shall discuss further, his observation is, in fact, consistent with John Morreall's remarks about the necessary prerequisites to the enjoyment of humour, for which "we must be without urgent practical concerns."[26] Maria's concerns, with both physical and mental consequences, are too urgent to permit her to enjoy a sense of humour; she is not able to have "a distanced, and, at least potentially, a more objective view of the world" which provides a fertile mindset for "a rich sense of humor."[27] Here, we are also reminded of Mrs Chicky's remark about being "too busy knockin' up against" the reality of life to distance oneself from it (7). Women's apparent unlaughing humourlessness is, thus, political in aim, emphasising the difficulty of women's experience, which the tragic tone of the plays also serves to convey.

Women's sour laugh

Yet John does acknowledge one "sort o' 'umour" for women: "as far as my experience goes – it's a nasty <u>sour</u> sort o' 'umour that don't do nobody no good an' leaves a man tired – an' thirsty."[28] This sour laughter is much exampled in the plays. Ostensibly paradoxically, this laughter, like the pathos above, serves to emphasise the humourlessness and pain of women's existence. Chafe has pointed out that laughter and humour are by no means coterminous; laughter can be, instead, "quite often a response to some very nonhumorous situations."[29] In *At the Gates* and Chapin and Mabel Collins' *Outlawed*, for example, women's pitiful powerlessness is highlighted by melancholy, irony and resigned laughter. The Seamstress in *At the Gates* laughs "drearily" when she laments the fact her husband struck her again after the law's intervention: "that's why I'm sure a pretty thing to look at" (10). Faced with legal lack of interest, her laughter reflects upon the inevitability of her husband's actions. Furthermore, when the Sympathiser asks if she goes on strike, she simply laughs: "What, with children to feed? Strike, with no Union back of you? No fear" (11). Her social position makes her powerless in both her domestic and financial situation; action is impossible and therefore sadly ludicrous.

In *Outlawed*, performed first at the Royal Court on 23 November 1911, the life into which Jane and Clara have been born is similarly inescapable, their laughter representing tired resignation. Experiencing a hellish life as a cast-off and having been accused of murder against the "hateful tyrant" whom she has supported all her life, Clara's laughter emphasises

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[26] John Morreall, *The Philosophy of Laughter and Humor* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1987), 2.
[27] Ibid.
[28] This is a post-manuscript addition. See Gardner (1985), 17.
[29] Chafe (2007), 1.

the pitifully ironic disparity between her appellation as a love child and the loveless existence into which she has been thrown: "Who am I? – A living witness of a man's victory, of a woman's fall. A love child. Ha! Ha! Ha! A love child."[30] Both Jane and Clara see death as a preferable outcome to their slavish states, sadly being the one control they may still possess, although it is also hinted that this final freedom, too, could prove elusive: "Die at last. They can't always keep you from that" (21). Jane knows more than most about the law's deficiency in justice: describing her life's impasse and her attempt to " 'ook it" that resulted in imprisonment, Jane "laughs wearily" in the hard-won knowledge that there is no certain escape (3).

It is powerlessness, too, that is expressed in Helen's laughter in *The Apple*. At the start of the play, Helen utters shame about her employer's sexual advances as well as sadness in the knowledge that his romantic offer would afford her possibly the best opportunity for freedom which, on her own, she can only struggle in vain to achieve. Her "burst of laughter" regarding her employer's offer of "anything – anything I wanted in the whole world," is marked by ashamed excitement as well as self-pity: Helen's sole ability to progress lies not in her own power but in the hands of a married man (10). It is this revelatory incident that explains Helen's "*bitter laugh*" at the play's opening, accompanying her assertion to Ann that it is a pity the two sisters were not born in China (5). In an acknowledgement of the disadvantage women are born into, Helen remarks, "Superfluous girl babies there, are legally and comfortably done away with directly they are born" (5). Emphasising the incensed and violent outburst of this laugh, Helen's subsequent actions as she works the sewing machine are performed "*almost viciously*" (6). This angry battle highlights the frustrated futility of trying to do anything: like Jane and Clara, Helen's life seems to have reached an impasse from which death is a desired escape. Such powerlessness is further emphasised when she realises that all liberating funds will instead go to her brother. Laughing "*a little bitterly*", she angrily addresses Cyril with this confronting reality: "Your future is the only thing that matters. Being a son," and quotes Robert Browning's poem *A Woman's Last Word* about such gendered favouritism: "Where the apple reddens never pry" (18). Browning's mid-Victorian poetry itself provided an honest release from the hold of respectable etiquette towards emotional expression, mirrored in Helen's attitude and laughter which is hardened by the sad acknowledgement of inevitabilities dictated by superior powers.

As shown by Helen's plans to go abroad, even when women make attempts towards betterment, resigned smiles point towards the utter futility of such actions. When, for example, the Assessor in *Compensation* decides that the Working Girl will be fit to return to work "in a week or two" after her tentative request for greater compensation (which would

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[30] Alice Chapin and Mabel Collins, *Outlawed*, 14. LCP 1911/31, Lic. No. 434.

provide the means of opening a business and liberating her from her dangerous employment), the Girl "*smiles feebly in dissent*" (499). Despite her smile's optimism towards rebellion, it is underlined by weakness and powerlessness. Likewise, in *The Woman with the Pack*, which considers the gender inequality within the Tempest children's upbringing, in spite of her studious endeavours, when Philippa smiles at her brother Dick's remark that her academic abilities match and even supersede his own, they mark grateful yet powerless resignation: "But I can't take my degree" (35). In the same play, when Fanchette decides to move to England to find a kinder employer, her plans are met by Woman's sad smiles and a shake of her head in knowing rejection of her optimism (48).

These smiles demonstrate women's awareness that any change in their existence is not predicated on their own actions, which strenuous experience demonstrates to be futile, but on the political actions – or inactions – of men. This aspect is highlighted in *The Master* when Grace questions her mother about the lack of support Anne received as a working mother while nursing her children, the younger of whom has physically suffered from Anne's personal strain. Grace demands inquisitively, "But mother was there no political power" (9). Anne sardonically responds, citing the politicians' want of concern: "Why should they [care]? Too busy, some fighting the beer interest, some protecting the beer interest (*laughs*). The beer interest was just as much in the air in those days as it is to-day (*laugh*)" (9). Here, her sense of humour seems at first to be used ironically to highlight powerlessness, like that of the Seamstress in *At the Gates*. Yet, further evidence regarding Anne shows that her use of laughter in the play is not ironic at all but a conscious and habitual attempt at survival, as shown of women's complicit laughter in Chapter One. She tells of how she laughed even as the bailiffs stood not far from her door threatening to take her much-loved "plush sofa" (9) and she laughs again as she complains to Clara the maid of the "fourteen hours" of work she must do each day to support her family, the responsibility of which rests solely on her shoulders (3). In this sense, the handwritten addition into this manuscript of Anne's laughter regarding the "beer interest" helpfully emphasises the forced, non-tangential nature of this laughter and thus Anne's determination to find humour in her powerless situation (9). Her laughter has enabled her to continue each day without dwelling on the piteous aspects of her existence.

This survival mechanism is also evidenced in her conscious decision to find her husband's behaviour lightly amusing rather than, as it so clearly is, frustrating. William's infuriating inability to lend a hand and his tardy recognition of how their lives might have been easier had he "been at the head of things," is met by Anne's "gentle" laugh (29). Knowing any admonishment to be pointless, Anne's laughter is instead kindly and forgiving, which she knows to be an easier response. Even when William's potential power to change the family's circumstances offers itself again and he predictably lets the family down, Anne's laughter

resurfaces. Without a vote herself, Anne is reliant on his political astuteness to vote for the party that will ensure protection of the family business. Having ignorantly pledged voting allegiance to the opposing party, he declares that "he cannot vote", to which Anne laughs again "and wipes her eyes", suggestive of the pitiable nature of this laughter (29). Likewise, regarding her husband's incorrigible propensity to throw away her hard-earned money at "Mrs Kers-George's bar parlour" and through gambling and other dubious activity, Anne chooses instead of admonishment a "whimsical smile". Here is a conscious decision to remove oneself from a dire reality of which Anne is acutely aware and to instead, whimsically or fancifully, sustain a far less realistic yet, in the quotidian, easier outlook: "Poor old Will […] I wonder what luck he'll have" (29).

When the far more subversive character, Clara the maid, challenges William's behaviour on the grounds of the "nasty persiflage" spoken of his actions, dismissed by William as a "misunderstanding" which will "amuse" his wife, Clara replies, "Yes, I think she'll laugh" (18). The maid's statement is a sad acknowledgement of her employer's sustained complicity in the unreality of William's irresponsibility. Far from sarcastic, Clara's statement is a realisation that, despite Anne's experience and insight, Anne will choose to dismiss as a triviality the problems her husband inflicts on her family. This humour is pitifully complicit, emanating from a resigned feeling of powerlessness and apparent necessity: it is what sustains at least the cohesiveness of her family if not her and the welfare of each individual. In its forced and resigned quality, her humour is pitiable, perhaps even more so than the use of laughter in other plays because of its pathetic attempt towards optimism. Yet both emphasise women's tragic existence.

Women's hysterical laugh

Underscoring their powerlessness, women's laughter here is a weak, tired, if sometimes sarcastic acceptance of circumstance. Where it pertains to a sense of humour, there is no joy in it but rather an awful necessity that disconnects women from their own needs. According to Tonnies' study of post-1860s theatre, this disorientating laugh was, in fact, being readily employed by "new" dramatists on the stage at the turn-of-the-century. As Tonnies describes, the stage directions gave the "Ha, ha!" a different tone which communicated a hysterical reaction to one's circumstance – a disorientation, an inability to cope, and a subsequent distancing.[31] As Parvulescu has pointed out, it is linguistic usage that has coined the phrase "hysteric laughter" when, in fact, laughter is "rarely among the hysteric's symptoms."[32] Instead, it is characterised by cries and spasms which intermingle, in the popular imagination

[31] Tonnies (2002), 111.
[32] Parvulescu (2010), 103.

– and thus perhaps via stage directions – with laughter. Instead of mirth, such laughter thus expresses resignation and exasperation, pointing to "a degree of alienation from the circumstances and of moral confusion on the part of the characters that would hardly have been possible" before this period.[33] This laughter communicated the experience of modernity which, according to Katherine E. Kelly, tended to be represented "in the figure of a woman in crisis" by male playwrights, making this laughter a particularly feminine one.[34]

Such hysterical laughter was attributed to women by dramatists to draw attention to this crisis, of which only a brief survey is possible here. Reflecting women's late twentieth-century disquiet on the subject of marriage, in Jones' 1897 *The Liars*, Lady Jessica's laughter, apparently joyful and flirty, is merely a veneer which hides from herself and others the sad reality of her unhappy marriage and boredom. Shaw's 1893 *Mrs Warren's Profession* closes with Vivie's ambiguous "*half sob, half laugh of intense relief*" as she adopts with finality a wholly modern, independent existence.[35] Despite her "*relief*" and apparent fulfilment in her work, it might be argued that with the emotional oscillation displayed here, the play far from conclusively calms the crisis experienced by the modern woman. In terms of hysterical behaviour itself, this has a long-established stage association with women which, in modern drama, we see in Ibsen's forward-thinking heroines whose modern despair banishes them from the stage by suicide or ill-fated departure.[36]

In the above laughter of Helen, Jane and Anne who variously contemplate suicide or resignedly accept the normality of oppression, it can be seen how some AFL plays demonstrated similar moral confusion to that which was portrayed by male playwrights. These are personalities in crisis whose laughter reveals female characters' lack of control. This laughter represented a theatrical novelty which stood as shorthand for an emergent modernist desperation and was used emotively to communicate the implied importance for political assistance and change. Reviews testified to a positive reception and the perceived utility of the depictions of such pitiful circumstance. Of M. Slieve McGowan's unpublished play *Trimmings*, one reviewer wrote that it was "powerful and tragic", and amongst three "admirable propaganda plays" performed at the Rehearsal Theatre.[37] Another reviewer deemed that "the whole tragedy of a quiet life is" in *The Master* and, for its "depth of feeling, artistic ability, and subtle character-drawing" found it to be one of "the cleverest plays that

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[33] Tonnies (2002), 111.
[34] Katherine E. Kelly, *Modern Drama by Women, 1880s-1930s* (London: Routledge, 1996), 3
[35] George Bernard Shaw (1898), *Mrs Warren's Profession* in *Plays Unpleasant* (Middlesex: Penguin, 1976), 286. This play was not publically performed until 18 June 1912 by the Pioneer Players (King's Hall, London).
[36] For example, Hedda Gabler in *Hedda Gabler* (1890).
[37] *Votes for Women* (28 April 1911), 430. Performed 25 April 1911.

has been written during the last few years."[38] The performance of this play, amongst a selection of others, led *The Times* to remark admiringly upon the "intense earnestness and the absolute good taste with which [suffrage] ideals were presented" and the attention with which the audience was held.[39] Such "straight" plays, a definition given of *The Apple* by Gardner, clearly moved their audiences and were felt by some to be powerful propaganda.[40]

Politics and hysteria

Yet, the tragic lack of control that such bitter laughter helps to communicate also brought this portrayal into question as a useful device for persuasive and political import in suffrage theatre. In male representation, women in crisis are fit only for despair, derangement and suicide. Given the literary propensity – even dramatic necessity – of this outcome, for women and men attempting also to demonstrate women's capacities and mental strength to participate in politics, it can be inferred how such a portrayal of the modern woman might ultimately be unhelpful. The potential disadvantage of such a depiction is particularly evidenced in Wells' depiction of women in *Ann Veronica* in which Ann's former political convictions are explained away as the result of hysterical derangement, rather than serious and committed endeavour. Ann's understanding of her own sex as "the hysterical animal" implicates all women in this charge, and Wells' representation of politicised women serves to heighten this.[41] The anonymous suffrage workers are charged as "hysterical" by Wells, ratified by their behaviour and laughter.[42] Their emotional volatility is emphasised by the group of women tasked with carrying out a raid. They are almost frenzied with the prospect of suffrage action and ardently desirous of prison service. Ann finds herself "in a little stirring crowd of excited women, whispering and tittering and speaking in undertones."[43] Their excitable emotions are highlighted by their uncontrollable laughter. Ann witnesses a "little blond creature close at hand" who "suddenly gave way to a fit of hysterical laughter, and caught up the end of it with a sob."[44] In prison, her neighbour is "noisy and hilarious and enthusiastic" who would howl before the mid-day meal, emulated by other prisoners "until the whole place was alive with barkings, yappings, roarings, pelican chatterings, and feline yowlings, interspersed with shrieks of hysterical laughter."[45] The madness and aggression of this laughter renders it barely human. Unlike the self-promoting laughter used by politicians that was discussed in Chapter

[38] "Actresses' and Writers' Suffrage Matinee", *Votes for Women* (19 November 1909), 117.
[39] Cited in ibid.
[40] Gardner (1985), 30.
[41] H. G. Wells (1909), 261.
[42] H. G. Wells (1909), 231.
[43] H. G. Wells (1909), 230.
[44] H. G. Wells (1909), 231.
[45] H. G. Wells (1909), 241.

One, this bears no relationship to the politically valued sense of humour. While those who could exhibit a sense of humour were well-balanced, sane and admired – useful attributes for the campaigning politician to display – in the popular imagination the suffragettes existed in the opposite camp, stereotyped as "grim, humourless fanatics".[46] Just as John in *An Englishwoman's Home* cites the sourness of Maria's laugh to discount women's sense of humour, fanatical laughter was attributed to those placed firmly in the category of the humourless, and this group bore the suspicions that were directed their way because of this.

Wells' depiction was part of a wider representation of the "hysterical" and frenetic suffrage worker, bolstering the anti-suffrage argument that the emotionality of women made them unfit for making sound political decisions and that their involvement in politics ran destructively against their feminine capabilities, which could "deteriorate" the nation. In order to add scientific weight to this argument, in 1912 the Government even tried to get doctors to examine suffragettes in jail to certify that they were insane, an endeavour reflected by Dugdale in *Clowning Street*. In her ironic portrayal, the suffragettes are "possessed" menaces, substantiated by the scientific enquiry by "Sir James Crouchington, of the Eugenics Society" who is in no doubt as to the matter (179). As supposedly hysterical creatures, rapidly and irrationally oscillating between sobs and excitable laughter, these women attracted suspicion, particularly and most crucially in terms of their capacity for public service.

A suffrage rejection of hysterical laughter

The AFL itself was acutely aware of this stereotype, as already indicated by Dugdale's reference to it. This is also shown when Hamilton and St. John have Horace call the suffragettes "hysterics" in *How the Vote Was Won*, and in *An Englishwoman's Home* when John calls the suffragettes " 'Ussies […] screamin', scratchin' ussies" (18). In recognition of this potentially disempowering stereotype which attracted derision, distrust and disrespect, some writers of the AFL created conscious distance between it and their portrayal of suffrage women. In invoking this stereotype the playwrights take control of it and ironically show it up as tiresome and unfounded, going so far as to displace this pitiful reaction onto other, more feeble characters instead, significantly all with anti-suffrage leanings. In *How the Vote Was Won*, Ethel's reaction to the disruptive actions of the suffragettes, who purposely embrace their supposed roles as dependants in order to highlight the danger of this erroneous notion, is hysterical (149). In Evelyn Glover's *Which?*, performed at the Arts Centre on 24 March 1914, Elsie is the hysterical woman whose excitement at the erroneous assumption that her sister's

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[46] Carolyn Christensen Nelson, *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England* (Plymouth: Broadview Press Ltd, 2004), xvii.

good news includes a marriage proposal is expressed in "hysterical" tones.[47] A nurse, Mary instead proudly announces her job offer at a hospital, before her father threatens to disown her if she takes it. Hysteria is firmly the over-wrought and ridiculous reaction of weak, silly and trivial proponents of anti-suffrage, with which the AFL desires no association.

Suffragist Israel Zangwill, in fact, goes even further in his 1910 *A Prologue* to attribute this reaction not to women at all, but to men. This piece lays out the League's propagandist aims and rallies support by declaring,

> The time is out of joint – let's set it right,
> Not whine and wail with Hamlet "cursed spite".
> That cry was merely masculine hysteria,
> For real statesmanship you need Egeria.[48]

In the contemporary consciousness, the notion of women's hysteria could not fail to conjure up images of Ophelia who, since the early modern stage, was closely aligned with female madness, probably understood as a biological and emotional erotomania. By the eighteenth century, Ophelia's madness was sentimentalized and presented more decorously, the influence of which can be seen in Sir John Everett Millais' 1851-2 painting which depicts Ophelia as a beautiful martyr, singing prior to drowning. Millais' painting reflects this "dignity" while also drawing on the stage conventions which signalled female madness, such as his use of the wild flowers and the act of committing suicide by drowning. By the early twentieth century, then, the tragic-romantic Ophelia was shorthand for female hysteria. So closely was Ophelia associated in the contemporary imagination with female madness that Zangwill's complete displacement of the hysteric onto Hamlet himself would have been striking and subversive. Hamlet's is not the typical masculine melancholy of the intellectual but, instead, the so-called "feminine" malady of hysteria, while conversely the feminine is embodied in the wise mythological figure of Egeria whose control, intellect and leadership is actively sought throughout the state. Employing *Hamlet* to emphasise this, Zangwill goes to the very heart of the stage representation of madness to directly challenge this gender dichotomy. For Zangwill, the hysteric reaction that has been so firmly attributed to women is, in fact, masculine. To follow the implications of Zangwill's assertions, literary portrayals of the hysterical woman are merely masculine creations in the same way that some of the AFL's hysterical women are shown to be beholden to men, such as Ethel to Horace, who seek and "create" that "feminine" reaction, as Hamlet of Ophelia.

Testifying to a conscious suffrage dissatisfaction with and dissociation from such weak reaction, representations of "whining and wailing" women by male playwrights for the AFL

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[47] Evelyn Glover, *Which?*, 8. LCP 1914/13, Lic. No. 2570.
[48] Israel Zangwill, *A Prologue* in Gardner (1985), 9.

attracted some degree of criticism in suffrage periodical reviews. Regarding the 20th June 1911 production of Ervine's playlet *Compensation*, sandwiched between two lighter entertainments, one reviewer – C. D., probably Despard – congratulates the portrayal of this "painful, but alas! too true, story" of a work-girl played by Miss Winifred Mayo. The reviewer concedes, "I have met that poor work-girl. Her ignorance, her sad patience, and her terrible humility have filled me with indignant sorrow."[49] The reviewer sympathises with the work-girl's sobs and worn, weak outlook. C.D. continues, "It is a tribute to the power of the little play, and the truth of its rendering, that several of us were seized with a longing to shake courage into the girl, and to kick every one in the office, especially the chief claim inspector."[50] Here, the reviewer appears torn between the play's "truthful" portrayal and the desire for an aesthetic (and actual) departure from this "truth".

Less torn is E.H.M in the 19 March 1911 review in *The Vote* for the Rehearsal Theatre's performance of "two new one-act plays", Harold Rubenstein's *Her Wild Oats* and John Kidd's *Restitution*, in which the reviewer takes Kidd to task for his "sickly sentimentality".[51] E.H.M angrily criticises Kidd's portrayal of the wife's behaviour, made to act "like a helpless fly caught in a spider's web," a web spun by her "selfish husband."[52] E.H.M continues unwaveringly, "to the mind of the Suffragist such sacrifice appears what it really is, a useless and wicked act on the part of the person making it; and what is intended to pass as heroic unselfishness is merely the selfishness of a weak and cowardly character."[53]

This play, as well as Rubenstein's, appears to have been unpublished, so it is not possible to know the full plot. However, the reviewer's anger towards what she or he perceived to be a weak portrayal of women is sufficient to highlight a severe dissatisfaction with such characters. The reviewer also appears confident in his or her reflection of suffrage opinion as a whole, which further analysis of the AFL's attitude strengthens. Although more vehement than C.D's sympathetic review above, both share a frustration with the stage presence of such powerless women; C.D's proclaimed desire to "shake" the cowardice out of the work-girl is also palpable in E.H.M's review.

It was a similar attitude that compelled some reviewers to criticise Brieux's play *Woman On Her Own* following its 1913 performance. Henry Nevinson – in the minority as one of a handful of male reviewers for the suffrage press – criticised the Woman Theatre's choice due to the play's "sense of hindrance and defeat."[54] There is an acknowledgement here of the disenfranchising effect of tragic weakness or indulgent sentimentality; an implicit awareness

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[49] C.D., "At the Rehearsal Theatre", *The Vote* (1 July 1911), 126.
[50] Ibid.
[51] E. H. M., "Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (18 March 1911), 247.
[52] Ibid.
[53] Ibid.
[54] H. W. N., "The Woman's Theatre", *Votes for Women* (12 December 1913), 163.

that this weak, renouncing attitude displayed on the stage was unhelpful propaganda both in terms of encouraging audiences and promoting the cause amongst others. Another reviewer for *The Suffragette* (the WSPU periodical) declared somewhat despairingly following this performance, "I wish some women would write a play showing the real spirit of the Suffragette. It has never been done yet, and I do not believe that a male dramatist will ever do it."[55] While the reviewer's complaint is perhaps rather dismissive of several plays (as will be explored), it does testify to a strongly perceived disparity between this worn-down tragic and defeated woman favoured by literature, and the "real" suffrage spirit. The modern woman is, according to these reviews, unfairly represented in such depictions. The reviews themselves juxtapose the energy of the suffragist reviewers, and that which was evidenced around them, with that demonstrated on the stage. Indeed, it seems to be, specifically, suffrage that compels this theatrical dissatisfaction.

The spirit of suffrage

The suffrage "spirit" to which *The Suffragette* refers is directly referenced in some AFL plays, and invoked in others. It is never wholly defined, but a sense of it infuses the tone, characters, and stories of a majority of plays, as it does various offstage documentation of the movement. As early as *Votes for Women!*, Vida cites a "new spirit among women […] And you couldn't make a greater mistake than to think it finds a home only in the exceptional, or the unhappy."[56] Indeed, when she describes women wiping the tears from her face at the end of the play, Vida is actively refusing sorrow as a reaction for women to suffering. Her remark "you couldn't make a greater mistake" gives emphasis to this assertion, firmly implying instead the very opposite of "unhappy". This subtly of expression is typical of Vida whose witting understatement carries the play.

Frederick Pethick Lawrence's 30 May 1913 article in *Votes for Women* echoes Robins' sentiment, demonstrating the endurance of this spirit throughout the campaign. Entitled "The Laughter of Women", the article's description of what women "ought" to be doing is reminiscent of the tragic Ophelia: women "ought to be in floods of tears, mourning the infidelity of men and the wrongs of women. Only they aren't!"[57] The use of the modal verb "ought" indicates not only probability but also a sense of duty and expectation, further established when, invoking men, he adds that such tears would "please you, only you know you are supposed to be grown up now."[58] This establishes crying as a traditional feminine

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[55] *The Suffragette* (12 December 1913) in Holledge (1981), 96.
[56] This is a post-manuscript addition. See Croft (1909), 102.
[57] F. W. Pethick Lawrence, "The Laughter of Women", *Votes for Women* (30 May 1913), 507. Previously published in the *Oxford Fortnightly* (19 May 1913).
[58] Ibid.

response enacted for the comfort of infantile man; these helpless tears are but a learned, artificial response which reinforce men's superior place, a dynamic in place as early as childhood when women let their sons win "because otherwise you would have cried."[59]

In rejection of "feminine" sobs, he cites a suffrage "chuckling" which is "against all the rules of common sense", also reflected in a variety of AFL plays.[60] Unlike the downcast characters of some, in other plays we encounter extremely cheerful and vibrant characters. In *How the Vote Was Won*, the aptly named suffragette Maudie Spark, a member of the suffrage resistance Horace has to endure in his own house, is "aggressively cheerful" (156). Similarly, in their other 1909 contribution, *The Pot and the Kettle*, performed at the Scala on 12 November 1909, the politicised women are joyous. Centred round the recounted events that took place during Marjorie's anti-suffrage meeting, suffragette Lady Susie (who caused there a significant disturbance) is full of life. Upon hearing the news, Marjorie's suffragette cousin, Nell, admiringly calls Susie "a ripping good sort".[61] Likewise, the entire group of women – with the exception (at least until the end) of the anti-suffragist Geraldine – in Beatrice Harraden's *Lady Geraldine's Speech* is infectiously joyous. This play, produced at the WSPU's Women's Suffrage Exhibition (13-26 May 1909) at the Princes' Skating Rink, concerns a tight-knit group of suffragettes and the appearance of Dr. Alice's friend, Geraldine, who requests the loan of Alice's writing skills for a speech she has to deliver at an anti-suffrage meeting. She is subsequently exposed to a beguiling group of women, such as Hilda Crowninshield, a famous pianist, whose predisposition towards playing the waltz encourages the group to "laugh and clap" and dance a little.[62] Despite Robins' assertion that this spirit is not confined to one group of women – a significant remark, perhaps to ward off early twentieth-century concerns regarding the exclusivity of the movement – the women in these plays are the elite in terms of talent and social standing. Yet, the charwoman Mrs Chicky in Glover's play and the housemaid Clara in *The Master*, for example, are similarly jolly characters, giggling throughout and making fun.

Although cheerful, this suffrage spirit does not deny the unhappy circumstances of women but is, instead, founded upon them. As outlined in Chapter One, the obstacle presented by anti-suffrage was, in an ostensible contradiction to the indications given by this suffrage amusement, powerfully and consistently significant. It is paradoxically the very scale of the personal and collective hardship that necessitates such cheer; their laughter exists in spite of as well as because of the suffering and derision they face. Highlighting this, in Hamilton's suffrage anthem, *The March of the Women*, laughter is an act of "defiance", an open

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[59] Ibid.
[60] Ibid.
[61] Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John, *The Pot and the Kettle,* 17. LCP 1909/26, Lic. No 302.
[62] Beatrice Harraden, *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, 10. LCP 1909/8, Lic. No. 378.

resistance to difficult circumstance. Hamilton wrote this song for the WSPU, the use of which was widespread throughout the movement, including by AFL members off and onstage. Composed by Ethel Smyth, the song foregrounds the value of this defiant laughter within the suffrage spirit:

> Life, strife – these two are one.
> Nought can ye win but by faith and daring.
> On, on – that ye have done
> But for the work of today preparing.
> Firm in reliance, laugh a defiance –
> (Laugh in hope, for sure is the end).
> March, march, many as one,
> Shoulder to shoulder and friend to friend.[63]

Hamilton herself was critical of her contribution, though happy to be collaborating with Smyth, even if she was not Smyth's first choice: "As a literary effort there was not much to be said for it, but, in spite of my personal dislike of my 'poem', I know I was secretly elated by the thought that Ethel Smyth and I were collaborators."[64] Despite what Hamilton's biographer has described as this "undistinguished" verse, the prevalence and influence of the song were hugely significant amongst workers both off and even onstage.[65] The song was named by Emmeline Pankhurst as the WSPU's official anthem, replacing the *Women's Marseillaise*, and was performed throughout the suffrage years, first on 21 January 1911 by the Suffrage Choir on Pall Mall, London at a welcome evening for released prisoners.[66] *Votes for Women* testifies that the "stirring march was […] sung by a choir to a rapturous welcome from the audience."[67] It was also frequently sung in prison, testifying to the spirit which suffragette Grace Roe admitted made it quite a "fun" place to be in the early years, the joyousness challenging Wells' own hysterical depiction.[68] Other significant performances included 23 March 1911 during a WSPU rally in the Royal Albert Hall in support of the Second Conciliation Bill when Smyth, processing up the centre aisle with Pankhurst, was honoured for her services in composing this tune and then "conducted the choir in a performance of the song, the entire audience joining in."[69] Capturing a sense of its rousing tone in performance, Smyth recalls, "A Suffragette choir had been sternly drilled, and I remember Edith Craig plaintively commentating on the difficulty of hitting a certain E flat

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[63] Norquay (1995), 94.
[64] Hamilton (1935), 79.
[65] Lis Whitelaw, *The Life and Rebellious Times of Cicely Hamilton: Actress, Writer, Suffragist* (London: Women's Press, 1990), 123.
[66] See June Purvis, *Emmeline Pankhurst: A Biography* (London, Routledge, 2002), 157. Also, Ronald Crichton, *The Memoirs of Ethel Smyth* (Harmondsworth: Viking, 1987), 297.
[67] *Votes for Women* (27 January 1911), 272.
[68] Audio interview with Grace Roe in WL 8SUF/B/007.
[69] Purvis (2002), 159.

[…]. We had the organ, and I think a cornet to blast forth the tune."[70]

This prevalent use perhaps indicates the way WSPU suffrage members identified with the spirit it evokes. Certainly, the idea of laughter as a defiance of circumstance was echoed by the leader of the WSPU, Christabel Pankhurst, who wrote about the way such humour characterised the militant movement, "in that our militant women were like the British soldier who knows how to joke and smile mid his fighting and trials."[71] Mirrored in the active singing of the anthem, Pankhurst envisages the movement engaged in a battle, the "strife" of which is deliberately endured in laughter rather than sorrow. Similarly, the anthem inspired the title of Mary Richardson's 1953 autobiography, *Laugh a Defiance*, and her work also carried as an inscription the complete last verse. The references to the prevalence of laughter itself in her autobiography testify to the importance placed on the suffrage laugh as described in the much-cited song. She recounts as a "valuable and essential lesson" the need to "smile though all the time we were longing to weep."[72] When, for instance, her face was "stiff and bruised" after a protest at the Holborn Restaurant, she at first found it hard to smile: she cried, "It's no laughing matter."[73] Encouraged by her laughing housekeeper Ellen, Richardson "began to see the episode's amusing side and […] ran back to other amusing incidents of this kind."[74] Richardson emphasises, "Throughout our struggle we never failed to find some occasion for mirth in the most unpromising circumstances. In our movement it was hard to find the soured old spinster so beloved of the pictorial press!"[75] The way the anthem captured this important aspect of the suffrage spirit is palpable here.

Defiantly cheerful laughter and the AFL

Although dedicated to the militant sector of the suffrage movement, the fact that the self-declared neutral AFL also used this song indicates both its popularity and possibly the AFL's identification with its message. The anthem was sung in at least two plays – by Alice in Housman's *Alice in Ganderland* and by the enlightened Parlourmaid Morton in Glover's *Miss Appleyard's Awakening*, both first performed in 1911. *Alice* depicts Lewis Carroll's characters as politicians who, at their Mad Hatter's tea party (which satirises party politics), refuse entry to Alice. In this play, the stage directions call for the first verse of this song to be sung by Alice.[76] Taking place at the end of the play, presumably the rendition would have compelled those familiar with the tune to recall the rest (including the final verse regarding

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[70] Crichton (1987), 297.
[71] Pankhurst (1959), 77.
[72] Richardson (1953), 27.
[73] Ibid.
[74] Richardson (1953), 29.
[75] Richardson (1953), 32.
[76] Laurence Housman, *Alice in Ganderland*, 22. LCP 1911/25 Lic. No. 328.

laughter) as they left the performance, such was its celebrity. In fact, advertising the Lyceum Theatre's upcoming show on 27 October 1911, one article suggests that the whole anthem will be performed: "The piece concludes with the singing of Dr. Ethel Smyth's 'March of the Women' conducted by the talented composer herself."[77] It would make sense that, with Smyth's presence, the whole song be delivered. Where the use of the song may well be intended to demonstrate the characters' militant affiliation, in *Alice* the song also exists in its own right. With its composer present, the song is celebrated as a popular symbol of the movement. The AFL would have been aware of its use as a symbol of unity between the various divisions of suffrage, so its theatrical appropriation may too carry this meaning, suitable for a multi-divisional troupe. It would be used again in such a way at events the AFL attended. For example, on 14 July 1912, at a large demonstration in Hyde Park. This included "twenty-one platforms of upwards of fifteen different societies" including the Actresses' Franchise League. [78]

The song's message regarding the suffrage spirit was consistent with that practised elsewhere by the AFL. From the very beginning those who ran the AFL meetings placed a high value on making each other laugh throughout their endeavours. Hamilton addressed its inaugural meeting "with no little humour", comic monologues accompanying musical interludes throughout to provide further amusement.[79] This established the humorous tone of the meetings, a flavour of which is given in reviews. *The Vote* reported on 26 March 1910 that "Miss Elsie Chapin volunteered to fill [Winifred Mayo's] place, and gave a graphic and amusing series of anecdotes illustrative of what woman has to expect to encounter on her courageous road to freedom."[80] On 16 April 1910, *The Vote* similarly reports that "Miss Fanny Brough was a mirth-provoking chairwoman" and that Miss Compton's speech "kept the audience vastly amused."[81] Mrs. Arncliffe Sennett, on 14 May 1910, "provoked continuous ripples of laughter by her plain speaking and witty remarks," Miss Horniman on 15 June 1912 also "kept her audience in a perpetual ripple of laughter" and simultaneously "urged women to stand together and be loyal to each other."[82]

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[77] "The Actresses' Franchise League", *Votes for Women* (20 October 1911), 45.
[78] Purvis (2002), 192.
[79] *The Stage* (24 December 1908) in Whitelaw (1990), 78.
[80] "Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (26 March 1910), 264.
[81] Inez Bensusan, "Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (16 April 1910), 300.
[82] See I. Bensusan, "The Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (14 May 1910), 35; "The Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (15 June 1912), 142; "The Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (12 October 1912), 423.

The laughing strength of suffrage

If the AFL members displayed a bright sense of humour with ease, the plays themselves make it clear that this is only possible because of the encouragement and subsequent strength derived from the movement itself. In *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, the "Spirit of the Age" is an "irresistible champion", suggestive of a powerful inevitability, which inspires an optimistic formidableness amongst suffrage workers (11). In this play, the "Spirit" is akin to a warrior leader who assists and guides its army, enabling a powerful capability. There are religious overtones of a morally just war here, and indeed such rhetoric was keenly employed elsewhere within the movement. Drawing from their ideas about women's superior morality, the notion of a spiritual battle was invoked by both poles of the WSPU and the more peaceful National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS). The former cited Joan of Arc as their leader to emphasise and lend strength to their militaristic exploits which, for the latter, had purely spiritual connotations.[83]

The AFL reflects such rhetoric to show the power of this suffrage army. Joan of Arc is represented, for example, in *A Pageant* and *Woman with the Pack*, her strength and confidence conveyed in the poised stance, flag in hand, of one actress in a photograph that could pertain to either play.[84] Likewise, Alice's group in *Lady Geraldine's Speech* become, for Crowninshield, "comrades", recalling Christabel Pankhurst's analogy to soldiers (10). Unified by a sense of rightful purpose, their collective friendship empowers and inspires women in cheerful and assured optimism. Harraden, the play's author, considered the "new comradeship amongst women [...] one of the most delightful and stimulating results of this long struggle to obtain citizenship."[85] According to her play, this was also one of the most attractive features of the AFL; the formerly reclusive Silberthwaite thanks the movement for bringing "all us professional women out of our libraries and studios and all our other hiding places [...]" into "intimate contact with a lot of fine women" (7). While this comradeship was often subject to the divisions that existed amongst suffrage societies (such as the WSPU, NUWSS and WFL), the AFL purported to make no such distinction and, furthermore, actively participated in the public unification of parties. Of the November 1909 Actresses' and Writers' Matinee at the Scala, for instance, *The Vote* reported that the audience consisted of "representatives of every form of suffrage society, lovers of peace and lovers of war."[86]

Robins understood the effect of suffrage's communal sense of purpose well, as she

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[83] See Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 85.
[84] Photograph: 'AFL – performing btwn 1909-1914 (?)' in WL, T/004
[85] Ethel Hill, "Miss Beatrice Harraden: Author of "Ships that Pass in the Night", *The Vote* (11 November 1909), 28.
[86] E. T., "Actresses' and Writers' Matinee", *The Vote* (18 November 1909), 38.

demonstrated in 1911 when she announced that the AFL contingent at the Coronation Suffrage Pageant – according to Penny Farfan "the largest and most spectacular demonstration of the British suffrage campaign" – would be led "by Hedda Gabler, in the accomplished person of the Princess Bariatinsky [actress Lydia Yavorska] on horseback."[87] Having already in *The Convert* described one suffragist character as "Hilda [Wangel of *The Master Builder*] harnessed to a purpose," Robins once again performs a revisionist act of Ibsen, enabling Hedda to refuse her hysterical tragedy and instead to take control over her body's torment (99). In an act of collective and victorious spectacle, which chimes with wider notions of suffrage as a battle, Robins subverts the Freudian hysteric body. The purpose of suffrage provides Hedda with a responsibility and optimism which steel her in a way that Ibsen's individualist vision could not. In the same vein, Zangwill speculates what Ophelia might have accomplished if "To vote or not to vote had been the question." Being part of a larger cause would have forced her not to wither away or to despair like Hamlet, but to act demandingly and positively: "'The time is out of joint?' Then what's the cure?" (7). Joanna Townsend traces Robins' hysteric trajectory from her part as Hedda, through to Jean in *Alan's Wife*, and finally to Vida.[88] Where, alone, women are "luckless", as Vida describes, suffrage widens one's vision beyond the individual and connects with a strong mass of women. The awareness of wider suffering motivates Vida to wipe the tears from her face, and the suffrage movement empowers her to do so. Yet, Robins' work with the AFL shows that her rejection of hysteria is, in fact, victoriously circular, ending not with Vida but with Hedda herself, as well as with Robins, as her actress self, representing a conscious triumph over feminized and theatrical suffering made possible only by suffrage.

In *An Allegory*, this cheerful transformation facilitated by suffrage is demonstrated when Woman sets off on her journey towards emancipation. When her chains are burst, joy replaces fear and prejudice, which she communicates to her sister the Slave Woman in a "radiant smile of happiness" (12). Likewise, even Maria in *The Englishwoman's Home* is able to laugh once she finds out about the "Women's League of Liberty" (18). With the prospect of the Young Woman from the League visiting her from time to time, Maria is now happier: "What prisoner wouldn't like to 'ear 'o a league o' liberty."[89] As she shakes her hand at the end of the play, she laughs again.[90] Already on this road, the effects of this joyousness are evident in other characters. After becoming a suffragette in *Jim's Leg*, Esther develops a happy disposition which enables her to joke and smile. She declares that, if her husband (who has a

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[87] Elizabeth Robins (18 June 1911), "Come and See" in Robins (1913), 246-252, 250.
[88] See Joanna Townsend, "Elizabeth Robins: Hysteria, Politics and Performance" in Maggie Gale and Viv Gardner (eds.), *Women, Theatre, and Performance: New Histories, New Historiographies* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2000), 102-120.
[89] This scene is a post-manuscript addition. See Gardner (1985), 20.
[90] See ibid.

wooden leg) tries to give her a black eye again, "'I'll give you one back with you own noo leg,' says I smilin' friendly-like" (171). Her friendly smiles are indicative of her (hopefully well-founded) confidence and strength, instead of fear.

Although suffrage is not directly cited in *The Twelve-Pound Look*, Kate's confident spirit is nonetheless analogous to that displayed by new converts, and its production by the AFL suggests that the character would have been understood in a suffrage light. Pushed to the limits by her husband's ill-founded superiority and self-belief, Kate decided she must leave. Before doing so, she had to find assurance that she would be able to support herself as a typist. It is the confidence, and subsequent financial reassurance, which enabled her at last to discover her laughter towards Harry; until then, her situation seemed hopeless. Refusing the tragic narrative of *The Apple* and *Trimmings*, in this play, the figure of the typist is transformed from the forlorn, even suicidal figure, to the confident and capable Kate. When her former husband expresses his shock at her profession – "This is what you have fallen to – a typist!" – Kate is "*unwithered*" and simply replies "Think of it" (55). She later mocks and thus rejects his idea of her fallen state by wondering "if [Lady Sims] would let me do her washing" (57).

Reflective perhaps of its evangelistic medium, with the exception of *At the Gates* these plays do not explore the personal destruction that can accompany political change, such as the family ruptures Carlson notes in her assessment of journalistic plays.[91] Instead, these plays side-step the matter to show that the suffrage spirit provides the necessary and helpful good humour in such circumstance. Vaughan's *The Woman with the Pack* was given an alternative title by one reviewer in *Votes for Women*, naming it "The Making of a Suffragette": "for it pictures the crisis in the development of a fine modern girl, who finds her sheltered home too narrow for her aspirations."[92] This play shows how difficulties can be endured and overcome with what the author herself described as Philippa's "saving sense of humour" (92). The suffrage movement's communality of experience and purpose provide the confidence to abandon fear as well as its concomitant tragic narrative.

Cultivating cheerfulness

As seen here, rather than suggesting that women have transcended their tragedy, it has instead been deliberately cast aside. The consistent reportage of women's laughter within the meetings and plays, and the existence of these structures themselves, point not only to the prevalence of cheerfulness but also to its busy and conscious cultivation amongst AFL

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[91] Susan Carlson, "Comic Militancy: The Politics of Suffrage Drama" in Gale and Gardner (eds.) (2000), 206.
[92] "Plays at Portman Rooms", *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.

members and beyond. Through its community, the AFL tried to advocate and create what the main suffrage anthem – a rallying instruction towards laughter – *The March of the Woman* promoted. Not the quieting aims of etiquette but loud and empowering imperatives that are noisily imparted, seized, and echoed in chorus, so that they become not mere orders but an accurate description of a public laughing transformation as they follow this apparent battle cry. The League functioned in the same way to reflect and promote as well as provoke a laughing disposition amongst audiences towards their circumstance. The way this works is exampled in the cheerful dispositions of Alice's group in *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, as well as of Maudie Spark and Lady Susie. The performative dynamism of the comic speakers is echoed in these characters who are, variously, stage entertainers. Waltzing pianist, zealous music hall performer (whose voice is "*raucous from much bellowing of music-hall songs*" (156)), and mischief-maker Susie, the audience is confronted in these characters by a bold humour. Like the audience's laughter that is recorded in reviews of meetings, provoked by each other female groups laugh together with ease throughout the plays.

In *At the Gates*, this active pursuit of audience laughter is made explicit. There is an intriguing exchange – seemingly at odds with the rest of play – about the function of the theatre audience. The Suffragette's companion, the 1st Officer, mentions to her his theatre trip the previous evening to see *The Haughty Patriarch*. The Officer declares his dislike for "funny plays" explaining, "the people will laugh so much." If they do find it funny, he asks, "can't the audience just smile quietly? There's no need to laugh so loud that they interfere with your hearing the next thing said on the stage. I never applaud" (8). Audience response constituted an important debate during this period. *At the Gates* directly engages with ideas expressed by Meynell in her essay "The Audience" that audience laughter obscures the actors' message.[93] On similar lines, Shaw would, in 1913, formalise his argument that applause interferes with the acting and actor; as the AFL's own response to him shows below, his views on the over-zealous audience response were much in evidence, however, in his earlier theatre criticism.[94] For both these critics, the act and provocation of laughter and applause were frequently overdone, therefore risking laughter's divorce from spontaneous or genuine amusement on the part of the audience (Beerbohm had written similarly on the subject of music hall).[95] In Meynell's essay, the demonstrative activity of the laughing and applauding audiences transforms them into the performers. The actors become the audience by virtue of watching, awaiting and pandering to the audiences' sense of humour. As her

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[93] See Meynell (1909), 75-78.
[94] See George Bernard Shaw, "Plays Should Be Heard In Silence," *The Manchester Guardian* (1 January 1913), 7.
[95] See Max Beerbohm, "The Humour of the Public," *Yet Again* (London: Chapman and Hall Ltd, 1909), 247-261.

daughter Viola summarised in relation to her mother's work, "The audience's too-easy laughter brands them as bad players; the players' too-willing pandering to that laughter makes them a bad audience."[96] Just as she criticised the stage's reliance on comedy at the expense of other drama, she lamented the loud laughter of English theatre audiences, vaunting a quieter appreciation of humour and an increasing sensibility towards "the value of composure".[97] Meynell's deprecation of the overused, premeditated and performative nature of laughter (on and offstage) led to her recommendation in "Laughter" of the quiet "natural smile" over the loud laugh for signalling one's perception of humour.

The way Meynell challenged the patriarchal value system of laughter, in her essay on the subject, informs this recommendation. Indicative of her criticism of the contemporary importance of the laugh, it is significant that she praises the women whose laughter is "Childish […] and sweet": they "do not disturb themselves as to a sense of humour, but […] laugh from a sense of happiness."[98] For her, the loud laugh in vogue threatened to eclipse life's emotional array: it has a silent, yet important, role to play in patrolling the wings of the tragic stage. The Suffragette's assertions in *At the Gates*, by contrast, articulate the importance evidenced across the AFL's work attributed to the audience's role as laughers and applauders. It is "natural" that people will laugh and "rather hard on the actors" if their efforts are not met with applause: "I can't help thinking that the actors prefer a little applause just as a sign that the audience is sympathetic" (8). Her comments about applause would later be paralleled in the comments of the President of the AFL herself in *The Vote* on 9 July 1910. In an interview, Miss Gertrude Elliot (Mrs Forbes-Robertson) said that she believes in the applause "in spite of Mr. George Bernard Shaw". She claimed that it "puts one in touch with the audience. If the house is good to you you can do much more for them, and give them of your best."[99]

For the Suffragette, too, applause – and laughter itself – signal amusement and, moreover, sympathy. The audience's emotional or intellectual identification with a play's ideas are importantly communicated through this medium. Amongst the female members of the audience, this was a consciously defiant promotion that rejected the enduring impact of etiquette and urged politically affirming collective laughter. It implicitly acknowledged that to renounce the value system of laughter, according to Meynell's ideal, was unrealistic and problematic: the Suffragette recognises how laughter can be useful, while Meynell's conception risks women's proximity with the silence and tragedy from which women must escape. This importance draws into consideration the Suffragette's reference above to

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[96] Meynell (1929), 254.
[97] Meynell (1909), 32, 34.
[98] Meynell (1909), 32.
[99] M. O. Kennedy, "Miss Gertrude Elliott", *The Vote* (9 July 1910), 124.

"natural" laughter, which reflects not simply spontaneity on the part of the audience member; it also constitutes conscious cultivation by the playwright and actors.

A laugh of their own: establishing a politically powerful laughing community

The suffrage affiliation, including the important role played by the AFL, offered women – for one of the first times beyond their immediate neighbourhood – their own community that reflected and encouraged a specifically laughing defiance in the face of the opposition. While suffrage laughter was not defined by or contingent on the patriarchal sense of humour – loud and defiant, it sought primarily to please not men but themselves – its active cultivation nonetheless originated in the recognition of the cohesive and active power of that patriarchal laughing community. As seen in the plays of Robins, Brieux, and Bjørnson, laughter at once forms and supports a community, hitherto the exclusive privilege of men. Their humorous attitude (which, according to Freud, transfers burdens from the ego to the super-ego), means that men are able to trivialise concerns and suppress or redeploy would-be reactions, thus facilitating useful action, including that of oppositional laughter. In *An Englishwoman's Home*, John is able to escape to the men's club to find this "bright side" of life, as Maria remarks (12). By contrast, Maria laments (perhaps too overtly for the playwright's ultimate satisfaction, as it is crossed out), "Sorry I isn't a member" (12). As Meynell wrote, women did not have a club of their own and could only be admitted upon 'explanation' rather than as laughing citizens in their own right.

Thanks to suffrage, the "comrades" of *Lady Geraldine's Speech* possess their own laughing "club". The entertainment and buoyant attitude it cultivates are evident throughout the play, motivating and urging its community onwards. The experience of this laughter offstage, amongst the theatre audience, functioned in a similar way to encourage and unify. We are here perhaps reminded of Meredith's character Adrian Hartley who reflects on the relationship between the mournful wise and the Comic Muse: "You should find great poets, rare philosophers, night after night on the broad grin before a row of yellow lights and mouthing masks. Why? Because all's dark at home."[100] When the reality of women's literal home was, indeed, "all dark", playwrights deliberately cultivated for women a custom of laughter within this theatrical "club" in order that women might derive from it politically important relief and hope.

Indeed, reinforcing its political centrality within the AFL and wider movement, it is laughter itself that anticipates victory. In *A Pageant of Great Women*, laughter actually denotes the moment of triumph of gender equal power:

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[100] George Meredith, *The Ordeal of Richard Feverel: A History of Father and Son* (London: C. Kegan Paul & Co, 1878), 39.

> Now you laugh, but I
> Laugh too, a laughter without bitterness;
> Feeling the riot and rush of crowding hopes,
> Dreams, longings and vehement powers; and knowing this –
> 'Tis good to be alive when morning dawns! (8)

Reminiscent of Robins' empowered Hedda, the biblical allusions to an apocalyptic revolution stage laughter as both an actualised gift and a fuller promise: it provides joy in the present, which is but a reflection of the happiness that will one day be. As seen, the movement frequently presented its battle and goal spiritually, the militaristic WSPU in particular referencing the "fiery spirit of revolution united with religious solemnity" that *The March of the Women* captured.[101] For Vaughan, prefacing *The Woman with the Pack*, the "day is breaking" (10) and the Woman's face is "radiant with triumph" (85). The "limelight" (85) in this play that characterises the final battle becomes the "light of the rising dawn" in *An Allegory* that Man, Woman and Courage approach at the end of their journey just as the Slave Woman reaches out towards Woman with a smile (12). Despite its religious vocabulary, this future is firmly materialistic. The AFL reflects the wider movement's hope for an equal world in which laughter is both the facilitator and the ultimate goal. As seen, the movement was widely understood by members as a spiritual battle ordained by God, but the AFL's imagery of change is reflective most directly of the WSPU's use of apocalyptic language from which, beyond 1910, other organisations moved away.[102] On the stage, both personal affiliation and literary quality might explain the use of such rhetoric. Far from alienating, it would have been extensively resonant across any divisions.

This is the type of laughter Rosi Braidotti imagines to be at the very beginning of feminism, when "joy and laughter were profound political emotions and statements" and the "subversive force of Dionysian laughter" was felt.[103] This faith in laughter's ability to forge politically useful and soon-to-be victorious communities constitutes a unique moment in the feminist history of laughter. This is an important point to remember when considering suffrage laughter, particularly given more recent scepticism that risks influencing our retrospective impression of it. While feminism has frequently promoted laughter (such as second-wave feminism), the twentieth century has seen increased scepticism regarding laughter's utility as a weapon, influenced by the ideas of Bataille. As Parvulescu has stated, "Bataille's laughing specter haunts the twentieth century."[104] Although he (tellingly) offers no monological discourse on laughter, the influence of his meeting with Bergson in 1920 has

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[101] *Votes for Women* (20 January 1911), 423.
[102] Nym Mayhall (2003), 99.
[103] Rosi Braidotti, *Embodiment and Sexual Difference in Contemporary Feminist Theory* (New York: Columbia University Presses, 1994), 167.
[104] Parvulescu (2010), 79.

shaped our readings of laughter since. Whereas Bergson (in his notion that laughter is a corrective social gesture that singles out and represses certain behaviours) codified laughter into conservative results, Bataille "chose to prove that laughter was beyond truth and discourse."[105] It therefore becomes impossible to perceive laughter according to Bataille as a weapon; investment in it as any type of reassurance or hope is futile. Although he discusses a laughing community, his conception is significantly different from the AFL's. For Bataille, laughter brings together communities of individuals who lack a shared identity, cause, and leader. If infinitely inclusive, this community is also fragile.

Such scepticism certainly existed at the time of the AFL too: in *Ann Veronica* Wells mocked Miss Miniver's enthusiasm pertaining to "The dawn!" However, by looking back at suffrage, we are reminded of a time when for others laughter was truly imbued with the capacity to forge a politically significant community. The AFL endeavours evidence the belief – derived, indeed, from their observations of such power within masculine communities – that laughter could materially unite people in the cause, despite divisions and differences, and bring about real change. Without recognising this, it is too easy to dismiss such proclamations on laughter as trivial, meaningless or naïve. Suffrage utopianism and the AFL's almost paradoxical earnestness on the subject of laughter can best be understood as the profound experience of unapologetic political conviction that it was to many suffrage members at this time.

Women and the sense of humour

The rather aggressive insistence on the laughing disposition of these women, as seen in the song, the AFL reportage and the plays, is suggestive not only of a promotion amongst suffrage workers of this spirit but also of a wider and conscious rebranding, given the agelast or "humourless" stereotype that abounded. Parvulescu describes "the tradition of caricatures depicting the suffragette as temperance fanatic and pleasure-spoiler" in which "she is portrayed as extremely worried, angry, or bitter" and "laughter does not disturb the seriousness of her face."[106] This is a stereotype which, as Carolyn Christensen Nelson points out, has been attributed to "feminists generally", including on the stage; Grundy plays it up in his New Woman character of Mrs Sylvester, and Harraden in *Lady Geraldine's Speech* references this precise stereotype when Lady Geraldine congratulates herself on her successful persuasion of her suffragette friend Alice to write an anti-suffrage speech for her: "A-ha! I knew she would come round. These grim people are always the easiest to deal with"

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[105] Bénédicte Boisseron, "Georges Bataille's Laughter: A Poetics of *Glissement*", *French Cultural Studies* 21 (3) (2010), 167-177, 172.
[106] Parvulescu (2010), 19.

(4).[107] For Parvulescu, the "most serious charge" against the suffragette is not that she "does not have a sense of humor" or that "she does not get the joke" but that "she actually cannot laugh. Wrapped in her seriousness, she has forgotten how to laugh."[108] A serious charge because, as previously explored in Meynell's work, laughter was an abundant and vital part of every aspect of life, including politics. Society was deeply sceptical of those who supposedly could not laugh and revered those who were keen laughers. Having forgotten how to laugh, the important sense of humour is fundamentally elusive.

As John's comments about Maria show, it was not only suffragettes but women more widely who were accused of lacking a sense of humour; indeed, the fact that women were thus described made an easy stereotype of the "grim" suffragette. This reflects the dominant notion regarding the sense of humour at this time – which defined ridicule as the antithesis of femininity – and the exclusionary basis on which the sense of humour was subsequently constructed. While the dominant bourgeois Victorian notion of the sense of humour was based on a sympathetic, emotional identification and a laughing with others, this identification took on an intellectual nature through men of the period who rejected sentimentality and who denied women a sense of humour despite women's supposedly natural sympathetic appreciation. According to Wickberg and consistent with Tonnies' definition of laughter on the stage, within the gender ideology related to the sense of humour during this period men associated the sense of humour with the more intellectual "sympathy" of ridicule and coarseness, supposedly necessitated by their role within the public sphere. Just as this sphere was exclusively male, so too was the sense of humour itself.[109] Freud's conception drew the same conclusion from a different premise: that women do not need a sense of humour because they have fewer strong feelings to repress.

The playwrights of the AFL were writing at a time of vehement debate concerning the supposed gendered exclusivity of the sense of humour. In 1899, *The Speaker* saw evidence of the destructive trajectory of the woman's movement in an essay that appeared in *The Cornhill Magazine*. In this, Edith Slater and Frances H. Freshfield challenged the notion that women have no sense of humour, of which "a good deal of law [has been] laid down of late."[110] In a move that presages the AFL's own treatment of the subject, Slater and Freshfield asked whether such ideas indicate not women's lack, but men's. Noting that men will laugh at jokes that women will not, being "often […] against [women's] own sex," the article called into question the notion of quality and declared women's "spirit" to "naturally" resent such

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[107] Nelson (2004), xvii.
[108] Parvulescu (2010), 19.
[109] Wickberg (1998), 92.
[110] Edith Slater and Frances H. Freshfield, "The Sense of Humour in Men", *The Cornhill Magazine* 6. 33 (March 1899), 347.

jokes.[111] Touching upon, in addition, ideas of masculine cultivation of humour and feminine suppression, and communities of work that foster men's sense, the article suggested that if women do not laugh, it is not through a lack of humour or understanding as to what they should laugh at. It is this challenge that there is equality with men in the matter of humour that deeply troubles the author in *The Speaker* for whom, if such equality is permitted, "the knell of the race has struck."[112]

The Speaker was also a publication, however, that had previously conceded that these notions constituted a recent "conspiracy" against women in which writers represent them as "wholly lacking that divine quality" and even suggest they are "better without it."[113] As Oscar Wilde's Lord Illingworth remarks: "Nothing spoils a romance so much as a sense of humour in the woman."[114] The author in *The Speaker* finds no sign of this in Shakespeare's day, just as Ellen Terry in her lectures on Shakespeare showed. Dismissing "anti-feminist" ideas that Shakespeare's characterisation was motivated by masculine stage incarnation rather than his own observations of women, Terry cited an array of high-spirited triumphant women in a lecture that was reviewed in *The Vote* under the title "Shakespeare as Suffragist", making explicit the contemporary identification with his portrayal.[115] The witty repartee of Beatrice should be understood not as "malicious" but as the "lightest raillery, with mirth in the voice."[116] Crucially, she is not bitter (which, according to John in *An Englishwoman's Home* does not fit into the definition of the sense of humour) but is a sprightly, clever and attractive duelling master.

The intellectual show of wit, while distinct from the sense of humour, has certainly been understood as an aspect of it, as evidenced here by Terry as by Slater and Freshfield who discuss "witticisms" within their definition of the humorous sense. Drawing attention to their relationship, other formulations have observed humour as a "democratisation" of wit. The way Beatrice recalls many of Wilde's own heroines arguably calls into question the idea of this contemporary conspiracy. Yet, despite the stage success of such portrayals, John's understanding of women in *An Englishwoman's Home* testifies to the tenacity of such prejudice into the early twentieth century, of which Arncliffe-Sennett displays acute awareness. If women's humour initiative has traditionally been cast off as suspiciously over-informed wantonness – Shakespeare's heroines ran this risk, of which Meynell's invocation of *Troilus and Cressida* reminds us – by the early twentieth century the idea of the loose

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[111] Slater and Freshfield (1899), 349.
[112] […], "The Sense of Humour," *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 19 (4 March 1899), 257.
[113] L. F. A., "The Humour of Women," *The Speaker: The Liberal Review* 8 (2 December 1893), 604.
[114] Oscar Wilde's 1893 play *A Woman of No Importance* (Leipzig: Bernhard Tauchnitz, 1909), 53.
[115] *The Vote* (29 July 1911), 180.
[116] Ellen Terry, "The Triumphant Women", *Four Lectures on Shakespeare* (London: M. Hopkinson Ltd, 1932), 83.

tongue or laugh had transformed into a general sense of moral wanting: an unfeminine disrespect of superiors or an immoral condescension into masculine ridicule. As shown in the work of Slater and Freshfield, even those women protesting their humorous capacities maintained a moral superiority when considering ridicule as well as physical and coarse jokes, which they say women do not find funny.

Some AFL writers understood this moral emphasis as a means of control: punishment dispensed by men forbidding or demoting women's sense of humour in order to ensure that women learned to still their quick-witted tongue and their mocking laugh, for men's own preservation. On the one hand, given the value of the sense of humour, the stress on women's lack was a tactic employed to demean their social and literary position and to promote suspicion towards them. Particularly for the suffrage movement, this prejudice was a way of undermining their political endeavours and retaining patriarchal control. Suzanne Clark explains that masculine fears pertaining to their own identity inform the masculine construction of modernism and the demotion of women's writing to the sentimental.[117] To relegate women's sense of humour is to protect oneself from its potential humiliating aim. Ideas of women's seriousness in life and literature (as characters and writers) thus constituted deliberate and erroneous prejudice. In terms of women writers of humour, American Kate Sanborn had already brought together British and American women authors of wit and humour in *The Wit of Women* to discredit such ideas, published in England in 1885.[118] Likewise, in 1899 R. Y. Tyrrell protested that women occupied a "pre-eminent position" in English Literature.[119]

On the other hand, the notion of women's lack of humour reflected women's resistance to the humour hegemony due to the fact that they were its constant target (a resistance formalised by the suffrage movement). While this draws attention to laughter unacknowledged by the hegemony (thus undermining the fallacious idea of women's unlaughing demeanour), for Hamilton there was also some reality in the stereotype of the earnest suffragette in general, and she deemed this problematic. In one anecdote regarding a gathering at the Albert Hall of the Women's Liberation Federation, Hamilton lamented "how deadly earnest the suffragette could be!"[120] This attitude perhaps testifies to the same sense of moral responsibility in women's literature (as also seen in the AFL's early writing) that was detected by an 1896 *National Observer* article. This article argued how women writers stifled their humour "for the sake of humanity", reflecting badly upon what are equal abilities to men

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[117] See Suzanne Clark, *Sentimental Modernism: Women Writers and the Revolution of the Word* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991).
[118] Kate Sanborn, *The Wit of Women* (London: Funk & Wagnalls, 1885).
[119] "Sense of Humour in Women," *The Cornhill Magazine* 6. 35 (May 1899), 628.
[120] Hamilton (1935), 73.

in “real life”.[121] There were certainly grounds for such a serious disposition amongst women, yet the suffrage movement’s own activity on and offstage to dispel the humourless stereotype suggests they knew this was not helpful to their propaganda or their cause.

Theatre and the “saving salt of humour”

Specifically theatrically, the AFL was already attuned to the sort of ridicule that earnest performance might attract. Despite its own humour endeavours (to be later discussed), the very first suffrage play had been criticised and dismissed by some influential theatre critics on the very same grounds. While *Votes for Women!* certainly met with enthusiasm amongst suffrage audiences, others rejected and even ridiculed it for its reliance on sentimental and melodramatic acting. Reviewer Alex Thompson in *The Clarion* argued that Vida’s character (played by Miss Matthison) constituted a return to “the normal, the chronic”. He noted her teary performance as “stagey”, too conventional for and, therefore, “less tolerable at the Court than in any other theatre, because we are accustomed there to take our sentiment with the saving salt of humour.” Used to staging artistically innovative realism, at the Court Matthison’s “dolorous heaviness” felt artificial rather than, as it might elsewhere, moving.[122] If her performance might have been less incongruous at a different theatre, Robins – like her AFL friends – shared more in terms of social values if not yet style with this arena and its audiences than with nineteenth-century sentimentality. Such criticism seemed to suggest the real risk that the significance of their politics might be dismissed by potentially interested and, even, sympathetic audiences due to the conventional theatrical form they took.

Played by Dorothy Minto, Ernestine Blunt was, like Vida, similarly targeted for her earnest sentimentality. Reviews in the *Evening Standard and St James’s Gazette* used puns to mock Robins for “[sinking] the artist in the earnest”.[123] In this figure, the moral earnestness associated with women’s writing had been combined with the “feminised sentimental”, both of which were ridiculed as theatrically inelegant. This contributed to negative reviews of the play as well as, indeed, to the ridicule of the appreciative side of the audience. This is the tone of Hankin’s aforementioned review in *The Academy* in 1907. To him, the audience is a “congregation,” arrived “in the missionary spirit.” His tentative employment of the feminine of propagander – “propagoose” – accentuates the mocking tone towards these suffrage followers, suggestive of their ardent, pious naivety. Here, both artist and audience lose critical respect, enabling the important arguments of Robins’ work to be dismissed in ridicule.

In the modern theatre, it seems, there was not so much concern over women emulating

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[121] A Special Pleader, “The Humour of Women”, *The National Observer and British Review of Politics, Economics, Literature, Science and Art* 17. 420 (5 December 1896), 68.
[122] *The Clarion* (19 April 1907), 3.
[123] 10 April 1907 in Thomas (1994), 78.

"masculine" humour, but over their not doing it enough. Suffrage theatre faced the conundrum of expressing ardent beliefs in a manner that would be approved by the early twentieth-century world of theatre. As Henry Nevinson had shown in a 1912 article for *Votes for Women*, a humorous tone need not be incongruous with strong conviction: "Mr. Zangwill, one of the wittiest of living writers, is one of the most sincere. Like Mr. Bernard Shaw, he has proved that laughter and irony can go side by side with intense earnestness of purpose. The reformer is not necessarily a stuffy and solemn person."[124] Both Shaw and Zangwill were devoted to several causes and their writing reflected their politics.[125] Their commitments also included suffrage, as explored in relation to Shaw in Chapter Five. This article suggests both admiration and promotion amongst the periodical's reformist readers. In arguing that laughter and irony can go "side by side" with earnest purpose, Nevinson elevates these weapons to the position of fellow comrades in battle – legitimate, even indispensible, assistants.

Laughter as propaganda

The fact that this tactic had been employed by suffrage for quite a number of years by the time of his writing, and in theatre since the very beginning of suffrage drama, shows that Nevinson's comment also constitutes an encouragement of strategy. Offstage, the new century of suffrage workers consciously rejected the rule-abiding activities of their predecessors.[126] Although it is important to understand militancy in a continuum with its nineteenth-century forms, the early twentieth century marked an awareness amongst the movement that fervent insistence on the seriousness of their cause that had largely characterised activity thus far had been lamentably greeted by a refusal to see it as anything but laughably trivial. In an ostensibly paradoxical attempt to overturn this reception (but not when we note the contemporary politicisation of laughter), some divisions turned to overtly playful militant activity. A sense of their consciously performed cheekiness is given by Ray Strachey's account of the way these exuberant suffragettes cross-dressed, chained themselves to railings and statues, "sprang out of organ lofts, […] peered through roof windows, and leapt out of innocent looking furniture vans."[127]

In *Votes for Women!* Vida unites these offstage militant strategies with drama's own when she says that militancy (specifically, their disturbance at the House of Commons) "seems not such a bad way to get it known they *do* want something – and (*smiling*) 'want it bad'" (ii.32). When repeating her claim, a smile similarly accompanies her declaration that the suffragettes

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[124] H. W. N., "The Next Religion", *Votes for Women* (26 April 1912), 477.
[125] See, for example, Zangwill's 1908 play *The Melting Pot* in relation to his support of the movement for an independent Jewish state, and Shaw's socialist beliefs in *Mrs Warren's Profession*.
[126] Spender in Lacey and Hayman (eds.) (1985), 7.
[127] Ray Strachey, *The Cause* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1928), 312.

acted "in the only way left them. (*sits ~~craning~~ leaning forward reflectively smiling, chin in hand*)" (i.34). Contemporary understandings of smiles put them in close relationship to laughter. Sully, taking the lead from Darwin's own gradation, stated: "A smile is [...] rightly regarded as an incomplete laugh."[128] Chafe emphasises this relationship when he points out that one can hear the smile if performed simultaneously with speech, due to a shortening of the vocal tract.[129] It is possible that the actress's voice would have slightly altered upon her words "want it bad", since the stage directions inform us that she is already smiling by this point. Vida's incomplete laugh is thus poised at the moment she discusses women's militant tactics, a half-laugh accompanied by a half-movement "leaning forward" as if of action. Staging the battle between etiquette and an emergent political laugh, Vida paves the way for how theatrical laughter will become a politicized act for suffrage, just like the comic disruptions offstage.

Suffrage antics were numerous, but one stands out for its parallel with the AFL's stage presentation. On 25 April 1913, *Votes for Women* shared a story of an incident which took place the Friday prior in which "two Women Suffragists", Gertrude E. Shaw and Ethel Spark, captured Monument (near London Bridge), having trapped the attendants in their office. They held it for an hour "during which they hauled down the City flag, substituted for it the purple, white and green *criflamme* of the militants, hung out a black cloth banner inscribed in white letters with the words, 'Death or Victory.'" The women proceeded to distribute hundreds of propaganda flyers entitled "A Mother's Appeal" on topics such as sweating and white slave traffic, "thus adding a serious note to the demonstration."[130] According to Shaw and Spark, their aim was to attract attention in a safe manner and to do something "monumental" to remove the impression that the suffragettes "lack a sense of humour".[131] At the very heart of their motivation lay a desire to alter the general impression of the suffragettes with regard to the sense of humour. In this sense, this was not separate but crucial to the "serious note" of the demonstration.

Critics used this incident as evidence of the "diseased mentality" of suffrage and, in their portrayal of Shaw and Spark as "pale and dishevelled", suggested the just consequences of such errant behaviour.[132] The women took offence at this description of themselves – asserting their elation to correct their representation – as they also did to the descriptions of

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[128] Sully (1902), 26: "The Smile and the Laugh, viewed as physiological events, stand in the closest relation one to the other." More recent scientific investigations of laughter emphasise the complexity of this relationship. See Provine (2000), 52; 167-8.
[129] Chafe (2007), 51.
[130] "The Capture of the Monument: 'Two on a Tower' – Suffragette Flag Flies Over the City – London's Laughter", *Votes for Women* (25 April 1913), 425.
[131] "Suffragettes Capture a London Monument", *Nelson Evening Mail* (28 June 1913), 5.
[132] Reported in ibid.

the crowd as an "infuriated mob". A press image reveals that those who witnessed the spectacle were mainly working men who, according to Shaw and Spark, were "distinctly complimentary to our pluck and our determination." [133] *Votes for Women* likewise insisted on Londoners' positive reception of this mischievous incident. It asserted, "The City rocked with laughter," citing the comments in the *Evening News* for substantiation, "One cannot laugh and be seriously angry at the same time."[134]

This incident is closely reminiscent of the "latest man prank the Zealots have been up to" cited in the play *The Better Half*, published in the same year (43). From Lady Diana we learn that this has something to do with "the church steeple" – given its height, the steeple, like Monument, commanded visual attention, allowing the Zealots to perform their tricks and prove their humour to mass audiences (43). Like the reportage of the incident at Monument, Lady Diana learns of it through a suffrage paper. Even as an anti, she asserts that she found it "humorous," in the same way that *Votes for Women* claimed that a wide audience found the suffrage prank amusing rather than infuriating (43). Garland's account captures the contemporary importance of the public refutation of the agelast suffrage stereotype and of the concomitant promotion of their sense of fun. Harraden's portrayal – in defiance of the "grim" stereotype – had sought earlier to do the same, as can also be said of Nell, Lady Susie, and Maudie Spark, for instance. The League was keen to show to a wider audience that these women – and, by possible extension where they were women, their creators – possessed a good sense of humour, joining a chorus of men and women who were protesting the same.

Conclusion: towards a suffrage sense of humour

Early on in suffrage theatre, Blunt in *Votes for Women!* asserted what would be women's relationship to oppositional laughter when she declared that ridicule "steels a woman. We've come to know the value of ridicule" (ii.6). Hitherto a masculine assessment of the sense of humour, Blunt humorously seizes the word "value", wrenching it from the grasp of the opposition and appropriating it for women, asserting that their defiance towards anti-suffrage laughter will be a laughing one. Both the on and offstage incidents depicted in this chapter demonstrate how well suffrage understood that representations of themselves could dramatically manipulate public and political perceptions of the movement. Instead of being indifferently or angrily dismissed as an unlaughing and fanatical cliché, people bestow attention and even respect on those who demonstrate "good" shows of humour, while the notion of "good" is being purposely challenged by this community that consciously sets itself apart from patriarchal complicity. As seen, while laughter is by no means coterminous with

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[133] Ibid. For press image, see Museum of London, 1913-04; 50.82/1310.
[134] *Votes for Women* (25 April 1913), 425.

humour, the evident predisposition towards joyous entertainment of the laughter that rejects bitterness demands this interpretation in the context of contemporary notions of the sense of humour. Provoking irresistible displays of humour, such women asserted their ability to laugh and, in so doing, implicitly validated the important existence of their own sense of humour. This conscious representation aimed to convert. Just as Lady Geraldine is inquisitive about the suffrage spirit surrounding her, the onstage portrayal of this laughing community sought to serve as enticing propaganda to waverers. It acts as reassurance that to be associated with the suffrage movement was not to be part of a serious, ugly, bitter or fanatical group of individuals, a stereotype which acted for many as a barrier to this movement, but to be a member of a humorous, supportive, and principled collective.

It is these insights regarding the cohesive and propagandist advantages of laughter that inform the entire humour strategy of the AFL. Having established the way the AFL increasingly and consciously promoted laughter in defiance of circumstance, the following chapters consider its specific direction (in addition to the sense of fun towards one's situation shown here): the mocking laughter aimed at the antis, the laughing entertainment provided by physical comedy and, lastly, the laugh that suffrage turned upon itself. In so doing, it will be shown how the AFL sought to establish a specifically suffrage sense of humour that, inspired by yet distinct from the humour hegemony, challenged how and at what one should laugh.

Chapter Three

Making a mockery: women's jeers and the anti-suffragists

Introduction

The suffrage spirit discussed in the previous chapter incorporated an expression not only of a humorous perspective regarding women's circumstances but also regarding those people who perpetuate women's hardship and oppose their progress. Thanks to suffrage, Esther in *Jim's Leg* no longer fears or suffers her aggressor; in fact, like Young Person and Maria, she is able to laugh at him. This is not the laughter of despair and acceptance towards men we see in some plays, but the laughter of amusement, delight, and optimism. In his 1913 article, Frederick W. Pethick Lawrence described this "amused attitude on the part of women" in which women "are quietly laughing at you and me and the rest of our sex and particularly at the men in the House of Commons."[1] This chapter considers the reasons for and cultivation of this amusement within the AFL towards such men as well as, more generally, the numerous anti-suffrage leagues that were set up at the same time as the founding of the theatrical League.

According to anti-suffragists, the laws of suffrage were justified on the grounds of men's intellectual and physical superiority, as opposed to women's inferiority on those two accounts. With the exception of the matter of physical superiority, which is the subject of Chapter Four, this chapter considers the way that suffrage mockery was employed to attack the prejudice and stereotypes regarding gender that underpinned the conservatism of anti-suffrage arguments and attitudes. An exploration of the way suffrage mockery challenged contemporary understandings of women's humour elucidates the political significance of the AFL's direct inversion of anti-suffrage stereotype, while a consideration of the conceptions of social and theatrical laughter shows how this inversion sought to create meaningful and compelling humour as well as consequently powerful offstage communities of sympathy and support. In so doing, mockery is proposed as a central theatrical tool within suffrage theatre, more radical than has been previously acknowledged.

The anti-suffrage pantomime

From the very beginning, anti-suffragists, and the political position they represented, were the source of much amusement in AFL meetings. In mid-December 1908, the Criterion Restaurant in London was host to the AFL's first public meeting. During the meeting, Hamilton told an "amusing story" concerning a speaker at an anti-suffrage meeting who had

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[1] F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, *Votes for Women* (30 May 1913), 507.

stated that, "women should not be given the vote because it was their duty to stay at home and console their husbands." [2] The *Stage* reported that Hamilton expressed incomprehension at why a husband "should need consoling" and articulated concern over women's capacity to fulfil this life mission "should they happen not to possess a husband."[3] Hamilton's mocking and sarcasm, derived from the one-dimensionality of woman established by anti-suffrage rhetoric, is captured in the *Stage*'s understatement ("there might be difficulty") and in her depiction of the enfeebled husband.

The anti-suffrage position was at base an easy and wide source of suffrage entertainment. Zangwill pointed out that the "very notion" of an anti-suffrage league "is only fit for the pantomime season – for what can be more topsy-turvey than for women to rush into a political agitation to prove that woman's place is the home?"[4] The idea of a female anti-suffragist public speaker and campaigner, of which there were many, was widely recognised as highly ironic. Mrs Humphry Ward was a particularly vocal member of the opposition, believing that women's moral influence could be "seriously impaired" by women's unnatural admission into the "turmoil of active political life."[5] In a 1910 contribution to *Votes for Women*, Robins pointed out the irony of such women's work: "Lord Cromer and his friends cannot reasonably ask their Anti-Suffragist ladies to go about arguing in public that women should keep out of public life."[6]

The hypocrisy of this position is dramatised in *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*. Having tried to persuade Mrs Chicky that women's place is not in politics, anti-suffragist Mrs Holbrook then zealously declares that "you and I and millions of other women who know better" must stop those few with the "ridiculous idea that they ought to have votes" (3). Pausing, leaning on her broom-handle, and asking "<u>as if seeking light</u>", Mrs Chicky uses a pretence of confusion to emphasise the irony herein: "Then I '<u>ave</u> got to trouble me 'ead about pollytics, after all?" (3). The opposition relied heavily on the vocal and financial support of women – Robins points out that the Anti-Suffragists had already succeeded in raising £100, 000 – all the while declaiming women's capacity for public service.[7] Members of the suffrage movement were aware of the opportunism displayed in this inconsistent attitude. As pointedly expressed by Robins, the line between "laudable and reprehensible activity is found, on examination, to be

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[2] *The Stage* (24 December 1908) in Whitelaw (1990), 78.
[3] Ibid.
[4] Israel Zangwill, "Anti-Suffrage Humours", *The Vote* (31 December 1910), 119.
[5] Mrs Humphry Ward, "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage" in Rosemary J. Mundhenk and LuAnn McCracken Fletcher (eds.), *An Anthology of Victorian Prose* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1999), 419.
[6] Elizabeth Robins, "Mr Partington's Mop", *Votes for Women* (12 August 1910), 755.
[7] Ibid.

strangely arbitrary."[8] As illustrated by Glover in her play, the suffrage movement found humorous fault with the logic of members of the anti-suffrage league as a whole, as well as with that of the leading politicians who ratified proceedings. According to Pethick Lawrence, men's actions have never been "half so engaging, half so supremely ridiculous!"[9] To emphasise the total illogicality of the anti-suffrage position, in *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, one man's attendance at an anti meeting actually facilitates his conversion to suffrage. Nellie recounts this to her assembled and delighted group: her story, as well as the laughter which accompanies it, testify to the humorous entertainment derived from the anti-suffragists (10).

Mockery and the suffrage movement

If the anti-suffrage opposition presented an easy and enjoyable source of humour, active mockery was cultivated with an earnestness of purpose as a central, satisfying and indispensable tactic of platform suffrage. As Cowman has written, during a time when women were considered inferior to men (and, indeed by political standards, *were* inferior), "many suffragettes found that provoking laughter at the expense of their opponents created a powerful and subversive weapon which they put to good use in their campaigns."[10] Eva Moore described Christabel Pankhurst's ready wit to be particularly outstanding. Detailing one incident in which a man asked her what would happen to "the home" if both he and his wife got into Parliament, Christabel replied, "I don't know your wife, sir [...] she might, of course, be returned for Parliament; but you – oh! (*very soothingly*) I don't think *you* need to worry!"[11] Reflecting such incidents, Dangerfield described the "ruthless and intractable spirit behind [Christabel's] friendly appearance" when she "smiled happily at an insistent heckler, and suddenly threw back the unanswerable retort."[12]

Taking their lead from the masculine world of politics in which heckling was a central and respected tactic, the way women enjoyed deriding their opponents is also represented in the plays. When, in *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, Alice prevents Baillie from attending a meeting in order to "heckle" Geraldine, the latter is most disappointed (12-13). In a reversal of the amusing suffrage spectacle, Baillie speaks of the meeting as of a comic show, going to the effort of buying a ticket "surreptitiously and with the utmost difficulty" in order to enjoy the scene.[13] Likewise, in *The Pot and the Kettle*, Nell is envious of Lady Susie's attendance at an anti-suffragist meeting and the ensuing havoc that she provoked and enjoyed: "Good Lord, to

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[8] Ibid.
[9] F. W. Pethick-Lawrence, *Votes for Women* (30 May 1913), 507.
[10] Cowman (2007), 266.
[11] Eva Moore, *Exits and Entrances* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1923), 91.
[12] Dangerfield (1961), 169.
[13] This is not present in the manuscript (it was possibly on page 13, which is half cut out.) See Gardner (1985), 56.

think what a treat I've missed. I could kick myself when I think of it. I'd have given my best hat to be there – and a pair of boots thrown in" (6). Like Baillie, Nell's description of this meeting as a "treat" sets it up as a comedy theatre spectacle or, to take Zangwill's term, a "pantomime", for which she would do anything to get a sought-after seat. On and offstage, women seem to have taken their lead from the masculine world of politics in which heckling and mocking humour were, as explored in Chapter One, central and respected tactics.

The vexed matter of women's mockery

For a woman to laugh critically towards something that or someone who has not been ratified as ridiculous by the dominant group has been historically a socially dangerous position to put herself in. As Mary Daly has written, "There is only one taboo for titterers: they must never laugh seriously at Father – only at his jokes."[14] Here, "Father" is an abstract noun to signify the patriarchy while alluding also to each individual patriarchal male. As seen, at this time women's relationship to laughter was, by the standards of etiquette, to be one of conformity and coquetry which, consequently, assured their protection. Robins pointed out that women had learned not to laugh at men due to the dangerous repercussions. In *The Convert*, Blunt shows that, although women have noticed how "ridiculous" men can be, they have "never dared break it to them." Instead, she continues, "we've done all our laughing in our sleeves" to the extent that "some years our sleeves had to be made – like balloons!"[15]

Stetz has described the influence of this historical relationship between women and laughter on literature: "to survey women's comic fiction in Britain alone, from the eighteenth-century to the present, is to find one scene after another of female protagonists attempting, successfully or unsuccessfully, to suppress their immediate response to ridiculous circumstances or being punished in some way for not attempting to do so."[16] Reflecting this prohibition, Stetz describes women's relationship with laughter as "vexed" and "problematic".[17] Unable to express themselves in this way, women remain subject to patriarchal control. The suffrage movement was conscious of this dynamic, and the way it had been shown to be damaging to the movement. Acutely aware of the inevitability of humour surrounding the issue of suffrage, the movement knew that without inverting – instead solely denouncing the humour hegemony - women remain the perpetual butt. Reliant as the joke is on the construction of women's ignorance, this means that they are kept in a position of inferiority. It is, for example, notions of women's naivety that enabled and perpetuated the

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[14] Mary Daly, *Gyn/Ecology: The Metaethics of Radical Feminism* (London: The Women's Press, 1984), 17.
[15] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 98.
[16] Stetz (2001), viv.
[17] Stetz (2001), viv.

controlling laughter of politicians whose political games – promising then revoking suffrage bills, rejecting deputations, bequeathing support for personal gain – successfully thwarted suffrage progress. The power dynamic of the inevitable joke highlights that the success of women's emancipation necessarily calls not only for a challenge of hegemonic humour, but for its inversion.

Mockery and the AFL

While Blunt's reference above to women's "daring" critique of men serves primarily to emphasise the difficult nature of women's relationship with their own laughter, it also implicitly suggests that with sufficient courage, it might be importantly overcome. As evidenced by members of the on and offstage suffrage movement, the "sense of power" that Gail Finney observes to be "central to the creation of humor, which is in turn empowering," was derived from precisely that group.[18] Zangwill's *Prologue* marks the most direct theatrical invocation of mockery as a suffrage strategy, and his depiction draws attention to the reasons why it was specifically the suffrage movement that offered women a unique public opportunity to express themselves in this way. Significantly, the *Prologue* was first performed, according to Viv Gardner, in 1910 for the Croyden WSPU, emphasising the mutual identification with this tactic. It was staged several times, "most notably" at the 1911 AFL Matinee at the Lyceum.[19]

In this piece, Zangwill speculates that Ophelia's attitude to her circumstances would have been different had "To vote or not to vote […] been the question" (9). Rather than responding to criticism and rejection with the renounced tragedy of suicide, Zangwill imagines that Ophelia would have instead "met, with mocking flout, / Hamlet's male insolence of sneer and doubt"; instead of accepting her tragic end, Ophelia simply dismisses Hamlet's "suicide-suggestion" with well-placed irony, shouting "Nunnery forsooth!" (9). Empowered and undeterred, she "thunders suffrage from the castle-platform" (9). Like Robins' reincarnated Hedda, Ophelia derives laughing strength from being part of a larger cause which, in turn, affords her a resilient robustness that bolsters and empowers her political action. In demonstrating the intimidating power that this attitude would have provided this theatrical protagonist most overtly associated with tragic hysteria, Zangwill consciously reflects and promotes this strategy amongst not only the offstage movement but amongst stage heroines too. Shakespearean actress Fay Davis was one of the women who performed this *Prologue*, and "most effectively", at the AFL matinee (27 October 1911).[20] Recasting the very epitome

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[18] Gail Finney, *Look Who's Laughing: Gender and Comedy* (Berkshire: Gordon and Breach, 1994), 3.
[19] Gardner (1985), 6.
[20] *The Vote* (4 November 1911), 19.

of feminized literary suffering into a suffrage champion of mockery, this performance would have been widely resonant amongst theatre audiences.

Zangwill was one of many men and women writers for the AFL engaged in an ongoing act of recasting at this time, consciously swapping tragic for mocking Ophelias, just as occurred offstage. Humorously emphasised by her very name, Mrs Chicky's mocking strategy evidences the conscious ploy behind suffrage amusement which carries far more intent than at first might be credited to it. Faced with Mrs Holbrook's arguments that uphold patriarchal views about the physical and intellectual attributes of man that qualify his access to a vote, Mrs Chicky is unable to contain her laughter. She discloses both the physically and intellectually compromised capacity of a paralysed man she assisted to vote. As Mrs Holbrook protests that "it's not just the voting! Look how this Mr Welby had probably <u>studied</u> the question, and how he – what's the matter?" Mrs Chicky "<u>emits strangled sounds</u>" representing her impossible attempt to politely stifle her laughter: "On'y – on'y you'll eggscuse me larfin' 'M., but Tom Welford can't read" (12). This laughter is loud and, by Mrs Chicky's own admission, rude as she fails to control her sense of the ludicrous. There is a freedom here and an enjoyment which supposes at first to be spontaneous as well as kindly. Yet the friendly sympathy which Mrs Chicky claims to have for Mrs Holbrook's ignorance, as when she exclaims "Bless your 'eart" and apologises for her laughter, is surely undermined by the intentionality with which Mrs Chicky goes about her discussion (7). We understand her ostensibly accidental exposure of Mrs Holbrook's ignorance to be expertly calculated when, upon discovery, Mrs Chicky mischievously reveals "something approaching a grin" (15). She plays on Mrs Holbrook's class stereotypes about ignorance and employs faux sympathy which, purporting to be kind, is mocking. Mrs Chicky in fact makes no attempt to restrain her laughter; her polite pretence is a mocking ruse for a game in which her very goal is to poke fun at Mrs Holbrook. It constitutes loud and strategic rebellion: rather than another attempt to suppress her response, Mrs Chicky's laughter mocks such caution and delights in its release. The "strangled sounds" which she emits are, therefore, not the repressed laugh but, instead, its long-awaited release.

Here, Glover demonstrates how turning the laugh onto the anti-suffragists can dramatically upset the onstage power dynamic between the two parties. Where Mrs Holbrook had held Mrs Chicky up as the logical and ignorant humour target, Mrs Chicky's mockery challenges these assumptions, to Mrs Holbrook's surprise and shame. In so doing, her dominance is disrupted and she accords Mrs Chicky albeit suspicious attention. This mocking strategy achieves this by proving the fallacy of the butt's ignorance, an idea on which the success of the joke is based if it is to establish unidirectional laughter against the target. If the target itself laughs – except in complicity – the lines of power are destabilised. This is shown time and again

throughout the plays as apparent in-jokes of politicians are undermined by suffrage's appropriation of this humour. *Clowning Street* and *The Better Half* wittingly cite, for example, the political tactics of procrastination and flattery, mocking them as examples of ignorance and prejudice that self-servingly seek to control women's progress.

In an extension of this mockery, in *Alice in Ganderland* Housman makes his self-satisfied characters vocally transparent about these political games, or "riddles" (9). On giving Alice "nothing" while purporting to offer her a "present", Hatter explains this to be logically necessary to politics' treatment of suffrage: "There isn't anything there – yet. It's all in the future" (12). The present was merely a promise, "something you can't have now but may have some day"; apparently this is something Alice would understand had she "studied party politics long enough" (12). Hare pertinently points out that the Liberal Women's Federation "could explain it to you in a minute [...] They understand politics" (17). Emphasising that women refuse to be outwitted, Alice plays Hatter at his own game, using his riddles against him. When he asserts that saying what you mean is not the same as meaning what you say is "not the same thing at all. You might just as well say, 'I preach what I practise' is the same thing as 'I practise what I preach,'" Alice confidently retorts: "Oh, no. I should never have said that of you" (9). Likewise, when the assembled group think they have successfully triumphed over Alice's proclamation that she cannot take any more tea because she has not yet had any, she reasserts her superiority. In response to the Hatter's assertion that "It's very easy to take more than nothing," Alice denies his wit and logic and succinctly replies, "I've not found it so" (14). Rebuffing and destroying his riddles, Alice and Housman use anti-suffrage humour against itself to turn the political laugh onto its original perpetrators. Such mirroring is paralleled in the play's use of metatext: Alice's recitation of Housman's poem *Woman This and Woman That* (21) which documents anti-suffrage laughter is answered by the suffrage laughter of *The March of the Women* (22), sung most likely in its entirety at the end of the performance. Mocking men, their jokes and the foolish tactics of anti-suffrage, these playwrights show that women are not ignorant targets. Women's refusal to inhabit this place within the humour dynamic undermines the onstage strength of anti-suffrage humour. Moreover, it is indicated how turning the laugh on the anti-suffragists instead might challenge their political position and, concomitantly, assert suffrage superiority.

The use of mockery across the plays

The suffrage observation that mockery might usefully unsettle established power assumptions compelled its use within the AFL theatre where it was employed as a means of challenging the strength of the anti-suffrage position. To use Zangwill's terms, the "mocking flout" of the AFL targeted a wide range of common anti-suffrage "sneering" and "doubting"

arguments, considered across the following analysis. Anti-suffragists held a wide range of specific arguments against suffrage, exampled in a variety of pamphlets and manifestos, such as Lord Curzon's *Fifteen Good Reasons Against the Grant of Female Suffrage*.[21] Itself invoked in H. M. Paull's *An Anti-Suffragist* or *The Other Side* (published by the AFL in 1910 and performed at the Rehearsal Theatre in March 1911), Curzon's reasons are cited below as exemplar arguments for the purposes of grouping and contextualising instances of mockery, in order to highlight their place within the wider suffrage debate. This survey seeks to demonstrate the preponderance, content, target and variety in order, therefore, to demonstrate the importance of mockery within suffrage theatre. In so doing, a greater understanding of the specific suffrage reason(s) for its use within the AFL theatre is sought.

"Political activity will tend to take away woman from her proper sphere and highest duty, which is maternity."[22]

One of the main arguments against suffrage pertained to contemporary ideas of femininity and the separate spheres. Gentle and innocent, women should remain within their private, domestic sphere; women's "feminine" duties relating to the home would be apparently corrupted by politics should the vote be granted. Hamilton alludes directly to this argument in *How the Vote was Won* when Horace lends Williams a pamphlet published by the Men's League for Opposing Women's Suffrage, entitled "Where's the Wash-tub now?" with a preface by Lord Curzon (148). This constitutes a spoof of contemporary fear mongering about the likely impact of suffrage. Such corruption was supposedly already evidenced in the suffragettes; their "ugliness" and "frigidity" presaged the inevitable and dangerous compromise that the beautiful and fecund feminine state would suffer. Garland, in her highly satiric play *The Better Half*, cites this idea in the observation that male suffrage might encourage "a race of effeminate men": "You would see men probably wheeling perambulators in the Park [...] When once strong men stoop to folly there's no knowing where the end will be" (17). The panicked hysteria mimics and exaggerates those who expressed such concerns, thus satirising their belief as foolish.

The Pot and the Kettle also reveals such fears to be unfounded. In contrast to anti-suffragist Marjorie's public lifestyle, which causes her to neglect her domestic duties, suffragette Nell's own behaviour has become increasingly domestic, much to the sneering and self-satisfied delight of Marjorie's fiancé Ernest. Nell has taken over Marjorie's duties, caring for her aunt and uncle which, as Nell declares, is "just as well, isn't it, now that Marjorie's

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[21] Curzon, who would in 1912 become President of the National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, first cited his arguments in a 1909 speech. Exact date of leaflet publication is unknown. (London: National League for Opposing Woman Suffrage, 1910-1914?).
[22] Curzon, argument 1.

political views take her out so much" (3). She even makes a "quite decent salad dressing" for Marjorie's return from the meeting. Nell offers this in a "*kindly*" tone; we are to know that her caring domesticity is willingly and genuinely offered; it is not employed in sole service of mocking intent (6). However, the attentiveness with which Nell vocally draws attention to the juxtaposition between Marjorie's behaviour and her own demonstrates how Nell also consciously and opportunistically employs her behaviour in service of anti-suffrage mockery. This consciously highlights and challenges the ignorance of those who subscribe to this stereotype, simultaneously promoting suffrage members who are far removed from the feared, unsexed radical of the popular imagination.

If Nell mocks the anxieties surrounding the perceived disruption of the spheres, Vida goes further to challenge received notions of feminine duty. Greatorex fears Vida's involvement in the matter of public "drains" and "baths", concerned about the way this might compromise her femininity and feminine respectability. When asked by an incredulous and worried Greatorex whether or not she realises she is dealing with "*drains*", Vida replies in the affirmative, "I'm dreadfully afraid it is!" (i.11). Her ironic appropriation of the intensifier "dreadfully" mocks both Greatorex's horror and his notions of respectability, highlighting the humorous disparity between his revulsion and Vida's independent capability. While this heightens the sense of mockery for the audience, her use of mock horror assures that, onstage, her derision retains a subtle kindness. This is likewise shown when Greatorex suggests that Italian literature might be "more savoury for a woman," to which Vida replies with an ironic question: "But for the tramp population less conducive to savouriness, don't you think, than baths?" (i.11). Vida mocks Greatorex's myopic and selfish attitude pertaining both to politics and women, the comic juxtaposition of literature and tramps challenging ideas of respectability and feminine responsibility. However, Vida's questioning technique retains an albeit ironic hesitancy which assures that Greatorex, shocked though he is, remains oblivious to her personal mockery.

Serving as this subtly does to emphasise his prejudiced ignorance, it is harder for the audience to ignore Vida's mockery. Her technique reveals the way men's prejudiced understanding of women provides them comfort and control. When the women's political conversation is interrupted by the men's enquiry into what they are discussing, Vida's sarcastic subscription to the gender dichotomy – "The latest thing in veils" – shows up men's relieved veneration of the "invincible frivolity of woman!" This is "a very proper tonic" for a respectable woman (i.36-37). Aware that even political women are susceptible to such ideas, Vida aims her mockery also at them. When she mocks Lady John's confidence – based on presumptions about the respectable woman – that Jean will not be interested by the women's talk of sanitary baths and therefore should leave, Vida's tone again purports more towards

hospitality than hostility as she states apparently rhetorically "*in the tone of one agreeing*" that "It's only an effort to meet the greatest evil in the world?" (i.16). There is no sign that Mrs Heriot and Lady John feel affronted by Vida's challenge, although Vida's comment does intrigue Jean. Her mocking technique aims to challenge the audience's own notions of women's duties, proposing respectable and noble service for women outside the home.

Vida's own overt femininity – her clothes and her charm – helps to promote this idea of respectable public duty. If it was believed that suffrage would endanger women's role in the home, a more general disintegration of feminine norms was attributed to the corruption of the separate spheres, evidenced by several characters across the plays who cite the suffragettes as proof of this. For Horace, in *How the Vote Was Won*, the suffragettes are the antithesis to femininity, as when he laments to Agatha, "All this sounds as if you had become a Suffragette! Oh, Agatha, I always thought you were a lady" (152). Greatorex regresses to stereotype to express exactly what sort of woman – the "typical English spinster" – should engage herself in charity work. Due to Vida's appearance, Greatorex is incredulous that she might be engaged with the political movement of suffrage: "Not people like you." He offers that Vida is "much too" (implied) pretty to be a suffragette (i.11). *The Pot and the Kettle* reveals that it is not only men who share this prejudice. Like her fiancé, Marjorie is taken in by popular stereotype, surprised to find that the lady at her anti meeting with the "fawn coat and a black hat with daisies in it" was really a suffragette because Lady Susie "looked just like anyone else" (11).

In the figures of Vida and Lady Susie, the playwrights use their suffrage characters as a means of visual contradiction. In so doing, they "unmask" the antis as the source of the stereotype message as well as the interests it serves, a central tactic for dispelling such stereotype that Tickner also finds in suffrage images.[23] Horace's exaggeration and Greatorex's display of horror and disgust comically reinforce the prejudice and ignorance of those who are susceptible to such prejudice, urging audience mockery towards them. The active work of onstage characters further implores the direction of this exposing and mocking laughter. Vida's tone seeks to tease Greatorex's conviction that she is not a suffragette, as when she replies, "How do you know?" (i.13). She lightly challenges the steadfast opinions of this man, as she continues to do when he asserts as evidence that Vida's "frocks aren't serious enough" (i.13). For her onstage acquaintance, her mocking tone remains typically subtle; like her teasing, it retains an ironic hesitancy that proclaims received knowledge rather than personal conviction. Her suggestion that suffrage women's dullness and dowdiness is an "exploded notion" supposes to be casual hearsay ("I'm told"), which serves to heighten her mocking tone for the audience (i.13). By referring to "an exploded notion", Vida mocks and

[23] Tickner (1987), 173.

challenges Greatorex's ideas as woefully outdated and domineering; her promotion of a new, public duty for women is aided by her own unthreatening femininity.

"[Political activity] will tend by the divisions which it will introduce to break up the harmony of the home."[24]

In *The Pot and the Kettle*, it is significantly an anti-suffragist rather than a suffragette who is "unfeminine", as Marjorie violently attacks Lady Susie. She realises that her unladylike behaviour has put her engagement to Ernest in jeopardy, as he "could never marry anyone but a womanly woman" (10). In this play, Hamilton reverses the stereotype pertaining to the suffragettes in order to mock and expose as hypocritical and therefore vacuous the "concern" expressed by anti-suffragists pertaining to the disharmonious effect of women's political activity on the "home". In order to draw attention to the inherent contradiction within this anti-suffrage argument, in *The Pot and the Kettle*, it is, ironically, anti-suffragism that compromises the unity of family life. Nell uses ironic sympathy towards Ernest to expose this hypocrisy, which leaves him confused. Knowing his views about "women interfering in politics", Nell can "quite understand that he feels annoyed at finding his best girl neglecting him for a political meeting" (4). Upon Mrs Brewster's insistence that "The Anti-Suffrage League is not a political society," Nell cannot contain her excitable mockery as she exclaims, "Then what the Dickens is it?" She proceeds to mock the meeting's appellation, which emphasises the League's laboured circumvention of politics. It is called "A union of right-minded men and women pledged to defend that most sacred of all institutions – the Home" (4). Hamilton's comically cumbersome title is reminiscent of the name Grundy gave to the Clapham suffrage society in *The New Woman*. Although it is not clear if this was a deliberate citation, Hamilton's conscious or unconscious appropriation of theatrical ridicule for her own purposes helpfully highlights suffrage theatre's project of turning the laugh. Although no contemporary accounts record this dramatic association, given the theatrical popularity of Grundy's play it seems reasonable to speculate that audiences may have been struck by the significance of Hamilton's allusion. Nell's humorous mockery highlights the engrossed Marjorie's political commitment.

The dramatisation of women's comic battle with the inherently contradictory anti-suffrage position is a key source of humorous challenge throughout the plays. This is shown in H. M. Paull's *An Anti-Suffragist*, a monologue in which Miss De Lacey, as Secretary of the Little Pendleton Anti-Suffragist Society, addresses a meeting to tell them all about the foundation and activities of her society. She recounts how women found themselves in an uncomfortable position when, at their anti-suffrage meeting, the Archdeacon asserted that women must

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[24] Curzon, argument 2.

always be found "in [the home], not gadding about to meetings and so on."[25] Anti-suffragist Miss Prideaux was half-aware of this contradiction as she refused to stand during her speech "because she thought it unladylike to be so obtrusive" (4). Mrs Crabtree in *Miss Appleyard's Awakening* is more sensitive still to this inherent contradiction, although her anti-suffrage commitment means that she is unable to maintain her own strictures regarding women's non-attendance of meetings. This play, produced at the Rehearsal Theatre on 20 June 1911, concerns the namesake's door-to-door suffrage campaigning, rumours of which provoke a visit from anti-suffragist Mrs Crabtree who ironically deplores such political activity in women. She declares that she is "not at all in favour of women attending public meetings as a rule, though I *have* made an exception myself to hear Lord Cromer" (14). The dramatic orchestration of anti-suffrage hypocrisy mocks the movement, thus challenging anti-suffrage credibility and integrity.

Regarding the matter of anti-suffrage credibility, the plays draw attention to the way that the inherently contradictory nature of the anti-suffrage position means that women are reluctant to engage properly with the arguments they so ardently espouse and, more worryingly, refuse (or are necessarily unable) to contest such arguments when they do not agree with them. Miss De Lacey, in *An Anti-Suffragist*, asserts that the speaker at the meeting, Lady Bellamy, "didn't know anything about politics, and she didn't suppose any of us did, but that she was always pleased to do anything to elevate the masses" (4). Here, H. M. Paull uses the contradiction between Bellamy's pride of ignorance and her earnest political action as a humorous way of mocking the very foundations of the League, as well as to indicate the danger of this irresponsibility. E. H. M. in *The Vote* praised it as an "amusing monologue" which was "cleverly recited" by Margaret Bussé.[26] Like Miss Prideaux, Bellamy is politically "obtrusive" in spite of attempts to be otherwise, and the impact of such uninformed obtrusiveness can be significant. For example, even though De Lacey has trouble recalling one Member of Parliament's statistics ("I think he said 103 per cent didn't want [the vote]"), she is nonetheless happy to agree with and evangelise about the impactful logic that "if the majority don't [want it] why should the minority have it?" (6). The comic exaggeration behind De Lacey's confident assertion that Prideaux's "beautiful" gardens confirm the validity of the latter's strict policy of employing Conservative-voting gardeners only emphasises the dangerous adherence to authority that such complacency unconditionally endorses (4).

The content of anti-suffrage meetings is the subject of wide mockery throughout the plays,

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[25] H. M. Paull, *An Anti-Suffragist* or *The Other Side* in *English Plays*. London: Actresses' Franchise League, 1913, 6.
[26] E.H.M., "Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (18 March 1911), 247.

shown to be predictable and vacuous. In *The Pot and the Kettle*, Nell feigns interest in the success of Marjorie's meeting in order to mock it. She derides the "cheers" for the "wife", "mother" and " 'ome" which accompany assertions of women's idiocy. Nell guesses that Lady Shiplake would have spoken about "woman's true sphere of influence" (5-6). When Mrs Brewster contests that Nell "couldn't possibly know" because she was not in attendance, Nell rejoins that it is a "safe guess [...] They all say it" (7). Her assumptions are proven to be accurate as Marjorie reports that it was at the moment of Lord Camberwell's "lovely speech" on "Men are men and women are women" that Lady Susie "jumped up on her seat and shouted 'Now we are hearing something!'" (12). Just as Alice's speech in *Lady Geraldine's Speech* draws attention to anti-suffrage nonsensical platitudes, both Susie and Nell here mock the inanity of both the speech and its unthinking positive reception. Lady Susie hisses, claps and cheers in "all the wrong places" and at "all the wrong things", mirroring the idiocy of anti-suffrage chants and cheers (12). This deliberate misplacement emphasises the illogicality and meaninglessness of revered anti-suffrage arguments, in particular referencing Austen Chamberlain's reason against women suffrage: "Because women are women, and men are men". Eva Moore cited this as one of the many "funny incidents connected with the Suffrage Movement," and it seems here that Hamilton profits from the attested amusement surrounding this argument.[27]

Chamberlain's line can, in fact, be found in several plays. In *Mrs Appleyard's Awakening*, Mrs Crabtree solemnly declares that "Man is Man and Woman is Woman!" Mocking the vacuity of the statement, Mrs Appleyard is "quite prepared to concede that" (18). Like Mrs Crabtree's "solemn" and "loud" declaration in Glover's play, Mrs Harlow Phibbs similarly uses Mrs Puckle's response in *The Mother's Meeting* to deride this argument. Published in 1913, it was performed at the Woman's Kingdom Exhibition in April 1914. A monologue in which Mrs Puckle recounts her accidental attendance at an anti-suffrage meeting (mistaking it for a mother's meeting) to which the vicar's wife had invited her, she recalls the way the latter argued definitively and in tones "very slow and solemn" that "the 'ole jest of the matter lies in this, that MAN IS MAN AND WOMAN IS WOMAN."[28] The profound gravity implied in this delivery – "as if she'd just thought of something nobody'd ever found out before" – accentuates the lines for comic effect, emphasised further by Mrs Puckle's genuine sympathy: "Then she sits down sudden like, and I reely pitied her for giving herself away before all of them mothers as needs no telling on that point" (5). Her low social standing and confusion enables Mrs Puckle to speak up effectively against this rhetoric (to the extent that

[27] Moore (1923), 90.
[28] Mrs Harlow Phibbs, *The Mother's Meeting* in *English Plays*. London: Actresses' Franchise League, 1913, 5.

the assembled suffragists try to recruit her) remarking, "You may mean well, but there's no sense in all you've been saying" (6). Here, as in *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*, the stereotype surrounding the supposed low intelligence of working-class characters is employed to humorously underscore anti-suffrage ignorance. However, while Mrs Chicky is in on the joke all along, thus overturning such stereotype and the intelligence hierarchy, *The Mother's Meeting* relies on the strength of this stereotype for its comic effect. As Chapter Two's discussion of the worn-out labourer also shows, the AFL was not above using what Tickner describes as "well-meaning" stereotype if in service of their cause.[29] Mrs Puckle's support for suffrage, including her accidental wearing of the suffrage colours, is inadvertent, thus imbuing suffrage politics with a sense of inherent logic while the employment of anti-suffrage platitudes seeks to indicate this position's intrinsic illogicality.

Not only does this exaggeration highlight anti stupidity: the way women nonetheless unthinkingly praise and recite such platitudes also shows how the "feminine" deferral to masculine authority can be extremely costly to women. In *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, as Alice points out, it has never occurred to Lady Geraldine to think for herself before. When Sir Reginald Bellamy is rude about women's political unfitness, women's devotion to "ladylike" behaviour means that they are unable to contradict him, sitting silently instead (7). Likewise, in *Mrs Appleyard's Awakening*, not even Mrs Crabtree's own doubts over Lord Cromer's logic will affect her willingness to evangelise his ideas. Convinced on the matter of masculine intellectual superiority, she is "content" to defer instead to "a superior brain to my own" (15). Glover's ridicule of the public figure of Lord Cromer is daring which, perhaps, intensifies the comedy of this instance. Yet it also highlights the worrying danger of complacent reverence. Mrs Crabtree's attitude contributes to the advancement of an incredible cause and the enablement of a self-serving hypocrisy. The way this works is evidenced particularly in *An Anti-Suffragist*: despite anti-suffrage views about the unsuitability of women in politics, it is recounted how a Member of Parliament nonetheless asks women to canvass for him in the upcoming election. The use of mockery by the playwrights here reveals the hypocrisy that is concealed beneath and which motivates anti-suffrage arguments pertaining to women's rightful sphere. Regarding *Miss Appleyard's Awakening*, one suffrage reviewer refers with confidence to the amusing and "foolish" arguments of a "rampant "Anti" which "is slightly in the nature of a tract, perhaps, but would surely act as an amusing eye-opener to those who are still sitting on the fence."[30] In response to fears about the impact of suffrage on the harmony of the home, these plays show that it is ironically the very arguments that are supposed to

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[29] Tickner (1987), 181.

[30] "At the Theatres", *Votes for Women* (30 June 1911), 647, regarding 20 June performance at the Rehearsal Theatre.

prevent disunity that actually promote division and discord; such control serves the interests of the authority to the detriment of all women.

"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."[31]

The self-serving nature of anti-suffrage arguments is further highlighted by the mockery Blunt employs in *Votes for Women!*. In drawing attention to the slavery and sweated work in which thousands of women are engaged in the interests of economics, Blunt mocks both the argument that women's involvement in politics is antithetical to femininity and the idea that equality would compromise the respect supposedly admitted to them by masculine chivalry. Blunt ironically assumes the voice of the male politician who permits female slave labour yet denies women "better paid work of the liberal professions" (ii.7). Emulating the tone of a politician protesting for women's rights, Blunt shouts, "*Let* the women scrub and cook and wash. That's all right!" Blunt mocks the hypocritical political outcry that occurs when women seek betterment by seizing, exaggerating, and turning to irony the politicians' own morally earnest language, evidenced in the exclamation "oh, very unfeminine indeed!" and the ironic appropriation of the adverb "dreadfully" in describing the men who are "dreadfully afraid we'd lose the beautiful protecting chivalry" (ii.7). Here, Blunt mimics the politician's tactical use of language to heighten moral fear. By ironically (mis-)employing the intensifier "dreadfully", Blunt draws attention to the vacuity of this rhetoric. As she points out, "The beautiful chivalry of the employers of women doesn't prevent them from paying women ten pence a day."

In *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*, Mrs Chicky's mockery draws attention to the same hypocrisy. In the face of Mrs Holbrook's arguments about the ridiculousness of these ideas about women doing "men's work," the deliberate irony of Mrs Chicky's continual sweeping and hard toil, juxtaposed with her apparent agreement, is lost on the comfortably seated Mrs Holbrook who seems pleased to have won Mrs Chicky over (3). Drawing explicit attention to Mrs Holbrook's seated position, Mrs Chicky ambiguously states, "I've no patience with the way you'll 'ear some folks settin' women against men as if they were oppersite sides in a battle" (9). Her stance is embodied by her hardworking self yet it completely eludes Mrs Holbrook's comprehension. Suggesting the perceived power of this portrayal, *The Vote* reported on 23 November 1912 that *A Chat with Mrs Chicky* is "such excellent suffrage propaganda that it was a most welcome item on our programme," given "twice to crowded audiences."[32] Like

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[31] Curzon, argument 11.
[32] *The Vote* (23 November 1912), 60.

Mrs Chicky, the Suffragette in *At the Gates* knows that her very work undermines all credible notion of masculine chivalry. When a Member asks her what "good" she thinks she is doing by protesting outside Parliament, she sardonically replies that she is "Proving the chivalry of the law-makers of England" (15). Satirising this argument against suffrage, the Suffragette – and Chapin herself – are shown to be acutely aware of cunning patriarchal prejudice.

In *An Englishwoman's Home* Maria also emphasises the hypocrisy of this anti-suffrage invocation of chivalry. As her drunk husband enters their home, Maria remarks, " 'Ere comes my purtector!" (9). The juxtaposition between her hard work at home and John's drunkenness serves to emphasise the overwrought rhetoric which deems to protect women from the unsuitability of public service. The irony of John's repetitious singing of "Rule Britannia", including the lines "Britons, never, never, never shall be slaves!" is not lost on Maria who asks tellingly, "Is females Britons?" In his ignorance, John dismisses the "silly" question in the affirmative (9). For Maria, her existence is slavery, or according to her, even worse because at least a slave would get free food and lodging. Maria seeks to draw attention to the damaging and idealistic fallacy of the separate spheres, a notion that harms hardworking women. When in *Votes for Women!* Blunt decides to leave the topic – "So we won't talk about chivalry. It's being over-sarcastic." – she does so, again, mockingly (ii.7). She knows she has already successfully exhausted the topic with her own sarcasm; her comment is, instead, a plea to politicians to refrain from the damaging sarcasm they use in any discussion of chivalry with regard to women's work. According to Robins' depiction, Blunt's compelling, authoritative presence achieves a *rapprochement* in the form of surprised respect among the crowd who exclaim, "The little 'un's all right. Ernestine's a corker, *etc*."[33]

"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 be equally well be removed or alleviated by a legislature elected by men."[34]

The argument pertaining to chivalry was also frequently used to justify the position that women did not need the vote to ensure their own protection. According to anti-suffragists, women's needs were fully defended by their closest male relative whose own vote represented women's interests as well as his. This is undermined in *An Englishwoman's Home* by the revelation that John only accepts women's opinions when they are the same as his own (15). The lives of Maria, Mrs Chicky and Anne in *The Master* illustrate that men's vote does not protect the interests of women. Mrs Chicky's ambiguous declaration mocks this idea as she states, "I don't interfere with what don't interfere with me" (3). Mrs Holbrook,

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[33] Post-manuscript addition; see Croft (2009), 68.
[34] Curzon, argument 12.

unable to detect the irony, is quite satisfied that Mrs Chicky knows where her place lies as she continues to talk the whole time that Mrs Chicky, scrubbing away in front of her, evidences in deed, word and evident experience the sheer necessity of her voice in politics, as well as the asset she would be.

"Women have not, as a sex, or a class, the calmness of temperament or the balance of mind, nor have they the training, necessary to qualify them to exercise a weighty judgment in political affairs."[35]

In fact, men's political capacity to represent themselves or others is brought entirely into question by the plays, which widely mock their political ignorance. In *Which?*, Mary talks of her train journey home during which she sat with three men discussing "Lloyd George and Insurance till I had to join in!" When her father worries that she might have shown her "ignorance", Mary replies robustly, "No – they showed theirs. The thing's complicated enough, certainly, but the ignorance of the average man on the Doctor question is something amazing!" (6). Likewise, in *The Master*, William "does get so muddled over politics" (7). For reasons of confusion and laziness, he subsequently decides to forgo his vote which could have directly contributed to the strengthening of his own family's livelihood. In *How the Vote was Won*, Horace has only ever voted once in his life and, in *A Woman's Influence*, Herbert has never voted. By juxtaposing such masculine incapacity with women's capability, this depiction calls into question Curzon's notion that women do not have a sufficiently "weighty judgment in political affairs" and the logic of their exclusion on these grounds. Regarding the charges of women's temperament, it has already been seen in the previous chapter how the plays ironically cite in order to distance the movement from the hysteric stereotype and how their portrayal of anti-suffrage women's behaviour likewise undermines the legitimacy of the argument.

This same depiction of masculine ignorance also serves to mock the basis of the anti-suffrage argument that women should not be permitted the vote because they would not use it anyway (Curzon's seventh argument). By showing that men are susceptible to voting negligence, the plays challenge the logic of this barrier to suffrage for women. In *Mrs Appleyard's Awakening*, we learn that one gentleman voted for Mr Holland for the trivial reason that "his own wife's a Dutchwoman!" This motivates Mrs Appleyard to reflect that she is "at least as capable" of forming her own political opinion as he (18). In Helen Margaret Nightingale's 1909 *A Change of Tenant*, when they vote at all, men misunderstand the entire procedure. Nightingale was an AFL member and her play was performed by the AFL in Essex in 1909. It deals with a landlord's decision to evict his tenant, Mrs Basset, because her

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[35] Curzon, argument 4.

presence cannot help to get his son elected. Faced with other prospective tenants, the Squire realises that, even with the vote, men might not be a help either. Laughing, the Squire recounts how "that tipsy Tom Taylor" went to the polling station inside the church, which also happened to be where the "table of forbidden degrees was hanging up." Mistaking this table for the ballot slip, Tom "put his cross against his grandmother," thinking that he had voted for Col. Grandison.[36] Similarly in this play, John Smith mistakes the cross with which one is required to mark the ballot paper as a concession for the uneducated. In a bid to show off his own literacy, he writes "John Smith, his mark" next to his cross (116). The audience is informed that, on other occasions, he has been successfully bribed with food to vote for certain parties (116). In the face of such ignorance, the opposition to women's suffrage loses credibility, underlined when John in *An Englishwoman's Home* is unable articulate his anti-suffrage conviction: "Never you mind, I got my reasons" (15). To the Squire in *A Change of Tenant*, this all serves to prove that "it's a deuced silly law that says that John Smith's more fit to have a vote than Mrs Basset," the common name emphasising the argument's universality (118).

As well as the common man, Housman shows that even politicians are unable to explain the reason for their anti-suffrage conviction. Despite the deeply impactful nature of this reverently cited conviction, Dormouse has to defer to Hatter: "<u>You</u> tell her why not – I've forgotten" (4). Of course, the fact that he forgets emphasises that this policy is based not on innate logic but on vacuous prejudice. Calling into question the political management of the country's affairs on this matter, the plays widely mock and challenge the aptitude of politicians. In *Deeds not Words*, Marjory cuttingly points out to George, "You also are told that women haven't the brain for politics. Judging by the present state of things, I imagine that some men are not overburdened with the capacity for political affairs." George quite enjoys her derision, interposing "Ha – ha, that's good" (18). Similarly, in *Clowning Street*, Arthur Featherstone "would not strike one at first sight as possessing capabilities beyond the average" (174). This incapacity is evidenced in *A Woman's Influence*, in which Herbert's political aptitude is limited to indifferent resignation, speaking jovially about sweating at the factory and declaring patronisingly to his wife, "Nothing can be done, nothing can be done. Don't worry your pretty little head" (4). In this play, men are more concerned with personal gratification than social questions of the day. It is told how a "promising member" would come to tea "like a shot", if it was not to discuss a "grave social question" (6). Likewise, in the aptly named *Clowning Street*, the Prime Minister is more concerned about his own health than that of the country, demanding a salt bath rather than attending to his affairs (174).

This attitude leads, in *Alice in Ganderland*, to a "great mess", which is Alice's description

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[36] Helen Margaret Nightingale, *A Change of Tenant* in Croft (2009), 115.

of the tea table that stands as a metaphor for the state's governance over the matter of suffrage. She draws attention to poor leadership and control, noting, "it looks as if you had been very wasteful, or very careless. I see a lot of plates broken" (5). The legitimacy of the anti-suffrage position, as well as the logic of the argument that bars women from political self-representation, are both mocked and challenged. One review by M. H. describes the "sly digs at the political parties" in this play, hopefully speculating that, "if any 'antis' were present they must have realised that they have a long way to go before they will 'catch up' with the numerous leagues and unions that have sprung into being."[37] The notion of 'catching up' is suggestive of suffrage superiority over the discordant political parties which the play mocks, and which the reviewer hopes to have been in evidence.

The sense of anti-suffragism's innate foolishness is further accentuated by the frequent depiction of unconscious self-mockery on the part of the antis, as seen in this play. This is also achieved in *Miss Appleyard's Awakening*, pertaining this time to both men and women, Mrs Crabtree announces that she is "a delegate from the Mudford A.S.S" and asks Miss Appleyard if she too is a member, to the latter's momentary confusion: "Oh, I beg your pardon. I didn't recognise those rather unfortunate initials" (7). Similarly, in *Lady Geraldine's Speech,* Geraldine sends up all antis by announcing that she could not possibly ask them to write her speech for her because, "With a few notable exceptions, all the Anti-Suffragists have my sort of brains. How can we possibly help each other?" (4). Her own comic incredulity upon Alice's "ridiculous" suggestion emphasises this stupidity (4). Elsewhere, the way anti-suffrage insults are turned against their proponents also serves to heighten ignorance. This is demonstrated in *At the Gates* when the mocking remark of a passer-by – "Votes for Women, I don't think" – is answered by the ironic reprisal of his words by the Suffragette who "*Sweetly*" replies, "No, you look as if you didn't" (4). Unconscious self-derision helps the AFL to indicate what is to them an inherent illogicality within the anti-suffrage position.

The construction of compelling caricature

While differing in tone, the regular mockery of the anti-suffragists contributes, in these plays, to the construction of a derogatory caricature that is consistent across the plays. Ranging onstage from Vida's light smiles and subtle comments to Mrs Chicky's increasingly overt mockery and the brazen tone of Nell and Lady Susie, it serves to represent the anti-suffragist as ignorant, even mad, and the political standpoint as intrinsically idiotic. In *The*

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[37] M. H., "The Actresses' Matinee", *The Vote* (4 November 1911), 19.

Pot and the Kettle, this ignorance is an inescapable inevitability, the very substance of anti-suffragism itself. Nell tells Susie, "of course she was an idiot – but what else can you expect from an anti?" (16). To take again Zangwill's motif of the "pantomime" of anti-suffrage, the antagonist and fool are singularly incarnated in these plays in the figure of the anti-suffragist (bearing more resemblance to the foolish Clown of pre-nineteenth-century pantomime, after which Joseph Grimaldi's incarnation made the fool a far more respected character, rather than a comic idiot).

It is paradoxically this manipulated representation of the antis that the AFL uses to argue persuasively that the very nature of the anti-suffragist is promotion enough for the suffrage cause. In a move that accentuates their ignorance, Marjory, in *Deeds not Words*, refers to those who "do us far more good as a full-blown "anti" than as a half-hearted suffragist" (17). Glover in *Miss Appleyard's Awakening* literalises this idea when Mrs Crabtree ironically becomes a mouthpiece for suffrage. She cites suffrage policy in frustration and anger which, against her own intentions, compellingly advertises the cause: "But Suffragists think that a woman should take what they call an intelligent interest in the affairs of her country! Suffragists maintain that a woman doesn't unsex herself by political activity. Suffragists declare that the average woman is as capable of forming an opinion in these matters as hundreds of the men voters of today" (19). Glover's use here of tripartite rhetoric and formal vocabulary makes of Mrs Crabtree's complaint a well-delivered, succinct and compelling political speech for suffrage instead of a spitting critique of it, demonstrating very literally the politically persuasive idea that antis were the best suffrage campaigners.

Despite her own speech and Miss Appleyard's derision, Mrs Crabtree is unable to see the irony in her political activity and the fallacy of her wider logic. This is consistent with the construction of caricature. According to Bergson, a comic character is "generally comic in proportion to his ignorance of himself."[38] The anti-suffragists resist enlightenment, remaining entrenched in their own prejudice and demonstrating comic and shocked affront when their ideas are brought into question. Greatorex shows "comic terror" at the notion Vida might be a suffragette (i.12); Horace is horrified that the scandalous Molly has come into his home (153); and John "gasps" when he realises a woman has come to his door to discuss politics: "How dare you? You most presumptoo-us-[…]" (14). These characters remain ideologically inflexible, recalling the relationship Bergson drew between the comic and "inelasticity of character, of mind and even of body."[39] As these plays show, Bergson's theory can be used radically as well as conservatively. Just as laughter functions as a conservative force to signal and purge asocial activity, it can also be employed to highlight regressive attitudes. Where

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[38] Bergson (1914), 16.
[39] Bergson (1914), 19.

they had been subjected to a form of "modern pillory" discussed in Chapter One, members of the movement through the AFL turned the laugh to set up the anti-suffragists as the true object of derision.

The way that Nell in *The Pot and the Kettle* extends anti-suffrage idiocy into a form of madness confirms the complete overturn of anti-suffrage laughter. Nell humorously assures Susie, "No, I've not gone quite mad – I have not joined the antis" (16). Here, the suffrage stereotype of madness has been directly inverted to denigrate the anti-suffrage cause and, concomitantly, to promote the sanity of the suffrage movement. In *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, such is their oddness that Silberthwaite is deeply curious when she meets Geraldine: "Great heavens! How delightful! I've been longing to meet one face to face" (12). The impersonality and intrigue comically reinforce the idea of anti-suffrage eccentricity. Again, this tactic inverts the stereotype for suffrage's gain: anti-suffragists consciously erased suffrage individuality in order to establish the group as a feared target of derision, such that Jean in *Votes for Women!* is eager to reach the suffrage platform to meet the spectacle of her imagination. This overturn gleefully highlights the cost of subscribing to stereotype, as it can be used pointedly against oneself. In fact, the AFL plays show awareness that, for their humour to be successful, they *must* employ such stereotype. As Tickner's own study has shown, all representation takes place within the hegemony, whose ideological hold is tenacious. To be understood and to possess meaning, humour must relate to the experience of the majority. Inserting familiar stereotype into different discourses assures that it can be readily comprehended which, through negotiation, can therefore usefully threaten its "fixity".[40] There is a touch of sarcasm in both examples above that betrays this conscious inversion, mocking yet profiting from and enjoying anti-suffrage tactics.

Ironically citing and re-employing anti-suffrage jokes and caricature, the AFL directly and deliberately copied tactics, in order to turn the laugh on its perpetrators. This point is made explicit in *The Pot and the Kettle* when Lady Susie's response to Marjorie's protestations – "She only laughed" – matches that of the antis who "only" laugh in Robins' and Wells' portrayals (12). This inversion fully deprives the opposition of their powerful role as laughers and jokers. Indeed, consistent with Bergson's idea of the comic object's ignorance of himself, the anti-suffragists hold no humour agency or self-awareness in this depiction. Assuring a complete reversal of stereotype, these eccentric and ignorant characters are the joke incarnate; the unlaughing at which men laugh.[41] In only one case does an anti-suffragist join in: George in *Deeds not Words*, but this is due to the fact that the joke does not directly implicate

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[40] Tickner (1987), 173.
[41] Reginald Blyth, *Humour in English Literature: A Chronological Anthology* (Folcroft, Pa: Folcroft Press, 1970 [1959]), 15

himself, so his laughter again emphasises the humour dynamic set up by the AFL. The anti-suffragists remain largely oblivious to their status as a laughter target: for instance, Greatorex, Ethel (in *How the Vote was Won*), and a "*mystified*" Geraldine in *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, who is in a state of permanent confusion (11). Where they are conscious of it, they remain confused or angry which, due to the compelling force of anti-suffrage caricature, can serve to strengthen the laughter against them. Firmly establishing the jokers as those within the suffrage camp, this portrayal deliberately challenges the established humour dynamic within the theatre – engaged as it was in anti-suffrage laughter – and beyond.

A political suffrage humour

Impacting upon the power relations between suffrage and anti-suffrage on the stage, the conversation between Mr Brewster and Nell in *The Pot and the Kettle* shows how integral the attempt to establish the superiority of the suffrage laugh in the theatre was to the promotion of the suffrage position itself. Mr Brewster "*stiffly*" admonishes Nell for her consistently mocking tone: "Perhaps, Nell, you will have the courtesy to remember that your jeers are out of place in an old-fashioned household, where we are not in sympathy with your peculiar ideas on these subjects" (5). His invocation of the spheres speaks directly to the contemporary debate about women's sense of humour in which the very definition of humour rested on the supposed skills men needed to negotiate the public sphere: capacity for intellect, derision and ridicule. Confined to the home, women apparently did not possess or require such skills, so by definition they were logically barred from a publically recognised sense of humour. Full of that "masculine" ridicule, Nell's jeers are "out of place" because they unsettle the dichotomy of the separate spheres and the conception of femininity on which this dichotomy, as well as that of the sense of humour, were based. It is for the same reason that the girls' laughter in *An Anti-Suffragist* is denounced as "irreverent" (4). They giggle in agreement with the argument that Queen Victoria's status as a "political personage" undermines the notion that women should not involve themselves in politics (4). The notion of irreverence captures the way their derisory laughter disrespects the dictates of authority surrounding both the political matter of women and of women's laughter which, just a decade earlier even Slater and Freshfield, in their rejection of "cruel" ridicule and embrace of women's moral superiority, had to a degree upheld. It also evokes the idea of women's moral responsibility to uphold the sanctity of the spheres: the very articulation of the female laugh is blasphemous in terms of the way it undermines women's superiors as well as their own duty. By contrast, the unique subtlety of Vida's mockery means that it goes largely unnoticed amongst characters; at most, it confuses or lightly troubles her targets. While it might be argued that her tactic mocks in its very conservatism the conventions of women's laughter it

purports to follow, the criticism of Robins' play on the grounds of sentimentality would suggest that, for many, Vida's mockery proved too subtle to dramatically influence the overall tone of the play.

The mockery of later plays proved much louder in tone. Like that of the girls above and of many the female characters in these plays, Nell's sense of humour consciously and overtly rejects the gendering that excludes women from the public realm of service. Acknowledging the way that the patriarchal idea of the sense of humour supports this exclusion, Nell employs keen ridicule to demote the logic and power of both. In light of this, it does not seem a coincidence that in this play one of the male characters is called Ernest. Reflecting the contemporary theatrical wordplay on this name, Hamilton uses this character – and witty Nell – perhaps in tactical response to criticism levelled at Robins' character, Ernestine, to pointedly invert the gendered conception of earnestness in order to provoke a revaluation of the humour hierarchy. While Wilde, in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), uses wordplay to distance himself from the earnest world of theatre, Hamilton's use of it is more akin to Shaw's in *You Never Can Tell* (1897) in which earnestness and joking are closely related. For Hamilton, jesting about earnestness is politically purposeful, seeking as it does to overthrow the damaging and falsely gendered dichotomy relating to the sense of humour that perpetuates notions of women's humourlessness. While the power structures at play mean that Nell's mockery cannot hope to approximate the level of derision achieved by the patriarchal laugh towards the suffrage movement, the disparity between her laughter and that of feminine prescription makes it nonetheless noteworthy. Her compelling humour emphasises the ignorance of the patriarchal position on women and humour, and derides those who subscribe to it. It is not Nell's ideas that are "peculiar" but Mr Brewster himself – and Ernest, and all the unlaughing antis – who refuse to partake in her superior laugh.

The audience and the politics of the suffrage sense of humour

If the likes of Mr Brewster denounced such humour onstage, in a reflection of the strength of this caricature audiences responded positively to it. Of *How the Vote was Won*, *The Times* remarked that the audience "were delighted. How could they help it?"[42] *The Star* described it as "Genuinely funny", the *Stage* wrote of its "fun" and liveliness, while the *Pall Mall Gazette* praised its funny story and delivery.[43] The *Standard* delighted in the "spicy political 'tang'" of *Alice in Ganderland* that provoked laughter "from the moment the curtain went up until the

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[42] *The Times* in Holledge (1981), 67.
[43] *The Star* in Lacey and Hayman (1985), 19; *The Stage* and *Pall Mall Gazette* in Lacey and Hayman (1985), 20.

March Hare, in his big blustering way, shouted 'Votes for Women!'"[44] *The Times* described *A Chat with Mrs Chicky* as "a female suffrage tract, but a tract with more fun and actuality than most."[45] The *Daily News* admired *The Better Half* as "witty, amusing" while the *Morning Post* stated that "there was every reason for the applause with which Miss Garland's really clever work was greeted."[46] The fact that these publications, unlike the suffrage press, did not have specific suffrage affiliations suggests a genuine enjoyment that transcended the biased audience.

The way that the audience laughter was compelled for specifically political purposes, moreover, was not lost on the reviewers. *The Stage* recognises the "propaganda" beneath the fun in *How the Vote was Won*; of *Alice in Ganderland*, the *Pall Mall Gazette* declared that "the Theatre of Ideas is upon us" and E. A. Baughan in the *Daily News* declares that *The Better Half* "would do much to advance the cause of female suffrage. When women are witty and humorous, who can resist them?"[47] From their knowledge of the dynamics of both the theatre and the platform, the AFL was aware that absolute resistance is made very difficult by humour. Cowman has described how suffragettes took advantage of this on the suffrage platform, explicitly invoked in the plays where characters speak directly to the audience (*Votes for Women!*; *The Mother's Meeting*; *An Anti-Suffragist*): "A speaker with a quick and ready wit could turn a hostile audience into a sympathetic one."[48] Annie Kenney said that the most popular speakers were those who were able to make audiences laugh, "even though they did not agree with them."[49]

From the beginning of their platform endeavours, women vaunted the political value of making the audience laugh. Margaret Wynne Nevinson wrote in her article "Concerning Out-Door Speaking", "Youth and good looks are a great asset for an outdoor speaker, and also a nimble wit, great knowledge, and good temper (particularly at question time)."[50] Ethel Hill wrote that Nevinson herself "possesses a ready fund of humour" and is thus "a very welcome figure on the Suffrage platform."[51] Hill likewise praised Mrs Zangwill's phrases on the platform as full of "wit and wisdom."[52] So important was the act of entertaining the audience that, as described by Hamilton in one incident, it could reach the point of tiresome repetition for the speakers themselves. She recalls a set of suffrage speeches in which she took part,

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[44] *The Standard* in "Lyceum Theatre Matinee", *Votes for Women* (3 November 1911), 70.
[45] "The Little Theatre – The Connoisseurs, so far", *The Times* (24 June 1912), 10.
[46] "Press Opinions" in Alison Garland, *The Better Half* (Liverpool: Daily Post Printers, 1913), np.
[47] *The Stage* in Lacey and Hayman (1985), 20; *Pall Mall Gazette* in Hayman (1985), 20; *Daily News* in "Press Opinions" in Garland (1913), np.
[48] Cowman (2007), 268.
[49] Annie Kenney, *Memories of a Militant* (London: E. Arnold, 1924), 104.
[50] Margaret Wynne Nevinson, "Concerning Out-Door Speaking", *The Vote* (18 November 1909), 45.
[51] Ethel Hill, "Mrs. H. W. Nevinson", *The Vote* (9 December 1909), 76.
[52] Ethel Hill, "Mrs. Israel Zangwill", *The Vote* (8 January 1910), 124.

during which one speaker "told night after night the same would-be humorous story of a Liberal statesman – in exactly the same words, with exactly the same emphasis – while every night, [as I sat on the platform in view of the audience], I tried to register surprised appreciation in a smile that grew more and more wooden."[53]

Sustaining the amusement of the platform was evidently so crucial that it could become a cynical exercise, which emphasises again the deliberate project behind suffrage humour. Hamilton's account shows an awareness of the contemporary importance of laughter, so that one does not want to be seen missing or misunderstanding the joke. This also risked one's inadvertent identification with the shamed object of humour which could attract ridicule towards oneself, which was according to Robins a particularly, but not exclusively, masculine fear. Suffrage humour could thus attract and retain attention, even from unlikely sources. According to Vida in *Votes for Women!*, women's platform powers "keep a rowdy meeting in order" in a way that is far superior to men's. Vida asks Trent, "Haven't you noticed that all their worst disturbances come when men are in charge?" (iii.16). In *Deeds not Words*, Marjorie's humour even provokes George's surprised respect. In wishing that "political questions could be made as lively and as pleasant in another place," the *Stage*'s review of *How the Vote was Won* testifies how theatre humour can also attract and manipulate interest in one's cause.[54] This manipulation is further emphasised in those plays in which, like a pantomime, audience participation is directly implicated in performance and the direction of their support is set up as inevitable. Paralleling platform tactics, the humour dynamic thus compels a theatrical response that targets the eccentric anti-suffragist and confers respect on the suffragist or suffragette.

Furthermore, their observations deriving from anti-suffrage presentation regarding its political impact meant that the League was similarly attuned to the potential offstage effects of this successful promotion laughter in the theatre. In her analysis of journalistic suffrage plays, Carlson's reservation about the extent of the political radicalism of AFL plays derives from the consideration that most are encased within what she deems the limiting genre of comedy. While she argues that comedy functions as a vehicle for vocalising community and "expressing hopes and envisioning a changed world", and can also be "conscripted as a persuasive tool", the subscription to dramatic tradition required of this genre negatively affects its radicalism.[55] This results from comedy's ultimate social conservatism that means that such plays do not differ significantly – aside from perhaps a conversion to suffrage – from the anti-suffrage plays. Any power the women derive from their mockery is, due to the

[53] Hamilton (1935), 70.
[54] *The Stage* in Lacey and Hayman (1985), 20.
[55] Carlson (2000), 212.

inherent safeguards within comedy, temporary and provisional, contingent on the fictional narrative. Thus, while Carlson acknowledges the political persuasion that can nonetheless occur, she urges caution against over-investment in this outcome. Interrogating further the power of this portrayal, Henry Jenkins has said even more conservatively that jokes themselves are a non-threatening discussion of ideas which "neutralise the radicalism" of laughter.[56]

Yet, while it is true that the comedic frame through which the vote is presented is non-threatening, it is in precisely this frame that the AFL itself located the plays' powerful politics. Its traditionally based portrayal ensures a positive, laughing reception that, in turn, can actually effect change offstage. This derives from the politically significant way the plays, and the laughter that ratifies their humour, intrinsically disrupt the fundamentally obstructive stereotype of the unlaughing suffragette and, in so doing, the humour and wider hegemony. While women writers' earnestness had been much remarked, reviews of *Votes for Women!* had demonstrated the popularity of humour within modern theatre, even its necessity if a play and its playwright is to be respected. For E. A. Baughan, to take one example, *The Better Half* convinced him that Garland, already known as a "witty speaker on women's suffrage", should "seriously turn her attention to the writing of plays." Her "witty, amusing" AFL contribution evidenced an "instinct of the theatre" that, a mere decade before, was believed to belong solely to men.[57] Furthermore, the roles that these plays provided for their actresses helped to strengthen arguments that contested women's supposed lack with regard to the sense of humour both on and offstage. The conscious rejection of the tragic and eccentric tropes in favour of the laughing "suffrage spirit" suggested new ways of representing femininity on the stage, while women's devotion to these roles – mirrored by their use of wit in the wider suffrage movement – located their offstage counterpart in real women.

Understood to be an essential component of sociability, it can be seen how this perception of women's humour logically entailed the necessary disruption of basic assumptions not only about the humour hegemony itself but also about women's public capacity, from which their supposed lack of humour excludes them. An investigation of the moment of the theatrical laugh illustrates how laughter works to legitimise women's entry into that public space, even through comedy. Purdie urges an examination of the genre of comedy in terms of its concern with discursive norms, rather than with the conception of its defining characteristic as a concern with "vital forces". The former constructs the texts "as benevolent arguments for accepting 'life as it is'," whereas an understanding of the genre as an interrogation of identity

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[56] Henry Jenkins, *What Made Pistachio Nuts?* (Columbia: New York, 1992), 251.
[57] E. A. Baughan, *Daily News* in Garland (1913), "Press Opinions" (no page no.).

as discursively produced shows how, while joking and comedy are "likely" to support the patriarchy, in "actuality, joking can – and sometimes does – confirm relationship and identity beyond [its] miserable limits."[58] In the theatre, this idea of "actuality" concerns the audience's experience of the performance in real time. Within this framework, the stage transgression of norms is not limited to but supersedes the transience of the genre. Purdie uses the Greek meaning of "drama" – "the thing done" (rather than said) – to illustrate the way that performance, with the joke teller's "absence", is more likely to genuinely produce (rather than merely provoke) a transgression.[59] This concept is akin to Freud's notion of laughing complicity, yet Purdie goes further. Without discounting the fact that jokes, like all comic discourses, affirm even while they transgress the Symbolic (patriarchal) law – evidenced when Mr Brewster reaffirms patriarchal hegemony even as Nell transgresses it – Purdie calls for a recognition of the way the genuine moment of laughter's transgression within the theatre carries an energy that is a potentially disruptive "entity in its own right".[60] This takes us closer to Bergson's notions of laughter's impact. As Parvulescu's call for a focus on the material burst of laughter also signifies, Purdie's analysis states that the rupture effected by the laughing instant is significant even in its ephemerality. Here, discursive negotiations of one's subjection to the Symbolic law are shown to be possible. Although Mr Brewster reinstates the appropriate use of humour, Nell's targets remain in place as "discursively incompetent", just as anti-suffrage humour achieved towards its own (suffrage) targets.[61] Yet, unlike anti-suffrage humour, which reinforces the audience's conservative identity, this humour renegotiates the audience's very relationship to the Symbolic law in a move that also weakens established lines of power.

It is in this observation that the AFL's promotion, despite its critics, of loud audience laughter can be explained. Laughter acts not only as a feedback mechanism to measure audience response but, due to the environment's dynamic that compels a chorus of audience laughter, manipulates it too into a transformative sympathetic experience that challenges dramatic and wider convention in that moment. In the very acceptance of its entertainment as valid therefore, suffrage theatre, enjoined with offstage re-representations, made significant in-roads into the dominant contemporary prejudice concerning women's humour, literary, and political space. Just as Tickner noted "some evidence" of the way suffrage's objections to how they were portrayed and their subsequent self-representation "weakened the popular stereotype," so too does their theatrical depiction denote this.[62] The radical nature of this

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[58] Purdie (1993), 148.
[59] Purdie (1993), 74.
[60] Purdie (1993), 152.
[61] Purdie (1993), 59.
[62] Tickner (1987), 166.

action and of its results (even gradual as they were) is evident when the tenacious power and dominance of the humour hegemony, and the way this controlled representation as well as actuality, are taken into account. If the time displacement (three years hence) allowed Aunt Lizzie in Hamilton's *How the Vote was Won* to declare that anti-suffragism was an unfashionable and derided political standpoint, specifically through their humour these plays represent in real time the radical disruption of the familiar thinking that blithely accepts it as reasonable and suffragism as not.

Suffrage audiences and mockery

Periodicals also show that this humour had a significant role in reinforcing the political strength of the suffrage community. While the way reviews frequently referenced the suffrage audience's amusement betrays an element of inevitable self-promotion, the popularity of the League amongst its members and sympathisers certainly proves their enjoyment. On 8 December 1911, *Votes for Women* described *An Englishwoman's Home* as "a play of which Suffragists are rightly never tired." [63] Reporting from the same set of performances at the Portman Rooms, the reviewer also recalled how "The fifteen "Good Reasons" of Lord Curzon, quoted by Miss Crabtree [in *Miss Appleyard's Awakening*], were greeted with chuckles, and the indignant words of Miss Appleyard, "It seems to me that you want every woman to be a perfect fool!" were applauded all over the house."[64] Earlier that year, on 20 October 1911, the same periodical had also decided that, "All Suffragists should see Mr. Laurence Housman's delightful play *Alice in Ganderland* at the Lyceum Theatre on October 27."[65] On 11 November 1911, *Votes for Women* spoke admiringly of the way that this play will mean that "no Suffragist will ever in future be able to think of [the party members as the Mad Hatter (etc.)] in any other light." The reviewer, M.H., appreciates the way "witty inconsequence hits back in sly digs at the political parties."[66]

M.H.'s reference to "hitting back" seems to inform much of the amusement and enjoyment of the plays' humour here. Lisa Merrill's observation that female audience members of feminist comedy performances are not eavesdroppers or voyeurs but "a party in the dialogue between performer and spectator" resonates here.[67] Politically inferior and consistently ignored, it is simple to see how the ways that the plays theatrically turn the laugh onto the opposition would have provided much delight amongst the audience, thus compelling their sympathetic laugh which, as seen in Chapter Two, the AFL understood to be politically

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[63] "Entertainments at the Fair", *Votes for Women* (8 December 1911), 159. See Glover (1913), 14.
[64] Ibid.
[65] "The Actresses' Franchise League", *Votes for Women* (20 October 1911), 45.
[66] M. H., "The Actresses' Matinee", *The Vote* (4 November 1911), 19.
[67] Lisa Merrill, "Feminist Humor: Rebellious and Self-affirming" in Regina Barreca (ed.), *Last Laughs: Perspectives on Women and Comedy* (London: Gordon and Breach, 1988), 279.

significant, not to mention novel. Given the very real strains between the government and the suffrage movement, for example, *Alice in Ganderland*'s portrayal of the transparent politicians would have provided the audience with much comic relief. Such laughter gives audiences an opportunity for escapism: the plays conjure up scenarios for mockery and power reversal that elude the offstage reality, which momentarily satisfy frustrations and, even, guard against political hesitations.

Understood as such, if the onstage humour and its laughter amongst audiences are merely transitory, its effects for its sympathetic audience, as also seen for its more hesitant or oppositional audience, arguably live on after the performance. Suffrage audiences repeatedly came back to the same performances because they ratified their views and visualised their success in meaningful and enduring ways, encouraging the community even when such triumph was not evident offstage. The humour was also, perhaps, instructive. Members were used to undertaking classes in public speaking to capture the attention of and to persuade an audience (Chapin ran her own, for instance). The parallels between Nell and Mrs Chicky's use of mockery, and the WSPU's own tactic, would have been evident. Their humour, and its effect on the audience, shows that sufficient daring can be self-satisfying and even fruitful. It was, therefore, the instructive encouragement that attracted members to these plays while the communal power of their consequent laughter was widely believed to be instrumental to the individual and collective force of the movement. A rehearsal of victory, the League emphasises the importance of mockery in the fight towards success.

Women anti-suffragists and mockery

Mockery had, however, to be used strategically. In several plays, where the provocation of confusion, frustration or anger amongst the men seems to be desired, the ridicule of women often (but not always) is modulated, withdrawing at the last moment into a kindly gesture. In *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, it is Alice's close friendship with Geraldine – they are "old school chum[s]" – that causes her to protect her friend from humiliation at her anti-suffrage meeting (2). She dissuades her group from revealing the true identity of the author of Geraldine's speech or from attending to heckle her. Alice's summons are decidedly firm: "I can't and won't have her humiliated" (13). It was, in fact, the fear of this outcome that persuaded Alice to write the speech for her initially: "If I hadn't helped her over her speech, she would have probably made herself ridiculous – and I couldn't have stood that."[68] Although the speech, as well as Geraldine's presence, give the group much opportunity for private ridicule (which continues even after Alice's request), the risk of a friend's public humiliation is a step too far even for this lively group, all without hesitation giving their "word of honour" to Alice, even

[68] Post-manuscript addition. See Gardner (1985), 56.

despite Baillie's regret: "Oh, and to think I shan't be able to go and heckle you!"[69] She sacrifices her love of ridicule for Geraldine. When Alice later cannot resist exclaiming that Geraldine has "never done such a thing" in her life (15) as think for herself, Baillie, with a glint of her own humour, reminds her of her own request: "Shame, Dr Alice! It's never too late to sin – I mean to think!" (15)[70] While all the characters struggle to silence their friendly mockery, their pledge to draw the line at Geraldine's public humiliation seems genuine and assured. These suffragettes take very seriously the protection of fellow womenfolk from public ridicule.

Likewise, it is very important to Nell in *The Pot and the Kettle* that Marjorie does not endure any further humiliation than she has already suffered. Lady Susie's rather zealous mockery of the anti-suffrage meeting has led to Marjorie's frustration and subsequent assault on Lady Susie. Citing the importance of family, Nell phones Susie to plead, at times rather angrily but ultimately successfully, for her to withdraw the police charges against Marjorie: "You're used to appearing in police courts but she isn't" (16). Instead, all three will lunch together the following day. In acknowledging that Lady Susie can "get a bit out of hand when there are antis about," Nell draws the line at extreme and disruptive public ridicule, putting the importance of her family first (17). In *Votes for Women!*, Vida is similarly careful not to mock Jean's innocence, instead drawing her smilingly into the suffrage community.

In these plays such acts are not merely kind but calculated; in *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, the warm sympathy as well as the good humour persuasively endear the group to Geraldine who insinuates that she will no longer partake in the anti-suffrage meeting. In *Votes for Women!* it is Vida's smiles of encouragement that draw an inquisitive Jean into the suffrage group and, in *An Allegory*, Woman's smiles towards the Slave Woman that spur the latter on. By phoning Susie, Nell does not only help Marjorie in her predicament but, in so doing, also helps to dispel the negative impression of the suffragettes, declaring, "Even beasts aren't so black as they're painted" (6). Similarly, by accepting Susie's lunch invitation, Nell's phone call also brings Marjorie into closer proximity with the suffragettes. With the wariness that the family already (ironically) held for the anti-suffrage meetings, which keep an exhausted and now disgraced Marjorie out so late, it can now be assumed that Marjorie will be socialising more with those who have greater suffrage sympathies. While this situation is largely a happy coincidence, Nell is not afraid of manipulating it further to play ironically on the snobbery of this family who are delighted at the idea of their daughter dining with this respectable woman. Nell accepts the invitation at once, bettering the name of the suffrage movement while also recommending with cunning sympathy that her cousin be kept away

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[69] Post-manuscript addition. See Gardner (1985), 56.
[70] "Sin" changed to "mend" in published versions. See Gardner (1985), 57; Paxton (2013), 45.

from the overly "strenuous" anti-suffrage league: "If she must belong to something let her pick out something quieter – the Women's Freedom League, or the WSPU…" (18).

Among the women especially it seems important that humour does not become too vicious. The choice that humour demands of the (on and offstage) audience – to laugh one way or another – means that it is always to some degree and to one party or another aggressive. Yet, these plays thwart that choice at the final moment, or rather displace it onto the anti-suffrage women who are implicitly urged to decide which way to affiliate themselves within the humour dynamic. This is a conscious tactic that seeks to avert the alienation of and prevent further insult to women, so as to facilitate or compel an interest in their cause. The aim of the AFL, as of the movement as a whole, was to unify and convert. The aforementioned secretary's annual report for 1910-11 singled out as a specific (and apparently successful) target the "members of that class most difficult of all to get at 'the women who take no interest at all'."[71] Merrill's assertion that comedy that "recognises the value of female experience may be an important step in developing a culture that allows women to self-critically question the stereotypes that have governed our lives" seems particularly pertinent here.[72] As Robins believed, it was in these women particularly that the dissuading effects of laughter – and laughing complicity – were in evidence. Suffrage humour, by contrast, actively sought to enlighten, encourage and engage women in order to draw them, through their own sympathetic laughter, into the powerful community of defiant laughers, an experience paralleled and promoted on stage.

The way AFL mockery more consistently treats men with disdain is reflective of their position within the suffrage laughter dynamic. The fact that Lady Diana in *The Better Half* forbids as "unfair" the attendance of "mere scoffers" at the men's suffrage deputation testifies to women's acute sensitivity towards the power hierarchy that renders any laughter towards inferior groups more significant than if inverted (11). Where their well-established relationship with derision meant absolute mockery of women could prove alienating, contradictory, and even dangerous, its use towards men reflects men's contemporary status as laughing superiors where the reversal could provide satisfaction and reward at lower risk. Indeed, the fact that ridicule played a central part in men's public life meant that women's use of it could earn them attention and respect.

Fundamentally, however, instances of mockery towards both men and women anti-suffragists are intrinsically less derisory in relation to the laughter directed at the suffrage movement. This dynamic is dictated both by relationships of quantity and power, as well as by intent. Indeed, the political importance of audience entertainment and the portrayal of

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[71] The Women's Library at LSE, 2AFL 1990/NoAccNo05.
[72] Merrill (1988), 279.

women's sense of humour meant that sourness (which John in *An Englishwoman's Home* does not include in his understanding of the sense of humour) had limited use. In their counter-attack, as Tickner has shown, suffragists and suffragettes understood that utter deviancy in their work was a characteristic to be avoided.[73] Blunt's tone, in parts, might undermine the stage direction's insistence in *Votes for Women!* that the crowd responded wholly positively (substantiated perhaps by some of the reviews); it, like that of the Suffragette in *At the Gates* and Helen in *The Apple*, tends more towards bitterness than to the comic buoyancy or entertaining ridicule of other plays which brought them attention and praise.

Conclusion

The AFL's direct borrowing from and inversion of the opposition's tactics consciously sought to weaken a tradition that was tenacious both on and offstage. Onstage evidence shows the AFL's strong conviction regarding the political necessity and utility of humour, while reviews and wider discourses demand an acknowledgment of the way the audience's laughing burst was politically radical in the context of contemporary constructions of gender and power. While the focus of this chapter has centred on verbal mockery, a significant proportion of the comedic stage space of the AFL was reserved for physical humour. This specifically addressed a major obstruction to the progress of women's suffrage, that pertaining to the argument of Physical Force. Having established the ways that suffrage humour could construct and enforce a political community, the next chapter considers how the AFL's use of farce engaged notions of physical strength as a means of politicised material empowerment.

[73] Tickner (1987), 167.

Chapter Four

Farce and the fallacy of Physical Force

Introduction

As Julie Holledge remarks of Hamilton and St. John's *How the Vote Was Won*, "the League's first smash hit was a play that was steeped in the nineteenth-century tradition of farce."[1] The AFL's much-remarked predilection for comedies – particularly as the League matured – included a tendency towards the use of overtly recognisable farcical features, such as slapstick, comic violence, and exaggerated characterisation. Considering the specificity of the historical moment, as Peter Holland shows is important of all accounts of farce, this chapter assesses the significance of these dramatic features by situating them within the Physical Force argument and the wider suffrage reaction to it.[2] Early on, the AFL adopted an amused interest in this position. In Harraden's 1909 *Lady Geraldine's Speech*, Alice parodies the anti-suffragist desperate dependency on it. Composing the speech for Geraldine's anti-suffrage meeting, Alice is sure to bring in "all the points," check listing amongst other items the "Physical force argument" (14). This was, to the suffrage movement, the most tenacious anti-suffrage argument deployed, and tricky to combat. The tenets of this argument were increasingly central to anti-suffragist defence and progressively more topical within world politics as the suffrage movement, and the AFL, established themselves.

This chapter firstly explores the AFL representation of this argument before showing how the League employed farcical comedy to directly challenge this most dogged of resistances as fallacious. The specific significance of this farcical treatment is then assessed against the contemporary popularity of farce, audience reception, and the gendered debate regarding the sense of humour. As Jim Davis states, by the nineteenth century, farce was "as popular as melodrama."[3] What had once been the theatrical afterpiece had become an important entity of its own, the influence of which continued into the early twentieth century. Speaking as it does to the fundamental human condition and typically targeting men, farce has historically provided the most egalitarian theatrical space for laughter. Where women's laughter in the early twentieth-century theatre was often directed against themselves, farce has traditionally provided a unique space where their laughter at the expense of men could dominate and thrive

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[1] Holledge (1981), 66.

[2] Peter Holland, "Farce" in Deborah Payne Fisk (ed.) *The Cambridge Companion to English Restoration Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 109.

[3] Jim Davis, "'His Own Triumphantly Comic Self': Self and Self-consciousness in Nineteenth Century English Farce" in James Redmond (ed.), *Themes in Drama X Farce* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), 115.

as legitimate, if not essential. As playwright, actress or audience member, women's engagement with farce in the fight for suffrage is lastly, therefore, considered as a politically transformative device.

The Physical Force argument and the AFL

As early as 1904, the antis were "forced back onto their ultimate line of defence" due to the failure or weakness of other arguments, such as those relating to the psychological and intellectual.[4] While WSPU militancy provoked a revival of those arguments, particularly regarding the "unnatural" and "sexually disruptive" activities of female militancy, this defence would constitute most tenaciously the argument of Physical Force. Predicated on the notion, as described by Pugh, that "the modern state depended for its existence on naval and military power, diplomacy and finance to which women could make no significant contribution," the implication to suffrage was drawn from the idea that those who cannot defend the State should have no voice in dictating its affairs.[5] In *Miss Appleyard's Awakening*, Mrs Crabtree cites this argument when she denounces Miss Appleyard's notion of female nationalism: "*Her* country? It's the country of the men who fight for it!" (13) At the anti gathering in *The Mother's Meeting*, Mrs Puckle is also exposed to this argument when a female anti-suffragist declares that because man fights for his country, he "alone" has the "privilege of 'is constitooshun" (5). Here, "constitooshun" ambiguously refers both to the state body as well as to man's body, emphasising the idea of a "naturally" gendered exclusivity, based on one's physical state, on which access to the country's governance is founded.

The assertion that force was the defining qualification for suffrage also contributed to another argument concerning the idea that a state's stability rests on the equal balance between political power and physical force, as expressed by doctor of law Heber Hart.[6] Those who can vote are necessarily the same as those who have the power to enforce their will on the community, so that the rule of law rather than the rule of force can prevail (the implication being that disagreements can be settled by voting, rather than by force). This argument would permit Sir Almroth Wright in 1913 to explain why women are subject to a different basis to all others who request citizenship.[7] Unlike men's, women's suffrage would unsettle this balance in state governance, potentially leading to personal government and general disorder. In *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*, this rationale is reflected in Mrs Holbrook's view that men's physical experience in war exclusively qualifies them to deal with and "settle" conflict. She

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[4] Pugh (2002), 41.
[5] Pugh (2002), 55.
[6] Heber Hart, "Woman Suffrage: A National Danger" (London: P. S. King and Son, 1912).
[7] Sir Edward Almroth Wright, *The Unexpurgated Case Against Woman Suffrage* (London, 1913).

continues in the general vein of the Physical Force argument, asserting "isn't it better for them to leave the Army and Navy and wars with other countries to the men who know all about them?" (5). Women's physical limitations make them wholly unsuited to the intellectual responsibility required of the State. According to Mrs Holbrook, women's lack of experience in battle means they cannot involve themselves at government level; they do not have "the brains to understand the things men settle in Parliament" (5). Their "natural" and appropriate environment which, according to the lady Mrs Puckle hears speak, is "the peaceful shelter" of "'ome," excludes women from both knowledge and ability. Women remain in the home because they are "otherwise constricted", implying both their duties as wife and mother, as well as their "natural" weakness, incomprehension and cowardliness (5).

The duty of masculine force

This dichotomous conception of combative masculine strength and pacifist feminine weakness was in full force at the beginning of the twentieth century. It emanated from the Victorian, specifically Ruskinian perception that woman must be "protected from all danger and temptation" while man's work must "entail all peril and trial".[8] Regarding British men, this was a time when the glories of empire and domination inculcated ideas of Christian duty and rule by force. Susan Kingsley Kent has commented on the contemporary significance of Robert Baden-Powell's establishment of Scouting for Boys in 1908 which emphasised to boys the importance of a masculinity based on "action rather than reflection," enforcing the discourse of the separate spheres at an early age.[9] As a hero of Mafeking, Baden-Powell was an influential figure for boys and men alike, his wartime heroism and physical endurance inspirational to the scouting movement. Housman reflected upon the diffusion and impact of this ideology on the boys and, by implication, men of this period. On 3 March 1910 during a speech at Caxton Hall, he described the way that, at school, "the physical force argument is very much to the fore; boys are taught to worship it." There, according to Housman, schoolboys received from the actions of bullies the anti-suffragist training that "physical force was the basis of government."[10]

The early impact on children of this ideology is also reflected in a speech given by Robins at a WWSL meeting in 1911, as reported by *Votes for Women*. She describes the way boys'

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[8] John Ruskin, "Of Queen's Gardens" in John Ruskin, *Works of John Ruskin* (New York: John Wiley and Sons, 1886), 99.
[9] Kingsley Kent (1999), 237.
[10] Speech by Laurence Housman at Caxton Hall (3 March 1910), "The Anti-Suffrage Point of View", *The Vote* (12 March 1910), 238.

bookcases heaved full of "those stirring stories, those high adventures."[11] Informed by distinctive notions of British rule and supremacy, this upbringing was regarded as vital preparation for men's ultimate service to their country. The official war training manual of 1909 noted that the essential precondition for success in battle was that men maintain throughout attacks the "sporting spirit inherent in every individual of the British race" and that they cheer as loudly as possible throughout their charge, "so as to effect, by vibration, the enemies' nerves."[12] Childhood experiences were fundamental in enforcing these principles.

Such experiences have clearly made a lasting impression on Herbert in *A Woman's Influence* whose strong masculine ideals mean that he is easily persuaded by Mrs Perry's ironic flattery. She pits her 'feminine weakness' against his masculine "strength" and "self-control" to show how much women need "the strong hand of a man" (16-17). It is aptly Prejudice in *A Pageant of Great Women* who similarly echoes this dichotomous relationship:

> Force is the last and ultimate judge: 'tis man
> Who laps his body in mail, who takes the sword –
> The sword that must decide!
> Woman shrinks from it,
> Fears the white flint of it and cowers away (6).

Reflecting imperialistic rhetoric, man's courage is portrayed as quick and confident. The verbs "lap" and "take" are suggestive of unquestioning, loyal action, with the reference to "lapping" his body in "mail" implying a natural fitness for such duty.

Woman and weakness

By contrast, where man's stature increases, woman's falls. Just as Housman asserts the impact of deliberate sexual differentiation of physical force on boys within the playground, he also claims that civilization has "tended to make women less physically fit for […] service".[13] Emelyne Godfrey situates this within the mid-nineteenth century "bourgeois aspirations to gentility" that "led to the prioritization of leisure over exercise and the creation of the lady who was not supposed to have the strength to exercise."[14] The Victorian feminine ideal surrounded notions of frailty and fragility, galvanised by rhetoric of divine intention. This is reflected in Wentworth's *An Allegory* by, aptly, Fear who attributes this weakness to God's design: "God hath made women weak, and infirm of purpose" (4). Contemporary publications

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[11] Elizabeth Robins, "The Real Woman: A Speech delivered by Miss Elizabeth Robins at The Women Writers' Suffrage League Meeting", *Votes for Women* (30 June 1911), 639.
[12] See Wade Davis, *Into the Silence: The Great War, Mallory and the Conquest of Everest* (London: Vintage, 2012), 16.
[13] Laurence Housman, "The 'Physical Force' Fallacy: Part II", *Votes for Women* (26 February 1909), 372.
[14] Godfrey (2012), 87.

substantiated such notions of natural feminine physical inferiority. In 1909, T. Dundas Pillans reflected this position in his book *Plain Truths about Woman Suffrage*, asserting that women's mental and physical attributes "handicap them in the race of life."[15] The "functional disorders" from which she suffers and from which men are free mean she frequently "collapses".[16] This makes her highly unreliable in the workplace, let alone in war. Reflecting these ideas, in Bessie Hatton's *Before Sunrise*, set in the mid-nineteenth century, Mrs Sewell suffers from fainting fits that occur as regularly as her husband's utterances about women being "tender plants" who need the "shelter of the sterner sex".[17]

As Robins noted, these ideas were reinforced in the reading material available to girls, full of "variants on the theme of the Patient Griselda" and wholly lacking in stories of "a girl's endurance, a girl's courage."[18] Such tales taught girls to support conflict unquestioningly and peacefully, with the promise of a happy ever after reward. It was, in fact, the supposed influence of such rhetoric on the pre-twentieth-century suffrage movement that Emmeline Pankhurst blamed for women's lack of progress. In her 1913 speech "Why We Are Militant", she discussed women's reliance on "purely peaceful methods": "We have been so accustomed, we women, to accept one standard for men and another standard for women, that we have even applied that variation of standard to the injury of our political welfare."[19]

The physical limit of emancipation

The idea that this apparent physical weakness presented an insurmountable obstacle to women's full liberation was established early on by the anti-suffragists. Predicated on the perceived value of physical force within the country's governance and defence, this remained a tenacious argument throughout the movement. As early as 1889, Mrs Humphry Ward conclusively declared that, "the emancipating process has now reached the limits fixed by the physical constitution of women."[20] As the movement wore on, this argument was continuously cited, becoming indeed all the more topical due to threats posed by Germany that would lead to the First World War. United with Mrs Humphry Ward were other women anti-suffragists, such as Violet Markham who, at an anti-suffrage rally on 28 February 1912 at the Albert Hall, upheld what she called the "hard facts and natural law" of female physical inferiority. This substantiated their claims to a different citizenship for women not based upon

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[15] T. Dundas Pillans, *Plain Truths about Woman Suffrage* (London: Watts and Co), 8.
[16] Ibid.
[17] Bessie Hatton, *Before Sunrise* in Gardner (1985), 62.
[18] Robins (30 June 1911), 639.
[19] Emmeline Pankhurst, "Why We Are Militant: A Speech Delivered in New York October 21st, 1913" in Marcus (1987), 162.
[20] Mrs Humphry Ward *et al* (June 1889), "An Appeal Against Female Suffrage" in Jane Lewis (ed.) *Before the Vote was Won: Arguments For and Against Women's Suffrage 1864-1896* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd, 2001 [1987]), 410.

the vote (although just "as great and as real" as men's).[21] In 1911, S. H. Halford published *A Criticism of the Woman Movement from the Psychological Standpoint*; in 1912, A. MacCallum Scott published a pamphlet on "The Physical Force Argument against Women's Suffrage". Both reiterated the idea that stable and good government ultimately rests on physical force, therefore reinforcing the notion that masculine domination was vital. When, similarly, Lord Cromer in 1912 expressed the desire that "this great Empire of which we are all so proud, should in the future, as in the past, be governed by that sex which is alone physically capable of defending it," he consciously played on British ideals and anxieties of domination to substantiate his case that only the "best" must rule.[22]

Robins captured the contemporary public impact of this in *Votes for Women!* in which one male crowd member provocatively enquires, "If the women get full citizenship, and a war is declared, will the women fight?" The "Poetic Young Man" is incredulous, unable to process the aesthetic impertinence of this man's implicit challenge to perceived femininity. Stumbling, he declares, "No, really – no, really, now!" The rest of the crowd's delight indicates the supposed ridiculousness of this notion as well as the implied defeat suggested by his question: "Haw! Ha!"; "Yes!"; "Yes, how about that?" (ii.9).[23] Both responses demonstrate the widespread influence of the Physical Force argument in relation to the suffrage debate as well as the commonly received view surrounding women's physical incapacities.

Farce and warrior women: evidencing women's physical capacity

By 1907, clearly Robins could already recognise the importance of the Physical Force argument within the anti-suffrage position, an importance that would compel consistent response from suffrage supporters over the years of the movement. However, while suffragists and suffragettes were united in refusing the suffrage implications of the assertion of female physical inferiority and masculine physical superiority, the various angles from which they refuted this argument represented the differing suffrage opinions about force, a variety also represented in the AFL's use of farcical humour. One approach taken, reflected onstage, was to attempt to prove women's own qualifications for the vote on the very grounds dictated by the Physical Force argument: that of being equally capable of physical defence as men. This was a position mainly reserved for the suffragettes who, as Godfrey says, "worked hard to prove that women had the physical and mental stamina to qualify for a say in how the

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[21] "The "Antis" at the Albert Hall", *The Vote* (9 March 1912), 233.
[22] At the Albert Hall Antis rally (28 February 1912), according to an interested and angry reviewer at *The Vote*, ibid.
[23] The appearance of the Poetic Young Man is a post-manuscript addition. See Croft (2009), 67.

country was run."[24] This stance comprised a contemporary and fundamental rebellion against the idea that weakness is women's natural state, a rebellion expressed in, amongst other plays, Graham Moffat's *The Maid and the Magistrate*, performed at the WSPU Christmas Bazaar in 1911 after shows in Glasgow in 1909. Published by the AFL in 1913, it concerned Miss Smith's impending trial for suffrage militancy over which her suitor, Mr Potter, a lawyer and conventional on matters pertaining to suffrage, slowly realises he will be presiding. Before he realises how radicalised she is, he seeks to flatter her. Showing instead how it has been cultivated to satisfy masculine desire, Mr Potter admires feminine weakness (specifically Miss Smith's) as "delightful".[25]

If Zangwill's *Prologue* recounts men's on and offstage idealisation of women as the extremes of passive beauty and active heroine that has relegated women's physical accomplishments to the realm of idealised fantasy, other plays are acts of visual anamnesis that refocus attention on women's past and present physical capacities. An influential reminder of these had been the advent of the sporty New Woman who had challenged the Victorian ideal. This progress is documented in Brieux's *Woman on Her Own* through the juxtaposition of Féliat, who does not recall ever having gymnastic lessons, and Lucienne, for whom physical exercise is most important. In *The Woman Wins*, such is this revolution that Bertha Moore mocks those who refuse the modern sportiness in women. Performed at the Portman Rooms on 18 February 1911, only five pages exist of this manuscript. However, it is possible to discern the story in which a hockey player, Georgina, arrives at the wrong house before her game and is thus confused with being a suffragette. "Mrs N" explains that she is not a sympathiser – "I consider women should stay at home and wear stays" – to which Georgina laughs and replies, "You're rather old fashioned down here perhaps."[26] The realisation of such physical accomplishments led to revolutionary ideas about women's actual or imminent physical equality with men that existed at the same time as the early twentieth-century fight for suffrage. The impact of these notions is evidenced in a letter from a schoolgirl printed in *Votes for Women* under the heading "The 'Physical Force' Fallacy". She wrote that, as an "average girl of the day," she is "equal [to her brother] in physical and moral courage" and "actually stronger" than one of her cousins. She declares, "I am sure I could fight as well as many of my boy or men friends if I had to – at any rate, I am quicker and have more presence of mind."[27]

This fighting capacity was reflected onstage in AFL plays, through characters and their

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[24] Godfrey (2012), 86.
[25] Graham Moffat, *The Maid and the Magistrate* in *English Plays* (London: Actresses' Franchise League, 1913), 5.
[26] Bertha Moore, *The Woman Wins* (1911) in *Vera L. Holme, Speeches by Leading Members of the W.S.P.U.* in WL, 7VJH/1/1/01, 1-5.
[27] "The 'Physical Force' Fallacy", *Votes for Women* (12 March 1909), 425.

actions. Whereas Hamilton's ever-popular *A Pageant of Great Women* lists an extensive array of historic captains and warrior women to challenge sincerely such ideas, in his 1911 play *Physical Force* Cecil Armstrong uses the medium of farce to actually stage women's physical combat, paralleling suffrage women's contemporary offstage pursuits pertaining to jujitsu.[28] Originally entitled *What Every Woman Ought to Know* (perhaps alluding to J. M. Barrie's 1908 play *What Every Woman Knows*, but adding physical cunning to woman's necessary knowledge), mention of this play appears in a review in *Votes for Women*. It is described as a "one-act comedy by Cecil Armstrong", produced at the Portman Rooms on 8th December 1911 during a matinée.[29] It appeared alongside a range of other AFL plays performed that week as part of the WSPU Christmas Fair, for which the WSPU expressed great thanks to the AFL.[30] The play opens at the Borrers' house with Elizabeth (Liz) Borrer demonstrating to her friend Mrs Terry the jujitsu skills she has been learning over the past six months from the "professor's wife".[31] Liz explains that she saw an advertisement for jujitsu aimed at "Dahn trodden & beaten wives" and " 'enpecked 'usbands". She undertook the classes to learn how to overpower her husband who is a violent drunk, the skills of which she enacts upon Mrs Terry as the play opens who is "lying face downwards on the floor, held there by Mrs Borrer who has her knee planted firmly in the small of her friend's back" (1).

Soon she has the opportunity of trying out her moves on her husband for the first time, as he returns home drunk and demanding. When he wants alcohol in his tea, Liz decides to pour the contents down the sink, entailing violent abuse from Bill: "I'll bash yer bloomin ead in!" (4). His attempt to make a rush at her is broken by Liz who catches and throws him onto the ground and keeps him there. He refuses the idea that Liz has him in her power so she gives him "a wrench that makes him cry out," meanwhile allowing Liz to, as she tells Bill, "give yer a bit of my mind, as well as my muscle." Her complaint derives from his spending so much money on alcohol, calling instead for him to give all his money to Liz on Saturday evenings and, "if yer behaves yerself proper," she will give him back sixpence for a drink, reduced by a tuppence each time he returns home drunk or verbally abuses her (4). After she smacks his face as she calls for him to wash it before meals, she releases him, only for him to

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[28] See the appendix for details about my research of this play and the conjectures on which this analysis is based. For further discussion of the representation of warriors in Hamilton's *A Pageant*, see Katharine Cockin, "Cicely Hamilton's Warriors: Dramatic Reinventions of Militancy in the British Women's Suffrage Movement", *Women's History Review*, 14, 3-4 (2005), 527-542. The spelling of 'jujitsu' varies greatly across sources; consistent with recent scholarship, I have adopted this form throughout (except in citation where source spelling is observed).

[29] "Plays at Portman Rooms", *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.

[30] *The Twelve-Pound Look* (performed three times); *An Allegory; The Maid and the Magistrate*; *The Apple*; *Miss Appleyard's Awakening*; Trimmings; Before *Sunrise*; *An Englishwoman's Home*; and *The Woman with the Pack*.

[31] Cecil Armstrong, *What Every Woman Ought to Know*, 1. LCP 1911/20. Lic. No. 253.

try “rushing at her.” She niftily stops him by doubling his arm up, forcing him to wipe his boots which he had, before, flatly refused to do. As he “flies at her throat,” Liz catches and throws him across her back, carrying him to the sink and holding his head underneath to wash his face (5-6). Each time he attempts to hit her, she deflects his action to the point that she has “both [his] arms doubled up.” When he refuses to drink his tea, she pours it over him and then pushes him out of the chair, explaining “That’s wots goin’ to ’appen every time you come ’ome drunk!” (6). With her husband making for her one last time, Liz now “doesn’t mince matters but throws him over her back on to the floor, hard. He aims a desperate kick at her & she catches his lef [leg] & twists him deftly over on to his face, then wraps his legs somewhere up into the small of his back” (6-7). When he refuses to give in, she tweaks his arms again then and then, deciding to drink her tea, “drags him along the floor and sits at the table, keeping him helplessly in position by a simple pressure of her foot.” Giving in, he is released and complains that his leg is broken, to which Liz exclaims, “that’s not broke it’s only bent!” (7).

Physical Force is clearly driven by the farcical comic element: its extreme buffoonery and horseplay harks back to the demanding acrobatic physicality of the commedia dell’arte and later clowning, the commonest and most basic form of farce; its working class domesticity follows in the nineteenth-century farce tradition; its stock characterisation – the drunken man and discontented wife – is typical of such a dramatic work which descends from clowning and pantomime; and the sexual conflict at the centre of the plot is characteristic of what Rosalind Crone calls farce’s “traditional theme of the ‘struggle for the breeches’.”[32] Consistent with farce, this dramatic language typically indicates to the audience that the play’s sole aim is to excite laughter. It certainly seems it would have achieved this at the Portman Rooms. A WSPU event, the audience was likely majority female: affiliated members and their guests. Despite speculation that women prefer “romantic” comedy to the violent slapstick of farce and moral protestation against it on their own part, as shown by Slater and Fairfield’s assertion that women are not amused by practical jokes, farce and coarseness, research has shown this to be historically incorrect (for instance, in the audience population of Punch and Judy shows).[33] In fact, although information regarding the specific performance of *Physical Force* is not given in review, *Votes for Women* does state that a “crowded house” and “delighted audiences” were features every day of the Christmas event.[34] Bearing in mind Jessica Milner Davis’ point that farce “refuses to be pigeonholed in any one camp of theory of humour,” it seems that the audience’s laughter would have in part related to the superiority

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[32] Rosalind Crone, “Child’s Play? Laughter, Humor and Emotion in Responses to the Nineteenth-Century Punch and Judy Show”, *The Historical Journal* 49.4 (2006), 1059.
[33] See Crone (2006).
[34] *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.

theory in the way that the direction of the play's humour promotes a sense of satisfied vindication regarding Liz's easy victory over Bill, cleanly highlighting women's defensive capacities and ridiculing men's claims to the contrary. [35]

It appears that at least one other play within the AFL repertoire also staged a battle between a man and a woman accomplished in jujitsu: Alfred Bucklaw's *The Suffragette*, a one-act play performed on Tuesday 24 March 1914 at the Arts Centre. Unfortunately I have been unable to locate this script, suggesting that it is unpublished, corroborated by Susan Carlson's research. The reviews, however, tell us that it consisted of a physical fight between "a mere man who was also a tramp and careless about the condition of his health" who was "no match physically for a well-equipped young woman with some knowledge of ju-jitsu." According to *The Vote*, this point was cleanly "demonstrated" by the play.[36]

Bucklaw's play had been announced with anticipation the previous week in *The Vote*, declaring that "special interest" is attached to this play due to Bucklaw's reputation; he had previously played in *The Gauntlet* during Woman's Theatre Week and he "strongly advocate[d] the advantage to women of a knowledge of Jujitsu."[37] As Sylvia Pankhurst also warned, "the police know ju-jitsu. I advise you to learn ju-jitsu."[38] Jujitsu – a form of self-defence – was already popular amongst women before the suffrage movement, during which the suffragettes in particular engaged with this practice in response to the physical and sexual violence they had to endure.[39] Edith Garrud was a jujitsu instructor and member of the WSPU who frequently demonstrated her methods to the suffragettes. Influenced by Edward William Barton-Wright who introduced Japanese martial arts to Britain, Garrud "was probably the first lady teacher to strenuously forge the link between Japanese martial arts for women and the female suffrage."[40] By 1908, she was helping her husband with women's classes. Becoming a member of the WSPU and leading the WFL's athletic branch in the same year, Garrud would by 1909 begin demonstrating to the suffragettes how to counter police aggression, her classes frequently advertised in the suffrage press.[41] By 1913, she was a

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[35] Jessica Milner Davis, "Traditional Comic Conflicts in Farce and Roles for Women" in Delia Chiaro and Raffaella Baccolini (eds.) *Gender and Humor: Interdisciplinary and International Perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2014), 37.
[36] "The Actresses' Franchise League's Matinee", *The Vote* (27 March 1914), 372. Additionally, regarding the 13-16 November 1912 International Suffrage Fair, Chelsea, *The Vote* lists "A Ju Jitsu Entertainment by Mr. E. H. Channon" as one of the 'attractions', alongside *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*. What form this entertainment took, however, is unclear. *The Vote* (9 November 1912), 21.
[37] "Actresses' Franchise League Matinee", *The Vote* (20 March 1914), 347.
[38] "Suffragist Militancy: Miss Sylvia Pankhurst's Advice", *The Times* (20 August 1913), 8.
[39] See Robins' *The Convert* and Richardson's autobiography, which details the violence of, for instance, Black Friday after and due to which (according to Richardson) Emmeline Pankhurst's sister, Mary Clarke, died.
[40] Godfrey (2012), 99.
[41] For example see *The Common Cause* (8 June 1911), 164. The advertisement reads as follows: "EVERY WOMAN MAN AND CHILD OUGHT TO KNOW THE ART OF SELF-DEFENCE &

trainer for The Bodyguard, a group of twenty-five members enlisted to protect Emmeline Pankhurst from re-arrest under the Prisoners Act. One demonstration she led took place at the very staging of *Physical Force* by the AFL: *Votes for Women* reported that the performance included a jujitsu display by "Mrs. And [Garrud's daughter] Miss Sybil Garrud."[42] In fact, reports show that Garrud had played a more intrinsic role in the play during its original performances for which she trained the actors. A journalist for *Health & Strength* writing on 8 April 1911 witnessed the rehearsals at Garrud's dojo (studio).[43] Perhaps her input there also indicates she had a similar choreographic role in the play's AFL incarnation.

This impetus to physical resistance as represented by the methods of self-defence and wider violent militancy adopted by the WSPU was partly an attempt to demonstrate how women could meet the supposed physical force requirement of citizenship. Aware of the gendered exclusivity of citizenship's contemporary definition, the suffrage movement sought to reconfigure it in a variety of ways. Drawing on the long history of masculine radicalism (such as how men themselves protested for the vote), the WSPU understood citizenship as a civic and active duty in each individual. By actively proving their militaristic ability to resist a corrupt and tyrannical government in the face of violence and discrimination, the militants (for whom Joan of Arc was significantly the "patron saint" of the movement) sought to show their civic engagement to be worthy of the vote based on historical admissions to it, and to humiliate through example the opinion of those who continue to obstruct their way. As suffragette Richardson wrote, "We were inaugurating a new era for women and demonstrating for the first time in history that women were capable of fighting their own battle for freedom's sake."[44]

In their vindicating performances that mixed simulation with real skill, the jujitsu plays promoted exactly this position. The jujitsu moves evidenced true effort on the part of the actors. Reflecting the real arduousness of the physical activity onstage in *Physical Force*, *The Daily Mirror* referred to the original rehearsals of the play as "training". As Eva Quin, who played Liz in the first performances in April 1911, said of her and Martin Rowland (Bill), "It is such hard work for both of us […] that if we miss for a single day we suffer for it. We have carried realism just as far as it is possible to go. When Mr. Roland aims a blow at my face, for instance, I have to be sure I do catch his wrist and put a lock on him or my jaw would be struck, perhaps broken." [45] The choreographed jujitsu was not mere enactment but real

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PHYSICAL CULTURE KNOWN AS JU-JUTSU (THE SOFT ART) VISITORS WELCOMED. HOURS 10-30 TO 7-30. EDITH GARRUD."

[42] "Plays at Portman Rooms", *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.

[43] See appendix for more details.

[44] Richardson (1953), 103.

[45] "What Every Woman Should Know: Performers' Strenuous Realism in Ju-Jitsu Playlet", *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.

demonstration of skill, with all the associated dangers of the art for both parties. Rowland said he struggled to make people understand that, when Quin throws him, "I really do come down violently on my back."[46] In theme as well as performance, then, it is evident how *Physical Force* provided its WSPU audience with a sense of celebratory vindication that was intimately related to their suffrage goals.

Reflecting affiliations with the WSPU, other plays in addition to *Physical Force* similarly stressed the militant resoluteness of women, this time with overt reference to the movement which, as the WSPU was also wont to do, is configured as a war. In *Deeds not Words*, Marjory's work is a "battle" in which she is "enlisted", and her father describes her as his "soldier daughter" (15; 23). In recognition of wartime suffering and its inevitable casualties, Marjory collapses at the thought of prison's hardships while Phyllis in *The Maid and the Magistrate* imagines her prison experience as an act of heroism for which she will be decorated with a "Holloway medal" (15). As well as evidencing their militant fitness, these examples also speak to the notions about physical requirements for work in the political world in general. Evidenced across the plays is political women's indefatigable strength: Vida in *Votes for Women!*; Nellie Grant in *Lady Geraldine's Speech*; her comrades and the Suffragette herself in *At the Gates* who seeks to prove that "the government cannot wear us out" (17). It is therefore with comic irony that *Miss Appleyard's Awakening* highlights the physicality of the movement for even the women anti-suffragists. Morton (the maid, a suffragette) pleads with anti-suffragist Miss Appleyard to "go and lie down a bit." She dismisses the idea with soldier-like spirit, saying, "I shall be all right when I've had some tea" (4). By demonstrating even an anti's strength, the play suggests a physical dedication is common to antis as well as their opponents, thereby ironically dispelling the anti position regarding feminine frailty and proving their capacity for public service. Mrs Crabtree is impressed by Miss Appleyard's work, ironically and unwittingly confirming the suffrage position as she celebrates, "And yet Suffragists say we don't work for our cause!" (7).

For Mrs Chicky in *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*, women's militant capacity does not derive from current political necessity or renewed sportiness. Toil, risk and sacrifice are, and have always been, at the very core of what it is to be a woman. Women's daily physical trials – childbearing and dangerous jobs – are proof of their would-be prowess in the field. She snuffs Mrs Holbrook's idea that "Women can't fight" by rolling her sleeves higher and defiantly announcing "Try 'em!" (10). This unwavering defiance of contemporary prejudice seems likely to have drawn a laugh from the audience here, probably emanating from a combination of Mrs Chicky's audacious self-assurance and pluck, and the confident belittling of preconception there implied. The curt, direct, and matter-of-fact manner in which Mrs Chicky

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[46] Ibid.

shoots down her opponent's argument is effective in its very simplicity, presenting her view as merely that of commonsense: indeed, as Hamilton also shows in *A Pageant*, women have been fighting and sacrificing themselves for centuries. For Garrud, jujitsu provided proof of this long-established ability. If recent tradition had kept them cloistered and affected their physical capacities, Garrud believed jujitsu "gave women a method of changing nature."[47] Just as they did offstage, women's use of self-defence onstage was one way of directly evidencing their fighting spirit and self-sufficiency, and farce is the vehicle through which negative claims as to women's ability are demolished.

Suffrage militancy and the ridiculing farce of superior force

However, the way that a lot of these plays focus not only on an equal but superior force introduces farcical tones, as already seen in *Physical Force*, that arguably undermine the sustainability of such ideas of physical self-sufficiency. The demonstration of a superior physical capacity in the jujitsu plays is mirrored in the presentation in several non-jujitsu plays of wrestling and sport, the latter which, as the aforementioned 1909 war manual shows, was also understood to be an indication of one's prowess in battle. As in the jujitsu plays, in *The Master* a physical competition between the sexes is staged. Grace makes a show of her superior strength when Tommy cites *The Weekly Gramaphone*'s assertion that nature has made women "our inferior physically" (7). There ensues a physical commotion onstage during which Grace takes Tommy under her arms and runs around the room with him, declaring only to release him if he says "pax". Grace's strength is such that it overpowers Tommy, whose initial reluctance to say "pax" only extends his ordeal. He is eventually yet reluctantly compelled to shout, "Damn you – pax," at which Grace puts him down. A sense of his annoyance and humiliation is communicated in his angry, repetitive, and ineloquent ensuing outburst: "How dare you. How dare you. Damn you – damn you" (7). Also in this play, Grace challenges her brother to a hockey match. Tommy immediately declines: "Play against a lot of girls. Not me. […]. I don't like the tone you girls are taking with us men just now" (5). As we know, Grace is significantly stronger than Tommy, so the outcome is implied. In *An Anti-Suffragist*, Jack does take on such competition in the form of a golf match with Mrs Vickers, "who plays for the county." He "got licked at five and four to play" (8). In these plays, women are physically unsurpassable.

The overtly farcical representation of much of this superiority shows up its conscious dramatic manipulation for comic purposes, suggesting that the aim behind this humour was less to vindicate women in their physicality in any real sense, and more to ridicule men's

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[47] Godfrey (2012), 105.

own. Offstage views and tactics support this idea. Just as there is within the very nature of farce an implicit acknowledgement of the temporary nature of norm transgression – its very humour, as in comedy itself, points to a transitory festivity disengaged from reality – behind the WSPU's use of force was an awareness shared with other sectors of the movement about women's physical inferiority. Asserting physical equality and, more so, superiority to men usually required some concession and was certainly not widely asserted with confidence across the movement (which is not to discount the validity of the achievements of some individual women, such as the self-proclaimed ones of the schoolgirl, and any offstage versions of Mrs Vickers). Emphasising this, at the WFL Special Conference in April 1912, a group criticised the organisation's unwillingness to challenge the WSPU's use of force. Suffragette Edith How Martyn was one who disclaimed the political utility of violent militancy "partly because [such agitation] is a direct appeal to physical force, in which women are admitted inferior."[48] Here, the WSPU's potential for success is undermined by their reliance on a force understood to be unquestionably inferior to men's. This belief is reflected in Robins' *The Convert* in which Vida protests that it must be "futile" for Miss Claxton to pit her "muscle" against men's; it is "merely absurd." Vida knows Miss Claxton feels the same, given how "intelligent" she is.[49] Likewise, in *Physical Force* Liz is aware of the limitations of her own force. Her defeat is enabled by Bill's drunkenness; with his sobriety comes a reality in which Liz can no longer overpower him.

The dangerously escalating violence brought prolific criticism against the WSPU and their use of violent force. It was variously perceived to be unfeminine, counter-productive, and in glaring contradiction to the suffrage movement's stance against the government's own view and use of force. What has been eclipsed by the serious violence and criticism thereof that dominated the latter years, however, is what we might term the conscious farcical aspect at the origin of this force. This requires a degree of retracing because of the way post-war discussions of militancy have eclipsed ideas of any political rationale. As Nym Mayhall says, this has led to a rupture between the act of militancy and its motivation as resistance and an engagement with citizenship, valorising instead ideas of (comic) irrationality.[50] Reflecting the way the movement has been much discussed in terms of its theatrical nature, farce has been indeed historically used as a derogatory term against the movement in its post-war documentation: Dangerfield likened it to an Aristophanes comedy, referencing the "unprincipled laughter" that continues to rise from the "spectacle of women attacking men."[51]

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[48] Edith How Martyn, letter resigning as Head of Political and Militant Department and from NEC of WFL (17 April 1912). Suffragette Fellowship Archive, reel 2, group D, vol. III, Z6070, 84-68.
[49] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 17.
[50] Nym Mayhall (2003), 7.
[51] Dangerfield (1961), 154.

As Jane Marcus points out, here he uses "the brilliant patriarchal ploy of labelling the suffrage movement a comedy" to belittle it.[52]

Looking at the political rationale of resistance, however, shows that it was precisely the incongruous spectacle of farce to which Dangerfield made reference that the suffragettes consciously played upon, albeit with a different laughter target in mind. As Milner Davis notes of stage farce, although no one is safe from ridicule, it is the man who is traditionally cast as the victim, sustaining all sorts of physical degradation and humiliation as he is forced to confront the nature of his stupidity and physicality. This highlights Dangerfield's manipulation of the dynamic of the suffrage farce in order to make women the humour target; more traditionally, as shown by the way the suffrage movement used this theatrical history, the true target is man. While women were acutely aware of the ways their "transgressions" attracted derisory laughter, they used their force to actively challenge the direction of that laugh as well as to reconfigure the idea of victimhood in the farcical world they inhabited.

Women's political actions frequently met with the disparaging laughing gaze of anti-suffragists; in many ways, women's entire lives have been characterised by the farcical element, which is to say – as Booth has written of the "best farce" such as Georges Feydeau's – that which "takes man into the heart of a malicious, cruel, and absurdist universe which everywhere conspires against him."[53] If the fundamental practical joke in farce (and life) is that man's spirit is trapped in man's body, women have been trapped by a physicality that is a far greater practical joke than that played on any man, epitomised for suffrage women by the Physical Force argument itself. We might think of the Seamstress in *At the Gates* and Maria in *An Englishwoman's Home* whose spirits are ensnared by their own bodies, and Mrs Humphry Ward's declaration that pits the desperate farce protagonist's spiritual aspiration – defined by "the emancipating process" – against fundamental material entrapment, women's "physical constitution". If women tried to transgress, their behaviour was deemed eccentric and anti-social, the precise traits typically attacked in a standard eighteenth-century farce, and their actions were punished in ways that reminded them of their inescapable materiality, such as the violation of their bodies through forcible feeding. The suffrage movement knew women's world to be a frustratingly farcical one on which the curtain has not yet descended.

As in staged farce, the frustrating inability to exploit a society's distribution of power led to rebellion within the movement that sought deliberately to initiate the incongruous inversion of expectation at the core of all farce plots. Typically used to humorously explore the essentiality of gender roles, women's actions sought to consciously reframe their life's farce in order to make man's behaviour, rather than women's, the target of laughing accusations

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[52] Marcus (1987), 3

[53] Michael Booth, "Feydeau and the Farcical Imperative" in Redmond (1988), 152.

regarding humorous eccentricity. Amongst the (then as now contested) ways in which militants legitimised force as politically useful (it was reluctantly deemed a necessity: a morally-driven wake-up call to men who refused to take women seriously) was the idea that it could humiliate men regarding their own physical limitations into ceasing their tyranny. Women's ploy here is akin to the workings of a humiliation farce, itself "practical joking turned theatrical".[54] So, while undoubtedly suffragette violence sought partly to demonstrate the validity of their claim to citizenship on the grounds of physical force, at the outset they were realistic about their relative force to men's, using it not in the conventional sense to repress men physically but, instead, to repress men ironically through humiliation regarding their misplaced reliance on force.

The use of jujitsu itself by the suffragettes was a clever concession to this reality, enabling women to show themselves to be self-sufficient fighters in order to intimidate and thus humiliate the opposition, while actually admitting the strength of the enemy. Jujitsu is, of course, a deceptive art: the jujitsu fighter only *appears* to exert his or her own force over the opponent; in actuality, jujitsu is a gentle manipulation of the opponent's force, rather than an application of one's own. Garrud knew this when she expressed jujitsu to be a "science" that is a useful substitute while waiting for women's evolution towards actual physical equality.[55] This fundamental deception at the heart of jujitsu was captured in a *Daily Mirror* interview with *Physical Force*'s Quin. She was amused at the way the "stage hands" regarded her with awe: "Mr. Rowland is much taller than I am, and to people who do not understand ju-jitsu it must seem marvellous what I can do with him."[56] This was a technique based more on skill and agility than force, as Armstrong makes clear in his script when Liz reads the jujitsu advertisement that states "little knowledge" can enables "the weakest of women" to overcome men (1). Women's offstage adoption of this skill derived from their awareness that this manipulation was the only way to adequately challenge their adversaries, such as the police. In *Physical Force*, this sense of manipulation is enhanced by the dramatic context of this jujitsu. The *Daily Mirror* refers to this play as "Strenuous Realism", drawing attention to the fact that this jujitsu is of a performed nature.[57] Notwithstanding the fact that the performance – and jujitsu itself – requires impressive physical energy and courage, the fact that *Physical Force* was a rehearsed routine – the actor playing Bill facilitating by lack of resistance – would have aided the actress playing Liz to achieve the moves required in the script.

The performative nature of both on and offstage jujitsu helps to show how it could be employed to humiliate. In *Physical Force*, for instance, Liz's deliberate contrivance of a

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[54] Eric Bentley, *The Life of the Drama* (New York: Atheneum, 1964), 234.
[55] Edith Garrud, "The World We Live In", *Votes for Women* (4 March 1910), 355.
[56] *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.
[57] Ibid.

situation that enables her to manipulate the impression of her strength relative to Bill's results in the utter ridicule of his physicality. This play corresponds to Milner Davis' categorisation of "humiliation farce" in which the unpleasant victim is exposed to his or her fate without opportunity for retaliation. The fact that Bill does try to retaliate, but that his attempts are immediately thwarted, humorously reinforces the humiliation, frustrating any swings of power more typical of a "reversal farce".[58] With the rationale that Bill is getting his comeuppance, Liz wins the empathy of the audience, while his consistent and deserved defeat assures unidirectional laughter towards Bill.

Admittedly the serious dedication to force in the latter years, from around 1912, arguably qualifies the period in which the pretence to ridicule can be said to be valid, yet there seems to have been enough of this feeling for Robins in 1907 to allow Miss Claxton to rationalise the use of force in this way. As she says, the strength of women's physicality lies not in its actual physical force but in the potential for ridicule that lies within women's use or threat of violence against men, precisely due to the incongruous reversal there invoked. She explains, "A man's fear of ridicule will restrain him when nothing else will. If one of them is publicly whipped, *and by a woman*, it isn't likely to be forgotten. Even the fear of it – protects us from some things."[59] In a speech in 1912 during an AFL matinee at the Rehearsal Theatre, Mr. Atherley Jones made a similar statement, as reported by *Votes for Women*. He noted that "no great Constitutional change had ever been effected but by the fear if not the actuality of physical force."[60] Here, as in Miss Claxton's words, the convincing use of force is understood to facilitate tangible political change.

Masculine fear and the Physical Force argument

At the base of the militant's logic explained by Miss Claxton is a deep awareness of the way men view themselves and women, and of the fear attached to the disruption – however slight or temporary – of this hierarchy. In their representation of women's superior sporting abilities, *The Master* and *An Anti-Suffragist* demonstrate men's tenacious and fearful grip over masculine and feminine ideals that the adherence to the Physical Force argument represents. Reflecting the traditional notion of woman's weakness and concomitant sporting shortfalls, Tommy refuses the idea of playing sport with a girl as an unnatural notion; women cannot be legitimate opponents. The humorous cowardice in his evasive response indicates the importance of masculine supremacy to him; he does not wish to be shown up by his sister. In *An Anti-Suffragist*, Jack does play against a girl and is duly humiliated, which angers him:

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[58] Milner Davis (2014), 38.
[59] Robins (1908), vol. ii, 17.
[60] "The Actresses' Franchise League", *Votes for Women* (9 February 1912), 295.

"He came back in an awful temper […] he said women had no business on the links" (8). Jack's lack of sportsmanship is a comic representation of men's closely guarded supremacy.

For the suffrage movement, the importance men attributed to their physical superiority was a source of easy humour and ridicule. From early on, the antis' tenacious dependence on the Physical Force argument reflected in these plays was raising smiles amongst the suffrage camp in terms of the way the anxious attack on women's physical capacities ironically exposed a vulnerable and self-protective desperation amongst men. It is these smiles that paved the way for the AFL's own comic treatment of the subject. In 1909, Sidney Low wrote in *Votes for Women* about this "last stand" which the anti-suffragist is taking: "It always strikes me as rather funny, this *ultima ratio* of the anti-suffragist. […] Driven to his inner defences the anti-suffragist reiterates that women after all *are* the weaker sex physically."[61]

Low's writing is evocative of a retreating army, suggestive of women's warring success and men's feeble and ill-considered last-ditch assault. As Low reflects in this article, the tenacity of the masculine ideal also reflected contemporary anxieties concerning the reality of this force. Behind the rhetoric of masculine heroism lay the stark truth, exposed as recently as the Boer War recruitment process, that not all men have such soldierly strength. During this, the pitiful quality of Britain's men was in acute evidence, as many as nine out of ten would-be soldiers were rejected on health grounds. Thus, from early on, amongst the most cited defences concerned one of the most glaringly ridiculous implications of the Physical Force argument: that men's vote is based on their physical capacity. Low wrote of the ridiculous concept of the vote as a reward "for actual or potential warlike capacity": "In that case how many males could claim it? […] we might indeed refuse to enfranchise women; but we should have to begin by disfranchising about two-thirds of the men."[62] This point was also satirically delivered in suffragist Mona Caird's 1908 assertion that, should polling booths be fitted to test and measure the force of each candidate's biceps, this would "shortly banish the representative system altogether."[63]

Men's fear and farce's restraint

It is a combination of this fervent claim to superiority and men's vulnerability to exposure, as well as men's aforementioned inability to support (specifically women's) ridicule, that made the movement sure that men would be fearful of the actions that threatened to show them up. According to Miss Claxton, the fear or actuality of challenging the strongly held

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[61] Sir Almroth Wright's *The Unexpurgated Case Against Women Suffrage* would not be published until 1913, yet with irony Low seems to presage much of its content here. Even Mrs Humphry Ward would be amongst Wright's critics for his particular violent tirade against women.
[62] Sidney Low, "The 'Physical Force' Argument", *Votes for Women* (4 June 1909), 750.
[63] Letter to *The Times* (11 August 1908), 10.

ideals of masculine physical supremacy and women's concomitant weakness is enough to "restrain" men. This restraint refers undoubtedly to men's use of violence (physical restraint), but is sufficiently vague to suggest that women's actions also aim to attack patriarchal tyranny on a far wider scale. *Physical Force* illustrates this restraining potential in action. It is not Liz's show of force that restrains Bill in his own use of violence, but his "fear of ridicule" regarding his own masculine strength, actualised by the farcical ambush Liz contrives and threatens again if Bill does not change his ways. It causes a grovelling Bill pain but even more, embarrassment, demonstrated as he defiantly refutes her assertion that she has him in her power: "You avn't". Such embarrassment leads to a realisation as to the type of husband he has been to Liz and motivates him to "get drunk no more" (8).

What this incident also highlights is that, for the humiliation to be successfully repressive, women's force and the reputation of it have to be sufficiently credible. As later discussed, this would place women in a dangerous position regarding their political repute. In *Votes for Women!* it is from precisely this reputation that Vida's humorous humiliation of Greatorex derives, while also highlighting the potentially dangerous political consequences of these tactics that could ostracise women. When Vida questions him about his trepidation regarding the prospect of receiving a suffrage deputation, Greatorex initially dismisses her accusations that he was afraid with a pretence of indifference, demonstrating his embarrassment about being scared of women: "Of course I wasn't going to be bothered with a lot of - " (i.14). His veneer of confidence is belied by his irritable reluctance to engage with this topic, and his fear is soon apparent. Vida sets up the women as "heroic" Daniels against the dangerous and brutal men whom she depicts as "arch opponent" lions that the women have to beard in their den. This farcically exaggerated presentation, as well as the way she simulates shock towards the fact that he resisted meeting them, heightens the subsequent incongruity and therefore Greatorex's humiliation. He tries to disguise his refusal as distaste rather than apprehension but his "*comic look of terror*" as well as his language betrays his fear: "a friend of mine went and had a look at 'em" (i.14). The exaggerated anxious caution, the ridiculous physicality of his facial movements, and his fearful depersonalisation of the suffragettes only heightens Vida's scoffing, these farcical elements having been orchestrated by Vida and employed by the playwright to further humiliate him. Although the two men manage to dismiss their wariness amongst themselves as indifference, Vida's ironic tone unveils the true nature of their reluctance.

As shown in both of these plays, women's reputation facilitates men's restraint physically if not politically. This restraint takes on a wider political significance in *10 Clowning Street*. In this play, the anti-suffragist Prime Minister risks being ridiculed by the widespread journalistic and public support for the suffrage campaign as vitally legitimate. Fearing such humiliating exposure, the Prime Minister is forced to give in to women's suffrage. He is

ironically swayed by Marchmount's flattery that he "will go down to posterity as the bravest Prime Minister that ever existed – the one who wasn't afraid of women!" (187). The fact that this works on the Prime Minister highlights the commonplace nature of such fear and the consequent powers of intimidation that women have over men, as well as the command of men's ego. Even at the cost of women's suffrage itself, this ego cannot permit weakness in the face of women. In recognition that it is fear that compels men's majority opposition to suffrage, Marchmount realises that it is paradoxically by permitting suffrage for women that men uphold their strength.

Likewise, in the popular farce *How the Vote Was Won*, it is the fear of being further humiliated by women's demonstration of power that compels the men to concede to the vote. This play is set "on a spring day in any year in the future" when, according to Aunt Lizzie, men have "suddenly found out that they have always been in favour of woman's suffrage!" (159). Now, it is unfashionable to be anything but established pro-suffrage supporters. Lizzie's tone here is obviously facetious: she knows that the men have only just converted due to the pressure and disorder women have deliberately brought about but she is also aware that it would be humiliating for them to admit that "it was not until we held a pistol to their heads that they changed their minds" (159). Here, the pistol is a metaphorical allusion to the threatening and embarrassing hold – both physical and mental – that women have been shown to have over men throughout the play.

Indeed, it is the physically overbearing and disruptive presence of his relatives that causes Horace's debilitating fear. Like Williams, who has "got twelve of them [women] in my drawing-room," Horace's close and distant female relatives descend upon his home to enforce themselves as his dependants (163). Despite his initial relief that a cab full of luggage is stopping next door, its actual destination is Horace's door, thereby frustrating the Freudian concept of comic "relief" so that what might have been Horace's becomes the audience's own laughter. This play received a very warm reception from audiences, *The Times* recording their inevitable delight: "How could they help it?"[64] Typical of farce's truncation of time to enhance the pressure on the protagonist, no sooner has he encountered Agatha than his niece Molly arrives, followed by his second cousin Madame Christine whom Horace has never met. He increasingly finds the intruders most tenuous, emphasising the hilarity of his acute victimisation: "If anyone calls me [their nearest male relative] again I shall go mad." Without time to collect himself, his cousin, Maudie Spark enters, and then Aunt Lizzie, played in the initial performance by Edith Craig who, according to Allan Wade who played Horace several times, "made a tremendous entrance looking like a drawing by Leech or Charles Keene, and

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[64] *The Times* in Holledge (1981), 67.

carrying either a cat in a basket or a parrot in a cage."[65] The script called for "a fat spaniel" and "a birdcage with a parrot in it." (158).

With their large cases, pets and other paraphernalia, as well as their imposing personalities, the women make quite an entrance, the overall effect of which exaggerates Horace as a "put upon" man. His wife pities him and, unable to cope, he "*dives*" under the table to escape the dreaded Aunt Lizzie. As Lizzie talks freely, since Horace is "out", her discussion about the success of the cause is interrupted by a cowering Horace who shouts out from under the table, "Liar!" (159). Since it does not affect the women's onstage dialogue, this acts as a comic aside – even appeal – to the audience, furthering the sense of Horace's powerlessness amongst these women. But, as Lizzie states that all remaining antis are now so unpopular that they will be "slung up to the nearest lamp-post," Ethel runs to her "Horry" who emerges from the table "*dashed and beaten*" by Lizzie's intention to stay (160). The dynamic of Ethel and Horace here enables the play's farcical parody of melodrama, intensifying the ridicule of these two characters. Horace's stature has been well and truly deflated by the ordeal, as indicated by Ethel's childlike appellation, Lizzie's reference to him as a "boy", and his own shows of ineptitude (160). Horace himself claims that he hid away to be "less in the way" – this is untrue, yet nonetheless acts as a comic physical deflation (160). This farce contrives unrelentingly to undermine Horace's authority by exposing his cowardly weakness.

The idea that women have held such power over men is too much for the latter to admit, as it impacts the idea of their superior authority, so they act – as shown by Horace – as long-time devotees to the cause. As in *10 Clowning Street*, this ostensible conversion highlights men's humorous desperation to uphold the masculine force ideal on which the effectiveness of this ridicule is founded. Having been converted by coercion, even the impressiveness of his profession that the men will "know what to do" and will do it with "dignity and firmness" is, by the stage directions' admission, "*marred by the fact that Horace's hand, in emphasising it, comes down heavily on the loaf of bread on the table*" (157). Physical objects, including food, are focal points in farce. Humans often find themselves dominated by these inanimate objects, the emanating laughter testifying to Bergson's insight about the comic tension between the mechanical and the flexible (his reflections on the comic were, indeed, inspired by the French farce-writers). The presence of bread here is perhaps significant as a riposte to Horace's earlier incessant laughter at the "Hovis wharf" incident: "[Winifred] asked for a vote, and they gave her bread" (144). As the spongy obstacle of the bread breaks the force of Horace's action, his laughing strength is turned back upon itself in a comic reversal to mock Horace's

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[65] Allan Wade in Eleanor Adlard (ed.), *Edy: Recollections of Edith Craig* (London: Frederick Muller, 1949), 69.

pretence of masculinised leadership and to stress, despite his conversion, his enduring rigid mindset about men's superiority. This humour pertaining to Horace is captured in a photograph of the performance in which the actor has assumed a self-important stance, the women's glances humouring him.[66] It is this tenacity that informs the on and offstage farcical humiliation.

As with all these plays, *How the Vote was Won* almost unidirectionally promotes condescending laughter towards the victim. Booth points out that, in farce, "It is important that the only people amused and entertained by this spectacle are the audience."[67] However, the nature of the humiliation in these plays assures that the suffrage women themselves are not implicated amongst the main laughter targets (some qualifications are discussed in the next chapter). Instead, they are complicit instigators of the jokes, as shown when the women of *How the Vote Was Won* delight in the farcical outcomes of their actions. As perpetual victims of laughter and mistreatment themselves, these characters join those who were the targets of suffrage caricature in the previous chapter who likewise have no humour agency. The essential downfall of the farce's victim is their complete lack of a sense of humour, thus fully inverting the anti-suffrage humour dynamic. If the men's physical authority is humiliated, then so is their sense of humour, of which Horace shows awareness. Upon Molly's entrance, a frustrated Horace declares, "I suppose this is a joke!" (154). His angry and ironic statement demonstrates his utter incapacity to find any humour within the evolving situation, due to his own ignorance. Part of his frustration derives from a realization that he is the butt of the joke, the bread incident making it clear that the targets have been reversed. Molly wittingly replies to Horace that a joke is "one way of looking at [the situation]" (154). The women know that the success of their actions depends on this very interpretation, for to be the subject of a joke was very serious indeed.

Humiliation farce and Physical Force in the wider AFL

Convinced of the potential power of humiliation farce both on and offstage in terms of the way it can satisfy audiences and even be helpfully repressive, this mode was used widely and diversely in the plays to ridicule men and amuse audiences, in turn to show up the Physical Force argument as a fallacy. These plays paralleled the premise on which militant force was partly based regarding the repressive effect of humiliation, largely replacing force with forceful humour. While the jujitsu plays actually enacted women's physical public whipping

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[66] Photograph postcard: "How the Vote Was Won" in WL, TH/008. It carries the ironic caption, "When you want a thing done, ask a man to do it."
[67] Booth (1988), 152.

of men for ridiculing purposes, more widely the plays act as metaphorical public whipping devices of men in their various convictions regarding physical force using, as in jujitsu, men's attachment to their (idea of their) own force against them. The women characters consciously and unconsciously orchestrate observations and scenarios which facilitate the humiliation of men, in order to ridicule the Physical Force argument in its multifaceted entirety. They show that, far from physically capable and brave, it is fear not force that drives men's anti-suffrage arguments.

Mocking masculine infirmity

The plays above have already evidenced men's less than soldierly attitude in the "war" that is the fight for suffrage. Reflecting Caird's polling booth satire, the League widely mocked the argument that all men possess soldierly strength by using some humour techniques that are traditionally at home in farce to show up men's infirmities. In *An Anti-Suffragist*, Miss De Lacey recalls the speech of General Sir Thomas Charrington during the anti meeting. He is "rather old and has only one lung" but nonetheless, when he tells the women that because they cannot fight they ought not to vote, De Lacey is convinced by his logic (7). The way she innocently notes his pitiful infirmity while willingly accepting his argument serves to heighten the irony surrounding his own citizenship, further emphasised when he has a coughing fit and has to be attended to by his wife.

The Archdeacon's own strength is also brought into question in this play. De Lacey's initial reverence for this figure serves to humorously accentuate his diminished features: "a dear man, and so learned" (6). She laments that, "the poor man is quite bald" (6). The state of one's hair is a frequent reference in these plays, drawing on traditions stemming back to the "father of farce", Aristophanes, whose work frequently mocked bald, old men as a stock motif to ridicule authority.[68] In *Votes for Women!*, Greatorex has a "shining bald pate" with "two strands of coal-black hair trained across his crown from left ear to right and securely pasted there" (i.10-11). In *An Englishwoman's Home*, the lodger Bates – comically obsessed with (and pitifully incapable of) washing his head – has a "fat" head according to John and looks "ridiculous as possible" with his "hair all sticking out from having been washed", and in *Mary Edwards* the "large full-bottomed wig" (3) worn by Lord Anne Hamilton highlights his pretentions to power and authority which evade his natural capacity, underlined when his own child, to his protestation, attempts to "despoil [his] father" of it (4). With hair's obvious

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[68] Douglas M. MacDowell, "Clowning and Slapstick in Aristophanes" in James Redmond (ed.), *(*1988), 12.

biblical connotations, these references imply a belittling lack of Samsonian strength.

The depiction of feeble men who profess the sanctity of the Physical Force argument in *An Anti-Suffragist* was reflected in other suffrage observations of the same year, highlighting the way this play interacted closely with contemporary debates. Speaking on 5 June 1910 at the Queen's Hall (later reported in *Votes for Women*), Mr. Mansell-Moullin observed that the Physical Force argument "is usually brought forward by men who could not fight if they would and would not if they could. That argument would have kept John Bright out of Parliament altogether."[69] Perhaps Greatorex is intended as a John Bright type, and similarly Geoffrey de Haughten and Mr Foljambe, the Prime Minister, in *10 Clowning Street* who are respectively "a young man of weedy, aristocratic appearance, to whom every movement seems an effort" (173) and a man with "a large, weak mouth" and rheumatism (177). Such is also the portrayal of the General in *An Anti-Suffragist*, made all the more poignant by the possibility that, although he might once have fought (or at least served in some manner), his vote is clearly not based on his enduring capacity to do so. Regarding those of the "would not" camp which Mansell-Moullin identifies, William in *The Master* fits this category. Although his "cough" and his wife's subsequent aid parallel the dynamic portrayed by the Archdeacon and his wife in *An Anti-Suffragist*, unlike the Archdeacon's, William's cough is a consciously performed affliction as a means of deflecting responsibility; he still enjoys large breakfasts and whisky sodas (2). On this latter point, several other plays affiliate women's relative powers for physical endurance to masculine privilege and laziness.[70]

In their belittlement of men, these comedies create a playfully ironic tone, particularly where tropes pertaining to weak, balding men are borrowed from the "harmlessness" of farce. Farce is traditionally a vehicle through which the essentiality of gender roles is challenged, making it ideal for these playwrights' purposes. Typically, farce has privileged the subservient classes (witty servants, for instance) over and above authority, who manage to outwit their masters. As Milner Davis notes, humiliation farce has often featured the "woman getting away with it" motif. The "stylised playframe" or "festival licence" through which this is done assures that authority (whose "humiliation would outrage social conventions") can be critiqued relatively harmlessly, cloaked in a sense of lively fun rather than satire: the humiliation is veiled as a mere joke.[71] The "festival" context allows playwrights and audiences alike to derive pleasure from anti-suffrage misfortune in wholly safe and sociable ways. According to Freud, jokes circumvent social taboo, also providing pleasure and satisfying aggression. Offstage, causing such offense was punished so this was possibly a

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[69] Report of a speech delivered at the Queen's Hall on June 5, 1910, by Mr. Mansell-Moullin. "A Medical man on the Suffrage Question", *Votes for Women* (10 June 1910), 597.
[70] See *The Apple*; *An Anti-Suffragist*; *Woman on Her Own*.
[71] Jessica Milner Davis, *Farce* (London: Methuen, 1978), 24, 90.

welcome outlet for those not indulging in such extreme behaviour. As Bentley has written of farce's audiences, "we enjoy the privilege of being totally passive while on stage our most treasured, unmentionable wishes are fulfilled before our eyes."[72] Pro-suffrage supporters could therefore savour this spectacle without taking responsibility for it. The fact that farce invites, even depends on such inversions of power, makes it a safe space in which to promote pointed laughter without offense, thus proving a useful vehicle for the AFL.

At times, however, the plays' more pitiful portrayals could appear as mean-spirited satire, a tone which the AFL had much criticised in its opposition and from which it had seemingly distanced itself as unhelpful. In *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*, Glover uses a paralysed man, Mr Welby, to send up the Physical Force argument and *Jim's Leg* concerns a man who has lost his leg after being "run into by a motor bus" (169). Yet, while there is certainly some enjoyment in depicting some of the targets and a sense of impropriety in terms of discussing and profaning the male body, the true direction of ridicule lies, of course, in the argument and advocators of Physical Force, rather than in the men who are used to prove the disparity. This is emphasised in *A Chat with Mrs Chicky*; Mrs Chicky only cites Mr Welby's infirmity in response to Mrs Holbrook's assertion that "the right to vote really depends on physical force – strength, you know" (11). The impersonal nature of this depiction arguably reduces the satiric bite against any individual, redeploying it for a wider ironic service.

Citizenship and feminine complementarity

While these plays subscribe to the idea that it is only by employing such mockery that the full impact of the disparity is achieved, *The Master* seemingly denounces and distances itself from any form of derision. Having indulged in a short spell of mockery in the form of the wrestling match, Grace apologises to Tommy for the ways she has previously treated him. She expresses regret, admitting, "I've often been horrid to you, haven't I?" (10). In the scope of AFL plays, Grace displays an unusual self-consciousness regarding her use of mischief. In the same way that farce "risks its immunity when its jokes become shame-faced about their aggressions," the tone of the farcical wrestling episode is completely reframed by Grace's reflection. [73] It is no longer harmless fun but refigured in hindsight as aggressive ("horrid"). Her comments reflect Shaw's own misgivings about the "horrible, derisive joy" of the laughter of farce. For him, laughing "without sympathy" is "a ruinous abuse of a noble function."[74] Farce, as Milner Davis has remarked, can be in danger of becoming "merely and violently aggressive" due to its reliance on "the direct, dramatic enactment of its jokes and

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[72] Bentley (1965), 229.
[73] Milner Davis (1978), 90.
[74] Shaw (9 May 1896), "The Farcical Comedy Outbreak", *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable and Company, 1948), vol. ii, 118.

humiliation."[75] The resistance towards the uninhibited employment of ridicule shown by Grace derives in part from the close nature of the sibling relationship as well as from the play's choice of dramatic tone. As previously discussed, laughter in *The Master* is characterised by a tone of resignation rather than positive vigour for change. The play does not appear to invest in laughter the same political persuasion as other plays, opting rather for a more pitifully emotive tone as its means of exposure regarding male infirmity.

Her guilt stems from a realisation about her brother's physical misfortune; he is "not a very robust boy" (8). As her mother explains to her, Tommy was born into poverty, meaning that Anne, who had to go out to work in a factory, could not nurse him herself. Anne attributes this to Tommy's poor health: "It's bad for the babies being put out to nurse – but you can't have it all ways" (8). Grace, described as Anne's "amazon", was born in healthier circumstances; she even had "a Christening cake" (8). The lack of "political power" (Grace's term for the protection of mothers and children) at the time means that, now, according to the statistics cited by Anne, "seventy five per cent of the Manchester operatives would never be taken as soldiers if they wanted to enlist" (9). Here, *The Master* plays directly into the anxious hands of the proponents of the Physical Force argument, affected by contemporary fears regarding poverty and the aforementioned Boer War recruitment process, to show how the argument rejects to the nation's detriment women's involvement in the neglected administration of issues surrounding maternity and infancy. Following the Boer War, a committee was founded in 1903 to investigate physical deterioration, promoting free school meals for the poor. Suffragists aimed to show that without more substantial reform to protect the mother and child, driven by the experience and political input of women as well as men, the defensive future of the nation would be compromised.

Drawing on these fears surrounding men's health, women put forward new conceptions of citizenship as vital. In contrast to the militarism of the WSPU, this play reflects the arguments of other militant groups who centred their efforts to redefine citizenship on ideas of women's complementarity to men. Between the years 1910 and 1914, violent militancy came up against much criticism from other suffrage societies. President of the NUWSS Millicent Garrett Fawcett said that the "reactionary appeal to […] physical force" was "a negation of the very principles for which we stand."[76] The morally superior feminine was an extremely important concept for militants and non-militants alike. For suffragists and non-violent militants, this called for a complete denunciation of violence as ugly and masculine. Rejecting militarism for the way it apparently compromised the idea of women's moral superiority (and potentially their political progress, as reflected by Greatorex's reluctance to meet with the

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[75] Milner Davis (1978), 24.
[76] Millicent Garrett Fawcett, "Broken Windows – And After", *Daily News* (9 March 1912) in Nym Mayhall (2003), 105.

women), an increasing number of suffragettes embraced ideas of complementarity which emphasised women's different yet vital feminine, maternal and moral contributions to the state.

Florence Nightingale and women's invaluable war effort

It is in this context that Florence Nightingale became, in contrast to Joan of Arc of the WSPU, an embodiment of femininity, performing vital patriotic and military service to her country while also exemplifying nurturing femininity. Her moral duty, indeed, compelled her to serve even when the nation's laws prohibited women from doing so fully. As Hamilton writes in *A Pageant of Great Women*, Nightingale was "No soldier" but she was "not unused to war / Nor fearful of its horrors – death and wounds / And pestilence – well hast thou fought them, well…" (6). This speaks to the popular "ministering angel" rhetoric of Walter Scott which the General cites in *An Anti-Suffragist* (7).[77] A divine role to minister to the needs of men, this is also the reason given by Fear in *An Allegory* for women's weakness. This sought to establish woman's nature as homely and caring, a role which Mr Sewell in *Before Sunrise* commands his daughter uptake: "be a ministering angel to your mother, Caroline!" (62). By setting up "death and wounds / And pestilence" as an enemy that women 'fight', Hamilton dismisses as a fallacy the distinction between femininity and patriotic service. So does Harraden in *Lady Geraldine's Speech* when Alice urges Geraldine to join the Territorial Nursing Corps: "do so at once, because that's a piece of subtle cleverness. You disclaim physical force, and yet are preparing indirectly to defend your country" (15). On the one hand, it is "subtle cleverness" on the part of the antis such as Geraldine because it ostensibly enables the antis to uphold their position regarding women's place in times of war while profiting from their vital work. On the other, Alice's pronouncement of the "subtle cleverness" of this point's inclusion in the speech she is writing for Geraldine's anti suffrage meeting is self-congratulatory in so much that women's nursing activity ironically undermines the exclusionary basis of the Physical Force argument. Like many suffragettes, Alice highlights the invaluable war effort that women devote to their country, even as "ministering angels."

Maternity, satire and war

In *The Master*, women's war effort similarly constitutes their nurturing contribution to the health of the nation. Grace's anger towards her mother stems from a belief that, had Anne not gone out to work, Grace's brother and father could have been (would have been compelled to

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[77] Sir Walter Scott (1808), "Marmion", Canto VI.

be) far stronger beings than they are. Tommy might have been a "soldier or sailor or that political power perhaps" (9). In *At the Gates*, it is similarly the consequences of the overworked mother that threaten the health of the children; when the Seamstress had to go to hospital, she also had to abandon her children (11). In *A Chat with Mrs Chicky,* the shameful result of women's lack of self-representation is evidenced in men's ill-fated policy, based on upper-class comfort, against babies sleeping in the same bed as the mother. Mrs Chicky describes how her friend's baby caught pneumonia because she had to let it sleep in a "banana box" (5). Likewise, in *Votes for Women!* there is a direct correlation between powerless women and unhealthy children. In this play, it is the political and legal ignorance regarding poverty that leads a "little, thin, half-starved boy" who stole some milk into the courtroom. Recalling this incident which she witnesses, Vida emotively asks the political question, "Isn't it time the women lent a hand?" (ii.18).

The pitiful tone of this scene mirrors that of *The Master*. Guided by her own personal experience, Vida promotes the persuasive powers of infant vulnerability, declaring, "from the beginning, it was not the strong arm – it was the weakest – the little, little arms that subdued the fiercest of us" (iii.21). Other plays, however, subscribe to humour as the persuasive power rather than sentimental pathos. Arguably, this is even so in *The Master* itself. Despite the play's ostensible resistance towards mild humiliation, it paradoxically belies the playwright's recognition of its utility. It is perhaps only because of the mockery Grace previously uses towards Tommy that the point regarding his poor health – and, more widely, the insufficient political support regarding maternity and infants - is fully evidenced. The impactful reframing of the initial humour of this sibling rivalry is only possible because of the original arresting buffoonery, the dramatic impact of Grace's easy and supposedly incongruous assertion of power over Tommy communicating the full significance of Anne's declaration of political insufficiency. In this light, the initial promotion of fun laughter is a canny means of engaging the audience in the politics of the play in which, when later raised, the audience is already emotionally implicated.

Certainly *The Better Half* shows Garland's commitment to humour over pathos regarding the same matter, employing a humorously exaggerated reversal in order to ridicule the idea that women cannot contribute to the physical defence of the nation and, therefore, have no role worthy of citizenship. In this play, women are in possession of all the power and manage to raise an enviably healthy nation. Women's rule has ensured "a healthier race. No half-starved gutter babies" (29). Co-operative kitchens run in "every town and village," assuring good nourishment and fair distribution of work, and the Army is cared for physically and financially in such a way that is superior to "countries where men alone have the suffrage" (29). The Prime Minister presents her (socialist feminist) government as caring, efficient, and experienced, and the nation as physically and defensively robust. Lady Diana is reluctant to

permit men the vote because, she asserts, countries governed by men are proven to be less physically robust. If *The Master* drew attention to the aggression behind humour when stripped of its farcical "playframe", this play embraces a tone that sits somewhere between the two. Although bearing the attributes of a farce's reversal and playing off the incongruities there invoked, unlike in farce, the play depends for its very purpose on the fixed rather than oscillating nature of power within this universe, which itself enables Garland's keen satire. The strongly satiric element as well as the play's form distinguishes it from the farcical plays here discussed, yet its likeminded humour invites comparison.

On the one hand, men's ironic exclusion from the vote based on a maternal conception of citizenship in this play satirises the exclusionary definition of citizenship on which the Physical Force argument is based. On the other, Garland uses this satire to criticise current political shortfalls and, in so doing, promote the aforementioned argument that women's maternal instincts ballast rather than demote their political capacity. Incredulous that men are requesting an extension to suffrage, Lady Diana ardently promotes women's abilities and denounces men's: "you ask us to stop the hands of the clock of progress, and cry halt to our reforms by admitting millions of voters from the football field […], from the music hall" (23). Women's maternal devotion makes them a natural fit for leadership, represented by the tautological presentation of the absolute assertion, "We rock the cradle; therefore we should rule the world" (22). Meanwhile, in portraying men as self-indulgent leisure seekers, Garland calls into question their political fitness. Garland's humorous reversal promotes women's political capacity and, in so doing, satirises contemporary male prejudice. The shamelessly transparent and candidly promotional tone of Garland's portrayal invites further humour regarding her own confident audacity to ridicule and undermine men's authority.

Slapstick and domestic masculinity

In *An Englishwoman's Home*, it is similarly men's nurturing ineptitude and laziness that disqualifies them from political credibility. As Holledge has written, this play is a "mixture of styles" ranging from its sympathetic opening portrayal of poverty, developing into slapstick as the play progresses.[78] In these moments, this play bears several farcical elements reminiscent of the Victorian working-class domestic farce. The domestic reality of the working class home has often been the subject of exposure in farce since its 1840s adoption of lower class themes. Parodying the proverbial "an Englishman's Home is his castle", for example, John Maddison Morton's 1857 farce of the same title undoes the idealism about the home as a place of refuge through a series of farcical events.

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[78] Holledge (1981), 80.

In a reversal of the caricature that ridiculed women's physical aspirations (we might think of the derisive humour aimed at women's engagement with jujitsu and cycling), *An Englishwoman's Home* uses slapstick to deride men's attempts at domesticity. In order to attend a suffrage meeting, Maria leaves John to look after the lodger, Bates, and the baby, tasks with which she copes single-handedly on a daily basis. John's haplessness is immediately showcased when Bates asks him for " 'alf a jug more 'ot water" (13). He rushes about the stage, picking up item after item, unable to locate a jug. Instead, he finds a basin, although no sooner has he achieved this than he is perturbed by the crying baby. He subsequently burns his hand on the water and drops the basin, "rushing up and down stage shaking his hand, blowing on it, and howling," all the while being screamed at by a demanding baby and lodger (13). As with Horace, evidenced here is farce's technique of compressing time to intensify the distress of the victim. When the Suffragette appears at the door and offers to look at his hand, she exclaims to John's indignation, "Oh, I don't really think that's serious" (14). Her attempt to placate and sympathize - "of course, I can see it must be very painful!" - frames John as an overly demanding child, humorously unable to withstand even the smallest physical trial (14). Angry and frustrated at the difficulty of the task in hand, he leaves Bates in charge, ironically asserting, "I don't see as 'ow it wants two of us to look after a little place like this" (15). Indeed, these men originally idealise the "home" as a place full of royal "comforts" and ease (9). In so doing, they show a complete lack of appreciation for Maria's hard work. Inspired by Bates' hair-washing and light-hearted singing of the music hall favourite *Put Me Amongst the Girls*, John advises him to "stop at 'ome and put yer 'air in curls," again patronising women's hard work and trivializing their contribution (15).

Bates' own ineptitude has been showcased throughout John's drama, in the extended comic attempt to wash his hair. Incapable of even attending to his person, Bates now looks as "ridiculous as possible" and stands little chance of bettering even John (19). Indeed, he is fearful about what awaits him, communicated through his "alarmed voice" and his comical concern: "I don't know nothin' about kids! What's the game?" (19). He "looks terrified" as the child cries and he "shrinks back slowly as if some apparition were rising" (19). Bates' disproportionate fear clearly drives the humour of this scene, the baby's needs comically pitted against Bates' own infantile disposition. His stage movements are reminiscent of Greatorex's in *Votes for Women!*, who reacts in much the same way to the realization that Mrs Freddy is a suffragette (i.12); the comedy of both arise from the disparity between the man's fearful reaction and the innocuous provocation. Intensifying the sense of his domestic ignorance, Bates cannot fathom where the cries are coming from, saying in a "hoarse whisper," " 'Evvens above! What's that?" (19). His fear quickly heightens as the cries increase in regularity, culminating in his reluctant resolution to attend to the spectre. When

the Young Woman's return threatens to disturb the baby, Bates' nervousness is communicated in highly theatricalised glances at the baby's bedroom door and comically cautious movements as he moves "mysteriously in stealthy grotesque melodramatic fashion," towards the woman to explain that "it" is asleep, further emphasising his inexperience and apprehension.[79]

The physical comedy here serves to ridicule men in their inability to perform women's daily work. The very status of these typically "feminized" tasks, relegated as they are to a sphere unworthy of the recognition of citizenship, heightens the mockery of this humour aimed towards hapless men, while simultaneously redeeming women's work. Bearing the ironic resonances of the castle proverb yet making the home the woman's space (in recognition of the play's focus on the demands therein for women which put constraints on their possible endeavours outside the domestic space), Arncliffe-Sennett's play draws attention to the separate spheres ideology and the pretence of this place as a protective haven. John starts to "Wish I wern't" at home (13), while Bates realises the irony of being "promised all the comforts of 'ome […]."[80] His assertion that "sure enough I'm gettin' 'em" is as much a bitter complaint as an insightful realisation as to the realities of the home and the invaluable nature of women's work that facilitates men's own comfortable existence.[81] Aware of their failure, both men come to recognise the demands of women's work, thus challenging the ideology of the separate spheres which claims women have no physical capacity nor make a worthy contribution to the state. Maria has the last laugh of the play as she recalls with satisfaction the suffrage speaker's remark that "Home was the place – for Men!"[82] Men's ineptitude and women's adeptness has compelled a reversal of the separate spheres ideology as we find in *The Better Half*. As in this play, here women's superior domestic qualities prove their fitness for political representation whereas men's physical shortfalls call into question the legitimacy of theirs.

A play of which *Votes for Women* declared suffragists "are rightly never tired," it seems likely that Schadenfreude formed part of the sympathetic audience's enjoyment.[83] Frustrated by attempts to devalue their work to the extent of withholding the right to citizenship, women could derive pleasure from the comeuppance men here receive. Challenging Shaw's (and Grace's) idea about the aggressiveness of farce, this portrayal continued in the tradition of Victorian domestic farce which, as Booth comments, amused in a "jolly" rather than hostile

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[79] Post-manuscript addition. See Gardner (1985), 19.
[80] Ibid.
[81] Ibid.
[82] Post-manuscript addition. See Gardner (1985), 20.
[83] "Plays at Portman Rooms", *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.

manner.[84] Holledge notes that the play was "enthusiastically received" at Poplar and Stratford East, with audiences exclusively comprised of working-class people.[85] This composition confirms a warm identification with the setting and characters – and caricatures – of the play.

An economic rejection of Physical Force

While these plays focused on enlarging the definition of citizenship by considering women's contributions that affect the physical wellbeing of the state, the humour of *How the Vote Was Won* calls into question entirely the primacy of physical force within the nation's concept of citizenship. As part of an ironic and disruptive demonstration, the women in this play take up their positions according to the conception of their sex in the Physical Force argument (which states that women make no qualifying contribution to the state), in order to demonstrate how economics is a more important factor than force in the rule and success of a modern state. Refusing to work, they demand that Horace take care of them financially. Their actions constitute an albeit extreme form of non-violent militant economic resistance in which women offstage were participating in the manner of tax resistance. In fact, Hamilton (as well as several other theatrical figures such as Lena Ashwell and Beatrice Harraden) was a key figure in the Tax Resistance League, seeking to show the "injustice" and "stupidity" of the Government's request that women "pay an income tax on income earned by brains, when they are refusing to consider us eligible to vote."[86] Housman was a supporter of such passive resistance, considering it a means of fighting against the ridiculous attempt to make physical fitness a condition of the vote. He keenly contributed to the debate by way of speeches and articles throughout the period between 1909 and 1914, his articles republished as a pamphlet ("The Physical Force Fallacy") by the Woman's Press, having "attracted so much interest" from readers, according to *Votes for Women*.[87]

Although no reports substantiate this, it is possible that Housman, as an AFL member, had seen Hamilton's play the year before he warned, in 1910, of "compelling" economic resistance to physical fitness as a legitimate condition of the vote. Revealing a commonality of purpose, his language about proving by "practical demonstration" echoes Winifred in *How the Vote was Won* who says, "They wouldn't listen to argument…so we had to expose their pious fraud about woman's place in the world in a very practical and sensible way" (145). Winifred's reference to "fraud" connotes a specifically economic deception which amounts to

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[84] Michael Booth, "Early Victorian Farce: Dionysus Domesticated" in Kenneth Richards and Peter Thomson (eds.), *Nineteenth Century British Theatre* (London: Methuen, 1971), 103.
[85] Holledge (1981), 80.
[86] Beatrice Harraden. "Miss Harraden Hit In Eye: She Accuses London Police of Standing By While Roughs Assailed Her", *The New York Times* (3 May 1913), 3.
[87] "The 'Physical Force' Fallacy", *Votes for Women* (5 March 1909), 397.

men's gain and women's loss, inferring the injustice of women's taxation and their representative exclusion. Housman referenced minorities of the past who had "by persistence and by economic pressure, enforced their will upon a reluctant majority." He warned that women will do the same, with their "indispensable" economic value and the "preponderance of economic forces" which support women's cause. This resistance, "not necessarily physical," will be "so compelling in its economic force, so costly in its results, that your strong physical majority will speedily be reduced to ignominious surrender."[88]

How the Vote Was Won demonstrates these costly results in hilariously extreme fashion. Horace's sister, Agatha, immediately enforces her economic resistance by asking Horace to pay the cab two shillings. Upon hearing of her intentions to stay until the passing of the "Bill for the removal of sex disability," Horace worriedly explains he has not the means (153). He continues to agonize over the financial impact, declaring that the profitable dressmaker Christine who has arrived on his doorstep could "probably turn over my yearly income in a single week!" (155). The destruction that ensues domestically is mirrored on the public scene. As Spark delightedly explains, women's refusal to work means that the "big drapers can't open tomorrow. One man can't fill the place of fifteen young ladies at once, you see" (156). Likewise, the "defaulting waitresses" at Lyons and Co. have had to recruit "non-commissioned officers and men of the 2nd Battalion Coldstream Guards" under an arrangement with the War Office, and Naval Volunteers are taking over as charwomen in the House of Commons (159). The Prime Minister is unavailable for consultation because "he was actively engaged in making his bed with the assistance of the boot-boy and a Foreign Office messenger" (159). Aunt Lizzie cannot begin to imagine what the boys at the boarding-house for which she used to work will do for dinner: "They're a helpless lot!" (160).

With the personal and national evidence of a heavily weakened state, Horace and his friends are compellingly confronted with the true ruling factors of a modern state. As shown by the destructive withdrawal of women's vital economic input, a modern state like Britain, based on democracy and a will to construction and industry, relies far more on economic rather than physical governance, including within times of war, the military organisation of which has become reliant on such industry. Housman asserted that such organisation (and success) depends, as well as on force, on "an economic combination which draws upon the whole community for its supplies."[89] In this sense, he declared, men as well as women are fighters: "the army is a weapon loaded from the rear, and women as well as men are the

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[88] Laurence Housman, "The Relations of Physical Force to Political Power", *Votes for Women* (29 April 1910), 491.
[89] Laurence Housman, "The 'Physical Force' Fallacy: Part II", *Votes for Women* (26 February 1909), 372.

loaders of it."[90] He therefore concludes threateningly (and poignantly, given emergent world events), "If the co-operation of women is necessary for the efficiency of a modern army, then their right to representation, even on the physical force basis, clearly follows: for, if you deny it, it is within their power, when you are next engaged in war, to compel it." [91] Portraying all of Horace's relatives as self-sufficient if not extremely financially successful, the playwrights demonstrate why women's invaluable contribution to the state deserves the vote. Furthermore, by calling upon the War Office to supply men to fill waitressing and drapery vacancies, the playwrights humorously undermine the men's status as fighters as well as confuse the respect of citizenship that is conferred to one group over above another.

The destructive fallacy of force

Contrary to the assertions of Hart in 1908 that stability is only assured by force being equal to political power, violent and non-violent suffragettes were united in rejecting the idea that the state's stable authority rested in its monopoly on force. They argued that the Government functions optimally with the consent of the governed and that the attempt to bring physical force into a position of primacy is destructive. Godfrey thus identifies the WSPU's approach as paradoxical, although wanting to prove military ability as one facility women can draw on does not necessarily entirely contradict their ultimate stance on the supreme reign of force as something to be avoided.[92] Housman warned that the attempt within a civilized community to "erect physical force into a position of primacy" will "breed fatal weakness for the State."[93] In *Alice in Ganderland*, he shows Physical Force to be a catalyst for destruction. In this play with its tea party setting, "government tea" stands for that which sustains and maintains control over the state (18). As Hatter and his parliamentary crew show Alice, this tea is made by "physical force" (18), the distribution of which apparently enables everything to acquire the "constructive force, organization, logic and dynamic of a male mind" (19). In fact, it is a force of destruction rather than construction; as Alice points out, "this departmental tea" is "merely a waste of good materials" (20). By contrast, when it is permitted, self-government leads to State strength, nullifying the need for rule by force.[94] Significantly, it is Prejudice in *A Pageant of Great Women* who, in heroic tones, declares that it is the "sword that must decide!" Like Housman's 1910 assertion that "The doctrine of physical force appeals by its very crudity to minds prejudiced against change," Prejudice here

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[90] Ibid.
[91] Ibid
[92] Godfrey (2012), 100.
[93] Laurence Housman, "The Relations of Physical Force to Political Power", *Votes for Women* (29 April 1910), 491.
[94] Laurence Housman, speech at the Caxton Hall, "Physical Force and Self-Government", *The Vote* (16 May 1913), 46.

is a character whose adherence to this doctrine is unprogressive and, as such, foolish.[95]

The way in which the men in these plays come to the same realisation as women captures the debate surrounding the utility and appropriateness of the humiliating deployment of force by women. In *Physical Force*, Liz's use of force causes Bill to confront the foolishness of his affiliation to it. This play follows the tactics of the WSPU. If it has already been shown how the WSPU privileged the utility of humiliation in showing up men's fallacious attachment to physical force, it is necessary here to expand on their views concerning this fallacy, grounded not only in men's physical incapacities but also in men's misguided emphasis on force. By embracing violence, the suffragettes sought through farcical methods to expose and mock the fallacy of the state's reliance on force, demonstrating the instability caused by this very stance and simultaneously showing how the government's legitimacy is maintained not by the rule of law but by the law's violent enforcement. Professing a hatred of violence, the WSPU sought to legitimise (with albeit waning logic concerning morality and a higher duty) their seemingly paradoxical forceful retaliation as a case of the ends justifying the means. [96]

The happy ending of *Physical Force* is not only a dramatic concession typical of comedy. It marks a rejection of force as a means of asserting one's authority that reflected the views of both suffragists and suffragettes. By concernedly enquiring about whether she hurt her husband, Liz demonstrates that with her jujitsu she intended not harm but long-term reform. When Liz invitingly enquires as to why, if Bill loves her, he doesn't "knock us abaht," Liz at once mocks (thanks to her new-found confidence) Bill's use of physical force as a means of asserting his marital authority and ushers in a new, playful dynamic. The scene ends with Bill, challenged by Liz, "playfully" knocking Liz down. Bill's demonstrative decision to engage with this playful rather than forceful activity offers some optimism for a less violent relationship, his emergent self-consciousness turning this farce into a more thoughtful form of comedy. Garrud's jujitsu teaching demonstration that accompanied this performance testifies to the WSPU's views of the enduring need for force in the hope that, one day, it will be force itself that proves itself redundant. In light of this point, it is significant that this play is one of only two I have been able to find that stages women's violence. Not only does this evidence the AFL's own self-declared neutrality regarding suffrage tactics and its wider attempt to dispel through ridicule the unhelpful stereotype of suffragettes as "a lot of female roughs who bite policemen" (*The Pot and the Kettle* (3)), but also the party-wide insistence on the ultimate rejection of force in general as destructive.[97]

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[95] Laurence Housman, "The Relations of Physical Force to Political Power", *Votes for Women* (29 April 1910), 491.
[96] See Emmeline Pankhurst's speech "Why We Are Militant" in Marcus (1987), 162.
[97] The jujitsu plays have clear links with Melvillean melodrama of this period and the "bad girl" (as well as music hall), while the principled rejection of force by the end invites further discussion of the

Conversely, in *How the Vote Was Won*, it is through non-violent militancy that Horace personally confronts and realises the destructive and fallacious nature of the Physical Force argument as a sustainable model of civilized existence (although his general obnoxiousness regarding his masculine superiority remains). The women non-violently protest against the enforcement of this argument, but in such a way that indirectly provokes the destructive power of state coercion that is being enacted on them under the current suffrage laws. The women force themselves, their paraphernalia and large personalities, into Horace's household to provoke on a small scale the full and destructive effect of such coercion. Horace ultimately rejects the primacy of physical force, declaring, "Why shouldn't [women] have a voice in the rate of wages and the hours of labour in certain industries?" (162).

Audience reception and women writers' sense of humour

If the approaches they take towards the Physical Force argument vary, what all the plays have in common is the WSPU idea that men's conversion has to be forced in some way, by fear of or humiliation itself, rather than effected by genuine conviction. This humour-based conversion points towards the question regarding the extent to which the AFL's onstage humour could be politically effective amongst its unconverted audiences. On the one hand, it appears possible that these plays were simply enjoyed in the tradition of farce, as an unthreatening vehicle for the audience's fun and amusement, rather than as a theatre for reflection. Non-suffrage reviews give us some indication as to how these plays were received by mixed audiences. Before it ever reached the AFL audiences, *Physical Force* was performed in East London "with great success" according to the *Daily Mirror*.[98] Generally not going so far as harsh satire to push forward as the main focus a social critique, keeping characters sufficiently individuated to avoid broad satirical meaning, it is the dramatic element in farce that can be the focus of the audience's enjoyment.

For the women writing and performing these farcical plays, successfully achieving amusement amongst audiences was far from trivial, challenging as they did perceived gender dichotomies concerning dramatic talent and the sense of humour. The sort of prejudice directed at women writers is in evidence in the reception of the successful production of Clotilde Graves' play *A Mother of Three* in 1896. *The Daily Telegraph* described "Lady farce-writers" such as Graves to be a "novelty", stating that this playwright is starting

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connections between these suffrage plays and this other theatre. See Eltis (2013) and David Mayer, "Why Girls Leave Home: Victorian and Edwardian "Bad-Girl" Melodrama Parodied in Early Film", *Theatre Journal 58*, (December 2006), 575-593.

[98] *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.

"another future for clever women."[99] The writer bases this "novelty" on the historical denial of the "virtue" of humour amongst women: although women are given "credit for every virtue," regarding humour "the sceptical man is inclined to shake his head."[100] Dismissing women's achievements in "conversation, novels [and] correspondence," Grave's farce has apparently challenged this historical assumption in ways that it has not been before, perhaps owing to the play's public nature and the typically "masculine" (and therefore "valid") domain into which it was released.[101] By contrast, Henry Elliott in *The Theatre* set about fiercely questioning the idea that Graves is "the pioneer of feminine farce-writing, the first of the female theatrical humorists," citing a long list harking back to Aphra Behn and simultaneously damning the colleague at *The Daily Telegraph*.[102] Yet, if Elliott defends women's tradition of farce writing, his own review draws attention to certain prejudices. It asserts that women have not produced any "masterpieces" yet, owing to certain faults and a lack of practice.[103] Similarly, although Shaw praised Graves' play for the fun and "certain sense of [Irish] humour of indecency," he concluded that, ultimately, she had not got the execution quite right, rejecting her credentials as a farce playwright, even if it clearly informed his own play *You Never Can Tell*.[104] It would seem that, at the time of the AFL, women farce writers still had a lot to prove amongst male critics.

In terms of the theatrical canon, Hamilton and St. John's achievements in entertaining a delighted audience and challenging enduring prejudices about women's ability to write farce cannot therefore be overstated, however incredulous our attitude towards such prejudice might be. Emphasising the quality of both the writing and acting, *The Times* described this play to have been "carried out in the finest spirit of farce."[105] Indeed, if Shaw had in part criticised Fanny Brough's performance in *A Mother of Three* as on occasions "quite genuinely tragic", in these AFL plays actresses were able to demonstrate a comic force that was still greatly questioned both on and offstage. [106] Ellen Terry had only a few years before complained of the paucity of such roles available to women. It was, in fact, due to this that she became the lead in another of Graves' farces for the opportunities of comedy it offered her (*The Mistress of the Robes*, 1902). Although the victims typically take the comic leading role in farce, parts such as Liz and Aunt Lizzie appear to have attracted the respect of audience's conferred laughter, thus reminding audiences of women's own comic capacities.

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[99] *The Telegraph* (9 April 1896) in Henry Elliott, "Female Comedy Writers", *The Theatre: A Monthly Review and Magazine* (June 1896), 328.
[100] Ibid.
[101] Ibid.
[102] Elliott (June 1896), 329-331. See also Fidelis Morgan, *The Female Wits* (London: Virago, 1981).
[103] Elliott (June 1896), 332.
[104] Shaw, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable and Company, 1948), vol. ii, 96-97.
[105] *The Times* in Holledge (1981), 67.
[106] Shaw (1948; vol. ii), 97.

Replacing the "Patient Griseldas" to which Robins refers, these characters followed the line of the "witty trickster heroines" of the comedies of Hannah Cowley and Elizabeth Inchbald.[107] As a counter-balance to tragedy and sentiment, the theatrical use of farce represents women's onstage rejection of their association with the tragic and humourless element of life both on and offstage, as discussed in Chapter Two, and a celebration of their humour. Indeed, referring to the stereotype of the "grim" suffragette, in the run up to the Christmas Fair at which *Physical Force* was performed, *Votes for Women* explicitly billed the entire event as a means of publically dispelling such ideas. Mabel Tuke assured her readers that this fair would show "the truth that Suffragettes, when they really set out to play, do so in just the same whole-hearted fashion as they work, and with just as much success."[108]

Given the gendered prejudice pertaining to humour in the theatre and its impact on the public reception of women, it was precisely by "harmlessly" amusing audiences that these plays sought to gain attention for suffrage. If Shaw claimed the laughter provoked by farce is hostile, also reflected by Grace's comment in *The Master*, the endings indicate more a tone of amiable familiarity consistent with the previous chapter's acknowledgement of the AFL's priority not to alienate potential supporters, reinforced by the rejection of physical hostility as destructive. It is difficult to assess the precise tone of performance without having more details about the performers, on which farce strongly depends. As Styan has pointed out, "in any analysis, the quality of comic style, and thus its meaning, rests finally upon the comic actor."[109] However, the sense of the victims' "just desserts", created by their own obnoxiousness and blindness to the rights of women does, according to dramatic logic, justify a great deal if not all of the laughter provoked. In the review of *Physical Force* in *Health and Strength*, the "moral of the sketch" is described as "great", suggesting the audience's support of the wife's plight and her tactics.[110] Indeed, for the *Daily Mirror* journalist, it is the consistent gender dynamic that saves *Physical Force* from Shaw's charges about farce: "the woman wins so easily all along the line that there is nothing repulsive in it."[111] Douglas M. MacDowell has written of the portrayal in farce of women as the "weaker party getting the best of it" as "more satisfying" because "the men are physically stronger."[112] It would seem that the dramatic incongruity of this dynamic makes such a depiction both enjoyable and

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[107] Misty G. Anderson, "Women Playwrights" in Jane Moody and Daniel O'Quinn (eds.), *The Cambridge Companion to British Theatre 1730-1830* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007), 147.

[108] Mabel Tuke, "Advertising Christmas Fair – Portman Rooms, Baker Street, December 4-9", *Votes for Women* (1 December 1911), 135.

[109] J. L. Styan, *Drama, Stage and Audience* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 87.

[110] "Ju-Jutsu as a Husband-Tamer: A Suffragette Play with a Moral", *Health & Strength* (8 April 1911), 339.

[111] *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.

[112] MacDowell (1988), 9.

acceptable, else it becomes something far more troublingly realistic. There is a liberating potential in this play that subscribes to society's moral claim to the protection of women.

Furthermore, the victims of these plays are a far cry from the Malvolios of crueller farce worlds. The domestic locations, such as in *An Englishwoman's Home*, reflect more what Booth notes as a "jolly" setting than a harsh universe, so it seems reasonable to suggest that the laughter produced did bear, if not actual sympathy, some of the "friendliness" that Booth feels Shaw overlooked, therefore checking some of that aggression.[113] Similarly, if the satiric elements of, for instance, *The Better Half* bear a resemblance to men's derisive and hostile comedy of the 1890s, the fact that it is the inferior class who are winning in these plays against a greater force arguably justifies or lessens the sense of derision so as to reaffirm their ultimate goal to build rather than spoil potential communities of support. Humour that was too forceful potentially ran the same risk that the WSPU's use of offstage force did in terms of alienating potential support (or, indeed, risked being used as an excuse for this).

It is through the ostensible fun, superficial and familiar humour that the playwright entices the spectator in, only to divulge critical judgments on the characters. It might be said that these plays work in a similar way to Oscar Wilde's use of farce a decade before, the "barbed critiques" of *The Importance of Being Ernest* "veiled by a flippancy" (although Wilde's critique was multidirectional and, unlike these playwrights, he would have resisted any notion of a play's social or political utility).[114] Given the overt "suffrage" element of these plays, the debates in which they spoke, and the climate in which they were performed, even the most ostensibly harmless farcical portrayal in these plays could not be received without some level of political engagement. The way that the essential conservatism of farce and comedy more generally, in which triumphs of the subservient class are contained by a structure that returns the world of the play back to society's norms, is largely unrealised as these plays challenge audience assumptions about farce's "harmlessness". The domestic bliss is prefaced not with women coming "back into line" and men resuming authority; Horace's reassertion of authority is an ironic nod to comedic convention which is used for further ridicule. Instead, endings are albeit amiably marked by men's promise to change or to effectuate change (Bill, Horace), or with women plotting change (Maria).

While the exaggerated and dramatic nature of the portrayal itself contains these threats of change (despite festive truces farce characters do not change their nature), the arguments with which they engage that seek to ridicule proponents of the Physical Force argument are familiar and actual, meaning they could not be easily dismissed as solely fictional or

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[113] Michael R. Booth "Comedy and Farce" in Kerry Powell (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 143.
[114] Joel Kaplan, "Wilde on the Stage", Peter Raby (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to Oscar Wilde* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997), 252.

transitory. In this context, audiences would have understood the characters not as individuated but as political representatives of anti-suffragists, of themselves even, recognising the ridicule aimed at their own beliefs as much as at those on stage. This is illustrated in a review of *How the Vote Was Won*. *The Daily Graphic* described the performance's "crowded house … provoked to cheering and counter-demonstrations by the vigorous arguments."[115] It is clear that audiences engaged with this play politically, setting up a dialogue in agreement as well as disagreement. Likewise, while previous performances of *Physical Force* might have been enjoyed as a trivial knockabout farce, the WSPU fair and change of name framed it within a specific and divisive political context that transformed its subject matter into a debate of clear contemporary significance that would have resonated with any non-suffrage guests.

In particular, it is specifically in their staging of unidirectional humiliation that the political confrontation of these plays can be found. A review in *The New Age* suggested that an invitation to the cabinet ministers to attend a performance of *How the Vote Was Won* would be successful: "Cannot you imagine a nudge and a whisper creeping along their row of the stalls: 'I say, you fellows – we've been making fools of ourselves… Let's bring in a Bill.'"[116] While this scenario was unlikely (and did not occur), such speculation does capture the ability of this humour to create new patterns of power, albeit in a more gradual way. While each play was a transitory experience defined by the time and space of the theatre, the practice of humiliation itself was not. What is evident is that, given the fact that these plays existed on a continuum with militant offstage activity, the plays' humiliating threat of showing up anti-suffragists as the butt of the joke was far from an empty or fleeting one. The compelling laughter dynamic facilitates the spectator's theatrical experience of humiliation so that, as the victim is forced to confront the fallacies of the Physical Force argument, so too is the audience compelled to pledge allegiance through laughter to one or the other side. Despite inevitable contestations, as previously discussed social motivations would have likely urged audiences to laugh along the lines of the joke which, Purdie shows, can in actuality contribute to a theatrical moment of political significance in which conservative attitudes pertaining to the interrelated dynamics of gendered power and humour can be progressively weakened. To ratify the suffrage farce was also, therefore, to give power to its politics.

Conclusion

If farce's narrative had been involuntarily thrust upon the suffrage movement by amused spectators, on and offstage suffrage workers consciously adopted this mode as their own. Farce enabled the AFL to safely yet poignantly challenge both the authority's control of the

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[115] *The Daily Graphic* in Croft (2009), 142.
[116] Review from *The New Age* quoted in Hamilton and St. John (1909), ii.

sense of humour as well as of citizenship. Contesting the definition of both, it was in its very spirit as a vehicle for fun and delightful taboo-violation that farce, usually dismissed as trivial, held an important political value for suffrage.[117] Although these plays represent a diverse range of opinion on the matter of the Physical Force argument, taken together it seems that the inevitable range of suffrage members of the audience would have been able to find some solidarity within the diverse portrayal. Whether as members of rejected deputations, devoted yet belittled public servants, or as patient protesters, the variety of ridicule no doubt facilitated a momentary yet nonetheless satisfying dramatic vindication for these women who had to suffer the daily consequences of masked masculine prejudice and fear, all the while being rejected on grounds that asserted the natural lawfulness of men's actions. Throughout the suffrage audience's responses, it can be seen how farce encouraged the communal effects of laughter that ballasted their cause and even, given "comedy's wish-fulfilment structures", perhaps their optimism.[118]

Far from vulgar, the AFL relied on the very amiability of farce for their political goals, compelling the audience members to laugh at each other and themselves, this latter notion the subject of the next chapter. Before any solution could be reached, the war posed the next challenge to the Physical Force argument. Women largely embraced the service model of citizenship, making it harder to denounce women's active contribution to the strength of the nation. As the war threatened the Home Front, fallacious distinctions between masculine sacrifice and feminine cowardliness were increasingly in evidence, while the suffrage notion that the stable state need not be defined by force was lamentably eclipsed. The Young Person's proclamation in *A Junction* that physical capacity – "cigars and rifles and footballs, as well as fans and bouquets" – is an integral part of full womanhood would be in part temporarily answered by the opportunities of war (including full access to departed men's football pitches) (9). Whether it was the First World War that led to the 1918 partial extension of suffrage remains the subject of debate, but what is certain is that the humour on which the AFL relied to highlight the fallacy of Physical Force firmly ceased when the AFL committed itself to wartime patriotic entertainment.

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[117] Of note is the fact that, while cross-dressing was a familiar technique used by suffragettes offstage, women's calculated mischief is not evoked in this way on the AFL stage, with the exception of the warriors in Hamilton's *A Pageant*, whose historical status arguably exempts them from precise comparison here. Stratchey wrote in 1928 in *The Cause* (312) of suffragettes dressing in "all sorts of guises" such as a "messenger boy". Despite the comic potential of this depiction (realised in other plays about suffragettes), this resistance is consistent with the plays' attempts to stress the femininity of suffrage women in the face of the anxieties of detractors about "unfeminine behaviours", and indeed of the desire to firmly emphasise feminine ability which had been traditionally eclipsed by men's, including onstage as Shakespearean female exploits were sometimes dismissively explained away by the muddling factor of cross-dressing.

[118] Misty G. Anderson (2007), 147.

Chapter Five

Making yourself ridiculous: the AFL and the politics of self-derisory suffrage

Having explored in Chapter One the reasons why some women and men decided it an important project to resist anti-suffrage humour and, in proceeding chapters, how and why they sought to establish their own, this chapter revisits this initial rejection to show how and explore why some decided, instead, to embrace such humour. As shown in Chapter One, after years of what Robins described as women acting "pelican-like, […] submitting herself to be the target for [man's] pleasantry," many suffrage women staged a refusal to be further used in this way, for the inferiority it implied.[1] As the perpetual comic character of the social, literary or political narrative, women were cast as continually foolish, a casting that, as Hamilton explored in *A Pageant of Great Women*, can through repeated performances influence the sense of self and keep women from the political world they want to occupy. Lisa Merrill has written of the "necessary and powerful gesture of self-definition" that women perform when they "refuse to see the 'humor' in [their] own victimization."[2] While this liberation rhetoric is indeed reflected in the AFL's own relationship to anti-suffrage humour, this final chapter considers more fully the divergences of opinion within the AFL, briefly mentioned in Chapter One, that challenged the value of this refusal. A controversy surrounding the 1909 play *Her Vote* by H. V. Esmond highlights the beginning of what would be an ongoing contestation within the AFL regarding the extent to which the suffrage movement should join in the laughter that targeted its own members. Analysing the AFL's engagement with Shaw's "suffrage" plays (as will be shown, this is a contested description) and looking at the wider debate within suffrage periodicals and reviews, this chapter considers the perceived dramatic and political advantages for suffrage of making oneself ridiculous onstage. It seeks to evaluate the AFL's hesitant efforts to become the target of their own "laughing gaze", in order to make eventual steps towards defining more fully the League's relationship with the sense of humour.

Eva Moore and divisive humour within the League

In May 1909, actress Eva Moore (sister to Decima Moore) found herself in the centre of a divisive argument surrounding her husband's play, *Her Vote*, in which she starred. This play, written by Esmond and first performed on 13 May 1909 at Terry's Theatre, told the story of a Girl whose initial devotion to the suffrage movement is entirely supplanted by romance when she excitedly accepts a marriage proposal from Reginald Wellington. The end of the play sees

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[1] Robins, "Woman's Secret" in Robins (1913), 10.
[2] Merrill (1988), 279.

her offering her suffrage meeting tickets to a servant ('Drudge'), explaining that "circumstances have arisen – I'd sooner you had my ticket – I'm going to have a little chat with Reggie."[3] Moore described this character as "fluffy", suggestive of her unthreatening femininity and her triviality, which is communicated onstage by stereotype.[4] She arrives with feminine paraphernalia – a parasol and gold purses "etc" – and squeals in excitement at Reggie's proposal. Phoning her prospective fiancé, she asserts that his "news is more serious than votes" (91). As for her suffrage work, this is characterised by a childish attitude: vehement stamping to make her point; idealistic excitement ("it's coming…and oh! then won't it be splendid!" (92)); and class ignorance. The Girl speaks to the Drudge in levelling terms ("our *status* will be so much improved" (92)) and patronises her suffrage contribution, privileging talk of "noble" rather than practical activity (92). Having enquired at which end of the telephone book she can find "W" (to phone Reggie), she later struggles to pronounce the word "prerogatives" which undermines her political chat regarding women's status (92). This is compounded when she fails to convincingly conduct an informed discussion with the Clerk about the Tariff Reform, truthfully admitting, "I don't think I know quite *all*" (93). Speaking in platitudinous tones about the cause, suggestive of an enthusiastic commitment to idealistic rhetoric over actual substance, the Girl asserts that the vote "means so much that I couldn't possibly explain it" (94) and is enthusiastic at the prospect of "[opening] one's arms and [grasping] the intangible, as it were" (92). This seeming commitment is undermined by her rapid rejection of suffrage in favour of marriage and her immediate distancing from the cause as something of concern to other women now, as well as ironically by her myopic reassertion of the importance of commitment, urging the Drudge not to "*back out* – it's so cowardly to back out – if you women don't stick together, your cause will never advance" (96). The Girl had previously employed the collective pronoun ("our *status*" (92)) but now rejects it entirely. As indicated by her inadequate knowledge and swift departure, her suffrage commitment was a mere whim before the arrival of her true vocation, that of wife.

To Moore, this play was "really […] very funny."[5] Yet, two days after Moore's performance, "someone" stood up at an AFL meeting and declared that her part in this play had shown that Moore preferred "kisses to votes," sparking a divisive debate.[6] The automatic conflation of stage acting with the actress's own convictions highlights the way offstage politics were assumed to motivate closely the performer within the AFL, while the way the play's portrayal was taken so seriously emphasises the sensitivity towards such presentation and also an instinctive concern for its offstage impact. It seems that, for the detractor, *Her*

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[3] H. V. Esmond, *Her Vote* (1909) in Paxton (2013), 96.
[4] Moore (1923), 95.
[5] Ibid.
[6] Ibid.

Vote seriously offended and even risked undermining the credibility of the movement and its followers. The objections to this play mirror those aimed at other representations that privileged the romantic narrative at the expense of the political one, as seen in the response to H. G. Wells' *Ann Veronica*, published in the same year as *Her Vote*'s performance. E.T.'s fiercely critical review in December 1909's *The Vote* found Ann thoroughly unconvincing and saw no likeness between her and the contemporary members of the suffrage movement. The reviewer emphasised the gulf further by adding that, "If such a woman ever existed, she would have been asked to take herself and her enthusiasms elsewhere by any of the existing Suffrage societies that we are acquainted with."[7] Perhaps in mind was the very debacle surrounding Moore.

One particularly striking example of the way the romantic narrative supplanted the suffrage one for comic purposes is found in Mark Sheridan's 1909 music hall hit *In the Days That Are Coming Bye and Bye* in which it is revealed that Mrs Pancake really wanted "blokes for women."[8] Behind this popular stereotyped portrayal was the idea that women's "true" vocation and desire rested with romance, a departure from which – such as those "playing" at politics – is temporary and misguided. As explored in Chapter One in the context of Wells, Allen and the anonymous author of *A Woman's Vote* (all also dated 1909), this was seen as a popular means of dangerously trivialising the movement and its members, a representation widely found in unfavourable depictions of suffrage. The press similarly undermined the serious political endeavour of the suffragettes by presenting altercations between them and the police as games of "kiss in the ring, the police forming the ring."[9] Those who criticised *Her Vote* and Moore's involvement in it identified in this play the same derisory depiction of the movement that existed outside the AFL, which those such as Moore's critic, the reviewer E.T., and Robins (in her reaction to Wells's novel) deemed offensive and even damaging.

By contrast, as Cockin, Norquay and Park have pointed out, pro-suffrage plays often deliberately used conventional romantic narratives as a foil "to highlight the centrality of the suffrage cause in the protagonist's life."[10] We might think of Vida (*Votes for Women!*) or Mary in *Which?*. More often than not in suffrage literature, the romantic life of the protagonist is not merely shunned but is non-existent, as in the cases of Nell (*The Pot and the Kettle*) and Winifred (*How the Vote Was Won*). Significantly, this representation also stood in contrast to women's comedy of the late nineteenth century which, as Carlson has shown, was marked by a trajectory towards marriage in which women display intelligence and wit "only

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[7] E. T., "Book of the Week", *The Vote* (23 December 1909), 103.
[8] *The Blaze of Day: The Suffragette Movement* (1999), Pearl, track 9.
[9] *Daily Express* (21 October 1908) in Cowman (2007), 262.
[10] Cockin, Norquay and Park (2007; vol. i), xxiii.

in a quest for marriage."[11] It was the fact that *Her Vote*'s narrative departed so radically from that which was regularly employed by the AFL that led to unfavourable comparisons of this play to the dramatic tradition from which the AFL had so consciously distanced itself.

As a consequence, it was suggested that the popular and well-established actress Moore should either not play in it again or resign, which she temporarily did, pointedly declaring the right to return and perform in any play "without the assumption that I was working anti-suffrage propaganda."[12] Moore returned cheerfully to resume her active role as an actress-activist in the movement. Her involvement is frequently referenced in the suffrage press, in activities such as peaceful picketing; recitations at the AFL's fourth birthday party; collecting signatures by taxi from actor-managers for the 1910 Conciliation Bill; and dramatic performances such as a "delightfully rendered" Alice in Housman's play, a part in Louis Cowen's unpublished 1910 play *Unforeseen Circumstances*, and when she was chosen to recite Hamilton's "humorous prologue" entitled "Forward" at the WWSL matinee of 9 February 1912.[13] However, the play itself was withdrawn from the repertory and rarely performed after.[14]

Writing about this incident in her autobiography, Moore drew attention to the "humourlessness" of some members of the AFL.[15] The response demonstrated how, while Moore could find fun and entertainment in the piece, others were unable to, offended and/or concerned about the repercussions in terms of the impression it gave of members of the movement as romance- rather than vote-seekers (and the impression that enjoyment of it might give). More widely, it evidences the AFL's tricky negotiations with the debated parameters of the suffrage sense of humour. Rather than evidencing that Moore held weaker convictions on the subject of the politics of dramatic representation (her membership of the AFL indicates otherwise), her analysis of this incident indicates instead that she held a different opinion regarding the politics of supposedly "derisory" representation. In other words, her enjoyment of this play derived from the idea that the humour and her response to it did not conflict with but could support her political beliefs. Moore would later write of the incident, "I think in most of us the work cultivated a sense of humour, but it was certainly due

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[11] Susan Carlson, "Conflated Politics and Circumspect Comedy: Women's Comic Playwriting in the 1890s" in Tracy C. Davis and Ellen Donkin (eds.), *Women and Playwriting in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), 263.
[12] Moore (1923), 95.
[13] Peaceful picketing: *The Vote* (24 January 1913), 219; birthday party recitation: *The Vote* (21 December 1912), 139; collecting signatures: *The Vote* (3 December 1910), 64; Alice: M. H., "The Actresses' Matinee", *The Vote* (4 November 1911), 19; *Unforeseen Circumstances*: "Actresses' Franchise Matinee", *The Vote* (14 May 1910), 27 (also listed as *Unexpected Circumstances*); Hamilton's Prologue: *The Vote* (10 February 1912), 188.
[14] See Claire Hirshfield, "The Suffragist as Playwright in Edwardian England", *Frontiers: A Journal of Women Studies*, vol. 9, no. 2 (1987), 13.
[15] Moore (1923), 95.

to a lack of that valuable commodity in someone that I was asked to hand in my resignation."[16] The fact that she was asked to do so, and did indeed follow through with this, indicates the significance of the split and the delicacy of this topic within the AFL.

Laughing at oneself as a "valuable commodity"

While Chapter One considered the reasons why some decided it politically important for women to stop laughing at themselves, and to encourage others to do likewise, in her reaction to the controversy surrounding *Her Vote*, Moore asserted the importance of a different relationship for women to such humour. Her remarks regarding the sense of humour as a "valuable commodity" reflect the turn of the century valuation of the ability to laugh at oneself (to "take" and even make a joke about oneself) as a socially important asset, emergent in the 1890s and 1900s. As previously explored, the change in the definition of humour from a superiority to incongruity basis in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw a collapse of the subject and object. In contrast to the figure of the eccentric humorist of the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries (external to oneself), this collapse entailed the recognition of the self *in* the other. In addition to the way this introduced the valued ability to laugh *with* rather than *at* someone, it also established the value of the capacity of the individual to laugh at him or herself – the recognition of the self *as* other.

As Wickberg has written, from the 1920s this ability would be defined as "self-objectification" by those such as William Burnham – a helpful descriptive term from which we will borrow here, in recognition that the ideas on which it was based were emergent at the time of the AFL.[17] In the later twentieth century, it would become the attribute of the tolerant relativist. Within this process, the eccentric objectivity of the Jonsonian humour character is internalized as incongruity, characterising the incongruous relationship between self-perception and, as Wickberg describes, "how one actually existed in the world."[18] To be able to laugh at oneself became defined by a growing number of people as the marker of a "well-developed" sense of humour. "The concept of 'sense' allowed for both an expansion of the inner life of the self and an ever-increasing sensitivity to the external and objective world."[19] As previously discussed, the valuation of the sense of humour within the individual – understood as proof of one's capability of "seeing and acting from multiple perspectives without succumbing to the extremism inherent in any particular point of view" – encouraged scepticism towards those who did not exhibit or were stereotyped as lacking this sense, such as fanatics or the insane (whether or not one believed that such a humourless person could

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[16] Ibid.
[17] Wickberg (1998), 102.
[18] Wickberg (1998), 107.
[19] Ibid.

exist).[20] Given the new prominence of the idea of self-objectivity, it was socially important not only to laugh at those deemed eccentric but also to be able to laugh at oneself, at the eccentric within oneself. It meant that not taking oneself seriously encouraged others to do the opposite, and vice versa. Or, as Hatter says to Hare in *Alice in Ganderland*, "when you say anything in earnest, - well, one does get a good laugh then, sometimes" (7).

When Moore speaks praisingly of *Her Vote* in terms of the way it apparently 'cultivated' a sense of humour in "most of us," she shows an appreciation for the way it promoted and improved members' socially valued sense of fun as well as, concomitantly, their socially valued capacity for self-objectification: seeing the eccentricity of the self that others perceive. It was the possession of this sense that had been the very ground on which she and others praised Christabel, speaking of how people admired "her youthful enjoyment of any and every joke, even if one was turned against her."[21] Such praise and her own denouncement of those who are humourless shows that Moore felt strongly that this was a capacity in which such promotion and improvement amongst the members of the movement was necessary. Fellow suffragettes were acutely aware that they were commonly perceived as lacking a sense of humour, whether they agreed with this judgment or not.[22] This was also linked to the fact that eccentricity was a label with which suffrage women, particularly of course the militants, were frequently charged. Ambitiously political, publicly defiant and outspoken, these women were people who consciously sought to depart from recognised convention, making such a charge unsurprising. However, if Moore shows an understanding that eccentricity was not a sociable trait and therefore was potentially an obstacle between the movement and others, the sense of humour that she promotes is capable of diminishing this charge. In laughing at the depiction of a romantically inclined suffragette in *Her Vote*, suffrage women could actively demonstrate that they are able to see how they "actually [exist] in the world," as people whose political ambitions are so atypical of women that some drew the conclusion there must be something temporarily amiss (in fact, charges of hysteria in militants stemmed from ideas of repressed sexuality). In so doing, they could evidence or develop an important self-awareness in terms of the potential disparity between their self-perception and other people's perception of themselves, as well as an understanding of other viewpoints.

Invoking the idea of tradable goods, Moore's term "commodity" promotes the sense of humour as a valuable mentality for oneself and useful in terms of the movement's public

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[20] Wickberg (1998), 96. See Burges Johnson: "The fanatic has no sense of humor… The egoist gradually loses his sense of humor." Burges Johnson, "The Right Not to Laugh", *Harper's* 132 (April 1916), 785.
[21] Moore (1923), 92.
[22] See for example E.M.N.C., "At Play – with a purpose – at Croydon", *The Vote* (13 July 1912), 209: "Suffragettes are said to take themselves seriously."

dealings. The way she sets up the majority ("most of us") as reasonable against the anonymous "someone" as defective in personality demonstrates Moore's conscious promotion (even if only retrospective) of the superiority of those who could laugh at themselves. Her insult towards a lonesome critic cements this superiority, implying as it does that no one would want to be associated with this figure. For Moore to denounce her critic as humourless was a serious insult, implying as it did incompleteness and an unmodified or unconscious eccentricity, which can shame the individual and encourage suspicion towards such a person.

For women, as many members of the AFL complained, to be told they lack a sense of humour has conventionally derived from a hierarchical (patriarchal) definition of humour that was directed at their own. Being cajoled into having a "sense of humour" has thus necessarily and compromisingly conflated laughing at others with laughing at the self, which made some sceptical about responding positively to this humour that seemingly asked of women the same. The way Moore denounces those who refuse to find the play funny potentially recalls this patriarchal hierarchy and perhaps draws attention to her own bias towards the humour of this play. However, Moore shows that her appreciation of, and her encouragement of others to see the play as "really […] very funny," produces a laugh quite distinct from the coerced laugh with all its connotations. Not only does her enjoyment imply a conviction regarding her husband's friendly motivation behind the use of this humour (rather than aggressive), to extend her valuation of laughing demonstrates even to those who might be less sure of this why laughing at even apparently derogatory depictions (Esmond's portrayal being reliant on traditionally derisive features) need not be politically compromising.

If her notion of 'cultivation' suggests a deliberate development that parallels the learned nature of the patriarchal laugh, Moore's valuation implies that this cultivation is, unlike the coerced laugh, advantageous for suffrage; she shows that it does not have to compromise one's beliefs - it can, in fact, strengthen them. Unlike coerced laughter which, according to Freud, makes of the laugher a conspirator in the joke (thereby possibly undermining a woman's integrity), self-objectifying laughter can appreciate the entertainment within a joke as well as the joker's initiative without becoming complicit in any potential aggressive tendency in it. The way this dynamic works is shown by Robins in *The Convert* in which it is recounted that Filey witnessed Stonor at "a Bond Street show looking at caricatures of himself and all his dearest friends." [23] Rather than laughing at the joke itself, Stoner was instead "immensely amused at the fellow's impudence."[24] He shows an appreciating awareness of circulating humour in such a way that does not compromise his own politics or

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[23] Robins (1908), vol. i, 94.
[24] Ibid.

his reputation surrounding the sense of humour. For Stonor, this is a pragmatic and politically astute stance. In laughing, he refuses to be psychologically defeated by the inevitable; as a politician, Stonor is sufficiently experienced to know that ridicule is inescapable within his line of work. This derives from a number of unquantifiable factors including the divisive and public nature of his work and the amused enjoyment derived from the denigration of public figures. Also, the intrinsic privileging of one political discourse above others is fodder for mockery and taunts of closed-mindedness. While he recognises the "impudence" of the creator – his cheek to treat such a public figure irreverently – Stonor chooses to amusedly accept rather than denounce these representations. In so doing, he safeguards against the disempowering insult regarding one's self-objectifying humourlessness, puts himself in a closer position to his opposition, and arguably even dispels some of the caricatures' power. In the case of the audiences of *Her Vote*, they could have shown appreciation that Esmond's portrayal consists of what is commonly perceived to be "good" dramatic humour, even if for some it verges on the "impudent", without compromising but ballasting their own integrity and reputation. This conception of laughter explains why Moore praised rather than criticised Christabel's laughing response even to derisory jokes.

Shaw and the suffrage sense of humour

In the same year as *Her Vote*, and just after the controversy it caused, Shaw was similarly promoting the ability to laugh at oneself as politically valuable amongst members of the suffrage movement, in his first and, later, in his second play about suffrage. In spring 1909, Shaw completed his play *Press Cuttings*, written at the request of Sir Johnson Forbes-Robertson for the NUWSS. On 9 July 1909, it was privately performed by the Civic and Dramatic Guild at the Court Theatre, having been banned in June by the censor due to the obvious basis in living and "respectable" persons of the male characters (Arthur Balfour/Herbert Asquith and Lord Robert Kitchener in the figures Balsquith and Mitchener). The names Mitchener and Balsquith were censored and replaced with "Bones" and "Johnson" respectively (reported elsewhere as "Jones").[25] Shaw's first long-running London stage success, the anonymously signed *Fanny's First Play* was completed on 5 March 1911, appearing at the Little Theatre until the end of 1911 and afterwards at the Kingsway for "a total of more than six hundred performances."[26]

Using comic representation and exaggerated stereotype in both his plays Shaw, like Esmond, actively encourages laughter towards the movement. His suffragettes in *Press*

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[25] "Royal Albert Hall – Yuletide Festival", *The Vote* (9 December 1909), 82.
[26] Katherine E. Kelly, "Shaw on Woman Suffrage: A Minor Player on the Petticoat Platform", *Shaw* Vol. 14, 1992: SHAW AND THE LAST HUNDRED YEARS (1994), 76.

Cuttings, which Shaw claims was a play compiled "from the Editorial and Correspondence Columns of the Daily Papers during the Women's War in 1909," are portrayed as violent hysterics, as the press itself was wont to do.[27] Indeed, in the same year Shaw was writing, the press had in typical exaggeration concerning suffrage violence reported their recent demonstration of 30 March 1909 as a forceful "raid".[28] In fact, the WSPU had convened a mock parliament chaired by Emmeline Pankhurst at Caxton Hall after Asquith's refusal to consider their case. They then reassembled as a formal public demonstration outside Westminster Hall, which nonetheless led to police arrests and further disorder the day after.

Such exaggerations are reflected in Shaw's characterisation for, although the suffragettes were indeed chaining themselves in protest at this period, the extremes to which they go in Shaw's depiction are sheer caricature. Upon hearing from the Orderly that another "one" has "chained herself," General Michener is incredulous: "How? To what? Weve taken away the railings and everything that a chain can be passed through." The Orderly points out, "We forgot the door-scrapes, sir" (1). She has "put the key of the padlock in a letter in a buff envelope" (2) and has since started "hollerin" (1). Even though the audience later discovers that this suffragette is actually the Prime Minister in disguise, attempting to reach Mitchener, the success of his disguise according to the plot of the play comically reasserts the suffragette stereotype. The comic depersonalisation of the suffragette as well as the extreme dedication to chaining herself to anything and everything exaggeratedly references the sensationalising reportage of the activities of the militant suffragettes, while the invocation of her "hollerin" reflects the derisory characterisation of the hysteric in public. As Mitchener says, "She's mad" (2). Later, also offstage, a suffragette shoots the sentry, while a group of them set off a "pasteboard" bomb ("Full of papers with Votes for Women in red letters.") (11). Faced with such violence and disorder, all men live in fear of their windows being smashed or themselves being shot, to the extent that martial law has been imposed. Of this play, Michael Weimer has written that Shaw brought "more than a cartoonist's talent to the task of writing political satire."[29] In his well-observed use of caricature, Shaw implicitly acknowledges and profits from its inherent entertainment.

Shaw's comic use of such stereotype went beyond his plays. He had shown this in a 1906 "mock interview" between himself and Maud Churton Braby (suffragist and author of the 1908 *Modern Marriage and How to Bear It*) when, having said that he has no opinion to express on suffrage since, being a man, he already has it, he declared,

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[27] Shaw (1909).
[28] "Woman Suffrage", *The Times* (31 March 1909), 12.
[29] Michael Weimer, "*Press Cuttings*: G. B. S. and Women's Suffrage" in Rodelle Weintraub (ed.), *Fabian Feminist: Bernard Shaw and Women* (London: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 89.

> Women should […] shoot, kill, maim, destroy – until they are given a vote […] I would make the conditions [for voting] exactly the same as for men; it's no use women claiming *more* than men, though probably in the end they'll get more, as they invariably do whenever women agitate for equality with men in any respect… Take the Married Women's Property Act! Since that has been law, man is a mere insect.[30]

His inability to resist announcing what Kelly calls his "mock invective against women's abuses of power" demonstrates his fondness for humour that depicts women as a dangerous threat to men.[31] It is this attitude, as well as the way historians have recently shown that Shaw's political views differed somewhat from those of suffrage women (such as his opinion on mandated representation and his socialist priorities), that has contributed to ideas of Shaw's flippancy on the subject of suffrage; for example, Kelly concludes this in reference to the portrayal in his plays and wider analysis.[32] This leads Kelly to argue that Shaw's relation to the campaign is "ambivalent", while in the work of Susan Kingsley Kent and Lis Whitelaw, his suffrage commitments have been completely dismissed.[33]

By contrast, in his suggestion that Shaw understood the laughter provoked by such humour to be a political weapon, for women, Holroyd points towards a different relationship between such flippant humour and suffrage that parallels Moore's own. Holroyd has asserted that Shaw's frequent flippancy on the subject of suffrage is evidence of Shaw paying women "the compliment of assuming that they had a sense of humour and that they could value laughter as a political weapon."[34] As seen in previous chapters, such women could indeed "value laughter as a political weapon", but Holroyd's emphasis here is implicitly on the political utility integral to being able to laugh at oneself as well as at others that Shaw's depiction provokes. If this reads as passive aggressive and critical, this tone is provoked, perhaps, by frustration with the contemporary complaints about Shaw's flippancy that Holroyd cites. For, as well as evidencing a different relationship between humour and suffrage, this argument concomitantly indicates a different relationship between Shaw and suffrage that has been somewhat sidelined by notions of Shaw's ambivalence or indifference towards the movement. As Rodelle Weintraub has shown, this is the conclusion one makes when one examines the

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[30] "G.B.S. and a Suffragist", originally published in *Tribune*, London (12 March 1906). Reprinted in Rodelle Weintraub (ed.), *Fabian Feminist* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1977), 236-42. Weintraub says this is "a most likely self-interview." Weintraub, "Votes for Women: Bernard Shaw and the Women's Suffrage Movement" in C. C. Barfoot and Rias van den Doel (eds.), *Ritual Remembering: History, Myth and Politics in Anglo-Irish Drama* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1995), 35.

[31] Kelly (1994), 68.

[32] See discussion in Kelly concerning Shaw's support for mandated representation and his own priority towards socialist progress, ibid.

[33] Kelly (1994), 67; Whitelaw (1990); Kingsley Kent (1987).

[34] Michael Holroyd, "George Bernard Shaw: Women and the Body Politic," *Critical Inquiry*, vol. vi, no. 1 (Autumn, 1979), 26-27.

"usual source books."[35] Yet, as Weintraub has also shown, when one considers primary sources, "one comes away with a portrait of an early, consistent advocate of full equality for women, including the right to vote."[36] Shaw's conviction that women must be granted the vote is widely evidenced: in his *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*; in his 1907 speech published in the *New York American*; in his participation in the 21 June 1908 WSPU procession (he was in one of the leading coaches); in his signing of the petition in favour of suffrage, published in *The Times* (23 March 1909); in his financial donations; in his denunciation of "masculine laughter" that accompanied women's struggles.[37] He would continue to write letters and give speeches criticising government methods, including a speech on the matter of forcible feeding (at the Kingsway Hall, 18 March 1913). In 1913, newspapers and periodicals contained ten Shavian items, including his response to Sir Almroth Wright published in pamphlet form, for which *The Vote* said suffragists were grateful. Indeed, the suffrage press frequently recorded and praised Shaw's suffrage activities.[38]

Differences of opinion were inevitable: for example, he fell out with Emmeline Pankhurst because he refused to speak on the issue of suffrage at a 1908 NUWSS rally at the Albert Hall (he felt it degrading to women to fight openly on their behalf) and several, such as Ethel Smyth, similarly felt he was not doing sufficient for the cause through his own art. His particular stance on the vote – as a means to get women on public bodies rather than sufficient in its own right – was different from that of many (but not all) women for whom the vote in itself was symbolically important. He also did not share the same idealistic enthusiasm for the vote of which he despaired in some women (and men, such as J. S. Mill), reminding others of woman's "common humanity" with man that will make her, as Barbara Bellow Watson summarises of Shaw's views, a similarly "doubtful political asset".[39] He said: "it is well to remind the uxorious that women have all the faults of men, and that Votes for Women will no more achieve the millennium than Votes for Manufacturers did in 1832 or Votes for Working Men in 1867 or 1885."[40]

Emphasising also that different permutations of suffrage ideas of course existed within the

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[35] Weintraub (1995), 34.
[36] Ibid.
[37] See Shaw, *The Quintessence of Ibsenism* (London: Walter Scott, 1891); Shaw, "Why All Women Are Peculiarly Fitted to Be Good Voters", *The New York American* (21 April 1907) in Weintraub (1977), 248-54. "Masculine laughter" is Barbara Bellow Watson's description (1964), 181.
[38] See, for example, "George Bernard Shaw on The Husband, the Supertax, and the Suffragists", *Votes for Women* (17 June 1910), 613; "Forcible Feeding – A Denial of Life Everlasting: Passages from a Speech Made by Mr. Bernard Shaw in the Kingsway Hall, on Tuesday, March 18", *Votes for Women* (28 March 1913), 367; "Bernard Shaw on Government Methods", *The Vote* (June 27 1913), 141; "Sir Almroth Wright's Case Against Woman Suffrage Answered by Bernard Shaw", *The Vote* (9 January 1914), 174; "George Bernard Shaw Condemns the Speaker", *The Vote* (14 February 1913), 260.
[39] Bellow Watson (1964), 191.
[40] George Bernard Shaw, "Sir Almroth Wright's Polemic [C1910]," *New Statesman* 2 (18 October 1913), 47.

movement itself, Mrs Zangwill was one woman who agreed with Shaw's thinking, asserting, "The vote is, after all, only the means, not the end."[41] But for others like Smyth, these opinions made Shaw unreliable. Yet, if in 1912 *The Vote* declared of Shaw that "even our friends fail us sometimes in comprehension and sympathy," still this shows the favourable regard with which many in the movement held Shaw.[42] This was the same newspaper that wrote of the Embankment procession in 1910 during which "in the crowd Mr. George Bernard Shaw proudly watched us go by, his wife walking amongst the writers."[43] This newspaper also advertised his name as one of the contributors to the 1913 Woman's Theatre souvenir pamphlet, demonstrating his close work with the AFL itself: alongside Hamilton, William Archer and Flora Annie Steel, he contributed an article on the "question of work". The souvenir was apparently "destined to become historic with the enterprise which it supports."[44]Albeit for differing reasons and with varying fervour, Shaw and members of the movement were fundamentally united in valuing the vote. This, and the important fact that he had spoken out against derogatory laughter, indicates that his frivolous treatment of the movement did not lack thought or understanding but was politically minded. Many recognised Shaw's commitment while some remained sceptical, a dynamic which, based on the AFL's involvement and suffrage reviews, extended to the reception of his plays.

***Press Cuttings*: the reaction of the AFL and the wider suffrage audience**

The AFL had a keen involvement in the performance of *Press Cuttings*. This play featured in the AFL's Yuletide Festival on 11 December 1909 at the Royal Albert Hall of which *The Vote* proudly reported "we have secured the first public performance in London."[45] As its second major production, Shaw also gave the script to the AFL in June 1910 for a NUWSS benefit matinée at the Kingsway Theatre fundraiser, at which Hamilton and St. John's *How the Vote Was Won* was also performed as part of a double-bill. On 8 July 1910, Alice Chapin's matinée at the Rehearsal Theatre featured Agnes Thomas in her original part in *Press Cuttings* as the War Office charwoman Mrs Farrell (she had also played the Working Woman in *Votes for Women!*).[46] These performances seem to show that the AFL had a positive regard for this play, but suffrage audiences were more divided. When it was revived by Annie Horniman in Manchester in November 1909, the NUWSS's periodical *Common Cause* was concerned about the way the play's humour presented both military and government strategies in light of current politics: "When one remembers that women are at

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[41] Ethel Hill, "Mrs. Israel Zangwill", *The Vote* (8 January 1910), 124.
[42] "Our Point of View", *The Vote* (30 November 1912), 74.
[43] "Other Suffrage Societies", *The Vote* (25 June 1910), 101.
[44] "The Woman's Theatre", *The Vote* (12 December 1913), 115.
[45] "Royal Albert Hall – Yuletide Festival", *The Vote* (9 December 1909), 82.
[46] "Press Cuttings", *The Vote* (9 July 1910), 125.

the present moment being tortured in prison by a Government whose only remedy for disorder is repression, one can scarcely laugh very heartily at 'Shoot em down!' or if the laugh is loud, it is bitter too."[47]

The play was too close to actuality for its material to be enjoyed as "mere skit" by some.[48] In the play, the comic order to "Shoot em down" derives from the threat that the Government perceives the suffragettes to be, a threat perpetuated by common stereotype. As Michael Weimer points out, suffrage events in April 1909 – and the reporting of them – had heightened public anxiety concerning the possibility of an intensified women's war. This was emphasised by the fact that April 1909 saw a seven-day gathering of the International Suffrage Alliance in London, as well as by the upheavals portrayed in *How the Vote Was Won* which were staged at the Women's Freedom League Bazaar.[49] In voicing concerns that such repressive activity onstage is not too far from events offstage, the *Common Cause* highlights an anxiety about laughing at such depictions that confirm (and perhaps perpetuate) rather than attempt to dispel prejudice and, therefore, wrongful treatment. In this analysis, the way such laughter is envisaged puts it not far from the complicit laugh that suffrage women criticised as endangering the cause.

Another reviewer complained the play was rather too subtle "in so far as it referred to the liberation movement."[50] This comment largely reflects the way the play captures male reluctance towards the issue of suffrage; the men only agree to it when faced with the unattractive alternative: being ruled by women. Although presented according to the typical suffrage "conversion" play, this play ultimately settles for a traditional portrayal, the humour deriving conventionally from enduring male prejudice and manipulative women (both pro- and anti-suffrage). Kelly argues that this reflects Shaw's own anxieties about his relation to the campaign, and his parodic take on them.

Yet, if reservations such as this surrounding the conventionality of the play's humour were expressed, they were also challenged. In response to the idea that this play was too subtle, one letter to *The Common Cause* argued:

> [although] we women would have liked a play in which all the old arguments were polished up afresh, and presented with irresistible humour…if I mistake not, this play was written for men – for the men who still believe that they are lords of everything in general, and of women in particular. It is these men who will now help to fill our coffers, and will laugh over the play… Only gradually will it dawn upon them that Shaw is laughing at them, that he has turned the full glare of the light on to the

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[47] *The Common Cause* (30 September 1909) in Sheila Stowell, "Suffrage Critics and Political Action: A Feminist Agenda", Michael Booth and Joel Kaplan (eds.), *The Edwardian Theatre: Essays on Performance and the Stage* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 173.
[48] Ibid.
[49] Weimer (1977), 85.
[50] *The Common Cause* (15 July 1909) in Stowell (1996), 183.

> absurdity of the position. The average Britisher hates to be ridiculous, he will do anything rather – even concede women the right to vote.[51]

This response concedes that a different portrayal might have been preferable, but nonetheless finds its value in the way that, in its very use of humour convention, it attracts men to watch it. In so doing, they (and the humour they laugh at) inadvertently finance the movement. Apparently, this means that the men will eventually come to the realisation that the real ridicule is reserved for them. The play lures men in order to entrap them into a shamed conversion, which is presented as better than no conversion at all. Given the implied idea that, even though preferable, other portrayals might not work as effectively on the audience, this reviewer might even go so far as to say this depiction is necessarily superior.

Other suffrage supporters had likewise positive things to say about this play's depiction, including about its comedy. Focusing almost exclusively on the main direction of derision in the play – towards Mitchener and Balsquith, as well as the two anti-suffragettes – *Votes for Women* described this as a "highly entertaining and witty farce", exclaiming that the "large audience thoroughly appreciated the wit and humour of the play."[52] This review takes no offense at the anti-suffragette suggestion that the suffragettes be put down by "force of arms," instead delighting in the "sly and very excellent hit" that Shaw makes towards anti-suffrage arguments (presumably pertaining to the fear of the loss of masculinity).[53] Similarly, ahead of the Yuletide Festival, *The Vote* anticipated a warm reception of this play, asserting that, "To the admirers of Mr. G. Bernard Shaw's epigram and wit the Yuletide Festival is a gift from the gods."[54] It again focuses on the humour depicted in the figures of Balsquith and Mitchener and delights in the way that the portrayal of the dangerous suffragettes facilitates the demeaning depiction of the Prime Minister; obliged to "chain himself to the door-scraper and shout 'Votes for Women' in order to enter his own house [he] may yet become an historical figure!"[55] Conceding that "No Suffragette is present in the play, but her spirit, like that of Caesar, is all-pervading," the reviewer again proudly alludes to the military and governing authority shown by Shaw's offstage suffragettes.[56] Reflecting the opinion of those who actively promoted such ideas about women's military and political capacity, as well as the way this facilitates the derogatory depiction of the men in the play, this response highlights a confidence and positivity with regard to such a portrayal. The overwhelming sense here is that the stereotyped figure of the suffragette in *Press Cuttings* was a facilitator for the play's main humour target – the men – and a promoter of the cause. While we can

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[51] *The Common Cause* (22 July 1909) in Stowell (1996), 183.
[52] "Suffrage Play at The Court Theatre", *Votes for Women* (16 July 1909), 950.
[53] Ibid.
[54] "Royal Albert Hall – Yuletide Festival", *The Vote* (9 December 1909), 82.
[55] Ibid.
[56] Ibid.

only speculate as to what the AFL's aforementioned positive reception of this play says about their relationship to these suffrage caricatures, perhaps it had something to do with the idea that, in the context of the overall sway of the play, far from being risky such caricatures might actually be useful. Aware that no character, whether suffrage or not, had escaped caricature in the play, the AFL knew not to take personal offense but, because of this very fact, to find utility therein.

These responses show how women could agree with Holroyd's assertion that Shaw's humour was a "political weapon". While some expressed concern, others evidenced Moore's own awareness of the ways in which the use of such humour is not necessarily harmful and could even be politically useful, whether in terms of being proud of such stereotype as a political promotion or as a necessary means to a constructive end. As these reviews testify, the way Shaw consciously and comically mimics for the purposes of theatrical fun and entertainment the distorted portrayal of the movement that could be found in the contemporary press actively encouraged audience laughter and enjoyment amongst both sympathetic and non-sympathetic audience members alike. The value of this for the suffrage movement resides in the way that such humour apparently entices men in and implicates them within the negative portrayal while indirectly or directly ballasting women.

Shaw's self-deriding suffragette

Reminiscent of Moore's idea of the sense of humour as a commodity, Shaw shows how being able to laugh at oneself is to recognise that such humour can be helpful in promoting the cause as well as its individual members. As Holroyd says, Shaw's ridicule assumes women's good sense of humour about themselves, which their response to *Press Cuttings* enabled many to implicitly yet valuably evidence. In his 1911 *Fanny's First Play*, Shaw returned to this subject, this time promoting self-derision as both a valuable passive and a valuable active activity for the suffrage movement, with a particular emphasis on the sense of humour of the suffrage theatre. Indeed, this play represents Shaw's own intervention within the keen contemporary debate that surrounded the matter of the aesthetics of suffrage theatre, as indicated by his central casting of a suffrage playwright in the framing play.

This play concerns Fanny's attempt, in defiance of her father's ideals, to write a modern play. Her unwitting father has invited a range of theatre critics to assess her work. A play within a play, Fanny's story of Margaret, a rebellious young woman, is staged around her own. As is revealed at the end of the Epilogue, Fanny is a suffragette who has served time in prison. Trotter detects suffrage overtones derived from her personal experience in Fanny's play, leading him to assert that Fanny must be a suffragette. Although her main protagonist, Margaret, is not a suffragette, her experiences are closely aligned with those Fanny has encountered during her suffrage involvement. In her playwriting, Fanny is thus explicitly

associated with the contemporary women playwrights Shaw knew, such as Robins. More specifically, the criticism that her political dramaturgy attracts from Trotter aligns her with such playwrights who also frequently encountered such disparagement on the same grounds. As soon as Trotter has confirmation that Fanny is a suffragette, he expresses downright annoyance as he asks her if this is meant to justify her dramatic impertinence: "Is that any reason why you should stuff naughty plays down my throat?"[57] Suggestive of an unpalatable clumsiness in both content and style, this metaphor is employed to criticise Fanny's privileging of political realism over pleasant illusion, as suffrage theatre itself was wont to do. Trotter refuses to acknowledge "modern plays" as Fanny describes her own: "whatever else they may be, [they] are certainly not plays" (9). For him, there is too much of the author as well as the personal life of others in such pieces.

To Trotter's question, Fanny asserts in the affirmative – "itll teach you what it feels like to be forcibly fed"– aligning her own art with and drawing attention to the explicit political aims of suffrage theatre (52). In an approach very different from Fanny's own, Robins subtitled her own play a "tract" in order to avoid the aesthetic criticism that accompanied overt political theatre. Nonetheless *Votes for Women!* was challenged for the apparently disagreeable way it blurred the lines of art and politics and, echoing Trotter's criticism, the way it drew too much attention to the author and her aims. Of this play, W. L. Courtney wrote: "To be conscious of a grievance is a bad soil from which the artistic flower is to bloom, because when one is profoundly interested, the stress is apt to be laid on the wrong points, and the artist should, above all, have a disengaged and neutral mind."[58]

According to Courtney, Robins' obvious "grievance" and "profound interest" disrupt the play artistically. Suffrage theatre would continue to be criticised in terms of the way it disturbed the dramatic aesthetic. Edith Craig responded to the enduring criticism that such plays make of the playwrights and actors "propagandists rather than entertainers" by maintaining that "we ourselves have no desire either to preach dull doctrines or to provide dull amusement. Naturally our productions do not always please everyone." She maintained that the fact these plays provoke both antagonism as well as sympathy show that they are useful "from the point of view of ideas."[59] Yet, that the AFL held a debate on this matter suggests that not all could quite so easily and confidently dismiss such criticism. On 27 January 1911 at the New Reform Club they debated the motion "That Interest in Politics is Not Injurious to Dramatic Art", at which Shakespeare's own drama was cited and where apparently all agreed that "an interest in politics was of vital necessity for the truthful

[57] George Bernard Shaw, *Fanny's First Play* (Teddington: The Echo Library, 2006 [1911]), 52.
[58] In Thomas (1994), 10.
[59] Provincetown Players' Annual Report, 1913-14; 8-9 in Cockin (2001), 43.

interpretation of the drama of life."[60]

Shaw's use of the forcible feeding metaphor is an intriguing one in terms of his own position in relation to this criticism. On the one hand, it draws attention to his solidarity with the suffrage cause and, implicitly, the aims of its drama. He was strongly against the practice of forcible feeding and later, in 1913, would protest it at Kingsway Hall.[61] Fanny's self-objectifying allusion to it thus seems to form justification, supported by Shaw, for her choice of dramaturgy; initially upset, she laughingly shrugs off criticism and asserts the importance of her work. Shaw sometimes called his own drama propaganda, and he too showed the importance of laughing off the criticism about his socialist aims by means of self-derision, as evidenced in the way he introduces Vaughan's comment that all of Shaw's characters are "mere puppets stuck up to spout Shaw" (51). Actively creating these characters who criticise him and his dramaturgy, Shaw's eventual confession as author allowed him to confirm his own positive rapport with ridicule and aesthetic criticism.

However, as David J. Gordon points out, "Shaw was seldom a propagandist *in* his art (his art is didactic in tendency, but it does not preach socialism, and indeed only refers to it ironically)."[62] While he certainly advocated the view that art could be and should be refining, the means by which he advocated reform relied more on the intellectual steering towards a "truth" representative of his own politics rather than on polemic. Vaughan's criticism about puppetry draws attention more to Shaw's reputation as a socialist than to the actual dramatic presentation of his ideas. For, while the aims are nonetheless discernible, in Shaw's work the use of discussion and argument are the important agents of productive conversion, as already seen in *Press Cuttings*. This is acknowledged in the main criticism against him in *Fanny's First Play*, itself a parody of his own "play of ideas", when Bannal calls Shaw someone who "insults everybody all round" just to "set us talking about him" (51). Shaw's distaste for forcible feeding arguably, therefore, takes on a different meaning here, pertaining to the means by which personal politics should be conveyed in the theatre.

His commitment to this style of dramaturgy was, in fact, evidenced in the suggestion Shaw made to Robins regarding her own play about which, as Robins expressed in a letter to Florence Bell, he was enthusiastic and "*very* encouraging," particularly towards the middle act "which he declares to be original and amusing."[63] His advice, as expressed by Sue Thomas, was "insistent" regarding the inclusion of interjections and banter between the speakers and the audience in the rally scene (for which, as seen, Robins had already made

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[60] *Votes for Women* (3 February 1911), 298.
[61] See Weintraub (1977), 228-35.
[62] David J. Gordon, "Shavian Comedy and the Shadow of Wilde" in Christopher Innes (ed.), *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 128.
[63] See Gates (1994), 160.

notes).[64] His recommendation evidenced the value, as interesting and useful rather than harmful, Shaw put on the replication of the multitudinous and antagonistic voices surrounding the issue of suffrage. Where a tract-like approach might mention them to mock them, these interjections are a rare moment where oppositional stances and ridicule are given air in a live communal suffrage forum. As well as adding dramatic interest in the form of conflict, the way that these interjections challenge suffrage opinion with popular belief calls on the suffrage speakers to refine their arguments in order to convince the crowd. This exchange, which does not presuppose that the speakers have all the answers, suited Shaw's own ideas about even his forward-thinking characters. Far from mere puppets for his views, Shaw's protagonists are not perfect and his admirable forerunners stumble. The debates in *Votes for Women!* showcase the suffrage speakers' skills in rational and considered debate and display their good-humoured and self-reflective treatment of ridicule, which is of important social and political value. Far from denouncing the cause, the inclusion of this self-derisory ridicule thus demonstrates, in addition to that of the women onstage, Robins' own good humour and confidence.

Shaw's behind-the-scenes contribution to *Votes for Women!* highlights the importance he placed on public expressions of self-derision, in general but particularly amongst non-conformist subjects such as displayed by the movement. In his active demonstration of the inevitability of ridicule, Shaw proves that non-convention will always be intriguing and amusing to others. Although Shaw's main satiric arrow is aimed at convention and respectability, as Gordon has written, "Shavian comedy never forgets that there is something absurd as well as wonderful about an idiosyncratic stance."[65] The fact that Shaw's mockery is aimed at all characters emphasises this. His use of stereotype in both *Fanny's First Play* and *Press Cuttings* shows his acknowledgment that women's political activities attracted public notions about their eccentricity, ideas of which, in his identification with Mrs Farrell's reaction to them in *Press Cuttings*, he shows a keen understanding. Mrs Farrell is unable to tell the suffragists apart from the anti-suffragists because "theyre all alike when they get into a state about it" (19). There is an eccentricity common to both parties, despite or indeed because of their polarised positions. This straight-talking Irish woman was, according to Shaw in a letter to Bertha Newcombe, the "only really sympathetic woman in [the play]."[66] Furthermore, unlike the others, she has a sense of humour. Her balance makes this an easier character with which to identify, compared to the extremes of the other personalities.

In his suggestions for Robins' play, Shaw showed that derisory humour has a role in the

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[64] Thomas (1994), 9.
[65] Gordon (1998), 133.
[66] Letter to Bertha Newcombe (14 May 1909) in Dan H. Laurence (ed.), *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1898-1910* (London: Max Reinhardt, 1972), 843.

theatre in terms of its capacity to reveal a sophisticated and illuminating equivocation. Shaw understood this as dramatically pleasing, interesting, and, concomitantly, politically helpful. The self-objectifying sense of humour is thus directly linked to political persuasiveness in the theatre in a way that sheer brute force is not. Although Robins' rally scene was praised as both dramatically and intellectually stimulating, her play nonetheless attracted criticism about her political earnestness: the way her intense personal conviction is transparently evidenced. Shaw knew first-hand how biased assumptions about an author's political stance can affect a play's reception but, in praising the structure and not the characters, he also showed his own reservations. Through his own character Fanny in *Fanny's First Play*, he not only continued to show solidarity with suffrage playwrights' political ambitions, as he did with Robins: refusing to fight the battle for women themselves (which he perceived as degrading to their own efforts), Shaw also continued to offer these playwrights advice in his self-appointed role as "father".

He did this most directly through the creation of suffrage playwright Fanny and her telling emulation of Shaw's aesthetics. As J. Ellen Gainor has remarked, Fanny acknowledges the influence of Shaw's paternity on her.[67] As an alumna of the Cambridge Fabian Society, her politics are aligned with his, as is her new dramaturgy in terms of its attack on formal and moral convention. She also shares with Shaw a positive regard for the uses of ridicule. Citing the Cambridge Fabian Society's motto, "You cannot learn to skate without making yourself ridiculous", Fanny understands that ridicule should be actively invited and is necessary to self-advancement. She goes further to assert that the "dread" of ridicule is "so frightfully out of date" (10). This mindset makes one far superior to those who remain serious, such as the critic Vaughan whom Shaw attacks as humourless; while he is able to recognise a joke, it nonetheless "hurts him" as "he'll think youre insulting him" (5). As well as inviting it, in her own play Fanny creates self-ridicule, towards her own political affiliation; the similarities between the details of Margaret's criminal past and Fanny's own invite the interpretation that Fanny's play is her moment of active self-objectification.

As Shaw did in *Press Cuttings*, Fanny draws widely upon the representation of the suffragette that appeared, often for comic and/or derisory purposes, in public discourse. Although she is not a suffragette, the portrayal of Margaret's violence towards the police officer would have easily recalled the depictions of contemporary altercations between suffragettes and the police, most recently the arrests of Black Friday (18 November 1910). In her unpublished 1910 *Pages From the Diary of a Militant Suffragette,* author and narrator Katherine Roberts describes the way the press – which one man tells Roberts is women's

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[67] J. Ellen Gainor, *Shaw's Daughters: Dramatic and Narrative Constructions of Gender* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1991), 184.

"worst enemy in this movement" – exaggerated militant violence. Observing Mrs Pankhurst speaking to an Inspector Jarvis, Roberts remarks, "The papers say that she assaulted him," to which the man laughs: "That is just what they would say."[68] In another incident, the friendly conversation that a "small and fragile-looking" speaker was having with the police was reported in the press as "Struggling, kicking, and biting." Roberts points out that it was this account that men believed.[69] If Roberts' account was indeed fictional, it nonetheless represents wide concurrence of opinion regarding the press's distortion of suffrage activity. For, although the suffragettes became dependent upon press coverage (they complained about the press boycott against them in 1907, 1909 and 1911), suffragists as well as suffragettes protested the "tendency to misrepresent the movement by exaggerating the militant side of it."[70]

Rather than correcting this, in her exaggeration Fanny recycles it (Margaret knocked two of the policeman's teeth out). She indulges in stereotype, actively creating humour towards her own type (she has also spent time in prison for disruptive activity). Indeed, Bobby's declaration that Margaret is utterly transformed by her experience, devoted to going "loose on principle", pokes fun at the self-consciousness of militant tactics as much as it echoes anxious press reportage, actively evidencing how Fanny recognises the eccentricity within suffrage behaviour (32). Likewise, she ambiguously satirises the suffrage predilection for jujitsu in Duvallet's remark that England's progressiveness is evidenced in Margaret's violence. This reference also reflects public concern and stereotype regarding what Duvallet terms the "athletic young Englishwoman" (34). He asks, "where else are women trained to box and knock out the teeth of policemen as a protest against injustice and violence?" (44).

In recycling it, Fanny displays a self-awareness towards her eccentric behaviour as well as a confidence in relation to the stereotype of the violent suffragette, just as Garrud had the year before. Reflecting the close link between militant suffrage and jujitsu, on 6 July 1910 *Punch* portrayed the archetypal campaigner in the well-known cartoon, "The Suffragette That Knew Jiu-Jitsu: The Arrest", featuring the poised stance of the jujitsu master with cowardly policemen before her and defeated ones behind. The *Punch* image was reprinted next to Garrud's 1910 *Health and Strength* article on women and self-defence, "Damsel versus Desperado". This occurred upon the editor's request, but there is no evidence of Garrud's resistance, which is consistent with her own assertions in this same article regarding such depictions. She wrote: "The daily papers, by their witticisms, smart or otherwise, at the expense of the Suffragette who goes in for ju-jutsu in order that she may foil her supposed

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[68] Katherine Roberts, *Pages From the Diary of a Militant Suffragette* (Letchworth: Garden City Press, 1910), 73.
[69] Roberts (1910), 35.
[70] Pugh (2002), 229.

natural enemy, the man in blue, has certainly helped to popularise that mode of self-defence we owe to the Japanese amongst our women, whether they clamour for the vote or not."[71] Conscious of the "many perils nowadays" to which women are exposed and the way that the press has inadvertently advertised the method of jujitsu as a helpful response, Garrud's consideration of such derisory depiction is positive. Within her response Garrud, like Fanny, shows a confidence towards such humour, rather than perceiving it as a danger to avoid.

Typical of her fearless attitude towards anti-suffrage depictions, Fanny goes on to cite another stereotype about class and the suffrage movement. Upon hearing that Margaret was put away in Holloway Gaol, her father despairs, "You've joined the Suffragets!" to which Margaret replies, "No. I wish I had. I could have had the same experience in better company" (22). While "better company" could merely suggest friendliness and comradeship, it undoubtedly has class resonances to which Margaret is more likely referring. This depiction reflects the perceived class bias within the movement and, particularly, within the WSPU. Historians continue to debate this matter: Pugh criticises what he perceives to be the Pankhursts' rejection of mass movement amongst the textiles workers for the drawing rooms of London while Paula Bartley has emphasised the social spectrum reflected by the WSPU in terms of campaigns and membership (Annie Kenney being a famous example of a working class activist).[72] This debate aside, Margaret's invocation of the high class suffrage inmates reflects contemporary opinion which, Bartley argues, is partly explained by the preference amongst the press for reporting the violent acts of the WSPU over more mundane work, the latter of which was represented by the working class in greater numbers. The frequency with which anti-suffragist postcards pitted the aggressive feminist against the working-class housewife, haranguing her without success, seems another likely source of this idea. Despite a certain amount of sympathy for the suffragettes amongst the working-class in the 1911 publication of *Seems So! A Working-Class View of Politics*, this biased account reinforced perceived battle lines in the movement, drawn by class (focusing as it did on the purported attitudes of the Devonshire working class instead of on the potentially more open-minded urban working class, who were more familiar with suffrage activities).[73] Such divisions played into the hands of those who felt this movement was the product of the few rather than the majority, characterised by whimsical boredom of the privileged rather than by real need. Depictions that reflected this could potentially undermine the movement's relevance.

The AFL itself reflected suffrage anxiety surrounding this issue. To some extent, it

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[71] Edith Garrud, "Damsel v. Desperado", *Health & Strength* (23 July 1910), 101.
[72] See Chapter 9 "Women's Suffrage and Public Opinion" in Pugh (2002), 224-252, and Paula Bartley, *Votes for Women, 1860-1928* (London: Hodder & Stoughton, 1998).
[73] Stephen Reynolds, Bob Wooley, and Tom Woolley, *Seems So! A Working-Class View of Politics* (London: Macmillan, 1911).

displayed the weakness of the poor, worn down by circumstance, a weakness that Emmeline Pethick Lawrence said emphasised the responsibility of upper-class members to work on their behalf. She perceived the poor workers to be insufficiently strong compared to those of greater privilege, stating the latter should "take upon their shoulders the burden of the weak."[74] It was true that the middle and upper classes represented large numbers of the most militant suffragettes. These women could better afford the risks of imprisonment and ill reputation associated with violent activity. It was also proven that, once in prison, they risked less than their lower-class comrades. Margaret's remark about "better company" also suggests by implication "better treatment", which was proven to be the case. Lady Constance Bulwer-Lytton (with whom Fanny later says she was imprisoned) was a suffragette activist who joined the WSPU and was imprisoned four times. She used the *nom de guerre* Jane Warton, a London seamstress, in order to show up the unjust class discrepancy. Due to her aristocratic family background (her mother was lady-in-waiting to Queen Victoria), she received better treatment in prison.[75] Yet in, for instance, the daring defiance of Mrs Chicky and Mrs Puckle, the League also depicted the enduring energy of the working class. This varied depiction demonstrates the tricky balance experienced by the movement between highlighting the desperate needs of the poor without alienating them as valid and valuable participants, something that Sylvia Pankhurst felt the WSPU had got wrong. In 1914, she would, indeed, leave the WSPU to privilege popular support and participation in the East End. In her reference to this "better company", Fanny thus replicates rather than shies away from this delicate and divisive stereotype of the upper-class suffragette – both within and outside the movement – to evidence her self-awareness.

As with her treatment of violence, Fanny's use of such humorous stereotype implicitly acknowledges the way even derogatory and critical humour could bring publicity to the cause, as shown in postcards or other representation. Inevitably portraying the novel aspects of the movement such as Garrud's jujitsu cartoon, such humour piques the interest of the spectator in what could be perceived as something very exciting and important (even in its apparent exclusivity or eccentricity), in the same way that Fanny's depiction does. Of *The Daily Mirror*, founded in 1903 as a picture paper for ladies and taking a neutral stance towards the matter of the vote, Pugh says on this subject: "it could hardly avoid promoting the cause because it depended heavily upon the visual material generated so freely by the campaign. Similar remarks apply to the large quantity of postcards, cartoons, and music hall songs of the period which often presented women's suffrage in a humorous or hostile form, but which

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[74] *Votes for Women* (9 July 1908), 296.
[75] Brittain (1953), 36.

nonetheless forced the issue into public consciousness."[76]

One of the pictures that *The Daily Mirror* published captured what would become a customary tradition: the suffragettes being welcomed by supporters upon departing prison. The photo, printed in the paper on 1 August 1908, carries a caption which describes how the former inmates were treated to a "cordial" reception, "bouquets being presented to them as they emerged," followed by a "breakfast at the Queen's Hall, to which they were escorted [...] in a wagonette."[77] This tradition sometimes attracted derision from those who felt it affected the cause's credibility in terms of privilege and commitment. In Morton's *Deeds not Words*, the fact that Marjory attended a reception breakfast at the Criterion Restaurant causes George to announce disparagingly, "Oh, it is not all hardships then?" His mother protests that a breakfast is hardly "sufficient reward for six weeks imprisonment," which he half-heartedly concedes (10). In 1909, Robins even felt compelled in an article for *Votes for Women* to reiterate the real trial of the prison experience and assert that it brings people of different classes together through common experience: "She has proved her faith to those who know the harsher side of life; and she has brought herself through suffering into more direct relation with the masses than she could have done by all the academic eloquence in the world."[78]

Given the anxiety surrounding such prejudice, it is significant that Fanny references the image of this cordial reception. When Dora declares that she left prison "this morning", she describes a confusion that occurred outside prison: "there was such a crowd! and a band! they thought I was a suffragette: only fancy!" (14-15). Her humorous reference to this apparently glamorous tradition consciously alludes again to the potentially discrediting stereotype of the privileged suffragette. This enables Fanny to reveal a critical understanding of the movement to which she belongs, as well as its external perception, as Robins does above in a wholly different tone. As a privileged woman whose past has included suffrage violence and imprisonment, Fanny's use of humour is wholly self-objectifying.

In this play, Fanny tentatively follows in the footsteps of Shaw himself, replicating postcard and newspaper humour just as Shaw did in *Press Cuttings.* She shares his confidence with regard to ridicule, the suffrage overtones of which position Fanny and her play within the specific debate pertaining to suffrage and suffrage theatre's relationship to derisory laughter. Her work is not free from political clumsiness for which Trotter criticises her; this attempt is not perfect. If his creation of Fanny uncomfortably recalls Shaw's difficult attitude to women writers and actresses and his disparaging tendency to "rewrite" their plays, as explored by Holledge and Powell, it also emphasises here at least Shaw's solidarity with the suffrage playwrights, highlighting the inevitability of criticism (particularly when an author's

[76] Pugh (2002), 225.
[77] *Daily Mirror* (1 August 1908), 8-9
[78] Elizabeth Robins, "The Sign of the Times: Part II", *Votes for Women* (26 March 1909), 469.

political affiliation is known) as well as the elusiveness of perfection.[79] It is this attempt that Shaw puts forth for discussion as a theatrical political aesthetic. Shaw's work asserts the importance for suffrage women to publicly demonstrate their positive relationship to self-derisory humour.

According to Shaw's promotion of it, this humour helps rather than compromises the cause. As shown through Fanny, Shaw demonstrates that when stereotypes are embraced by those they represent, they do not serve the same purposes of mere entertainment (valuable though that is). In promoting ridicule, self-objectifiers manipulate such humour for the purposes of their own endorsement. Fanny/Shaw employs the easy stereotypes in recognition of, and to draw attention to, the inevitability of such humour, based upon the way they entertain and satisfy an audience as well as the non-convention from which they derive. In this way, the plays meet the antis on their home ground, grabbing their attention and appealing to what they recognise as good humour. In the predictability and ease with which Fanny/Shaw mimics the construction and circulation of these depictions, there is arguably also a touch of mockery towards them, their creators, and those who enjoy them.

Indeed, the author retains the upper hand as the joker, allowing him/her to (literally) stage-manage his/her own representation. For Fanny, self-derision allows her to represent the cause as good-humoured, intriguing and self-aware, promoting its sense of moderation. This confidently pre-empts any criticism about the suffrage argument as well as any ideas about suffrage humourlessness. This acceptance of stereotype differs from the AFL's mockery of it (as dealt with in previous chapters) because it acknowledges the positive elements of such stereotype as well as the potential facets of the campaign that have contributed to it. Recognising the inevitability of ridicule, Shaw shows that self-derision is advantageous rather than foolish. Indeed, it is those who are regressive and critical in outlook – Fanny's father and the critics themselves – who bear the full brunt of the ridicule in this play. For Shaw, despite satirising his own dramaturgy, his humour is largely directed towards the affronted Trotter rather than himself. Significantly, such people are also the ones who fail to laugh at themselves, showing that self-objectifiers always come off best.

As well as publicising the cause amongst the antis, this humour also encourages self-derisory laughter amongst the members of the movement themselves. According to Shaw's conception of this humour, laughing at these aspects does not offend or compromise. The fact that a suffragette character never features on stage in either play (except as Fanny in Shaw's Prologue and Epilogue) demonstrates that Fanny/Shaw does not ask the suffragettes to laugh completely at themselves. Standing as a literal demonstration of the distortion within, for

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[79] See Holledge (1981) and Kerry Powell, "New Women, New Plays, and Shaw in the 1890s", Christopher Innes (ed.), (1998), 76-100.

example, the press reportage on which *Press Cuttings* is purportedly based, Fanny/Shaw encourages laughter towards commonly perceived eccentricities that influence such depictions as well as, indeed, the comically distorted representations themselves. Moreover, in apologising to those "somewhat hurt" critics he had to leave out of the play, Shaw showed his high regard for his subjects, his faith in their good humour, and his anticipation of what he hoped would be their positive, even flattered, reaction.[80]

***Fanny's First Play*: the reaction of the AFL and the wider suffrage audience**

In terms of its cast in the April 1911 run, *Fanny's First Play* belonged to the AFL. As Kelly points out, "only one of the six female parts – Maria Gilbey – was played by a non-A.F.L. member."[81] Mrs Knox was played by Hamilton, Margaret by Lillah McCarthy (in the 1916 revival, this part was played by Lena Ashwell), and Dora by Dorothy Minto (whose performance in 1907 as Ernestine Blunt in *Votes for Women!* led to her membership of the AFL). McCarthy's husband Granville Barker directed this play at the Little Theatre and it was McCarthy who encouraged her husband to give Hamilton the part of Mrs Knox (McCarthy had played the part of Woman at suffrage matinees in Hamilton's own *A Pageant of Great Women*). Hamilton would call the play a "truly obstinate success," her role in it leading to other parts for her in the commercial theatre.[82] At this time, as one review asserted, there was "hardly a name in the cast which will be recognised outside Little Theatre audiences, members of the Stage Society, the Playgoers' Society, and the enthusiastic supporters of side shows."[83] If their involvement is natural for talented actresses aspiring to bigger roles, as politically conscious and principled artistic women it seems appropriate to suggest that their involvement was also marked by an awareness of the play's political material, suggesting at the very least no objection to it. Acting out jokes about their own movement's class, tactics and even prison experience, it would seem that these actresses were at ease with (or, even, passionate about) humour that encouraged such active self-objectification. Indeed, the women's political affiliations arguably meant that such mockery, including self-objectification, bore meaningful resonances.

Of course, their acceptance of these roles might simply be put down to the humour's subtlety. Some audiences, who did not recognise the AFL actresses within the cast and the play's references to the suffrage movement, were able to indulge in the play as the fun, trivial piece – "but a potboiler" – that Shaw facetiously advertised in his Preface (for Shaw, humour

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[80] George Bernard Shaw, Preface to *Fanny's First Play* (2006), no page no.
[81] Kelly (2004), 76.
[82] Hamilton (1935), 83. She says this in the context of her original, erroneous expectation that the play would only require her services for "two or three weeks".
[83] " *Fanny's First Play* at the Little Theatre", *The Academy and Literature* (29 April 1911), 521.

is always a serious matter). Emmeline Pethick Lawrence wrote, "Throughout the play there are innuendoes full of significance to 'Militants', though the uninitiated might sit through all the acts until the very end without any idea that allusion was being made to the Suffrage Movement."[84] The *Academy*, indeed, dismissed the play as the comedy of old, set up for the sole purpose of mindless entertainment: "it was indeed good to throw back our head and shout with laughter at his spontaneously idiotic jokes."[85] The actresses' involvement might have derived from an ability to disregard any specific suffrage jokes (and possible offensiveness) in this humour, and/or their effect on the audience.

Not all audiences came to this conclusion, however. One contributor to *The Vote* in 1911 reported overhearing a remark after a performance of the play outside the Little Theatre: "Chubby-faced male, in evening dress, to his companion: 'I think it's a satire – it *must* be a satire – on the Suffragettes and all those sort of people'! G. B. S. ought to see this!"[86] As well as drawing attention to the potentially dangerous volatility of such humour (as later discussed), this shows both the way that members of the audience did discern the humorous references to suffrage as well as a delighted ease within the wider suffrage community towards such an interpretation. Far from concerned that the play might spread negative views about the movement, this contributor revels in the man's confusion. In excitedly invoking Shaw's enjoyment, s/he sets up an imagined community of laughers against such ignorance (Shaw's authorial identity was not actually disclosed until the play's publication in 1914 but the contributor seems nonetheless convinced here; the fact this remained a secret is evidenced in the "coded" use of Shaw's initials). Pethick Lawrence recommended the play to suffragists due to its innuendoes which are "full of significance to 'Militants'." This suggests the same idea of a secret laughter community. For Kelly, Pethick Lawrence's enthusiasm derives from the movement's "eagerness for celebrity support […] even when equivocal."[87] Yet, there is more kinship between the two parties than this comment allows. The references are described as inside jokes, oblique to others but resonant to members of this group, akin to the suffragette jewellery that was worn during the movement to secretly affiliate themselves through gem colour and pattern. If, as previously explored, suffrage humour aimed at the antis could strengthen their community, this shows that self-objectifying humour also contributed to it. Women could identify closely with its references which also satisfyingly highlighted anti ignorance. Rather than concerning themselves with worries that this play was not sufficiently clear on the suffrage issue, such women were not short of ways to positively respond to it.

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[84] E. P. L., "Fanny's First Play: Who Wrote It?", *Votes for Women* (28 April 1911), 487.
[85] "*Fanny's First Play* at the Little Theatre", *The Academy and Literature* (29 April 1911), 520.
[86] *The Vote* (12 August 1911), 203.
[87] Kelly (1994), 76.

Due to the very ambiguity of its humour, the actresses would have been aware of the possibility that the play in which they were involved might be interpreted as a satire against them, as indeed it was. Their involvement suggests, therefore, an enjoyment towards the playfulness of *Fanny's First Play* as well as a confidence that, even in its self-objectifying humour, it would not be offensive or harmful to the movement in which they were engaged, and even that it could be helpful. As suggested by *The Vote*, the value of this play could be found in the laughing community that it set up against those who could not detect the self-objectifying humour; in other words, against those who took it too seriously. In both its performance and the play itself, Shaw establishes the superiority of those who actively welcome ridicule over those who, too serious, fail to detect it even when targeted at themselves. Those within this superior camp included a host of women.

Shaw's flippancy on the subject of suffrage derived, therefore, not from unthinking, irreverent fun at the expense of the suffragettes but from a deliberate promotion of self-derision among them as a politically motivated activity. (This observation regarding Shaw's sensitivity to humour also informed Chapter One's omission of Shaw's New Woman parody of Vivie from the discussion of Grundy's and Jones'). For Shaw, who revelled in his reputation as a "trifler with the most sacred subjects", it is far better to be ridiculed than not and those who can take it and make it are far superior to those who cannot (*Fanny's First Play*, 10). His teachings regarding flippancy on the matter of suffrage represented, therefore, less his own ambivalence on the subject and more his support of it that overrode any personal politics.

Cicely Hamilton and the wider AFL's promotion of self-derision

Despite women's involvement in this play and other women's positive reaction to it as politically valuable, the idea of Shaw as a supportive figure to politicised women has been sidelined in favour of accounts that portray him as ambivalent on the subject and women as independent self-starters. Shaw's own respect for the abilities of women to fight their own battles means that this narrative has been promoted, at what would perhaps be Shaw's own approval. While his neglected relationship to suffrage needs to be recuperated, his own promotion of self-objectifying humour does not mean all initiative should be traced back to Shaw. From early on, particularly from an oratory standpoint, the movement knew it needed to self-deprecate. Annie Kenney said that the suffragettes "were taught never to lose our tempers; always to get the best of the joke, and to join in the laughter with the audience even if the joke was against us."[88] *The Vote*'s comment following an exhibition that "Picture postcards of a line of Suffragettes engaged in a bun-munching competition would have sold

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[88] Kenney (1924), 104.

well as the Anti-Suffrage stall" displays a canny ease as laughter targets who knew how this could promote the cause.[89] In echoes of Fanny's Fabian assertion, Sir Frances Vane (President of the Boy Scouts) declared with a touch of praise at a 1911 AFL meeting that "no movement was worth anything unless those in it were prepared to make fools of themselves for it," with particular reference to the self-aware activities of the militants.[90]

In terms of how this translated to the stage, not everyone categorised derisory portrayals of the movement as necessarily dangerous. Of Netta Syrett's play, *Might is Right*, performed at the Haymarket in 1909, one *Votes for Women* reviewer recognised how the nightly performances "at an important London theatre" presupposed and promoted the importance of the movement. The periodical noted how the play evidenced "the prominent place which the militant suffrage movement holds in the public mind at the present time."[91] As such, the reviewer was able to see the play's caricatures as "not unkindly."[92] We are reminded here of Blunt's declaration in *Votes for Women!* that the presentation in the comic papers are a sign that "we've *arrived*!" Referring to the papers as an "advertisement" of the cause, she points out that no one "cartoons people who are of no importance" (ii.6). Similarly in this play, Vida shows an unperturbed and quietly confident attitude towards ridicule. It was for the same reason concerning the sense of importance that one writer decided to look on the bright side of the publication of books which reflected the women's movement, such as Karin Michaelis' *The Dangerous Age* and Antony Hope's *Mrs. Maxon Protests*, even if the heroines were "foolish [one] and morbid the other." [93]

In terms of active self-derision, Hamilton is one of the playwrights who publicly promoted this. Hamliton and Moore serve to show how women were less daughters of Shaw and more comrades. As well as choosing to star in *Fanny's First Play*, Hamilton was also one of those (and, it would seem, the only woman) whose name was put forward in the quest to discern the play's author. Before Shaw revealed that he had written *Fanny's First Play*, there was much speculation over its creator. While many had guessed Shaw, Emmeline Pethick Lawrence, writing for *Votes for Women* "boldly conjects" that the play might have been written by the same woman who wrote *Diana of Dobson's*, Cicely Hamilton: "Suffragists will find reason from internal evidence in the play to suspect that it was written by a woman. And we should not be surprised, while we should be highly delighted, to hear one day that 'Fanny' and 'Diana' (of Dobsons) are sisters."[94] For Pethick Lawrence, it is the "action of every one of the women" in the play that indicates "the freemasonry of women." The reviewer concludes

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[89] E. M. N. C., "At Play – with a purpose – at Croydon", *The Vote* (13 July 1912), 209.
[90] Reported in "Actresses' Franchise League", *The Vote* (13 May 1911), 34.
[91] "Militant Suffrage on the Stage", *Votes for Women* (19 November 1909), 117.
[92] Ibid.
[93] "New Women", *Votes for Women* (6 October 1911), 6.
[94] E. P. L., "Fanny's First Play", *Votes for Women* (28 April 1911), 487.

that the play, with its “jest and downright farce” and the way it challenges the “intellectual and critical faculties,” is “vastly entertaining and stimulating, and wholly enjoyable.”[95]

To have offered Hamilton as the anonymous writer of this enjoyable farce is to have recognised certain comic parallels between this play and Hamilton’s own writing. Hamilton appears, like Shaw, to find value in sympathetic derision. In *How the Vote Was Won* (co-written with Christopher St John), although her main ridicule is reserved for the antis, Hamilton also draws attention to comic material on home ground. Like Fanny, she demonstrates the ability to self-objectify, as in her depiction of militant tactics. Engaged as she was in resistance strategies (specifically those of tax resistance), Hamilton, with her co-writer, uses comic stereotype to depict those on stage who are similarly involved in such work. If *Her Vote* drew on the romantic tradition of women in comedy, *How the Vote Was Won* alludes to the trope of the overbearing, hen-pecking wife (with Horace consequently as the henpecked husband). Although the wife is, in fact, the only woman character in the play who is not overbearing, the representation of Aunt Lizzie and her group individually and collectively recall this comic stereotype, harassing Horace into suffrage submission. Rather than denouncing this stereotype the playwrights use it for its comic and political potential. Long recognised by stage convention, this portrayal sought wide appeal and attention. The aforementioned reviews show that this play successfully achieved this, publicly evidencing women’s contested ability to write and act comedy along traditional lines, as well as their ability to laugh with the public at their much-ridiculed choice of tactics.

The value of dramatic self-objectification is further shown in the observation that, pitched against Horace, these women are compelling and attractive even in their harassment. An intimidating and extreme personality, the hen-pecker supposedly depicts someone whom, while demonstrating the actress’s comic powers, is not known for many herself. Consciously assumed for political purposes by these women as well as by Hamilton and St John, both the personalities onstage and the playwrights themselves are self-aware and humorous. Manipulating this stereotype for their own purposes like Fanny, these militant women actively demonstrate a comic self-objectivity that pre-empts and therefore alters the power of the stereotype, creating both dramatic and political appeal towards suffrage. Such comedy made this play a suitable partner for *Press Cuttings* in their double-billed performance.

Like Fanny’s depiction of class, Hamilton’s on and offstage writing uses humour to lightly challenge the movement into a good-humoured self-awareness. Her periodical articles (read mainly but not necessarily solely by suffrage subscribers) were direct appeals from Hamilton to suffrage members’ self-objectifying sense of humour. In 1909, she wrote entertaining pieces for *The Vote* recounting a fictional “History of the Votes for Women Movement”

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[95] Ibid

which told, for example, a fantastical story about suffragists ("dressed as boy scouts") who kidnapped the Prime Minister.[96] The story mocked the movement's tendency towards angry intensity as well as its sometimes dubious musical and literary zeal, and even the quality of their jokes. After charging upon "their prey", the suffragists hold him hostage for three days, during which he was subjected to, in a description reminiscent of Wells' depiction, "wild-eyed suffragists" who recited "suffragist odes", "suffragist ballads", and "suffragist jokes".[97] Hamilton remarks, "Only those who have studied the copious and excruciating poetry of the movement can realise the appalling nature of the penalty. It is, I think, to the credit of the luckless minister that he held out against it as long as he did."[98] We might recall here the unfavourable light in which she viewed her own lyrics for *The March of the Women*.

The Prime Minister only yielded when, on the third day, he was subjected to a "more hideous" form of torture: "an unceasing torrent of eloquence from the worst suffragist speakers." Having previously been "crouching in a corner," this "wretched man" now grovels on the floor and promises to do their command.[99] However, despite his promise, the House of Lords ultimately dismisses the proposed Bill. This mocks the movement's initial naïve optimism that, in 1909, was quickly making way for increased wariness. This parallels Garland's later parody in *The Better Half* of suffrage optimism when Gunning rejects Mr Tregillus' opinion that their Bill will receive support with a majority of forty. Gunning replies, "Nonsense. More likely they'll lose by ten votes. He takes all his views from Miss Rosamund Hope; happily-named lady – she is always optimistic of success" (10). Although she generates a humorous and demeaning image of the Prime Minister, Hamilton's revisionary history makes the movement itself the main target of derision, promoting a wide-ranging self-derisory sense of humour that, in its publication, *The Vote* is shown to welcome. Comparing this dynamic, in which the movement comes off worst, with her plays that do not fiddle with the overall humour bias, it would seem that such a portrayal was only acceptable because of its different audience, emphasising the idea of deliberate cultivation amongst members.

In addition to Hamilton, St. John and Garland, other AFL playwrights were similarly promoting derisory laughter towards the cause amongst their audiences. The use of the violent suffragette stereotype displayed by Hamilton and St. John is also shown in the 1910 play *An Englishwoman's Home*, by H. Arncliffe-Sennett. This stereotype is introduced through the song, "Put Me Amongst the Girls".[100] Sung in this play by Bates (15), this was originally a

[96] Cicely Hamilton, "History of the Votes for Women Movement", *The Vote* (30 October 1909), 3.
[97] Ibid
[98] Ibid.
[99] Ibid.
[100] C. W. Murphy and Dan Lipton, "Put Me Amongst the Girls" (London: B. Feldman & Co., 1907).

popular music hall song written and composed by C. W. Murphy and Dan Lipton in 1907 and performed by Charles R. Whittle. Featuring a naughty schoolboy, a reluctant soldier, and a dying man, each asks to be put in the company of girls – "Those with the curly curls" – instead of amongst the boys or men, whether at school, in the army, or in the ground. A scornful John changes the chorus, saying, "Put 'im amongst the suffragettes, I say! Perhaps they'd make something of him" (15). As shown in the way they are presented in this song, music hall tended to make of women a visual spectacle. Any deviation from convention invited derisory humour, as in the treatment of the suffragettes. John's revision of the lyrics derives its humour from the way it exchanges pleasure (beautiful girls) with implied pain, specifically in terms of that inflicted by the suffragettes. His suggestion that the suffragettes might "make something of" Bates reflects the violent and authoritarian stereotype frequently attached to them. In embracing this music hall song for comic interest, Arncliffe-Sennett does not denounce such representation of women but borrows from it, aiming to attract laughter about this figure.

In employing this song within a pro-suffrage play, Arncliffe-Sennett shows how such humour can enhance the dramatic presentation, promotion and reception of the cause as good-humoured and self-aware. His portrayal implicitly rejects notions explored in Chapter One that music hall is integrally or solely hurtful to the movement, actively acknowledging the ways in which it publicised it and, in bringing it into the public domain of discourse, advertised its importance. Lord Robert Cecil humorously reflected this ironic mark of respect in a speech at a Conservative women's meeting on 9 July 1910 when he compared the status acquired by suffrage to the dignity of a music hall joke, "something on the level of a mother-in-law."[101] This is a sign – however ambiguous – of one's significance.

In *Votes for Women* the positive reception of rumours that the WSPU is creating "Suffragette Explosive Crackers" as part of its future militant programme – they are merely Christmas crackers – similarly indicates awareness of the helpful aspect of such portrayals.[102] Likewise, Bertha Moore's play *The Woman Wins* embraces the violent stereotype. Georgina's arrival at the wrong house causes a muddle, prompting a perplexed "Mrs N" to enquire why Georgina carries a hockey stick with her: "I thought horse whips were the thing" (2). The two engage in a confused conversation about the inevitabilities of violence, Moore making light of the suffragette reputation. Within this acceptance is an understanding of the complexity of comic stereotype, particularly within performance. Indeed, if it provokes laughter towards the violent suffragette stereotype, it also draws attention to the ignorant prejudice towards the plight of women which Arncliffe-Sennett's and Moore's portrayals confirm throughout the

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[101] Lord Robert Cecil at the Wharncliffe Rooms, "Two Great Meetings", *The Vote* (9 July 1910), 130.
[102] "Suffragette Explosive Crackers", *Votes for Women* (24 December 1909), 210.

plays (likewise, the Christmas cracker incident is also used to poke fun at masculine anxiety). This shows how representation is multi-faceted in interpretation and, as such, can be manipulated to one's advantage.

More generally of music hall, this medium allowed women to challenge gender roles and poke fun at men (particularly through cross-dressing, as shown by Vesta Tilley), showing off their comedic skills.[103] In this light, it is noteworthy that Hamilton and St. John's Maudie Spark in *How the Vote was Won* is a music hall singer and self-professed "Queen of Comédiennes" (156). Given the debates surrounding the music hall, it seems significant that these playwrights portrayed Spark as such. This explicitly declares her suffrage views to be consistent with her career on the stage and complicates Sheila Stowell's assessment that "suffrage [theatre] critics formed a united front against musical comedy."[104]

The way such women as Spark position themselves in relation to derision and self-derision indicates a beguiling confidence; they possess such self-belief that no amount of ridicule will shake. This is also shown in the self-assured group of *Lady Geraldine's Speech* who, unlike some in the audience of *Her Vote*, have no problem pitting romance against suffrage conviction. Noticing that Alice is preoccupied writing Geraldine's speech, Baillie speculates about what she might be up to: "A letter to the Prime Minister perhaps! A love letter to the Home Secretary! A valentine to the Governor of Holloway! Who can tell? Anything may happen in these days" (7). In echoes of the music hall "blokes for women" humour, Baillie momentarily reduces Alice's suffrage conviction to a series of fickle romances. The other characters do not regard this conscious fiction as destructive; instead, Silberthwaite laughs. Their ease shows their attractive confidence towards such stereotype. Just a year after the controversy surrounding *Her Vote*, Mary O. Kennedy would write a short biography of the "witty", "beautiful" and popular Eva Moore describing how on the stage she impresses men in the way she is "exquisitely dressed, belying every Suffrage caricature and poster."[105] Like Spark and Alice's friends, Moore and O. Kennedy were aware of how in performance even supposedly compromising portrayals could be helpfully manipulated for their own purposes.

To return to Arncliffe-Sennett's representation, like Hamilton he frequently demonstrates a commitment to suffrage caricature, as also shown in what Holledge has noted as his "parody of the suffragette's middle-class evangelism."[106] The Young Woman, who announces her politics with a loud shout of "Votes for Women!" asks the working-class John, "You don't believe then, that what is sauce for the goose is sauce for the gander?" To which John replies,

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[103] See Elaine Aston, "Male Impersonation in the Music Hall: The Case of Vesta Tilley", *New Theatre Quarterly* vol. 4, issue 15 (August 1988), 247-257.
[104] Stowell (1996), 171.
[105] Mary O. Kennedy, "Miss Eva Moore", *The Vote* (3 December 1910), 64.
[106] Holledge (1981), 80.

"I dunno nothin' about goose's sauce, 'cos we don't 'ave none" (16). Her argument, with its reliance on typical suffrage idiom and platitude incomprehensible beyond her own class and/or politics, is obtuse and vague.[107] As such, John finds her manner obtrusive and impudent. She thus fails to establish a common understanding, implying the class divide that the suffragette inadequately attempts to breach.

This class interaction is reminiscent of the exchange between the Girl and the Drudge (albeit already a suffrage supporter) in *Her Vote*. In this play, the Girl similarly shows her class ignorance in terms of other people's living conditions and, therefore, their needs. As a particularly controversial matter, class was a subject that this playwright acknowledges had to be addressed head on. Like Esmond and Shaw before him, Arncliffe-Sennett parodies the commonly perceived class bias of the movement that, in performance, could be politically useful. Indeed, frequently played to working-class audiences and achieving a "firm hold in the minds of the audience," the parody of the suffragette's class may well have helped to bridge class divides through laughter to promote mutual tolerance.[108] In this way, Arncliffe-Sennett's play shows how self-objectifying humour could be helpful in the political unification of otherwise divided groups.

Inter-movement critical humour

In this comic treatment of class and violence, these playwrights draw attention to the divides that existed within the movement and that risked its cohesive strength. Hamilton's work actively encouraged such inter-movement humour as means of challenging behaviour and advancing a stronger cause. In her "History of the Votes for Women Movement", Hamilton's depiction is at once self-derisory (referencing her own lyrics as well as the militant tactics in which she was involved) and, so the tone might suggest, critical towards elements of the movement from which, it seems, she distances herself, such as the speech-making reference. Indeed, Hamilton expressed her frustration with some repetitive speeches of the movement that seems to target certain, but not all, members of the movement.[109]

In the same way, Fanny's humour pertaining to class might express Shaw's own criticisms derived from his socialist persuasion. In his treatment of class there is arguably a departure from simple reproduction of ridicule towards his own light derision. Given his socialist views, which also influenced his views on the vote, it seems possible that Shaw's humour regarding the way various quarters of the movement considered class is genuinely critical. Within his ridiculing promotion is a Shavian resistance to political idealism. As previously mentioned,

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[107] For a discussion of this "frequent suffrage allusion", see Claire M. Tylee, "'A Better World for Both': Men, Cultural Transformation and the Suffragettes" in Joannou and Purvis (eds.) (1998), 148.
[108] *Votes for Women* (7 April 1911), 421.
[109] Hamilton (1935), 70.

his protagonists are never perfect beings; as shown in Fanny's skating metaphor, their status as forerunners throws up new challenges and, therefore, opportunities for mistakes and ridicule. These are inevitable, so through humour Shaw urges a mentality that accepts and uses them as useful and integral learning opportunities, while continued endeavour and confidence evidences one's strong conviction. Primarily using thoughtful comedy to "chasten morals with ridicule," Shaw's comedy also encouraged healthy self-evaluation more generally.[110] When Bannal notes that in his plays Shaw "insults everybody all round" he is referring to Shaw's use of such productive ridicule (51).

This critical humour can also be seen in AFL playwrights' use of the comic stereotype pertaining to the virtuously spiritual suffragette, such as in *How the Vote Was Won*. Although Hamilton and St. John's depiction mainly recalls the activity of non-violent militants such as herself, this stereotype was, in particular, associated with the violent militants of the WSPU. The character of Madame Christine, with her affiliation to this violent branch of the movement, thus alludes to this stereotype. In this play, Agatha speaks in solemn tones of her "higher duty to perform" (152) and Madame Christine, having donated her property to the WSPU, NUWSS and WFL respectively, solemnly and dramatically announces, "Money is the sinews of war, you know" (156). This depiction parallels both that of the Girl in *Her Vote* who, in platitudinous tones, speaks of the "noble" cause, and of Margaret. In *Fanny's First Play*, Margaret is utterly transformed by her prison experience, devoted to going "loose on principle", recalling the ennobling rhetoric behind militant tactics. Furthermore, the spiritual inspiration at the source of her conversion (singing hymns at a Salvation Festival about "climbing up the golden stairs to heaven" (24)) lightly parodies the lofty spiritual justification that suffragists and suffragettes typically leant their disruptive activities, what a disapproving Mrs Knox denounces as the justification of "wickedness in the words of grace" (26). Hamilton had, of course, played the part of Mrs Knox, allowing her to parody both religious morality and mock the WSPU's manipulation of spirituality for its own means. In fact, perhaps the actresses' participation in Shaw's play can be more widely understood as not only self-critical but also critical towards elements of the movement with which they did not agree. The frequency and variety (speeches, songs, spiritualism) with which Hamilton used critical humour suggests not only her minor personal frustrations but also, in the way her work actively promoted other people's laughter towards these aspects, a dramatic and even political importance that Hamilton attributed to this internal mockery.

As the WSPU's activities became all the more extreme and contentious, inter-movement critical humour was increasingly directed towards these members, as displayed in a 1911 debate that arose in the *Common Cause*. Strongly denying the notion that "we are all working

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[110] George Bernard Shaw, *The Complete Plays of Bernard Shaw* (London: Constable, 1931), vi.

for the same thing," in echoes of Hamilton's own use of it a writer for the *Common Cause* controversially deems humour an appropriate means of challenging such areas of the movement over which there is internal dispute.[111] On 7 December 1911, this periodical published what would turn out to be a contentious front-cover image of "The Sad Story of the Girl Who would not take her Soup."[112] With the soup bowl reading "Votes for Women" and the petulant girl's bib imprinted with the initials "WSPU", it is clear that this cartoon targeted the violent militants who refused what this particular periodical believed to be "the solution of the question."[113] The girl is shown to stomp in a childlike manner, and promptly die of starvation (she is depicted advancing towards her grave), in the same way that some feared the movement might if the WSPU continued their divisive tactics.

A week later, on 14 December 1911, the *Common Cause* admitted receiving "quite a number of letters objecting to last week's cartoon – some polite, some not."[114] One was printed in this edition of the periodical, in which Bertha Lowe (NUWSS) complained about the "ridicule" directed against "the recent militant methods." [115] To Lowe, this was an undignified descent that was "perilously near to the same plane as those less reputable members of the Anti-Suffrage camp who jested about the women's struggles with the police and made merry over the tortures of the hunger-strikers."[116] In response, under the heading "Poking Fun", the *Common Cause* defended its caricature, upholding the right as well as responsibility to make fun of other members of the movement, and simultaneously denouncing those who criticise this activity. The fact that the cartoonist targeted policy rather than an individual, and a policy that they consistently contested, makes this subject "fair game for good-natured chaff", unlike the subjects cited by Lowe pertaining to women's sufferings about which they would certainly never allow "any jesting". Here, a moral distinction is made between humour that is based on political criticism and that which seeks to compromise individual integrity. With sole reference to the former type, the *Common Cause* advocates such humour as entirely appropriate, useful and necessary. Indeed, expressing hope that the leaders of the WSPU will realise that their isolating tactics will "end in their political extinction" and that they will "like good tacticians abandon an untenable position," it is clear that the writers hoped the cartoon would provide thought-provoking and transformative criticism of the political tactics of the WSPU. In response to those who are "making rather a fuss" over this cartoon and taking things "*au tragique*", the writer strongly argues that this depiction is good political training for women: "If women come into politics they must, like

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[111] "Poking Fun", *The Common Cause* (14 December 1911), 626.
[112] *The Common Cause* (7 December 1911), 599.
[113] Ibid.
[114] "Poking Fun", *The Common Cause* (14 December 1911), 626.
[115] "LAST WEEK'S CARTOON", *The Common Cause* (14 December 1911), 638.
[116] Ibid.

men, take their chance of political caricature." Citing this value of self-objectification, the article furthermore explains: "The present situation has its comic as well as its serious side, and we think that it makes for sanity in human relations to see the comic side, and to bear with others when they see the comic side of our policy […]. We plead for a robuster view about women and criticism. It is demoralising to be supposed to be exempt from criticism. We certainly are not. Why should other women be? It is wholesome discipline for us all."[117]

In this conception, self-objectifying humour is healthy for all "human relations" within and without the movement. This recalls Hamilton's own respect for it. She spoke out critically against the "deadly earnestness" of the suffragette, captured in some of her own portrayals. When, at a speech given by Lloyd George at the Albert Hall, interruptions escalated into a tumult, Hamilton appreciated the organist who started to play "Oh dear, what can the matter be?" which, transforming intensity into mirth, promoted a useful and positive levity amongst the earnest suffragettes. In this incident, Hamilton admired the ability of the organist's humour to diffuse tension, promoting peace and uniting the several divided parties through common laughter.[118] Perhaps in her writing Hamilton sought to perform the same: providing farcical entertainment for the enjoyment of both suffrage members and antis which actively demonstrated the suffragettes' own good humour about themselves which, in turn, might also improve relations amongst members and between them and the opposition. Promoting this, as shown in the wordplay on Ernest in *The Pot and the Kettle*, earnestness is a derided position in her plays; it is occupied only by the opposition. This tactic is also used by Helen in *The Apple* when she laughs at Cyril who "takes himself in such deadly earnest" (18). By pioneering this self-derisory laugh Hamilton seeks to ballast, not weaken, the cause, implicitly asking members to have more confidence in the integrity and power of the cause as of its constituents, that others might perceive this too. Indeed, ideas about the "wholesome discipline" of critical humour and the demoralisation that occurs when women refuse it speak to wider ideas about politics and women's rightful place within that world. To be exempt from derision is to distance oneself from the political space, hence the dispiriting effect of this refusal.

The AFL's caution towards self-derision

Actresses and playwrights alike promoted self-derisory humour's capacity for critical cohesion. In the mixed audiences of Shaw and the working-class communities who saw *An Englishwoman's Home*, the benefits of this humour were in evidence. Living up to their profession that women can deal well with ridicule, they not only put up with it but they

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[117] "Poking Fun", *The Common Cause* (14 December 1911), 626.
[118] Hamilton (1935), 70-73.

invited it, borrowed from it and profited from it, turning unfortunate vulgarity into useful, even essential, practice. In manipulating and complicating stereotypes, they highlighted the fact that derision is not statically defined. If the Member in *At the Gates* saw in the Suffragette's ability to withstand ridicule her qualification for a career in politics, several women displayed these skills and, convinced that derision is a healthy sign of importance and critical awareness, went further even to attract it rather than to denounce or stop it.

Yet, while the Suffragette in *At the Gates* stoically endures "vulgar chaff" (17) and puts it to good use against her deriders, her refusal to laugh at the Sympathizer's joke about militant violence shows that her employment of it stops short at self-derision. If Stonor in *The Convert* is able to confidently laugh off and even admire the caricatures of himself, the censorship of Shaw's *Press Cuttings* shows the sensitivity even men had towards such political satire aimed at themselves and which in 1897 Shaw proclaimed in his review of Meredith's reprinted essay. He facetiously questioned why this essay was being reprinted when the English playgoing public is ignorant as to what comedy is and resistant to laughing at their own prejudices over which they are protective.[119]

Within the need for a "robuster" view about women and criticism expressed by the *Common Cause*, is an acknowledgement of the strength demanded by this outlook. To be able to laugh at oneself requires a good deal of confidence about the validity of one's beliefs as well as one's community, or else logically the active promotion of ridicule risks destabilising both. While it was this strength that Hamilton and Shaw were hoping to inspire and promote through such humour, it is easy to see why some responded negatively to notions that their speeches, songs and policies could be derided not only by those outside but also those inside the movement, just as had been shown by the audience of *Her Vote*. A positive relationship to self-derision requires a great deal of confidence and self-belief that even periods of stability or historic strength do not assure. As the AFL plays show, even more than men, women's political attempts were consistently thwarted and derided, not only from one opposition but many. They had no precedent from which to derive assurance and self-belief, and no solid political community with which to protect themselves. Their reluctance to add to the chorus of derision, shown by the infrequent and contested use of such humour on the stage, derived from a sensitivity towards the real inequalities provoked by the tradition of women's relationship to self-deprecating complicity within the humour hegemony, as well as a palpable feeling of fragility to which no one is resistant.

Shaw's acknowledgment of the inevitability of ridicule as well as the fear of being the brunt of it led him to promote self-derision as cannily advantageous. He himself admitted that

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[119] Shaw, "Meredith on Comedy", *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (London: Constable and Company, 1948 [1932]), vol. iii, 83-88.

he feared the ridicule associated with being a "male suffragist" and, while he could not control the response he might receive on the suffrage platform, he could manipulate the response on the theatrical stage.[120] However, in so doing, of course, he also actively highlighted that offstage reception is always out of the playwright's control, so that Fanny's play is subject to multiplicitous interpretation. If some responded well to the play precisely because, as Margot Peters says, they were "weary of causes", they could also dismiss it as such too.[121] Some women feared this, especially the volatility of humour in performance. In defining hers as "bitter", one reviewer highlights the fact that people's laughter may signify many different reactions.[122] A person can no more be sure of the impression that his or her self-derisory laughter gives than the onstage cast can be sure that the playwright's derision has been communicated as intended. Shaw's play is the most significant example of this; then it was mistaken for a satire while today it is mistaken for something even less committal than that.

Weintraub attributes the disappearance of Shaw the suffragist to the way facts of history are ignored, quotes distorted and conclusions forced to fit "the prevailing politics of the time," rather than to any misunderstanding.[123] The way Weintraub ascribes the (mis)interpretation to deliberate politics rather than to misunderstanding overlooks somewhat Shaw's conscious flippancy which, then as now, led to confusion and distrust. Shaw's flippancy and some divergence of opinion meant some people were sceptical as to his position on the matter of suffrage. Even those who did not question his support were nonetheless concerned about the risky volatility of such humour which might, as Holroyd says somewhat facetiously, "injure the heroic tone of the movement." Or they were worried that his "clever analogies, qualifications, jokes […]" might "confuse a simple theme and enable opponents of enfranchisement to delay reform."[124] His views, including on the matter of sincerity and humour, did not always coincide with those of his female contemporaries and it is this disparity that continues to make some sceptical of his contribution.

The fact that Shaw's plays nonetheless invited a huge AFL involvement, whereas members of the League spoke out against Wells who had similarly pledged his allegiance to the cause (he signed the same petition as Shaw), is indicative of the totality of ridicule directed at the movement in the latter's work. Unlike Shaw's suffrage caricatures, who are rivalled by all his other characters in a frivolous frenzy of derision, Wells reserves his main

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[120] See letter from Shaw to Emmeline Pethick Lawrence (4 July 1933) in Laurence (1988), 345-7. "But, as I have repeatedly explained, my personal vanity will not allow me to be led in triumph by eloquent militant women…" (346).
[121] Peters (1980), 321.
[122] *The Common Cause* (30 September 1909) in Stowell (1996), 173.
[123] Weintraub (1995), 34.
[124] Holroyd (1979), 27, 28.

ridicule for Ann, so that his profession of "gentle kindly criticism" is actually a thorough attack that does not seek to redeem the cause.[125] For example, despite the comic treatment of both Ann and Margaret's arrests, ultimately the tone of Wells' portrayal means that his ridicule is taken more seriously than Shaw's. *Her Vote* was rejected on similar grounds. Like Ann, the Girl is not only romantic, silly, ignorant and uncommitted, but all of these things and irredeemably so. Whereas Esmond uses the political stereotype fleetingly, it is this manner in which Harraden in *Lady Geraldine's Speech* uses the romantic one. As such, Alice's politics are never compromised. In its reception of this latter play (as well as Hamilton and St. John's, Arncliffe-Sennett's and Garrud's), the AFL demonstrated that they could tolerate and/or enjoy self-derision when contained and when it did not threaten the theatrical bias towards the derision of the antis. As her "History" showed, Hamilton was capable of more thorough mockery but on the stage she steered away from the deliberate equivocalness of Shaw. Her plays retained the clear political direction typical of the AFL, which exposed her to the criticism concerning the League's artistic deficiencies. When Rebecca West complained in 1912 about this, she attributed the public's enjoyment of Hamilton's plays to the way suffrage speeches have supposedly perverted their taste. Perhaps this popularity also shows Hamilton's touch of comic irreverence, which made platform experiences such a draw:

> The Pioneer Players and the Actresses' Franchise League are perhaps the most shameless offenders in the way of producing degradations of the drama written by propagandists, whom nothing but the fire of Prometheus could make into artists. It is untrue to say that these impertinences towards Art are innocuous by their own ineffectiveness. For the public taste has already been so perverted that dislocated Suffrage speeches, such as Miss Cicely Hamilton's plays, stand the chance of wide popularity.[126]

Conclusion

Relative to the laughter directed towards the anti-suffragists, the self-derisory laugh was an infrequent feature on the AFL stage and, in addition to Hamilton and St. John's work, is present in the work of only two other women playwrights, as far as can be discerned. Among the playwrights who promoted self-derision were those who arguably possessed a degree of personal distance from the suffrage cause, either as men or, in the case of Hamilton, as someone who in the main defined herself as a feminist. In the case of Shaw at least, this gave him a perspective from which he did not regard the vote in itself as supremely important or as the answer to all social problems, as some members were wont to do. Such perspective is perhaps fruitful for highlighting the humorous aspects of the cause.

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[125] H. G. Wells letter to Elizabeth Robins (1910) in Smith (1998), 276.
[126] Rebecca West, "A Modern Crusader", *The Freewoman* (23 May 1912), 8. See Cockin 2001: 48.

While it was political commitment that inspired such promotion, it was similarly the importance of the suffrage cause to others that prevented them from laughing at themselves. Given the destabilising and derisory attacks the movement frequently suffered, it is easy to see why the AFL failed to reach a unified consensus on the matter of self-objectifying humour. Some were suspicious of Shaw and Esmond's portrayals, even when they were not oppositional, due to the precedent of "masculine" humour and the unstable quality of such humour and laughter. With so much of this humour in the political arena, it could be confused with that which sought to demean the movement and, therefore, could undermine the cause. Pragmatically, protectively and even politically, some did not want to appear tolerant or less eccentric, precisely due to the revolution to which they were committed. It is clear that the AFL largely preferred, therefore, to focus on the use of less ambiguous mockery that enhanced their community rather than on the self-ridicule that presupposed its strength. For the AFL, it was in the former that they could more confidently invest their political hopes, just as male politicians did. When the Member in *At the Gates* sees in the Suffragette's sufferance of ridicule qualification enough to "go into Parliament", he notes a discipline suited to political life (17). We might add that her caution towards self-derision befits it too.

Conclusion

An anamnesis of the feminist laugh

The AFL's engagement with the contemporary debate regarding the sense of humour was prolific and strategic. Based on observations of how women's age-long position as the target of the laughing gaze has impacted upon prejudices that bear repercussions in the political sphere, many members of the League were convinced of the direct relationship between comedic and political representation. They subsequently sought, through critique and their own use of humour, to dissuade such laughter. Indeed, aware of the tenacity of oppositional humour and the disempowering nature of earnestness, the League seized mocking humour for itself and, to a far lesser extent self-derision, to actively manipulate the direction of the laugh.

While social anxiety meant that suffrage theatre had to reassure the populace that female values would not be sacrificed by emancipation, the contemporary importance of the sense of humour in relation to society's tolerance of individuals and political communities uniquely compelled a radical confrontation of its gendered definition. Rather than alienating however, it was this value as well as the strategic use according to ratified theatrical convention that largely stressed amiability and therefore assured, by a majority, suffrage humour's positive reception. Manipulating the normally conservative theatrical prescription of laughter and forging a community of laughers, this sought to contribute to a revisionist weakening of humour convention. Confronting and negotiating with contemporary gender assumptions, women's validated laughter continuously asserted the legitimacy of women's entrance into the public sphere against its inevitable and tenacious tide of opposition.

Contemporary academic discourse, much influenced by twentieth-century philosophies of laughter and humour, tends to be a lot more sceptical towards the idea of humour – including literary humour – as an effective political tool than were many members of the AFL. Bataille rejected Bergson's understanding of laughter as an effective weapon, arguing that laughter "was beyond truth and discourse."[1] In its multiplicity of meaning, it cannot be harnessed for concrete goals, so investment in it in this way is futile and hopeless. Laughers are "strangers" to one another, making the concept of community in which the AFL invested an elusive one. Feminist discourse on this subject ranges from that represented by Cixous for whom laughter's meaning is always transitory – it cannot be fixed or controlled in the way required if it is to be modelled into a weapon – to what Stetz describes as the over-zealous championing of laughter "as a means toward achieving personal liberation and also as an effective political tool for the women's movement as a whole."[2] Nancy Nash-Cummings and Regina Barreca endorse this liberation rhetoric of humour's subversive quality, while Stetz is

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[1] Boisseron (2010), 172.
[2] Stetz (2001), x.

more cautious.[3] Indeed, some of this work elides contextual exploration of what are historically defined concepts, or generalises, thus tending towards the optimistic statement of which it is easy to be sceptical. Paralleling this trend of scepticism, in literary studies, Indira Ghose and Carlson validate (albeit within different contexts) laughter's political utility in terms of its optimism and power to construct communities, but warn about its limitations to actually change things. Others considering the genre of comedy have appropriated Meredith's notion that comedy for women means power – Wilt cites it to show that comic exposures "really do make for changes" – while Carlson has reframed it to show that women's inequality rather than equality is "comedy's essential ingredient", thus calling for a certain measure over such pronouncements.[4]

Both this enthusiasm and scepticism regarding humour and the comic genre in which it is often encased risk imposing upon the appreciation that, for suffrage, laughter was a politically transformative experience. Barbara Green and Jane Eldridge Miller define suffrage theatre, as Carlson has written, as a "weak participant in political aesthetics."[5] Miller says that focusing on comedies, farces and fantasies avoids the "ongoing and complex rebellion" of the suffrage era.[6] Likewise, Stetz demotes the political role of laughter in suffrage theatre. Her review of the laughter of the New Woman as ultimately politically limited informs her judgment of suffrage theatre, too. If the New Woman realised that "satire is no substitute for political solidarity and that poking fun at the patriarchy cannot do the work of organised action," suffrage theatre, Stetz argues, proved them right, as it was easy to make audiences laugh but difficult to turn laughter into action.[7]

The way the New Woman's laugh informs Stetz's conception of suffrage laughter means that she overlooks the political change that had occurred in the intervening years, during which the tangible obstacles oppositional laughter presented to citizenship were met not by the individual plight of the New Woman but by a collective assembly of motivated, confident and defiant women. A contextual analysis of AFL laughter shows that the significance of this politicised body and of the contemporary importance of the sense of humour with which it negotiated meant that suffrage understood laughter to be intrinsic to rather than a replacement for political solidarity and action. The way suffrage theatre joined with a wide intervention in

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[3] See Nancy Nash-Cummings [Walker], *A Very Serious Thing: Women's Humor and American Culture* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988); Regina Barreca, *They Used to Call Me Snow White…but I drifted: Women's Strategic Use of Humor* (New York: Penguin, 1992). Stetz (2001), 47.

[4] Judith Wilt, "The Laughter of Maidens, The Cackle of Matriarchs" in Janet Todd (ed.), *Gender and Literary Voice* (NY & London: Holmes & Meier, 1980), 178; Carlson (1991), 33.

[5] Carlson (2000), 199. See Barbara Green, *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905-1938* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1997) and Jane Eldridge Miller, *Rebel Women: Feminism, Modernism and the Edwardian Novel* (London: Virago, 1994).

[6] Miller (1994), 131.

[7] Stetz (2001), 46.

the politically important notion of the sense of humour valuates its successful provocation of inverted laughter as a significant political action in itself.

The AFL understood the momentary decision towards and the act of laughter itself as politically radical. It promoted a community that attracted, encouraged and empowered: onstage laughing women depicted the movement as buoyant and appealing, in contrast to contemporary stereotype, seeking to draw attention to and expose the reality of suffrage that existed behind the masking humour of the opposition. The theatre's provocation of audience laughter had its motivation in the notion that this politicised chorus, in enforcing solidarity and complicity, could actively weaken the established lines of patriarchal humour that impacted upon women's public reception. Recognising the political control implicitly asserted within all forms of representation, Tickner's own analysis similarly finds this representational negotiation intrinsic to the political protest for suffrage. Comprising as hegemonic representation did a significant obstruction to the recognition and respect of women's public role, the inversion and validation of humour (and, for some, its self-inversion) was a prerequisite to the legitimisation of women's space in that sphere.

The League's records evince a confidence towards the impact of their plays. Indeed, they had "good reason to believe that plays were effective in changing attitudes" because the production at this time of Margaret Nevinson's play *In the Workhouse* had been linked to a change in legislation.[8] This belief was not the naïve credulity about writing's instant impact, which Shaw detected and of which he despaired in Ethel Smyth and Maud Arncliffe-Sennett; as shown by their very preoccupation with the continuous negotiation of representation, the AFL valued on and offstage humour acts as ongoing and mutually supporting contributions towards the gradual encouragement of audiences to perceive women as serious players in the public sphere (in this way, their ideas about theatre's political impact were not too dissimilar from Shaw's own). Inspired by the very conviction that laughter as a social and impactful force cannot be permanently controlled, this fluidity also meant the AFL understood the habitual need to both challenge the hegemony and reassert those new patterns of power. The League battled continuously up to the First World War against representation within anti-suffrage plays which, in their later incarnations, had the tendency even to parody the suffragists' own use of comedy, as against that in some of their own.[9] They did this in the tangible belief that this defiant effort could effect change within the humour and, thus, political hegemony.

Whereas, for the New Woman, hampered by her individualist outlook, laughter could have

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[8] Katharine Cockin, "Women's Suffrage Drama" in Joannou and Purvis (eds.) (1998), 128.
[9] See Maggie B. Gale and John F. Deeney, *The Routledge Drama Anthology and Sourcebook: From Modernism to Contemporary Performance* (London: Routledge, 2010).

no actual power, for the politically organised suffrage movement it was the joyous and subversive weapon that Braidotti locates at the dawn of feminism. The sunrise represented optimism and victory for suffrage; it was yet to become, as painter Paul Nash wrote in 1917 during the war, a mockery to man.[10] After the war, laughter on the stage for men and women could not be the same. While the AFL did not formally survive the war, another suffrage theatre group, the Pioneer Players, continued to host performances. Its choice of Susan Glaspell's *The Verge* in 1925 characterises the change in laughter's tone that occurred in the intervening years.[11] Claire's discordant laugh, rupturing speech in a way prescient of *écriture feminine*, is full of pain and anguish. In the same way as for Cixous, this laughter cannot be fashioned into victory: represented by her fraught relationship with her daughter, the unity and optimism of the movement are diminished by the World War, so that the victorious laugh represented by Robins' Hedda on horseback reverts to a maddening death.

This rupture between generations altered both laughter's tone as well as the memory of its pre-war manifestation. Geraldine Lennox was one who wrote, in 1931, about the "deplorable ignorance amongst the younger generation of women as to the work of the Militant Suffrage Societies."[12] They are remembered as "a body of wild women", destructive and rowdy, to which historian Dangerfield would shortly contribute in a way that would come to define the century's understanding of militancy and the movement in general.[13] This recalls Wells' own portrayal of hysterically laughing women against which the AFL rebelled in favour of a witty and joyous laugh.

As Parvulescu's assessment of Cixous' essay argues, the crack that runs down Medusa's stone body can be reminiscent of her defiant laugh, of the laughing maternal. Likewise, the ruptures within the existential female laugh of the twentieth century invite activity that retraces women's laughter to the point of suffrage's dawn, shown by Claire's link to Robins' Hedda. Dramatic performance, like laughter itself, proves elusive, but manuscripts and reviews open spaces in which tone and volume can be reinserted. A contextual reading demands an awareness of the political investment that suffrage held in laughter that might today appear utopian and naïve. However, the recontextualisation of suffrage's continuous negotiation with the sense of humour underlines the significance and daring of women's stage mockery as of their own laughing community that challenged laughter's unidirectionality. Indeed, denied a decade before, some women playwrights received attention on the very grounds of their humour, while reviewer responses showed that the ignorance or prejudice of

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[10] Paul Nash letter to his wife (1917) in Paul R. Thompson, *The Edwardians: The Remaking of British Society* (London: Routledge, 1992), 183.
[11] For discussion of this play's performance by the Pioneer Players, see Cockin (2001), 188-189.
[12] Geraldine Lennox, "The Suffragette Spirit" (1931), 15 in WL 7VJH/1/5/10.
[13] Ibid.

any audience members would have been likely ruffled by performances.

While details pertaining to precise audience composition and its political affiliations are elusive, discursive understandings of comedy show that this laughter inherently rather than quantitatively contributed to the valuable disruptions of politicised representations and discourse that oppositional laughter asserted. As Alice Rayner has said of other comedy, this opened "new space for thought" by adding to the "vocabulary of potential that then redefines the actual."[14] Set within an ongoing battle of erosion of what have been shown to be politically impactful attitudes, this laughing activity thus constitutes a significant category of radicalism previously ignored. This observation urges an academic approach that, where validated by contextual caution, reconstructs the comic with the political narrative, as did Virginia Woolf after the war. Although her study of women's writing does not reference the AFL's work itself, Woolf acknowledged the "usefulness of comedy to expose misogynistic aporia."[15] Likewise, AFL theatre shows that women's political laughter, as the (sometimes literal) marginalia, can, and should, be re-membered.

Representations of suffrage today

There is a growing awareness of and interest in the suffrage movement, as shown by the scholarship documented throughout this thesis. As mentioned, recent anthologies have brought together little known and previously unpublished plays for new audiences. In addition, motivated by the centenary of Emily Wilding Davison's death (who was trampled by a horse on 4 June 1913), the last few years have hosted the performance of several revived and new suffrage plays in theatres, as well as a suffrage comedy on BBC television. In June 2013, short readings were given at the National Theatre from *How the Vote was Won*, *A Woman's Influence* and *The Pot and the Kettle*, followed by a discussion chaired by Naomi Paxton and Professor Maggie Gale. In the same year, Ros Connolly toured her new play *Emily Wilding Davison: The One Who Threw Herself Under The Horse*. Kate Willoughby's *To Freedom's Cause*, concerned with the same subject, was similarly produced in 2013. Samantha Coughlan's new drama *Surplus Women* considers the vote from the post-war perspective.[16] In 2013, Jessica Hynes wrote and starred in a suffragette television sitcom, *Up the Women*, while 2015 sees the topic, in the film *Suffragette*, reach the big screen.

These productions have brought (or will bring) popular attention to the movement and, in the case of the National Theatre's event, to its theatre. However, with the exception of the

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[14] Alice Rayner, *Comic Persuasion: Moral Structure in British Comedy from Shakespeare to Stoppard* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 114.
[15] Cockin (2001), 54.
[16] NOVA new writing submission. First performed 6 January 2015, Ustinov Studio, Theatre Royal Bath.

revival of AFL plays seen there and the film on which it is not yet possible to comment, the suffrage spirit that the theatre and wider movement sought hard to represent and create has largely been lost in these contemporary portrayals. While it is not possible to say accurately whether Connolly and Willoughby's specific choice of subject warranted such an earnest depiction, their choice of medium sets them within a historical dialogue with the AFL which highlights this stark difference in tone. Whereas the AFL largely (but, as seen in Chapter Two, not entirely) moved away from earnestness, sentiment and tragedy, the portrayal of Emily reprises all these. Unlike all of the AFL plays, Connolly's depicts the torture and brutality suffered by the suffragettes in prison and, in marked contrast to the variety of AFL plays that consciously reframed such portrayals, she shows Emily's extreme inner torment, creating a sometimes claustrophobic atmosphere heightened by the adoption of the one woman play format. Her militant transformation is dramatic and fervent as she sings hymns, repeatedly pledges obedience to God, and is overtly likened to Joan of Arc. While the singing camaraderie of prison inmates is referenced, with only one actress on stage it appears a lonely and personal plight. Effective use is made, however, of a recording of the jeering crowds who protest that Emily should be home darning stockings, to which she defiantly and coquettishly replies, "I'll show you my stockings if you show me yours." This provoked further jeers as well as audience laughter. Aside from a few such moments of survival and occasional albeit bitter humour, the overall performance by Elizabeth Crarer was one of determined earnestness.[17]

In *To Freedom's Cause*, Emily's family take her to task on the way her commitment to suffrage has made her "so serious"; she used to have "love and laughter".[18] While this admonishment provokes a small display of her playful side, her humour is not confident but defensive and angry which perhaps recalls the Suffragette's in *At the Gates*. Indeed, their critique of laughter is similarly infused; as Emily says in this play, "It's easy to mock from a position of privilege." The way that the Suffragette in Chapin's play lacks the comic buoyancy seen in other plays emphasises the same distinction in Willhoughby's own presentation.[19] Both Willhoughby and Connolly's plays were well received by audiences. The way they served to remind or teach people about the extent of violent resistance and personal sacrifice is useful considering that the true nature of women's plight to win the vote has sometimes been all too easily forgotten (or, in the case of Dangerfield, dismissed as trivial farce). It is only in recent years that the historical discourse has more frankly incorporated admissions of physical, including sexual, assault and the consequent daring of women in

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[17] Based on performance at Burton Taylor Studio, Oxford Playhouse (17 June 2013).
[18] Quote from performance at Tristan Bates Theatre, Covent Garden, London (29 June 2013).
[19] Based on performance of 29 June 2013.

response, as explained for instance in Godfrey's 2012 *Femininity, Crime and Self-Defence*.

Thus these plays achieve something that was important to several AFL playwrights, namely that of drawing attention to women's tragic history, but fail to capture the spirit adopted by many within the League. Given the fact that autobiographies of the movement, such as Mary Richardson's, explicitly detailed suffrage's fun, convivial and daring humour, the plays' deficiency in portraying those elements of that conscious legacy is particularly striking. While Nym Mayhall's study of such works emphasise their highly stylised nature that deliberately emphasised comradeship over passive suffering, the plays demonstrate that this narrative did not emanate solely from the 1920s and 1930s, as Nym Mayhall argues; it can be traced directly back to the AFL plays that, in promoting this spirit, indeed created it.[20] It is this story, the trail of which was laid by the League itself, that these plays do not tell.

Although there is much humour in Hynes' sitcom, its relationship to that legacy is similarly distant. This appears to emanate from a lamentable misunderstanding of it and of the movement itself on the part of the writer. In an interview with the *Radio Times*, Hynes said that her research led her to the conclusion that, what with "all these lists of women who were beaten up and killed," it was "all quite serious. […] I was crying into my tea."[21] As seen in their meetings, the AFL, like many others, deliberately constructed the opposite response to tragedy, setting up unifying and defiant laughter for its communal power. The humour Hynes injects into her comedy, therefore, is inspired not contextually but from her awareness of dramatically successful traditional and commercial techniques. She describes the sitcom's "quaintness" and "retro" quality while her interviewer is reminded by it of *Dad's Army*: it has "a quintessentially British way of looking at deadly political seriousness and still [manages] to find it really amusing."[22]

Because the "subject matter is obviously quite serious," Hynes says, the humour comes "from the fact that they are failed Suffragettes," failure being often key to comedy.[23] Hynes' characters are stock comic ones with some modern alterations for today's audience: the well-meaning but flustered and ugly spinster, the politically fervent teenager with violent ideas who falls in love against her own ideals, the serious, politically passionate yet bitter leader, her interfering and disapproving mother (a take on the stereotypical mother-in-law figure), and an always-pregnant, naive young mother. While the humour certainly incorporates the

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[20] Laura E. Nym Mayhall, "Creating the 'suffragette spirit': British Feminism and the Historical Imagination", *Women's History Review*, 4:3 (1995), 319-344.

[21] Zoe Williams, "Jessica Hynes on her new Suffragette sitcom Up The Women", *Radio Times* (30 May 2013), http://www.radiotimes.com/news/2013-05-30/jessica-hynes-on-her-new-suffragette-sitcom-up-the-women

[22] Williams, *Radio Times* (30 May 2013).

[23] Jessica Hynes, "I would have stood shoulder to shoulder with the Suffragettes", *The Independent* (26 May 2013), http://www.independent.co.uk/voices/comment/i-would-have-stood-shoulder-to-shoulder-with-the-suffragettes-8632323.html

mockery of patriarchal ignorance, its main focus on this group of women and the strong reliance for comedy on traditional comic stereotype means that the humour is reminiscent far more of the stage comedy the AFL consciously rebutted rather than of its own. The long-winded renaming of their craft circle – "The Banbury Intricate Craft Circle Frankly Demands Women's Suffrage" or "BICCFDWS" – recalls Grundy's own satire, for instance, that Hamilton had inverted in *The Pot and the Kettle*. Where it corresponds to the AFL's self-objectifying humour, mocking the stereotype of the fervent, "mannish" or frigid suffragette for instance (a self-penned article by Hynes actually led with the heading, "It's OK to poke fun at suffragettes"), this humour arguably lacks empowerment in the ways understood by the AFL, confirming rather than using stereotype ironically for women's gain.[24] While the AFL did, at times and sometimes uneasily, concede to their failures and eccentricities as an important aspect of their humour, it remained vital that these contributed to rather than undermined the overall portrayal of the members of the movement as self-aware, reasonable, and good-humoured. The extent to which *Up the Women* utilises derogatory stereotype means that failures and eccentricities define the presentation, resulting in the representation of women as unwitting parodies rather than as consciously self-parodying superiors. Largely ignorant, incompetent and humourless, they are the butt of the joke.

The way that the AFL consciously reframed representation to create new ways of constructing women's relationship with humour is largely reversed in Hynes' portrayal, testifying to the tenacity of patriarchal humour in modern day commercial ventures of which the suffrage movement was acutely aware. This is not to imply that women's commercial humour has not advanced – the important contributions in theatre and beyond since the days of the AFL is a subject in its own right – but instead testifies to the comic allure of traditional stereotype. Arguably this representation matters less now where women have experienced some political progress. Hamilton's view that inevitable stereotypes are markers of such power and should be confidently embraced by women and by men alike is pertinent here. The way that humour remains an important political issue in relation to equality and discrimination might, however, demand caution, just as the AFL showed with regard to self-objectifying humour, highlighting the necessity of habitually challenging patriarchal humour patterns that the AFL's project also actively stressed. While this continuing discussion exists elsewhere, the concern here remains with the suffrage legacy.[25] Although writers do not necessarily have obligations towards their subjects, it seems at the very least a shame that the

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[24] Jessica Hynes, "It's OK to poke fun at suffragettes", *The Telegraph* (30 May 2013), http://www.telegraph.co.uk/culture/tvandradio/10073032/Jessica-Hynes-its-OK-to-poke-fun-at-suffragettes.html

[25] May 2014's BBC documentary *Blurred Lines: The New Battle of the Sexes* presented by Kirsty Wark drew renewed attention to how ideas of humour impact upon the ways women are presented and discriminated against in modern life.

rebellious humour that characterised the important suffrage spirit was not prominent in any of the works here discussed. Hynes' stated motive for writing this sitcom particularly highlights the reason for this: she wanted it to contribute to the ongoing remedying of what she considered a wrongful contemporary detachment from women's history.[26] While it certainly provided audiences with a degree of insight into the women's campaign, no doubt attracted by its comic medium, it is precisely the tone of this humour that calls into question the sitcom's contribution towards remedying such detachment. Advertising her sitcom as one means of improving understanding, yet falling short, highlights how continued misrepresentation fails in its duty to members of the movement as well as to the plight of those they sought to help, the importance of which endures today.

The work of the National Theatre in restaging a handful of excerpts from the original productions discussed in this thesis was an important means of reminding audiences of the stage history of women's relationship to humour. In the same way, the 2014 revival of Ellen Terry's Shakespeare lectures by Eileen Atkins – including her observations about women's wit – helpfully brought contemporary audiences into direct confrontation with one woman's public protest against both literary and non-literary prejudices regarding women's sense of humour.[27] The importance of this protest, as well as of the awareness of it, derives from the consideration that the progress of feminism relies on the clarification of women's relationship to laughter. The study of the AFL's own attempts within this frame, pithily captured in John's remark in *An Englishwoman's Home* that women "[reckon] ter 'ave" a sense of humour, helps to resituate women's long-possessed humour tradition within literary history and the wider feminist consciousness (12). The continuing and necessary work to detail the matters of stagings, venues, and audiences will help further in this act of recuperation.

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[26] Hynes in Williams (30 May 2013).
[27] Sam Wanamaker Playhouse, Shakespeare's Globe, 12 January - 23 February 2014.

Appendix

Researching *Physical Force* by Cecil Armstrong (Chapter Four)

The analysis in Chapter Four of the manuscript from the Lord Chamberlain's Plays Collection *What Every Woman Ought to Know* derives from the conjecture that this was the play on which the performance of Cecil Armstrong's *Physical Force* was based.[1] Detailed below is the research I undertook on which I form the conjecture. The fact that *What Every Woman Ought to Know* was understood as a "suffragette" playlet (implying sympathy with and interest in the suffrage movement) should mean that, even if it does not correlate to *Physical Force*, the discussion of this play is relevant to the arguments discussed.[2] Given that *Physical Force* was the title under which the play was performed for the AFL, it is this title that is used throughout the discussion; the playscript from which I quote throughout the thesis is that which is entitled *What Every Woman Ought to Know*.

Tracing the play: *What Every Woman Ought to Know*

I was unable to trace the play's manuscript as *Physical Force*. Emelyne Godfrey, in her research on Edith Garrud, makes no mention of a play or of the AFL, referring only to an article written in 1911 which "derived from a performance given at Garrud's dojo."[3] She describes a "pictorial essay, accompanied by narrative."[4] When I contacted Tony Wolf (author of *Edith Garrud: The Suffragette who knew Jujutsu*, 2009), he similarly could not recall any reference to such a play. However, he was aware of a "polemic playlet" entitled *What Every Woman Ought to Know*, written by Cecil Armstrong. This playlet was rehearsed at Garrud's dojo (jujitsu studio; 9 Argyll Place, Regent Street, London) for two months around April 1911, with Martin Rowland and Eva Quin as Bill and Liza Borrer, and Garrud as choreographer. A journalist writing for *Health & Strength* on 8 April 1911 – the article to which Godfrey refers – watched and recounted the rehearsal "of the new suffragette sketch, by Mr. Armstrong, in which Ju-jutsu (the real thing) plays a dominant part."[5] Seven images from the play displaying jujitsu mastery are included in the article, accompanied by a scant narrative to which Godfrey refers. Wolf had never seen a script for *What Every Woman Ought to Know*, "other than the snatches of dialogue recorded in the *Health and Strength* article and a line from 'Liz' to the effect that Bill's leg wasn't broken by her jujitsu hold, 'only bent a

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[1] Cecil Armstrong, *What Every Woman Ought to Know*. LCP 1911/20. Lic. No. 253.
[2] *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.
[3] Godfrey (2012), 106.
[4] Ibid.
[5] "Ju-Jutsu as a Husband-Tamer: A Suffragette Play with a Moral", *Health & Strength* (8 April 1911), 339.

bit' – I'm not sure where that comes from."[6] This most likely comes from a 29 March 1911 *Daily Mirror* article.[7] Although the script I found in the British Library does not carry Armstrong's name (it cites merely a return address of "S Wardour Street, London"), given its same characters and storyline (the snippets of dialogue recorded in *Health & Strength* appear in exact form in the playscript), and its reference to "Professor Garrud […] Oxford Circus" and Liz's teacher, the "professor's wife," it appears certain that this is the playlet Garrud was helping Rowland and Quin to perform in her dojo (1).

The manuscript shows that Armstrong originally intended Garrud's husband, William – noted in the script as "Professor Garrud […] Oxford Circus" – to be Liz's teacher (1). However, "The professor 'isself!" is crossed out. The script introduces Edith Garrud (Liz recalls how Edith asked her if she was a suffragette), but is not consistent in overwriting Armstrong's original intention that William was Liz's instructor. Liz recounts what her (male) teacher said to her, "Well, then 'e says as ow 'e admires me grit & offers ter teach me free o' charge" (1). The teacher her or himself never makes an appearance onstage in the play as a character, so this was not an important casting detail. Why Armstrong originally cited William as the instructor is unclear. Changing it to Edith reflects her vital involvement as choreographer behind the scenes, a participation possibly unconfirmed when Armstrong originally wrote the script (or perhaps he desired for his play William's reputation). Given Edith's work amongst the suffragettes, her 'casting' as instructor in the play would have brought a reputable authenticity and immediate (suffrage) relevance to Liz's abilities with which audiences could identify. In that sense, Edith played an important (and metatheatrical) role within the play as performance.

As for performances, the *Daily Mirror* review of 29 March 1911 says that the play was "performed in East London with great success" and declares it "will be seen in the West End of London before Easter," indicating that it fared well.[8] Rehearsals were necessarily intense and daily, continuing between performances, as indicated in *Health & Strength*. Suggesting that this play went further afield (and implying that previous performances had not required a licence), the manuscript, dated 20 August 1911, records King's Theatre, Southsea as the place of licence request.

***Physical Force*: a revised version of *What Every Woman Ought to Know*?**

Regarding the relation of *What Every Woman Ought to Know* to the play *Physical Force*, any speculation is limited to the information we have from *Votes for Women* which,

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[6] Email correspondence, 6 December 2013.
[7] "What Every Woman Should Know: Performers' Strenuous Realism in Ju-Jitsu Playlet", *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.
[8] *The Daily Mirror* (29 March 1911), 4.

according to my research, appears to have been the only periodical (affiliated as it was) to cover the WSPU fair at which the play was performed on 15 December 1911.[9] Given that the reviews state that this play was also written by Armstrong; was also in one act; was performed in the same year as the rehearsals of *What Every Woman Ought to Know*; and also featured Garrud's jujitsu involvement, it seems reasonable to speculate that this was the same play under a revised title. This suggestion is further substantiated when we consider the relatively short space of time between the Easter rehearsals of *What Every Woman Ought to Know* and the December performance of *Physical Force*, the time constraints of the collaboration demanded by the play, and the seeming improbability that one author (who does not seem to have been a prolific playwright) would choose to write two different plays on exactly the same subject in a short space of time.

With its apparent success in both East and West London, a change in title seems odd. Perhaps this revision reflects the normal editorial changes through which a play might go, but such a change would seem unhelpful if we are to accept its popularity. Possibly its new title, pertaining as it does to a specific anti-suffrage argument, was born out of the desire to capture the supposed interests of the anticipated audience who would be coming to see the play at the Portman Rooms. The original title is elusive and, moreover, the storyline of the play is only loosely suffrage themed. Indeed, given this, it is of interest that *What Every Woman Ought to Know* was referred to, by the *Health & Strength* journalist as well as by the *Daily Mail* journalist, as a "suffragette" playlet. The characters do not appear to be suffragettes and the storyline does not explicitly reference the movement (except tenuously when Liz relays to her neighbour the conversation she had with Garrud who asked her if she was a suffragette: "Suffered yet says I, I should think I 'ave!" (2)). This description seems to be based instead on the strong contemporary link between jujitsu and suffragettes, and the obvious relevance to the suffrage endeavour of matters concerning domestic violence. This point at once substantiates the way the play itself would have been considered of interest to a suffrage audience, such as that at the Portman Rooms, and offers a potential reason for the change in title. With the play's story lacking direct engagement with the suffrage question (humorously dismissed as it is), its new title would have been a simple means of asserting its topicality. While the actual audience composition is unknown, AFL performances typically attracted a majority of keen suffrage supporters, as well as some yet unconverted. Given the topicality and relevance of the Physical Force debate to suffrage, such a title would have been likely to appeal to the interests of such an audience and would have ensured that the play be understood in the light of this argument.

As for the number of performers listed for *Physical Force* in *Votes for Women* which

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[9] *Votes for Women* (1 December 1911), 139; *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.

exceeds the number required for the play itself, this can be explained by the jujitsu demonstration(s) that Garrud carried out in addition to the performance. *What Every Woman Ought to Know* requires three performers (not including Garrud, as backstage choreographer). According to *Votes for Women* on 15 December 1911 at the Portman Rooms, *Physical Force* "included a Jujitsu display by Mrs. And Miss Sybil Garrud. Mr. Victor Wiltshire, Miss Ethel Trevor Lloyd, Miss Violey Bazalgette, Miss Janet Warden, and Miss Winifred Laurence also took part."[10] Although the wording is ambiguous, it seems that the participation of these extra persons refers to the jujitsu display rather than to the play itself. Substantiating this, on 8 December 1911, Mrs Pertwee announced "Mrs. Garrud and Co., for a ju-jitsu display."[11] After another demonstration, *Votes for Women* recorded that "four of [Garrud's] pupils created tremendous interest" in the "jujitsu displays" alongside Mrs. Garrud and her son.[12] It seems that Garrud often led demonstrations alongside several helpers; one of these demonstrations accompanied the performance of *Physical Force* on 15 December 1911.

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[10] *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 175.
[11] *Votes for Women* (8 December 1911), 163.
[12] *Votes for Women* (15 December 1911), 174.

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