



Miranda

Revue pluridisciplinaire du monde anglophone /
Multidisciplinary peer-reviewed journal on the English-
speaking world

27 | 2023

Natures mourantes

“Soldiers in petticoats” on the British screen: a mirror to historiography

Nicole Cloarec



Electronic version

URL: <https://journals.openedition.org/miranda/53449>

ISSN: 2108-6559

Publisher

Université Toulouse - Jean Jaurès

Printed version

Date of publication: 1 January 2023

Electronic reference

Nicole Cloarec, ““Soldiers in petticoats” on the British screen: a mirror to historiography”, *Miranda* [Online], 27 | 2023, Online since 03 April 2023, connection on 08 April 2023. URL: <http://journals.openedition.org/miranda/53449>

This text was automatically generated on 8 April 2023.



Creative Commons - Attribution-NonCommercial 4.0 International - CC BY-NC 4.0
<https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by-nc/4.0/>

"Soldiers in petticoats" on the British screen: a mirror to historiography

Nicole Cloarec

- 1 "We're clearly soldiers in petticoats / And dauntless crusaders for woman's votes": The singing of "Sister Suffragette" in Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins* is probably the first scene that comes to mind when evoking the figure of the suffragette in cinema. It may not come from a British film, but it does refer to British society and a British author. The song is quite revealing of the appropriation of the figure of the suffragette in a Disney film. As it happens Mrs Banks's engagement in the suffragette cause does not appear in the original novel by P.L. Travers (1934), and was apparently an afterthought to expand the part of the mother played by Glynis Johns who thought she would be the lead actress (Mayhall 1999, 12). Mrs Banks is certainly a perky character but nonetheless a poor housekeeper and a neglectful mother. While her depiction as a "sister suffragette" unmistakably anchors the plot in Edwardian England, she also appears as a descendant of Mrs Jellyby, the Dickensian type of the irresponsible wife and mother who, at the end of *Bleak House* (1853), is clearly an object of ridicule as she espouses the cause of women in politics as a substitute for her unwise utopian project concerning the natives of Borrioboola-Gha. But Mrs Banks is also the direct product of the conservative line of Walt Disney in keeping with the dominant ideology of the 1950s and early 1960s. Quite tellingly, at the end of the film, her "Votes for Women" sash is used as a tail for the children's kite, thus sealing the preservation of the family's so-called "natural order". As Laura Mayhall observes, in her analysis of how the figure of Emmeline Pankhurst and, by extension, of women's political activism, has been "domesticated" and reincorporated "as a bulwark to the status quo" (Mayhall 1999, 16): "Certainly, the figure of the suffragette in Walt Disney's *Mary Poppins* acts as a fulcrum for specifically American anxieties about postwar challenges to gender, class, and racial hierarchies" (Mayhall 1999, 15).

- 2 Now it is a commonplace to say films are the products of their time, reflecting, however indirectly, the social and cultural context in which they are made. While we should bear in mind that films are always the result of compromises between commercial rationale and artistic aspirations, as well as the product of collective work, and as such, could never be straightforward replications of "real life", they do provide embedded discourses that convey the world-view of their production time. The purport of this article is to show how British films not only make use of popular representations of the figure of the suffragette but also actually reflect the dominant historiography of the suffrage movement.

Cashing in on sexist types

- 3 While contemporary newsreels testified to the suffragists' and suffragettes' strategy of occupying the public space and making their campaign as visible and spectacular as possible, mainstream films singled out the figure of the suffragette mainly for comic or satiric purposes, following the types depicted in the comic postcards of the time. As Martin F. Norden recalls in his study of early cinema, "These women were often characterized as either men-hating, ugly spinsters or wives whose attempts to liberate themselves proved futile if not ridiculous" (Norden 173).
- 4 For the film industry, the suffragette movement is an ideal vehicle for comedies staging the eternal battle of the sexes, ridiculing domineering women as well as henpecked husbands. *Milling the Militants* (Percy Stow), is one of such surviving short films dating from 1913, and as its subtitle "A Comical Absurdity" indicates, is clearly meant to be a farce exploiting current events. It features a husband dismayed at being left to babysit while his suffragette wife takes part in militant actions. He eventually falls asleep and dreams of revenge as prime minister, introducing new laws to suppress the suffragette movement, but his measures are also ridiculed, forcing women to smoke clay pipes or wearing trousers, or positively medieval (the stocks for "annoying cabinet ministers"; a ducking stool for hunger strikers).
- 5 A later example of stereotyping is the two-minute scene in the Ealing classic *Kind Hearts and Coronets* (Robert Hamer, 1949) dedicated to Lady Agatha d'Ascoyne,¹ who is played in drag by Alec Guinness, who also impersonates the other eight members of the d'Ascoyne family. She is seen smashing shop windows at night before being arrested by the police, then "to celebrate her latest release from Holloway" plans to shower Whitehall and the West End with leaflets from a hot-air balloon before being shot down by the main protagonist. The narrator's voice over comments on the whole scene, adding to the comic distance, and wryly concludes by rewriting Longfellow's poem "The Arrow and the Song":
- Lady Agatha d'Ascoyne was a pioneer in the campaign for women's suffrage – with the inconvenient consequence that her public appearances were invariably made under the watchful eyes of the Metropolitan Police. When she was not making public appearances, she was in prison, and still more inaccessible. In fact before I could learn of a favourable opportunity, I had to join the movement myself. Secret plans had been made for Lady Agatha to celebrate her latest release from Holloway by a shower of leaflets over Whitehall and the West End. I shot an arrow in the air, she fell to earth... in Berkeley Square.²
- 6 While the scene sets the storyline in the early 1910s, when spectacular militancy reached its peak, it clearly cashes in on unflattering sexist types of suffragettes

depicted as mannish old spinsters and hot-tempered cranks. On the other hand, if, as Maroula Joannou has observed, "the figure of the suffragette has served as an immediately recognisable icon of strong-minded English womanhood or audacious female eccentricity" (Joannou 101), it has also been associated very early on with all types of rebelliousness and the aspiration of women for more freedom of any kind.

Retracing the women's suffrage cause

- 7 In this respect, the women's suffrage movement is used in films as a landmark in the history of Britain, and a milestone in an ongoing process towards better days, in the present or yet to come. In *Royal Cavalcade* (1935),³ a documentary drama meant to celebrate the Jubilee of King George V which mixes newsreel footage and re-enacted scenes loosely linked by a coin that passes from hand to hand, the suffragette movement appears just after a boxing match with the comment that "these women fought too – for the right to vote". The two-minute sequence ends with archive footage of Lady Astor "tak[ing] her seat as the first woman in Parliament."
- 8 In *To Be a Woman* (1952), Jill Craigie uses brief footage of suffragette parades twice (6:29-6:51 and 16:06-16:30) as part of her demonstration for the urgency of an ongoing struggle for equal rights. Craigie, a committed feminist and a socialist, was one of the pioneering female directors at a time when the film industry was male-dominated, not to say male chauvinist. *To Be a Woman* focuses specifically on discrimination at work and the campaign for equal pay. It draws an explicit parallel with the past tergiversations of the Liberal government on the question of the women's vote when a man's voice explains that "all political parties agree with the principle of equal pay. It's simply that now isn't the time." And a woman's voice answers: "now never is the time. Women were fighting for the rate for the job even before they were going to prison for the vote. That's one of the reasons why they fought for the vote. Why they paved the way for women to go to parliament."
- 9 Interestingly, *To Be a Woman* starts with a reference to one of the early campaigners for women's rights, recalling John Stuart Mill's essay *The Subjection of Women* (1869). Some fifty years later, Mill's essay appears in *Enola Holmes* (Netflix 2020)⁴ when, after Enola's mother Eudoria has disappeared, Mycroft is searching for clues at their mother's quarters and upon finding the book, exclaims "Good God! Feminism! Perhaps she was mad, or senile!" As it turns out, Enola discovers her mother belongs to a group of suffragette activists, which no doubt explains the unconventional education she has received. In the film, the issue of enfranchisement is evoked through the subplot involving the Representation of the People Act of 1884 that extended male suffrage, thus inserting the struggle for woman's suffrage within a broader history of social reforms. Most of all, it works as a metanarrative comment on the feminist spin put on the very popular Sherlock franchise that has been historically speaking fairly misogynistic.⁵
- 10 Another reference to Mill, but this time to his "Considerations on Representative Government" (1861), was used in the 1988 adaptation of D.H. Lawrence's *The Rainbow*⁶ to dramatise what in the novel remains a cursory evocation of the heroine's going out with her friend Maggie to "all kinds of places together," including "big suffrage meetings in Nottingham" (Lawrence 457). In the three-part serial, Ursula, who has met

Maggie as one of her colleagues teaching at school, comes and listens to her speak in a suffrage meeting:

When one realises that all this is being done at a time when a woman reigns in this country, then the picture of unreason and scarcely disguised injustice is complete. Let us hope that before the lapse of another generation, the accident of sex, like that of colour or religion will not be deemed justification for depriving its possessors of the equal protection and just privileges of the citizen. And I hope we will all agree with that statement.⁷

- 11 It seems that in the late 1980s Ursula's inner quest for personal fulfilment should be portrayed along with the broader story of women's struggle for emancipation and rights, even though Lawrence's depiction may be more ambiguous.⁸
- 12 The same goes for the 1960 adaptation of *Sons and Lovers*,⁹ which is even more ambivalent towards the figure of the suffragette Clara Dawes.¹⁰ The film adds a scene (starting at 55:00) where Clara and a few women are delivering a suffrage address at a street corner in front of a dozen attendees scoffing and jeering. The film makes fun of the outraged reaction of the group's leader when she is asked if they believe in free love but Clara answers in Rooseveltian style: "yes we want the four freedoms: speech, thought, opportunities, love."
- 13 A last, more recent, instance of such strategy appears in the 2012 adaptation of Ford Madox Ford's tetralogy *Parade's End* (1924-1928) by Tom Stoppard.¹¹ In the preface to his published screenplay, Stoppard explained how he wanted to inject more dramatic momentum into the often reflective narrative and to do so, turned to history (see Stoppard ix). He thus has the main protagonist Tietjens comment on the broken promise of the Liberal government when Asquith withdrew support for the first conciliatory bill in July 1910 (episode 1),¹² has the spirited suffragette Valentine Wannop enter the National Gallery just at the moment (on March 10, 1914) when Mary Richardson slashed Velazquez's painting in protest against Emmeline Pankhurst's incarceration (episode 2), and even puts the suffrage campaign in relation to women's broader fight for freedom and happiness when the same Valentine, now a teacher, catches schoolgirls reading a book that turns out to be Marie Stopes's *Married Love* (episode 5). To prevent the girls from being reported, she argues: "It's a proper book. It's not trash. [...] I was a suffragist when I was at the age of our senior girls. I thought that getting the vote for women was the only thing that would make me happy. And now we've just got the vote, well some of it, some of us – and about time too! But it's got nothing to do with happiness. I've found out that much."

Iconic scenes and figures

- 14 However, what is most striking about the representation of the suffragettes on screen is how closely it follows the prevailing historiography of the time, notwithstanding the personal idiosyncrasies of the works. In particular, the suffrage movement has become identified with a set number of iconic scenes and names that have eclipsed the longevity and diversity of the movement, with its multiple associations and diverging methods, and specifically the "constitutional" wing, with for example the longstanding National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) led by Millicent Garrett Fawcett.¹³ Laura E. Nym Mayhall has cogently analysed how a "suffragette spirit" was constructed as from the 1920s, resulting in the equation of the whole movement with the militant activities and more specifically with the Pankhursts and the WSPU. She

cites Rita Pankhurst, Sylvia's daughter-in-law, who wrote in her introduction to the 1987 reissue of Christabel Pankhurst's memoir, "It would appear that the suffragettes have hijacked the movement's image as they hijacked the action at the time" (Mayhall 1995, 319).

- 15 As Laura Mayhall observes, "Not only do suffragettes dominate discussions of the pre-war women's suffrage movement, but the very definition of militancy with which historians and critics operate equates it with the material practices of window-breaking, arson, and hunger striking, associated with members of the Women's Social and Political Union under the leadership of Christabel and Emmeline Pankhurst" (Mayhall 1995, 319). Katharine Cockin sums up this capturing of the imagination of the public and historians alike when she writes: "The suffragettes have persisted in popular culture, but perversely reduced to a name and a fatal action: Pankhurst, and that woman who threw herself under the horse" (Cockin 17).
- 16 No doubt this is accounted for by the fact that their methods were precisely meant to be spectacular and draw maximum publicity,¹⁴ so it is little wonder that films would find suitable feed in such sensational actions, with recurrent tropes functioning like expedient ready-made signifiers for the whole movement.
- 17 When filmmaker Sarah Gavron expounds why she wanted to make a film about the suffragettes, she lists these very tropes: "There were the charismatic Pankhursts and the purple, white and green of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), force-feeding, and the startling, ambiguous death of Emily Wilding Davison in 1913—the story called to me, dramatically and visually" (Gavron 986).
- 18 In addition to public addresses in halls or at street corners, window smashing is probably one of the most common, as in *Kind Hearts and Coronets*, or much more recently at the beginning of *Suffragette*. A whole episode (season 1, episode 6) of the period drama television series *Mr Selfridge* (2013) is devoted to the department store's response to the WSPU's window-smashing campaigns in November 1911 and March 1912, resulting in the store dressing their windows in the purple, white and green colours of the WSPU.¹⁵
- 19 Other dramatic actions include women chaining themselves to railings and heckling politicians in meetings or from the Ladies' gallery of the House of Commons before it was forbidden to them after Helen Fox and Muriel Matters chained themselves to the grid in October 1908 (*Royal Cavalcade* and *Fame Is the Spur*). Setting fire to letter boxes is of course highly spectacular (*Savage Messiah*, *Shoulder to Shoulder*, *Suffragette*), as well as damaging property (*Milling the Militants*, *Upstairs Downstairs*, *Suffragette*). The slashing of the *Rokeby Venus* provides a dramatic interlude in *Parade's End* and concludes episode 5 of *Shoulder to Shoulder*, aptly called "Outrage" as it deals with the intensification of the militant campaign. A striking variation occurs in Ken Russell's *Savage Messiah* (1972) which is loosely based on the life of the artist Henri Gaudier, whose radical and impassioned approach echoes the flamboyant style of Russell himself. One of his muses happens to be a socialite and a suffragette (Gosh Boyle played by a young Helen Mirren) who performs a sort of happening in a night club, recalling Mary Richardson's provocative gesture. One major difference is that Russell replaces Velázquez's painting by a crude imitation of Goya's *The Nude Maja* (*La maja desnuda*), an even more provocative reclining nude, renowned for the unashamed straightforward gaze of the model towards the viewer, in a film that includes one of the first female full-frontal nudes in British cinema.¹⁶

20 On a more tragic note, but no less spectacular, the reckless action of Emily Wilding Davison throwing herself in front of the king's horse is evoked right at the beginning of episode 6 of the first Season of *Downton Abbey* (2010) when Lady Sybil listens enthralled to the Liberal candidate's harangue for the by-election of May 1914 which starts recalling that "last June saw Emily Davison crushed to death beneath the hooves of the King's horse. Will the summer of 1914 prove as fatal for the hopes of women? It cannot. This historic by-election had been the first step of the journey to women's equality."¹⁷ Historical footage of the fateful Epsom derby features in *Royal Cavalcade*, while archive footage of her funeral procession follows the enactment of the accident in *Suffragette*. Filmed from the perspective of the main protagonist Maud, the traumatic violence of the scene is paradoxically conveyed through the suppression of all ambient sounds, which also harks back to the famous silent newsreels of the time. Interestingly, a similar effect is used in *Shoulder to Shoulder* (episode 5), when Emily Davison's funeral procession is accompanied by a slow melancholy song with no diegetic sound. In contrast, in accordance with the low-budget production, the accident itself is evoked through the sound of horses galloping on a close shot of Emily's face before the screen turns black.

The prominence of the Pankhursts

21 Nevertheless, of all the historical figures, Emmeline Pankhurst remains the prime signifier of the "suffragette", with references to the WSPU, its colour scheme superseding all others,¹⁸ its slogan "deeds not words", and its anthem "The March of the Women"¹⁹ that resonates for example in *To Be a Woman*, played on a glockenspiel, which is hummed out of tune by Margaret in *Up the Women* and of course is used for the title of the landmark BBC series *Shoulder to Shoulder*. Emmeline Pankhurst's notorious subterfuges to avoid arrest at public appearances under the infamous "Cat and Mouse Act" even inspired a whole episode of *Lost Empires*, which focuses on a troupe of vaudeville. In the second part of the first episode, the manager-magician is asked to perform some of his tricks to help a suffragette on the run "disappear". The political act becomes a pretext for performing tricks but the leitmotiv of eluding arrest is also found in *Suffragette* where a woman dons Emmeline Pankhurst's attire to attract the policemen's attention while the real Emmeline can escape.

22 However, apart from Emmeline's iconic function, what is remarkable is how the Pankhurst narrative in films aligns itself with the historiography of the late 1960s and 1970s dominated by the socialist-feminist school. Historians like Jane Marcus as early as the late 1960s, Sandra Holton in the 1980s, Maroula Joannou and June Purvis from the 1990s onwards, have analysed how, among all the memoirs and testimonies, Sylvia Pankhurst's writings *The Suffragette*, published in 1911, and most specifically *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals*, published in 1931, had such a critical influence as to be regarded as an authoritative account of the WSPU. June Purvis and Maureen Wright thus recall that:

[Holton Sandra Stanley] contends that [Sylvia Pankhurst's first book] *The Suffragette* established a 'plot' around which future militant accounts were drawn, a storyline that organised material around dichotomous categorisation of suffragists as radical or conservative, militant or non-militant, populist or elitist. [...] And it is Sylvia's bitter picture of her mother and Christabel in *The Suffragette Movement* that has

become the dominant narrative through which much suffrage history in Britain has, until recently, been filtered (Purvis and Wright 406-407).

- 23 *Shoulder to Shoulder* (1974) is the epitome of this interpretation. The series was devised by three women, script editor Midge Mackenzie, producer Verity Lambert and actress Georgia Brown, who carried out significant archive research and interviews with former suffragettes. It is very much in tune with the dominant socialist-feminist world-view in women's history-writing of the late 1960s and 1970s, when concerns with issues of class prevailed above all others. Indeed, the series, while relating the history of the suffrage movement from the 1890s to 1918 as it was led by the Pankhursts, focuses on the embittered rivalry between Christabel and Sylvia. While Emmeline is portrayed as an inspiring and valiant militant, she is also shown as a weak mother deferring to Christabel who appears as snobbish, self-centred, ambitious and cold-hearted, causing "bitter divisions and destructive splits within the movement." In contrast, Sylvia Pankhurst is portrayed as the true moral centre. Not only is she the focal point of the two episodes that frame the whole series, she is the one who keeps alive the socialist faith of her father, who always cares for others and fights for social justice beyond the issue of the vote. In this respect, her portrayal perfectly fits Sylvia's personal account, but also the vision of historians like Sheila Rowbotham or Jill Liddington and Jill Norris. The former, in her 1973 book *Hidden from History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight Against It*, contended that Emmeline and Christabel were "quite explicitly on the side of the ruling class, conservatism, and the Empire" (cited in Purvis 1995, 105-6) while the latter, in their study of Northern working-class suffragists published in 1978, presented Christabel, in Jill Craigie's words, as an "out-and-out villain" (cited in Purvis 2013, 579).
- 24 Unsurprisingly, due to her pacifist agenda during the First World War, Sylvia is also the one Pankhurst who features in *Oh! What a Lovely War* (Richard Attenborough, 1969), which is a scathing anti-war satire. Along with other "law-abiding suffragettes", she faces a rather hostile crowd that shouts her out, singing "Rule Britannia". In this film, however, Sylvia's impassioned discourse, although in line with the film's anti-war message, is depicted as disconnected and condescending, quoting "a letter from George Bernard Shaw to my mother" and calling the booing assembly "you misguided masses."

Redressing social bias

- 25 Socialist-feminist historians in the 1970s were eager to redress what they perceived, to some extent wrongly, as the obliteration of working-class women in the suffrage movement and the WSPU in particular, which they decried as middle-class and exclusive. Interestingly, films and series have followed suit. The series *Upstairs Downstairs* that started in 1971²⁰ was the brainchild of two actresses, Jean Marsh and Eileen Atkins, who both came from working class families, and were concerned to portray a social group so far largely ignored on television, the parts of servants being reduced to "mobile props".²¹ In "Special Mischief" (series 2, episode 10), Miss Elisabeth, the young lady of the house, feels her life is "one long boring holiday" and to find some amusement joins a group of suffragettes in their plan of attacking the home of a prominent politician. Rose, the faithful servant, follows her to try and stop her in what she considers is wrong. As a consequence, all the women are arrested but Miss Elisabeth is bailed out shortly after. Rose the servant is the one who has to go through

the ordeal of imprisonment and hunger striking. The episode makes it clear that Rose takes the rap for her mistress's conduct while she herself does not approve of any change, as regards gender, or even social, equality.²²

- 26 Remarkably the same distinctive concern to reassess the part that little known militants and working-class women in particular played in the women's suffrage movement characterises a recent film like Sarah Gavron's *Suffragette*. Unlike the landmark series *Shoulder to Shoulder* that charted the suffragette movement by focusing on the "women who made history", *Suffragette* clearly means to distance itself from classical biopics and adopts another type of established narrative pattern which consists in foregrounding an ordinary person with whom the viewer can immediately identify and who gets involved with a cause worth fighting for.
- 27 Ironically, though, despite all its attention to social inclusiveness, the film was criticised for ignoring the contribution of non-white campaigners, some taking offence in particular at the slogan displayed on the promotional T-shirts that flaunted Emmeline Pankhurst's quote "I'd rather be a rebel than a slave."²³ To address the controversy, Sarah Gavron explained that it was a matter of historical accuracy since there was not much ethnic diversity in the British movement at the time, contrary to the situation in the United States. Gavron added there were indeed a few women of colour involved, citing Sophia Duleep Singh who worked with Emmeline Pankhurst, but "she was an aristocrat, and she was treated very differently from the working women. We really wanted to focus on the working women, and so that's what we did" (cited in Erbland).
- 28 Indeed, the film's opening sequence takes care to set a sharp contrast between two worlds apart in terms of gender and social inequality when male politicians argue in voice-over about the inaptitude of women to take part in society²⁴ and the images testify to their outrageous exploitation. The unfolding captions nail the film's colours to the mast:
- FOR DECADES WOMEN HAD PEACEFULLY CAMPAIGNED FOR EQUALITY AND THE RIGHT TO VOTE.
THEIR ARGUMENTS WERE IGNORED.
IN RESPONSE, EMMELINE PANKHURST, LEADER OF THE SUFFRAGETTE MOVEMENT, CALLED FOR A NATIONAL CAMPAIGN OF CIVIL DISOBEDIENCE.
THIS IS THE STORY OF ONE GROUP OF WORKING WOMEN WHO JOINED THE FIGHT.
- 29 The main protagonist Maud Watts (played by Carey Mulligan) is a young working-class woman who has been toiling in a laundry since the age of seven in London's East End.²⁵ As the main character, Maud functions as the main focalising agent through whom the events are perceived. At first an apolitical exploited worker, obedient wife and loving mother, she becomes more and more interested in the suffragette movement to the extent of becoming a full participant in militancy.

Perpetuating the master narrative of self-sacrifice

- 30 What is striking about Maud's character development is how it perpetuates the master narrative that was instituted by both the suffragettes' memoirs and the decisive part played by the Suffragette Fellowship.²⁶
- 31 Laura Mayhall and Kabi Hartman²⁷ have shown how suffragettes' accounts have modelled themselves on the narrative structure of conversion, after Emmeline

Pankhurst's autobiography (*My Own Story*) starting with a chapter entitled "The Making of a Militant", and even more specifically after Lady Constance Lytton's memoir²⁸ whose first chapter is aptly called "My Conversion".

- 32 In *Suffragette*, as Maud awakens to the feminist cause, she gains self-awareness and self-confidence. Although she has lost her job, her husband's respect, her beloved son whom her husband gives up for adoption, and ends up homeless and alone, she finds comfort in her ordeal when she reads the book that Emily Davison has given to her. The book, which is Olive Schreiner's *Dreams*, Emily tells her, "has been an inspiration to a great many of [them]." And poignantly Maud reads a passage in voice-over from "Three Dreams in a Desert" right at the end, when she is seen joining Emily's funeral procession. Quite significantly the very same passage appears in Constance Lytton's memoir where she asserted that "Olive Schreiner, more than any one other author, has rightly interpreted the woman's movement and symbolised and immortalised it by her writings [...] The words hit out a bare literal description of the pilgrimage of women" (Lytton 159):

The woman wanderer goes forth to seek the land of freedom. "How am I to get there?" Reason answers: "There is one way, and one way only. Down the banks of labour. Through the waters of suffering. There is no other."

The woman, having discarded all to which she'd formally clung cries out. "For what do I go to this far land which no one has ever reached? I am alone. I am utterly alone."

And reason said to her: "Silence. What do you hear?" And she said: "I hear the sound of feet. A thousand times ten thousand, and thousands and thousands and they beat this way."

"They are the feet of those that shall follow you. Lead on."²⁹

- 33 According to Laura Mayhall, "Lytton's work enshrined the narrative of authentic suffrage militancy, a story that has come to serve as the archetype for the true militant autobiography. [...] Central to Lytton's account is the assumption of personal sacrifice and voluntary exposure to bodily humiliation" (Mayhall 1995, 323-4). As a result, a master narrative was promulgated that singled out one type of experience, and excluded all others, one, according to Laura Mayhall, "that privileged the sequence of events leading from action on the part of women, to their arrest and incarceration" (Mayhall 1995, 332), to which one must add hunger striking and forcible feeding. Mayhall even contends that "Women's bodies in pain lie at the center of many recent analyses, enticing us voyeuristically to imagine the suffering of Edwardian women activists, and to comprehend it as the defining moment of their political consciousness" (Mayhall 1995, 333).
- 34 Certainly the first depiction of such traumatic ordeal is to be found in the 1947 Boulting brothers' film *Fame is the Spur*, adapted from Howard Spring's novel of the same name (published in 1940) which relates how the ideals and great expectations of the Labour movement at the beginning of the 20th century were betrayed by its leaders. This political sell-out is epitomised by its main protagonist Hamer Radshaw (played by Michael Redgrave), whose career is loosely based on Ramsay MacDonald's, the former Leader of the Labour Party who was bitterly denounced by the Labour movement as a traitor to its cause after entering the National coalition after the 1929 Wall Street Crash. One sequence deals with the suffragette movement which Radshaw strongly objects to for political reasons while his wife Ann becomes an active militant, ending up in prison. There, she goes on a hunger strike and is forcibly fed. Although most of the barbaric treatment is kept off screen, the scene is all the more remarkable since it is

filmed mainly from Ann's point of view in a film otherwise narrated through the perspective of her husband Hamer. No doubt the Boultings benefited from some latitude on the part of the British Board of Film Censors in the immediate post-war period to tackle such a sensitive issue, although the board was still wary to stipulate that "forcible feeding should not be overstressed as torture" (See Aldgate and Richards 106). In the film, Ann is the one who lives up to the ideals of justice and equality of her youth and she pays a hard price for her convictions by having her life shortened due to the suffering she endured in prison.

- 35 In *Upstairs Downstairs* forcible feeding is evoked mainly through dialogue, through the evocation of a letter to the press, which recalls the letter that 116 British doctors signed to the Home Secretary in September 1909 to denounce the barbaric treatment that woman activists underwent in prison, describing forcible feeding as "an act of brutality beyond common endurance" (cited in Keyte 42) tantamount to "official cruelty" (cited in Joannou and Purvis 179).
- 36 On the other hand, harrowing scenes of imprisonment and forcible feeding abound in *Shoulder to Shoulder*. Episode 3 is entirely devoted to Lady Constance Lytton's experience when, after realising that upper-class women were given preferential treatment in prison, she had herself arrested under the guise of a working-class woman named Jane Warton and could prove that prison authorities did have differential treatments for women from different social backgrounds.³⁰ Recurring long scenes are devoted to imprisonment along with harrowing depictions of forcible feeding. Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst are shown emaciated in their dingy damp cells. Emily Davison is also shown hose piped in her cell.³¹ Repeatedly it is made clear that embracing the suffrage cause implies some sort of self-sacrifice, embracing "a new religion" as Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence wrote in 1909.³² Emily Davison is thus filmed in front of a statue of Joan of Arc (episode 5). Sylvia is equally invested with a mission to keep alive the socialist spirit of her beloved father who tells her when she is a child that "you prove your real strength when you deny yourself" (episode 1). In episode 2 Sylvia overtly criticises her sister Christabel who, she says, works for her own self-aggrandisement. She explains to Annie Kenney, a mill worker who eventually became a forceful speaker for the cause, that her own work with the movement "has to be a sacrifice of my life."
- 37 In *Suffragette*, as mentioned above, Maud's espousing the women's cause is tantamount to losing everything that defined her social life – job, home, husband, even her son. As historian Andrew E. Larsen aptly puts it, "Basically, she pays just about every price a suffragette ever paid for involvement in the movement" (Larsen). Maud's journey just perpetuates the epitome of the canonised "master narrative" of the sacrificial militant.

33

Conclusion: deriding the canons

- 38 One exception to this overarching narrative is to be found in the 2013 BBC production *Up the Women* which paradoxically offers a genuinely revisionist vision in the very outdated (and low-budget) format of the sitcom. The series is deliberately stagey with a limited cast and one main location, and even includes canned laughter,³⁴ which gives it, as its creator Jessica Hynes explained, "a deliberately retro-sitcom feel" (Hynes). It thus entirely relies on characterisation and clever witty dialogues, playing both on fairly

crude gender stereotypes and highly sophisticated humour, highbrow references and lewd jokes.

- 39 *Up the Women* focuses on those middle-class women whom Emmeline Pankhurst scornfully dismissed as those "quiet, gentle, ladylike suffragists asking nicely for a vote."³⁵ It features a fictitious Oxfordshire sewing group who is persuaded by one of their members, Margaret (played by Hynes), to support the women's suffrage cause, renaming their group "The Banbury Intricate Craft Circle Politely Request Women's Suffrage". This definitely echoes Emmeline Pankhurst's sardonic remark and gives a fairly good idea of how effective their campaigning will be.
- 40 Without being disrespectful towards suffragettes, *Up the Women* gently derides the canonical narrative of militancy as martyrdom, even poking fun at the time-honoured figure of Emmeline Pankhurst, who incidentally hardly bears any physical resemblance with the actress playing her role (she is very short and plump), is announced by Wagner's "Ride of the Valkyries" and is depicted as insufferably haughty and intolerant.³⁶
- 41 Hynes's sitcom may appear neglectful of the current concerns over greater inclusiveness, both from a social and ethnic point of view; it may also seem close to a post-feminist stance in eschewing any radical antagonistic position while indulging in character typing.³⁷ However, it celebrates a motley crew of ordinary women who, for some, are neither very bright nor politically aware. Most importantly, it succeeds in revisiting the history of the suffrage movement in a comic mode that is no longer the mere caricature of early comedies.³⁸
- 42 To come full circle, I will conclude by quoting from another song, the theme song of the series. Its composer Jules Gibb explained it was inspired by her own Nana's story.³⁹
- 43 "Nana was a suffragette, it's as if she's still alive,
Nana was a suffragette, their voices still survive."

BIBLIOGRAPHY

Aldgate, Anthony and Jeffrey Richards. *Best of British. Cinema and Society from 1930 to the Present* [1999]. London & New York: I.B Tauris, 2002.

Atkinson, Diane. *The Suffragettes in Picture* [1996]. London: The History Press, 2010.

Atkinson, Diane. "Six suffragette photographs." In *The Women's Suffrage Movement. New feminist perspectives*. Ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 89-100.

Bacon, Thomas. "Why Sherlock Movie & TV Is So Obsessed With The Suffragettes As Villains." Sep 30, 2020. <https://screenrant.com/sherlock-enola-holmes-movies-shows-suffragettes-villains-reason/>. Accessed 25 July 2022.

Cockin, Katharine. "Inventing the Suffragettes: Anachronism, Gnosticism and Corporeality in Contemporary Fiction." *Critical Survey*, 16:3 (2004): 17-32.

- Cowman, Krista. "'A party between revolution and peaceful persuasion': a fresh look at the United Suffragists." In *The Women's Suffrage Movement. New feminist perspectives*. Ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 77-88.
- Erbland, Kate. "'Suffragette' Director Sarah Gavron Explains Why She Didn't Cast Women of Color." 13 October, 2015. <https://www.indiewire.com/2015/10/suffragette-director-sarah-gavron-explains-why-she-didnt-cast-women-of-color-56679/>. Accessed 6 July 2022.
- Ford, Madox Ford. *Parade's End*. Manchester: Carcanet, 1997.
- Gavron, Sarah. "The Making of the Feature Film *Suffragette*." *Women's History Review* 24:6 (2015): 985-995.
- Hartman, Kabi. "'What Made Me a Suffragette': the New Woman and the new (?) conversion narrative." *Women's History Review* 12:1 (2003): 35-50.
- Holton, Sandra Stanley. "Now you see it, now you don't: the Women's Franchise League and its place in contending narratives of the women's suffrage movement." In *The Women's Suffrage Movement. New feminist perspectives*. Ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 15-36.
- Hynes, Jessica. "Jessica Hynes: it's OK to poke fun at suffragettes." *The Daily Telegraph*. 30 May 2013.
- Joannou, Maroula. "Suffragette fiction and the fictions of suffrage." In *The Women's Suffrage Movement. New feminist perspectives*. Ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 101-116.
- Keyte, Suzanne. *The Suffragette Timeline*. Golden Manor Press, 2018.
- Larsen, Andrew E. "Suffragette: Putting the Suffer Back in Suffrage." 11 November 2015. <https://aelarsen.wordpress.com/2015/11/11/suffragette-putting-the-suffer-back-in-suffrage/>. Accessed 6 July 2022.
- Lawrence, D.H. *Sons and Lovers* [1913]. Penguin, 1989.
- Lawrence, D.H. *The Rainbow* [1915]. Penguin, 1989.
- Liddington, Jill and Jill Norris. *One Hand Tied Behind Us: the Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement*. London: Virago Press, 1978.
- Lytton, Constance. *Prisons and Prisoners: Some Personal Experiences* [1914]. Broadview editions, 2008.
- Marson, Richard. *Inside Updown: The Story of Upstairs, Downstairs* [2001]. Dudley: Kaleidoscope Publishing, 2011.
- Mayhall, Laura E. Nym. "Creating the 'suffragette spirit': British feminism and the historical imagination." *Women's History Review* 4:3 (1995): 319-344.
- Mayhall, Laura E. Nym. "Domesticating Emmeline: Representing the Suffragette, 1930-1993." *NWSA Journal* 11:2 (1999): 1-24.
- Mill, John Stuart. "Considerations on Representative Government" (1861). In *Utilitarianism*, Everyman, 1992.
- Mill, John Stuart. *The Subjection of Women* [1869]. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/27083/27083-h/27083-h.htm>
- Mitchell, Hannah. *The Hard Way Up. the Autobiography of Hannah Mitchell, Suffragette and Rebel* [1968]. London: Virago, 1977.

Myall, Michelle. "No surrender!: the militancy of Mary Leigh, a working-class suffragette." In *The Women's Suffrage Movement. New feminist perspectives*. Ed. Maroula Joannou and June Purvis. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998. 173-87.

Norden, Martin F. "'A Good Travesty Upon the Suffragette Movement': Women's Suffrage Films as Genre." *Journal of Popular Film and Television* 13:4 (1986): 171-177.

Pankhurst, Emmeline. "Freedom or Death." Speech in Hartford, Connecticut, 13 November, 1913.

Pankhurst, Emmeline. *My Own Story*. London: Eveleigh Nash, 1914.

Pankhurst, Sylvia. *The Suffragette*. London: Gay & Hancock, 1911.

Pankhurst, Sylvia. *The Suffragette Movement: an intimate account of persons and ideals*. London: Longmans, Green & Co., 1931.

Pethick-Lawrence, Emmeline. "What the Vote Means to Those Who are Fighting the Battle." *Votes For Women*, January 1908.

Plunkett, John. "Jessica Hynes and Doon Mackichan star in new BBC4 sitcoms." *The Guardian*, 30 May 2013.

Power, Vicki. "Jessica Hynes chooses an unlikely subject for seriously funny new comedy *Up the Women*." 25 May 2013, <https://www.express.co.uk/showbiz/tv-radio/402551/Jessica-Hynes-chooses-an-unlikely-subject-for-seriously-funny-new-comedy-Up-The-Women>. Accessed 5 July 2022.

Pulver, Andrew. "Meryl Streep defends feminist credentials as Suffragette opens London film festival," 7 Oct 2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/film/2015/oct/07/suffragette-london-film-festival-meryl-streep-carey-mulligan>. Accessed 6 July 2022.

Purvis, June. "The prison experiences of the suffragettes in Edwardian Britain." *Women's History Review* 4:1 (1995): 103-133.

Purvis, June and Maureen Wright. "Writing suffragette history: the contending autobiographical narratives of the Pankhursts." *Women's History Review* 14:3-4 (2005): 405-433.

Purvis, June. "Gendering the Historiography of the Suffragette Movement in Edwardian Britain: some reflections." *Women's History Review* 22:4 (2013) 576-590.

Rowbotham, Sheila. *Hidden from History: 300 years of Women's Oppression and the Fight against It*. London: Pluto Press, 1973.

Schreiner, Olive. *Dreams* [1890]. <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/1439/1439-h/1439-h.htm>.

Stoppard, Tom. *Parade's End*. Faber and Faber, 2012.

Filmography

Downton Abbey (2010), created by Julian Fellowes, Carnival Films (ITV), WGBH-TV.

Enola Holmes (2020), dir. Harry Bradbeer, screenplay by Jack Thorne, Netflix.

Fame is the Spur (1947), dir. Roy Boulting, Boulting Brothers production in association with Two Cities Films.

Kind Hearts and Coronets (1949), dir. Robert Hamer, Ealing Studios.

Lost Empires (1986), dir. Alan Grint, Granada Television.

Mary Poppins (1964), dir. Robert Stevenson, Walt Disney.

Milling the Militants (1913), dir. Percy Stow, Clarendon Film London.

Mr Selfridge (2013), created by Andrew Davies, TV Studios.

Oh! What a Lovely War (1969), dir. Richard Attenborough, Accord Productions.

Parade's End (2012), dir. Susanna White, written by Tom Stoppard, BBC/HBO/VRT.

The Rainbow (1988), directed by Stuart Burge, BBC.

Royal Cavalcade (1935), also known as *Regal Cavalcade*, dir. Thomas Bentley (supervising director), Herbert Brenon, Norman Lee, Walter Summers, W. P. Kellino and Marcel Varnel, Associated British Picture Corporation.

Savage Messiah (1972), dir. Ken Russell, Russ-Arts.

Sons and Lovers (1960), dir. Jack Cardiff, screenplay by Gavin Lambert & T.E.B. Clarke, Jerry Wald Productions.

Suffragette (2015), dir. Sarah Gavron, written by Abi Morgan, Film4, BFI, Ingenious Media, Canal+, Ciné+, Ruby Films, Pathé.

To Be a Woman (1952), dir. Jill Craigie, Outlook Film.

Shoulder to Shoulder (1974), dir. Waris Hussein and Moira Armstrong, BBC.

Upstairs, Downstairs (1971-1975), dir. Raymond Menmuir, London Weekend Television.

Up the Women (2013-2015), created and written by Jessica Hynes, BBC.

NOTES

1. 53:00-55:18.

2. The last line echoes Henry Longfellow's poem "The Arrow and the Song" published in 1845, which starts "I shot an arrow into the air, / It fell to earth, I knew not where."

3. *Royal Cavalcade*, also known as *Regal Cavalcade*, was produced by Associated British Picture Corporation and directed by six separate directors: Thomas Bentley (Supervising Director), Herbert Brenon, Norman Lee, Walter Summers, W. P. Kellino and Marcel Varnel.

4. The film is actually a British-American coproduction, directed by Harry Bradbeer from a screenplay by Jack Thorne (both British with a British cast and setting) and adapts the first novel in *The Enola Holmes Mysteries* series by American author Nancy Springer (*The Case of the Missing Marquess* 2007).

5. See Bacon. Bacon mentions *Sherlock* Christmas special "The Abominable Bride" (BBC/PBS, 2015), in which Holmes and Watson are led to investigate into a secret group of women belonging to the Women's Rights Movement, who are wearing Ku Klux Klan-style hoods and prone to murder men. One can also cite an episode of *Sherlock Holmes* called "The Case of the Careless Suffragette" (MPTV, 1955) which features a suffragette who inadvertently causes the death of a member of parliament, killed by a bomb she acquired in the shape of a croquet ball; or the first episode of season 5 of the Granada series: *Sherlock Holmes*, called "The Disappearance of Lady Frances Carfax" (ITV, 1991), where a suffragette falls under the sway of a murderous con artist. Broadly speaking, many *Sherlock Holmes* adaptations make use of subplots that involve the women's suffrage movement in the UK but also in the USA and Canada (for example in *Murdoch Mysteries* (CBC, 2008-). As Bacon notes, incorporating the suffragettes' movement into a *Sherlock Holmes* adaptation is not only an immediate landmark of the Edwardian period but can also be used to challenge the period's prejudices and dominant worldview.

6. The 1988 adaptation of *The Rainbow* is the BBC television mini-series directed by Stuart Burge, not to be confused with Ken Russell's film of 1989, which skips over this point.

7. To compare with Mill's words: "Let us hope that [...] before the lapse of another generation the accident of sex no more than the accident of skin will be deemed a sufficient justification for depriving its possessor of the equal protection and just privileges of a citizen" (Mill 292).

8. Episode 2 at 4:00. True enough, in the mini-series, Maggie's speech is followed by Ursula's voice-over: "I so want to be like her. But I do not think that this struggle with men will change my nature or free it. I think the struggle is with myself." This echoes the passage in the novel "Maggie was a great suffragette, trusting in the vote. To Ursula the vote was never a reality. She had within her the strange, passionate knowledge of religion and living far transcending the limits of the automatic system that contained the vote." (Lawrence 456).

9. Directed by Jack Cardiff, screenplay by Gavin Lambert & T.E.B. Clarke.

10. Clara is mainly seen through the perspective of the main protagonist Paul who is both intrigued and exasperated, calling her a man-hater. (See Lawrence 323).

11. Produced by BBC/HBO/VRT the five-part miniseries was directed by Susanna White and written by Tom Stoppard.

12. Tietjens is interjecting into a conversation held in a minister's home while some suffragettes are protesting outside his home (scene starting at 17:40): "Perhaps if the Prime Minister had kept his promise to address the women's concerns after the summer recess. The women kept their promise to stop protesting while the police had their hands full with the Coronation." In the novel, Tietjens sounds more sceptical about the cause declaring to Valentine: "I approve entirely of your methods; but your aims are idiotic" (Ford 114).

13. According to Krista Cowman, in January 1914 the "Suffrage Directory" of *Votes for Women* listed no less than 53 suffrage organisations (See Cowman 79).

14. See Emmeline Pankhurst's "Freedom or Death" Speech in Hartford, Connecticut, November 13, 1913: "You have to make more noise than anybody else, you have to make yourself more obtrusive than anybody else, you have to fill all the papers more than anybody else, in fact you have to be there all the time and see that they do not snow you under, if you are really going to get your reform realised."

15. Selfridge's was known to be generally supportive of the suffrage cause, as testified by the publication of *The Suffrage Annual and Women's Who's Who* published jointly by Stanley Paul and Selfridge's department store in 1913 with entries supplied by the women themselves (See Atkinson 91). However, Selfridge's was not the only store to identify suffragettes as valuable customers. "Retailers and entrepreneurs identified suffragettes as valuable customers with money to spend, and stoked a wide variety of purple, white and green fashion items. Leading department stores in London and the provinces filled their windows with the WSPU's colours" (Atkinson 61).

16. The whole scene turns into histrionics with Helen Mirren's character singing out of tune: "I like horses just as much as you do. Why do I do the things I do? Everything my mother does she does to please the Pope. But I don't want virtue. I want the vote. Votes for women!" and Gaudier shouting out repeatedly: "Give her the vote and take off your knickers!"

17. Later on at dinner (5:31) Lady Sybil is told off by her father Robert Crawley, Earl of Grantham. The Dowager Countess (played by Maggie Smith) then answers Lady Mary very snobbishly about being entitled to one's own opinion:

Dowager: "Are you canvassing too? Or would you rather take in washing?"

Mary: "I was only going to say that Sybil is entitled to her own opinion."

Dowager: "Not until she is married. Then her husband will tell her what her opinions are."

The scene is quite typical of the way the series has its cake and eats it – playing on the outrageously snobbish character of the Dowager, who voices strong reactionary views while her opinionated behaviour mostly contradicts her discourse.

18. The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) colour scheme was chosen by Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence in 1908 for the massive demonstration the WSPU organised in Hyde Park on 21 June whose attendance is estimated at about 500,000. However, the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) was the first to use a colour scheme to be identified, choosing red and white in 1906 before adding green in 1909. The Women's Freedom League's colours (founded in 1907 by some dissenting members of the WSPU including Teresa Billington-Greig, Charlotte Despard, Alice Schofield, Edith How-Martyn and Margaret Nevinson) were green, white and gold; the United Suffragists' (formed in February 1914) purple, white and orange.

19. "The March of the Women" was composed by Ethel Smyth, to words by Cicely Hamilton. It became the official anthem of the WSPU in January 1911.

20. *Upstairs, Downstairs* was originally produced by London Weekend Television and ran from 1971 to 1975.

21. John Hawkesworth, the series' producer, cited in Marson 13.

22. When Elizabeth tells her "You don't understand, Rose, the world is changing." Rose candidly answers: "Why do you want it to change?"

23. See Pulver. The term "slavery" was often used in the suffragettes' writings. As early as in the 1890s, Florence Fenwick Miller, writing for the Women's Franchise League, justified their actions to "avoid for women the sufferings of slavery", comparing a married woman to "absolutely a slave, with no free-will in herself", and asserting that "that condition under which the women of this country lived was simply slavery" (cited in Joannou and Purvis 26). Emmeline Pankhurst's quote is taken from a speech given in 1913 "Know that women, once convinced that they are doing what is right, that their rebellion is just, will go on, no matter what the difficulties, no matter what the dangers, so long as there is a woman alive to hold up the flag of rebellion. I would rather be a rebel than a slave."

24. Three politicians can be heard addressing the Parliament: "Women do not have the calmness of temperament or the balance of mind to exercise judgement in political affairs."; "If we allow women to vote, it will mean the loss of social structure. Women are well represented by their fathers, brothers, husbands."; "Once the vote was given, it would be impossible to stop at this. Women would then demand the right of becoming MPs, cabinet ministers, judges."

25. During the deputation to Lloyd George at the Parliament Maud explains she has been working "part time from when I was seven, full time from when I was twelve. Don't need much schooling to launder shirts. I was good at collars, steaming the fine lacing. Got the hands for it. I was made head washer at seventeen. Forewoman at twenty. Twenty four now" she adds. "Laundry work's a short life if you're a woman."

26. The Suffragette Fellowship was created in 1926 by former militant suffragettes who wanted to keep a record of their movement. See Mayhall 1999, 3.

27. Hartman 35. See also Cockin 21.

28. Constance Lytton, *Prisons and Prisoners: some personal experiences* [1914].

29. The passage quoted in the film is actually slightly edited from Olive Schreiner's short story. Interestingly, the film edited out the reference to "that old man" who personifies Reason in the book.

30. "Thus, she exposed the hypocrisy of a system that had released Lady Constance Lytton on account of her weak heart, but forcibly fed Jane Warton with only a cursory medical examination." (Hartman 38).

31. The scene refers to the event on 28 October 1909 when Emily Wilding Davison was in prison at Strangeways Manchester. See Keyte 44.

32. Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, "What the Vote Means to Those Who are Fighting the Battle," *Votes For Women*, January, 1908, 49, cited in Hartman 38.

33. In this respect, another example of such a sacrificial journey is epitomised by the quite telling title of Hannah Mitchell's memoirs published in 1968, relating her personal journey as a Northern working-class woman: *The Hard Way Up*.

34. *Up the Women* was actually the last sitcom to be filmed before a live audience at the BBC Television Centre in Shepherd's Bush. See John Plunkett, "Jessica Hynes and Doon Mackichan star in new BBC4 sitcoms," *The Guardian*, 30 May 2013.

35. The quote is taken from an address given in 1913 at Hartford, Connecticut, to the National Woman Suffrage Association. Speaking about the strategy of smashing shop windows: "The shopkeeper cannot afford to quarrel with his customers, and we have today far more practical sympathy amongst the shopkeepers of London than we ever had when we were quiet, gentle, ladylike suffragists asking nicely for a vote."

36. Emmeline Pankhurst refers to herself in the third person. When Margaret thanks her for responding to her letter, she is led to rephrase herself as she meets with Emmeline's disapproving look "I very much hope that we can walk with ... beside... slightly behind you on your long lonely march to female emancipation."

37. The women's group is composed of bookish but considerate Margaret, haughty and bossy Helen always contrary, reacting in particular against the permissiveness of her mother, the lascivious Myrtle, Helen's daughter Emily, rebelling against her own mother, featherbrained Eva, a pretty young mother of 14 and heavily pregnant, simple-minded and kind-hearted Gwen, the household drudge of the group. The women are joined by Thomas, a rather effete young man who suffers from "a congenital wrist condition" and is enamoured of Emily.

38. Jessica Hynes explained she originally wanted to write a script about an actual and much more dramatic historical event which was a suffragette plot to assassinate former Prime Minister H. H. Asquith in 1910. She added "No, there aren't many laughs in women's suffrage, which is why I wanted to broach the subject from a comedic angle." cited in Power.

39. "Nana was a Suffragette" was written and composed by Jules Gibb (with coda words by Naomi Littlebear Morena). Jules Gibb has been a singing workshop leader for over 20 years. She is the co-founder and director of Manchester Community Choir.

ABSTRACTS

Suffragettes on the British screen have long been an object of ridicule and stereotyping, following the prevailing representations of popular culture. Often used to anchor the storyline in Edwardian England, the figure of the suffragette has also very early on been used to epitomise all types of rebelliousness and women's aspiration for more freedom. However, the most striking feature about the representation of the suffragettes on screen is how closely it follows the prevailing historiography of the time. In particular, the suffrage movement has become identified with a set number of recurring tropes, iconic scenes and names like the Pankhursts that have eclipsed the diversity of the movement. Drawing on the historiographical analyses of Jane Marcus, Sandra Holton, Maroula Joannou and June Purvis, this article aims to show how British films and series not only make use of popular representations of the suffragette but also actually reflect the dominant historiography of the suffrage movement. In particular, it shows how films and series have been foregrounding narratives that align themselves with the historiography of the late 1960s and 1970s dominated by the socialist-feminist school, and that

perpetuate the canonised "master narrative" of the sacrificial militant, instituted by both the suffragettes' memoirs and the Suffragette Fellowship.

Les suffragettes ont longtemps été stéréotypées et ridiculisées sur les écrans britanniques, reprenant les représentations dominantes de la culture populaire. Souvent utilisée pour ancrer les récits dans l'Angleterre édouardienne, la figure de la suffragette a aussi été très tôt utilisée pour incarner toutes sortes de rébellion et l'aspiration des femmes à plus de liberté. Cependant, le trait le plus frappant concernant la représentation des suffragettes à l'écran est de constater à quel point elle reflète l'historiographie dominante de son temps. En particulier, les mouvements suffragistes sont identifiés par un nombre de tropes récurrents, de scènes emblématiques et de noms iconiques tels les Pankhurst, qui ont éclipsé la diversité du mouvement. S'appuyant sur les analyses historiographiques de Jane Marcus, Sandra Holton, Maroula Joannou et June Purvis, cet article vise à montrer comment les films et séries britanniques non seulement utilisent les représentations populaires de la suffragette mais reflètent aussi l'historiographie dominante du mouvement suffragiste. Il montre notamment comment les films et séries ont privilégié des récits qui s'alignent sur l'historiographie des années 1960 et 1970 dominée par l'école socialiste-féministe, et qui perpétuent le « métarécit » de la militante sacrificielle, récit institué par les mémoires des suffragettes et la Suffragette Fellowship.

INDEX

Keywords: Suffragette, suffrage movement, women's rights movement, British cinema, British television series, historiography

Mots-clés: Suffragette, mouvement suffragiste, droits des femmes, cinéma britannique, séries télévisées britanniques, historiographie

AUTHORS

NICOLE CLOAREC

Maître de conférences

Université de Rennes - ACE EA 1796

nicole.cloarec@univ-rennes.fr