

**THE ART OF CITIZENSHIP:  
SUFFRAGE LITERATURE AS SOCIAL PEDAGOGY**

by

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*The Art of Citizenship* examines the largely forgotten literary tradition that emerged as part of the women's suffrage movement in the United States, exploring through these texts and their history the relationship between literature, pedagogy, and social change. It argues that suffrage literature and its performances constituted what I have labeled "social pedagogy," or pedagogy as social action, a project that included both intentional and unintentional educational aspects. The study focuses on the genres of suffrage literature that could be performed at suffrage meetings and elsewhere (the plays, pageants, poems, and songs) because the claiming of public spaces that occurs in such performances reinforces the lessons about women's rights and roles to be found in the texts themselves, thus adding another dimension to their pedagogy. It also considers the larger rhetorical context within which this literature existed, examining the forms of criticism suffragists faced and the ways suffrage writers engaged with this criticism. In part, the study is an archival project, a continuation and extension of earlier feminist recovery work that reclaims women's literary texts and women's history. It significantly expands the currently known body of suffrage literature, much of which was written and performed by women, by examining many texts that have not at this time been reprinted or collected in anthologies. The study is also an exploration of the ways suffragists understood and theorized gender, performance, and pedagogy, often anticipating the ideas and theories of second and third wave feminists and proponents of critical pedagogy. It argues that in their efforts to gain enfranchisement for

women, suffrage writers and their writing played a pedagogical as well as an aesthetic role, offering images of female enfranchisement as logical and natural, challenging notions of separate spheres, and generally inviting discourse about women's rights and roles. In doing so, they negotiated normative gender patterns in order to ensure that their words could find an audience, yet also invited American men and women to consider alternative possibilities for gender identity and expression.

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## PREFACE

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## 1.0 INTRODUCTION: SUFFRAGISTS AS CITIZENS AND PEDAGOGUES

“It was we, the people; not we, the white male citizens; nor yet we, the male citizens; but we, the whole people. . . .”

-Susan B. Anthony, suffrage leader and speaker<sup>1</sup>

“We, the people! All the people! How it rings!”

-Minetta Theodora Taylor, “Ballot Song of American Women”

“To me the vote, as the symbol of political expression, means part of my freedom as an individual. I don’t want anybody else voting for me, any more than I want anybody else trying to shape and mold me in any other way.”

-Mary Shaw, actress and playwright<sup>2</sup>

Like many movements for social change, the American and British women’s suffrage campaigns included an outpouring of artistic and literary production; writers fired with passion for country or comrades (those newly discovering the power of pen and paper as well as those turning long-practiced skills to new material) contributed to the creation of a literary tradition both separate from and closely related to the concurrent body of written work containing tracts and speeches, articles, educational pamphlets, and press releases. To the daily efforts of rhetoric, persuasion, information, and instruction that were needed to keep the machinery of a movement gliding along, these writers added plays, poems, stories, songs – a various and extensive body of literature largely about and largely written by women. This literary tradition, as I will show in the pages that follow, was a pedagogical one, whereby those who wrote or otherwise participated

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<sup>1</sup> From the speech “On Women’s Right to Vote.” Anthony was arrested after casting a vote in the 1872 presidential election and fined a hundred dollars, which she refused to pay.

<sup>2</sup> From a 1915 *Harper’s Weekly* article by Rose Young, “Suffrage as Seen by Mary Shaw.”

in its dissemination became participants in what I call, with the intent of evoking both possible meanings of the phrase, “the art of citizenship.” For suffragists on either side of the Atlantic, the theme of citizenship was both compelling and complex, and while it was explored in the genres we might consider to make up the more “practical” or “functional” daily workings of the movement (such as in the above-quoted speech Susan B. Anthony delivered after the 1872 voting experiment that led to her arrest), it also frequently surfaced in the literary genres.

What makes a citizen? What is the relationship between this concept and the civic responsibility and duty so many women felt towards their country and acted upon in its interest? How does the individuality and separateness connoted by the term simultaneously accommodate the cohesive and unified identity of “nation,” and what do these identities mean for women denied the vote, that symbol of the individual’s voice within the country? Even a small sampling of suffrage literature shows that these questions were central for a group of writers invested in educating not only themselves, but their sister women and fellow men as well. For both American and British suffragists, one useful way of raising such questions was to step away from their more abstract arguments about natural rights and focus on the immediate material reality of taxation; frequent references to the injustice of women’s being taxed yet denied the vote appear in suffrage texts. “If a body pays the taxes,” the first verse of the British song “Our Hard Case” begins, “Surely you’ll agree / That a body earns the franchise, / Whether he or she.”<sup>3</sup> And the American suffrage opera *Melinda and Her Sisters* (1916), which depicts the “coming out” party held for a family’s debutante daughters, offers for contemplation the words of the black sheep suffragist daughter, Melinda; while at the party, she pushes the male authority figure for a definition and an explanation:

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<sup>3</sup> Written by S. J. Tanner and set to the tune “Comin’ thro’ the Rye,” this song was originally published in *Woman’s Suffrage Songs*, London, by Kenny & Co. The year of publication is unknown (Nelson 178).

MELINDA. Mayor, what exactly constitutes a citizen of a country and a member of a community?

MAYOR. [*Promptly*]. A man who pays his taxes.

MELINDA. But women pay taxes just the same as men and yet they have no rights. How do you explain that?

Melinda speaks here for many women who saw injustice and sought answers. Suffrage writers posed such questions, encouraging others to consider the inherent conflict, for instance, in requiring women to pay taxes without giving them a say in what was to be done with the money.

While taxation was one part of the issue, however, suffragists saw citizenship also as being about honor, pride, and civic responsibility,<sup>4</sup> and their relationship to the concept of citizenship was a complicated one. The literature reveals their ongoing efforts to navigate the terminology. Suffrage writers sometimes represent themselves as *already* citizens, denied a voice, but not the identity or the responsibility the role brings. Yet on other occasions, they represent the vote as a way to *become* citizens, to reach a zenith of personal and national identity that correlates in the texts with freedom. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's play, *Something to Vote For* (1911), women are recognized as citizens even without the vote; a male speaker refers to himself as "an old friend and fellow-citizen" when addressing a women's club meeting (161). Although he turns out to be a crook and not a friend at all, his lines allow Gilman an opportunity to raise the issue of citizenship in such a way as to suggest that *even the crooked* recognize woman's firmly established and admirable relationship to her nation. By contrast, the song

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<sup>4</sup> Women's interest in their country's political life has a rich and informative history, even before the campaign for the vote began. In *Voices without Votes: Women and Politics in Antebellum New England*, Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray show that women in New England in the 1830s, 1840s, and 1850s "not only had a consciousness of politics; they had an active presence in it, with definite roles to play" (3). In their diaries and letters, women expressed "interest and excitement over elections and partisan contests," identified "with mainstream political parties, and define[d] themselves against the opposition," and wrote "fluently and confidently about their political engagement, ranging from forming opinions through reading to influencing voting through arguing" (2).

“Marching to Victory and Freedom,”<sup>5</sup> published at very nearly the same time in suffrage history, provides an example of the other train of thought, whereby women envisioned the acquisition of the vote as a rite of passage conferring citizenship. The lyrics in the first verse call for “sisters” to “[c]ome and join the marching throng,” and the third verse describes the goals for which the women march:

Thus we make a pathway here

For citizens to be;

Thus we make a pathway clear

For women to be free.

In this instance, citizenship is an aim, a state and status to be reached ultimately when the movement inevitably succeeds, rather than an inherent identity already possessed. This construct is put to humorous use in the play *Back of the Ballot* (1915), by George Middleton, when a young woman finds a burglar in her bedroom and immediately tries to persuade him to vote for women’s suffrage. To her father, she says, “I will not have him arrested so you can make a criminal out of him. I want to save him to have him make a citizen out of me” (340).

Similar contradictions arise in the very scope of female citizenship envisioned by suffragists. At some moments, the rhetorical constructs to be found in the literature center around a celebration of patriotism and love of country, pride in a role that is concretely defined by nation. At other times, the suffragists depict a sisterhood between countries or even venture to define themselves as citizens of the world, their unique identity as women in quest of their own freedom surpassing national boundaries and their responsibilities for humankind stretching

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<sup>5</sup> Set to the tune “Marching through Georgia,” this song was included in Eugénie Rayé-Smith’s 1912 *Equal Suffrage Song Sheet*, p. 4-5.

beyond borders.<sup>6</sup> The British poem “Woman,” published in 1910 by Elizabeth Gibson, illustrates this vision of woman as citizen of the whole world. Upon meeting a woman out “walking with a will” (3), the speaker begins to question her about her realm:

‘Of what land are you an inhabitant?’

‘Of every land I have heard of.’

‘Of what city are you a citizen?’

‘Of every city I can imagine.’

‘Where are your children?’

‘All over the earth. Every child that is born is mine. . .’ (8-13)

In this poem, the pleasing regularity of the questions – the assonance of “land” and “inhabitant,” then the alliteration of “city” and “citizen” – echoes in sound and structure what the queries offer in content: an invitation to the woman to identify and affiliate in an expected manner, to define her role using traditional and comfortable measures. But she breaks free from the allure of safety, regularity, and a smaller scope, claiming in each utterance a larger responsibility, as far-reaching as her own imagination. Similarly, the chorus to the American “Woman’s Song of Union,” by Eugénie Rayé-Smith,<sup>7</sup> also claims that “[a]ll the world is one great union.” Set to the popular tune “Suwanee River,” the song depicts English and American women as sisters whose

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<sup>6</sup> In navigating a discourse of solidarity based on both nation and the category of “woman,” the suffragists were exploding homogenizing definitions of nationhood that occluded sex inequality even as they faced the limitations inherent in such identity categories. As Andrew Parker et al. note in the introduction to *Nationalisms and Sexualities*, suffragists and other women’s rights workers “challenged the inequalities concealed in the vision of a ‘common’ nationhood” (7). The term “nation,” they explain, “is incapable of registering the multiple and incommensurable differences dividing one nation from another (or from itself)” (3). Nor, as Judith Butler explains in *Gender Trouble*, is “the subject of woman” any longer understood (if in fact it ever was) “in stable or abiding terms” (4). For more on the interrelationship between nation and sexuality or gender, see George L. Moss’s 1985 *Nationalism and Sexuality* and Nira Yuval-Davis’s 1997 *Gender and Nation*.

<sup>7</sup> This song is included in Rayé-Smith’s 1912 *Equal Suffrage Song Sheaf*, p. 5.

voices ring back and forth “o’er the waste of waters” as they work towards “[o]ne human goal” (verse 2).

It is not surprising that the suffragists’ ideas about citizenship should be so complex, even in some ways contradictory; they were exploring terminology that does not resolve itself into easy and unchangeable definitions, and perhaps they even found power in the mutability of the term, as the desired vote eluded them decade after decade. I offer these examples of the sometimes contradictory ideas about female citizenship to show how actively suffragists engaged with the concept, how alive their deliberations and negotiations were. There are many parallels between British suffrage literature and American suffrage literature (and this type of negotiation is one of them), but it is important to point out that there are also distinct differences – especially when history and genealogy are invoked, as they so often were. Although Rayé-Smith’s “Woman’s Song of Union” depicts “England’s daughters” and “Columbia’s daughters” as “one band united” and as “joint heirs in civic right and station,” other texts celebrate a history belonging uniquely to one nation – and even this song differentiates between those “daughters.” For a country whose history includes female monarchs, the role of a queen could be invoked by suffrage writers both to call attention to the irony of denying women the vote but not the throne and to establish for themselves a heritage or genealogy that confirms female strength and merit in politics. As the lyrics to one song point out, “When Good Queen Bess Was on the Throne”<sup>8</sup> three hundred years earlier:

She labored for her country’s sake,

And no one questioned then, Sir,

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<sup>8</sup> Written by H. Crawford and set to the tune “Vicar of Bray,” this song was originally published in London by the London Society for Women’s Suffrage. The year of publication is unknown, but the song was performed at Albert Hall on Suffrage Saturday, June 13, 1908 (Nelson 174).

The right of England's queen to make

The laws of England's men, Sir. (verse 1)

After establishing this national heritage, the lyrics in the second and third verses follow up by calling attention to the injustice of denying women a part in government and law-making.

For American women, the Revolution is frequently invoked as shared national heritage. As one writer puts it, "a favorite theme of the suffragists was that they were continuers of the tradition of the American Revolution; that they were fighting to fulfill the promise of the Declaration of Independence" (Liner Notes 9). This tradition was established early, when the 1848 "Declaration of Sentiments" was modeled on that earlier "Declaration."<sup>9</sup> Similarly, both Susan B. Anthony's speech and Minetta Theodora Taylor's "Ballot Song of American Women," quoted at the head of this chapter, reference the phrase "we the people," echoing but also revising the Preamble to the Constitution in ways that assert the inclusion of women. American suffragists took pride in their Revolutionary heritage and expected it to be recognized and respected as conferring merit. Not only did their foremothers travel along with the men to settle an unknown land, but they also participated directly in the rebellion that followed. This was no war fought on distant shores by men sent lovingly and proudly away. American women made bullets, fed soldiers on the front lines, spied, fired guns and cannons, traveled with the soldiers as "camp followers," or, if they were able to remain in their homes, hosted enemy soldiers as courtesy required, suffered raids that left them with no blankets or provisions to endure a winter, and sometimes burned their own crops to keep them out of enemy hands (Hemming and Savage

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<sup>9</sup> The writers of the "Declaration of Sentiments" borrowed directly from the text, editing it to suit their purpose; for instance, the document reads, "We hold these truths to be self-evident: that all men *and women* are created equal" (77, italics mine).

12-25).<sup>10</sup> The American suffragists claimed this heritage, took pride in the combination of determination, endurance, and daring they saw to be a national characteristic and an important inheritance passed down from one generation of women to the next.

Recurrent references to themselves as “Columbia’s daughters” allowed suffrage writers to invoke this uniquely American heritage; even while celebrating connection with allies from other countries, they were able to refer to and reaffirm their national identity by employing a term that had during the Revolutionary War come to symbolize a distinct American identity. Like Rayé-Smith’s “Woman’s Song of Union,” L. May Wheeler’s “Hallelujah Song” employs the phrase. Wheeler’s song also makes explicit a connection between the 1776 rebellion and women’s campaign for equal rights; asserting that “equal rights in law and love is meant for you and me” (verse 5) and referring to the inevitability of a time when “freedom’s light will shine” (verse 1), the lyrics note that “Columbia’s daughters saw it when / their brothers sprang to arms” (verse 3). With this kind of imagery, the song establishes a connection between the aims of the American Revolution and those of the suffrage movement, also claiming the men of the nation as “brothers” and thus drawing on a vision of the sexes as united for the cause of freedom.<sup>11</sup> Another song, by Harriet H. Robinson, takes the phrase “Columbia’s Daughters” for a title, its

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<sup>10</sup> In *Women Making America*, Heidi Hemming and Julie Hemming Savage offer a much-needed antidote to American history texts that write women out of the picture. Their multifaceted depiction of women’s presence in the Revolutionary War, for instance, is a startling and vivid reminder that women were very much present. Their description of the “camp followers” is particularly interesting. The American army had “thousands of women and children in its ranks,” some wives lucky enough to gain an official role as a “woman of the regiment” and awarded both pay and partial rations for themselves and their children, some following in an unofficial capacity with nowhere else to go (18). They endured a great deal, “[l]iving outside in all kinds of weather, emptying the bedpans of dying men, marching hundreds of miles, scrubbing crusty clothes, cooking for hundreds, and toting water to cool down firing guns,” all with children “tagging along” (19).

<sup>11</sup> Set to the tune, “John Brown,” this song “shows how woman suffrage flows naturally out of the traditions of American history” (Liner Notes 9). It was printed in the 1884 *Booklet of Song: A Collection of Suffrage and Temperance Melodies*, which was compiled by L. May Wheeler and published by Cooperative Printing Company in Minneapolis (Crew 82, 93).



chorus stating, “Brothers we must share your freedom, / Help us, and we will.”<sup>12</sup> Many other texts invoke the American rebellion as well, even without referring to the suffragists by this particular poetic turn of phrase. The 1876 song “The Yellow Ribbon,” with lyrics by Marie Le Baron,<sup>13</sup> takes the centennial as an opportunity to look back on history and to point out that the women are fighting still:

‘Tis just a hundred years ago our mothers and our sires  
Lit up, for all the world to see, the flame of freedom’s fires;  
Through bloodshed and through hardship they labored in the fight;  
Today we women labor still for Liberty and Right. (verse 1)

This song, like so many other American suffrage texts, pictures a country created and fought for by men and women laboring together equally; the implication is that, therefore, men and women alike should have equal voice in its maintenance – an impossibility while the franchise is restricted to one sex alone.

In addition to seeing themselves as citizens or citizens-to-be, suffragists also perceived themselves as educators, and they expressed an interest in pedagogy through all stages of the campaign. At times their educational efforts were aimed at the public, as they attempted to persuade and inform those indifferent or hostile to the cause, but they were equally invested in educating themselves and their allies. Besides distributing information in as many forms as possible, for instance, American suffragists held “Suffrage Schools” that served as training

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<sup>12</sup> Set to the tune, “Hold the Fort,” “Columbia’s Daughters” appears “in at least three different suffrage song collections, so we must assume its widespread popularity” (Liner Notes 3). It was included in the *South Dakota Equal Suffrage Songbook*, published in 1888 by the South Dakota Suffrage Association (Crew 108, 113); the November 15, 1889 “Song Leaflet” issue of the American Woman Suffrage Association’s *Woman Suffrage Leaflet* (117, 119); and the February 1897 issue of the *Woman Suffrage Leaflet* “Published Bi-Monthly at the Office of the Woman’s Journal, Boston, Mass.” (Crew 150-51).

<sup>13</sup> Like a number of suffrage songs, this one is set to a well-known tune: “Wearing of the Green” (Crew 66; Liner Notes 8).

programs for new activists. Programs for a two-week suffrage school held in December of 1913 appeared in *The Suffragist* that month; the sessions included lessons in history and law as well as in practical strategies for campaigning.<sup>14</sup> And suffrage schools continued into the final years of the movement, when the aim was ratification of the Nineteenth Amendment. The 1919 Handbook of the National American Woman Suffrage Association and Proceedings of the Jubilee Convention (the organization's fiftieth convention) mentions a number of suffrage schools held around the country during the final stretch of the long campaign. In South Dakota, for instance, the national organization held suffrage schools in seven different cities in the course of seventeen days, interspersing these with street meetings in nearby towns during the evenings (103). The Women's Franchise League of Indiana held a five-day suffrage school in Merom, Indiana, "preparatory to the work of obtaining signatures" (265). And the Iowa Equal Suffrage Association held a suffrage school at Penn College, Oskaloosa, which was attended by women from eight of the eleven local districts, who "returned to their homes stimulated to work for the ratification of the [federal] amendment" (267).

The pedagogical nature of the suffragists' work did not escape notice. A 1919 article in *The Independent*, viewing the extension of suffrage as by then an inevitability, comments on the "schooling" that led to this point; claiming that in response to the March 3, 1913 parade, "Washington proved an unruly scholar," the author indicates that things had changed in the six years since then: "Congress has learned its suffrage lesson. The President has learned his

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<sup>14</sup> In addition, for instance, to sessions about the history of women's voting and property rights in the middle ages (given by Dr. Annie Heloise Abel, Professor of History at Goucher College), a series of classes in law (given by Mrs. Nanette Paul, L. L. B., of the Faculty of Washington College of Law), and sessions on "The Industrial Position of Women" (given by Miss Mary Dreier, President of the Woman's Trade Union League of New York), there were a number of sessions on lobbying, campaigning, and other strategies. Of particular interest are the many sessions that focus on performance: Dr. Anna Howard Shaw held a session on "How to Interest an Audience"; Hazel MacKaye on "Suffrage Plays and Pageants"; and Mrs. Randolph Keith Forrest, a graduate of the Sargent School of Acting, offered a six-part course in "Vocal Culture and Public Speaking" ("Program of the Suffrage School: First Week" 26, "Program of Last Week of Suffrage School" 42).

suffrage lesson. And the women, while teaching the two, gained much valuable knowledge themselves” (“Woman Suffrage Marches” 174). The suffragists were very much aware of how much they were learning in their nontraditional classrooms. A poem from the British *Holloway Jingles* (1912) comments on this directly; Edith Aubrey Wingrove is referring to the prison and its suffragette prisoners when she writes, “There’s a strange sort of college, / And the scholars are unique, / Yet the lessons are important which they learn” (1-3). As Wingrove points out, the experience of participating in the suffrage movement was in itself an education.

What I explore in this study is the pedagogical side of suffrage literature, focusing in particular on the genres with a performance aspect because of the ways their claiming of public spaces echoes and reinforces the “lessons” about women’s rights and roles that the texts and the movement itself were providing; additionally, I believe that the educational transactions that take place in and through the writing and performance of these texts can offer insight into both current and historical ideas about feminist pedagogy. In Wingrove’s strange college, “the scholars are the teachers” (7), a disruption of hierarchy that retains enough intrigue to continue surfacing in discussions of feminist pedagogy in the current era. In what other ways do the suffragists anticipate later thinking about performance and pedagogy? How do their texts and performances dismantle hierarchical relationships or challenge ideology? In what ways do they moderate such challenges in the interest of intelligibility? And what, if anything, does this literary tradition have to teach us today? These are the questions that guide this exploration of suffrage literature. In the pages that follow, I first address the focus and scope of the project. Then, I discuss the importance of feminist recovery work, especially in light of the apprehension with which political literature has often been viewed. Finally, I summarize some of the ideas

about pedagogy and feminism that shape the thinking in this study and offer a definition for “social pedagogy,” the term I have chosen to refer to the work of suffrage literature.

### 1.1 SUFFRAGE LITERATURE AND PERFORMANCE: DEFINING AND SITUATING THE STUDY

Suffrage literature, it should be clear even from the small sampling of texts mentioned above, both participates in and intervenes against the ideological work of culture. It questions, it enacts, it reifies, it challenges; it is neither able to refute cultural norms entirely, nor to function without them, yet it encourages critique and participates in social change. It is a literature that engages with the social world directly, not only as subject matter, to be taken up and examined, but as material reality, to be prodded and improved. For this study, I have chosen to focus on those genres that have an explicit dimension of performance: the pageants and plays, and the songs and poems. Whether or not a given text was ever performed,<sup>15</sup> its genre nonetheless signaled it as “performable,” and thus as having the potential for additional levels of intervention into that world it critiqued and questioned. Pageants and plays were of course offered as theatrical performances, with female bodies onstage enacting both a material and an ideological intervention; but songs and poetry, too, were potential fodder for theater, and had the added possibility for spontaneous performance. The pedagogical relationship that arises between performers and audience, like that between writer and performers, offers a possibility of

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<sup>15</sup> Suffrage plays were sometimes published in periodicals, and these were likely to be read privately (though this did not necessarily preclude the possibility of performance). Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Something to Vote For* (1911), for example, was published in her paper, *The Forerunner*; and Alice E. Ives’s *A Very New Woman* (1896) appeared in *The Woman’s Column*. Friedl notes that while some suffrage plays “appear to have been closet dramas,” other plays – including Ives’s – were “published in widely read feminist journals with the intent to motivate suffrage organizations and perhaps even women’s clubs to perform them” (5). For an analysis of the journalistic drama of the British suffrage movement, see Susan Carlson’s “Comic Militancy: The Politics of Suffrage Drama.”

participating in disruptive “readings” of the social and political world; all members of the relationship are invited by the very fact of their coming together to explore the subject matter of the text (which, in suffrage literature, often dealt with women’s roles and identities), and also the implications of its performance. Jill Dolan comments on the “temporary communities” that theatrical production and performance construct as productive locations for such exploration; “[t]heatrical performance,” she notes, “offers a temporary and usefully ephemeral site at which to think through questions of the signifying body, of embodiment, of the undecidability of the visual, and of the materiality of the corporeal” (426). These questions may be useful to theater scholars today, as Dolan suggests, but they were no less useful to the suffragists, exploring the possibilities of visual display, embodiment, and vocal presence in variously “public” locations while aiming at “a voice” and “a presence” in the managing of their country.

Texts that attempt to intervene in this way are not always celebrated for such aims, a topic to which I will return soon in order to describe the importance of the recovery aspect of this project. In the introduction to her anthology of British suffrage literature, Glenda Norquay suggests, in fact, that “we may have lost sight of what it means to write as a direct intervention in public and political debate” (3). She describes this intervention, claiming that suffrage texts:

are, by the very nature of their subject matter, located in the public sphere. Created to convince the readers of their arguments, aimed at altering the structures of society, [they] contain voices which demand to be heard. Heated, committed, often unsubtle, the arguments that play across the pages still have the power to hold our attention, forcing us to question our own position on issues central to feminism today. (3)

The argument that all suffrage texts are public in terms of their content and aims is convincing, but the genres under consideration here were public in form as well; the performance genres could offer a literal embodiment of the ideological interventions described or proposed. Thus, suffrage literature (and its writers and performers) can be seen as enacting feminist claims to public space, and the suffragists, in addition to transgressing into male-coded territory,<sup>16</sup> contributed to theories for understanding this act.

In fact, the literature is particularly interesting for what it reveals about how early and emergent feminists understood and theorized gender and performance in ways that anticipate recent trends in theoretical approaches to these subjects. In *Feminist Theaters in the U.S.A.*, Charlotte Canning writes that “feminist theory . . . emerged contemporaneously with feminist theater” (182), and the history of suffrage spectacle in the form of plays and pageants supports this claim; theories about the objectifying gaze and the “naturalness” of the female body, for example, did not originate with second wave feminism, but existed in sophisticated forms during the suffrage era. In her critical history of *American Feminist Playwrights*, Sally Burke claims that playwrights “from Mercy Otis Warren on,” have called attention to the workings of the male gaze (3).<sup>17</sup> And in her study of the Pioneer Players (a London-based theater group that produced a number of plays promoting social reform between 1911 and 1925),<sup>18</sup> Katharine Cockin points out that the players actually “share more political ground with those who have questioned the category of gender in the 1990s than with the ‘women’s theatres’ of the 1970s” (*Women* 3). While these comments acknowledge the role suffrage theater performances have played in the

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<sup>16</sup> On gendered space, see Chapter 2 of Judith R. Walkowitz’s *City of Dreadful Delight*, which deals with “Contested Terrain,” and Doreen Massey’s *Space, Place, and Gender*.

<sup>17</sup> Warren, a Revolution-era playwright, would not have been identified as a feminist since the word was not in use in her time, but Burke’s inclusion of her in a genealogy of playwrights concerned with women’s rights makes sense.

<sup>18</sup> Edith Craig’s Pioneer Players was not solely or explicitly a suffrage organization, but it produced “numerous works exploring, in ways largely unavailable to other cultural forms, issues of concern for suffrage feminists” (Cockin, *Women* 6).

development of feminist theory, theatrical performances of other types are worth examining as well; the kinds of “temporary communities” Dolan discusses are also created in the briefer moment of performance needed for the recitation of a poem or the singing of a song. And these shorter genres of suffrage literature were often used to comment upon and create community in ways that anticipate second wave theories about feminist coalition.

In part, then, this project is an exploration of some of the ways suffragists theorized their own efforts – and of the ways some later feminist thinking about performance, gender, the “public,” identity and coalition, and pedagogy can be seen as having antecedents or roots in this earlier feminist movement. My work is both influenced by and builds upon Nancy Cott’s *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, which explores early feminist thinking in the United States; Linda K. Kerber’s *Toward an Intellectual History of Women*, which investigates ideology, citizenship, identity formation, and gender roles in early America; and Channing’s suggestion that feminist theory and feminist theater arose out of the same historical and social circumstances, perhaps even out of one another. In general, I am interested in the relationship between past and present, in the ways feminist ideas surface and re-surface over time, appearing new to second and third wave activists even though they were contemplated by women of centuries past. In particular, I am interested in the specific instances in which the suffrage literature under consideration here reveals an active engagement with feminist ideas that are alive and viable in the current era.

Although the suffrage movement was in many ways a transnational movement, with texts, ideas, strategies, and even individuals circulating regularly across the Atlantic Ocean, I have chosen to limit this study by focusing primarily on the American texts and performances; as a way of situating and comparing these texts, however, and because the traditions are never

fully separable, I also reference and quote from a number of British texts.<sup>19</sup> I made the decision to focus on the American tradition for two reasons. First is the simple fact that although not well known, suffrage literature is in fact an extensive tradition, and it would not be possible to do justice to both American and British suffrage literature in one dissertation, even while limiting the scope to the performance genres. The second reason is that while neither has been studied extensively, the American literature has received much less attention. A body of scholarship on British suffrage theater began to emerge<sup>20</sup> after Julie Holledge's 1981 history, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* offered chapters on the Actresses Franchise League and on the Pioneer Players and Dale Spender and Carole Hayman's 1985 collection, *How the Vote Was Won and Other Suffragette Plays* made the scripts of seven suffrage plays more readily

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<sup>19</sup> When discussing suffrage literature, I refer to the traditions as either American or British for the purposes of simplicity. Although the term "American" is arguably inaccurate, as I am considering only the suffrage literature of the United States, and not that of other countries in the American continents, its usage is the most common and therefore the easiest to employ. I use the term "British," on the other hand, when referring to that tradition as a whole (although I sometimes refer to an individual text as English), because while much of the literary production appears to have been centered in London, not all suffrage authors were necessarily English. The *Holloway Jingle* "To a Fellow Prisoner (Miss Janie Allan)," for instance, was probably written by Scottish suffragette Margaret McPhun (Norquay 176).

<sup>20</sup> Claire Hirschfield published several articles on suffrage plays and the Actresses' Franchise League in the years after *Innocent Flowers* was published: "The Actresses' Franchise League and the Campaign for Women's Suffrage 1908-1914" (1985); "The Suffragist as Playwright in Edwardian England" (1987); "The Suffrage Play in England 1907-1913" (1991); and "The Actresses' Franchise League in Peace and War: 1913-1918" (1994). A number of other scholars published work on British suffrage theater and/or playwrights after the Spender and Hayman anthology came out. Sheila Stowell's 1992 *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* devotes one chapter to suffrage drama in general, and a chapter each to four individual playwrights with varying degrees of involvement in suffrage theatre (Elizabeth Robins, Cicely Hamilton, Elizabeth Baker, and Githa Sowerby). Katharine Cockin's 1998 book chapter, "Women's Suffrage Drama," provides a nice overview of the subject. Claire M. Tylee's chapter, "'A Better World for Both': Men, Cultural Transformations, and the Suffragettes," which came out that same year, looks at the transformative possibilities of suffrage theater. Other essays include: Sowon S. Park's chapter, "'Doing Justice to the Real Girl': The Women Writers' Suffrage League" (2000); Carlson's chapter, "Comic Militancy" (2000), and article, "Portable Politics: Creating New Space for Suffrage-ing Women" (2001); and Christine Woodworth's "Cleaning the House: Working-class Women and Suffrage Drama" (2006). Some scholarship has focused on the work of American-born Elizabeth Robins, who took an active part in the British suffrage campaign; see Sue Thomas's "Sexual Matters and *Votes for Women*" (1997) and Joanna Townsend's "Elizabeth Robins: Hysteria, Politics and Performance" (2000). And work on the Pioneer Players is also relevant, though the group was not explicitly a suffrage theater group. See, for instance, Cockin's 2001 study, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players*, and Christine Dymkowski's 1992 chapter, "Entertaining Ideas: Edy Craig and the Pioneer Players." Preceding all of this is the chapter on "Women Writers and the Suffrage Movement" in Elaine Showalter's 1977 *A Literature of Their Own*, which includes some discussion of British suffrage theater.



available.<sup>21</sup> Bettina Friedl's 1987 American anthology, *On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement* may be spurring a correlating body of scholarship on the American plays, but although the two anthologies came out at approximately the same time, studies of American suffrage theater do not appear to have followed as readily. Nor has much critical attention been afforded the American songs or poetry thus far, even though Francie Wolff's 1998 "history in song," *Give the Ballot to the Mothers*, and Danny O. Crew's 2002 illustrated catalogue of *Suffragist Sheet Music* have made at least the former genre far more accessible. Interestingly, there has not been a great deal of attention paid to the British songs and poetry either, which indicates that there is a need for further scholarship on these genres.<sup>22</sup>

This project is also a continuation of the feminist recovery work of the 1970s and 1980s (which was itself a continuation of similar recovery work done by the suffragists).<sup>23</sup> Many scholars have contributed to the recovery of forgotten women writers, and such efforts continue, making it impossible to list them all as influences on my own work. However, I do want to note

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<sup>21</sup> The Spender and Hayman anthology of plays was followed in 1995 by Glenda Norquay's collection *Voices and Votes*, which includes excerpts and short texts from British suffrage novels, short stories, biographies, and poetry (though no plays). This, in turn, was followed in 2004 by Carolyn Christensen Nelson's *Literature of the Women's Suffrage Campaign in England*, which includes arguments for and against women's suffrage, excerpts from suffragists' biographies, suffrage poetry and songs, suffrage drama, and suffrage fiction. No correlating multi-genre anthology offering an overview of American suffrage literature is yet in print, although the first such anthology, edited by Mary Chapman and Angela Mills is forthcoming.

<sup>22</sup> The situation does appear to be changing during the period while this dissertation is being written; the 2009 Northeast Modern Languages Association conference in Boston included a panel on "American Suffrage Literature: Fostering a Field," and there are a few scholars currently involved, as I am, in the work of "fostering" this field.

<sup>23</sup> Suffragists noticed the erasure of female writers, inventors, and explorers from recorded history and made an effort to reclaim women's accomplishments in all fields. One interesting example can be found in an 1868 issue of *The Revolution*, which contains a letter describing in glowing terms the unsung contributions of Mrs. Green [born Catharine Littlefield], inventor of the cotton gin. Although the model was constructed by Eli Whitney, the letter states, Mrs. Green "originated the idea" and, knowing that Whitney had mechanical expertise, "suggested his doing the work." She also proposed the necessary change in the design when the wooden teeth employed in the first model were not a success (Gage 259), but she did not take out the patent in her own name because "to have done so would have exposed her to . . . contumely and ridicule" (260). Unfortunately, many school textbooks today still discuss Eli Whitney with no mention of Catharine Littlefield Green, an indication of the difficulties we face in efforts to change the "story" of history.

that this project has been influenced significantly by Judith Fetterley's<sup>24</sup> argument that recovery alone is not enough. In a commentary for the journal *American Literary History*, she explains that in her own 1985 *Provisions: A Reader from 19<sup>th</sup>-Century American Women*, she was attempting "to recover for contemporary readers and American literary history a variety of nineteenth-century women writers" (600). Yet, as Fetterley points out, "it will be all too easy for the texts we have recovered to disappear again from memory" and, indeed, to slip quietly back out of print. To prevent this, she argues, it is necessary also to write the critical biographies, the literary histories, and the criticism that take women writers and their writing seriously (605).<sup>25</sup> This project, then, aims to do both: to further the recovery of suffrage literature, much of which was written and performed by women, and also to make that literature the subject of scholarly inquiry that takes these women and their writing seriously. To this end, I am also influenced by Cary Nelson, whose scholarship is focused on the recovery and appreciation of political literature; "recovery alone," he writes, "is incomplete without a serious interpretive effort, preferably in the form of a dialogue among numerous critics" (2). Like Nelson, I believe that, despite dismissive attitudes towards "propaganda literature," political literature is interesting aesthetically as well as culturally. The exploration of the pedagogical aspects of suffrage literature in the chapters ahead, therefore, treats the texts as literary artifacts as well as cultural ones, attending to the relationship between textual elements and pedagogical outcomes.

The recovery work is nonetheless important in itself, however. Many of the American plays, some of the songs, and almost all of the poems remain difficult to locate, scattered as they are across a vast country, in small collections and historical societies as well as in larger

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<sup>24</sup> For an extensive list of other recovery efforts, see Fetterley, pp. 601-02.

<sup>25</sup> To do so, Fetterley explains, may mean finding "ways to revitalize modes of criticism no longer fashionable because these modes may represent stages in the process of literary evaluation that we cannot do without" (605).

depositories (for, though activism certainly centered around the major cities, localized suffrage efforts took place all across the United States, not just in Boston, or Washington D.C., or New York City). This perhaps partly explains why the British plays have received more critical attention than the corresponding American texts; while performances certainly took place outside that city, much of the suffragists' literary and performance work was London-based. With the work thus centralized, it may be that collecting the plays and getting a clear enough sense of the overall scope of the playwrights and performers' endeavors proved simply to be a more manageable and appealing project. Certainly, it would be no small challenge to acquire a comprehensive understanding of suffrage literary performance in America, where each state had its own centers of activist and literary production.<sup>26</sup> Another factor that facilitates work on the British plays is the professionalized and systematic manner in which British suffragists approached artistic production, at least in the later years of the movement when they began forming their own suffrage leagues. Like the visual artists, who formed an Artists' Suffrage League in 1907 and an arts and crafts society called the Suffrage At elier in 1909 (Tickner xi), the members of the theatrical profession also formed their own suffrage organizations. The Women Writers Suffrage League, founded in 1908 by playwrights Cicely Hamilton and Bessie Hatton, published a wide variety of suffrage literature and other written campaign materials (Stowell, *A Stage* 40).<sup>27</sup> That same year, the Actresses' Franchise League was also created; it formed a Play Department headed by Inez Bensusan, who oversaw the writing and publication of suffrage plays

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<sup>26</sup> Of course, it is also possible that the current "story" prioritizing London-based suffrage literature is itself a cultural product participating in the erasure of other traditions. It would be interesting to see scholarship addressing the question of whether there was a distinctly Welsh or Scottish suffrage literature, for instance.

<sup>27</sup> The WWSL included among its charter members Sarah Grand, May Sinclair, and Olive Schreiner. Elizabeth Robins was the group's first President (Stowell, *A Stage* 40).

(40, 42).<sup>28</sup> Such organizations kept records of their meetings, their members, their productions, and their finances, making it possible to trace many of their literary endeavors and theatrical performances.

American performances were often coordinated by general suffrage organizations or by private individuals rather than by writers' or actresses' suffrage leagues, with the result that any records kept of such performances are scattered, often sparsely. This is not to say that there were no American theater groups that focused at least in part on the production of suffrage plays. The Twenty-Fifth District Players, which included both professionals and amateurs and was organized by Reverend Marie Jenney Howe, toured the state of New York performing suffrage plays (Auster 83).<sup>29</sup> And a brief 1912 article in the *New York Times* mentioned that the "Woman Suffrage Party. . . [had] organized a regular stock company, under the direction of Mrs. Helen Griffith, to play in New York and nearby towns" that would "work on the same lines" as the Twenty-Fifth District Players ("Stock Co. for Suffrage" 3). It is possible that evidence of other such organizations can be found as well. Yet the fact remains that there was no clear central organization behind suffrage performances in America, and little is currently known about the theater companies that did exist.<sup>30</sup> In order to get a sense of what American suffrage performances were like, and to acquire copies of some of the texts that were performed, therefore, I found it necessary to supplement the material currently available in anthologies by completing some archival research. For the reasons mentioned above, this must necessarily be a

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<sup>28</sup> As differences arose within the suffrage movement regarding the appropriateness of the so-called "militant" tactics, the AFL maintained a policy of supporting *all* methods of fighting for the vote, thus attempting to situate themselves in such a way as to be able to work with the largest possible number of allies in the movement (Green 5).

<sup>29</sup> The Twenty-Fifth District Players was "the most prominent of the suffrage theater groups," according to Susan Glenn; its members included Mary Shaw, Fola LaFolette, and Caroline Caffin [sometimes spelled Coffin] (137).

<sup>30</sup> An exploration of the history and role of these theater companies is beyond the scope of this dissertation, but future work on this topic would make an important contribution to the field.

representative, rather than a comprehensive, study. Still, the archival research that went into the project does extend the field significantly.

I gathered materials from collections in several different states, which was a useful way of gaining a broader sense of the literary and performance endeavors of American suffragists. The Schlesinger Library at Radcliffe College houses an extensive collection of suffrage materials, especially – though not solely – from the Boston area; of particular interest are the scrapbooks of newspaper clippings and other ephemera (including saved poems or songs) and the collected papers of individual suffragists (who sometimes kept fliers for plays or meetings, and occasionally even authored a play or poem). The Schlesinger also houses microfilm copies of women’s rights newspapers, which sometimes printed literary pieces as well as news articles. The Indiana Historical Society holds records of Indiana’s different suffrage organizations, which contain occasional references to performances, or to plans for such performances – a useful reminder that such activities were not limited to the eastern cities. The Hillman Library at the University of Pittsburgh has an extensive collection of old periodicals, which enabled me to acquire many examples of commentary and public opinion regarding the suffragists as well as examples of suffrage literature that were offered in mainstream, rather than suffrage-related, publications. And the New York Public Library houses a number of suffrage and anti-suffrage plays, published originally in a variety of locations, including some smaller cities. In addition, the new digitized archives are beginning to make some of these materials more accessible. This work is still in the early stages, and categories such as “suffrage literature,” “suffrage plays,” “suffrage poetry,” and “suffrage songs” are also fairly new, which means that often, the texts are not catalogued or retrievable using these terms. But when it is possible to search for a known title, the online resources can be valuable sources of suffrage literature; I was able to acquire a

number of additional plays and both of Alice Duer Miller's collections of poetry from Internet Archive and Google Books. While the texts I have gathered make up only a percentage of the American suffrage tradition,<sup>31</sup> their breadth and variety does make it possible to observe some patterns in the writing and the performances and to begin the work of interpretation and analysis. That is what I aim to do in the following chapters. First, however, I want to address the cultural "forgetting" that makes this kind of archival work necessary.

## 1.2 THE (IN)DIVISIBILITY OF ART AND PROPAGANDA

Suffrage genres were ignored for many years, and because they were not intentionally preserved, some of the texts have disappeared for good. Spender believes that suffrage plays, "like so many other aspects of women's creative and cultural past" have "languished among the obscure and forgotten" not because of artistic deficiencies in the texts, but because inequality has continued despite the winning of the vote and therefore male-authored plays with good male roles continue to be more likely to be staged (13). Because suffrage plays, pageants, poems, and songs are also norm-challenging feminist texts in addition to being largely female-authored texts, it is possible that they were not merely forgotten, but that their erasure from literary history and theater history has been to some degree an intentional suppression, or at least an intentional forgetting. Elaine Aston claims in *An Introduction to Feminism and Theatre* that "the pattern of an historical 'silencing' of women's texts appears to occur whenever and wherever female authorship

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<sup>31</sup> Between the suffrage literature currently available in published anthologies and reprints and the texts I have acquired through archival research, I now have several hundred American songs, more than two hundred American poems, and over sixty American plays in my collection, some of them pro-suffrage, some anti, and some ambiguous.

critiques or ridicules the forms and ideologies of dominant culture” (15), and suffrage literature participated in just this sort of critique.

Despite the alternate explanations offered by Spender and Aston, the justification most frequently offered for dismissing politically engaged literature is that it *is* characterized by “artistic deficiencies.” Even during the suffrage movement, the assertion that suffrage plays and other dramatic performances about women’s rights “consisted of ‘propaganda’ rather than ‘art’” (Cockin, *Women* 41) was already being made; the cultural erasure of these texts, therefore, was occurring even from the moment the words were first set down on the page. A 1912 article by Rebecca West in *The Freewoman*, for instance, though written in a wry and witty style, nonetheless dismisses suffrage drama in familiar terms that reify “Art” as a special terrain not to be tampered with by those with a political agenda or attempted by those without proper genius:

Words are sacred, pen and ink are sacred, because of the noble uses they have been put to by artists, and propagandists who mishandle them ought to be punished for sacrilege. 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. (8)<sup>32</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> It is in Cockin’s work (see *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, p. 48) that I first encountered this passage. It comes from a highly arch and humorous negative review of the play, “A Modern Crusader” (not a suffrage play itself), that is also – branching off from the “crusade” of the play’s title – a dismissal of the proposed “home schools” where girls would “learn how to be good wives and mothers,” favoring instead the “aboli[tion of] the problem of domesticity” (9). *The Freewoman* was influential among early Modernists and became more concerned

West here establishes “artists” and “propagandists” as binary opposites, with only members of the former able to put words to “noble uses.” Echoes of this type of reverence for a form of “true” or “pure” art can be found across the decades, and despite the turn towards cultural studies in the academy, there is still some wariness regarding the inherent value of politically motivated art. This can be seen in the hesitance with which even those who study suffrage literature sometimes present the tradition. Burke describes American suffrage plays as “simplistic and didactic” (35), and Sheila Stowell writes that “the aesthetic limitations of [British] suffrage drama are readily apparent” (*A Stage* 71), thus positioning themselves as apologists, constrained by judgments like West’s even while the very fact of their scholarship proclaims the texts worthy of attention.<sup>33</sup>

Claims that political literature subordinates aesthetics and innovation, and that “art” and “propaganda” are discrete and opposing categories, have frequently served to de-legitimize and devalue women’s artistic production; Adrienne Rich refers to such claims as “the political declarations of privilege” (“Blood, Bread” 178), and Ann Ardis comments on the way they contribute to the devaluing of feminist literary works. She writes:

It is not insignificant that aesthetic theory began to valorize anti-representationality at exactly the point in time when women writers with overt feminist agendas were flooding the literary marketplace with ‘new’ novels, reaching more readers than ever before, and proselytizing for women’s rights as

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with literary modernism and less with feminism in its later iterations, first as *The New Freewoman*, and then as *The Egoist*. For more on the publication and its relationship to modernism, see Bruce Clarke’s *Dora Marsden and Early Modernism*.

<sup>33</sup> Particularly dismissive is Rachel France’s 1993 essay, “Apropos of Women and the American Theatre: The Suffrage Play.” She describes the plays as “often amateurish and naively polemic” (35), and finds them (and the entire suffrage movement) lacking, from a Marxist perspective.



effectively through their fiction-writing as through their political and social activism. (190)<sup>34</sup>

Ardis, and others, suggest useful reading strategies that take into account other factors besides aesthetics in order to appreciate more fully political texts by women. Wendy Mulford proposes that we consider the “social and political force” of literature (182). In her study of suffragette fiction, Maroula Joannou suggests that when reading suffrage literature, it is important to assess “its relationship to existing power structures and the wider social, historical and political relationships of which it forms a part” (Joannou 103). In short, they are suggesting that it is important to consider the *politics* of political literature, a reminder that is as useful as it is seemingly simple. I choose to interpret this not as a call to apply new measures and discard aesthetic ones, which would presume that aesthetic measures will necessarily find the texts lacking, but as a call to bring these additional considerations into the conversation. For propaganda and art, as Lisa Tickner puts it, are not reducible to a “crude division between the ideologically saturated and the ideologically pure,” and we can reject the binary “to the extent that we choose to recognize art as a cultural activity, and culture as the arena in which a society produces those representations that make sense of its world” (xi).

In viewing literature not as isolable from politics, but rather as integral to national identity, and pedagogy not merely as a form of training, but as a process of shaping individuals into their best selves, both physically and spiritually, the suffragists can be seen as part of a longer philosophical tradition. In *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture*, Warner Jaeger explains that, for the Ancient Greeks, cultural education was a process aimed “at fulfilling an ideal of what a man ought to be” (3). The measure of *areté* was different for women than it was for men,

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<sup>34</sup> For more on aesthetics and (de)valuations of women’s writing, see Rita Felski’s *Beyond Feminist Aesthetics*, Barbara Herrnstein Smith’s *Contingencies of Value* and Suzanne Clark’s *Sentimental Modernism*.

but even as they embraced for their own sex the heroic qualities tradition had allotted to the male, the suffragists did also continue to draw upon the tradition that “honors woman as the repository of high morality and old tradition” (23). Another point of interest is Jaeger’s comment that in Ancient Greece, the “trinity of poet, statesman, and sage embodied the nation’s highest ideal of leadership (xxvi). In cultural education, he explains, “the true representatives of paideia were not . . . the voiceless artists – sculptor, painter, architect – but the poets and musicians, orators . . . and philosophers” (xxvii). The voice, the uttered word, had the highest pedagogical potential.

The literature of the women’s suffrage movement, like the art from other political movements, is self-consciously grounded in its historical moment, representing the political atmosphere from the point of view of a citizen-insider, someone who is living through and attempting to navigate the moment that is being portrayed in the art. In Tickner’s terms, it is a set of representations whose role is the making of sense, the creating of understanding. In Jaeger’s terms, it can be seen as a component of cultural education, the process of developing individuals into their “best selves” and thereby into ideal citizens. Because suffrage writers and performers *were* so conscious of their presence and participation in a specific era, and in fact embraced the political nature of their work, it is particularly important to understand that the meaning of the word “propaganda” was not static during this period. Suffragists saw their efforts to create politically engaged literature in a positive light; they perceived themselves as citizens involved in a creative act of civic responsibility, not as hack writers degrading their art by dirtying it with politics.<sup>35</sup> This definitional tension is important; questions about who is given

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<sup>35</sup> The Pioneer Players, for instance, made the production of “propaganda” one of their explicit aims. Although their efforts were reported in positive terms in suffrage papers, the mainstream national newspapers “invariably used ‘propaganda’ as a derogatory term” (Cockin, *Women* 7).

the right to define a work's value (whose use of the term "propaganda," for instance, is privileged) echo questions about the power dynamics involved in the notion that the political and the aesthetic are – or should be – separable.

Whose work and which types of work are excluded by such distinctions? And what are the ideological underpinnings of this exclusion? Such questions underlie any feminist recovery project, and serve as a useful reminder that our systems for placing value on creative production are never neutral. As Joannou and June Purvis explain, "The notion that the art, writing or music of the suffrage era was disfigured by its feminist politics must depend in part on a formalist valorization of style over content and in part on the abstraction of art from the history of the social relations in which it participates" ("Introduction" 11). Approaches that valorize style over content or that attempt to separate art from the social world miss the point entirely when it comes to understanding suffrage literature. That is not to say that the best way to appreciate this art is to reverse the approach, to focus so intently on content and on the social role that style is overlooked altogether, and so, in the chapters that follow, I consider the formal elements of the texts as well as (indeed as part of) their pedagogical function.

### 1.3 SUFFRAGE LITERATURE AS SOCIAL PEDAGOGY

I use the term "social pedagogy" to refer to pedagogy as social action. As I explained earlier in this chapter, suffragists understood themselves to be part of a larger community and were very much invested in its success and progress; professionals and amateurs alike felt a civic responsibility to contribute to a project they believed would improve their country as well as advancing the sex, and through suffrage literature, they found a way to do so. Because their

project aimed at improving the rights and status of women, the social pedagogy they engaged in was inherently a feminist one, and it is interesting to consider its relationship to more recent ideas about feminist and other related pedagogies. I am not the first to observe that suffrage performances played a pedagogical role. Claire Tylee notes that performances can both reinforce ideologies and create the potential for change; she refers to the use of theater and representation as “one of the main vehicles for transmitting social values and for challenging them” (140). And Stowell argues that theater criticism and theater itself were both pedagogical endeavors (174); she explains that pro-suffrage critics saw the theater as offering “a platform for powerful dissent, a literal stage for the criticism of current orthodoxies, and a highly visible venue for participants to display either conversion to or reaffirmation of the suffrage cause” (“Suffrage Critics” 169). But, while some have acknowledged the pedagogical role and potential of suffrage literature and performance, nobody has thus far examined it in depth, and that is the aim of this study: to ascertain just what was being taught and how it was communicated.

In both content and approach, this pedagogical project is one we would now label “feminist.” In her entry on the topic in the *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women*, Frances A. Maher writes that feminist pedagogy is “rooted in the women’s liberation movement of the 1960s,” and particularly in the phenomenon of consciousness-raising groups (1523), but an exploration of suffrage literature and performance suggests that its roots actually extend much further back. The term “feminist pedagogy” is a fairly new one,<sup>36</sup> yet existing definitions offer a general agreement that, as Galina Laurie and Jen Skattebol explain in their entry for the

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<sup>36</sup> At the time of writing this, the term “feminist pedagogy” has not yet been included in the *Oxford English Dictionary* (nor has “feminist theory,” although, interestingly, there are entries for “queer theory” and “queer theorist”). However, several feminist resources have offered definitions and/or encyclopedia entries for “feminist pedagogy.” See the *Historical Dictionary of Feminism* (1996), by Janet K. Boles and Diane Long Hoeveler; the *Women’s Studies Encyclopedia* (1999), edited by Helen Tierney; and the *Routledge International Encyclopedia of Women* (2000), edited by Cheri Kramer and Dale Spender.

Routledge encyclopedia, “[f]eminist pedagogies occur at the interface of feminisms and emancipatory education theories” and developed “out of a western, historical concern about women’s exclusion from and experience of discrimination within masculinist educational institutions.” Their focus is on access, equity, and “the recovery of subjugated knowledge,” and they are “part of a more general cross-cultural, historical tradition in education” that views “social justice as a central concern” (1524-25).

It is logical that the suffragists would turn to theatrical genres as part of their pedagogical project. According to Lynne Conner, the broader impulse towards using theater as both an educational and persuasive force coincided with the later decades of the suffrage movement and increased in momentum in the twentieth century. Theater held such appeal as a pedagogical opportunity that suffragists even ventured into mainstream shows, persuading managers to allow them to make speeches during intermission – a trespass which caused one writer to complain, “The theater is no place to get real ideas, and it is to be hoped that women in the audience will show their disapproval by following haughtily in the footsteps of the male sex who scud out between the acts” (“The Drama”). Believing that, contrary to this individual’s opinion, theater was in fact an excellent place “to get real ideas,” suffragists embraced performance, creating again and again those “temporary communities” that, according to Dolan, enable questioning and exploration. Feminist scholars have since articulated the idea that pedagogical spaces can exist in many forms and pervade our lives and social interactions. Carmen Luke writes in *Feminisms and Pedagogies of Everyday Life* that teaching and learning are “the very intersubjective core relations of everyday life” and that they “exist beyond the classroom” and “are always gendered and intercultural” (“Introduction” 7). Already participating as both teachers and scholars in what

Rich would later refer to as the “women’s university-without-walls,”<sup>37</sup> suffragists were also attentive to the gender dynamics in a pedagogical exchange, working to find ways of tuning their delivery to make it possible for their lessons to be heard.

The “curriculum” offered by suffrage literature and performances can be divided into two categories. The first is the dispensing of straightforward information, educating audiences (especially women) by providing information the suffrage authors deemed it important for them to know; such lessons might include practical information about how to cast a vote or historical or legal information about women’s position in society. The second category is perhaps a more complicated form of pedagogy, encouraging audiences to question ideology and think in new ways about women, gender, and society. Some aspects of this curriculum were certainly intentional, but the literature and its performances can also be seen to offer lessons that were probably not explicitly intended and yet furthered the overall pedagogical project in interesting ways. Besides teaching others, the suffrage writers and performers were themselves learning a great deal in their “strange sort of college,” positioned in their own project as both “scholars” and “teachers.” Norquay refers to “the educative experience of campaigning” and explains that, especially since many working for the vote had also struggled hard to gain access to education for women, “the concept of their own educative community, dedicated to a shared aim, was strongly attractive” (24). Understanding the importance of this education for themselves, they sought ways to share it. The suffrage literature and performances that enabled them to do so contributed to both of the curricular tracks, often at the same instance. To illustrate this, it will be helpful to point out several ways their efforts align with aspects of what we know today as feminist pedagogy.

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<sup>37</sup> See her “Toward a Woman-Centered University,” p. 126.

First, suffrage literature engages women as potential agents of social change and as citizens (or citizens-to-be) of the society they are working to change. To this end, “social pedagogy” is a pedagogy of respect, one that acknowledges the agency of its students/practitioners and promises to help equip them more fully for their work. It participates in conversations about democracy and education that have continued from the time of the suffrage movement forward. Maher points out that “the principles behind the development of feminist pedagogy . . . reflect many strands of education thought,” including the ideas of John Dewey and Paulo Freire (1526). Freire’s 1982 call for “education as the practice of freedom,” for instance, led to the variously labeled “liberatory,” “critical,” “oppositional,” or “radical” pedagogies (Fitts 169) out of which current feminist pedagogy developed. And Augusto Boal’s *Theatre of the Oppressed*, which arises out of Freire’s work, makes the connection between pedagogy and performance explicit. As Maher explains, however, “Freire [and others] assumed that the oppressed, and their teacher allies, would all speak with the same voice, ignoring the multiplicity of identities and the ways the working class subjugated women” (1526). Current-day feminist pedagogy therefore both borrows from and adds to critical pedagogies, using their “omissions” as “starting points” (Laurie and Skattebol 1525). Although feminist teachers do share Dewey’s and Freire’s “commitments to students’ empowerment,” they also “claim a particular commitment to women students, a concern with gender as a category of analysis for their teaching practices, and a notion that women and men (and by extension other diverse groups) might have divergent needs and interests in the classroom” (1526). These ideals upon which both critical and feminist pedagogies rest, however, are also evident in the much earlier pedagogical efforts of the suffragists. Although their “students” included men as well as women, suffrage writers and performers were especially attentive to women, and the texts give a sense of

the kinds of lessons they felt would meet the needs of the female students in their ephemeral “classrooms.” Drawing on their own valuations of civic responsibility, they offered as content historical information, legal information, and facts about female contributions and accomplishments that would make for a more informed, prepared citizen; at the same time, the texts offered an implied lesson that a citizen thus prepared also had the power to effect change in her world.

Second, suffrage literature and performance invite egalitarian relationships with their audiences while also asserting that women could have authority. Looking at the more recent women’s theater movement of the 1970s and 1980s, Canning points out that feminist theaters “did not perceive themselves as theater based on a model of seduction or mystification” or view their audiences as “unwilling masses to be led or ignorant pupils awaiting instruction” (188). This vision of the audience as having agency and intelligence, as taking an active rather than a passive role, is congruent with descriptions of the student to be found, for instance, in Freire’s work on liberatory pedagogy and in Boal’s on theater-based pedagogy. Suffrage writers appear often to have imagined audience members as having such agency, inviting them to view themselves as potential authors or performers themselves, but also inviting them to think about gender and thus to participate in cultural meaning-making by re-imagining one of the central factors in the organization of a society.

There are obstacles in such an approach; as scholars who write about feminist pedagogy have pointed out, making the Freirean step of setting aside traditional authority roles is an entirely different process for a female teacher,<sup>38</sup> and when authority is already tenuous at best, it

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<sup>38</sup> See, for instance, Sheila Minn Hwang’s “At the Limits of My Feminism: Race, Gender, Class, and the Execution of a Feminist Pedagogy” and Elizabeth Flynn’s “Strategic, Counter-strategic, and Reactive Resistance in the Feminist Classroom.”



is not necessarily a productive move. A study comparing authoritarian and collaborative modes of teaching showed that students saw professors who employed the latter as less competent (Ashton-Jones and Thomas 99-100). Already disenfranchised, suffragists were seeking to convince the general public that they *could* speak with authority and be taken seriously. Suffrage writers and performers found useful ways to negotiate the seemingly conflicting aims of authorizing their audience and enacting female authority themselves. By positioning themselves as authorities – but not as authoritarians – they were able to bridge this gap. And by experimenting with position in a spatial sense, they were able to disrupt expectations and create new relationships with their audience. Catherine Burroughs writes that “because experiments with space are primarily political acts, they provide the cornerstone for feminist pedagogy,” adding that “if educators can become more sensitive to the dynamic created by repositioning bodies in space, then the patriarchal system we worry about recreating despite our pedagogical philosophy can be more quickly and surely undermined” (13). Suffrage performances experimented with this type of disruptive repositioning in a number of ways. As Lynda Hart points out, even today, “many women playwrights continue to use stage space in conventional ways,” putting women in the margins, at the edges, in balconies, etc. (9), but in suffrage performances, women quite often took center stage. This, combined with the fact that society women began taking part in performances, would have closed the distance between the stage and the middle-class woman audience member. In the later years of the movement, Edith Craig began urging for the creation of “new theatre spaces which, liberated from the constraints of the proscenium stage, might unite performer and audience” and where “the audience should be an integral part of the play, and feel that it is in it, not merely looking on” (Cockin, *Women* 172).

But, in some of their theatrical and pedagogical endeavors, the suffragists were already doing just that.

Third, suffrage literature entails a unique feminist literacy act, whereby women, in significant numbers, come to view themselves as writers (or as singers, actors, or performers) out of a sense of civic responsibility; this act would then demonstrate to other women their own potential for such public roles, in a circular and escalating process that also calls into question many ideas about women's supposed "natures." It is noteworthy that during the suffrage movement so many women, even those without any experience as writers or performers, felt both called upon and empowered to contribute by creating in the literary arts. It appears that there was a sense of suffrage literature as a kind of public art – public in the sense that it was performed publicly, but also in the sense of being publicly "owned," not private or professionally controlled – a "people's art" with the built in lesson that women are "people." The suffrage movement seems to have engendered a sense that anyone could (and should) try her hand at writing, a sense of possibility that was of course tempered by class, as the very real limitations of a working woman's life decreased the likelihood that she would become an author, but was important all the same.<sup>39</sup> The historical period created an opportunity for women to see authorship as the purview of all, not the restricted terrain of a gifted few. And when a woman who had not previously composed a poem or crafted a play had her work performed, her amateur status served as an invitation to others to take part and to imagine themselves, also, as potential

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<sup>39</sup> Critics at times conflated feminism with other "isms," particularly socialism, as a way to dismiss or discredit the suffrage movement. For a discussion of this, see Jane Jerome Camhi's *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*, p. 67. In actuality, the movement was not, overall, a socialist endeavor; still, a number of its members considered themselves to be socialists, and many of its middle-class activists strove to ensure that working women were informed about and involved in the movement.

authors. In this way, “author” status was claimed by suffragists as an accessible and logical identity for women.

And, fourth, suffrage literature and its performances assert the value of both individual and communal ways of being that counter accepted beliefs about gender, embodying during the suffrage era theories regarding coalition and selfhood that were later discussed in second wave feminism. Suffragists’ visions of coalition became material reality before the eyes of the audience as women joined forces on stage to form a sisterhood of activists committed to social justice at a play performance, or perhaps joined their voices in song at an outdoor demonstration. Their representations of unity offered lessons not only in what might be possible if women would band together, but also in ways of “doing” gender that transcended limiting and limited cultural norms. And their coalitional politics was not a blind approach to activism. Suffragists were never unaware of the differences among women that might make their coming together difficult; like the coalitional efforts of more recent feminists, they made attempts to cross identity boundaries (especially class boundaries) that were sometimes successful and at other times problematic. Such work is difficult in any era. In her 1981 “Coalition Politics: Turning the Century,” Bernice Johnson Reagon notes that “our primary cultural signals come from some other factors than that we are women” (361), an observation that was no less accurate – and no less a challenge – during the suffrage movement. Similarly, Drucilla Cornell explains that in second wave consciousness-raising efforts, she and others “saw ourselves as creating new representations of ourselves as a group without minimizing the differences of race, class, ethnicity, and national backgrounds among us” in meetings that were “as often about contest and profound disagreement as they were about agreement” (44, 42). Coalition work is by its very nature a messy and contested process rather than a polished finished product, which can make it

easy to overlook the importance of the suffragists' contributions to ideas about female identity. Yet suffrage literature offers frequent depictions of both individual women and women in coalitional groups that challenge accepted beliefs about gender and nature.

In all of these ways, the work of suffrage writers can be seen to anticipate and correlate with later feminist theories and pedagogical aims. The work of this study is to explore these connections in detail, to gain a clearer understanding of suffrage literature and its pedagogical project, and in the process, to discover what it has to teach us about pedagogy more generally. In the chapters that follow, I consider the content and formal elements of the texts themselves as well as – when possible – some aspects of their performances, grounding the discussion in the feminist and pedagogical theories discussed above. In the first half of this study, I introduce and explore the genres of pro-suffrage literature under consideration, devoting one chapter to the plays and pageants and another to the songs and poems in order to allow for the type of focused attention that reveals the ways their pedagogical projects differ as well as what they have in common. Chapter 2 analyzes the feminist appropriation of spectacle in suffrage pageants and plays; in this chapter, I trace suffrage performers' presence over the years in increasingly public venues and consider the ways their bodies both served a pedagogical function in society and illuminated women's complicated relationship to the concept of "citizenship." After analyzing a variety of plays by different authors for their participation in the kinds of pedagogical projects discussed above, I turn to the pageants of Hazel MacKaye as an illustration of one suffrage writer's efforts to stretch both the formal and pedagogical elements of performance while remaining accessible and intelligible to her audience. Chapter 3 turns to the shorter genres, examining how the poems and song lyrics, like the plays, called into question a "natural order" and, as a readily accessible form of public literature, had the potential to carry reverberations of

this kind of questioning into society at large. Because there are far more poems and songs in existence than could be given careful consideration in a single study and because so little scholarship on these genres has thus far been written, this chapter must of necessity limit its scope. Aiming for depth rather than breadth, this chapter therefore considers the pedagogical aspects of one suffrage organization's use of song and poetry, as evidenced in the pages of its newspaper. Reading the lyrics and poems printed in the pages of *The Suffragist* as exemplifying what Cary Nelson labels a "choral poetics," I consider the lessons this particular subset of suffrage poetry and song offers about coalitional relationships and individual female strength.

In the second half of this project, I consider the criticism that suffragists faced, the roles this criticism played in the maintenance of normative systems of gender, and the ways suffrage writers engaged with it, stepping back to consider the larger rhetorical context within which suffrage literature existed in order to understand more fully the pedagogical project in which it was engaged. Chapter 4 turns to the critiques found in newspapers, magazines, and other forms of mainstream media – critiques which can be understood as having a pedagogical role of their own. In this chapter, I examine patterns in the negative verbal and visual imagery used to depict women's rights activists, arguing that the intensity of the critique is indicative of a society undergoing a period of significant cultural flux, and therefore one that is potentially receptive of the suffragist's pedagogical project. I also consider the positive alternative imagery created by the suffragists to offer images of women activists as both feminine and heroic, teaching potential converts as well as critics that female agency need not be interpreted as a complete overthrow of cultural norms. Chapter 5 continues the exploration of anti-suffrage critique, emphasizing the extent to which this sort of imagery and criticism could be found in literary genres as well as in other forms by focusing on plays that depict suffrage and/or its advocates in a negative light.

Just as the suffrage writers' efforts often participated in and furthered cultural norms regarding gender even as they engaged in a pedagogical project aimed at creating significant change, the writers of these plays often contributed lessons about female agency and feminist potential even as they criticized the suffragists. In this chapter, I examine both the normative "gender lessons" and this additional aspect, the disruptive "accidental pedagogy" to be found in anti-suffrage plays, considering also some ways suffragists appropriated the "anti" position to their own ends.

Finally, Chapter 6 offers some conclusions about what the "social pedagogy" of suffrage literature, as explored in this project, might suggest more generally about teaching, about political literature, and about the ways we understand our own era's contributions to feminist theory and pedagogy. Overall, this project is a study of the transgressive possibilities of producing literature *as a citizen* – in Rich's terms, of "mixing politics with art" ("Blood, Bread" 178). It considers the role of art and the artist within society, focusing in particular on the performance genres of suffrage literature in order to examine the pedagogical aspects of a body of work that offers women a public voice, that engages with politically charged ideas, and that endeavors to effect social change.

## 2.0 POLITICAL BODIES: SPECTACLE AND PEDAGOGY IN SUFFRAGE THEATER

“Alone among all literary productions, the theatre’s medium is the physical body – the virtual corporality of the text makes the drama unique.”

-Lynda Hart, *Making a Spectacle*<sup>40</sup>

“Forty-nine women, picked for their statuesque beauty, and forty-nine men, selected for their Adonis-like proportions, will be present in couples representing the forty-eight states and Alaska.”

-from a description of the suffrage pageant,  
*A Dream of Freedom*<sup>41</sup>

“A pageant has more power to convince people of the truth of our cause than any other means. A pageant is a forceful and vivid form of drama. It combines the medium of the spoken word, the dance, pantomime, stirring music, masses of people in striking costumes, strong contrasts in situation, in its appeal. It is an intensely moving thing to witness.”

-Hazel MacKaye, prominent suffrage  
pageant director<sup>42</sup>

In the campaign for the vote, suffragists experimented with a wide variety of techniques whose attention-getting power derived from the spectacle of the female body on display in public space. The range of these performances is evidence of the creativity and energy of the movement’s participants. From the seemingly impromptu street-corner speeches in which an individual woman addressed a crowd to the vast and carefully choreographed parades and pageants, from defiant hunger strikes and picketing efforts to comic one-act plays and vaudeville shows,

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<sup>40</sup> From Hart’s introduction to the 1989 collection of essays on women’s theater she edited, p. 5.

<sup>41</sup> The pageant, talks to be given by Theodore Roosevelt and Anna Howard Shaw, and a parade and meeting to be held the next day are all mentioned briefly in a May 2, 1913 Associated Press article titled “Roosevelt to Talk Suffrage Tonight.” The pageant was held that night at the Metropolitan Opera House.

<sup>42</sup> From MacKaye’s “Pageants as a Means of Suffrage Propaganda,” p. 6.

suffragists explored the many possibilities of employing the female body as spectacle. While all of these could be fruitful topics for study, I focus here on the genres that illustrate the suffragists' conviction that it was productive to combine the literary with the political. Looking at a sampling of plays and pageants, I examine the complexities of suffragists' use of spectacle and display, arguing that suffrage performers' "political bodies" served a pedagogical function in society and illuminated women's problematic relationships to the concept of "citizenship."

The role of spectacle in suffrage theater has received surprisingly little attention. Existing scholarship tends to focus either on spectacle or on drama, but not on the relationship between the two. Lisa Tickner's *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign, 1907-1914* explores the visual aspects of the British campaign but focuses primarily on arts and crafts (including painting, drawing, and fabric arts) and on the display inherent in parades and other public demonstrations. Similarly, in *Spectacular Confessions: Autobiography, Performative Activism, and the Sites of Suffrage, 1905-1938*, Barbara Green notes that suffragists conscripted a variety of different public spaces during their campaign, often through theatrical/spectacular performances, but she does not focus on theater itself, arguing that the plays, pageants, and skits are not as politically effective as other genres. Historical studies of the relationship between suffrage and theater, on the other hand, make an invaluable contribution to the recovery of information about the plays, performances, and people involved but do not examine in detail the role theater played as political spectacle.<sup>43</sup> This chapter bridges the gap,

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<sup>43</sup> Relevant histories include Sheila Stowell's *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era*, which discusses suffrage drama and feminist playwrights in Britain; Albert Auster's *Actresses and Suffragists: Women in the American Theater, 1890-1920*, which traces the relationship between theater and suffrage in the United States; and Bettina Friedl's anthology, *On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement*, which offers a brief but detailed historical overview of the performances and historical context of some suffrage plays in its introduction.



examining the role of the female body as spectacle in suffrage theater and exploring the relationship between activism and performance.

In part, the power of suffrage spectacle lay in the degree to which the events were performed in spaces that could be deemed “public.” As Carole Pateman notes, “the dichotomy between the private and the public is central to almost two centuries of feminist writing and political struggle” (118). The extensive body of feminist historical work on women and the public sphere confirms Pateman’s claim. Women have “never been completely excluded . . . from public life,” as she explains; yet, “the way in which women are included is grounded, as firmly as their position in the domestic sphere, in patriarchal beliefs and practices” (132). Work for the vote was spurred by the hope that this pattern could change, and much suffrage literature functions explicitly by calling the notion of separate spheres into question. The genres examined here do so not only in their content, which often addresses the desire of women to have a voice in the political realm via the vote, but also in their form, as these plays and pageants were performed in spaces that ranged from the semi-public arena of a middle-class parlor filled with guests to the fully public arena of Pennsylvania Avenue and the Treasury Building in Washington, D.C.

In the following pages, I examine the relationship between suffrage spectacle and social pedagogy. This chapter considers several of the ways American suffrage plays (a genre frequently dismissed for its didacticism) are actually much more complex pedagogically than is usually acknowledged and anticipate ideas that appear in later theories about performance and pedagogy. As an illustration of the ways suffrage writers worked to find a balance between pushing boundaries and remaining accessible enough to reach their audiences, I also discuss the work of Hazel MacKaye, the most prominent figure in American suffrage pageantry. The

performances of these plays and pageants educated audiences about women's history (and particularly about patterns of injustice), about the problems inherent in separate spheres ideology, about women's potential for agency in the struggle for their own rights, and about the value of coalition. Such teaching could have been done through essays and news articles (indeed, it often was), but the spectacular aspect of the theater genres, the presence of female performers' bodies on display before an audience, creates a different type of pedagogy altogether. This pedagogy functioned in several ways. Among other things, suffrage plays and pageants employed spectacle as a way of engaging the heart and the mind simultaneously, manipulated and subverted the woman-as-object aspect of spectacle, experimented with form and introduced realism into portrayals of women's lives and women's history, and created works that were intentionally didactic in some traditional ways and yet also represented a complex feminist form of pedagogy.

## 2.1 THE EMBODIED SIGNATURE: SPECTACLE AS SUFFRAGE STRATEGY

The term "spectacle,"<sup>44</sup> when mentioned in the context of the women's suffrage movement, immediately evokes images of the tremendous parades<sup>45</sup> that filled public avenues with marching

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<sup>44</sup> It is important to note that definitions and connotations of the word differ significantly. In theater-specific usage, according to Patrice Pavis, meanings of the term, which refers to "the visual aspects of the theatre phenomenon," vary across time (346). In the nineteenth century, the (impermanent) visual performance was understood as "opposed to the deep, lasting nature of the text" (347), and although performance and text were later considered to be of equal importance, echoes of this earlier conceptualization are present in current-day definitions that dismiss spectacle as frivolous, such as the *Oxford English Dictionary's* "a piece of stage-craft or pageantry, as contrasted with real drama." Pavis adds that theater is "often accused of making sacrifices for the spectacular, i.e. seeking facile effects or masking the text and reading beneath a mass of visual signs" (348). Such definitions, with their high art/low art distinction, may well have contributed to the overall lack of critical attention suffrage plays and pageants have received. However, many common-usage definitions are more neutral. The *American Heritage Dictionary* defines a spectacle as "something that can be seen or viewed, especially something of a remarkable or

women and curious onlookers. These parades were themselves a form of theater, carefully choreographed and directed, and in order to understand more fully the pedagogy of the plays and pageants, it is therefore useful to consider the suffragists' harnessing of spectacle in these mass performances – and their understanding of the concept itself. In an article published in *Votes for Women* in 1910, Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence used the word to describe the British suffrage parades, claiming that “all London comes out to see them, and those that see the amazing spectacle of two miles of women – women of every class, of every profession and calling – realize perfectly well that they represent a very great and widespread and irresistible demand” (qtd. in Tickner 55). Indeed, the American suffragists perceived, there was a unique kind of power in a performance that filled the eye and filled the streets with female bodies.

Although earlier American suffrage parades had been held in New York, the March 3, 1913 parade in Washington, D.C. that was timed to coincide with President Wilson's arrival for his inauguration is one of the best remembered. Paired with Hazel MacKaye's pageant, *The Allegory*, this parade “stirred Washington deeply” according to one writer for *The Suffragist* (Flanagan 8). Making the spectacle visually appealing was part of the strategy, and in a 1919 article reflecting on “The Woman's Party and Pageantry,” Annie G. Porritt was happy to point

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impressive nature” and as “a public performance or display, especially one on a large or lavish scale.” The *Merriam Webster* definition is similar, with the additional caveat that the public display be “eye-catching or dramatic.” Interestingly, the correlating negative definitions focus on the poor judgment of an individual person being looked at, and do not refer to large-scale, orchestrated displays at all. *American Heritage* suggests “a regrettable public display, as of bad behavior,” and *Merriam Webster* refers to “an object of curiosity or contempt,” offering as illustration the all-too-familiar phrase, “made a spectacle of herself.” It is this latter definition that interests feminist scholars who consider the daring of suffragists' decisions to appear in public, attentive to what Lynda Hart refers to as “the warning generally given to women to avoid having attention drawn to themselves, a prohibition against being publicly seen and heard” (1). Surprisingly, the 1913 *Merriam Webster* does not include these negative definitions, despite what amounted to a cultural taboo on performance and self-presentation by women; it identifies spectacle as “extraordinary, or as unusual and worthy of special notice; a remarkable or noteworthy sight; a show; a pageant; a gazingstock.”

<sup>45</sup> For an analysis of the suffrage parades as a rhetorical strategy, see Jennifer L. Borda's 2002 “The Woman Suffrage Parades of 1910-1913: Possibilities and Limitations of an Early Feminist Rhetorical Strategy.” For more on the suffragists' public demonstrations, see Linda J. Lumsden's 1997 *Rampant Women: Suffragists and the Right of Assembly*.

out that “the National Woman’s Party has a genius for picturesque effect” – or rather, that its members included many women of genius who contributed their skills and artistry; she writes that every demonstration, mass meeting, or pageant since the 1913 parade “has been characterized by the beauty and the high symbolic meaning that were first seen in the streets of Washington” on that day (7). That the NWP intended its visual displays to be educational as well as pleasing is evident in Porritt’s further comment that the organization “has always beauty and a serious lesson to offer to the onlooking public” (7).

But what was the relationship between the performance and the lesson? How did spectacle function as a pedagogical strategy? In part, it was the very fact of the material body that gave these “lessons” their power. The women’s visible, corporeal presence lent an authority that other forms of communication did not have. Noting a shift in campaign tactics from the collection of signatures on petitions to the organization of attention-getting public demonstrations, Tickner characterizes the British suffragists’ “taking to the streets” in large part as a response to Prime Minister Asquith’s demand for “proof” that a significant number of women wanted the vote. She suggests that suffragists responded to the challenge by “embodying their political commitment” in public displays such as parades (55).<sup>46</sup> In the American campaign too, as news articles in suffrage-era magazines and journals frequently noted, women found themselves called upon to offer some sort of “proof” that they either did or did not want the vote.<sup>47</sup> Public displays, where a woman’s body could stand in, literally, for her word, were a logical next step. As Tickner explains it, the women’s physical presence in a parade offered a

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<sup>46</sup> Tickner argues that organizers of the British suffrage spectacles were drawing consciously on precedent, influenced by state ritual and the “invented traditions” surrounding the British monarchy, by labor-movement activities, and by an “Edwardian fascination with pageantry” in general (56).

<sup>47</sup> American suffragist Frances Boardman Squire Potter sensed not only a call to prove that women supported suffrage, but also a call to indicate clearly that theirs was not a selfish desire, but rather one aimed at improving the world. In a typed manuscript titled “Womanhood and Woman,” she explains that “the burden of proof is upon us, that what we desire is for the certain betterment of existing conditions” (n.p.).

powerful response to objections that petitions “were fraudulent or signed in ignorance and haste” (55); they provided through spectacle what I would argue constituted an embodied signature, one impossible to forge.

It is evident that suffragists – and the “onlooking public” – perceived each individual woman’s body as “counting” in an important way; numbers figure prominently in descriptions of their public demonstrations. The March 3, 1913 parade in Washington was reported to have included eight thousand women marchers (Flanagan 8). Just two months later, the May 3 parade in New York was expected to be “the greatest woman suffrage parade ever held – 30,000 strong” (“Roosevelt to” n.p.). And the May 9<sup>th</sup> parade in Washington the following year was reported as featuring, among many other contingents, a “chorus of 1,000 voices” who would sing Ethel Smyth’s famous march (“The May Ninth” 5). As each of these women marched, her physical presence affirmed and asserted her support for the suffrage movement. The theater, also, was evidently a location where the embodied signature could be “inscribed” before the eyes of an audience, as the description of the pageant *A Dream of Freedom* included at the head of this chapter indicates. The forty-nine women and forty-nine men who represented the states and Alaska during the performance at the Metropolitan Opera House also “stood in,” literally, for suffrage. And it wasn’t only the bodies onstage that “counted” at this particular event. The Associated Press carefully reported that “one hundred and seventy-five college women will act as ushers” (“Roosevelt to” n.p.).

Suffrage theater performances ranged in size and scope, but the lesson that a woman both stood for suffrage and could occupy public space towards this end could be conveyed by even a single female body on stage. Some performances were quite basic when compared to pageants like *A Dream of Freedom*, which the *New York Times* described as “elaborate and imposing”

(“Roosevelt Centre” 1). On January 9, 1909, for instance, the Equality League for Self-Supporting Women organized a public reading of Elizabeth Robins’s *Votes for Women*.<sup>48</sup> Berkeley Theatre was “thronged” when the play, already well known in England, was introduced to a New York audience by reader Marion Craig Wentworth, who “received close attention throughout the three acts of the play” (“*Votes for Women Wins*” 13). And a number of monologues, duologues, and skits with very small casts were written during the movement. Suffrage playwrights also clearly felt, though, that there was a special element of spectacle in the various types of public demonstrations suffragists were engaged in, and they sometimes wrote these directly into their plays. The second act of Robins’s *Votes for Women*, for instance, depicts a full-fledged suffrage meeting in Trafalgar Square, complete with crowd, speakers, and hecklers. The characters in Alice C. Thompson’s comedy, *A Suffragette Baby* (1912), discuss the speeches that were given at the day’s suffrage meeting and make plans to attend “the monster parade on Friday” (223). And the first act of Hester N. Johnson’s *On to Victory* (1915) depicts Barbara Manning and her friends preparing to march in a suffrage parade, making final arrangements and admiring the ribbons and the large banner that will decorate their efforts.

While *A Suffragette Baby* and *On to Victory* both imply that suffrage parades are taking place, *Melinda and Her Sisters* (1916) actually puts one on stage. According to the *New York Times*, the February 18, 1916 performance of Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont and Elsa Maxwell’s suffrage opera, which took place in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria, featured “a real suffrage parade and a soapbox suffrage speech” (“Society Satirized” 11). The paper describes how these were staged:

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<sup>48</sup> The play was first performed at the Court Theatre in London in 1907 (Spender and Hayman 37). The first full-scale production in America took place shortly after the reading at the Berkeley Theatre. Starring Mary Shaw in the role of Vida Levering, the play, produced by the Actors’ Society, started its run at Wallack’s Theatre on March 15, 1909 (“To Produce” X8).

The suffrage parade came in from one side of the ballroom, marched across the room, and up the centre of the stage. It carried torchlights, banners, and soap boxes. Marie Doro [who played the part of Melinda Pepper] led it, preceded by a band. She was followed by a number of Red Cross nurses, and then came what had been kept a secret in advance, that ardent suffragist and peace advocate, Mrs. Inez Milholland Boissevain, carrying a large American flag, and as the procession reached the stage her tall figure dominated the scene.

Then the little suffragette [Melinda] called for her “throne,” a Red Cross nurse brought the soap box, and the speech began. (“Society Satirized” 11).

*The Suffragist* reports that Doro’s delivery was effective – that Melinda, wearing a “simple yellow frock” and “surrounded by factory workers,” made a speech that “won over the Pepper sisters . . . and incidentally converted the audience” (“Suffrage Opera Scores” 6). To what degree the latter is true, it is impossible to tell. The *New York Times* would only go so far as to say that Melinda’s speech had “perhaps” won over the audience. But it appears to have persuaded Doro herself, at any rate; she is said to have been impressed with the words and surprised to learn “there was so much in suffrage” (“Society Satirized” 11). And the opera was certainly getting attention. According to the *Times*, “Mrs. Belmont and Miss Maxwell cannot sleep nights because of telephone calls and telegraph messages from managers all over the country who want to get a chance to produce it” (“Marie Doro in” 6).<sup>49</sup>

Suffrage spectacle, as I have mentioned, depends for its force on the presence of the female body, and in all its iterations it drew power from the ways its performances enacted the

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<sup>49</sup> It is not clear whether this interest resulted in other productions of *Melinda and Her Sisters*. I have not yet found records indicating so, but such records may exist, and recovering more of the performance history of suffrage plays would be a valuable future contribution to the field. It is also possible that historically, this performance may have served as an unofficial “grand finale” for suffrage theater, as tactics changed in 1917.

unfeminine as well as the feminine. The embodied signature was a gendered inscription on public space, and the version of femininity it presented was both constructed intentionally by the performers and shaped by culture in ways beyond their control.<sup>50</sup> Green suggests that the widely varied spectacular events organized by suffragists all worked by “attach[ing] symbols of protest, political action, and social involvement to the feminine body – making the feminine body into a civic body” (1).<sup>51</sup> Indeed, aspects of traditional femininity were used both to explain why women ought to be considered full citizens (“who better to mother the nation?”) and to make more palatable to an audience gender transgressions in other areas (particularly the desire to participate in the political process). Suffrage spectacle employs “a theatrical and sensationalized femininity,” simultaneously “catering to and challenging a public gaze” (Green 5). This simultaneous acquiescence and agency makes spectacle a complex strategy, but suffragists embraced it all the same and found in the theater genres a variety of opportunities to employ it.

There is no way to determine the degree to which suffrage pageants and plays were or were not effective as tools for winning the vote,<sup>52</sup> but the enthusiasm and fervor so many women and men brought to writing, producing, and performing in them makes it clear that they were perceived, at least for a time, as having political and pedagogical power. Embracing theater (whether in the parlor, on a traditional stage, or in the streets) was a move both logical and daring for the suffragists. It made sense in the context of the growing importance of and interest in theater during the years the suffrage campaign took place. The end of the nineteenth century saw

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<sup>50</sup> See Judith Butler’s *Gender Trouble* for a discussion of the “performativity” of gender.

<sup>51</sup> As Green notes, the concept of the “civic body” originates in Richard Sennett’s *Flesh and Stone: The Body and the City in Western Civilization*.

<sup>52</sup> In “Women’s Suffrage Drama,” Katharine Cockin notes that “suffragists had good reason to believe that plays were effective in changing attitudes” because in Britain, “a change in legislation was attributed to the production of one play” (128). A number of individual “conversion” stories also attest to the power of theater to persuade viewers of the need to work for women’s suffrage. Yet no reliable method exists to measure the actual overall effectiveness of suffrage theater, and I am more interested here in considering how spectacle functioned pedagogically and what it might have communicated than in arguing for or against theater as a political tool.



significant growth in the entertainment industry (Auster 4).<sup>53</sup> The first drama schools were founded in the 1880s (51), and the number of stage performers in the United States increased significantly, from around 2,000 in 1870 to nearly 10,000 by 1890 (Glenn 13). The number of female theater-goers rose as well (14), offering an increased opportunity to reach women audience members through the performance of suffrage plays. Even so, theater had not entirely freed itself from connotations of sinfulness and promiscuity. Although attitudes changed a great deal over the many decades of the suffrage movement, anxiety about the stage and the propriety of women who chose to perform upon it did not dissolve entirely.

In part, it was for this very reason that suffragists could count on the spectacle of women onstage to surprise, intrigue, and lure in spectators who might otherwise have been uninterested in hearing anything at all about women's suffrage. When society women started to embrace the movement and even began appearing on stage in increasingly public venues, eventually working alongside professional actresses (many of whom had been involved in the suffrage movement since its early stages), it afforded new opportunities for manipulating public curiosity and interest in the social elite. Organizers of plays and pageants took to casting prominent women specifically for the purpose of drawing a larger audience, giving them permission to *look*, even to stare, as a way of inducing them to *listen*, to consider the arguments for suffrage. In doing so, they were capitalizing on the titillation of an association between the "best" women and the "promiscuity" of the theater. Casting well known actresses like Mary Shaw or Marie Dressler (who played Mrs. Pepper in the Waldorf-Astoria performance of *Melinda and Her Sisters*) could help fill seats, as their star power had an allure of its own. But putting society women on stage drew even more attention to the cause.

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<sup>53</sup> Auster attributes this to industrialization and the increasing amounts of leisure time that resulted, combined with a lessening of the "clerical influence" in America (4).

Suffragists took advantage of this and even advertised it. For instance, an article in *The Suffragist* about a benefit performance of two British plays scheduled for February 20, 1914 at the Columbia Theater announced in advance that the cast for Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John's *How the Vote Was Won* "includes many of Washington's most prominent social leaders" ("An Afternoon" 7).<sup>54</sup> The mainstream papers, too, were keenly aware of the class shift in suffrage theater. A *New York Times* article about Belmont and Maxwell's suffrage opera noted that "the chorus will be made up of the most charming of the debutantes of the season" ("Suffrage Opera Tonight" 11). Similarly, a notice about the Metropolitan Opera House performance of *A Dream of Freedom* announced that "society women, actresses and opera singers will participate" and "Mme. Nordica will take the part of freedom" ("Roosevelt to" n.p.). In addition, articles about performances often printed eye-catching cast lists in table form, making it easy for a reader to notice familiar names running down the columns. And reporters were well aware that it wasn't only those on stage the spectators went to see; therefore, they often listed the names of prominent box holders, thus "counting" certain members of the audience in their corporeal tallies, affirming them as part of the spectacle. In these ways, suffrage spectacle both relied upon masses of bodies and capitalized on the recognizability of the few. If every female body constituted an embodied signature, some were perhaps writ a little larger, in bolder "ink" than others.

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<sup>54</sup> Mentioned are Mrs. Randolph Keith Forrest, Mrs. Mary Kealty Claggett, Miss Jean Walsh, Miss Eunice Oberly, Mrs. Carol Bird, Mr. Morven Thompson, and Mrs. L. W. Jordan ("An Afternoon" 7).

## 2.2 THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERFORMER AND AUDIENCE

Women's role did not end with being eye-catching, and this is what I find most intriguing about the various forms of display employed during the suffrage movement. As Green points out, suffrage spectacle "depended on the female body for persuasive force" (1), and the plays and pageants explored in depth the possibility that the female body could persuade. While Green is especially interested in the role of the so-called militants, focusing her attention on the spectacle of the starved body of the hunger striker and the defiant, sometimes tortured body of the picketing woman, both conservatives and militants alike (and these distinctions are not as clearly defined as we might imagine)<sup>55</sup> were attentive to the power of spectacle and developed theoretical understandings of its role. In their explorations of the "persuasive force" of female bodies onstage, suffrage writers experimented with traditional genres while re-imagining the roles of those to be looked at and those doing the looking. In this section, I consider the ways suffrage theater constructs a relationship between audience and performers that anticipates later ideas about egalitarian pedagogical interactions.

First, though, I want to point out that spectacle, as a feminist strategy, is not an uncomplicated one. Even when carefully deployed, it remained partly outside the control of suffrage performers, making it a strategy open to misreading and interpretation. One of the main challenges arises from the power dynamic, where the body, positioned as the object-to-be-looked-at, works in apparent contradiction to the suffragists' aims of active agency and a voice in their country's government. Susan Glenn notes a tension between women's wish "to use

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<sup>55</sup> Maroula Joannou and June Purvis note, for instance, that many British suffragists belonged to both the militant and constitutionalist sections of the movement. They point out that Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John's play, *How the Vote Was Won*, illustrates this fact when the character Madame Christine "divides her assets scrupulously between the NUWSS, the WSPU and the AFL [three suffrage organizations with very different philosophies]" (6).

theatrical spectacle as a vehicle for achieving greater voice in culture and politics” and the problematic potential for symbolic male (viewer) domination of female (object) spectacle (3). Green, too, sees spectacle as an unwieldy tool, one never fully in the control of those who employ it. She comments that “most readings of suffrage pageants,” for example, “assume an activist woman in control of her representation” (9), yet British suffragettes’ prison writings provide evidence of “a much more perilous spectacularity” (13).

Such concerns are not unfounded. Film theory, in particular, addresses the role of woman-as-spectacle in useful ways; and while the genres differ, there are enough parallels between the screen and the stage for the ideas to be applicable here. In her 1975 “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” Laura Mulvey explains that “in a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female.” She adds that “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (137). The way a woman is to be looked at is built directly into the cinematic spectacle (141), which situates its viewer as male and therefore as identified with “masculine” agency. Such a construction is clearly an obstacle to feminist goals, and E. Ann Kaplan’s warning that “screen images of women are sexualized no matter what the women are doing literally or what kind of plot may be involved” (30) is equally relevant for theater images, or even real-life encounters. A woman’s body is never *not* subject to this transaction of display and consumption.

Still, suffragists remained convinced that theatrical performances held great promise for the movement. It was only during the final years before the vote was won that plays and pageants ceased to be a prominent part of the American campaign, when many suffragists’

attention was diverted into war efforts and radical leaders' energy was sapped by jail sentences and hunger strikes.<sup>56</sup> Until about 1916, suffrage organizations all over the country were discussing plays and pageants and their potential for educating or effecting change. At the Third Annual Convention of the Woman's Franchise League of Indiana, for example, in May of 1914, Mary H. Flanner gave a speech on "Pageants and Plays" and Mrs. C.C. North gave one on "Spectacular Propaganda." At the following year's convention, Charity Dye argued for the educational power of pageantry, urging women "to fill the minds of the children of the State with Indiana history and to present it in pageantry wherever possible" (Woman's Franchise League). And as late as 1917, there is evidence that the topic was still of interest. The program for that year's Mississippi Valley Suffrage Conference in Columbus, Ohio included a series of speeches on how to get the vote; one of these, by Mary O. Cowper, of Kansas, suggested in its brief title that one way to do so was "By Plays" (Woman's Franchise League).

Suffragists were not, in their enthusiasm for these genres, blithely oblivious to the contradictions and challenges. Spectacle that relied upon the presentation of the female body to be looked upon by an audience trained in patriarchal cultural norms remained a complicated and potentially problematic technique, and suffragists understood this. As Green points out, they were "canny theorists of the problems of spectatorship" (33) who "commented directly and indirectly upon spectacularity, sometimes even employing the term in ways that predict late twentieth-century discussions" (7). Her argument that suffragists' writings "produced the political discourse of feminist spectacularity that gave feminist exhibitions their meaning" (7) is especially compelling because it indicates that the suffragists were not only aware of the challenges, but were also engaged in pedagogical efforts intended to avert misunderstandings,

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<sup>56</sup> Karen J. Blair attributes the move "away from pageantry and other educational techniques" and toward "more confrontational techniques" to the beginning of the war ("Pageantry" 25).

misinterpretations, and other appropriations of spectacular performances. They were aware that “both audience and activists had to be prepared through a variety of educative discursive acts” and that, as Green phrases it, “‘Who wins the eye wins all’ – as long as that eye had been properly trained to see” (7).

In addition to being attentive to the task of “winning” the eye and to the need to “train” it, suffrage playwrights and pageant directors were keenly attuned to the question of just who was doing the looking. As pedagogical texts, these plays and pageants invite a relationship between audience and performer that goes beyond either passive receiving or the consumption of a commodity for the viewer. One of the reasons suffrage theater is especially compelling is because of its consideration of a “female gaze.” Film theorists and other scholars have contemplated female agency and spectatorship, calling attention to the ways women, while not necessarily able to escape the role of object of the male gaze, have nonetheless held simultaneously a more active role.<sup>57</sup> Kaplan, for instance, asks, if viewing is typically a male/masculine act, “what does it mean to be a female spectator?” (25). In a later revisiting of her earlier work on visual pleasure, Mulvey attempts to answer this question and offers two possibilities: a female spectator can “find herself so out of key with the pleasure on offer . . . that the spell of fascination is broken,” or, on the other hand, “she may find herself secretly, unconsciously almost, enjoying the freedom of action and control . . . that identification with a [male] hero provides” (“Afterthoughts” 24), thus making a transition “out of her own sex into another” (27). But suffrage theater frequently offers its viewers heroes that are women, thus

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<sup>57</sup> Judith Walkowitz’s *City of Dreadful Delight*, for example, while primarily an analysis of sexual narratives in Victorian London, offers a model for imagining women as more than a part of the landscape observed by men, but as actors and (also) spectators themselves (18).

potentially bypassing, at least in part, what Mulvey describes as the “‘masculinization’ of the spectator position” (“Afterthoughts” 24) for its female viewers.

When Melinda Pepper leads her band of marchers onstage at the Waldorf-Astoria; when Kate Grovenor, in Ella Cheever Thayer’s *Lords of Creation* (1883), proclaims with satisfaction after taking over her ailing father’s business and paying off his debts with her own savings, “Yes, dear father, my woman’s wit has been equal to the occasion” (114); when the bold Jennie Martin expresses no fear upon discovering a burglar in her room in George Middleton’s *Back of the Ballot* (1915) and attempts instead to convert him into a suffragist; and when Mary Shaw’s “Free-souled Parrot” in *The Parrot Cage* (1914) tries to lead its cage-mates to freedom, female audience members are invited to envision themselves in all of these roles – without having to make a transition out of their sex and into another. I am not suggesting that their readings of the images before them can escape entirely patriarchal enculturation. Yet, to adapt Mulvey’s psychoanalytic explanation, suffrage theater offers women the same re-visiting of the Lacanian mirror stage that cinema typically offers to men: a fantasy image of the self that provides a “more perfect, more complete, more powerful ego” (“Visual Pleasure” 138). Because suffrage theater conflates the stage performance and reality, this “fantasy” image of female agency becomes even more accessible. The events and roles depicted onstage were similar to those that could be seen off the stage, in the movement. The performers might be one’s own neighbors or relatives (in a parlor performance), or else familiar actresses or socialites (in the later stage performances). And in moments such as the one when Inez Milholland Boissevain, known for having led several real-life parades, marched onstage in *Melinda and Her Sisters*, the borders between fact and fiction dissolve entirely.

As Sue-Ellen Case points out in *Feminism and Theatre*, “the composition of the audience is an element in the co-production of the play’s meaning,” and “the gender of the audience members is crucial in determining what the feminist play might mean” (116). For audience members who were women, suffrage theater’s lessons were, to a significant degree, about female agency. Embodied before their eyes was the message that women could take part in effecting social change. And they could do so not only by giving speeches, marching in parades, or asserting women’s competence in business or other fields, but also by performing in or writing suffrage plays and pageants. In fact, a great number of women came to associate writing with civic responsibility during the suffrage movement and felt encouraged to pick up the pen.<sup>58</sup> Perhaps in part because many suffrage plays are amateur efforts, the genre as a whole is sometimes referred to dismissively as didactic and/or simplistic. Yet such dismissals overlook the complexity of a theatrical tradition whose texts vary greatly, the level of nuance to be found in its pedagogical elements, and the sophisticated parodic or self-reflexive quality to be found in some of the seemingly simplistic plays.<sup>59</sup>

All suffrage theater was pedagogical, and sometimes the plays even offered literal “lessons” about history, law, or the proper steps for casting a vote. These may not always have come off with the professional polish of other forms of theater, but then, they were quite often not written by professionals. And even the transparently amateur aspects of such plays would have carried a certain pedagogical weight, inviting other non-professionals in the audience to

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<sup>58</sup> As Stowell puts it, the early twentieth century “witnessed a veritable explosion in the number of women dramatists” (*A Stage* 1). Cockin explains in “Women’s Suffrage Drama,” that “many women, including actresses active in the women’s suffrage movement in Britain, wrote plays and sketches as an integral part of their political campaigns, especially between 1908 and 1914. They did not necessarily regard themselves as writers, but were moved to write for the first time because the vote promised to change women’s lives” (128).

<sup>59</sup> Such dismissals also overlook the fact that “there is an element of didacticism in all theatre work” (Pavis 100) and rely on a highly reductive definition of the word. The definition Pavis offers for “didactic theatre” suggests a much more complex pedagogy; she explains that it is “any theatre that aims to instruct its audience by inviting them to reflect on a problem, understand a situation, or adopt a certain moral or political attitude” (100).



visualize themselves, too, as potential writers of suffrage theater, capable of the “literacy act” of composing for cause and country. As a vehicle for the delivery of straightforward information, suffrage playwrights sometimes conscripted the didactic children’s forms for their own pedagogical purposes, as I will discuss in the two examples below. Yet even while invoking these supposedly simple forms, they also restructured the traditional pedagogical relationship of passive learner and authoritarian teacher, both mimicking it and dismantling it. Their social pedagogy seems to anticipate Paulo Freire’s later critiques of what he would call the “banking model” of education, which “transforms students into receiving objects . . . attempts to control thinking and action, leads men and women to adjust to the world, and inhibits their creative power” (77). Suffrage theater constructs women as active agents who are invested in changing the world and who do not settle for adjusting to its flaws. In this way, the suffragists anticipate both Freire’s ideas and the later feminist pedagogies that were influenced by his work.

In some ways, suffrage theater also anticipates Augusto Boal’s related proposals for a form of theater in which passive spectators would be transformed “into subjects, into actors, transformers of the dramatic action” (122). During most suffrage performances, this transformation was expected to happen *through* the theater performance; audiences were invited to become “transformers of the dramatic action” outside the theater, in the world – not necessarily to change the action taking place upon the stage. At times, however, viewers did participate directly in a performance. For instance, during the Metropolitan Opera House performance of *A Dream of Freedom*, the audience applauded actively when the enfranchised “states” came onto stage, represented by women “each with a star in her hair,” thus interrupting the performance to express their approval. They then became an actual part of the performance, lifting their voices in song to join Columbia [Mme. Nordica] in the chorus of “The Star Spangled

Banner” (“Roosevelt Centre” 2). Even when they were not invited to break the barrier between stage and seats by becoming part of the performance in song, suffrage theater’s audiences were invited in other ways to recognize the limitations of the passive spectator/learner role and to imagine something different. They were receiving “lessons” not only in law and women’s history, but also in how to interpret and examine their own positions. Suffrage theater’s pedagogy thus anticipated some aspects of Boal’s “theater of the oppressed,” in which audiences, even when positioned as viewers rather than as actors, would acquire a critical and questioning perspective; as Boal writers, this “training” enhances the possibility that “they will no longer assume a passive, expectant attitude, but instead a critical, comparative one” (149). Like Boal and the advocates of feminist theater practices that build upon his ideas, the suffrage writers viewed their audiences as having the intelligence and agency to effect change in their own lives.

As a way of illustrating all of these connections, I’d like to turn now to two examples of suffrage plays that adapt traditionally didactic forms. The first is Kate Mills Fargo’s 1912 *A Voting Demonstration; or, An Election in Primerville*. After California women got the vote in 1911, writers like Fargo saw a need for educational texts that would enable the newly enfranchised voters to embark with confidence (and without mishap) on their initial forays into voting. In the play, a series of women come onstage to cast their ballots and are given instructions or gentle rebukes from the officials; after each voter completes her scene, the action freezes while a “teacher” addresses the audience directly and reviews the “lesson.” Before any voters arrive, the teacher has already made contact with the audience, breaking the fourth wall to explain, “This demonstration of voting is given to illustrate the mistakes which can be made by those ignorant of the laws governing the polls. Please bear in mind that this exercise is intended to be purely an instructive one, and is not meant merely for entertainment” (Fargo 210). It is true

that the piece is not a fully developed drama with dynamic and changing characters and a significant plot.<sup>60</sup> Yet there is a ring of the tongue-in-cheek about that initial disclaimer, and Fargo's appropriation of the simplistic grade-school-skit style of pedagogy is well suited to elicit laughter and through this, to build community and coalition among new voters long familiar with the genre of the "primer." The town's name contributes to the comic and slightly self-deprecating effect that, I argue, could serve to establish a sense of community among women who were both conscious of their novice status and simultaneously aware of their positioning as pioneers among the country's women.

*A Voting Demonstration* was intended to impart information, and the writer and the "teacher" exist in an expert/novice relationship with the audience regarding the particular lessons imparted, but the purely didactic form creates space for some more subtle and more radical "lessons" to occur simultaneously. First, the feminist move of taking upon themselves the responsibility of educating their sister voters shows once again the suffragists' investment in social pedagogy, and every performance of Fargo's play would have offered a new audience the chance to reflect on the secondary message of this particular spectacle: that teaching one another how to make their voices heard as citizens was a role women could take on, whether as amateur playwrights, as "teachers," or as performers in suffrage dramas. In addition, the very existence of such plays indicates that suffragists were interested in theories of spectacle and in the relationship between spectacle and pedagogy. The information contained in the play was printed in the newspapers, after all, and widely accessible, so the play was apparently understood as serving a different purpose. Finally, the performers' bodies, too, served a pedagogical function

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<sup>60</sup> Friedl describes it as "an instruction manual in the form of drama [that] reads like a script for a classroom demonstration" (27).

as, with each production of the play, audiences got to see women in the act of casting a vote,<sup>61</sup> thus further normalizing the act. At times, performances of this play presented as natural and matter-of-fact not only women's voting, but women's presence as judges, inspectors, and clerks as well. As Fargo's prefatory note explains, for performances given "before women's clubs and civic classes," the roles of the members of the Board of Electors could be played by women. Like Case so many years later, Fargo believed that the audience played a role in the co-creation of a play's meaning; she understood that whereas a male audience could perceive a drama in which all the authority roles are held by women as threatening, a female audience could find it validating. She is careful to select an audience she deems ready for this move, an audience already at least in the preliminary stages of being "properly trained to see."

Catharine Waugh McCulloch's 1911 *Bridget's Sisters; or, The Legal Status of Illinois Women in 1868* also has information to impart. McCulloch's legal training, experience as a lawyer and as Justice of the Peace of Evanston Illinois, and involvement in the suffrage movement enabled her to write with expertise about how the law affects women (Friedl 26). The play traces the story of Bridget O'Flannigan, a working woman who is held responsible for her husband's liquor bill, and her employer, Mary Bradley, who is garnisheed for Bridget's wages by the saloon-keeper.<sup>62</sup> Most of the action takes place in the courtroom, where Mrs. Bradley and the other middle class women who employ Bridget learn a great deal about how Illinois laws

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<sup>61</sup> While today a woman voting would not constitute a spectacle, during the suffrage movement, it was indeed something remarkable, unusual, and/or extraordinary to look upon, as a 1912 *Harper's Weekly* cartoon titled "Her First Vote" clearly indicates. The cartoon shows one somewhat timid-looking woman holding her ballot and contemplating entering the voting booth while no fewer than eight men look on, some laughing, all blatantly staring. See Monika Franzen and Nancy Ethiel's *Make Way!: 200 Years of American Women in Cartoons*, p. 33.

<sup>62</sup> *Bridget's Sisters* is based on McCulloch's earlier "novelistic tract," *Mr. Lex* (1899), about the legal status of women who were married or widowed (Friedl 26). McCulloch explains in an introductory note that "an incident very similar to the one shown in this play occurred in the life of Mrs. Myra Bradwell about the year 1868. She was garnisheed by a saloonkeeper to pay a debt due him by a drunkard whose wife had left with Mrs. Bradwell for safe-keeping some of her hard-earned wages" (164).

have affected women. While audiences viewing Fargo's play were addressed directly, made part of the drama (if not part of the spectacle) by being positioned as students, with a teacher to help interpret the "text" of the series of voting attempts, audiences seeing McCulloch's play did occupy a more passive spectator role. However, like *A Voting Demonstration*, this play also calls attention to its own didacticism. The character of Mr. Common Law serves a function similar to Fargo's Teacher, stepping in with lessons, explanations, and information. At times his dialogue is stilted, driven more by information than by the needs of the plot. He even veers off on tangents, offering legal information that is not directly relevant to Bridget's situation, whose custody of her children is never under dispute. But his chatty tendencies are intentionally brought to the forefront in the cast list, where he is described as "A Justice of the Peace, Talkative but Accurate" (164).

When one of Bridget's employers, appalled by all she has learned, asks what is to be done, Mr. Common Law serves up a little feminist propaganda along with his lessons in history and law:

MRS. EQUITY. How can we get the Legislature to change those wicked, immoral laws?

JUSTICE. Well, that's a conundrum. When I have been obliged to enforce these unjust laws, I have often wondered why the wronged women did not resort to riot and bloodshed as men have often done to avenge their wrongs. Perhaps it is because the blow comes to each woman singly and she is ignorant that she has companions in misery. Then, too, ages of masculine domination has broken the spirit of most women. . . (McCulloch 174)

If this speech is perhaps a bit stiffly unbearable in its solemn pomposity, there is also something delightfully over-the-top about it; and it serves to call attention explicitly to the play's aim of teaching. Whereas *A Voting Demonstration* invoked the grade-school primer, *Bridget's Sisters* invokes the equally familiar didactic form of the fable. Using character names like Mr. Summons (a constable) and Mr. Vulture (a saloon keeper), McCulloch prepares her audience to expect a moral, which she then delivers: women must organize. As Friedl points out, the "most important message of the play" is that "women have to organize, exchange information, and learn to cooperate in order to effect change" (27).

This lesson is delivered through spectacle, as a group of women onstage demonstrate first the occupying of public space (a courtroom) and then the use of this space to organize politically. When the Justice leaves the room, they have an impromptu meeting right there in the courtroom and start an Illinois Equal Suffrage Organization. Female citizenship and civic responsibility are explicitly intertwined with Christianity in this play in a way that can at times seem troublingly paternalistic. When the Justice returns, Mrs. Pious tells him, "You showed us our duty as Christian women" and explains that they have started their suffrage society because they need the ballot in order to help their "helpless sisters" (McCulloch 181), an act that can be read as a form of charity. Still, while *A Voting Demonstration* normalizes the act of women voting, McCulloch's play literally enables an audience to visualize the formation of alliances between women – and alliances that cross class lines, albeit in an imperfect manner. Thus, female members of the audience are figured by the play itself as citizens and agents of social change, not merely as passive recipients of historical and legal knowledge. If they are delivered an authority-driven lecture in law that they are meant to absorb, they are also invited to come away from the performance not only as more informed citizens, versed in the legal history, but also able to

imagine themselves as actors in roles like those they just saw onstage, capable of forming coalitions and taking an active role. They are, to return to Boal, invited to become actors “on an equal plane with those generally accepted as actors” (155); in doing so, they are asked to become actors in the world beyond the stage.

### 2.3 MODELING NEW “FASHIONS” – EMBODYING CHANGE

Pedagogically, in addition to challenging the traditional power dynamic of the relationship between spectator-student and performer-teacher, suffrage theater offers its viewers attractive models for change. Harriot Stanton Blatch,<sup>63</sup> an important proponent of visual display as a suffrage technique, was convinced that “the actress’s powers of persuasion – her capacity to move the hearts and minds of the audience – made her vital to the suffrage cause” (Glenn 135). In large part, it was what suffrage actresses were modeling that was moving and persuasive: strong roles for women, “sisterhood,” egalitarian relationships between the sexes, and overall a better world – one in which women’s citizenship was or would soon be fully affirmed by the right to vote. They also modeled techniques for reaching this desired better world. Blatch, like many others, had lost her citizenship when she married a non-American (Cooney, *Winning* 158), and was therefore especially keenly aware of the precariousness of women’s claim to the identity of “citizen.” Suffrage plays affirmed their right to this identity and depicted them as competent, compelling individuals. In Harriet H. Robinson’s *Captain Mary Miller* (1887), for example, the title character marries a steamboat pilot and takes over running the boat when he falls ill. Just

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<sup>63</sup> Blatch was for a time one of Emmeline Pankhurst’s close colleagues in the Women’s Franchise League, and is one of the individuals “credited with taking militancy back to the United States” when she returned in the early 1900s (Holton 16).

one of the many plucky heroes depicted in suffrage plays, Mary figures out how to get the boat safely along its course, commenting to herself, “How lucky I studied that book on navigation!” (18). Eventually, she battles sexism in order to obtain her own pilot’s license, a struggle that even converts her father, who announces that he has made up his mind that women’s rights must be important after all.

A number of other plays show women succeeding in professional roles. In Alice E. Ives *A Very New Woman* (1896), the character Edith Parker has been studying law and is “almost ready for examination” (141). And one of the main female characters in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Something to Vote For* (1911) is a doctor from Colorado, where women’s suffrage has been legal since 1893. Other plays, like Thompson’s *A Suffragette Baby*, depict women as busy activists. And all three of these plays offer models of coalitional relationships among women, providing images that are both contrary to popular wisdom about the inability of women to band together and radical in their refutation of the ideology positing heterosexual marriage as the center of a woman’s life. For example, even though the recent engagement of Edith and Arthur is central to the plot in Ives’ *A Very New Woman*, the audience is invited to imagine the connection between Edith and her future mother-in-law as an equally significant relationship. When Arthur brings his fiancée home to meet his mother, Mrs. Twillington is delighted to learn that, unbeknownst to Arthur, Edith too is a suffragist; the two women share a commitment to their sex, and having this in common, will be able to build a friendship. Nancy L. Nester<sup>64</sup> describes their coalition as a mentoring relationship because the older woman’s involvement in

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<sup>64</sup> In her 1997 article, “A Critical Second Look at the Suffrage Propaganda Play,” Nester “analyzes the critical renegotiations of the codes and conventions of courtship rituals, marriage, motherhood, home, family, and work” (par. 3) in two suffrage plays (*A Very New Woman* and *A Suffragette Baby*) and one anti-suffrage play (*The Spirit of Seventy-Six*).



the suffrage movement gives Edith the courage to stand up for her beliefs even at the risk of losing the approval of her male lover (par. 18).

Mrs. Twillington's jovial comment to Edith that if her son doesn't want a new woman, "he can go and get an old one" and "you and I will keep house together" (Ives 141) is not, in the context of the play, a serious offer to share living quarters – it is clear throughout that Arthur is a good but misguided man who will eventually come through in favor of the New Woman. Even so, the image suggests other models for women's relationships; and indeed, living arrangements based on female comradeship were a distinct possibility. Thompson's *A Suffragette Baby* affords a glimpse into an all-female home, where four suffragettes live together happily while their days are filled with suffrage activism. The humorous "crisis" occurs when three of the four suffragettes wish to include a homeless baby in their nontraditional household. By the end of the play, the group is firmly established as a family when the one reluctant member changes her mind and announces to a reporter, "She [the baby] belongs to all of us. We've adopted her" (230). Here, not only are women working together for change, they are also raising the next generation of suffragists. Additionally, "the home" has lost a great deal of its identity as "private sphere" in these plays, serving in one as the site where two suffragists become political allies as well as friends and in the other as the location in which four activists prepare for their suffrage work and meet to discuss tactics and successes.

It is worth noting that while both Ives and Thompson offer representations of alliances between women onstage, their characters did not have to cross class lines in order to unite as did the characters in *Bridget's Sisters*. However, some suffrage playwrights did try, with varying degrees of success, to address the class differences that separated women. Their plays allow female actors to demonstrate onstage the difficult and imperfect work of coalition, which Bernice

Johnson Reagon calls “some of the most dangerous work you can do” (359). As Glenn notes, after 1910, feminists generally “acknowledged that women differed from each other across class lines and other points of social location” and “believed that it was necessary for women to organize together in order to attain equality with men” (5). Understanding this was only a step, of course, and there is a noticeable tension in a number of American suffrage plays, as good intentions come up against ingrained ideology. Sometimes the plays are fairly successful in navigating cross-class alliances; at other times, the working class characters are depicted as merely objects of comic humor or middle-class pity, or as catalysts for the middle class character’s conversion to suffrage activism. Similarly, the treatment of racial and ethnic identities was often problematic.<sup>65</sup>

Gilman’s *Something to Vote For* (1911), for example, relies heavily on the poor-woman-as-object construct, albeit in a rather complicated manner (since the poor woman character is given a speaking role before an audience of middle-class characters). Set in a society woman’s home at a meeting of the local women’s club, Gilman’s play simultaneously calls for cross-class unity and depicts some unbridgeable distances, pokes fun at women’s clubs and attempts to appeal to middle-class viewers. Dr. Strong, who has been invited to the club in order to participate in the discussion of the day’s topic, “pure milk,” tells her host, “You said I might bring along one of my patients, for evidence, and I have. I’ve got little Mrs. O’Shane here to tell them how it affects the poor people” (148). Even before her entrance onstage, “little” Mrs.

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<sup>65</sup> The same is true of the British plays. Cockin notes that “the phenomenon of class conflict was explored by dramatists even though they were unable to develop a means of fully acknowledging differences other than those of sex” (“Women’s” 133); she points out, for example, that if working-class characters exist, they “tend to be servants who do not develop in their own right but merely function as the agents of a middle-class character’s conversion to the campaign” (127). Tickner notes a similar pattern in the visual art and claims that the predominantly middle-class suffrage artists exploited “the image of the oppressed and sweated worker to further their own campaign” (181).

O'Shane<sup>66</sup> is viewed in a sympathetic but condescending manner by the more privileged characters, including the doctor. Her testimony – a fairly long speech about losing her child because she was unable to buy the more expensive, higher grade milk – is given from the platform, where she participates in a spectacle staged within the larger spectacle of the play,<sup>67</sup> with the clubwomen as her audience. Situated thus, Mrs. O'Shane becomes the object to be looked at and pitied by both audiences – the club women listening to her speech and the actual spectators watching the play. In this way, the spectacle facilitates coalition between the middle-class characters and the audience members rather than with the working class character.

At the same time, however, this play does model the dawning awareness of the privileged women that they have some connection with Mrs' O'Shane – that “rich or poor, we are all helpless together unless we wake up to the danger and protect ourselves” (Gilman 161). And while Mrs. O'Shane functions in the play partly as object (present as much to *be* evidence as to *give* evidence), she is also both agent and subject. If the spectacle of the bereaved woman crying onstage while talking about her poor baby forms “act one” of the drama that unfolds before the clubwomen's eyes, the tests Mr. Arnold, the milk inspector, performs while Mr. Billings, Head of the Milk Trust, looks on, make up “act two.” Mrs. O'Shane again plays an important role:

MR. ARNOLD. While this is straining, I will apply the iodine test to what remains in the bottle. If there is starch in it, it will turn blue. (*Pours water from a glass into the bottle, adds a few drops of iodine, shakes it, holds it up before them. It is blue.*)

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<sup>66</sup> Irish names were frequently used in suffrage plays for characters from lower socioeconomic classes, and Mrs. O'Shane and Bridget are only two examples. Despite their desire to imagine coalitions among women, some middle-class suffrage playwrights relied heavily on anti-immigrant stereotypes, though representations of Irish characters did vary greatly.

<sup>67</sup> Gail Finney refers to such performances as “embedded spectacle” in her analysis of Wedekind Lulu's plays, a term I find useful here.

MRS. WHITE, MRS. BLACK, MRS. GREY (*together*). Oh! Look at that! Just think of it!

(*MR. BILLINGS much confused, but unable to escape.*)

MR. ARNOLD. I'm afraid one of the supplying dairymen thins his milk and whitens it. Starch is not dangerous. Dirt is. We will now examine our strainer. (*Holds up cloth. A heavy, dark deposit is shown. There is a tense silence.*)

MRS. O'SHANE (*suddenly rising up*). That's what killed my Patsy! (*Points at MR. BILLINGS.*) An' 'twas him that did it! (160)

Convinced that they need the ballot “to protect our homes! To protect our children! To protect the children of the poor!” (161), the clubwomen are at last all converted to the suffrage cause. Although cross-class coalition is far from perfected in this play, it is certainly noteworthy that Mrs. O'Shane's part is written in such a way that she steps into a heroic role, standing up to officialdom and making a public accusation.

Besides modeling empowering roles and coalitional relationships and enacting a world in which women are recognized as citizens and equals – after he is well, Mary's husband is happy for her to continue on as captain of the boat, saying “It won't be the first time a man has sailed through life under the orders of a brave and true-hearted woman” (Robinson 47), and Edith's fiancé offers to share his office with her as well as his home (Ives 142) – suffrage plays also “taught” their audiences a much more abstract lesson by encouraging them to think and to question. In *Bridget's Sisters*, Mrs. Equity models the latter directly by asking the Justice several probing questions about men's and women's rights to their wages and then, after determining that the laws are unjust, demanding to know how they can get them changed (McCulloch 172,

174). And some plays that deal with suffrage are actually open-ended, presenting suffrage views onstage, but also depicting the opposing arguments, or else portraying characters who don't ever resolve completely to join the suffrage campaign.<sup>68</sup> Such plays modeled complexity of thought, encouraging audience members to think further about the issues for themselves. Both American and British performances were meant to invite audiences to wrestle with ideas.<sup>69</sup> In fact, the British Pioneer Players addressed criticism that their work was propaganda rather than entertainment by suggesting that perhaps unqualified pleasure was not the best measure of theater. "Naturally our productions do not always please everyone," they explained; "If they did, it would probably mean that they were negligible from the point of view of ideas; for it is in the nature of an idea to provoke antagonism as well as sympathy (qtd. in Cockin, *Women* 43-44).

At times, suffrage theater also employed forms that left viewers unsettled, and this could provoke antagonism as well. Although Rachel France claims that suffrage plays are not formally innovative, arguing that since the suffrage movement overall "advocated no great change in the political system,"<sup>70</sup> there was "little impulse to develop new theatrical forms" (35), some suffrage drama did push boundaries. Many of the plays are comfortably-structured comedies that rely on traditional forms in order to depict a new version of the world. Using a recognizable form meant

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<sup>68</sup> In fact, there are a good number of what, for lack of a better term, I would call "ambivalent" suffrage plays. While the plays discussed in detail in this chapter are overtly "pro" suffrage, other plays depict a debate onstage, with both sides getting a hearing and neither necessarily the clear "winner," or are ambiguous in other ways. Some examples of plays that are ambivalent or ambiguous include George M. Baker's *Shall Our Mother's Vote?* (1876), G. F. Lisanti's *Little Harold, or The Suffragette* (1911), and Vida Varrie's *The Coming Man* (1872).

<sup>69</sup> Most scholars view the relationship between the movements as mainly one of British influence on American efforts, with British strategies (parades, pageants, play performances, militancy) "imported" after American leaders spent time across the Atlantic, learning new techniques which they then brought home. Rachel France's argument that American suffrage plays were more "aggressive" and "candid" than the British plays (37) is unique in claiming for the Americans a foray into territory unexplored by the British. Although it is beyond the scope of this present study, an extensive and thorough comparison of the trends in suffrage theater on either side of the Atlantic would be a useful addition to existing scholarship.

<sup>70</sup> France is right that suffragists were not advocating an all-out overthrow of governing structures, but minimalizing the changes suffragists sought in the political system and in society overlooks the wide range of tactics evident in their approaches both to the movement and to theater.

an audience could be assumed to have a safe enough starting point from which to have its eye trained to see, and it is logical that the suffrage movement, challenging its audience already to accept the idea of new political, economic, and social arrangements, would not be in a hurry to strain its capacity further by embracing literary modernism.<sup>71</sup> Still, suffrage theater did sometimes venture into realism in order to depict the flaws in the existing world and thus to reveal the necessity for change. America still had an uneasy relationship with realism during this period. Ibsen, Shaw, and Brieux evoked strongly negative responses in many parts of a country not quite ready for the starkness of their portrayals of life. But American suffragists saw value in their work and were often largely responsible for getting their plays produced in this country.<sup>72</sup> They also saw value in adopting realism in their own theatrical endeavors. According to Mary Grey Peck, by the end of the nineteenth century the “Great American Public” was growing impatient and wanted something besides amusement from its theater; when “the uproar over Ibsen had begun to die down,” she explains, America – though it still did not like Ibsen – had had its thirst whetted for something different and was ready for plays that reflected the realities of American life (129-131).

It is no surprise that suffragists would be drawn to a type of theater that had been employed to portray problems of interest to women. Some feminist scholars are wary of realism as a feminist tool, arguing that it can naturalize “the status quo of the patriarchal system” (Burke 191), but others suggest that it can be conscripted towards feminist ends. Stowell is of the latter opinion:

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<sup>71</sup> Remaining close enough to familiar forms not to repel an audience had the additional benefit of making the potential audience broader on the class level. In an article on British suffragette fiction, Maroula Joannou explains that suffrage novelists “usually eschewed irony, parody, and extended use of symbolic language and elaborate narrative structures” and used instead “vivid dialogue and/or interior monologue to formulate their arguments and to reach a wide readership” (106); this readership included “many unsophisticated factory girls” the authors wished “not to discourage from reading books by the use of inaccessible or unfamiliar forms of writing” (107).

<sup>72</sup> Actress and playwright Mary Shaw was particularly active in such efforts.

Why may not realism's recognizable worlds be used to challenge or condemn as well as mystify and naturalise social relations? Indeed, from Ibsen and Shaw to Osborne, Orton, and Hare, male playwrights have been quick to recognize the efficacy of replication in attacking normative ideology. . . . realist drama is not necessarily the expression of a coherent (unassailable) view of the world." (*A Stage* 100)

In a similar vein, Patricia R. Schroeder suggests that such forms can "support feminist values by depicting the entrapment of female characters in an unyielding, traditional society" (105). To the extent that an audience can be taught to see meaning in feminist uses of the form, the form can be subverted for feminist ends. Stowell suggests that Elizabeth Robins's *Votes for Women* does so successfully; she states that this play "asked audiences to think not only about the subjects of feminist debate but about the very aesthetic structures to which they had grown habituated" (*A Stage* 2). Despite the popularity of the comic form among American suffrage writers, a number of them embraced both literary change and social change by adopting the still-unnerving realist techniques or by experimenting with form in other ways. I'd like to end this chapter with a look at Hazel MacKaye's suffrage pageants because her work provides a clear example of the struggles suffrage writers faced if they wanted to "train" their audiences' eyes to be able to view both challenging theatrical forms and the embodiment of new roles for women as making sense. Interested in experimenting with realism's capacity for illuminating injustice, but also willing to adjust her experiments and recalibrate her pedagogical project in order to meet her audience at a place where thinking is encouraged rather than simply shut down, MacKaye is an interesting figure from a pedagogical perspective. I turn now to her pageants in order to discuss how one woman explored the possibilities and limitations of realism for suffrage theater.

## 2.4 HAZEL MACKAYE'S SUFFRAGE PAGEANTS

A theater professional as well as a suffragist, Hazel MacKaye was a key figure in the development of suffrage pageantry; she wrote four pageants for the movement, including a retrospective celebration of the suffrage struggle. The first of these was *The Allegory*, written at the request of Alice Paul for the National American Woman's Suffrage Association and paired with a suffrage parade on the day before President Wilson's 1913 inauguration. This was followed in 1914 by *The American Woman: Six Periods of American Life*, produced for the New York City Men's League for Women's Suffrage, and in 1915 by the *Pageant of Susan B. Anthony*, written for the National Woman's Party. Later, MacKaye also wrote the *Equal Rights Pageant* for the 1923 conference that was held by the NWP at Seneca Falls to celebrate the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary<sup>73</sup> of the beginning of the suffrage movement and to launch the new campaign for an Equal Rights Amendment (Wilmer 155; Blair, "Pageantry for" 25, 43). In the pages that follow, I trace MacKaye's changing approach in her first three suffrage pageants, those that were written and performed while the suffrage movement was still underway. The pageant was popularly understood as an educational form, carrying for viewers an implicit promise of affirmation and education; and as MacKaye's experiments with realism revealed, it was important to attend to the former in order to find a reception for the latter.

Hazel MacKaye and her brother Percy (whose commentary on his sister's suffrage pageants is excerpted in the discussion that follows) considered the affective dimensions of persuasion, the ability to "move" the audience, to be highly important, and they endorsed

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<sup>73</sup> Claiming an "official" start of the struggle was both an empowering move, giving the suffragists the opportunity to celebrate their own history, and a disempowering one, necessarily omitting recognition of any earlier efforts that might be read as part of the struggle. It was historian Lisa Tetreault who first called my attention to the problems with the traditional narrative that depicts the 1848 convention as the beginning of the movement.



pageantry as an activist technique with this in mind.<sup>74</sup> They each considered logic to be an important factor, but believed that it was only part of the equation. Percy explains that in creating a suffrage pageant, women were “scattering the creative fires of [both] beauty and reason” (“Art and” 680). And Hazel MacKaye states that “through the medium of art the suffrage movement will appeal to the heart as well as to the mind” (qtd. in “Pageant of” 8). When the emotions too are engaged, she explains, “the light comes to us in a single flash, instead of by dim and cautious flickerings” (“Pageants as a Means” 6). MacKaye, like her more famous brother, was very much interested in the theoretical underpinnings of the form; yet she assures readers that she speaks “not from theory alone, but [also] from actual experience” (6). To illustrate this, she offers an example. She appears to be referring to *A Dream of Freedom* when she describes the effect a “Metropolitan Pageant written by Margaret Tuttle,” performed in Cleveland in May of 1914, had on its audience:

People were asked to sign the petitions before the performance began, but many refused to do so. After they had witnessed the spectacle, however, and had breathed in the beauty, the sincerity, the majesty of what had taken place upon the stage, and had been filled to the brim with its spiritual message, those same people, upon leaving the theatre, eagerly asked to be allowed to reconsider their decision and to place their names upon the list. As one man said, “No one could witness that noble spectacle and have a doubt left in his mind that human beings

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<sup>74</sup> Percy MacKaye wrote extensively on the uses and value of pageantry. Details about his life and ideas, and a bibliography of his writings, can be found in the 1932 *Annals of an Era: Percy MacKaye and the MacKaye Family*, edited by Edwin Osbood Grover. The volume includes a small amount of information about Hazel MacKaye and a bibliography of her work, but for more information on her pageants and her life, see Blair’s 1990 article, “Pageantry for Women’s Rights: The Career of Hazel MacKaye, 1913-1923” and her chapter on pageantry in her 1994 *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930*. Lumsden also discusses MacKaye’s suffrage pageants in *Rampant Women*, which includes a chapter on pageantry. Blair’s and Lumsden’s careful reconstructions of MacKaye’s pageants from archival material inform the following discussion.

capable of so lofty and beautiful a thing were unworthy of the vote.” (“Pageants as a Means” 6)

Clearly, at least for some, the pageant had appealed and persuaded in a way that logic and argument alone, without adequate attention to the affective dimension, could not. For MacKaye, the visual rhetoric, with its careful attention to beauty and inspiration, was an important and compelling aspect of the pageant’s power because it could “move” as well as challenge.

Anti-suffragists, too, were interested in – and wary of – pageantry’s power. In a 1910 article titled “Pageantry and Politics,” Ethelberta Harrison<sup>75</sup> expresses concern over the very appeal to the affect that MacKaye sees as so useful, warning of the possible dangers that might arise as a result of women taking a role in politics. Her comments suggest that an appeal to the affect necessarily implies an overriding of reason:

Displays and pageants are dangerous things in politics, where we need brain power and cool, dispassionate deliberation. . . . we think that, with women in politics, political advertisement and political pageantry might become frequent, and . . . appeal would be made not to the national sense of justice, nor to the powers of sheer reason and reflection, but to the emotion and sentiment of the people. (223)

Whereas MacKaye sees pageantry as deriving power from its ability to reach an audience by appealing to the heart as well as the mind – to educating, one might argue, the whole person – Harrison’s warning relies on a complete opposition between reason and emotion. It also reveals a lack of faith in men’s abilities as discerning audience members in the face of pageantry or other forms of spectacle; she claims that “the unfortunate male elector, bewildered by shows, pageant,

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<sup>75</sup> Harrison wrote about the “dangers” of pageantry in Britain, but Americans, too, formed anti-suffrage societies and discussed their fears about the suffragists’ tactics.

and political advertisements, has almost come to believe that the majority of women want the vote” (224). MacKaye figures the male voter in a much more positive light, as possibly persuaded or educated by spectacle, but not duped or convinced against his will. Like the playwrights discussed in the preceding pages, she imagines the spectator – whether male or female – as having agency.

MacKaye tried a number of different strategies for invoking the persuasive and pedagogical power of female bodies on display, experimenting with the pageant form in ways that allowed her to comprehend and eventually to navigate more effectively its strengths and limitations. As Green makes clear, spectacle can never be fully under the control of its creators, and this was true for MacKaye; pageantry’s traditional ideological underpinnings worked sometimes in contradiction to the suffragists’ aims. The American pageant, often used to patriotic ends, was usually a program of approximately two and a half hours, put on by a large number of amateurs and volunteers, and was, Karen Blair states, essentially a conservative form that functioned to maintain the status quo (“Pageantry for” 28). There appears to be little room in such a form for a pedagogy based on the need for change. “Generally,” Blair writes, “the pageant’s text held instant appeal for the community, affirming and thereby perpetuating popularly-held social values” such as “patriotism and reverence for the American democratic tradition” and “could easily please the public because [it] did not assert the need for change.” Overall, she claims, the pageant was attended and enjoyed by the masses “for its very refusal to explore, question, or critique historical and contemporary patterns and problems” (28-29), making it seem an unlikely form for suffragists to embrace.

And yet, as I have already discussed, suffrage writers often found useful ways to subvert traditional forms, adopting and adapting them to further feminist aims. Sarah J. Moore

understands pageant history somewhat differently than Blair does. She writes of what she refers to as pageantry's "mandate for social reform and optimistic belief in change through democratic cooperation" (89), implying that it offers a dramatic form inherently suggestive of social change. The characteristics she notes in her study, which focuses on three pageants that took place in 1913, are probably more indicative of new approaches to pageantry than of an inherently radical form, but this nonetheless offers some important context for MacKaye's efforts. A number of Progressive reformers adopted the pageant form, perhaps sensing in its power to stir the emotions a possibility for inspiring a commitment to social change. Moore contrasts "the growing recognition of pageantry as a political tool" with "its more traditional functions as the progenitor of . . . civic idealism and social cohesion" (90). And Blair suggests that Progressive reformers, "not content to perpetuate a self-congratulatory, unthoughtful, uncritical, and shallow type of recreation for the masses" began "trying to shape pageantry to serve a higher goal" ("Pageantry for" 20). By 1910, pageantry was widely popular, and Progressive reformers "had claimed for it virtues said to uplift, unify, and strengthen the American populace." MacKaye's attempt to use the form "in the service of fundamental changes in the social fabric" Blair sees as an ambitious project rather than a typical one mandated by the form (31). Her suffrage pageants reveal her as both working within the conservatism of the form and feeling out the degree to which it was possible to push the pageant to serve more radical purposes.

In some ways, MacKaye's first suffrage pageant, *The Allegory*, might appear not to be a radical project at all. It has been criticized, as I discuss below, for displaying female bodies in ways seen as too traditional or too reliant upon the performers' roles as passive spectacle. MacKaye did employ a visual rhetoric that relied on femininity and beauty for both persuasive and inspirational force and that invited its audience to *look*. The program for the March 3, 1913

event describes the pageant. First, the figure of Columbia, played by Hedwig Reicher of New York, was to emerge from the shadows, soon to be joined by figures representing Justice, Charity, Liberty, Peace, and Hope, each making an impressive entrance with music, attendants, and dancing. Hearing the approaching parade, these allegorical figures were then to turn their attention to the procession, reviewing the new ranks of women in a show of solidarity with the marching suffragists (“Official Program”). Collectible photo postcards give evidence of the attention to creating an overall impression of beauty and grace and indicate the types of costumes (feminine and flowing) and props (large round balloons and white doves) that contributed to this effect (Scrapbook). Blair calls *The Allegory* “far from bold” since it relied heavily on familiar elements such as the frequently employed Delsartian dance movements, which added yet another aspect of beauty to the performance (“Pageantry for” 35).<sup>76</sup> Mary Chapman critiques the pageant for being, in her opinion, less subversive than the accompanying parade, and “retreat[ing] to more traditional representations of women as silent, static icons of ‘Liberty,’ ‘Justice,’ and ‘Hope’ as if to mask the more radical claims of the parade” (343).

Yet this attention to beauty does not necessarily indicate that MacKaye’s project was a conservative one overall. Instead, I’d like to suggest, it both challenges norms, encouraging audience members to question accepted roles for women and to participate in an enactment of feminist coalition, and remains far enough within norms for its pedagogy to be palatable. Even a performance that adhered to so many familiar elements could be perceived as threatening. One

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<sup>76</sup> MacKaye would have been very familiar with François Delsarte’s ideas since her father, the famous Steele MacKaye, had been Delsarte’s pupil and disciple in France. He then brought the Delsarte system to the United States and spent a number of years giving lectures that ended in physical demonstrations (Sokalski 20-21). As he shifted his attention more directly to acting, his “reliance on Delsartean gestures as physical expressions of a character’s emotions” continued (43). Hazel MacKaye would also have been influenced by her father’s attention to beauty. Actor training – including Delsarte’s variety – “demanded that the actor should always complement the overall pictorial beauty of the scene rendered on stage,” and Steele MacKaye took this edict seriously, making “a careful study of the many compositional elements of the stage” (22).

critic at the time was upset about the “diaphanous and abbreviated costumes” worn by the performers (qtd. In Friedl 38). Such garments could position the women problematically as objects of aesthetic appreciation and even perhaps a kind of leering scrutiny. But Percy MacKaye offers a different interpretation. While some might view the flowing costumes as tantalizing or sexualizing, he interprets them as freeing, not restrictive to bodies in motion. The performers danced “in swaying gauzes,” he explains, “with bodies nobly free in action” (683). From this perspective, such costumes call attention to female physical strength and control, teaching viewers that women can be inspiring as active, physically capable figures.<sup>77</sup> Thus, the costumes, which actually drew on classical imagery, offered an intriguing combination of the traditional and the radical. Furthermore, Percy MacKaye sees the allegorical figures in the pageant not as problematically traditional or “static” representations of women, but instead as illustrating “those ideals toward which both men and women have been struggling through the ages and toward which, in cooperation and equality, they will continue to strive” (681).

So, while reliance on feminine beauty can be interpreted as a conservative feature of the pageant, it also furthered the more radical lessons *The Allegory* had to offer about women’s strength and potential. Still, an important part of suffrage pageantry’s pedagogical project was to make the movement and its goals appeal to masses of people, not just to the radical few. So it was equally important, since the suffragists’ “womanliness” was frequently questioned, that the immense spectacle of parade and pageant combined could educate a large number of observers – to say nothing of the many more the newspapers would reach afterwards – about the inaccuracy

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<sup>77</sup> Percy MacKaye’s valuing of clothing that permits freedom of movement is similar to comments that arose out of the Dress Reform movement. In a letter published in *The Liberator* in 1857, for instance, S. J. May writes, “Whatsoever we wear, no less than whatsoever we eat or drink, we should do it to the glory of God . . . . The structure of our bodies, each limb, each member, is undoubtedly the best that He could devise. Is it not impious folly, then, to corrupt, abuse, or prevent the development and right action of the body?” May concludes that clothing – including women’s clothing – “ought to be so contrived as to favor the fullest, freest exercise of the body” (102). See also B. O. Flower’s 1891 “Fashions Slaves” in *Arena*.

of such claims by providing a visual example of the suffragists as beautiful, orderly, well-attired, and (as the choreographed marching and dancing exhibited) carefully disciplined. Chapman asks, “Can ‘public displays in support of the status quo’ effect a critique of that status quo if they fail to offer an alternative?” And, “can masquerade avoid reinscribing the stereotypes of a dominated group which the group itself is attempting to revise?” (344). These are legitimate concerns. Chapman worries that the pageant failed to offer an alternative to woman as passive spectacle. However, it is important to remember that the pageant and parade were intended to work together.

Though they may have been silent, the performers nonetheless signified by their very presence their endorsement of the suffrage campaign (providing what I described earlier as an embodied signature). And when they all turned as a body to watch the coming marchers, inviting the audience to adjust its relationship with them and participate as fellow viewers surveying the new “troops,” they offer an alternative to passivity and objectification; they are demonstrating how to look upon the marching women with approval and admiration and inviting coalition. With this move, they endorse the suffragists parading in the public streets as both the new standard of (active) femininity and the new hope for social change. *The Allegory* is also notable because it established a connection between the pageant – traditionally an educational form, but a conservative one employed to teach and reinforce established values – and the suffrage movement, thus harnessing for the cause a form of spectacle already popularly understood as pedagogical. In doing so, it “captured for the suffragists the widest, most diverse audience they had yet reached” (Blair, “Pageantry for” 36), thus succeeding in encouraging large

numbers of people to give serious consideration to the issue of women's suffrage. And the audience was indeed engaged. Reviews, as Blair puts it, "were ecstatic" (37).<sup>78</sup>

In her second pageant, *The American Woman*, MacKaye experimented with representations of difficult moments in women's history, but she appears to have misjudged how much change (and how much truth) her audience could accommodate. Perhaps assuming that the Men's League for Women's Suffrage would be more receptive to a grittier representation of women's struggles and women's lives than the varied mass of parade-goers could be expected to be, MacKaye moved away from many of the classic elements she employed in her earlier aesthetically pleasing and symbolic allegory, though, as the *New York Times* was eager to point out, not away from beauty ("Real Beauty" 11). In place of decorative figures representing abstract concepts, traditional Greek costumes, and the fluid and graceful Delsartian movements, MacKaye attempted a production that owes much to the era's literary forays into realism. Described by Blair as "bald and brutal" ("Pageantry for" 25), *The American Woman* parodied the celebratory town histories that audiences had come to expect from the pageant form, using a series of historical scenes as a way of illustrating the economic, political, and social oppression of American women (39-40). Although suffragists often employed humor in their theatrical endeavors, parodying a loved form to depict painful realities may not have been a practical choice. The *New York Times* write-up does not at first appear offended by or resistant to the different approach in this pageant, but a closer reading reveals that the paper is resorting to a common strategy for defusing women's political arguments by focusing more on the clothing

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<sup>78</sup> The *Washington Herald* called the pageant "one of the most beautiful spectacles ever seen on the stage or in the open in Washington." The *New York Times* referred to it as "one of the most impressively beautiful spectacles ever staged in the country." And the *Woman's Journal* attempted in glowing terms to reassure those who feared that suffrage would result in a loss of femininity that this was proof it would not – that the pageant was a clear indication that there was no need to "fear the loss of beauty and grace, art and poetry, with the advent of universal suffrage" (qtd. In Blair 37).



and the beauty of the participants than on the message. References to the “prettiness” of the scenes and to the fact that the roles of man and woman of the future had been given to the “handsomest of their sex” cast a sort of aesthetic glow that diminishes any power the few references to the pageant’s actual content may have had (“Real Beauty” 11).

Blair suggests that MacKaye learned from this experience that the audience’s “perception of the pageant as a joyous and affirmative portrait of the past” puts limitations on the possibility of “transforming [it] to hold a totally new and controversial content” (“Pageantry for” 25). This content included the depiction onstage of injustices such as the bartering off of daughters, the burning of “witches,” and the withholding of the vote from all women when it was finally given to black men. *The Allegory*, with women’s bodies performing grace and representing abstract virtues in order to herald the coming era of suffrage and full citizenship was a use of pageantry the public was ready to understand; the spectacle of women’s bodies performing “American history as the long history of men’s subjugation of women” (Blair, “Pageantry for” 40-41), even a suffragist audience might find difficult to negotiate when they were expecting affirmation. Blair writes that the pageant met with “a steely silence” (41).<sup>79</sup> To return to Green’s idea, we might say that the eye had not been properly trained to see. While this second pageant might have had loftier pedagogical aims, asking the audience “to confront realistically-portrayed sexism head-on” (Blair 39) without preparing them to do so worked ultimately to shut down the possibility that the spectacle could educate. Finding the community-building and inspirational aspects of the form less prominent or else overshadowed by the stark depictions of injustice, spectators watching this pageant were less able to appreciate its lesson.

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<sup>79</sup> As Lumsden notes, not all reviews were negative (109). But unlike other suffrage pageants, which toured the country, it was not performed again. Blair writes, “So unpopular was it that neither [MacKaye] nor anyone else ever touched its angry realism again in women’s rights pageantry” (*The Torchbearers* 140).

In her third pageant, MacKaye reintroduced affirmation and celebration, but retained the visual representation of injustice she had introduced in *The American Woman*. Finding a balance between celebrating the suffragists' efforts and acknowledging the injustices against which they struggled, MacKaye created in the *Pageant of Susan B. Anthony* a much more popular spectacle that ultimately reached a wide audience when suffrage organizations chose to sponsor performances in Syracuse, Albany, Rochester, Buffalo, and other locations around New York state – and possibly in other states as well (Blair, "Pageantry for" 25, 43).<sup>80</sup> The original performance took place in Convention Hall, in Washington, D.C. It was planned to coincide with the meeting of the Sixty-fourth Congress, and was meant "to remind Congress that the amendment which Susan B. Anthony drafted over forty years ago is still to be passed, and that in the opinion of the leaders of the movement . . . it has never been improved upon" ("Pageant of the Life" 8). The program for the pageant<sup>81</sup> indicates that there were ten different episodes staged, each one depicting an important scene from Anthony's life, and five symbolic friezes interspersed between the episodes ("Susan B. Anthony" 7-8). As a follow-up article in *The Suffragist* indicates, each scene was "more than an incident in the individual story of Susan B. Anthony. It represented an era in the woman's movement, in the slow process of emancipation" ("The Susan B. Anthony Pageant" 5). Simultaneously educating viewers about the painfully slow pace of change and inspiring them with representations a female hero, the pageant had the potential to engage the heart as well as the mind. The friezes contributed to this by "pictur[ing] in symbol the changing mood of women working for enfranchisement" (5), including the moments of despair ("Susan B. Anthony" 7).

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<sup>80</sup> Blair indicates that the pageant was performed in Cleveland, but she may be mistaken, as she indicates that it was performed under the title *A Dream of Freedom* (43), which is the title of an earlier pageant that MacKaye attributes to Margaret Tuttle.

<sup>81</sup> A copy of the program was printed in the March 20, 1915 issue of *The Suffragist*.

Though attentive to the injustices and struggles suffragists faced, this pageant was imbued with a sense of pride in women's accomplishments and endurance, offering audience members something they had come to expect and thus allowing the form to fulfill its promise. The return to an inspirational and celebratory tone, however, did not mean that MacKaye had ceased experimenting with form; the American pageant had traditionally been used to express universal themes rather than to celebrate single historical figures, and her choice to focus on one individual suffragist was an innovation (Blair, "Pageantry for" 41). In this "highly sophisticated fusion of educational and entertainment elements," MacKaye created a pageant that "affirmed women's talents and strengths" and provided "instruction in little-known but verifiable historical episodes illuminating and praising Anthony's life-long commitment to social issues, her perseverance in the face of obstacles, and her ingenuity in devising strategies for change" (42). As a history lesson, it traced Anthony's involvement in the campaign for women's suffrage, but as a social lesson, it proclaimed that a woman could be a role model and hero.

To conclude, I'd like to note that MacKaye's pageants serve as a useful illustration of suffrage theater's social pedagogy more generally. Like all the plays discussed earlier in this chapter, their lessons are derived from and presented through spectacle, with the female body performing in public spaces positioned both as something to be looked upon and as representing alternative and empowering roles for women. Each performer's presence onstage was significant, inscribing before the viewers' eyes what I have referred to as an embodied signature, cementing solidly the lesson that actual women were in support of the suffrage cause. And the numbers involved in pageants could be quite large, giving significant impact to those "signatures." *The Allegory* (not including the accompanying parade) required one hundred performers, *The American Woman*, five hundred. And the *Pageant of Susan B. Anthony*

“assembled a company of four hundred women actors, sixty choristers, and twenty-five musicians” (Blair, *The Torchbearers* 139-40). Additionally, like other suffrage writers, MacKaye imagined her audience not as passive recipients of images and information, but instead as thinking and questioning people with the potential to become actors upon the larger “stage” of their country, where they would work to change laws and society. Anticipating ideas voiced later in feminist theory and feminist pedagogy, and in Freire’s and Boal’s work, in this way, MacKaye’s pageants also embody change, creating opportunities for audiences to see women in roles that assert female strength, intelligence, and heroism.

And finally, like other suffrage theater, MacKaye’s pageants offer the performers themselves an education. If the audience gets to see the power of coalition onstage when they view an impressive display, the performers experience first-hand a powerful lesson about what can be accomplished when a large number of women work together toward a single end. Even plays with very small casts afforded their performers this experience, but the ambitious scope of a pageant would have made the lesson indelible. MacKaye considered a pageant to be “the most potent means of welding the women themselves together” (qtd. in Blair, “Pageantry for” 43). Participants in a suffrage pageant or play weren’t necessarily already confirmed suffragists, but the experiences of working coalitionally and of enacting onstage those same positive representations of female strength their audiences were viewing would have helped them see ideas about women’s roles and rights in a new light. Thus, suffrage theater positioned audiences as actors, and performers as students – and both as potential agents of change.

### 3.0 SUFFRAGE SONGS AND POEMS AS PUBLIC LITERATURE

“Can you think in terms of a nation?”

-from Katharine Fisher’s poem, “Militants  
to Certain Other Women”

“Let us sing as we go, Votes for Women!  
Though the way may be hard, Tho’ the battle be long;  
Yet our triumph is sure; Put your heart into song,  
Into cheering and song: Votes for Women!”

-from the chorus to “Suffrage Song”<sup>82</sup>

“Locked in separate cells . . . the suffragists could still  
communicate by song. . . the prisoners would build a song,  
each calling out from cell to cell, and contributing a line.”

-Doris Stevens, *Jailed for Freedom*<sup>83</sup>

While the pedagogical power of suffrage theatricals derived largely from the paired elements of carefully orchestrated visual spectacle and the literal “standing-in” of the physical body to represent an individual’s political beliefs, the pedagogical power of the songs and poems can be said to derive in part from the very fact of their brevity. They are manageable, portable forms, accessible enough to be absorbed quickly and short enough to be composed even by those who lacked leisure time and/or writing supplies. As Doris Stevens’ above description indicates, they could even be composed aloud communally in a public building like the District Jail, where the suffragists who had been arrested for picketing the White House were denied paper and pencil.

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<sup>82</sup> These lyrics, written by James Weber Linn, were paired with music composed by Eleanor Smith (Linn 23-25). The song was originally published in 1915 in *Hull House Songs* (Wolff 22).

<sup>83</sup> In her account of the efforts of the National Woman’s Party, Stevens mentions several songs sung by the prisoners. Sometimes the women would sing together, and “sometimes it was the beautiful voice of Vida Milholland which rang through the corridors of the dreary prison, with a stirring Irish ballad, a French love song, or the Woman’s Marseillaise” (154). Vida Milholland, who gave up her singing career to work for the vote, was Inez Milholland’s sister. For a discussion of the prisoners’ singing, see p. 151-54.

Like the plays and pageants discussed earlier, the songs and poems offer images of women as strong and competent, celebrate individual female heroes and validate the importance of coalitional relationships, challenge notions about woman's "nature," contemplate the meaning of female citizenship, and (as Stevens' example shows) invite a blurring of boundaries between audience and artist. As social pedagogy, these genres build their lessons around many of the same themes that are taken up by the theater genres, thereby educating audiences of all sorts about women's strength and potential. Their brevity and accessibility, however, gave them nonetheless a somewhat different role than the plays and pageants. These genres opened up even further the possibility for amateurs as well as professionals to contribute their efforts. And, as I argue in this chapter, the almost infinite possibilities for sharing these texts and for "owning" them establish suffrage poems and songs as an especially powerful form of public literature, one particularly well suited for the pedagogical role it played.

The capacity for sharing was significant. Suffrage poems and songs could be recited or sung any number of times, in informal as well as formal settings. And the genres' compactness facilitated their transmission in a number of print formats as well, creating countless opportunities to reach new audiences. These ranged from the mass readership of a daily paper like the *New York Tribune*, which carried poet and humorist Alice Duer Miller's witty column "Are Women People," to the more specialized audiences of left-leaning publications like *The Masses* or of cause-specific papers like *The Suffragist*, to the individual recipient of a postcard or calendar inscribed with a suffrage rhyme. As feminist theorist bell hooks points out, short works combine reproducibility with accessibility in terms of the time investment required on the part of a reader, thereby making it possible to reach a wide audience that includes rather than dismisses working class readers (38-40). In much the same way that hooks imagines her readers claiming,

keeping, and sharing her short essays via the inexpensive technology of the local photocopier, suffrage-era readers were able to keep or share poems and song lyrics as newspaper clippings or through the acts of hand copying, recitation, and memorization.

In addition to their potential to reach an extensive and diverse audience, the repeated possibility for each new reader or listener to make the piece her (or his) own also contributes to the genres' role as public literature. In *Revolutionary Memory: Recovering the Poetry of the American Left*,<sup>84</sup> Cary Nelson considers the ways this can occur, the ways each new audience can re-author a poem. Discussing as an example a labor poem printed without an author named, Nelson claims that its authorship "in effect, is transferable; it is offered to its readers, and they are offered its site of enunciation. Read it aloud, stand with those whose history its sentiments evoke, and it becomes your poem" (31). Anonymous suffrage poems, like the postcard poem, "Suffragists' New Year's Greeting," and songs, like the "Battle Hymn of Women War Workers" printed in *The Suffragist* in June of 1918, were open to subsequent inhabitation in the same way. If a seemingly authorless poem or song made its invitation perhaps a little more apparent, however, those with a named author were also available for this type of re-authoring and ownership by audiences who recognized a text they could in some way "stand with." And this experience offered in addition the sense of a coalition formed with the text's original author.

These subsequent owners do not leave a poem or song unchanged. Sometimes the actual text is altered, shaped by accident or design into something that differs from the original. But there is also a more abstract type of change that occurs. Nelson offers as an example a poem that a wounded soldier copied onto postcards and then mailed to his mother, explaining that it

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<sup>84</sup> Nelson examines the poetry of the Left during the 1930s, 40s, and 50s – decades he suggests are remembered incorrectly as being characterized by apolitical poetry. While my own study ends with the 1920 passing of the Nineteenth Amendment, Nelson's project offers a useful model for this kind of recovery work and remains a key text for any scholar interested in political poetry.

“became a somewhat different poem than it was when [the author] wrote it in safety in the United States” and that “[t]o send it back in his own hand was to make it partly his own poem, or at least to put it in his own voice” (209). The idea that an individual who begins as audience can be transformed into an author – that he or she not only gains a type of ownership but also has the potential to invest the song or poem with new meaning or perspective, to take it up and use it – is particularly poignant. Like the soldier, those involved in the suffrage struggle could find poetry that spoke both to and for them; and their own experiences – perhaps of watching an inspiring speaker at a suffrage meeting, enduring criticism while standing in front of the White House as a picket, sitting in jail afterward, or simply reading about the women who were doing so – had the potential to color their readings.

The effect is that layer upon layer of voices discussing women’s roles and rights were in constant circulation. It is impossible to guess just how many suffrage songs and poems were written during the American campaign for the vote. It is not yet even possible to say how many remain in existence today,<sup>85</sup> although the recovery work completed thus far makes it clear that they were popular and plentiful. Already, the texts located through my own archival research or collected by other scholars number in the hundreds. Because there are too many to be given careful consideration in a single study, and because so little scholarship on these genres has thus far been written,<sup>86</sup> it is necessary to limit the scope of this chapter. In the following pages, therefore, I take as my primary focus a small, unified sub-set of this public literature, while also offering some context within which these texts – and their disappearance from the literary record

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<sup>85</sup> Nelson notes that we are not ready “to produce a complete bibliography of American poetry of the Left” (2); in fact, we are not ready to produce a complete bibliography even for this one social and political movement.

<sup>86</sup> The small body of existing scholarship includes: Zita Dresner’s 1987 article on American poet Alice Duer Miller’s use of humor; Mary Chapman’s 2006 article on Miller’s poetry and politics; Deborah Tyler-Bennett’s brief 1998 book article on “Suffrage and Poetry” in Britain; and Elizabeth Wood’s 1995 article on the music of Ethel Smyth.



– can be read. First, I discuss the public nature of the genres overall, exploring their uses as activist literature and the ways their accessibility both built coalition with audiences and invited those audiences to put the texts to their own uses. The need for archival recovery work, I argue, is largely a product of the social and literary context during and following the composing of these texts. Then I turn to the poetry and song lyrics printed in one suffrage periodical, the Congressional Union’s paper, *The Suffragist*, in order to offer a detailed exploration of the social pedagogy in which they participate. Borrowing Nelson’s terminology, I argue that the lyrics and poems printed in the pages of this suffrage newspaper can be read as a “poetry chorus” or a “choral poetics” in which different iterations of lessons about individual female strength and about feminist coalition echo and interweave.

### 3.1 PUBLIC GENRES, FORGOTTEN TEXTS

The distinctive power of suffrage song and poetry<sup>87</sup> as public literature is in large part due to its capacity to reach a wide audience. As Joseph Harrington points out in *Poetry and the Public: The Social Form of Modern U.S. Poetics*, poetry’s relationship to its audience was understood to

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<sup>87</sup> I want to clarify that, while I do devote some attention in this discussion to the special role song played in the suffrage movement as a genre in which many voices could be joined as one (as when the imprisoned suffragists sang together in jail), in general, I am referring to a larger poetic category that includes both song lyrics and poems when I refer to a “poetics” or “poetry chorus.” Not only is there no final, distinct boundary between the genres of “song” and “poem,” but there are, also, examples of genre ambiguity in some suffrage works that confound even the *idea* of such a division. Some of these can be found in *The Suffragist*, the paper that is the main focus of this chapter, in issues printed in 1918. While “A New Prison Song” is identified clearly as “song” by the printed indication of the tune to which it is to be sung (“We’ve been Working on the Railroad”), the presence of the word “song” in the title is not itself a guarantee that a piece can be sung. Kathryn Lincoln’s free verse poem, “A Picket Song,” for instance, has no ascertainable tune, and it appears centered at the bottom of a page, in the position the paper usually reserves for original poetry. That the editors of *The Suffragist* themselves believed lyrics were poetry is suggested by the fact that the “Battle Hymn of Women War Workers” is positioned in the same way and is printed without any mention of a “tune” – although the rhythm and the title allow a reader to infer the influence of another “Battle Hymn” quite readily. So, while songs and poems did play important distinct roles during this era, there is also reason to consider them together.

be of central importance during the decades in which the suffrage movement was under way. “From the early nineteenth century onward,” he says, “U.S. critics had understood poetry” largely “in terms of [its] effects on the reader” (27).<sup>88</sup> Like Hazel MacKaye’s pageants, these genres could combine an emotional appeal with an intellectual appeal, inviting audiences to ponder questions like the one Fisher poses in “Militants to Certain Other Women” and consider, for instance, just what it might mean to “think in terms of a nation” (7). It was no accident that “The Marseillaise” – quite probably the most rousing of national anthems, and a text remarkable already as a public one, “owned” by many – was reclaimed as a suffrage poem, its melody borrowed for a suffrage song (Cockin, *Women* 112). In fact, it was borrowed more than once, and in the United States and England both.<sup>89</sup> Eugénie M. Rayé-Smith’s version, “The Call of Town and Country,” is addressed to the “daughters of a nation” who are asked in the first verse to heed “your country’s call.” The chorus continues the exhortation:

Arise, the call is yours,  
Go forth, the world awaits!  
Press on! Press on!  
Till all her States  
Fling wide to you their gates! (14).

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<sup>88</sup> It was also perceived as serving “a public, often social function” This view, Harrington explains, “would be little challenged until the 1910s and remained dominant even after that” (17).

<sup>89</sup> In England, F[lorence]. E[lizabeth]. M[ary]. Macauley’s famous marching song, “The Women’s Marseillaise” (1909) was printed and distributed by the WSPU (Crawford 363). Various versions of a “Marseillaise” for women appeared in America as well. For example, the program for the Woman Suffrage Procession held in Washington, D.C. on March 3, 1913 includes lyrics for “Come Forth, Ye Women of the Land: A Women’s Marseillaise” by Eliza Tonks (“Official Program”). A small folded card offers lyrics for “The Marseillaise of The Women: A Song for Suffrage,” by Philip Green Wright. And Eugénie M. Rayé-Smith’s 1912 *Equal Suffrage Song Sheet* includes the lyrics for her “The Call of Home and Country,” which is set to the tune of “The Marseillaise” (14).

Anthems, processions, metaphorical calls to arms in the “battle” for the vote both in America and across the Atlantic could raise spirits, inspire action, and serve for many suffragists as a celebration and enunciation of their shared commitment.

In considering the body of work comprised of suffrage poems and songs as public literature, I do not mean to suggest that it is characterized by a univocal sameness. As Elizabeth Wood points out, the suffragists were never fully “an *esprit de corps* – a unified single entity that sounded as one voice by figuring many individuals as a single collective” (609). There were divisions, for instance, between the radical and the more conservative groups. Wood is attuned in particular to the ideological and tactical splits that at times characterized the British movement over the issue of militantism. Similar divisions occurred in the United States, both over the 15th amendment and over the country’s entry into war.<sup>90</sup> Still, even when their beliefs about which tactics constituted the best route to success differed, even when their relationships were at their most contentious, suffragists shared a common vision of women as active agents with a role to play in the maintenance of their country. And they understood the role suffrage songs and poems could play both in furthering this vision and in forging solidarity among women activists. The value placed on these genres can be seen not only in the fact that women (and men) composed them in such numbers, but also in the fact that individuals deemed them worth saving.

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<sup>90</sup> The first split occurred when members of the American Equal Rights Association disagreed regarding tactics (some believing that it was necessary to hold out for an amendment that eliminated disenfranchisement on the basis of both race and sex, others believing the amendment too important to delay). This resulted in the formation of two national suffrage organizations in 1869: the New York based National Woman Suffrage Association (NWSA) organized by Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Susan B. Anthony, and the Boston based American Woman Suffrage Association (ASWA) organized by Lucy Stone and Henry Blackwell. These groups eventually merged in 1890 to form the National American Woman Suffrage Association (NAWSA). The second split occurred in the final decade of the movement. While NAWSA continued to work for state-by-state passage of women’s suffrage, a group called the Congressional Union was formed in 1913 to work for the passage of a federal amendment. Led by Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, this group soon embarked upon tactics that conservative suffragists feared would set the movement back. By 1915, Paul had organized the group into the National Woman’s Party (NWP); in 1917, when the United States entered World War I, the NWP’s picketing of the White House was highly controversial.

Jeanette A. Jeffrey's scrapbook, for example, includes a clipping of a limerick by a Kansas suffragist (Scrapbook, 1912-1915), and Nancy Houghton Manning's scrapbook contains many clippings of poems, including a number about suffrage and women's rights (Scrapbook).<sup>91</sup> Both printed and handwritten suffrage songs can also be found in the collected papers of various individuals from the era. Perhaps the most significant evidence of the value suffragists placed on these genres, however, is the fact that in addition to being read and collected privately, they often saw public performance, both of the spontaneous and informal variety illustrated by the singing of the imprisoned pickets and also of a more formal variety, either as part of the official proceedings at suffrage organizations' meetings and conventions, or as part of other organized suffrage events.<sup>92</sup>

While both genres could move audiences and invite contemplation of the suffrage movement's aims and ideals, song did have a special role for advocates of change. Other social movements saw the value of song as a way to call out to others who might feel sympathetic to a

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<sup>91</sup> According to a 1913 reader of the *Dial*, clipping newspaper verse for scrapbooks was such a common practice in these years that one "might try to discover the home without its scrap-book of verse" (qtd. in Harrington 32).

<sup>92</sup> References to this type of usage can be found in various places. Songs appear especially frequently. A set of anonymous handwritten lyrics for "Three Old Crows" with "Woman Suffrage Convention, Burlington, March 10<sup>th</sup> 1870" written at the top includes a note that the hymn "has been composed expressly for the occasion, and if approved by the managers, will be introduced in the opening ceremonies to the air, 'When Johnny Comes Marching Home'" ("Three Old"). In 1876, when suffragists were not invited until the last minute to a centennial celebration, they decided to hold their own celebration, at which the famous Hutchinson family performed songs including "A Hundred Years Hence" (Liner Notes 9). The "official program of songs" for the 1891 NAWSA Convention included "The Promised Land" (set to the music of "The Red, White, and Blue") and "The New America" (set to the tune "America"), by Elizabeth Boynton Herbert [elsewhere spelled Harbert] (Liner Notes 5, 10). During the 1911 state referendum campaign in California, many groups organized trips to rural areas where they would perform skits and songs (Cott 28); the program of the College Equal Suffrage League of Northern California, for example, typically included both a talk and a performance of the song and dance "Reuben and Rachel," by Mrs. Edward Stanwood and Mrs. W.A. Starr, who were also cast members for performances of the play *How the Vote Was Won* (France 41). And in 1914, at the third annual convention of the Woman's Franchise League in Indiana, "Mrs. Ida Gray Scott opened the program by singing the National Suffrage anthem, the words of which were written by Miss Minetta Taylor, of Greencastle, and . . . set to music by Mrs. A.W. Tracy of Greencastle" (Woman's Franchise League). Poems, too, saw public performance at suffrage events. For instance, Frances Gage occasionally read her poetry at the annual meetings of the Indiana Woman's Suffrage Association, including one piece she composed spontaneously to celebrate the fact that the rain had at last stopped and the sun had come out, a fact she read as a metaphor for the movement's coming success (Record Book). These are only a few of the performances for which a written record survives.

cause; the IWW's 1909 pamphlet *Songs of the Workers* was, in Nelson's words, "among its most effective recruiting devices" (31). And suffrage songs (which were doing similar work in the same era) surely hailed many new members. In this way, the texts carried related but different lessons for those already "recruited" and for those just starting to consider the cause. According to Coline Jenkins-Sahlin, great-great-granddaughter of Elizabeth Cady Stanton, the music arising from a social and political movement "intensifies feelings and attitudes, infuses pride, and strengthens a sense of purpose in its followers" (1). The sheer number of suffrage songs written and printed during the movement lends weight to this claim. Songwriters were very active participants in the conversation about women's rights: Danny O. Crew's 2002 "Illustrated Catalogue" of *Suffragist Sheet Music* from the American movement contains hundreds of suffrage songs, and though extensive, this is not a complete collection.<sup>93</sup> Unlike longer genres, a song was accessible even to those with little time to spare, and also to those who could not read, if they happened by during a street performance. And as Jenkins-Sahlin explains, music was frequently a part of home life – especially, though not solely, for the middle class:

Prior to the mid-twentieth century, song was an integral part of everyday family life. The [middle class] home entertainment center of the eighteenth, nineteenth, and early twentieth centuries consisted of a piano or parlor organ. Families gathered around the instrument in the evenings and shared songs as we might share a movie today. Often, the songs were of a political nature. Published sheet music was a principle means of sharing ideas and issues of the day. Likewise,

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<sup>93</sup> Crew reviewed manuscripts at a great number of libraries and archives. A good description of this process and of the choices he made in determining what to include is provided in the brief preface to the collection. The scope of this undertaking was highlighted to me in my own archival research, as I came to realize just how far-spread these texts really are, and how limited the search options. As I work to compile the poems, I face the same challenges; since they are not yet catalogued as "suffrage poems," locating them requires great inventiveness and a good bit of luck; similarly, there is no accurate measure of how complete the record is.

song was an essential element in public gatherings such as rallies, political meetings, parades, and conventions. Without a microphone, many could not hear the speaker, but all could join in partisan singing, especially when the lyrics were set to a popular tune of the day. (1)

Thus, song was able to reach a great many people. And the popular strategy of setting new activist lyrics to a tune already familiar to a vast and varied audience can be understood as a canny pedagogical and political strategy, an anti-classist effort to create a sisterhood (and brotherhood) and to forge solidarity – a type of mass marketing of messages about women’s strength and worth.

Though original compositions were common too, a great many American suffrage songs were set to familiar tunes, especially traditional hymns<sup>94</sup> like “Missionary Hymn” and patriotic songs<sup>95</sup> like “America” and “Battle Hymn of the Republic.” Pamphlets of song lyrics such as the 1884 *Booklet of Song: A Collection of Suffrage and Temperance Melodies* compiled by L. May Wheeler<sup>96</sup> and Rayé-Smith’s 1912 *Equal Suffrage Song Sheaf* could then be distributed without sheet music, which kept costs down and made it possible to print and distribute greater numbers of copies. Listeners could memorize such songs easily, and could even join in on the chorus in a first hearing. As Miriam Reed, who recently produced a recording of some suffrage songs, notes, many of the songs “are set to music that is either already well known” or is “easily picked up after one or two hearings” – the songs are “meant to be sung” (2). They invite listeners to join in, thus merging audience indistinguishably with performer. R. Serge Denisoff comments

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<sup>94</sup> The use of hymns, Francie Wolff notes, was “more than merely convenient, as many early suffrage leaders were religious leaders as well” (Lucretia Mott was a dedicated Quaker, and Reverend Olympia Brown was “the first denominationally ordained female minister in the United States”). Early suffragists “often fashioned their gatherings after prayer meetings [where song played an integral role] because church functions were among the few accessible and acceptable opportunities for women to gather” (5-6).

<sup>95</sup> Familiar patriotic melodies also “reinforced the argument that woman suffrage was a patriotic cause” (Wolff 10).

<sup>96</sup> This collection was published in Minneapolis by the Cooperative Printing Company. See Crew, pp. 82-104.

that the use “of popular or familiar tunes to which new lyrics are adapted . . . places emphasis on a commonality of experience and speeds communication in terms of perceived social discontent” (qtd. in Wolff 44).<sup>97</sup> By joining voices, the singers share the immediate experience of uniting themselves in song, thus responding to the inherent invitation to enact coalition. Through the lyrics they sing, the singers often also participate in a communal act of commenting upon social injustice. Thus, because they are “owned” by each new audience in this way, suffrage songs can be seen to “represent the voices of thousands of people who were part of a significant movement in United States history” (Wolff xv), not just the voices of the authors.

While suffragists frequently sang these songs together in an impromptu choral performance, the songs also had a different type of “choral” nature in their authorship; some songs evolved over time, written and rewritten by different authors/owners, changed to suit geographic needs, to fill in the blanks left by faulty memories, or to include new verses that offer a “solution” to a problem described by earlier-written lyrics.<sup>98</sup> Although I am primarily concerned in this study with the suffrage songs as lyrics (including this potential for subsequent users to re-author the texts literally by revising them) and do not intend to offer an extended analysis of the music,<sup>99</sup> music certainly was a key element in the affective appeal of the genre and played a role in making it easier to assimilate ideas that could seem challenging or foreign.

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<sup>97</sup> Wolff notes that “while Denisoff neglects to mention suffrage songs in his book, *Sing a Song of Social Significance*, many of his descriptions of protest songs, or *propaganda songs* . . . apply to the protest songs written about suffrage” (44).

<sup>98</sup> “Winning the Vote” (1912) by Mrs. A. B. Smith is one such example. Previously printed as “Woman’s Rights” (1897) and attributed to M. B. C. Slade, this song had at least two authors (and titles), and at some point gained an additional “solution” verse (Wolff 73-75). “Winning the Vote” is also a musical dialogue, a genre typical of pre-World War I America, with a male part and a female part; it was published with the recommendation that it should be acted (Liner Notes 6).

<sup>99</sup> See Wood’s “Performing Rights: A Sonography of Women’s Suffrage” for an interesting and insightful analysis of the music itself; looking at the work of British suffrage composer Ethyl Smyth from 1910-1914, she explores the relationship between music and the body.

Like the lyrics, this music varied greatly, with work ranging from the borrowing from and derivation of traditional tunes to the creation of original works for the movement.<sup>100</sup>

Probably the most famous original composition is the British song, “The March of the Women” (1910), by Ethel Smyth, who was “universally acclaimed as the most notable composer among women of her time” (Wood 609). Paired with lyrics by Cicely Hamilton (616), the song was presented by Smyth to Emmeline Pankhurst at a 1911 function organized by the Women’s Social and Political Union to recognize the release from Holloway of prisoners who had been arrested on “Black Friday.” Soon thereafter, the song appears to have taken on a life of its own. It “was soon on everybody’s lips,” according to reviews in *Votes for Women*; with its “haunting melody that rings in the ears,” the song was “at once a hymn and a call to battle” (qtd. in Wood 617). I mention it here because, within a few years, it was adopted in the United States, becoming a rallying song for the American radicals. It is described in *The Suffragist* as “one of the most beautiful and inspiring pieces of music which has been written in modern times” (“Nation-wide” 6), and the lyrics (either in full or in part) appeared in the paper on three different occasions. Yet in addition to being beautiful and inspiring, the song was also, significantly, a public text. Wood describes it as “a propaganda song, no less: cheap, portable, and pocketable, a multipurpose commodity for the mass market” that was offered in “multiple editions and arrangements for any and every performance opportunity, site, and vocal resource to hand”

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<sup>100</sup> Although much suffrage music was accessible to a broad audience, this was not always the case. Wood notes an interesting class-based division in some of the songs, which, she says, “betray an earnestly didactic literary style in their religious, middle-class origin and are not as easy to perform (or suited to untrained voices) as the ‘barrack-room’ ballad style of labor and strike songs” (611).



(617).<sup>101</sup> Indeed, the song has survived in a number of different forms. My own research has turned up several different copies, varying in cost and format.<sup>102</sup>

While songs invited audiences to enact coalitional relationships by lifting their voices together, the poems, too, were public texts, aimed at accessibility and often reaching mass audiences. Some suffrage poems were published in mainstream newspapers, and these reached the broadest readership, their authors often strategically employing humor and writing in closed forms with regular meter and traditional rhyme schemes. *New York Tribune* Columnist Alice Duer Miller is the best remembered suffrage poet – and to my knowledge, the only one so far to be the subject of academic scholarship. I will not discuss her comic poems at length here, as Zita Dresner and Mary Chapman have begun this work and there are so many other suffrage writers about whom nothing has yet been written. However, as *The Suffragist* frequently reprinted Miller’s poems in its “Comments of the Press” section, her wry humor comprises a significant component of the paper’s “choral poetics,” and her efforts at marketability deserve some attention here.

Miller had a keen awareness of the role her art could play if she found ways to make it accessible to the widest possible readership. As pedagogical texts, her poems often demonstrate the task of wrestling with an idea or refuting an authority figure, but her humor is especially aimed to educate or enlighten without alienating. She frequently offers her readers a current

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<sup>101</sup> As Harrington notes, before T.S. Eliot and others “distanced themselves from the market in order to accrue cultural legitimacy,” marketability was a measure of poetry’s value and “the sales of poetry indicated its power to fulfill its social function” (33).

<sup>102</sup> Cicely Hamilton is not credited on any of the versions I have come across; Ethyl Smyth is credited on all of them, so for simplicity’s sake, I am listing Smyth as the author of this song even though I am listing all other songs under the name of the lyricist. One simple version provides piano music and the lyrics on a single one-sided sheet; a three cent folio style version, with the piano music and lyrics enclosed in a cover that has publishing information on the front and an advertisement for other works by Smyth on the back, can be found in the Ellen A. Webster Papers; a one penny card offering the lyrics with the melody music on one side and advertising other versions on the other can be found in the Clementina Hartshorne Rhodes Papers.

quotation about politics, women, or democracy and then addresses it in verse, thus modeling the possibility for two (or more) points of view to exist in the conversation about women's rights. In "Botheration," which appeared in *The Suffragist* in December of 1915,<sup>103</sup> Miller takes a lighthearted poke at Chairman Webb, who had apparently asked at a suffrage hearing in Washington, "Why do you come here and bother us?" Quoting his words as a preface to her poem, Miller considers the interaction in light and lilting verse:

Girls, girls, the worst has happened,  
Our cause it at its ebb.  
How could you go and do it!  
You've bothered Mr. Webb!  
You came and asked for freedom,  
(As law does not forbid);  
Not thinking it might bother him;  
And yet, it seems, it did. (1-8)

The poem continues in this light vein, ending with the humorous claim, "We never mention suffrage now— / It bothers Mr. Webb!" (23-24). Another poem, "The Petty Whim," which appeared in the August 4, 1917 issue of *The Suffragist*,<sup>104</sup> commences with an excerpt from a recent *New York Times* editorial that referred to "the sight of highbred women disturbing the peace in pursuit of a petty whim." More confrontational than the other, but still with a light touch, this poem recasts the labeling of the suffragists' project as the pursuit of a "petty whim," suggesting that it is the author of this statement whose aims are "petty." Miller comments on the

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<sup>103</sup> There is some inconsistency in the numbering of issues, so it is not entirely clear on which date the poem actually appeared. The issue is marked as coming out on December 25<sup>th</sup>, but this poem is labeled as having first appeared in the *New York Tribune* on December 26<sup>th</sup>.

<sup>104</sup> This poem is listed as having originally appeared in the *New York Tribune* on July 29<sup>th</sup>.

wars this “petty whim” has “brought to pass” (3) and the conflicts it has “made ‘twixt class and class” (5), pointing out that “men have died on land and sea, / For it – this whim of being free” (7-8). She finishes the poem by establishing distance between a “we” for whom freedom has value and the author of “that shabby line” (14), her speaker closing with the lines, “Pray God we may not be like him, / Who looks on freedom as a whim” (15-16).

In addition to “displaying her trenchant wit,” Miller regularly uses what Dresner calls “one of the most common tools of women humorists before and after her” by pointing out “the incongruity between images and realities, particularly in women’s lives,” thus revealing “a penetrating perception of the ways in which gender stereotypes were (and have continued to be) manipulated” to maintain a hierarchical power structure (33-34). Even while critiquing patriarchal institutions, Miller remains accessible to an audience that extends beyond committed suffragists, and she does so in part by allowing her illustrations of incongruity to speak for themselves. Her use of familiar forms, such as the sonnet and the ode, further contributed to her “readability.” Techniques like borrowing, rewriting, and parodying well-known songs and poems were regularly used by newspaper poets, who wrote under severe time constraints. But these methods were not simply shortcuts for Miller, who reclaimed such forms, according to Chapman, in order to question assumptions about gender (““Are Women”” 79). As a highly readable popular poet, Miller created texts that delivered lessons about gender and about women’s rights and roles in forms that could be taken up without alienating an audience.

The very qualities that gave suffrage songs and poems worth and meaning, that made them such a vital part of the movement’s social pedagogy, however, also contributed to their rapid disappearance from the literary record after the vote was won. As Harrington points out, in the early years of the twentieth century, “a broad cross-section of U.S. poets and critics” argued

that poetry “is (or ought to be) a popular art form” (13); but with “the accession of New Criticism in the U.S. academy. . . . popular audiences and authors [were] extirpated from literary history as well as excluded from legitimate and legitimizing institutions” (22). Political and popular art came to be viewed with suspicion, and suffrage poetry, culminating when it did, at the moment when modernism and New Criticism were taking root, had perhaps even less chance of being valued, studied, and preserved than other activist traditions in other eras. Not only were many of these poems and songs written by women, which has often been enough to eliminate literary texts from the list of “important” or “great” works, they also espoused a union of art and politics at a time when high art was strategically divorcing itself from politics.

According to Harrington, “it has become passé to critique the New Critics” because “their attitudes have been challenged and decentered from most fields of literary studies,” but in poetry scholarship, “the story of the twentieth century” is still “that of modernism,” and other interesting poets continue to be marginalized (2). New Critical ideals remain ingrained, coloring our thinking in ways we don’t always realize. Cleanth Brooks’s refusal to see any artistic merit in the anthology *Proletarian Literature* because of the “vice” of sentimentality for which he found it easy to “convict” the poets (50) exemplifies the kind of dismissal of popular poetry that has been echoed many times since. Even scholars engaged in the recovery of women writers can dismiss political literature in a wholesale manner, thus further marginalizing the literary efforts of women who wrote with their own interests at heart. In her 1977 *A Literature of Their Own*, Elaine Showalter claims that “the [British] suffrage movement was not a happy stimulus to women writers” (236) and that “the feminist writers were not important artists” (32). Showalter is more interested in the effects the movement had on well-known writers than she is in the

suffrage writers themselves, and her primary focus is on novels rather than poetry,<sup>105</sup> but her offhand dismissal of suffrage literature carries significant weight since her book was one of the first studies even to acknowledge the existence of suffrage poems, plays, and novels. She thus creates a real obstacle to the development of serious scholarship on the tradition of women's political literature,<sup>106</sup> as her readers can find their initial discovery of the existence of suffrage literature colored immediately by its denigration as undistinguished, uninteresting art.<sup>107</sup>

The reality is that suffrage literature is a highly varied tradition. Over the course of more than seventy years, suffrage writers, both amateurs and professionals, one-time authors and prolific writers, created a body of work that contains hundreds of songs and poems written in a wide variety of techniques and styles. These range from comic limericks to free verse elegies, from patriotic songs set to familiar tunes to original compositions in other genres like opera and ragtime, from the sentimental to the inspirational, and from parody to pastiche. And they are

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<sup>105</sup> There are numerous suffrage novels. The American novels include, among others: Elizabeth Boynton Harbert's *Out of Her Sphere* (1871), Gertrude Atherton's *Julia France and Her Times* (1912), Isaac N. Stevens's *An American Suffragette* (1911), and *The Sturdy Oak* (1917) – a compilation novel edited by Elizabeth Jordan, with chapters written by fourteen different famous authors. British novels include Gertrude Colmore's *Suffragette Sally* (1911), Edith Zangwill's *The Call* (1924), and Charlotte Despard and Mabel Collins's *Outlawed* (1908). I do not deal with fiction in my study, but some scholarship on suffrage novels has been written. Interestingly, Showalter does not actually offer many examples of suffrage novels in her book, and the one she gives most attention to (*The Convert*) is Elizabeth Robins's rewriting of her famous play, *Votes for Women*, a novel which she wrote for fear (unmerited, as it turned out) that the play might never see performance.

<sup>106</sup> Showalter's study has been subject to a great deal of critique, though not to my knowledge for its subsequent effect on scholarship on political literature. I am not interested here in joining the tradition of attacks on academic foremothers. Showalter's study was a ground-breaking and important work, and has frequently been criticized, at times by careless readers who hoped that it would do work it was never meant to do (or who misread the title, as she points out in her introduction to the 1999 printing of the book). What I *am* interested in doing is pointing out the challenges her value claims create for future work that takes political literature seriously.

<sup>107</sup> Of course, conversely, even scholars engaged in the recovery of political literature can sometimes seem to turn a blind eye to works by women and/or dealing with women's rights. Nelson, for instance, is neither unaware nor unappreciative of women's activist work. (In fact, he mentored Mark Van Wienen though the publication of his book on women's war-time poetry). Yet in his effort to create a genealogy of activist poetry, he overlooks the many decades of suffrage poetry and the even longer tradition of women's rights poetry. His claim that "poetry written to play an immediate role in public life" can be traced back to abolitionist poetry and broadside poems (145) is true, but it omits any reference to the tradition of women's rights poetry that grew directly out of the abolitionist movement and preceded the period of Nelson's own study – an important link in the timeline of public and political literature. Even when unintended, this type of omission contributes to the erasure of a long tradition of women's writing.

often as fascinating for their artistry and aesthetics as they are for their historical significance and their pedagogical role. Yet suffrage poems and songs have mostly been dismissed, ignored, or forgotten by literary scholars. A few individuals have begun the feminist recovery work necessary to ensure that these genres are not lost completely, but the picture remains far from complete. A small amount of the American poetry is again available, either in print form or online; and some of the British songs and poems have been collected.<sup>108</sup> The American songs especially are being recovered in significant numbers by researchers who noticed their absence. In preparing a short article for a 1991 issue of *Hotwire* (a feminist publication about women's music), guitarist Janna MacAuslan attempted to reclaim this genre for a readership interested in its musical foremothers but soon discovered that even books "claiming to represent political movements in the history of the U.S. completely overlooked any mention of suffrage songs" (12).<sup>109</sup> Since then, two larger-scale recovery projects have made a number of the songs available. Francie Wolff's 1998 *Give the Ballot to the Mothers* reprints 27 songs along with sheet music, interspersing them with some historical information. And Crew's 2002 *Suffragist Sheet Music* provides the lyrics for many more.

My own contribution here is to reclaim the poems and song lyrics that were printed in the pages of *The Suffragist*, a paper that was published as the voice of the radical faction of the American women's suffrage movement, the Congressional Union (which soon became the

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<sup>108</sup> Gail Dickersin's 1978 "Notes on Nineteenth Century Feminist Verse" reprints a handful of feminist poems, including some dealing with suffrage or women's rights, and offers some accompanying contextual information. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's 1909 collection *Suffrage Songs and Verses* was reprinted in 2008 by Dodo Press. Alice Duer Miller's collections, the 1915 *Are Women People?* and the 1917 *Women are People!* are now available online. But aside from the work of these two famous names, most of the American poetry remains unavailable in any easily accessible form. Some of the British poems and songs can be found in multi-genre anthologies by Glenda Norquay and Carolyn Christensen Nelson. Many of the American poems that haven't yet been lost are available only in archives, waiting to be collected – a compilation project I have begun for this dissertation and plan to continue.

<sup>109</sup> MacAuslan notes that John Greenway's [the article refers to him as John Greenwood] 1953 history of *American Folk Songs of Protest*, for instance, "contains many examples of songs from abolitionists, textile workers, union activists, and even relatively modern folk songs – but makes no reference to suffrage songs" (12).

National Woman's Party), from late 1913 to early 1921. While I'd like to suggest that the entire body of suffrage poetry, written across the many decades of the movement, is worth our attention, it is important to start somewhere. And this publication, which so clearly embraced poetry and valued song, is an especially compelling object of study, situated as it was at a kind of literary crossroads. If high modernism and New Criticism shaped the literary values that allowed subsequent generations to deem popular and politically charged poetry unworthy of preservation, this is by no means the whole picture. The final decade of the American suffrage movement, when *The Suffragist* was in print, was, as Harrington states, a time when "the very meaning of poetry was in considerable flux" – when the word "poetry" described "an indeterminate and contested space" (3). Although later remembered in literary circles as the decade in which modernism emerged, the 1910s were a time when "dichotomies between poetry and the public, form and function, were not yet as clear for readers as they would seem in subsequent decades" and when "many styles and philosophies competed for the allegiance of writers and readers or combined in hybrid forms that would later seem suspect" (15).

The suffrage poets represented in the pages of *The Suffragist* can be understood as active participants in the shaping and exploring of this "contested space." Anticipating later feminist projects aimed at dismantling binary thinking, they rejected dichotomies that would split poetry from the public, instead embracing its public and pedagogical functions; similarly, they were able to imagine a poetry that attended to both form *and* function. Chapman is attentive to this more complicated picture of the 1910s when she describes Alice Duer Miller not as an out-dated writer who has failed to keep up with the latest literary fashion, but as a savvy popular poet who knows what effect she wants her work to have:

While Miller was undoubtedly aware of currents in avant-garde poetics – indeed, her column appeared regularly alongside profiles of and interviews with poets such as Amy Lowell and editors such as Harriet Monroe, who discussed vers libre, imagism, and little magazines for *New York Tribune* readers – [she] chose not to deploy avant-garde poetics or to address an exclusive audience in her poetry. In fact, her poetry appears in opposition to it. (78)

Borrowed repeatedly by the paper’s editors, Miller’s poetry is one facet of *The Suffragist’s* choral poetics. Some of the other individual voices represented in the paper also took this approach, and song lyrics, especially, very often aimed at accessibility. Other poets included in its pages, however, can be seen as embracing literary experimentation. Nancy Berke defines what she calls “radical moderns” – “women poets on the left who wrote socially engaged poetry during the modern period” and “believed that modernist poetry could ‘make it new’ at the same time that it addressed the social and political realities of the modern age.” Such writers, she explains, can be seen as working to infuse modernist aesthetics with a “social conscience” (94).

The “poetry chorus” of the paper thus includes a number of different styles. As Nelson is careful to point out, a choral poetics does not imply that the poets “all wrote with one voice” (6), but that “in moments of particular crisis or public inspiration” they “wrote as part of a collective enterprise” (7). I find this a particularly productive way to read the suffrage poetic – as a collective conversation built of layer upon layer of voices iterating and reiterating, refuting and questioning, repeating some ideas and responding to others, in such a manner as to result in an artistry that is both interesting for its components – the individual songs and poems offered up at different moments by different writers – and for its collective power. Such a reading makes it possible to attend both to the social pedagogy of the paper’s poetry – to the particular types of



lessons about women offered in its verse – and to the formal elements through which those lessons are constructed.

### 3.2 CONSTRUCTIONS OF SELF AND SISTERHOOD IN THE POETRY OF *THE SUFFRAGIST*

Some background about the paper itself is useful context for a reading of the poetry chorus. As I mentioned above, this new paper was created in the final decade of the American women's suffrage movement to present the views of the more radical and rebellious activists – those who had grown impatient with conservative tactics and sluggish progress and were ready to try more subversive strategies. *The Suffragist* introduced itself in November of 1913 as the “official organ of the Congressional Union for Woman Suffrage.” Drawing from their experience in the British suffrage campaign, where they had learned the strategies of the militants and spent time in prison for their efforts, Alice Paul and Lucy Burns shaped the campaign of the new Congressional Union (and the later-organized National Woman's Party); they organized demonstrations aimed at getting a federal amendment passed and started a newspaper to cover the campaign. Although many subscribers to *The Suffragist* cancelled in protest when the controversial White House picketing began in 1917, new subscriptions outnumbered cancellations, and the paper reached its peak numbers in February 1918, with 5,599 subscribers and a press run of over 20,000 copies (Lumsden, “*Suffragist*” 531). Based in Washington, D.C., with access to the ongoing political scene, the paper had a national scope and agenda. Its “Comments of the Press” section, which reprinted excerpts from newspapers throughout the country, and its ongoing coverage of the CU and NWP efforts, as Linda Lumsden notes, “helped legitimize the federal approach to suffrage, especially since most of the nation's editors, every member of Congress, and the White House

received copies” (530). The paper played many roles. Lumsden explains that it “gave women a voice, offered them community, kept the suffrage issue alive during wartime, legitimized the demand for a federal suffrage amendment, and advanced the NWP viewpoint regarding the controversial pickets” (525). *The Suffragist* depicts a lively and passionate struggle through the eyes of those who lived it.

It also depicts a complex negotiation of the ideas of individuated selfhood and sisterly solidarity, a negotiation particularly evident in the poetry that graced its pages at first sporadically, and later with increasing regularity, up through the final celebratory January/February 1921 issue that came out after the vote was won; the individual poets contributed to an overall poetics of the radical branch of the movement, one that traces the activities, fears, hopes, and ideals of its members. In some ways, the poems (and occasional song lyrics) printed in this paper are representative of the larger body of suffrage poetry, exploring female identities and relationships and drawing on the concept of the movement as a “battle,” and in other ways, they establish a “choral poetics” unique to this particular time period and group of suffragists, establishing a cohesive sisterhood of radicals and drawing on their own claimed strategies of activist demonstration, including the picketing of the White House. Through such techniques as imagery, elegy, metaphor, and memory, the poets whose work was included in this paper explored the notions of self and sisterhood, constructing for their readers lessons about gendered ways of “being” that furthered their cause.

*The Suffragist* included poetry almost from the start, but the sources and types of poetry shifted notably over the paper’s short lifespan. Early on, the paper mostly reprinted an occasional poem that had been published in other papers. In 1914, it included two poems first published in *The Masses* – one by Elizabeth Waddell and one by Sarah N. Cleghorn – and a

poem by Charlotte Perkins Gilman from her own paper, *The Forerunner*. The one poem not attributed to another periodical that year was “The Soldier’s Mother” by Marietta M. Andrews, an illustrated piece that appeared on the cover of the August 22 issue. Song lyrics, too, were sometimes reprinted in the paper during its first full year in print. In May of 1914, the lyrics to Ethyl Smyth’s song “The March of the Women” appeared not once, but twice.<sup>110</sup> They are included first in an article describing plans for an upcoming procession, with an instructional note commenting on the “ease” of the music and asking readers to memorize the lyrics before the May 9<sup>th</sup> event. Women are encouraged to sing together; the instructions state that “after the chorus . . . has sung the first verse, the rest of the procession will be able to join in singing the remaining verses (“Nation-wide” 6). The subsequent May 9 issue contained more explicit directions for the day’s procession, and included piano music as well as lyrics for The March (“Direction” 6-7).

In the following two years, the paper’s “Comments of the Press” section offered the occasional humorous poem or silly rhyme reprinted from various mainstream newspapers and also included some song lyrics in an article on two different occasions,<sup>111</sup> but it wasn’t until December of 1916 that the paper offered another apparently original-run poem, when Ruth

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<sup>110</sup> Cicely Hamilton’s name does not appear alongside Ethyl Smyth’s on either occasion, though she is indicated in other sources as the author of the lyrics. It is unclear what the omission may mean, but it is certainly clear that the American radicals admired Smyth greatly.

<sup>111</sup> In October of 1915, “The March of the Women” again made its way to the pages of *The Suffragist*, though this time only a few lines were printed, in an article describing ceremonies at the closing night of the Convention of Women Voters (with 10,000 attending) which “opened, both symbolically and literally, the western woman voters’ campaign for the enfranchisement of the voteless women of the east and south” (“The Farewell” 5). Although the song is not mentioned by name, it is clear that it was familiar to all. A writer for the *San Francisco Bulletin* (excerpted in this same article) describes the powerful scene: “[T]he great crowd in the court joined in the swelling song that another band of women across the sea fighting for liberty had originated. Everyone was catching the words” (5). Later that evening, the singing of the “Song of the Free Woman,” with lyrics by Sara Bard Field, set to the music of “The Marseillaise,” was also part of the festivities. The full lyrics are printed in *The Suffragist*, and include the lines, “We are women clad in new power / We see the weak. We hear their plea. / We march to set our sisters free” (6-8).

Fitch's elegy for Inez Milholland appeared.<sup>112</sup> The establishment of a martyr, the growing frustration of the too-long-patient workers in the suffrage movement, the U.S. entry into the war, and the split in the suffrage movement as the Congressional Union and the National Woman's Party decided to protest Wilson's continued failure to act for suffrage all came together at a moment that appears to have been a significant turning point in the paper's relationship to poetry as well as in the movement itself. By 1917, the year the picketing began, the number of comic poems in the "Comments of the Press" section had multiplied, most of these the work of Alice Duer Miller, reprinted from the *New York Tribune*; and the number of poems presumably in their original printing rose from one or none in a year to six in a single year. By 1918, perhaps the peak year for poetry in the paper, the comic poems were fewer in number, but the first-run poems had doubled. And in each of these years, lyrics to two more songs appeared.<sup>113</sup> Several more poems were printed in the following two years, especially a small flurry of commemorative poetry in the final issues, but the poetic fervor, interestingly, was at its highest during the period when the suffragists in this faction of the movement were themselves taking the greatest personal risks.

Perhaps it is for this reason that overall, relatively few of the poems in *The Suffragist* have a first-person speaker. Particularly during these years, the women the paper spoke for were exposing themselves to aggression and violence as well as perpetual insults as they picketed the White House, enduring the physical pain of hunger strikes and forcible feeding in jail, and alienating themselves from former colleagues and friends who thought their protests destructive to the movement's aims, especially after the country entered the war on April 6, 1917. It is

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<sup>112</sup> I discuss this poem in greater detail in the following chapter.

<sup>113</sup> Overall, songs were printed far less frequently than poems in *The Suffragist*. Yet the uses to which the NWP members put song, particularly singing in prison and at events organized to greet and honor released prisoners, clearly indicates that song was an important component of this poetry chorus.

logical, then, that the poets would be both highly conscious of the separateness of the individual and highly invested in valorizing sisterhood. Since other scholars have examined Alice Duer Miller's comedy, and I have already discussed her work briefly above, I would like to turn my attention away from the comic poems reprinted in the paper and focus here on the previously unpublished poetry and the small number of reprinted "serious" poems;<sup>114</sup> of these, only a handful construct an individual self through the use of a first-person speaker who utters the singular pronoun "I," and of this handful, only the earliest two, both printed in 1914, depict a lonely, separate self. Marietta Andrews's "The Soldier's Mother" explores the thoughts of a mother upon her son's death as she remembers bringing her child into the world and contemplates the troubling idea that "a man was made . . . . To die, forsaken and alone" (9, 14), held close, she imagines, only "by his mother and by his God" (15). No other women are introduced in this poem; it is a study of individual sacrifice and loss. And no explicit mention is made of suffrage or of women's rights. Yet the poem's inclusion in the suffrage paper and prominent positioning on the front cover make it part of the poetry chorus under discussion here.<sup>115</sup> Its image runs counter to so many popular valorizations of the sacrificing female archetype, as its central figure rejects this role and expresses her unhappiness that a man was "made" to die (in both senses). The speaker's isolation – and her rejection of traditionally celebrated feminine roles – reflected suffragists' experiences on multiple levels.

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<sup>114</sup> It should be noted that not all of Miller's poems were comic in tone. I discuss one of her non-comic pieces in what follows.

<sup>115</sup> Andrews's own affiliation with *The Suffragist* until 1916 is another reason to consider her poem within the context of such a poetry chorus. The cartoonist and writer's eventual break with the paper, over the publication of a Lou Rogers cartoon that she likely felt indicated that the paper had "finally gone too far in risking the political enmity of the man and party destined to control the government for four more years" (Bearor 49), illustrates the falling away of former friends and supporters that the most radical suffragists endured, a phenomenon occasionally addressed directly in the poetry and perhaps also a motivator for the strong emphasis on unity and sisterhood that is taken up so frequently in later poems.

In contrast to Andrews's poem, Elizabeth Waddell's "The Sword of Flame" touches upon activism more directly, though it does not actually mention the vote either; its speaker feels alienated from her "comrades of youth" (1) and yearns for a time when the fight has already been won and old friends will "be my heart-comrades once more" (21). Waddell, a regular contributor to *The Masses*, viewed conflict over labor protests as a hopeful sign of "impending revolution" and later, along with fellow *Masses* poet Sarah Cleghorn (who also had a poem printed in *The Suffragist*), strongly opposed U.S. intervention in World War I (Jones 83).<sup>116</sup> Though "The Sword of Flame" does not refer explicitly to the vote, and may in the context of its original publication in *The Masses* have offered a more general activist message about isolation and loneliness, when read as part of the choral poetics of *The Suffragist*, its speaker takes on for readers a concrete identity as a suffrage worker, her childhood friends likewise becoming those who oppose votes for women, or else those who oppose the speaker's tactics. Waddell depicts a cozy home scene, old friends sitting around "a hospitable hearth" (1) for "sweet converse" (2), but her speaker feels sharply the new distance between herself and the others, saddened that they are spending this time together "all and only for the sake of the old days" (3). Into this homey hearth imagery, the speaker imagines detonating "The bomb of a fiery thought-- / the dynamite of democracy" (10-11), but says nothing, ending the evening with the hope that she will feel close to these friends once more after the divisive movement has reached its successful end. The explosive metaphor, the pictorial violence of an honest political opinion brought into a comfortable home gathering, is as stunning as the speaker's choice to muffle it is painful; this

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<sup>116</sup> Interestingly, though it risked suppression with its criticism of President Wilson, *The Suffragist* was never banned. By the fall of 1918, the government banned a number of papers as seditious, including *The Masses* (Lumsden 528).

would not have escaped the attention of those responsible for the creation of the paper.<sup>117</sup> To trace the shifts and changes within the poetry of *The Suffragist* is, it appears, also to trace the shifts within the rebel movement itself, as the radical American suffragists alienated themselves not only from old friends who opposed the movement in its entirety, but also from former allies within the movement who opposed their new tactics.

The other poems that make use of a first-person “I” as speaker, interestingly, all appear much later, after the 1917-1918 picketing had begun, and in contrast to these early poems, their speakers are all either describing or enacting feminist coalition. If in its early stages, the poetry chorus of *The Suffragist* was characterized by a contemplation of loss and loneliness, as represented by Waddell and Andrews, the poetics of the paper soon added a new dimension to this conversation, never moving away entirely from these early themes, but incorporating the additional themes of inspiration and sisterhood. Some poems focus on the efforts of predecessors or colleagues whose example can give strength and motivation, whose very existence is offered up to readers as a remedy for the feelings of loneliness, loss, or isolation that plagued suffragists from time to time. Vivian Pierce’s “Susan B. Anthony and The Revolution” (printed in April of 1917, one week after the U.S. entered the war), for example, depicts a speaker whose initial feelings of discouragement and disconnection are assuaged by reading old issues of Anthony’s paper, *The Revolution*, in a library. Picketing had begun on January 10<sup>th</sup>, and Pierce, editor of *The Suffragist* at this time (Lumsden, “*Suffragist*” 529), would have been particularly aware of the role of a revolutionary newspaper. She also would have seen first-hand

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<sup>117</sup> Rheta Childe Dorr, a well-known journalist, was editor of the paper at the time Waddell’s poem was published. She had been a reporter and free-lance foreign correspondent for the *New York Evening Post* and had, like Alice Paul and Lucy Burns, been involved in the British suffrage movement (Lumsden, “*Suffragist*” 526-27). The editorship changed several times over the years, and a number of women were involved in editorial tasks at any given moment.

the challenges of maintaining optimism on the picket line, having participated in the picketing herself.<sup>118</sup> A tone of melancholy pervades much of the poem; the speaker notes, “That library seemed a dead place – gray – fit for the burial of old hopes” (23). It is a place of “huddled readers” (25), “diffused light,” and “silent black figures” who “moved about book-laden” (24). The stillness and stultifying weight of Pierce’s imagery combine to create a sense of despair. Yet like the phoenix that rises from its ashes, hope emerges renewed from this image of its own burial:

Time had spotted the covers brown and the paper was yellow and faded.  
But on those yellow pages, written large, a reproach to the stragglers,  
Stood forth the unwithdrawn challenge she had carried through the bitter years:  
.....  
The Party of a New America – women welded together for their freedom!  
She had visioned our modern army in those days of struggle and doubt!  
The pages with their faded ink became illuminated missals.  
She had captained her band of crusaders through a crisis darker than ours,  
Alone, deserted by her friends, the butt of savage ridicule. (29-31, 33-37)

As the speaker reads, she finds her spirit rejuvenated after finding “on those yellow pages, written large, a reproach to the stragglers.” In a poem that depicts Anthony as a pioneer (and importantly, one who found herself at times alone and ridiculed for her beliefs), Pierce offers readers a reminder of those who have gone before them in this struggle and of their own

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<sup>118</sup> Pierce participated in the picketing multiple times (Irwin 244, 372-75). She was also “a seasoned reporter who had covered politics for the Scripps newspapers in California,” so political coverage was not new to her; under her editorship, the overall tone of *The Suffragist* “became more militant as the suppression of the pickets’ free speech intensified” (Lumsden, “*Suffragist*” 529). On June 26, about two months after her poem appeared in *The Suffragist*, she was arrested with other pickets for carrying a banner (Irwin 220); she was arrested again August 28 (238).



potential, like the speaker's, to become pioneers and leaders. In the fourth stanza, we learn that "one of the rank and file" (18) remembered Anthony and "[d]ragged out to the light" (21) her paper, *The Revolution*, "[t]o awaken the inert women to the endless battle for liberty" (22). The ambiguous phrasing of the line draws a connection between the two women, depicting both Anthony and this member of the "rank and file" as individual pioneers who wished "to awaken" women in order to further the cause. By the final stanza, the heaviness of the imagery and of the formal tone (with the speaker referring to herself as "one") has at last partially lifted. The speaker, finally shifting to the direct assertion of the first-person pronoun, announces, "I left the yellow books with faded covers and frayed markers" (41) to rejoin the fight; at this point, she is fully "armed" with renewed confidence and a feeling of sisterhood, ready to envision once again Pierce's powerful image of "women welded together for their freedom!"

Similarly, Elizabeth Kalb's "To A Comrade" (printed in January of 1919<sup>119</sup>) deals with a speaker who, upon faltering from time to time, repeatedly finds inspiration in another suffragist's courage. New to the NWP in 1918, Kalb, who had just graduated in 1916 from Rice (Stevens 363), quickly became an active member, picketing alongside Pierce and other prominent suffragists (Irwin 374-75).<sup>120</sup> In her poem, the "comrade" is anonymous. Addressing the unnamed suffragist as "you of the unquenchable spirit" (1), the speaker depicts her as a powerful source of light over whom "the jeers and the mockings and the ugly thoughts" (14) pass easily without affecting what she calls "the steadfast torch of you" (16). This comrade is a source of strength and inspiration for the speaker, who begins and ends the poem with the assertion, "I

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<sup>119</sup> Occasionally, the editors made errors in dating the paper and/or in keeping the volume and issue numbers running consecutively. Also, the quality of the microfilm copy at times made it difficult for me to ascertain the exact date for a given item. However, I have made every effort to determine the correct date for each poem.

<sup>120</sup> Kalb also did supplementary editorial work for *The Suffragist* (Irwin 46), endured rough treatment as a picket (377), and was arrested during the January 1919 watchfire demonstration and sent to the District Jail (Stevens 363).

could light forever the waning fires of my courage / At the incessant upleaping flame of your being!” (3-4, 17-18).<sup>121</sup> Kalb’s poem, with its bold assertion of self, is in some ways similar to Pierce’s homage to Susan B. Anthony. Both illustrate a change in the choral poetics of *The Suffragist*; the first-person speaker has shifted significantly, used in 1914 to depict isolated individuals, possibly yearning for connection, and after the spring of 1917 to show individual suffragists making emotional and spiritual connections with predecessors and comrades. Yet the poems differ markedly in several ways. The dark and heavy imagery in the earlier poem, pierced but not wholly eliminated by the bright contrast of the “shining armor” the speaker puts on in the final stanza, lends Pierce’s poem a weightiness that emphasizes the serious side of the struggle, the endurance of its fighters, and the emotional and spiritual exhaustion they must regularly drag themselves through to continue their work. It is a solemn poem, with a brave and valiant undertone. In “To A Comrade,” another suffragist draws inspiration from a woman she finds admirable; yet in this poem, we get no sense of the flagging spirit, the weight and responsibility of a many-decades-long movement. The solemnity and reverence of Pierce’s library scene is completely unlike the breathless enthusiasm of Kalb’s poem, which is set abstractly in the emotional current of the movement rather than in any concrete location.

Where one poem feels heavy and dark, the other feels full of light, darting and energetic, an outpouring of affection and admiration. And yet, light imagery actually plays an important role in both poems. In Pierce’s library, “The pages with their faded ink became illuminated missals” (35). Here, Anthony is the source of light, as author of those pages, and as giver of the metaphorical shining armor. Her “still-living spirit” is also imagined as a blaze in which “many have lit their torches” (15). In Kalb’s poem, however, the addressee *is* the light. The unnamed

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<sup>121</sup> In the second utterance, the word “light” is changed to “re-light,” but otherwise, the lines are repeated exactly.

comrade is depicted as a flame – and an “unquenchable” one, while the speaker’s own courage is a “waning fire” that can be relit by contact with the other. Where Pierce’s poem offers a chaste reverence for a sister and predecessor, Kalb’s more fiery verse can be read as a passionate love poem.<sup>122</sup> The speaker addresses her comrade repeatedly as “you,” appropriating the traditional cataloging of the beloved’s qualities so often employed by male poets for her own feminist purposes. For example:

You, fired with the beauty of ardor,  
Lovely with love for all that is clean and earnest and forceful,  
Yourself daring anything,  
So long as it be for Womanhood, and the cause of justice and progress,-- (8-11)

Again, the flame imagery is invoked, this time in verb form, in a rhetorical move that emphasizes the active and lively nature of a woman “fired” with her own passion – an emphasis that is reinforced with the surprising but apt adjective “forceful” in the next line. References to love indicate the beloved’s passion for the cause – and the speaker’s; yet passion extends beyond the cause itself for this speaker, whose flame is lit and re-lit by her comrade. “How I adore you!” (2) she proclaims, before proceeding to offer a breathless series of reasons for her adoration. The lesbian undertones evident in Kalb’s “To A Comrade” make up an interesting and important part of the suffrage aesthetic, and are not limited to the works under consideration here. Passion,

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<sup>122</sup> No clear record exists of the role of lesbianism in the suffrage movement. But certainly, passionate relationships between women were common, varying along what Adrienne Rich has called the “lesbian continuum” from romantic partnerships to less defined feelings of affectionate sisterhood and political alliance. Wood has begun breaking important ground in her study of Ethel Smyth, whose passion for Emmeline Pankhurst may well have been a significant factor in her decision to leave her professional career for two years in order to devote herself to the movement. Also, in *To Believe in Women: What Lesbians Have Done for America – A History*, Lillian Faderman examines the lives of several suffrage leaders whose emotional ties and living arrangements centered around women, arguing that their status outside of the institution of heterosexual marriage freed them to be highly effective in their activism.

admiration, reverence, adoration: powerful emotional ties between women characterize much of the poetry of the suffrage movement, and they appear in other genres as well.

The poems discussed thus far create individual identity in part by depicting a speaker outside of the realm of suffrage activism. In one, a solitary mother contemplates life and loss in no particular setting; in two others, the speaker's activist efforts are temporarily suspended as she makes conversation with old friends or reads old publications, though her mind remains actively engaged in the movement; and in Kalb's poem, too, the speaker describes not the specific arena of suffrage action, but the need for re-lighting the flame of her passion and the great value of a comrade who can do so. Other poems, however, offer vivid images of activists at work. In 1918, *The Suffragist* printed a poem that, like these others, makes use of the spoken first-person "I" in a way that emphasizes the individual self while also speaking to the power of Pierce's/Anthony's "welding" together of women, yet does slightly different work in its depiction of women participating in a suffrage parade. The poem, Katherine Rolston Fisher's "Alice Paul," employs a speaker who is not part of the action but who is knowledgeable about and sympathetic to the cause.<sup>123</sup>

This poem, more than any other, uses powerful visual imagery to comment on the relationship between the individual feminist self and the group. Observing a suffrage parade in Washington DC,<sup>124</sup> the speaker describes it as a beautiful and tremendous force: "I watched a river of women, / Rippling purple, white and golden, / Stream toward the National Capitol" while "Along its border, / Like a purple flower floating" (1-5) moved a woman apart from the

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<sup>123</sup> Fisher, like Pierce and Kalb, was a central member of the NWP. Not only did these poets know one another and frequently participate in the same events, therefore, they would also have known and worked closely with Alice Paul and Lucy Burns. Fisher picketed with both, and was arrested with them (Irwin 357); she depicts each of these suffrage leaders in her poetry.

<sup>124</sup> The poem was "[w]ritten at the time of the Inaugural Parade Deputation to the President when he refused to confer with suffragists in war time" (Fisher, "Alice Paul").

group, “keenly observing the marchers” (7).<sup>125</sup> In this poem, it is not the “I” whose separateness and individuality are emphasized, but the single woman on the curb, for whom the poem is presumably titled, who though “worn” (6) from her efforts is also fully engaged, “[w]ith eyes alight” (7). Few noticed her, the speaker explains, yet, she “was the spring whence arose that irresistible river of women” (12). Fisher’s poem notes the possibility that this great suffrage leader is lonely, remarks upon her separateness, but comments also on her power as “commander” and “leader” (11); like the speaker, this woman is identified as an individual self. The water imagery here is particularly poignant, with the spring an important beginning, but the river itself the truly powerful force. Especially interesting is the way Fisher has accommodated the paradox of the individual within the group, with Alice Paul represented in one moment as an individuated purple flower,<sup>126</sup> separate from the water, floating, and in another moment as a spring, as one smaller body of water which when combined with the rest forms a single, seamless, and powerful entity.

### 3.3 FEMALE HEROES AND A HEROIC SISTERHOOD

These last three poems, while addressing the value of interpersonal connection for individual activists and representing the potential for great action that occurs when individuals coalesce into

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<sup>125</sup> Inez Haynes Irwin describes a scene similar to this one in *The Story of the Woman’s Party*: “Alice Paul, who had not participated in the parade, was standing in the middle of the street, watching and listening.” She was notorious enough at that point that although she “had no banner” and “had not spoken,” a policeman recognized her as the leader and ordered her arrest (356).

<sup>126</sup> The color is also of significance, as purple was one of the colors frequently chosen by suffrage societies for their flags, ribbons, and emblems. The tradition seems to have originated with the British WSPU (whose colors of purple, white, and green were adopted by many American organizations after Harriot Stanton Blatch “imported” them on her return to the United States). The NWP colors were purple, white, and gold. Edith Mayo writes that color “was an instant means of visual communication in the suffrage movement.” She explains that “the indigenous American suffrage color” of gold or yellow was used “to connote light and the role of women as enlighteners,” while “purple symbolized loyalty and dignity, white signified purity, . . . and green meant hope” (26).

a unified force, also indicate another endeavor the poets of *The Suffragist* undertook: the reclamation of the male construct of the “hero” in what I will call the “hero memorial poems.” Refusing the tradition that calls for a male hero, suffrage poets, like suffrage playwrights, reclaimed many of the supposedly male qualities in order to celebrate the valor and strength of female leaders. I have commented on the poets’ use of terms like “commander,” “leader,” and “force” as celebratory terminology. In combination with this reclamation, there is also evident a reshaping – a move to juxtapose imagery depicting the movement as a “battle” or a “war” requiring “forceful” and powerful leaders with imagery depicting the beauty of those leaders and their ideals in more traditionally “feminine” ways (such as the above-mentioned simile comparing Alice Paul to a flower – even its movements graceful and “floating”). In addition to Kalb’s anonymous “comrade,” four of the movement’s leaders are mentioned by name and memorialized in verse as heroes. Alice Paul, of course, is one of these; celebrated in Fisher’s poem, she is also the subject of a later poem titled “To Alice Paul” (printed in 1920) and signed with the initials A. L. W. Paul’s colleague Lucy Burns also “burns” as a vibrant image in one of Fisher’s poems, which I discuss later. Inez Milholland, famous as the herald riding horseback at the head of suffrage parades, is elegized first by Ruth Fitch<sup>127</sup> and later in Hazel B. Poole’s “Winter’s Tale” (printed in 1917); these poems express disbelief and dismay at the death of the activist, imagining her spirit still alive. But it is to the poems about Susan B. Anthony I want to turn now for a focused consideration of the way the poets of *The Suffragist* reconstructed heroism as a female and feminine identity. Anthony, sometimes viewed as the mother of the movement, sometimes affectionately referred to as “Aunt Susan,” held a unique hero position in

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<sup>127</sup> Fitch’s poem starts with an epigram from Milton, “*For Lycidaes is dead, dead ere his prime; / Young Lycidaes, and hath not left his peer.*”

the eyes of NWP members. With her name in the title of four separate poems, each by a different author, Anthony receives more attention than any other individual leader.

These poems work both by establishing an explicitly female and feminine form of heroism and by asserting that a woman could be the epitome of courage and strength, worthy of admiration and able to inspire an “army” to follow her. The war imagery is combined repeatedly with assertions of Anthony’s femaleness, as “mother” and as “aunt.”<sup>128</sup> Katharine Fisher’s poem “Susan B. Anthony” (printed in 1920) claims Anthony as a mother figure. In this poem, Anthony is depicted as claiming such a relationship, urging, “Forward together, my daughters” (28); yet like many others, Fisher also employs the imagery of an old-fashioned army, re-shaping it so that it becomes a specifically female body, one in which “women march millions abreast on a widening way to free- / dom” (16-17) and Anthony’s “life is a luminous banner” (1). The slow motion of the alliteration in “widening way” itself enacts a sort of widening, adding to the image a sense of the very expansion (of their realm, of their rights) Fisher is exhorting women to seek when she warns that there is work yet to be done, that “trails there are still for women / Fearless to break and tread” (17-18). Even the shape of the poem on the page evokes a sort of marching, a rhythmical moving forward, created not by regular meter and rhyme (which Fisher does not use),<sup>129</sup> but by the physical appearance of the lines; each six-line stanza contains

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<sup>128</sup> Elsewhere, too, references to “Aunt” Susan abound, as well as references to Anthony as the “mother” of the movement. Biographies note that despite having many suitors in her youth, Anthony chose never to marry, disbelieving that true marriage of equals was possible under current law. Though she never had children of her own, she forged warm relationships with many young suffragists in the generation after hers, serving as a mentor and also adopting them, in a way, as family. She also became a second mother of sorts to Elizabeth Cady Stanton’s children. (See Jean H. Baker’s *Sisters: The Lives of America’s Suffragists*.) The emphasis sometimes placed on Anthony’s suitors and her “motherly” role with Stanton’s children is interesting, and may be an attempt (intentional or otherwise) on the part of some biographers to position Anthony firmly within an acceptable heteronormative narrative. As Faderman points out, Anthony had intense emotional relationships with two women: Anna Dickinson – to whom she wrote “emotional, playful, and erotic letters” (25) and Emily Gross – who is mentioned in Anthony’s letters to friends and family (27).

<sup>129</sup> Indeed, though many suffrage poems and songs employed familiar forms, a number of the original poems in *The Suffragist* were written in free verse, making this another facet to the paper’s choral poetics.

two sets of three lines, with each of the three indented further than the previous one in a forward motion.<sup>130</sup> Like Fisher's poem, Pierce's "Susan B. Anthony and the Revolution," which I discussed above, emphasizes Anthony's female identity; Pierce employs the metaphor of creation and writing as "birth" (1), describing Anthony's paper, *The Revolution*, as "a child of ink and paper" (2). With this line, Pierce, like Fisher, establishes Anthony in a female role, as mother of both "the brave paper with the brave name" (8) and the actual "revolution" of the women's rights movement. After reading old copies of the paper created by "[t]he brave woman with the fiery heart and the iron courage and the high hopes" (9), the speaker emerges from the library, in a kind of rebirth of her own, newly inspired and clad in metaphorical "shining armor I felt she had fashioned" (42). Dressed for battle, she is ready to re-enter the fight, thus moving from the gendered metaphor of birth directly to the other predominant metaphor, which represents the movement as a "battle" and the participants as warriors.

Anthony's death in 1906 preceded the first issue of *The Suffragist* by a number of years, and the poems about her therefore effect a sort of choral memory and memorializing, a shared insistence that women not forget the valor and leadership of one of their great heroes. The war imagery is depicted, always, as arising out of memory, a gift from the past to stir her "daughters" to new action; yet alongside war, birth remained ever present in the consciousness of *The Suffragist's* poets and editors; in fact, three out of four poems about Anthony were printed in February issues of the paper, as near Anthony's birth date as possible.<sup>131</sup> In 1915, Alice Duer Miller's "To Susan B. Anthony" (reprinted, like her comic pieces, from the *New York Tribune*)

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<sup>130</sup> The second and third lines in each set are also shorter than the first, an effect sometimes created with mid-word line breaks like the one above, with "freedom" split across lines. This is an intentional effect created either by the poet or by the editors of *The Suffragist*.

<sup>131</sup> Anthony was born February 15, 1820. Of the hero memorial poems, only Pierce's was printed in a month other than February. This strong awareness of Anthony's birthday is also evident in an article about the picketing, which states, "Susan B. Anthony's birthday this month was celebrated on the suffrage picket line in an impressive and beautiful manner" ("The Seventh Week" 5).



graced the cover of a special “Susan B. Anthony Birthday Number,” paired with a portrait of Anthony in profile. In this poem, the speaker addresses Anthony directly, as Kalb’s speaker would later address her comrade, but in more solemn tones:

Something there was that you imagined not,  
For all your wisdom, temperate and high,  
How unto us, to whom the kinder years  
Secure a fairer fight, an easier lot,  
Your name would be a creed, a battle cry,  
A silver trumpet blowing to the sky (1-6)

Echoing the heroic imagery of the woman bugler and the woman herald that was frequently depicted in the visual art of the movement as well as the literary, Miller creates an intriguing twist by making Anthony’s name itself into the instrument that summons and heartens the troops. Though Anthony may indeed have had an inkling of the role she played and would continue to play, Miller’s reference to the unimagined “something” of the first line emphasizes the extent to which Anthony would become an inspiration to those who followed in her path; shifting between second-person pronouns of address and plural pronouns of coalition, the speaker establishes a connection between the heroic figure and an “us” for whom the clarion call of that name would hold such power to motivate and inspire. The one other poem about Anthony, NWP member Beulah Amidon’s “To Susan B. Anthony, 1820-1918”<sup>132</sup> (printed in 1918), also establishes Anthony as a presence, formidable even after her death. “Sometimes we do not seem to walk / Alone upon our way” (7-8), the speaker comments, imagining ghostly “soft foot-falls through the rooms” (9). Here, the mother of the movement becomes a spirit guide,

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<sup>132</sup> The reason for the end date in this title is unclear. It may simply have been an error, or perhaps the author meant to imply that Anthony was present still in the current year as a ghost or spirit.

accompanying and leading, succoring and inspiring. Like Miller's poem before hers, Amidon's works with the pronouns "you" and "we," focusing on the individuality of the ghostly mentor and leader rather than the individuality of the speaker. Battle imagery occurs here only through the verbs, as the women who want to be free "march," "sing" (17), and in the final line, can be seen "in your spirit, conquering" (18). Anthony's longevity and the lastingness of her gift are asserted in the ghostly line, "Across the years you echo yet" (15).

While the hero poems establish coalition by emphasizing cross-generation cooperation and the continuity of the movement as enabled by the inspiration provided by great figures, the war imagery itself, resplendent with trumpets and banners, plays an important role in forging connection. Figuring the women in the movement as soldiers fighting for a cause allows the poets and lyricists to borrow "capital" from the affective dimension of a long tradition of notions about male armies and brotherhood. Such feelings of strength in community are depicted frequently in the poetry – in constructions of sisterhood, a communal identity, a feminist "we" or "us" that serves as a central theme. Another subset of suffrage poems, what I will call the "picketing and prison poems," builds upon this military imagery and its affect. These poems often depict a heroic sisterhood rather than positing an individual hero. Although poems that use one or both of the communal pronouns appeared at times in the early issues of the paper, the experiences of picketing and of prison appear to have inspired an increase in depictions of sisterhood and unity. Poetry and song, more easily shared among inmates than longer works, sometimes even shared with inmates by non-prisoners outside their windows, singing to hearten

and inspire their sisters within,<sup>133</sup> had a special capacity for the contemplation and creation of coalition. An article in *The Suffragist* describes the use of song inside the prisons:

The corridors of Occoquan and the jail have been kept ringing for many weeks with picket songs, for pickets can sing when they have no books to read, no pencil and paper with which to write, and when they are locked in cells away from each other's talk. "The Women's Marseillaise" has kept up spirit, and many new songs written by the prisoners have expressed what could not be expressed in jail in any other way. ("Over the Top" 4)

Thus, song-writing afforded an opportunity for subversive expression and also for "rallying the troops." The lyrics to two songs printed in the paper in 1917 demonstrate the coalitional uses to which this genre was put. Modeled after camp songs (and thus evoking the kind of jollity and cohesiveness such songs were meant to establish), these songs are humorous and afford an opportunity for suffragists to join their voices in chorus to list the indignities and suffering they endure, thus transforming these into a source of unity and empowerment. The song "Camping Tonight" proclaims, "We're camping tonight on the White House grounds, / Give us a rousing cheer" (1-2), adding that "[m]any of the pickets are weary tonight" (5) and "[m]any are the chilblains and the frost-bites too" (7). Similarly, the other song (no title is mentioned, so I will refer to it by the first line, "We worried Woody-wood") also affords the suffragists an

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<sup>133</sup> In Holloway prison, "both inside and outside its formidable gates," Ethel Smyth's March "cheered and exercised inmates and greeted their release" (Wood 618). Similarly, song was an important genre to the imprisoned American pickets. In a letter written from "The District Jail, Washington, D.C.," picket Mary Winsor notes of the 17 suffragists held in adjacent cells, "Sometimes we sing in chorus, the 'Occoquan Song,' set to Russian music for us by Miss Nina Samarodin" and written by Miss Lucy Branham (Winsor). Though "shorn of our liberty," the lyrics proclaim, the prisoners are "[f]ree in our souls," and all are called upon to join in and bring victory: "Come, hold a banner, swell our strong demand, / And crush injustice by your spirit's power" (Branham). Samarodin had picketed with Fisher (Irwin 242); a graduate of Kiev University, she came to the U.S. in 1914 and was involved in labor efforts as well as suffrage work (Stevens 367). Lucy Branham was an NWP organizer alongside fellow poets Pierce and Amidon (Irwin 124); she was such a presence in the movement that, Irwin notes, she "must have seemed a stormy petrel to all opposing forces – she had so much the capacity of being everywhere at once" (328).

opportunity to enumerate their sufferings in song while celebrating their own efforts to get the President's attention; in this instance, the lyrics list things requested by the imprisoned pickets and denied: a toothbrush, fresh air, a warm "nightie" to sleep in ("Over the Top" 4).

Particularly (though not solely) for the imprisoned pickets, song and poetry offered a way of recasting isolation and suffering as a shared ordeal, a test of their endurance and mettle. In her short study of British suffrage poetry, Deborah Tyler-Bennett comments on the role of the "Holloway Jingles":<sup>134</sup>

As verses from Holloway prison . . . indicate, poems provided a means of demonstrating solidarity, and also of communicating and responding to emotions created by incarceration. Indeed, one could suggest that, by depicting imprisonment as a collective experience, the Holloway hunger strikers of 1912 transform the intentions of the law, by making a solitary punishment a collective bonding process. (121).

In this way, the communication and sharing of experiences of "aloneness" (whether the formalized and actual isolation of institutionalized solitary confinement or the less tangible isolation of one's own experiences as a reviled "outsider") effectively de-power that isolation by reinforcing the connection between "sisters" who are undergoing the same things. The poems and songs also had the power to establish and strengthen connections between the radical suffragists inside the prison and those on the outside, reading about their experiences in *The Suffragist* and moved to compassion or admiration. Prisoners were greeted with song and ceremony upon their release, as, for instance, when "seventy-five men and women gathered at

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<sup>134</sup> A collection of verses from Holloway prison, *Holloway Jingles* was published in 1912. Some of the poems from this collection have been reprinted in anthologies of British suffrage literature edited by Norquay and Carolyn Christensen Nelson.

Cameron House” on a Sunday in July of 1917, “in spite of a heavy rainstorm, to welcome the return of the eleven suffrage pickets” – an event at which Vida Milholland sang Amidon’s “Alive, Oh!,” a song she had earlier sung “in the great outer court of the jail” (“Alive – Oh!” 7). The bond between prisoners, and their esteem in the eyes of their peers, was further cemented by the practice of awarding freed prisoners a badge of merit, a “prison pin” meant as an “emblem of the sacrifice of individual liberty for the liberty of all women” (“Decorated” 209).

Imagery, especially, helped the poets “transform” the legal and social punishments imposed on the pickets while simultaneously inviting empathy from readers who might not already be so disposed. “On the Picket Line” (printed in 1917), another poem by Amidon, is notable both for its poetics of sound and for its memorable imagery. Mostly a descriptive poem, it depicts the setting in misleadingly simple statements: “The avenue is misty gray,” the speaker explains, “And here beside the guarded gate / We hold our golden blowing flags / And wait” (1-4). The ponderous, slow alliteration of the “g” sounds in this first stanza – and the assonance of the long “o” sounds in the third line – emphasize the solemnity of the movement, the sonic heaviness contrasting with the lighter, brighter visual image of the “golden blowing flags.” Each stanza ends in a significantly shorter line (further emphasized by its rhyming with an earlier line) that also slows down the pace of the poem, causing a reader to wait, to listen, to contemplate the weight of the message and of the waiting itself. Amidon’s speaker goes on to describe the people who pass by, both the friendly and the scornful, including the man for whom “often the gates [at the White House] are swung aside” – “the man whose power could free us now” (9-10). While some passersby “smile their greeting where we stand” (6), others:

. . . scoff and turn away, and yet

The people pass the whole long day

Those golden flags against the gray

And can't forget. (15-18)

In this poem, unlike those that appropriate the masculine construct of heroism and depict specific heroic female figures, no individual woman is identified or even hinted at. An unnamed “we” offers an interestingly vague sisterhood of pickets, – women who in reality enjoyed and endured a great deal of press and notoriety here remade into a faceless mass identity that contrasts greatly in the poem with the brilliant beauty of those unforgettable “golden flags against the gray” – an emblem of their shared struggle which, like the “silver trumpet” of Anthony’s name, is thus instilled with a life of its own.

Kathryn Lincoln’s “A Picket Song” (printed in 1918), too, focuses on group identity, despite commencing with a single iteration of the first-person pronoun. Like many of the other poets who contributed to *The Suffragist*, Lincoln worked for the NWP and participated in the picketing (Irwin 251). She creates an optimistic speaker who announces in the first lines of the poem, “I will sing to the Cause of Woman / That unites from every walk in life” (1-2). The capitalization here lends weight to the speaker’s words, inviting an audience to perceive and appreciate the importance of the particular cause under consideration. It is a cause that:

brings from the ends of a great country

Women of all ages,

Who place a remote freedom for every sister

Above a near personal liberty. (4-7)

It is a cause that “unites” and “brings” – that draws women into a shared experience with a shared goal that is, importantly, for their own benefit as a group. Though female sacrifice is venerated in Lincoln’s verse (and in the description of the picket pins quoted earlier) – the cause

also “inspires to any sacrifice” (3) – the women are praised for focusing unapologetically on gaining their own freedom; the message in this instance is not modified or modulated by claims that the sacrifice is made in order to make the world a better place, for children, for husbands, though it is unsurprising that this type of rhetoric found frequent use elsewhere in suffrage verse, and even appeared in *The Suffragist* on at least one early occasion.<sup>135</sup> Plural pronouns never appear in Lincoln’s poem, a potentially misleading absence, since the first person speaker never asserts herself again after that first line, and the communal relationship is central to the poem. The use of the word “sister,” combined with the capitalization which turns the Cause into a proper entity and the imagery depicting women of all ages and from every walk in life joining together to work for one another, makes it clear that inspiration is the aim here; the poem goes beyond assuring women that they are not alone, indicating that, by contrast, they can’t help but be part of a great and unified force. Although class and racial differences continued to separate women to some degree, the hope was clearly there for a true unity, a squadron of women working for “freedom for every sister.”<sup>136</sup>

While Lincoln’s “A Picket Song” depicts women coming together without employing the plural pronouns, Katharine Fisher’s “The Empty Cup” (printed in 1917), like Amidon’s “On the

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<sup>135</sup> Some suffrage poetry does deal with sacrifice in more traditional terms, indicating, as I discuss at greater length in chapter 4, the need many suffrage writers felt to couch their daring proclamations about women’s rights, desires, and capacities in language acceptable and accessible to an audience uncomfortable with wholesale refutations of woman’s supposed nature. Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s poetry, for instance, demonstrates a complex balance that enables her to question the “natural” order while also offering reassurance to doubtful readers that women will remain women. “Coming,” reprinted in 1914 in *The Suffragist* from Gilman’s own paper, *The Forerunner*, is an example. “Not for herself” (11,12), the poem claims, “comes woman to her own” (10), but “for the child, who needs a nobler mother, / For the whole people, needing one another” (13-14).

<sup>136</sup> Although the NWP was largely organized by college-educated white women of comfortable socio-economic status, and *The Suffragist* in many ways reflected this make-up, an awareness of class difference circulated among the poets and editors of the paper. They chose for instance to include work by Waddell, for whom labor and class were important topics; and Amidon (a Barnard graduate from North Dakota) would later express dissatisfaction with the NWP’s post-suffrage decision to charge annual dues of ten dollars, which she felt identified the party as ““a conservative, property-holding, upper-crust group,”” and refuse “to recruit members at so high a fee” (qtd. in Cott 73). A number of NWP members were involved in labor efforts and organizations.

Picket Line,” establishes the women pickets as a stated “we,” this time considering their experiences after they have been put in prison. Here again, there is some neutrality and distance in the language, as the poem starts with a succinct description: “Evening at Occoquan. Rain pelts the workhouse roof. / The prison matrons are sewing together for the Red Cross” (1-2). At first, the prisoners, too, are described as if by an outsider; the speaker explains that they are “going to bed in two long rows” (3), an image that captures both the unity of the group, lined up in rows like an old-fashioned military regiment, and the dehumanizing/deindividualizing force of the prison in its erasure of identity. While in Lincoln’s and Amidon’s poems, the chosen facelessness of the individual suffragist in favor of depictions of women’s strength en masse can be seen as a tactical effort on behalf of frontline activists who found themselves at times all too visible individually and who could take refuge in images depicting them as unified with others, in Fisher’s poem, the complex interplay between self and group is brought to the surface (a thematic technique she would again employ in her later poem, “Alice Paul”), raising questions about the limits of military imagery for a women’s cause. The poem is not entirely a celebration of women united, though that is one part of its complex portrayal. The sense of objectivity, of distance, that the speaker’s descriptions create is trancelike, seeming as infinite as the relentless repetition of the raindrops that “pelt” the roof, as the constant motion of the matrons’ stitching. It is only in the sixth line (after a cry is heard in the fifth) that the group is named as a “we” and the spell is broken. Suddenly, the speaker chooses to inhabit her identity actively as part of the group, ears attuned, first as “[w]e listen at the windows” (6) and then as “[a] voice calls one of us by name” (7).

Interjected into the group identity, both that imposed by the patriarchal institution of the prison and that established by the women themselves, is an abrupt reminder of the women’s



individuality; a single woman's voice breaks the monotony of raindrops and stitches to ask Lucy Burns for help getting a drink, thus asserting identity and establishing coalition in one act. The lines that follow move in the direction of the hero poems, using visual and sensory imagery to create a majestic picture as "Lucy Burns arises; slips on the coarse blue prison gown. / Over it her swinging hair, red-gold, throws a regal mantle" (8-9). This scene, this image, with sound, color, texture, thirst, and motion, flares up like a match in the middle of the poem, interrupting – but not ending – the steady, heavy verbal "pelting" created by line after line of description in unvaried subject-verb construction; the incident is framed by the only instances in the poem where the beat is smoothed out by beginning a line with a prepositional phrase. With the second of these, the "match" of the scene dies out. Though Burns attempts to help, when the matron goes to the thirsty woman's cell, "[t]he light in it goes out" (13). Thus the suffrage hero is depicted as powerful – she both has a vision and is a vision; but she is also merely an individual human woman, and for this one night, hasn't the power to get her sister suffragist a drink of water. The poem ends just as it began, the rain pouring on the roof, the matrons back at work on their Red Cross sewing. The woman with the smoldering hair is not all-powerful, but the image captured by the speaker nonetheless will continue to burn; the sisterhood remains strong, united in suffering and thirst as well as in hope and vision.

This is the power of the picket and prison poetry. It not only can reshape solitary confinement into a shared experience, it can reshape all forms of suffering at the hands of the state by depicting them as a type of passage, an initiation, an ordeal undergone together. This power makes clear also the logic behind the frequency with which battle imagery appears in suffrage poems and songs when one considers the mythology of battle, with its repeated celebrations of undying loyalty and of a brotherhood forged by sharing intensely difficult

experiences. The women in the suffrage movement (and particularly the most radical members, including a number of *Suffragist* poets) did share difficult experiences they could interpret through this cultural mythology.<sup>137</sup> Fisher's interest in the interplay between self and group is evident in yet another prison poem, "Thoughts in Jail" (printed in September 1918), which draws on imagery from this male tradition.<sup>138</sup> The women's experience in prison takes on a barracks-room aspect in the poem; the individuals share sleeping quarters and are united as a force of female strength, yet they also retain their separate selves, pictured as individual "fortresses." Again, Fisher creates a speaker who asserts the group identity first, referring in the first two stanzas only to the communal "we" of the imprisoned suffragists. It is not until the third stanza that an individual "I" asserts itself, and even then, the statement it makes serves to describe a compelling and troubling uniformity. "I look down on the long row / of gray-blanketed heaps" (14-15), the speaker notes, establishing a mass identity in this colorless and lifeless image, one that appears at first to be powerless, but quickly changes to an image of potential, of power waiting, resting. She goes on immediately to restore a sense of the individual selves under those blankets: there is "Under every heap a woman" (16), she claims, "Weak, sick, but determined, / Twenty gray fortresses of determination" (17-18). At the moment, she seems to say, these women may be unable to do more than wait out their own suffering, but there are within each of those "gray-blanketed heaps" incredible reserves; they will act again, and act to win. Emphasis

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<sup>137</sup> In "From the Log of a Suffrage Picket," Fisher describes conditions in Occoquan Workhouse; she recounts hours spent doing overhead labor painting the lavatories, days without legal counsel, and food that "had reached its zenith of rancidity and putridity" and inspired the women to "make a sport of the worm hunt" (9). The experience of picketing, the violence sometimes visited upon the pickets, and the prison conditions are all examples of the kinds of ordeals that helped forge a powerful connection between members of this "army." The "prison pin" awarded to those who had been jailed carries the battle imagery further. Branham, Fisher, Kate Heffelfinger, Kalb, Lincoln, and Samarodin were among the 166 awarded the pin ("Decorated" 209).

<sup>138</sup> A number of different poets were published in *The Suffragist*, some only contributing a single poem, and none contributing so many as to be considered the dominant voice of the publication. However, Fisher was one of the most frequent contributors. Her poetry appears in one issue in 1917, three issues in 1918, and two in 1920.

is placed on their determination, mentioned twice within two lines in the third stanza, and then recalled in the fourth:

Do you imagine, Senators,

That your blind obstinacy

Can defeat our determination?

From you we shall wrest the Great Charter of our freedom! (22-25)

Here, the speaker establishes a connection – a confrontational one, it is true – with members of the United States government, calling for recognition of that power hidden in the “heaps” that are women.

Another poem also addresses the senators, asking them in less confrontational tones to recognize the contributions women have made to the country. Elliot Gherard Colgan’s “To the United States Senators Opposed to Suffrage” (printed just one issue prior to Fisher’s poem in September 1918) depicts women as competent and reliable, filling in everywhere needed when men left for the war and therefore clearly deserving of the vote. His style contrasts greatly with Fisher’s, the regular rhyme and meter marking what is clearly another voice contributing to the same conversation. “Who stepped into the breach grim War had made?” (13), Colgan’s speaker asks, “When industry lay prone, who heard the cry?” (14). Colgan’s poem points out the irony and injustice of the fact that the State “For freedom’s sake sends millions to their fate, / But right at home keeps millions under yoke” (23-24). Read together, Fisher’s and Colgan’s poems exemplify the kind of choral activity that characterizes the poetry of *The Suffragist*; the two poems participate in a single larger conversation about women’s right to the vote, and they invite a reader to consider the ways they play into and through one another. One is combative and fierce, the other attempts persuasion and reasoning. One delivers its images and argument in free

verse, the other in structured couplets. Yet neither is “the” voice of the radical branch of the suffrage movement in its final decade; as the poems printed in *The Suffragist* reveal, that voice is plural, multiple, and complicated.

And as they engage in a number of larger conversations, the participants themselves are changing. At some moments, the poetic style is an internal one, addressing and summoning the ready forces; at others, the poems reach outward, attempting to engage in conversation with those who oppose the picketing and protesting as well as with the paper’s allies. Although a primary audience for the poetry of *The Suffragist* was clearly the body of radical activists involved in the Congressional Union and the National Woman’s Party, and affirmations of solidarity and sisterhood via a solidifying and confirmation of the “we” identity are logical celebrations to find in such a paper, a theme of reaching out – sometimes angrily, sometimes not – as these two poems reach towards the senators, can also be found in the paper. While the hero poems about Susan B. Anthony reached back, intentionally shaping and claiming a history and genealogy for the suffrage movement, and other poems celebrate the existing sisterhood of their own moment, there are also several that seek to encourage future alliance and inspiration. In “To The Women of the Future” (printed in May 1918), Kate Cleaver Heffelfinger<sup>139</sup> reminds women of the future, in ten lines of rhymed couplets, to “think on them that dreamed your real” (5) and fought for what they did not live to enjoy; her speaker implores women to remember their predecessors and “keep their youth’s spilled wine immortal!” (10). While this poem asks women to remember and honor the activists who came before them, John Davidson’s “To the Generation Knocking at the Door” (printed in March 1918) invites new activists to “break it [the door] open” (1) and “boldly take the lead” (3). Also written in rhyming couplets, this fourteen line poem, like

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<sup>139</sup> Heffelfinger, an art student from Pennsylvania, was sent to the District Jail multiple times for picketing and for participating in the watchfire demonstration (Stevens 361).

Heffelfinger's, depicts activism as a power invested in youth – an idea possibly troubling and certainly at odds with the paper's frequent celebrations of Anthony's long activist life, yet somehow also attuned to the great woman's frequent encouragement of the "daughters" and "nieces" following in her path. "High hearts and youth are destiny enough" (8), Davidson's speaker assures the new generation. The struggle for the vote is not mentioned in this poem; the speaker establishes instead a general urging forward: "none but you can know what part you play; / Nor can you tell until you make assay" (11-12).

I want to end by discussing one more poem by Fisher, a poem that speaks with a plural feminist voice and also, like Heffelfinger's and Davidson's poems, dares to imagine a broader scope of feminist sisterhood, one that extends beyond the inner circle of "militant" suffragists. In "Militants to Certain Other Women" (printed in November 1918), Fisher recreates the divisive split that left more conservative members of the movement angry with the women who defied the larger organization and chose to picket the White House during wartime. Here, she creates a suffragist "we" that is separate from the mainstream members of the movement, but that attempts to reunite by converting this other sisterhood. The speaker calls to the disapproving conservative members, "You who pass coldly by when the police rush upon us" (1), to take note of the honor of the pickets' endeavor. On multiple occasions, the jeers and spitting the pickets endured escalated to physical violence or threats, sometimes from the passing crowds, sometimes from the police. The violent image in Fisher's poem is not a fanciful depiction, but rather a straightforward one that eschews the use of adjectives in its description of an actual occurrence.<sup>140</sup> "To win democracy for you" (12), the speaker explains, the pickets stand for

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<sup>140</sup> Irwin describes one instance when the crowd got violent: "Beulah Amidon was thrown down by a sailor, who stole her flag. Alice Paul was knocked down three times. One sailor dragged her thirty feet along the white house

what they believe in “Till our banners and our bodies / Are flung together on the pavement” (13-14). Conflating their message and their physical selves through the quick alliteration of banners and bodies, Fisher emphasizes the violence such women endured and the metaphorical violence to justice as well. By the end of the poem, the speaker is calling for the conservative suffragists to join “us” in coalition – “Cease to be content with applauding speeches, and praising politicians” (35), the speaker implores. “Awake, rise, and act” (37).

### 3.4 RECOVERING A SUFFRAGE POETIC: SOME FINAL WORDS

I’d like to conclude by noting that *The Suffragist* was just one of many places suffrage poems and songs were distributed. I offer the above analysis in part to show that even if we focus on one small subset of suffrage poetry, created by a fairly small and unified group of suffragists over the course of only a few years, the genre is too varied and interesting to be dismissed collectively for its political engagement. Yet suffrage poetry has not enjoyed longevity, perhaps due to the anathema of its attachment to – indeed, immersion in – history, biography, and social movement. The prevalence of battle imagery and rhetoric seen in the poetry chorus of *The Suffragist* may also have contributed to the texts’ current status as “forgotten” works; not only were women stepping “out of bounds” and “trespassing” on male territory by wanting the vote, their poetry was making itself equally unsavory by “trespassing” on male genres, images, experiences, and metaphors. Aside from the enthusiastic comments sometimes printed within the pages of suffrage publications about the beauty or value of a particular song or poem, there is

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sidewalk in his attempts to tear off her suffrage sash” (232). In another instance, “the police – assisted by soldiers and sailors from the crowd – rushed upon them; bore down the banners; broke them” (413).

no way to know exactly what people thought of these texts in their own time. We do know that these genres were read – sometimes by an audience primarily composed of suffragists (when a poem or song was printed in a publication aimed specifically at the activists themselves, for instance) and sometimes by a far broader audience (when printed in a mainstream newspaper). And there is also evidence that some of these texts were deemed worth saving, and that songs and poems were often performed aloud, in public spaces. But they were not reviewed, as the plays sometimes were; and they were not discussed by the shapers of the new aesthetic standards of the modernist era.

And yet, the sampling of texts discussed above can reveal something about how suffrage poems and songs were read by their primary audience during the final decade of the movement – and about the genres’ power as public literature. The poetry chorus of *The Suffragist* is characterized by a focus on sisterhood and on the relationship between the individual self and the group. Readers could find in its texts aesthetic pleasure, as the writers offered both the comfort of familiar forms and the innovation of free verse. Simultaneously, they could find both inspiration and reassurance. As pedagogical texts, songs and poems had the power to distribute their messages quickly and memorably. For readers of *The Suffragist*, these lessons were primarily about sisterhood. Readers are taught that women, too, merit their place in history, as the many hero poems indicate. And they are taught that coalition is power, especially through the frequent use of battle imagery and in the picket and prison poems. It is not yet clear just how much the choral poetics of *The Suffragist* might have in common with that to be found in other suffrage papers, or with the larger body of suffrage poetry and song as a whole, however. Future work is needed before we can understand more fully the ways these genres might have shifted in personality, aesthetic techniques, or coherence over time. Similarly, additional scholarship is

necessary before we can begin to understand any shifts in the genres' social pedagogy that might have occurred.

I'll end this chapter, therefore, by proposing just a few of the many possible directions for future exploration. Even if I focus these questions only on suffrage papers (and these were by no means the only method by which suffrage poems and songs were distributed), the scope of the potential recovery project quickly becomes evident. How many suffrage periodicals printed poems and/or song lyrics, and which papers were they?<sup>141</sup> According to Edward A. Hinck, *The Lily* (1849-1858) regularly included poems in its early days as a temperance paper (33). Did this continue as it shifted its emphasis to suffrage? And if NAWSA's *Woman's Journal* (1870-1917) / *Woman Citizen* (1917-1927) published poetry, can the somewhat more conservative nature of this group be read in its verse, if compared with the poetry of *The Suffragist*? Similarly, if there is poetry offered in the pages of *The New Northwest* (1881-1887), a paper published in Portland, Oregon by Abigail Scott Duniway, can a specifically western aspect be detected in the paper's poetry chorus? There are a great number of suffrage papers. In what ways is each paper's choral poetics (if it published poetry) unique to that publication? In what ways is it representative of suffrage poetry more generally? Such questions can't be answered at this time, but they can put the analysis I've offered in this chapter in perspective, making it clear that the lessons contained in the poetry of *The Suffragist* – about female strength and the value of coalition, about heroism and women's "natures" – are quite likely only part of the story of the social pedagogy of this public literature.

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<sup>141</sup> For more on suffrage newspapers, see Martha M. Solomon's *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press, 1840-1910*, Lauren Kessler's *The Dissident Press: Alternative Journalism in American History*, and Elizabeth V. Burt's entry for "Woman Suffrage Press" in the 2008 *Encyclopedia of American Journalism*.



#### 4.0 REVOLTING WOMEN: SUFFRAGE LITERATURE AND PUBLIC CENSURE

“Our hearts warm with pity toward those unfortunate creatures (suffragists). We fancy we can see them deserted of men and bereft of their rich enjoyments which belong to women, languishing their unhappy lives away in a mournful singleness.”

-*New York Tribune*, 1866<sup>142</sup>

“The strong-minded and hard-featured woman, as most suffragettes are, repels the male.”

-*Brooklyn Citizen*, 1912<sup>143</sup>

“A suffraget [sic] – one who spends more time airing her views than viewing her heirs.”

-*Detroit Free Press*, 1914<sup>144</sup>

In order to understand more fully the role of suffrage literature as social pedagogy, it is useful to step back from the literature and consider the larger rhetorical context within which these texts were written and performed. Suffragists’ engagement with the ideas and iconography in circulation in daily newspapers, general interest magazines, and politicians’ and other leaders’ public statements was ongoing and strategic. Not only was there a great deal being said about women’s roles and women’s identities, there was also a great deal being said about the suffragists themselves. As Elisabeth Israels Perry points out, “Almost as soon as the American

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<sup>142</sup> This excerpt from the *New York Tribune* was reprinted in *The Suffragist* in September of 1920, along with negative comments collected from other papers and from statements made by public figures such as senators, representatives, and the president of an anti-suffrage organization (“Beware!” 222).

<sup>143</sup> Such epithets cycled through the media, reappearing in other mainstream papers and magazines as well as in suffrage papers. This *Brooklyn Citizen* comment was reprinted in the well-known weekly general interest magazine, *The Literary Digest*, in a collection of excerpts intended to represent both pro- and anti-suffrage views included in its reporting of the May 4, 1912 New York suffrage parade (“10,000 Women” 1024).

<sup>144</sup> *Current Opinion* reprinted the *Detroit Free Press*’s definition at the end of an article called “The Annual Invasion of Congress by the Woman Suffragists” (9).

woman's rights movement got underway in the mid-nineteenth century, negative visual images of women activists began to appear in the popular press" (3). And while representations of the suffragists and their campaign were not always negative (indeed, some periodicals, like *The Literary Digest*, attempted to offer balanced reporting by including both positive and negative depictions within a single article, particularly as the movement drew to a close), images that depicted activist women in pursuit of their own freedom as unappealing or unnatural were plentiful in both American and British media.<sup>145</sup>

The relationship between this negative imagery and the pedagogical project of suffrage literature is worth examining. Why did the particular types of lessons described in the previous two chapters come into being? What was their relationship to disparaging representations of suffragists (which carried "lessons" of their own about woman's proper place) such as those that head this chapter? And why were the negative depictions of women so virulent during the years when the suffrage movement took place? I'd like to suggest that both the suffragists and their critics were acutely aware of the power of the image, and further, were engaged in a struggle for control of this power. As Martha Banta argues in *Imaging American Women*, an "abundance" of images of women, "both visual and verbal," came into being in the United States between 1876 and 1918 (xxvii-viii), and the concept of "women" was "one of the major ideas out of which Americans created . . . the embodiment of their collective will" (21). Image makers "acted to impose their ideas upon the culture," Banta explains; and therefore, "images of American women were *created* as ideas, not *found* as facts" (xxxii, italics original). Not content with the versions of femaleness and femininity in circulation, the suffragists were endeavoring to create

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<sup>145</sup> In *Bicycles, Bangs, and Bloomers: The New Women in the Popular Press*, Patricia Marks claims that the American media reactions to the "New Woman" were somewhat less harsh than the British. Still, media on both sides of the Atlantic offered negative depictions both of the New Woman and of the suffragist that ranged in tone from mockingly humorous to harshly critical.

for themselves a new mythology and iconography, one that posited identities for women that were directly opposed to the constraining images offered in anti-suffrage media.

Women's participation in politics – even women's participation in activism – was nothing new.<sup>146</sup> Nor was criticism of women who took an interest in politics or who espoused the kinds of ideas that would later come to be labeled “feminist” a new phenomenon.<sup>147</sup> Yet there was something about the suffrage movement that elicited a particularly strong reaction from conservative image makers. In addition to making a direct claim to their political identities by demanding the vote (in contrast to women who had earlier employed a kind of strategic stealth in claiming for themselves a role in the political life of their country without formalizing it by attaching their politicization to the franchise), suffragists also claimed the right to occupy public spaces, both physically and vocally, to a greater and greater degree. By 1909, attitudes about women appearing and speaking in public had changed enough for Florence Luscombe, a Massachusetts suffragist, to be able to say in all seriousness that “everyone knows” that “an American woman can stand in a hall and address American men with dignity and earnestness on her part, and courtesy and interest on theirs” (98). Luscombe's intent, in her speech on open-air campaigns, is to contrast the respectfulness with which women speakers were by this time

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<sup>146</sup> For an examination of women's political identities in New England between 1830 and the Civil War, as explored through their diaries and letters, see Ronald J. Zboray and Mary Saracino Zboray's *Voices without Votes: Women and Politics in Antebellum New England*. On women's rights activism before the Civil War, see Sylvia D. Hoffert's *When Hens Crow: The Woman's Rights Movement in Antebellum America* and Judith Wellman's *The Road to Seneca Falls: Elizabeth Cady Stanton and the First Woman's Rights Convention*. For studies that include the war years, see Barbara Cutter's *Domestic Devils, Battlefield Angels: The Radicalism of American Womanhood, 1830-1865* and Drew Gilpin Faust's *Mothers of Invention: Women of the Slaveholding South in the American Civil War*. On the years following the war, see Rebecca Edwards's *Angels in the Machinery: Gender in American Party Politics from the Civil War to the Progressive Era*. And, for an exploration of the ways one mother and daughter pair negotiated their political identities and activist work across these periods, see Elizabeth C. Stevens's *Elizabeth Buffum Chace and Lillie Chace Wyman: A Century of Abolitionist, Suffragist, and Workers' Rights Activism*.

<sup>147</sup> As Zboray and Zboray note in “Gender Slurs in Boston's Partisan Press During the 1840s,” “misogynistic imagery has been employed across time and various cultures to ridicule women who trespassed into the public sphere of politics” (416). For a discussion of heckling at early suffrage conventions and media depictions of suffragists and their efforts in antebellum America, see chapter 5 of Hoffert's *When Hens Crow*.

treated at indoor events to the popular opinion that, when the speaking is done outdoors, all propriety is lost and the women become “raving fanatic[s],” the men “jeering hooligans” (99). Her hopeful and positive tone implies progress made, change in public opinion achieved – at least when there’s a roof over the suffragists’ heads. (And this contrast alone raises interesting questions about the proper “containment” of women within certain spheres or spaces). Despite Luscombe’s optimism, however, what “everyone knows” at this particular moment in history is inescapably inscribed upon the general consciousness by a long-lived tradition of misogynist and anti-suffrage representations of women.<sup>148</sup>

Women were certainly *not* assumed to be able to address a male or mixed audience “with dignity” only a few decades earlier, when the cause was the abolition of slavery. Sarah and Angelina Grimké,<sup>149</sup> who moved north from South Carolina and began giving lectures for small groups of women but eventually found themselves addressing audiences that included men as well, are sometimes celebrated as the original “revolting women.” Though the sisters had many outspoken predecessors, the degree of censure their transgressions earned is worth note here, especially since the Grimkés and many other abolitionists later turned their activist efforts towards gaining rights for women. As Brenda Stalcup explains, the Grimkés’ “flaunting of conventional customs” in the 1830s “caused an uproar, and they were roundly condemned as immoral” (17); the Massachusetts Congregational clergy described them in disgust as “unnatural” women who would “fall into shame and dishonor” (qtd. in Stalcup 17). Fears about

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<sup>148</sup> Laura L. Behling’s comment about the role of the media is helpful here. She writes, “The influence this mass marketing of ideas had on the American psyche cannot be understated since it was capable of reaching, and indeed did reach, a larger, more widespread audience than any single novel or well-publicized speech, as Ellen Gruber Garvey argues in *The Adman in the Parlor*” (10, n. 3). Although pro-suffrage sentiments, too, appeared in the newspapers, popularly-read magazines, and other media, negative representations of woman suffragists were pervasive and powerful.

<sup>149</sup> For more on Angelina Grimké, see Stephen H. Browne’s *Angelina Grimké: Rhetoric, Identity, and the Radical Imagination*.

the appropriateness of women speaking in public and the possible consequences for the serious tenor of the cause also led many male abolitionists to vote against allowing the women delegates to be seated at the World Antislavery Convention held in London in 1840, which left delegate – and future suffragist – Lucretia Mott listening to the proceedings from behind a curtain.

This moment of censorship became part of the impetus behind the organized women's suffrage movement in America, for it was under these circumstances that Mott and Elizabeth Cady Stanton, whose husband was a delegate, first met (Clinton and Lunardini 113-14). Of course, a "woman movement" was already underway at this point, and many others besides Mott and Stanton were interested in women's rights, but Mott's experience at the World Antislavery Convention did serve as a lever of sorts, elevating a particular injustice into view and bringing Mott and Stanton together to discuss it. So, while progress had indeed been made by the time Luscombe was informing women about the usefulness of open-air meetings as a new tactic, and while suffragists certainly had reason to succor one another with hopeful optimism, it is also reasonable to assume that the prejudice and mistrust of decades past had not simply evaporated in the sunny atmosphere of a new century. Although support for suffrage had increased, obstacles remained. Among these, perhaps the most pernicious were the paired ideologies of "separate spheres" and "true womanhood," which, prescribing for women a certain constrained range of proper femininity, influenced popular thinking about the quest for the vote and its champions.

Catherine Clinton and Christine Lunardini note that women "were subjected to as much criticism in 1900 and 1910 as they had been in 1848" (126). Some of this criticism was specifically anti-suffrage in nature, while some was part of a more general pattern of critique aimed at keeping woman "in her place." In this chapter, I turn to the images to be found in daily

mainstream newspapers, popular magazines, and other forms of media in order to examine the complexities of a long-standing tradition of misogynist or anti-suffrage sentiment against which (and within which) the suffragists had constantly to work in order to be given serious consideration by a public trained to view them as objects of ridicule or as threatening to the social order. Unflattering representations of women included both visual images (in the form of cartoons, posters, postcards, illustrated journalism, and, later, photographs accompanied by anti-suffrage captions) and written images (in letters to the editor, news articles, snide editorials or blurbs, and anti-suffrage poems, rhymes, and plays). In the following pages, I examine patterns in anti-suffragist critique, looking at the ways popular representations of suffragists are invested in maintaining a normative femininity and at the ways suffrage writers have responded,<sup>150</sup> in the plays and also in the poetry and song lyrics, to the barbs aimed at limiting and defusing suffragists' power to expand woman's realm. Exploring the competing ideologies evident in anti-suffrage media and in suffrage literature, I argue that the vehemence of the critiques, the insistence on representing women in revolt as "revolting,"<sup>151</sup> is indicative of a culture's anxieties about a society in flux; these anxieties, combined with the general enthusiasm for education in an era that saw the founding of many colleges and the wide popularity of public lectures, reading

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<sup>150</sup> While I am primarily concerned here with the ways suffrage literature and its performances can be read as in conversation with anti-suffrage critique, it is worth noting that the campaign's visual artists, too, responded to negative depictions of suffragists. I do not discuss pro-suffrage visual art in depth in this project, but I do refer in this chapter to a few examples that help illustrate my claims about the literary images. For an excellent analysis of the visual elements of the British suffrage campaign, see Lisa Tickner's *The Spectacle of Women*. On American suffrage cartoons in both mainstream and suffrage periodicals, see Alice Sheppard's *Cartooning for Suffrage*, which, despite some theoretical and organizational weaknesses, is a pioneering work in the field and offers an extensive overview of one genre of the visual art of the American suffrage campaign. (See also Karen A. Bearor's careful review in *Woman's Art Journal* for a useful analysis of the book's limitations.)

<sup>151</sup> The wordplay on "revolt" and "revolting" has been used in discussions of women's roles and agency elsewhere. For an exploration of the topic in early modern England, for instance, see Brian Patton's "The Women are Revolting?: Women's Activism and Popular Satire in the English Revolution."

groups, and home study courses, created an audience potentially receptive of the pedagogical aspects of the literature discussed in the previous chapters.

#### 4.1 NAVIGATING IDEOLOGY, NEGOTIATING CHANGE

The notion of “flux” lies at the very heart of my analysis, and I believe it is more productive to think of the anti-suffrage representations of women as existing in a complex, dialectical relationship with the pro-suffrage literature than to imagine either one as the primary text to which the other is the response. Suffragists and anti-suffragists<sup>152</sup> produced texts and arguments in response to, in reaction to, and even sometimes in spite of one another for more than half a century<sup>153</sup> in what can best be understood as a sometimes combative but always iterative negotiation of a changing society. Although some suffrage groups were more radical than

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<sup>152</sup> It is worth noting that even those positions were not fixed, or even necessarily representative of the creators or providers of text and image. Cartoonist Laura Foster, whose images of old-maid suffragists, unwomanly women, and husbands in aprons looking after children deserted by mothers who have “gone to meeting” appeared in *Life Magazine*, was later described as a suffragist. Whether she was actually opposed to votes for women when she published these cartoons is, according to Sheppard, uncertain (89), but there was certainly ambiguity in her cartoon oeuvre. In 1916, she published a cartoon in *Judge* depicting a white-garbed female Justice pushing aside two men who are leaning against the ballot box to “Make Way” for a woman voter to cast her ballot (Sheppard, image 5.3).

<sup>153</sup> In *A History of American Magazines*, Frank Luther Mott notes that “there was little attention paid to women” in the earliest American magazines (v. 1, 65). But this soon changed, as women were perceived both as possible readers and as subject matter. During the period from 1825 to 1850, Mott observes, the “woman question” was on the table, and the idea “that good women should wish to vote seemed shocking to many.” The women’s periodicals, too, were “generally opposed to woman suffrage” in these years (v. 1, 483-84). From 1850 to 1865, the “position of woman in the American society” was discussed by women’s magazines and by “quarterlies, monthlies, and weeklies of all descriptions.” The topics addressed included women’s education, “the matter of women’s activities outside the home circle,” and “the scandalous movement for dress reform” (v. 2, 46); Mott notes also that “the new woman movement met with its strongest opposition” in the South (v. 2, 49). It was during this period that the first women’s rights periodicals began to emerge (v. 2, 50-53). And, in 1859, after a decade of women’s rights conventions, the *Democratic Review* exhorted, “Let not the women of America clamor for that which is opposed to the decrees of Nature and Providence” (qtd. in Mott v. 1, 483). From 1865 to 1885, Mott observes that “though most periodicals debated the matter at length, comment was predominantly hostile” (v. 3, 90); the humor publications in particular “satirized the suffrage movement unmercifully” (v. 3, 91). By 1891, Joseph Henderson wrote in the *Chautauquan*, “It would seem that every argument on both sides had been torn to tatters, to very rags, yet the interest flags not” (qtd. in Mott v. 4, 355). Indeed, interest did not flag, even in the years to come. As the twentieth century examples at the head of this chapter indicate, negative depictions of the suffragists continued well after this time.

others, and although feminism became a recognizable discourse in the last decade of the American suffrage movement,<sup>154</sup> suffragists were not advocating a complete overthrow of the social order or rejecting all ingrained ways of thinking about gender. Instead, they were simultaneously hemmed in and enabled by the ideologies of womanliness and woman's sphere, which were themselves continuously in flux, though no less prescriptive as a result.

That these ideologies are both historical and changing is one of the challenges for an analysis such as this. The suffragists at the height of the Progressive Era most certainly had a different relationship to the familiar image of the Angel in the House than did suffragists in the middle of the Victorian age. Yet as a mythical figure of woman with a "loving and self-sacrificing" nature whose responsibilities are "domestic and maternal" (Helsing, Sheets, and Veeder xiv),<sup>155</sup> she still had significant resonance for pro- and anti-suffragists in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Similarly, the concept of "separate spheres" is a changing but pervasive one, and Progressive Era women and men would have had to sift through a complicated inheritance of the idea in all its iterations. It would be a mistake to read the metaphor of separate spheres<sup>156</sup> too literally, as the division of the world into two discrete territories in which "women's work" and "men's work" occur, respectively, since some blurring of boundaries (especially regarding class) has always occurred; but it would also be a mistake to overlook its power in defining not only realms of "specialty" (and, at times, "authority") but physical/spatial realms as well. To understand the

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<sup>154</sup> In *The Grounding of Modern Feminism*, historian Nancy F. Cott points out that the word "feminism" did not actually come into common use in America until the 1910s, although historians have "applied it retrospectively and generally to claims for women's rights" (3).

<sup>155</sup> See also Barbara Welter's "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860" for a discussion of domesticity and the home as woman's proper sphere. Interestingly, although as Linda K. Kerber points out, the use of the word "cult" in the phrase has declined in current usage (163), Welter's word choice connotes both compulsion and reverence, the dual means by which this particular ideology can be seen to function.

<sup>156</sup> Kerber warns that "the language of separate spheres" has been "vulnerable to sloppy use" (170). In this study, I use the term in the manner she describes as the "third [and current] stage in the development of the metaphor," whereby "historians now" take "an interactive view of social processes" (171). See Kerber, pp. 171-196 for a further explanation of current usage of the term.



term productively, it is important to note that the idea has been in flux for the duration of America's existence as a nation. Historian Linda K. Kerber examines some of the complexities of the term, in part by calling attention to the post-revolutionary ideology of republican womanhood, which she sees as "an effort to bring the older version of the separation of spheres into rough conformity with the new politics that valued autonomy and individualism" (174). What is particularly interesting about the ideology of republican womanhood is that, according to Kerber, it "recognized that women's choices and women's work did serve large social and political purposes" (174). From the nation's beginning, then, the concept of separate spheres has been complicated by alternating tensions that serve both to control woman and to recognize her contribution.

For suffrage-era women, the ideologies of womanliness and woman's sphere, which found expression in print media of all sorts as well as in the churches, meeting places, and homes, served as hegemonic discourse. The compliance to social norms of femininity and the acceptance – at least to some degree – of female roles by both pro- and anti-suffrage women (as well as the undecided) can be seen in Gramscian terms as the "‘spontaneous’ consent given by the great [here, female] masses of the population to the general direction imposed on social life by the dominant fundamental group" (12).<sup>157</sup> This form of consent, because enabled largely through the mechanism of reward by social acceptance and approval rather than punishment (though disapproval and scorn could, of course, function as a sort of punishment),<sup>158</sup> appears

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<sup>157</sup> Others have applied Gramsci's concept of hegemony to feminist analyses of power. In "Remembering and Regenerating Gramsci," Jane Kenway notes that the concept "offers a means of investigating not only the gendered power relations of everyday life, but also sexuality as a site of domination and repression" (56). In "Male Hegemony, Social Class and Women's Education," Madeleine Arnot states that male hegemony is "a whole series of separate moments through which women have come to accept a male dominated culture" (64). She adds that women are "encouraged 'freely' to choose their inferior status" (66).

<sup>158</sup> See also Michel Foucault's *Discipline and Punish* and *The History of Sexuality, Vol. 1* for more on control through the non-forceful policing of behaviors.

spontaneous but, as the quotation marks signify, is actually manipulated. To illustrate this, it is helpful to turn to the question of appropriate feminine dress.<sup>159</sup> Women's clothing has long been used as a way of signaling the sexes as "different," and attempts by women to modify their dress in ways that made them appear less different, for example by wearing "bloomers," "divided skirts," or "trousers," were seen by the dominant group as threatening.<sup>160</sup> It is no surprise that the women who donned such garments experienced the act as dangerous or daring, even as they also found it freeing. And it is no surprise that most suffragists who adopted the style of wearing a short dress over loose trousers soon abandoned it in favor of more conventional dress. Susan B. Anthony continued to wear the bloomer outfit after Elizabeth Cady Stanton and Lucy Stone had given it up, but it was only a year and a half before she "exchang[ed] physical freedom for the conformity of silk dresses with lace collars and uncomfortable undergarments." Although Anthony "forever remembered the freedom of short skirts and their service, like a uniform, as an identifying badge of the sisterhood" (Baker 56-57), like so many others in the movement, she soon "consented" to the socially-accepted, physically constraining form of "womanly" dress. For those who did not reach the conclusion that dress transgressions were unwise, other methods of "persuasion" might be found in the law and its enforcers. When Gramsci writes of "the apparatus of state coercive power which 'legally' enforces discipline on those groups who do not

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<sup>159</sup> See Carol Mattingly's *Appropriate[ing] Dress: Women's Rhetorical Style in Nineteenth-Century America* for an analysis of the ways nineteenth-century women speakers "used appearances to negotiate expectations restricting them to limited locations excluding them from public rhetoric" (xiii). Especially relevant are chapter 3, which explores "Backlash Against the Reform Dress," and chapter 5, which looks at women's "rhetoric of dress" during the 1870s and 1880s, arguing that "the most impressive women rhetors effected a 'womanly' stance to disarm critics" (xiv).

<sup>160</sup> Interestingly, the Bloomer costume first "enjoyed great support and popularity" for a brief period, as newspaper editors throughout the country raved in 1851 about the practicality and attractiveness of the new dress (Mattingly 62). This soon changed, however; "as the Bloomer became associated with independent women and a changed station for them," the journalists "decided they would not have dress reform at the expense of changing women's role" (66). By mid summer that same year, journalists had begun "an attack that impugned wearers' modesty and morality, implied a physical danger to patrons of the dress, and finally heaped ridicule on them" (67).

‘consent’ either actively or passively” (12), he is not thinking of the literal policing of gender-appropriate dress; but, since men reserved for themselves the right to vote, it is fair to say that men (though not, in fact, all men) represented the state, and that when women were arrested for wearing pants,<sup>161</sup> the apparatus (the law) disciplining them can be understood as an apparatus of patriarchy. Most suffragists, however, never faced arrest for their clothing, and the movement as a whole presented a traditionally-dressed feminine image.

In this sense, the decision to wear “appropriate” and “womanly” clothing is not about individual choice, but about power and hegemony. As Judith Butler explains, “hegemony emphasizes the ways in which power operates to form our everyday understanding of social relations, and to orchestrate the ways in which we consent to (and reproduce) those tacit and covert relations of power” (“Restaging” 13-14). Certainly, power is operating to form everyday understandings of male and female difference<sup>162</sup> when cross-dressing is punishable by institutions (as it is even today, in some schools). But what aspect of patriarchy does gender-appropriate dress enable? Butler points out that sexual difference “functions . . . as a defining condition that must be instituted and safe-guarded against attempts to undermine it” (“Competing” 148); if gender-coded garments are read as the signifiers of sexual difference, it is not too much of a stretch to imagine that the maintenance of separate spheres might prove challenging should women be allowed to wear pants. As Kerber explains, “the language of separate spheres itself” is “a rhetorical construction that responded to changing social and

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<sup>161</sup> A news clipping in Ellen A. Webster’s scrapbook mentions Dr. Mary Walker, “the woman who wears men’s attire,” who was arrested in Chicago “for wearing trousers” (Scrapbook). For an insightful examination of Walker’s clothing and career, including her donning of an officer’s uniform while caring for wounded soldiers during the Civil War, see Mattingly, pp. 92-100.

<sup>162</sup> It is useful, too, to consider Butler’s theory of gender performativity, which she describes as “cultural ritual” and as “the reiteration of cultural norms” (“Restaging” 29)

economic reality” (175), but that isn’t to say that it responded quickly or readily to pressures we would now understand as feminist, or that it loosed its ties to patriarchy during this era.

Still, as the suffrage movement progressed, the proliferation of anti-suffrage representations of the home as woman’s sphere and suffragists as unwomanly or unfeminine signals the extent to which suffragists were threatening the status quo. Kerber notes that “one plausible way to read nineteenth-century defenses of separate spheres . . . is to single out the theme of breakdown,” adding that “the noise we hear about separate spheres may be the shattering of an old order and the realignment of its fragments” (176).<sup>163</sup> Her metaphor is astute, and her observation is no less true for the early twentieth century, I believe, when realignment most certainly continued; as suffrage began to seem inevitable (even if not exactly imminent), voices celebrating the sanctity of the home and ideal of the woman immured within, the still resonant image of the Angel in the House, and the “difference” and “separateness” of the sexes, were beginning to speak more defensively, and the textual examples I discuss below can be understood as originating partly from this defensiveness. Also interesting is that the suffragists, as evidenced in their literature, were working within the same ideological framework even as they were challenging it, not able (and perhaps not wanting) to escape it entirely. I’d like to turn now to some of the patterns in anti-suffrage representations, and to the various ways the suffrage plays, poems, and songs take them up.

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<sup>163</sup> As Elizabeth K. Helsinger, Robin Lauterbach Sheets, and William Veeder point out, one of the results of industrialization was that “the modern world required apparently irreconcilable social roles for women: their work outside the home and their presence within it” (109). With this apparently unnavigable paradox to consider, “breakdown” is a useful word, although as Kerber’s image of realigning (the same) fragments makes clear, it leads only to a re-ordered (rather than a new) way of imagining men’s and women’s roles.

#### 4.2 IMAGE CONTROL: WHO OWNS BEAUTY?

There were several types of criticism, censure, and backlash to which women involved in the campaign for the vote were subjected with great frequency, and many of these centered on women's bodies and sexuality; such critiques dismissed the suffragists as ugly, undesirable, and sexually frustrated. According to Banta, during the time period that coincides with the last four decades of the suffrage movement, the American people were, as part of the national culture, "tutored to see objects and persons in the form of generalized types" (*Imaging* xxix). While Banta's interest here is mainly in the creation of a national image and sense of identity, it is telling that anti-suffrage critics repeatedly used generalized types to represent suffragists. This technique was actually used with great frequency on both sides of the Atlantic, and there are several main types that appear repeatedly in both American and British depictions of the suffragists. One of the popular stereotypes that plagued suffragists was the familiar trope of the spinster; unattractive, unmarriageable, and unhappy, she exemplified below-par femininity and thwarted womanhood.<sup>164</sup>

For the British, this type was perhaps especially poignant during the years of the supposed "surplus" of women, when much discussion was devoted to the "problem" of a population unevenly divided by sex, and proposed solutions included shipping the "redundant women" to countries where they would have a better chance of getting married. In *The Spectacle of Women*, Tickner includes a reprint of an anonymous British color illustration depicting a meeting of red-cheeked, red-nosed, buck-toothed white women listening to an equally red and toothy speaker. The caption reads, "At the suffragette meetings you can hear

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<sup>164</sup> This stereotype gained added power when, by the 1880s, a "healthy" heterosexual libido had replaced purity and chasteness as the normative model for women, and doctors "began to label women's *lack* of sexual pleasure a mental disturbance," as Jonathan Ned Katz explains (138-40).

some plain things – and see them too!” and a poster on the wall behind the women proclaims, “Husbands for old maids.” The textual humor (which is echoed and reinforced in the visual humor) relies on the trope of the “plain” woman, and serves to dismiss the real suffragists’ campaign as the dissatisfied ranting of women who weren’t able to snare themselves husbands and whose interest in the vote, signaled by the poster on the wall, is primarily to compel men to marry them; the premise, though ludicrous, draws legitimacy from mere repetition for a narrative that dates at least back to Aristophanes’ politically ambitious *Praxagora*.<sup>165</sup>

Suffrage writers in England were certainly attuned to such critiques, and if we can judge from Cicely Hamilton’s characterization of the press in the following poem (from her collection, *Beware!: A Warning to Suffragists*), the caricatures were common enough to earn a humorous but weary response:

Now here are some  
Who want their rights  
You see they all  
Are perfect frights!  
Their feet are huge,  
Their stockings blue—  
The Press says so:  
It must be true.

Here, the speaker mimics the technique of dismissal through ridicule that is used in the typing performed by anti-suffragist critics. The light, joking tone adds humor to the sarcasm of that final statement, but does not negate the fact that Hamilton is suggesting the exact opposite of the

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<sup>165</sup> It is not incidental that W. H. Mallock’s *Women in Parliament*, reproduced from the Greek of Aristophanes, was printed in *The Nineteenth Century* in 1912. (Here, Praxagora is named Mrs. Pankagorus.)

literal meaning of those final lines. The Press, her speaker suggests, is quite capable of an untruth or two. Hamilton's very repetition of the popular typing of suffragists as "perfect frights" with "huge" feet, however, is indicative of the pervasiveness (and power) of this image. "By crystallizing an idea or an argument into a simple image," Perry explains, "visual rhetoric permits the argument to be grasped in a flash" (5-6). And verbal rhetoric that alludes to commonly recognized visual imagery works in a similar manner, drawing on the visual experience, but in a deferred manner, at one step removed.

American media, too, made use of this kind of typing. After the women's rights convention in New York in the fall of 1853, the *New York Herald* claimed that "the women who led the movement were 'entirely devoid of personal attractions,' and described them as 'thin maiden ladies' who, having been rejected as potential brides, 'are now endeavoring to revenge themselves upon the sex who have slighted them'" (qtd. in Hoffert 97). Years later, the same arguments appear. When the suffragists made one of their regular visits to Congress, *Puck* responded in its January 23, 1878 issue by printing (alongside a cartoon depicting suffrage leaders as geese flocking around the "besieged" Capitol) a sonnet proclaiming "Shame unto womanhood!" (1);<sup>166</sup> this sonnet describes the woman who dares to speak "in the public street" her "shallow tale of fancied wrongs" (2, 4) as unattractive to men, her life "incomplete, / unfruitful and unbeautiful" (13-14). Such images continued in the twentieth century.

For women in the United States, where, at least in some of the western and southern states and territories,<sup>167</sup> the women did not outnumber the men, the spinster stereotype may not have had quite the same cultural resonance. Even so, its hold on the American imagination was

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<sup>166</sup> This poem and a description of the cartoon appear in Mott's *A History of American Magazines* (v. 3, 91-92).

<sup>167</sup> On the west, see Rebecca J. Mead's *How the Vote Was Won: Woman Suffrage in the Western United States, 1861-1914*. On the south, see Marjorie Spruill Wheeler's *New Women of the New South: The Leaders of the Woman Suffrage Movement in the Southern States*.

strong, and suffragists took pains to counter it with images of beautiful and marriageable or married women, revealing a desire both to respond to the critiques and to establish suffrage as practicable *within* bounds of the ideology of womanliness. Offering counter-examples became easier, according to Tickner, when the newspapers shifted from providing illustrations to including printed photographs and readers began to see images of real women instead of drawings of supposed female types in their papers (166). Although this same medium could be used against them (much in the way trial photos today are sometimes used to depict individuals as angry, ugly, crazy, or out of control), suffragists found it useful. Frances Boardman Squire Potter, for example, who taught at the University of Minnesota before leaving to become the National American Women's Suffrage Association's corresponding secretary in New York, was valued for her looks as well as for her activism; some 1909 news clippings in her papers at the Schlesinger Library describe a suffrage demonstration as a sort of beauty pageant, where the pretty girls – including Potter, whose photograph is included – were the ones giving the speeches (Scrapbook, oversized).<sup>168</sup> And by 1912, reporting on the May suffrage parade in New York, *Current Literature* finds itself “forced” to report that “the paraders were well worth looking at. Many were young and attractive, nearly all were becomingly gowned” and that “the woman suffragist of the cartoons may have been there, but she was very inconspicuous” (“Parading” 627). What makes this “news” is that it is so contradictory to the popular image of crippled, incomplete femininity. The *Brooklyn Citizen's* comment that “the strong-minded and hard-

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<sup>168</sup> Potter, by all available accounts a happily married mother, directly countered the spinster image as well as the more general claim that suffragists were unattractive women. Interesting to note is that her position at the University of Minnesota did not seem to make her vulnerable to the “school-marm” image, one I have in fact not come across at all in my research, which perhaps indicates a certain level of acceptance of the “educated woman” by this point in history, despite the repetition of images of women who appear to have been “dried up” or “worn out” by too much reading or thinking.



featured woman, as most suffragettes are, repels the male” appeared in the same year (qtd. in “10,000 Women” 1026).

Many of the suffrage pageants and parades, in their reliance on beauty and feminine spectacle, can be seen as a direct refutation of the stereotype of suffragists’ unattractiveness. And suffrage authors, whether consciously or unconsciously, took up themes that spoke back directly to the tired trope of the spinster. Examples include two plays, one by Alice E. Ives and one by Florence Kiper, in which one of the main characters is both a suffragist and an acceptably feminine bride-to-be. Ives’s *A Very New Woman* (1896) is a very simple one-act play in which a son brings his fiancée home to meet his mother; in it, two “legitimately” feminine female<sup>169</sup> characters who are both “New Women,” make one another’s acquaintance. Mrs. Twillington’s normative femininity is ascertained by the existence of a son and by his gentlemanly deportment toward her when she asks him, out of respect for herself, not to mention age. Yet she sees herself as a “new woman” with “advanced ideas,” and hopes her daughter-in-law will prove the same. Similarly, Edith’s feminine qualities are made clear when we learn that, not only does Arthur want to marry her, but she is in Mrs. Twillington’s estimation a “pretty” woman who “dresses well” (137) and in Arthur’s “a dainty, delicate sort of a flower of a woman” with “modest, retiring, womanly ways” (138). Edith is more than this, as we soon discover; but her normativity is cemented when, even after she admits that she is a suffragist and has been studying law, Arthur still wants to marry her.

Kiper’s *Cinderelline, or, The Little Red Slipper* (1913) shows that, seventeen years later, suffrage authors are still not immune to the normalizing impulse which results in the creation of appropriately feminine and marriageable characters. A revision of the Cinderella story, the play

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<sup>169</sup> This construction is not in fact redundant, especially when viewed in connection with Behling’s work on the “masculine woman” in America during this period.

brings two sisters into Sylvius Sylvester's home (in an interesting spatial reversal) to try on the little red slipper he has crafted and find out whether it fits. One is glamorously beautiful while the other, intent on making a good impression by tidying up his workshop, shows herself to be skilled in the domestic arts. Yet it is neither of them, but their thus-far absent suffragist sister, who is revealed to be the feminine ideal. When Cinderelline, in a dirty gray cape covered in ashes, bursts into the room begging for pardon, she asks permission to rest a moment, away from those outside who "jeer at her because she wants the vote. / And goes about and tells men that she wants it" (278). Sylvius, who is depicted as a somewhat daft poet,<sup>170</sup> is charmed and replies, "Don't flutter like a little wounded bird. / We shall protect you—" (275). Kiper quickly makes it clear that the sisters, who scorn Cinderelline because she "says her home is larger than her house" and "Lectures in public places on a platform / Without a tremor" (278), are less becoming than the fervent activist. After interviewing Sylvius and then trying on the slipper, which fits, Cinderelline "throws off her dingy gray cape" to reveal a dress appropriately and symbolically of "glistening and sparkling white" and becomes a bride (282).

Characters like Edith and Cinderelline are complicated interjections into the dominant discourse about maidens, spinsters, and brides. While they provide a direct challenge to popular stereotypes about suffragists, they fail to dismantle entirely normative constructions of sexuality and femininity. Yet to expect them to do so is to ask of the authors something we, in the twenty-first century, have accomplished with no greater completeness; and this may not be the most productive way of analyzing what is, after all, a call for marriage on a woman's own terms, as a comrade and equal, even as it is a call for marriage. Cinderelline, it is clear from her quizzing of Sylvius, can be sure not only of some degree of respect, but also of a husband who offers

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<sup>170</sup> Sylvius's masculinity, interestingly, is not especially strong, and could be read as an argument for suffrage on the terms that, if feminine men had the vote, it didn't make sense to exclude others on the basis of their femininity.

“lifelong fealty,” is “a good friend / To little kiddies,” and comes to the marriage “pure in thought and pure in deed” (281). And Edith gets not only a husband, but a business partner. After eliciting Arthur’s assurance that he will not stop her from voting, she asks also about her study of the law; his response, “Hang out your shingle alone, or go in with me. I have a double office, you know” (142), indicates his respect for her as an equal even as the engagement itself situates the couple within the institution of patriarchy.

In these plays, Ives and Kiper face the challenge of saying something familiar enough in the terms of the hegemonic discourse to get a hearing without reiterating the terms of women’s oppression. Presenting characters that are both pretty and about to get married counters the spinster stereotype, though it is impossible to estimate the realm of influence these counter-images had. The ugly spinster figure, easily reproduced in mass media in the form of a cartoon or a humorous quip, remained prevalent, however, and a return to the idea of “defensiveness” can shed light on its power. Although the “free love” movement of the late nineteenth century was not in the mainstream of the suffrage movement,<sup>171</sup> as a threat to the ideology of True Womanhood it certainly caught hold of the public imagination, provoking fear and mistrust on the part of anti-suffragists and suffragists alike. Ideas about sex *were* changing. In the nineteenth century, conflicting discourses circulated, including new ideas about human

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<sup>171</sup> In actuality, As Joanne E. Passet explains in *Sex Radicals and the Quest for Women’s Equality*, the ideals of the two movements overlapped significantly (and for a time, participation in the movements overlapped, as well, though sex radicals believed a woman’s control over her own body was the first priority). Sex radicalism, starting around 1853, is “distinguished by its commitment to women’s social and economic equality and right to reproductive choices” and a belief in “female sexual desire as a healthy phenomenon” (1). However, in addition to the generalized fears of promiscuity evoked by the term “free love,” the movement aroused additional concrete fears when, in the 1970s, Anthony Comstock’s social purity reforms led to censorship and arrests. In consequence, Passet explains, “leaders of the organized movement for woman suffrage distanced themselves from sex radicalism,” fearing that its controversial reputation “might hinder their efforts to cultivate perceptions of woman suffrage as a respectable cause” (14). Prominent sex radical Victoria Woodhull’s relationship to the suffrage movement is particularly interesting. For more on Woodhull, see Barbara Goldsmith’s *Other Powers: The Age of Suffrage, Spiritualism, and the Scandalous Victoria Woodhull*.

physiology, arguments that sexual desire was natural, and claims that lust was sinful and that refraining from sexual activity even promoted good health.<sup>172</sup> In 1856, the *New York Herald* was already expressing concern. Its headlines were “characterized by rhetoric that questioned the integrity, sexual identity, and sexual behavior of the participants in woman’s rights conventions” (Hoffert 95); they referred to suffragists’ speeches as “‘Rich, Rare, and Racy,’ and charged that ‘free love’ was a part of the woman’s rights platform” (qtd. in Hoffert 95). By the 1910s, when many feminists were claiming the right to be “‘frank’ about sex,” reformulating “in terms of principle the loosening of sexual behaviors” as woman’s right, and “erasing the boundaries between the ‘pure’ and the ‘fallen’ woman” (Cott 42), there is no reason to suppose cultural anxiety about “uncontrolled” female sexuality had dissipated. The proliferation of the spinster image, then, may be a manifestation of a desire to “contain” suffragists within a non-sexual image, one perhaps more amenable to the ideology of womanliness because it represents a failed woman, an outsider within<sup>173</sup> the patriarchal system (in the sense that she wants, or “should” want, to be married) rather than a direct challenge to the system.

#### 4.3 FEMALE AGENCY: MONSTROUS OR HEROIC?

Suffragists, with their desire to make significant changes to the social fabric, their claims to their own autonomy and to the right to occupy public space, *were* perceived as threatening. Another effective technique for limiting the degree to which suffragists could be taken seriously was to depict them as “monstrous” specimens of womanhood, pathologizing them as in one way or

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<sup>172</sup> See Helen Lefkowitz Horowitz’s *Rereading Sex: Battles over Sexual Knowledge and Suppression in Nineteenth-Century America*.

<sup>173</sup> This term is used by Patricia Hill Collins in *Black Feminist Thought*. Though she uses the term to indicate the position of black women, I think it useful here as well.

another “sub-human,” or “diseased.” Imagery depicting women concerned with the advancement of their own sex as unnatural already had a long history; perhaps the most famous example is Horace Walpole’s characterization of Mary Wollstonecraft as a “hyena in petticoats” (qtd. in Tickner 314 n164). Representations of suffragists as “howling” and animalistic are based on the same critique that women who speak up on behalf of their sex are somehow less than human. Another example of British anti-suffrage visual art in Tickner’s *The Spectacle of Women* reveals just how closely suffragists and “beastliness” were aligned in some critics’ minds: above the caption “We Want the Vote” appears a visage not quite woman and not quite beast. She is shown from the shoulders up, with the ruffled collar of her purple blouse or dress visible, and she is wearing several pink flowers in her hair. Yet her wide pug nose, crossed eyes, sallow skin, and enormous mouth with its three pointed teeth (one of which is broken off) turn the clothing and adornments into a parody of femininity. The face reveals that this creature is not really a woman; but, as the feminine accoutrements suggest, she *thinks she is*. As do the suffragists, the image implies.

Images of the woman who fights for autonomy and freedom for her sex as unnatural or even “beastly” were common in America as well. A cartoon by Thomas Nast, printed in *Harper’s Weekly* in 1872, depicts Victoria Woodhull as “Mrs. Satan,”<sup>174</sup> with dark leathery wings enveloping her arms and ram’s horns growing out of her head. And a poem appearing in the *Southern Literary Messenger* in November of 1853 represents female doctors and women’s rights speakers as examples of nature gone awry:

These reverend Misses, doctors in mob caps,

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<sup>174</sup> This cartoon, and a number of others commenting on women who concerned themselves with the rights of their sex, can be found in Monika Franzen and Nancy Ethiel’s *Make Way!: 200 Years of American Women in Cartoons*. See p. 63 for this image.

And petticoated lecturers, are things  
Which make us loathe, like strange unnatural births,  
Nature's disordered works. Yon chirping thing  
That with cracked voice and mincing manners prates  
Of rights and duties, lecturing to the crowd,  
And in strange nondescript of dress arrays  
Unfettered limbs that modesty should hide . . .  
Sweet sisters, call not that unsexed thing  
By the pure name of woman.<sup>175</sup>

The reference to the bloomer dress, which shows what “modesty should hide,”<sup>176</sup> is an example of the accusations that women were “out of control” sexually as well as emotionally, that evidence of the “disease” of hysteria could be found in their desire to “display” themselves publicly. Another cartoon in *Harper's Weekly*, printed in 1907, suggests that suffragists don't even have anything to say and just want to be in the spotlight. It shows a group of fashionably-dressed white women with haughty faces marching and carrying signs, one of them bearing the message, “We don't want a thing. We are just showing off!”<sup>177</sup>

Suffragists were pathologized as being “addicted” to the excitement of campaigning and to the attention they received when they had an audience, and their participation in theatrical performances could evoke the same kinds of charges. At the end of the nineteenth century, there was still a great deal of suspicion surrounding the theater, and even private theatricals were

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<sup>175</sup> This poem appears in Mott v. 2, pp. 48-49.

<sup>176</sup> Interestingly, the reform dress was actually “far more modest in coverage than traditional dress,” but “its assumption of characteristics traditionally associated with men and with places from which women were restricted evoked charges of indelicacy and shame” (Mattingly 68).

<sup>177</sup> This cartoon can be found in Franzen and Ethiel, p. 77.

considered by some to be “dangerous” to women’s mental health. In her 1894 article, “Women and Amateur Acting,” Fannie A. Matthews likened the popularity of parlor theater to a kind of drug addiction, claiming that women were beginning to lose their grasp on reality, that they were addicted to applause and “glorying in a non-descript phase of self-adornment, which for the lack of courage to christen it *demi-mondaine*, we impertinently designate as ‘actress-like’” (qtd. in Friedl 4). Home theater for private amusement was one thing, she implies; ambitions for turning it into a profession quite another. While the expressed concern is for women’s health and well-being, critiques like this one served tidily to bind up women’s options for participation into a fairly limited, private venue – one compatible with the separate spheres ideology. In a typical double bind, the suffragist found herself labeled unwell if she chose to address a wider audience outside the home and making little impact if she chose to stay inside the home.

By 1913, attitudes toward the theater were changing, but the pathologizing of activist women continued. In the *New York Times* that year, Mrs. Arthur M. Dodge, President of the National Association Opposed to Woman Suffrage, was interviewed in an article whose title proclaimed, “Our Suffrage Movement is Flirtation on a Big Scale.” Not only is the movement “perilous to morals,” she warns, but the suffragists are unnatural thrill-seekers, addicted to excitement; “women are yielding” to the movement, she says, “because, idle and neurotic, they find in it the excitement which their bent natures crave” (qtd. in Marshall SM2). Dodge here associates the ideology of woman’s sphere with the idea of a “natural order,” designating women who would choose to leave that sphere<sup>178</sup> “bent” or “unnatural.” As Tickner notes, “For half a century and more, feminism and hysteria were readily mapped on to each other as forms of

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<sup>178</sup> Of course many, including the suffragists, were quick to note the irony of women in groups like NAOWS campaigning outside the home.

irregularity, disorder and excess, and the claim that the women's movement was made up of hysterical females was one of the principal means by which it was popularly discredited" (194).

Suffragists responded to such pathologizing by providing images of the women involved in the cause not only as beautiful, but also as calm, orderly, rational, and perhaps even reluctant to face an audience. Tickner points out that in the British campaign, a new type, the Militant Woman, provided a counterbalance by offering an image of female activism as intent and steady rather than hysterical. One of the best known visual examples of this type is the Bugler Girl poster, designed by Caroline Watts for the Artists' Suffrage League in 1908. It depicts "a woman trumpeter, standing on ramparts, flag in hand, and blowing an inspirational call to the women of Great Britain to come out and stand by their sisters in this fight" (qtd. in Tickner 80). The Militant Woman type was picked up variously by the press, and was ambiguously successful in America, where many suffragists and reporters alike were intent on distancing the supposedly more polite American campaign from the British militants. In tones of self-congratulation, many compared the campaign in the states favorably to the one across the Atlantic.<sup>179</sup> Even so, Tickner's observation that "the use of personifications and allegorical figures like Justice, Liberty, or Joan of Arc as the spirit of militant womanhood" served in Britain as a helpful antidote to the image of the "shrieking sisterhood" (173) can equally well describe aspects of the American campaign's imagery in the later years of the movement.

In 1910, the Women's Political Union, led by Harriot Stanton Blatch, even borrowed Watt's Bugler Girl to add a rousing and allegorical figure to the new radical faction in America.

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<sup>179</sup> In an article about the impending suffrage parade, the *Washington Post* stated on March 3, 1913 that "it should be a source of pride to Americans that the women have not forgotten their dignity, as has been the case in England" (6). Such claims establish the American movement as calmer and more rational (read, less hysterical) than the British movement. Both the more conservative suffragists and many members of the press were anxious about increasingly radical tactics.



Still, it might be useful to consider the American version as the Heroic Woman, in light of the newer nation's apparent intent to disassociate itself (despite its Revolutionary War history) from the word "militant,"<sup>180</sup> particularly since this figure was in fact adopted into the mainstream of the American movement. As Tickner explains, in Britain, where stone-throwing and arson had roused public anger, the "iconography of the Militant Woman" was meant to serve as a counter to "images of violent activity as hysterical and futile, as the work of bungling incompetents or screaming viragos" (207). For Americans, an image that would work against popular notions of suffragists as hysterical, excessive, or insane was no less useful, and depictions of women on horseback (invoking Joan of Arc) and women carrying or sounding trumpets became prominent. Inez Milholland, "a dazzling and adventurous suffragist" (Cott 42), riding horseback at the head of suffrage parades, symbolized an entire movement as purposeful, intent, and heroic.

The single Heroic Woman figure was accompanied, in the imagery of parades, with a mass "rank and file" of heroic female "soldiers" in the "battle" for the vote. As a 1914 article in *The Suffragist* about "The May Ninth Demonstration" reveals, suffragists were very aware of the power of the parades' visual rhetoric:

All suffrage processions should be beautiful. They should give the crowds that come out to see the suggestion that suffrage stands for beauty, for harmony, for order and for all right things. The white gowns of the marchers, the flowers and the banners are but the expression of the mental attitude of those who work for the

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<sup>180</sup> Despite the use of military imagery, Blatch emphasized the movement's nonviolence as one of its unique merits, saying, "Perhaps some day men will raise a tablet reading in letters of gold: 'All honor to women, the first disenfranchised class in history who unaided by any political party won enfranchisement of its own effort alone, and achieved the victory without the shedding of a drop of human blood'" (qtd. in Cooney, "Taking" 71).

woman's cause. Nothing of hardness, or bitterness or rancor, but a beautiful and righteous discontent with a state of affairs that ought to be changed. (5)<sup>181</sup>

The Heroic Woman demonstrating a “beautiful and righteous discontent” can be found repeatedly in the suffrage literature as well as in the visual imagery of the movement. As I discussed in chapter 2, a number of the plays depict suffrage parades and position women as leaders and standard bearers. And the combined visual spectacle of Hazel MacKaye's *Allegory* and the 1913 Washington D.C. parade offers a wealth of such imagery. Collectible artifacts from this event also enabled individuals to “own” samples of this visual rhetoric. For instance, the front cover of the program for the procession features a color illustration (in purple, gold, and white) of a horseback herald, bugle raised, leading a parade of women near the Capitol building (“Official Program”). And postcard memorabilia from the parade include a picture of “Miss Inez Milholland, Herald” and a number of pictures of the tableau, including “Liberty and Her Attendants” (Scrapbook). The pageant's allegorical figures, Columbia, Justice, Charity, Liberty, Peace, and Hope, also serve as examples of the Heroic Woman. This pageant, like other theatrical performances, draws its power in part from the representation of characters with whom the audience can identify (the allegorical figures were positioned with the audience as watchers of and commentators on the approaching parade), yet can also admire. In sharp contrast to the representations of suffragists as *sub-human*, such performances offer a connection between the campaign for the vote and female entities who are *more than* human.

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<sup>181</sup> Another examples of this type of embodied visual argument can be found in the “Walkless, Talkless, Golden Lane” and tableau of June 14, 1916. When delegates headed to the Coliseum for the opening session of the Democratic National Convention, “they passed between lines of silent white robed women,” numbering between 4,000 and 5,000 and “wearing yellow ribbons and carrying yellow parasols.” As the reporter explains, “the women were determined to see the effect of feminine gentleness on the hostile male” (“4,000 Suffragists” 3).

Many of *The Suffragist's* poems discussed in chapter 3 make use of military metaphors and heroic imagery, and Ruth Fitch's elegy, "To Inez Milholland Boissevain" is a particularly compelling example. Milholland did become a heroic figure in life, and Fitch's elegy serves to mythologize her after her death. After other deaths, the speaker observes, "We who remain and are lonely / find consolation" (11-12) in the knowledge that those departed have "won the vast vistas of quietness" (13). Not so with this death. The speaker explains:

But for you—  
The words of my grief will not form  
In a pattern of resignation.  
The syllables of rebellion  
Are quivering upon my lips!  
You belonged to life—  
To the struggling actuality of earth;  
You were our Hortensia and flung  
Her challenge to the world—  
Our world still strangely Roman—  
"Does justice scorn a woman?" (14-25)

Here, the refusal to express resignation does not signify a refusal to accept an individual woman's death. It is instead the claiming of a female mythic figure, one who can't truly be gone "When from the long halls of silence / The memory of [her] voice comes joyously back" (36-37). Milholland thus comes to represent the suffrage struggle itself, powerful and lasting. "You have gone—, / Yet you are ours eternally!" (40-41), the speaker exclaims. And the final assertion, "Inez, vibrant, courageous, symbolic, / Death can not claim you!" (44-45) rings true. The herald

and orator is established as an icon of the Heroic Woman strong enough to bolster suffragists' spirits even in the face of countless critiques of their members as unnatural and hysterical.

#### 4.4 SEXUAL DIFFERENCE AND SEPARATE SPHERES

Another way of pathologizing suffragists as “monstrous” involved typing them as unnatural “masculine” women who were abandoning femininity in favor of male roles, simultaneously abandoning the home, the husband, and the child. Sometimes such imagery suggested that suffragists were masculine even in physical appearance. For instance, in the 1850s, the *New York Herald* accused the participants in women’s rights conventions not only of preferring men’s clothing, but also of having “long shaggy beards” and “a general squareness of face, set off by singular determination and heaviness of the jaw.” It referred to the women variously as representing a “hybrid” or a third sex or as “mannish women like hens that crow” (qtd. in Hoffert 101). By the early twentieth century, fears that politics would “masculinize” women had not disappeared. The *Brooklyn Citizen* voiced concern about the damage politics would do to the “fair sex,” explaining that “politics is a dirty game, and the reverence which all men have for pure and good women makes them shrink from committing themselves to a policy which, in the light of their own experience, is sure to coarsen and contaminate the sex.” The author of this remark was not interested solely in the women’s well-being, however, as the additional plaint that “it will be a sad day for the world when the interest of women is centered on politics *instead of homes and children*” reveals (qtd. in “10,000 Women” 1026, italics mine).

Similar sentiments were expressed by Cardinal Gibbons of New Jersey in a 1915 letter published in the *New York Times*; Gibbons believed that “the ballot would drag woman from her

domestic duties into the arena of politics, and rob her of much of her charm, goodness, and true influence” (“Gibbons Condemns” 9). In short, he suggests, the vote would destroy her womanliness. While Gibbons depicts woman as being “dragged” from her proper sphere reluctantly, much of the imagery expressed a fear that, in fact, she was eager to leave it and never look back. The definition of a “suffraget” offered in the *Detroit Free Press* in 1914 is in part a bit of humorous wordplay, but it is also an accusation that the women involved in the suffrage movement are unnatural mothers who do not spend enough time “viewing their heirs.” And Congressman Hobson’s response to the 1913 suffrage parade, which was mobbed by spectators and held up because the police failed to keep Pennsylvania Avenue clear for the marchers, is direct and humorless: “They ought to have been at home,” he stated, according to the *Washington Times* (Scrapbook). It was not only “womanliness” that was of interest in such statements. A frequently repeated warning, first printed in the *New York Times* after a 1912 suffrage parade, sounds the alarm. “The situation is dangerous,” the paper proclaims, and if women try for the ballot, “they will get it and play havoc with it for themselves and society, if the men are not firm and wise enough, and, it may as well be said, masculine enough to prevent them” (“Parading” 628). Paired with True Womanhood, and dedicated to maintaining it with “firmness,” we see a continued concern about True Manhood.

Masculinity and femininity, manhood and womanhood were perceived as being at risk, especially in the early twentieth century. Katz refers to the years after 1900 as an era of “the distribution of the heterosexual mystique.” With falling birth rates,<sup>182</sup> increasing divorce rates,

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<sup>182</sup> In *Women and the Press: The Struggle for Equality*, Patricia Bradley says, “Of all the advice given to women [and there was a great deal of advice offered in the periodicals], none was more consistent than the importance of childbearing and the fear that women were not living up to the need for it. This was surely the fear of ‘race suicide,’ as it was called by Theodore Roosevelt, in light of the declining number of births in white Protestant families compared with the large families of the immigrant poor” (108-09).

and the idea of a “war of the sexes” worrying the public, procreation gained additional cultural value, and heterosexual union became further solidified as a norm. Katz explains that “the ‘oppositeness’ of the sexes was alleged to be the basis for a universal, normal, erotic attraction between males and females,” an idea that had carried over from the early nineteenth century and, in the twentieth, involved a “focus on [both] physiological and gender dimorphism” that “reflected the deep anxieties of men about the shifting work, social roles, and power of men over women, and about the ideals of womanhood and manhood” (142-43). Challenges to the idea of “oppositeness” were threatening (as the responses to “reform dress” reveal), and representations of the suffragists as deserters of the home and of their children centered on a form of role reversal that was both complete and cataclysmic.

Examples of this kind of reversal abound. A 1909 color postcard created by the Dunston-Weiler Lithograph Company of New York<sup>183</sup> depicts a woman dressed up to go out on election day. She is wearing a red gown and a large hat decorated with flowers, and she holds a dainty purse in one hand while she waves goodbye to her family. Though her attire is feminine, she has clearly disrupted the “natural order” that deems the home woman’s sphere; her husband is in a rocking chair (that symbolic seat of womanhood), preparing to feed the crying baby a bottle while the little girl leans on his lap. The woman appears oblivious of the reproachful glares of her husband and daughter as she prepares to leave. While this woman remains feminine in appearance if not in actions, other images represent both women and men as physically changed

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<sup>183</sup> This postcard is the seventh in a series of twelve produced by the company that year. For images of the postcards and for an analysis of their visual rhetoric, see Catherine Palczewski’s “The Male Madonna and the Feminine Uncle Sam: Visual Argument, Icons, and Ideographs in 1909 Anti-Woman Suffrage Postcards.” Palczewski is incorrect when she claims that only the visual artifacts, and not the verbal discourse, suggested that men would be feminized by women’s suffrage. (The idea appears in a number of anti-suffrage plays, for example.) But this oversight does not affect the quality of her analysis of the workings of gender in the postcard images. On postcards from the British movement, see Ian McDonald’s *Vindication!: A Postcard History of the Women’s Movement*.

by the switch in roles. An 1885 cartoon in *Puck*<sup>184</sup> shows a courtship scene in which a tall woman in bloomers has come to call on a young man. She stands confidently, legs jauntily apart, and drapes an arm over her sweetheart's shoulders while the stern female parent (also in bloomers) comes downstairs to look after her son's chastity. "Isn't that Miss Bloomers going soon?" she asks. "It's nearly eleven o'clock." The young man wears male clothing, but his small stature and fluttery hand gestures establish him as feminine. Perhaps the most blatant image reflecting the fear that women would crowd men right out of their own sphere (and then some!) appeared in *Life* in 1912. Standing on top of a sphere with continents lightly sketched onto its surface, a mob of sign-carrying suffragists charges the last man standing in their way to shove him, literally, off the earth. Previous victims are seen falling away into space.

Such images assert that women belong in the home and that suffragists (or enfranchised women) would take over men's sphere, leaving men no choice but to occupy women's – or, in this last example, leaving them no place to occupy at all.<sup>185</sup> Before I turn to the suffragists' responses to this kind of imagery, I'd like to mention one more visual example that sheds some light on the cataclysmic logic of role reversal by returning to the topic of appropriate dress. A 1915 color postcard depicting a comic illustration of a pair of pants poses the question, "What will men wear when women wear <pants>?" (here, the image stands in for the word).<sup>186</sup> Though

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<sup>184</sup> This cartoon, and the one that follows, can be found in Franzen and Ethiel. See pp. 69 and 32. For more on suffrage cartoons, see E. Michele Ramsey's "Inventing Citizens During World War I: Suffrage Cartoons in *The Woman Citizen*."

<sup>185</sup> On masculinity and the suffrage movement, see Eric Dwyce Taylor's "Chivalrous Men and Voting Women: The role of Men and the Language of Masculinity in the 1911 California Woman Suffrage Campaign," Angela V. John and Claire Eustance's *The Men's Share?: Masculinities, Male Support, and Women's Suffrage in Britain, 1890-1920*, and Louise Sachelle Phipps's senior honors thesis, "When Women Wear Pants: The Feminization of Men through Anti-Suffrage Propaganda at the Turn of the Twentieth Century." For more generalized historical studies of masculinity, see David G. Pugh's *Sons of Liberty: The Masculine Mind in Nineteenth-Century America* and John Tosh's *Manliness and Masculinities in Nineteenth-Century Britain: Essays on Gender, Family, and Empire*.

<sup>186</sup> This image can be found on the *Celebrate Boston* website. I have not yet determined its origins or located a print copy. The question mark is located, significantly, between the legs of the garment, raising – or perhaps emphasizing – questions about the biological sex of a potential wearer.

the pants themselves are amusing, with their brightly colored stripes and matching suspenders, the image also expresses fear that a trespass in clothing represents a threat to the foundation of “sexual difference” upon which the ideology of separate spheres depends. As Butler describes, the pathologizing of those who threaten this difference is an inherent part of the principle:

Sexual difference in the more ordinary sense operates as a radically incontestable principle or criterion that establishes intelligibility through foreclosure or, indeed, through pathologization or, indeed, through active political disenfranchisement. As non-thematizable, it is immune from critical examination, yet it is necessary and essential: a truly felicitous instrument of power. If it is a “condition” of intelligibility, then there will be certain forms that threaten intelligibility, threaten the possibility of a viable life within the sociohistorical world. Sexual difference thus functions not merely as a ground but as a defining condition that must be instituted and safeguarded against attempts to undermine it . . . (“Competing” 147-48)

Labeling women who “trespassed” onto the territory of “maleness” as unnatural or unwell thus protects the system, and it is logical that the visual and verbal imagery was underpinned by the emergence of a new vocabulary to describe the women as freaks of nature. In 1897, for instance, Reverend Charles Pankhurst coined the term “andromaniacs,” a “derogatory, scientific-sounding name for women who tried to ‘minimize distinctions by which manhood and womanhood are differentiated’” (qtd. in Katz 143). Similarly, influenced by the developing theories of sexology many people “began to look at U.S. woman suffragists and ‘see’ masculinization and female sexual inversion” (Behling 3).



Suffragists made an effort to counter the image of the masculine woman, the deserting mother and wife, and the subsequently impoverished home. This was true on both sides of the Atlantic. A series of postcards displaying photographs of individual British suffragists engaged in various domestic chores shows just how sharply suffragists felt the critique. Published by the Women's Freedom League, these "Suffragettes as Home" postcards include captions that explain who the pictured woman is and what she is doing. Examples include "Mrs. How Martyn Makes Jam" and "Mrs. Despard Knits a Comforter" (Tickner 221-22).<sup>187</sup> American suffragists, too, had strategies for establishing themselves as normative, "womanly" women, and they sometimes found the press helpful in circulating such images. A newspaper article in Frances Potter's scrapbook describes her as a model mother, and photographs of Potter frequently show her posed with her children (Scrapbook, oversized). This latter technique was one used by many suffragists. As Behling points out, generally, suffragists "did not propose alterations in woman's femininity or appearance" and were often actually "ardent defenders of the roles and behaviors traditionally assigned to males and females" (35). Many suffragists took great pains to present a "feminine" image, even instituting dress codes for their parades.

Suffrage writers, too, refuted images of the suffragists as unnatural, masculine women, suggesting that instead, it was their very femininity and domestic skill that fitted them to play a larger role. This type, a suffragist version of the "Angel out of the House," suggests that women's enfranchisement is not, in fact, incompatible with the ideologies of womanliness and separate spheres. She performs her feminine role, but on a wider scope; woman's sphere still

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<sup>187</sup> See Tickner, p. 221 for an image of the "Mrs. How Martyn Makes Jam" postcard.

exists, but it is expanded.<sup>188</sup> Images of suffragists as “mothering” the country or “keeping house” on a national level occur frequently, both in light-heartedly humorous lyrics and in more serious texts. L. May Wheeler’s “Uncle Sam’s Wedding”<sup>189</sup> offers a cheerful perspective on the country’s need for woman’s abilities:

When “Uncle Sam” set up his house,  
He welcomed every brother,  
But in the haste of his new life  
He quite forgot his mother.  
And now his house is up in arms,  
A keeper he must find him,  
To sweep and dust, and set to rights  
The tangles all about him.

Proposing that the nation would be well served by a “marriage” that brings woman’s “feminine” talents into public policy, Wheeler’s lyrics redefine the government as a “house,” thereby suggesting the legitimacy of woman’s presence there.

Other texts points out that women’s efforts outside the home were necessary even if they wished only to take proper care of their children. Working women and middle-class women alike are represented as having a stake in the policies and legislation that would affect children or the home. Sarah N. Cleghorn’s poem, “The Mother Follows,” depicts a mother who wants to be able to protect her young children from the social evils of “hideous, nameless house” (3) and

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<sup>188</sup> The figure of “The Angel out of the House,” according to Helsinger, Sheets, and Veeder, “did not challenge the leadership of men, but she did define her own distinctive tasks, ministering to the needs of the world at large through philanthropy or social service.” Florence Nightingale is mentioned as the “incarnation of this freed Angel” (xv).

<sup>189</sup> Set to the tune “Yankee Doodle” or “Old Air,” this song was printed in the 1884 *Booklet of Song: A Collection of Suffrage and Temperance Melodies* compiled by Wheeler and published in Minneapolis by the Cooperative Printing Company (Crew 102, 82).

“bright saloon” (4) that have been allowed to exist in her neighborhood, from the “fenceless cogs that whirl and thrust, / And fill the air with lint and dust” (10-11) at the mill where they work, and from the unhealthy “dark and airless” (18) tenement room where they live. An authoritarian voice rings out in each of the three verses, asserting that the questionable businesses in the neighborhood, the factory policies, and the Tenement Bill are none of her concern and that instead of being a “[m]eddlesome woman” (14), she should go home and take care of her children. The irony is clear. Even if woman’s only concern is her own children, it is impossible to take care of them solely from within the home. Cleghorn offers an image of a woman whose social consciousness has awakened. Highly aware of all the threats to her young ones, but also of the ways she is being prevented from helping to change them, at the end of the poem, she now “wears upon her breast / a button with the bold request: / ‘Let me take care of my children’” (23-25). The premise is similar in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s *Something to Vote For* (1911), a one-act play in which a group of middle-class club women realize that the ballot would give them the power to regulate the purity of the milk supply. Mrs. Carroll abandons not femininity but her anti-suffrage position when she exclaims, “Rich or poor, we are all helpless together unless we wake up to the danger and protect ourselves.” As president of the club, she is well situated to persuade others to join her when she adds, “I’m willing to vote now . . . I’ve got something to vote for! Friends, sisters, all who are in favor of woman suffrage and pure milk say Aye!” (161).

While texts like Gilman’s play argue for broadening the realm of domesticity, others take up directly the accusation that suffragists want to take on male roles, questioning whether there is in fact anything inherently “male” about the world of business, for example. Anti-suffrage discourse often depicts women as inherently incompetent to perform outside the home sphere.

William B. Fowle's play, *Woman's Rights* (1856), shows a wife trying (and failing, in a manner the audience is meant to see as humorously inevitable) to take over her husband's business responsibilities for a day while he stays home to run the household. In contrast, suffrage plays like Ella Cheever Thayer's *Lords of Creation* (1883) posit a defiant challenge to notions about woman's "natural" sphere; by taking over her father's business when his health fails, Kate, the heroine of this three-act play, is able to save the family, financially. Kate's role can be read as a somewhat more radical version of the Angel out of the House; her actions position her ultimately as a woman taking care of her family, but by replacing her father temporarily in his business, she has shown herself to be able (heroically and successfully, rather than "unnaturally") to cross into what is clearly designated in the plot as the male realm. By attributing her success in business to her "woman's wit," she underscores the idea that this success is natural.

Some writers turned to parody in order to dismantle the idea that suffragists were deserters of the home. In "Reuben and Rachel Up to Date," a comic song in which the title characters sing alternating verses, Reuben chastises Rachel in verse six:

Rachel, Rachel, you're forgetting  
Woman's proper sphere's the home.  
From the cook-stove and the wash-tub  
She should never wish to roam. ("Reuben and")

Here, the argument is clearly a farce; there is no sentimentalizing of the home, and the notion that Rachel would never want to take a break from cooking and doing laundry is a humorous one. Since Reuben ends up convinced by the final verse that women ought indeed to have the vote, the song serves to ridicule the reification of the home as a "shrine" from which woman

couldn't logically choose to roam. Like other texts, this song argues that "home's no longer / Bounded by our flat's four walls" – that women hear "calls" to concern themselves with "factory, prison, pure food, playgrounds" (verse 7) and that woman's place may still be the home, but "the home's our whole great state" (verse 8).

Despite the humor of texts like "Reuben and Rachel Up to Date" and the optimistic tone of others such as Thayer's *Lords of Creation*, undermining the separateness of the spheres was a threatening move that elicited strong critique. The harshness and prevalence of this criticism is indicative of a culture's defensiveness during a time of changing ideas about men and women, and it is likely that this response was informed by attitudes about class as well – that some of the censure was a backlash against the cross-class cooperation sometimes integral to suffrage work. As I discussed in chapter 2, the suffragists' depictions of alliances among women of different social classes were not always without bias, but both the American and the English suffrage movements had roots inextricable from the labor movements that preceded and coincided with them (Green 2), and calls for women to join the movement because "rich or poor," all women would benefit from the vote were common. The typing of suffragists as "unwomanly" when they embrace a sphere beyond the home relied on ideological underpinnings that reify a certain constrained version of nurturing middle class motherhood and make invisible the real work performed by actual women, especially those of the less privileged classes.

#### 4.5 THE "TRUE WOMAN" AND HER ADMIRERS: A DIALOGUE IN POETRY

While I have organized the preceding sections of this chapter so that a discussion of each of the negative "types" used to depict suffragists is followed by an examination of the pro-suffrage

images that counter this typing, I do not wish to suggest that the suffragists had the final word. As the wide span of dates across which both the negative and the positive images of suffragists in each category appeared in print suggests, each separate image existed within a complicated and ongoing conversation about woman's identity, roles, and "place." To illustrate the dialogical nature of this complex interplay of ideas, I'd like to close this chapter by turning to a pair of poems that were printed in *Harper's Weekly* in January and February of 1910. Read together, these poems provide a window into the cultural battle being waged over the contested territory of "womanliness."

Richard Le Gallienne's "Ballad of Woman," which appeared first, is "Respectfully, Admiringly, and Gratefully Dedicated to Mrs. Pankhurst." Antis and suffragists alike offered reverential images of motherhood, compared motherly sacrifice to saintliness, and likened women to flowers and birds in lyrical efforts to claim the power of the "mother" ideal for their own positions. In the first three stanzas, Le Gallienne considers the life-giving powers of the mother. He depicts her as holy and sacred, nourishing and nurturing:

Then, by some holy mystery,  
She fed us from her sacred breast,  
Soothed us with little birdlike words—  
To rest—to rest—to rest—to rest" (5-8).

Turning in the middle of the third stanza to the topic alluded to by the poem's dedication, Le Gallienne uses the literal image of feeding to invite a metaphoric one, asking, "Can it be true that men, thus fed, / Feed women—as I hear them say?" (11-12). This question is followed by a series of stanzas in which the speaker wonders if it is possible that "such men as these" (21) have ever really perceived all the comfort, mystery, and beauty that woman offers. The vivid imagery

in each of these stanzas culminates in a final query/command, the speaker's question transformed by punctuation into an exclamation. "[S]hall she— / Mother and sister, wife and fay— / Have no part in the world she made—" (47-49), he asks, "Save knitting in the afternoon, And rocking cradles, hour by hour!" (51-52). Le Gallienne does not devalue these homely contributions. Earlier, the poem mentions that "She sewed the little things we wore" (14). Instead, he celebrates the womanly/motherly figure (whether she be a literal mother or a more generally mothering figure, like a nurse on the battlefield) who offers spiritual and actual sustenance. The reference in the final stanza to minor chores suggests that far from finding these works all-consuming, such a woman is, in fact, well suited to "clean up" and offer sustenance in a broader sphere.

Francis Medhurst's "A Ballad of the True Woman" appeared about a month later in response. "Respectfully, reproachfully, yet admiringly dedicated to Richard Le Gallienne," its thirteen ballad stanzas with their abab rhyme scheme echo the form of the earlier poem. The shape and content are also similar, as the poem moves from the "primal mystery of birth" (4) through a series of images of the mother as "Madonna-like" (9) and holy, "a thing of light and life" (19), to a series of questions about her relationship to the franchise. While Le Gallienne proclaims woman fit for politics, however, Medhurst – like Cardinal Gibbons – proclaims politics not fit for woman. She is meant for better things, the thinking goes. And so, the poem's questions focus not on the idea of woman cheated of her rightful power, but on how the vote would taint her purity. Stanzas 8 and 12 are interesting examples:

And shall this creature, fine and rare,  
From whom we draw our lives, our souls,  
Descend to fight with noise and blare

The vulgar battle of the polls? (29-32)

.....

Shall her fair image leave its shrine

And in the market-place be set?

Shall she we honor as divine

Become a shrieking suffragette? (45-48)

Medhurst's construction of woman as divine and revered suggests that she holds power already and has no need to leave her "shrine" and "descend" to the polls. Should she do so, he warns, she would lose her power "to gain an empty vote" (44). By depicting this "descent" as converting a woman into a "shrieking suffragette," Medhurst also draws on the stereotype of the hysteric to give his argument weight. In the last stanza, he echoes Le Gallienne's final exclamation point, but to different effect: Let woman forsake the "fever" and "fuss" of politics, his speaker proclaims, and "bear her part again, / To mother us and marry us / And, first and last, to make us men!" (49-52).

In Medhurst's final phrase, we see once again the indication that it is not just femininity that is at stake in negotiations of the idea of the "true" woman, but masculinity as well. It is only within a system in which woman occupies her traditional role and eschews politics, Medhurst suggests, that men can truly be men. "A Ballad of the True Woman" speaks back to Le Gallienne's "Ballad of Woman," their lyrics expressing agreement in some respects while differing dramatically in others, and it is easy to imagine them as participants in the same conversation since Medhurst is so clearly responding to Le Gallienne. What I've tried to do in this chapter is make evident the fact that this conversation continues throughout the many years of the suffrage campaign, with theirs only two of the many voices taking part. By identifying



some of the patterns that emerge if we step back and take a long view of this conversation, it is possible to understand better the positions from which these voices speak. The imagery used to depict women who worked for the vote varied, but suffragists and anti-suffragists alike can be seen as working within the same ideological framework, attempting to navigate a changing world and find sense in its patterns.

Changes in the social structure led to very real concerns about men's and women's roles, identities, and relationships to one another; and anti-suffrage censure can be understood as arising out of fears about what these changes might mean. As the literary texts discussed in this study make clear, suffragists occupied a no less complicated position, working to navigate the discourse and argue for change in terms that were not too threatening to social norms to be given serious consideration. Voices on all sides of the conversation, therefore, were attentive to just what it was the others had to say, frequently taking into consideration ideas that countered their own beliefs and expectations as well as those that extended their thinking along lines they had already begun to explore. This, I argue, created an environment in which the social pedagogy of suffrage literature could find an audience. Not only was it a period during which nationwide (and larger) conversations about rights and roles were taking place, it was also a time when education itself was increasingly available and actively sought. During the decades of the suffrage movement, many colleges were founded, enrolling greater numbers of men as well as opening doors for women students,<sup>190</sup> and new academic departments were formed.<sup>191</sup> In

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<sup>190</sup> A number of American colleges were founded in the second half of the nineteenth century. Congressman Justin Smith Morrill's 1858 proposal that land be deeded to each state senator and representative so that it could be sold in order to fund new colleges resulted in the founding of 69 land-grant colleges by the end of the century (Leuzzi 65). Women's colleges opened their doors in this period as well. Vassar, the first American college for women, was founded in 1861. In 1875, Sophia Smith College was founded and Wellesley (which had been a women's seminary) became a college. In 1885, Mount Holyoke became a college, in 1886, Newcombe College opened, and by 1889, the Seven Sisters colleges all admitted women. Several teaching universities for black women had also opened by 1869, including Howard University, Morehouse College, Fisk University, and Hampton Institute (43-50).

addition, opportunities for adult education expanded significantly, as an enthusiasm for chautauquas,<sup>192</sup> book clubs, and home study courses grew. In such an environment, it was inevitable that the citizens would also work to educate one another, and suffrage literature was only one part of this larger project. Of course, the anti-suffragists' work, too, was pedagogical. In the following chapter, I continue the exploration of anti-suffrage critique begun here, returning more directly to a discussion of pedagogy in order to examine the role of anti-suffrage drama.

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<sup>191</sup> In *Gender and Higher Education in the Progressive Era*, Lynn D. Gordon describes American colleges and universities as “offering intellectual laboratories for reformers and their programs,” adding that “research on social problems took place in new departments of sociology, psychology, and anthropology” (3).

<sup>192</sup> On chautauquas, see John E. Tapia's *Circuit Chautauqua: From Rural Education to Popular Entertainment in Early Twentieth Century America*. See Andrew Chamberlin Reiser's *The Chautauqua Movement: Protestants, Progressives, and the Culture of Modern Liberalism, 1874-1920* for a reading of “the self-culture impulse embodied by Chautauquans” as “bound up in middle-class efforts to exert cultural authority” (4).

## 5.0 GENDER LESSONS AND ACCIDENTAL PEDAGOGY IN ANTI-SUFFRAGE DRAMA

MRS. WILSON. He says I'm not a woman, I'm only a Suffragette.

-*The Suffragette* (1909), by Helen G. Ludington

MISS HOPKINS. I wonder who put it in my vestibule.

ELIZA. Yes'm. Ain't dat strange?

MISS HOPKINS. What is strange?

ELIZA. Dat anybody should give a baby to a suffragist.

-*A Converted Suffragist* (1912), by Katharine Kavanaugh

MR. SHEEP. Here's a nice position for a man. I've got to scrub the floor and do all the housework . . .

-*The New Woman's Husband* (1912), by Frank Dumont

Anti-suffrage critique took many forms, but an anxiety about gender roles permeated much of it, as writers of both sexes considered what it meant to be “manly” or “womanly,” masculine or feminine; this is illustrated by the many media examples discussed in the previous chapter. The way pro-suffrage literature engaged with those critiques indicates that it was a lively and active – and sometimes contentious – negotiation. In this chapter, I continue the exploration of anti-suffrage critique begun in chapter four, this time demonstrating the extent to which such images saturated American culture by focusing on the repeated negative depictions of suffragists or of women’s suffrage to be found in the theater genres, particularly in parlor plays and other popular amateur drama. Anti-suffrage plays reflect some of the same critiques that were made in the newspapers and magazines of the era, and they contribute to the ongoing and complex negotiation of what constitutes an appropriate performance of gender. They are also, in ways

that parallel the suffrage literature to a surprising degree, frequently pedagogical texts wrought by individuals with an invested concern for their society, and the gender lessons they contain are worth consideration here. The texts can be read simultaneously as participating in the type of societal policing described by Antonio Gramsci in *The Prison Notebooks*, serving as a (here, literary) device for maintaining control, as I discussed in chapter four, and, as I argue here, as participating in a pedagogical project that has some similarities to the social pedagogy of the suffrage writers, offering both conservative and progressive lessons within a single script or performance.

Before I turn to an analysis of the plays' pedagogy, I'd like to offer some information about the genre itself. First of all, it is important to ask, what *is* anti-suffrage drama? What are its defining characteristics? Who were its authors and audiences? And second, what was its context? What is its relationship to pro-suffrage drama? And in what ways is it representative of the ideals of the organized anti-suffrage movement? The answers to these questions will serve as a useful grounding against which to situate the analysis of the plays as pedagogical texts. It is important to note is that the recognition of anti-suffrage drama as a separate genre and the development of scholarship in this area are both just beginning.<sup>193</sup> The plays themselves are therefore a challenge to locate, since they are not yet collected or categorized under this heading.<sup>194</sup> Even so, for this study, I was able to locate copies of more than thirty plays printed

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<sup>193</sup> The first use of the term "anti-suffrage play" I have come across is by Bettina Friedl, in the introduction to her anthology of suffrage (and anti-suffrage) plays, the 1987 *On to Victory: Propaganda Plays of the Woman Suffrage Movement*. Emma Dassori's 2005 "Performing the Woman Question: The Emergence of Anti-Suffrage Drama" is at this time the only published study in this new field. Maureen McCarthy's unpublished 2007 undergraduate thesis, "'That'll Do, Bridget': The Role of Irishwomen in American Anti-Suffrage Parlor Drama, 1850-1920," which she generously shared with me, is the only other study of anti-suffrage drama I have come across. See also pp. 206-207 of Susan Carlson's "Comic Militancy: The Politics of Suffrage Drama" regarding British anti-suffrage plays.

<sup>194</sup> Indeed, it is not even possible always to find such plays under the more general (but still fairly recent) category of "suffrage plays." My strategy for locating anti-suffrage plays for this project was therefore to cast a wide net, tracking down and reading as many plays as possible under more general headings in order to sift out the plays

in America during the years of the suffrage movement which depict suffrage and/or its advocates negatively. The authors of these plays include both men and women, though there appears to be a shift, with larger numbers of men writing anti-suffrage plays up to around 1890, and the numbers of women anti-suffrage playwrights increasing significantly after that.<sup>195</sup> The playwrights include some influential and well-known individuals like Annie Nathan Meyer, who was one of the founders of Barnard College and an important figure in women's higher education,<sup>196</sup> and George M. Baker, who was a familiar name in amateur drama during the early decades of the suffrage movement.<sup>197</sup> Other playwrights are less well-known, at least today; I have not yet located any information, for example, about Agnes Electra Platt.

The plays themselves vary, but in general, they are written primarily for middle-class audiences, and they are mainly comic pieces. What holds them together as a genre is their explicit or implicit concern that changes in women's rights and roles will have a negative effect on society; anti-suffrage plays frequently warn their audiences that unbalancing gender roles will disrupt the social fabric. Most of the plays under consideration here mention the vote directly; a number of these plays are explicitly anti-suffrage in their overall content while others focus on different themes but include a negatively depicted "suffragist" character or in some other way comment disapprovingly on the suffrage campaign. Other relevant plays do not

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related to the vote. One helpful source was Don L. Hixon and Don A. Hennessee's *Nineteenth-Century American Drama: A Finding Guide*, which has a section on the "Women's Movement."

<sup>195</sup> Further research will be necessary in order to verify this apparent trend, but it is an interesting pattern; it suggests that women's anti-suffrage playwriting efforts coincided largely with the organized efforts of the anti-suffrage movement in the U.S.

<sup>196</sup> For more on Meyer, see Lynn D. Gordon's *Annie Nathan Meyer and Barnard College: Mission and Identity in Women's Higher Education, 1889-1950*.

<sup>197</sup> Baker wrote many plays, and he put together a collection for the Amateur Drama Series titled *The Exhibition Drama: Comprising Drama, Comedy, and Farce, together with Dramatic and Musical Entertainments for Private Theatricals, Home Representations, Holiday and School Exhibitions*. His October 21, 1890 obituary in the *New York Times* states that "his position as a writer for the amateur stage, in which he had no genuine competition, is one that cannot easily be filled" ("Obituary" 5).

mention the vote at all, their anti-suffrage stance only implied, but some of these are nonetheless worth considering in connection with the explicitly anti-suffrage texts because they are clearly participating in the same ideological work at the same historical moment. Such texts appear also to arise out of a fear of women's suffrage or of other related changes in women's roles.

Anti-suffrage drama appears to have been quite popular, though further archival research is necessary before it is possible to estimate how many of these plays were actually written. The longevity of the genre, combined with the popularity of parlor drama in general as a form of middle-class entertainment, however, suggests that its numbers were probably high. Publication dates for these plays span almost the entire duration of the American suffrage movement, beginning in its earliest decades. The popular dystopia plot (in which men and women trade roles) dates at least as far back as William Bentley Fowle's 1856 *Woman's Rights*.<sup>198</sup> And the negative depiction of a suffragist character dates as far back as Henry Conrad Brokmeyer's 1860 play, *A Foggy Night at Newport*.<sup>199</sup> The popularity of this genre both preceded pro-suffrage drama and then later coincided with it.<sup>200</sup> A survey of publication dates supports Sally Burke's claim that the majority of nineteenth-century plays related to the vote appear to have been anti-suffrage comedies (31). Emma Dassori describes these as "satirizing the New Woman and her

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<sup>198</sup> This play was published in his 1856 collection of *Parlor Dramas, or, Dramatic Scenes, for Home Amusement*. Fowle appears to have written a number of schoolbooks and oratory collections in addition to parlor plays. See, for instance, *The Primary Reader: Consisting of Original and Selected Lessons, Intended to Interest as Well as Improve the Younger Class of Learners* and *The Free Speaker: A New Collection of Pieces for Declamation, Original as Well as Selected*.

<sup>199</sup> Brokmeyer was one of the St. Louis Hegelians. See Henry A. Pochman et al., *New England Transcendentalism and St. Louis Hegelianism: Phases in the History of American Idealism*.

<sup>200</sup> Interestingly, the two genres have a lot in common. In considering the British literature, Glenda Norquay finds conspicuous "the extent to which pro- and anti-suffrage writings draw upon the same scenarios, plots and characterization" (10), an observation I have found equally applicable to the American plays.

plight for equality” (301).<sup>201</sup> While some nineteenth-century pro-suffrage plays do exist, this genre was much more common in the second decade of the twentieth century.

Many anti-suffrage plays are brief comedies, often consisting of a single scene (and therefore minimizing staging requirements). Ida M. Buxton’s satirically titled *Matrimonial Bliss* (1884) is one of the shortest, its single scene running, according to the play script, for only 20 minutes. Others are longer and more complex, with multiple acts and changes of setting. Effie Merriman’s *A Pair of Artists* (1892) and Annie Nathan Meyer’s *The Dominant Sex* (1911), for example, are each three acts long. The plot structures of anti-suffrage plays vary as well, though patterns can be observed. Dassori argues that there are four categories of anti-suffrage plays: marriage role-reversal plays, plays set in the future at a time when women are in power, plays about the meetings of women’s clubs or conventions, and plays which depict women failing when they venture into the professions (305). To Dassori’s categories, I would add several more. There are plays about corrupt women officials, conversion plays (in which a suffragist realizes that she is on the wrong side), plays that center around other characters’ efforts to teach a “wayward” woman a lesson, racial or ethnic caricature plays in which black or Irish characters discuss the vote, plays in which a suffragist character is represented as purely bungling or comic, and even moderation plays (which do not argue entirely against suffrage).

Some of these plays may have been intended for the public stage, but mostly, anti-suffrage dramas were parlor plays intended for amateur performances in the home. Even Ariana

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<sup>201</sup> Albert Auster points out that “prior to 1900 the treatment of women’s suffrage and the ‘New Woman’ on the stage had hardly been sympathetic.” He lists a British play, Sydney Grundy’s *The New Woman* (1894), as an example (81). For more about the play and some information about Grundy, see Carolyn Christensen Nelson’s *A New Woman Reader: Fiction, Articles, and Drama of the 1890s*, pp. 295-97. Nelson mentions the play’s performance (at the Comedy Theatre in London in September 1894) as significant: “Produced just months after Sarah Grand had named the New Woman,” she notes, “the play was a great success with the audience, revealing that the New Woman was already in the minds of many a comic figure who could be easily caricatured and mocked” (295).

Randolph Wormeley Curtis and Daniel Sargent Curtis's play, *The Spirit of Seventy-Six* (1860), which made it to the professional stage in 1868 and ran for almost three weeks at Selwyn's Theatre (Friedl 15), was originally intended for home performances. An author's note proclaims, "This play was not written for the stage, nor with any view to publication, but simply for amateur performance" (Curtis and Curtis 56). Of course, it *was* published, by Boston's Little, Brown, and Company, and many editions were printed; as Friedl points out, "its success as a parlor farce was outstanding and lasted more than three decades" (15). Therefore, it is worth reading the authors' note in part as a performance of modesty, somewhat akin to the seventeenth-century practice of women authors prefacing their manuscripts with apologies. Even so, like many anti-suffrage playwrights, Curtis and Curtis clearly did intend the play for amateur performance, and that is an important characteristic of the genre. These works, as Dassori notes, were "penned as an outgrowth of the parlor theatrical craze gripping many middle- and upper-class American households" (302).<sup>202</sup> This is evidenced by the simplicity of the plays' sets (usually domestic, and therefore easily staged with few props), the form of publication (some plays were published in collections of drama for amateur performance while others were printed singly as part of an amateur series), and the advice on home staging sometimes found in the scripts themselves (302-303). Because the plays were both accessible and popular, they were an ideal medium for bringing lessons about correct gender performance – literally – home.

In the following pages, I examine the pedagogical aspects of these anti-suffrage plays, arguing that, like the pro-suffrage literature, their lessons reveal a complicated interplay of

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<sup>202</sup> See Melanie Dawson's *Laboring to Play*, which examines home entertainments such as recitations, tableaux vivants, theatricals, and other games. In addition to offering a way to combat boredom, Dawson notes, "as they developed across the nearly seventy years from roughly 1850 to 1920 [a period coincidental with the suffrage movement in America], home entertainments helped to clarify, critique, and question the everyday activities of their participants" (1). Later in the chapter, I turn to this potential for critique and questioning. For more on parlor plays, see also Pamela Cobrin's "Dangerous Flirtations: Politics, the Parlor, and the Nineteenth-Century Victorian Amateur Actress."



elements that work sometimes at odds with one another as the authors (and actors) attempt to navigate the medium. I turn first to the more conservative gender lessons offered in anti-suffrage plays, using John M. Sloop's theories about the ways normative gender patterns are reproduced culturally and about the ways what Judith Butler has referred to as "gender trouble" can be contained and depowered to examine the normative gender lessons offered in these plays and the techniques the playwrights employ in presenting them. While many anti-suffrage playwrights were interested in some forms of social change (several were involved in increasing women's access to education, for instance) the overarching lesson delivered in these plays is that it is a bad idea to push gender norms too far. Next, I turn to the additional layer of pedagogy created by the moments of apparent paradox or humor that can be found in the plays and their performances, arguing that these create a useful foothold for what Judith Fetterley has called "the resisting reader" (here, I would suggest the possibility of a "resisting viewer" as well). By making alternative readings not only possible but logical, the plays thus create the potential for what I am calling "accidental pedagogy," whereby a play simultaneously teaches a lesson that seems to run counter to its overt ideology. Finally, to conclude the chapter, I return briefly to the pro-suffrage plays in order to look at the ways they enter the conversation about identity, often reclaiming some of the same techniques used in anti-suffrage drama.

## 5.1 GENDER LESSONS

In *Disciplining Gender*, John M. Sloop examines the ways gender identities are reproduced rhetorically in contemporary American culture. His examples are drawn from the 1990s, a decade, he explains, when sexual and gender norms "were challenged and battled over on

multiple fronts” (1), but his arguments are equally useful in contemplating the reproduction of gender during the suffrage struggle. In representations of or conversations about non-normative gender, he notes, cultural critics can find “an ongoing cultural negotiation” within which “ideological change and transition can take place” (1). While such readings can be productive, however, Sloop points out that moments of “gender trouble”<sup>203</sup> do not necessarily result in an expansion of the catalogue of accepted possibilities for gendered representation:

[R]ather than each case acting as an example of “gender trouble” that encouraged reassessment of cultural assumptions about human bodies and sexual desire, such cases were more often positioned within the larger body of public argument as aberrations in nature’s plan and hence worked to reify dominant assumptions about human bodies and sexual desire. That is, while cases of gender ambiguity were “talked about” in ways that encouraged an undermining or questioning of the very notion of “aberration” as related to sexuality and gender, bi-gender normativity was for the most part underlined and reemphasized. Significantly, one finds assumed (and not necessarily spoken) within these discourses a series of binary roles and behaviors which ultimately constitute the very notions of male and female, masculinity and femininity, hetero- and homosexual. These public discussions all work in part, in Lauren Berlant’s words, as keys “to debates about what America stands for, . . . how citizens should act,” at least in terms of their gendered and sexual behavior.” (2)

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<sup>203</sup> Here, Sloop invokes Butler’s term, from *Gender Trouble: Feminism and the Subversion of Identity*. Butler describes her study as “an effort to think through the possibility of subverting and displacing those naturalized and reified notions of gender that support masculine hegemony and heterosexist power, to make gender trouble.” She argues that this is done, “not through the strategies that figure a utopian beyond, but through the mobilization, subversive confusion, and proliferation of precisely those constitutive categories that seek to keep gender in its place by posturing as the foundational illusions of identity” (33-34).

Sloop makes several important points here which are equally applicable to an examination of the gender trouble of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, when the “woman question” was under constant discussion. Anti-suffrage dramas, which participated in this conversation, work in much the same way as the contemporary examples Sloop considers; they reify dominant assumptions about identity, they underline and reemphasize bi-gender normativity, and their gender lessons are inextricably tied up in nation and citizenship.

Before turning directly to some of the plays to illustrate their role in the maintenance of normative gender patterns, I want to look further at the relationship between gender and citizenship. To understand its importance for anti-suffrage drama, it is necessary to realize that the relationship between pro- and anti-suffrage media in general and drama in particular rests on the tension surrounding the definition of “womanliness” – a tension that I believe can be productively reframed as a negotiation of the role of the woman citizen.<sup>204</sup> As I pointed out in the introductory chapter, suffrage activists were highly invested in images of women voters as full participants in society, capable of improving their local communities and the country as a whole, and willing to take on the responsibility of doing so; their plays often celebrate this image, modeling through fictional on-stage characters an example of feminine civic responsibility and a form of patriotic duty based on sisterhood. But women who opposed the extension of the vote to their sex had their own ideas about citizenship and responsibility. It would be a mistake to imagine that if suffragists understood woman’s realm to expand out into the world, into the supposedly male sphere of business and politics, then those opposed to women’s suffrage considered themselves to be “citizens” only of the female sphere of the home.

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<sup>204</sup> While questions of masculinity and manliness were always at stake, they remained, even in the plays that focus on male “hen-pecked” characters, an undercurrent; the “gender lessons” address both sexes, but usually focus more directly on the problematic gender transgressions of the women.

It is true that much of their rhetoric celebrates separate spheres for men and women, but for anti-suffragist women, this concept indicated a natural and complementary division of labor that allowed men and women to share the work required to create and maintain the social units of family, home, and community, not an invisible spatial barrier indicating that their roles ended or began at the front door. In *Women Against Women: American Anti-Suffragism, 1880-1920*,<sup>205</sup> Jane Jerome Camhi explains that the women who organized and led the anti-suffrage movement were in fact very active outside the home in efforts for the betterment of their communities – even before they commenced their work against votes for women. She notes that in Massachusetts, which was the first state to have an organized anti-suffrage movement<sup>206</sup> and was thus a leader in shaping subsequent campaigns in other states, the women who initiated the campaign were mostly wealthy, well-educated members of the social elite who had “both leisure time and money to devote to the cause” and were already active in charitable work and reform efforts (79).

Although suffragists would frequently use the apparent paradox of the anti-suffragists’ work outside the home as fodder for comedy in their plays and elsewhere, the women who campaigned against the vote saw themselves as citizens with a responsibility to effect reform in their communities and did not see their efforts as incongruent with their basic philosophy. They explained their campaign efforts against the vote as a sacrifice arising out of the need to “ward off an imminent threat” (Camhi 52), their justification indicating that they did view this

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<sup>205</sup> For more on the anti-suffrage movement and its perspectives, see: Anne M. Benjamin’s *A History of the Anti-Suffrage Movement in the United States from 1895 to 1920: Women Against Equality*; Thomas J. Jablonsky’s *The Home, Heaven, and Mother Party: Female Anti-Suffragists in the United States, 1868-1920*; and Mara Mayor’s “Fears and Fantasies of the Anti-Suffragists.”

<sup>206</sup> The first “remonstrance” took place in 1868, when women in Lancaster protested against suffrage and presented their views to the Massachusetts legislature. However, the first organized meeting of anti-suffragists did not take place until 1882, when the Boston Committee, the “working nucleus of the organization that would formally emerge in 1895 as the MAOFESW [Massachusetts Association Opposed to the Further Extension of Suffrage to Women]” met to work against an attempt to win municipal suffrage (Camhi 77-79).

particular type of activity as a trespass – but a necessary one – on male terrain; their various other reform endeavors within the community, however, they viewed as quite within their proper realm and requiring no justification. The difference perhaps arises out of their definition of politics – a more narrow definition than the one the suffragists held – as a male realm concerned mainly with tariffs and international trade and relations. If activities in education, social work, and reform (areas where most women’s accomplishments occurred) were considered to be outside of politics, then they were acceptable areas in which women could devote their energies (48).<sup>207</sup> While suffragists viewed the vote as integral to the full experience of citizenship, the anti-suffragists did not; they held, according to Camhi, “a kind of Benthamite philosophy, maintaining that ‘citizenship lies in the participation of each individual in effort for the good of the community,’” and that “woman’s contribution as a citizen derived from her special attributes as a sex” (33-34). Woman had a special role to play, they felt, and if she did it well, her influence on the community and the country could be quite significant. First, and most important, she was, in addition to being a citizen herself, a “citizen-maker,” responsible not only for birthing and bringing up the next generation of voters and rulers, but through her educative and moral influence on her offspring, responsible also for building character (8) and therefore ultimately “for the good and evil in men” (6). Second, as a voteless and therefore nonpartisan member of society, she could be presumed to be working disinterestedly, and thus had influence with members of all political parties (11); this gave her particular power *as a woman* in her efforts for reform, a power that it is logical that the anti-suffragists would be reluctant to relinquish.

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<sup>207</sup> Interestingly, suffragists and anti-suffragists alike claimed for women the right to work for improvements in these areas, though for different reasons. The suffragists claimed that these *were* a part of “politics,” and as areas in which women’s expertise was quite strong, were therefore clearly evidence that women *ought* to be involved in politics (Camhi 48).

I offer this discussion of the ways anti-suffragist women understood their roles as citizens for the light it can shed on the lessons to be found in anti-suffrage drama. Not all of the plays were written by women who actively campaigned against the vote; the playwrights were both men and women, and some of the plays were written before the anti-suffrage movement emerged in the 1880s, fueled by a more generalized anti-suffrage sentiment.<sup>208</sup> So a clearer understanding of the ways anti-suffragist women viewed their roles as female citizens is only sometimes useful for considering an individual playwright through a lens of historical and biographical detail. But many of the plays depict both anti-suffragist and suffragist women; this background information, therefore, can be brought to bear on a reading of the female characters and the gender lessons their presence facilitates. Camhi comments for example that “it is remarkable how infrequently the [women] Antis resorted to characterizing the suffragists according to the usual stereotypes of unfulfilled spinsters who were rebelling against domesticity in theory because they had never known it in practice” (255, n. 16).<sup>209</sup> Even so, when depicting suffragists in their plays, both male and female writers rely heavily on negative caricatures. The pro-suffrage plays discussed in chapter 2 came into being partly because suffragists were seeking creative ways to reach a wider audience and partly because the myriad negative depictions of

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<sup>208</sup> Meyer was one of the playwrights who did work actively against the vote, her published comments carrying additional weight because of her prominent position. See, for instance, “Barnard Girls and Suffrage,” her 1910 letter to the editor of the *New York Times*, assuring the public that “the whole question of woman suffrage is not taken too seriously at Barnard” (12). Her play, *The Dominant Sex*, depicts the dangers created by lenient husbands who fail to put their feet down and stop their wives’ persistent meddling in “causes.” Extensive biographical research would be required to determine the relationship (or lack thereof) of each lesser-known playwright to the movement; this is work that might prove interesting for a future project but is beyond the scope of this one.

<sup>209</sup> It is unclear whether this apparent reticence arises out of the women’s greater understanding of their suffrage counterparts’ psyches, or whether it was simply more convenient to focus their images on married women, the greater to emphasize the supposed destruction of the home that suffrage would cause. At any rate, “spinster” characters are fairly rare in the anti-suffrage plays I have located thus far (though not completely nonexistent); far more common is the character of the mother or wife who has “gone bad” and either neglects or abuses those she is meant to care for. An obvious exception is *The Bachelor Maids’ Reunion* (1906) by Eleanor Maud Crane, which depicts the meeting of a group of “old maids” with a minor interest in Women’s Rights and a major interest in finding husbands.

women to be found on the stage and elsewhere called for a counterbalance of some sort. Anti-suffrage plays contributed to this plethora of negative images, their depictions of women involved in the struggle for rights sometimes a harsh illustration of the fears many felt regarding the damage to a known and valued way of life that changing gender relations could bring about. It is clear from many of the anti-suffrage plays that “two of the perceived risks of woman suffrage were emasculation of men and the disruption of the heterosexual economy that kept the binary opposition of gender difference in its place” (Chapman, “Women and” 347).

Sloop refers to an “overall cultural impulse to contain ‘gender trouble,’ . . . to explain the cases within dominant frames of understanding” (151, n. 1), and I find this notion of “containment” fruitful for a reading of anti-suffrage plays. The plays frequently represent non-normative gender performances, but these are always contained within a larger narrative that celebrates normative femininity and separate spheres for men and women. The characters who might be “gender trouble” are positioned, in Sloop’s terms, as “aberrations in nature’s plan” (2). While these characters enact alternative gendered identities, it is a constrained performance, existing as it does within a dramatic framework that reinforces binary gender roles and presents anything different as evidence of an ailing society. The female anti-suffragist characters, and the overall narrative in which the plays participate, thus reflect the values of the actual women who worked against the vote. As I explained above, it benefited these women to maintain a clearly delineated distinction between the sexes and their spheres of responsibility, particularly if the “home” sphere was understood not as a circumscribed location within the house, but instead as a broader but distinctly female realm of influence. And they borrowed the scientific concept of evolution to establish this arrangement as an advanced stage in the development of mankind. They looked upon the differences between the sexes “not only as divinely inspired,” as Camhi

puts it, “but also as the crowning step in an evolutionary process” (22); they considered it folly to “backslide” to an earlier stage of human development (32).

Tension about the possible dangers of such “backsliding” surfaces frequently in anti-suffrage plays; and in the many role reversal plays found in this genre, gender lessons take the form of warnings about the dystopia that results when men and women trade their proper roles and realms. Some of the plays focus on marriage, with husband and wife trying on gender performances that differ from cultural norms. When this is simply a temporary experiment, as in Fowle’s *Woman’s Rights* (which I discuss at greater length in the pages to come), both parties soon return to their “natural” roles and gender order is restored. But in a number of plays, the gender trouble is depicted as ongoing, and while both parties participate in “aberrant” performances, the focus is often on the unhappiness that comes to a man foolish enough to marry a woman who exhibits masculine characteristics and/or stakes a claim in male spheres. Merriman’s *A Pair of Artists* and Dumont’s *The New Woman’s Husband* depict the misery of married life for the husbands of “a woman suffragist” and a “new woman,” respectively. Nellie M. Locke’s<sup>210</sup> *A Victim of Women’s Rights* (1896), too, depicts an unhappy husband; in this drama, Mr. Henry Peck laments, while tending the baby, “How little I thought when I married Sarah Brown that she would degenerate into a female suffragist! There never lived a more mild tempered young woman than she seemed to be” (3). He addresses his complaints to his infant son, advising the youngster to be sure he really knows a woman before he marries her – or rather, “because it is impossible to find out a woman until after marriage” (3), never to marry at all. When his wife returns home to find he has not yet washed the dishes, Henry’s vow to stand up to her this time is quickly forgotten; he mutters to himself abjectly, “I wish I had washed those

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<sup>210</sup> This appears to be a pen name for Belle Marshall Locke.



confounded dishes” and calls out, “Coming my dear!” (4). In these plays, the overt lesson addresses the men in the audience: marry a woman who is (gender) trouble, and you’ll be sorry! But the lesson for women is that concern for the rights of their sex is a gender transgression that will render them undesirable to men. Not only that, it suggests, but “those” women are also ruining things for everyone else, if men are coming to the conclusion that it is safer not to marry at all. The lessons gain power from two familiar methods of controlling women: threatening the loss of male approval, and encouraging women to see one another as competition or threat.

Other role reversal plays contemplated the kind of society that changes in women’s rights would bring about, picturing women hastily installed in every imaginable position of power without the training or the inherent ability they would need to succeed. In both *Vice Versa* (1892), by Mrs. E. J. H. Goodfellow, and *The Spirit of Seventy-Six* (1860), by Curtis and Curtis, a male character returns to his home town after a prolonged absence to find things much changed for the worse.<sup>211</sup> The first act of *Vice Versa* shows Will Brown at the train station, just arrived after five years’ absence; he is surprised to encounter first a female ticket agent and then a female baggage-mistress, who asks if he is a stranger in the town. He explains that he has been away and points out that “men used to hold the positions that you and your friend now occupy.” Bessie replies, “Oh! You haven’t been in Wollefdoo then since Woman’s Suffrage went into effect? I guess you will find affairs changed somewhat since then” (7). And changed they are, with women in all the professions. When Will asks what the men do, if women hold all of their former positions, the baggage-mistress smiles and says, “Oh! They are kept quite busy. I guess you will find out” (8). In the second and third acts he runs into old friends with new

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<sup>211</sup> While the two plays are very alike in plot and theme, they are separated in time by more than two decades. Many anti-suffrage plays closely resemble others in the same genre, but they also frequently have significant similarities to pro-suffrage plays. (Pro-suffrage plays in which women try out male roles, however, depict the women as both competent in these new roles and also appropriately feminine.)

responsibilities. Sam Black, for instance, is tending three children and explains to Will that when his wife was appointed to the post office, he “was elected housekeeper at the same time” (10). Sam notes that he gets an occasional break when his mother watches the children for a week, saying, “Bless her dear old heart! she don’t believe in Woman’s Suffrage” (10). Goodfellow doesn’t portray the women in her play as inherently unfeminine or corrupt. They are not particularly admirable in their performance of their jobs, but they appear to be as much the victims of circumstance as the men. None profess suffragist values, and hence they all appear to be women who *could* be admirable individuals, if only they could get back into their proper sphere. Indeed, the census worker Jessie White even says as much when she stops by Ben Green’s house, where Will is visiting, and helps the bungling Ben with both the baby and the dinner; she says, “I must confess I prefer the old occupations best, and so I really believe do the other girls” (17). This play is kinder than many, as both men and women appear silly and inept when they try to perform the “wrong” gender roles, and nobody onstage is depicted particularly harshly. The professional women are represented as having a natural talent and affinity for traditionally feminine tasks, and the Irish maid is depicted as fully competent in the kitchen, even if her “feminine” emotionality makes her unsuited for her new role as a juror.<sup>212</sup>

Post-suffrage *Wollefdoog* is a dystopia (none of the characters are happy with the new order, and they end the play singing reminiscently about old times), but it is a far gentler version than the gender-reversed Boston in *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*, with its unlikable and aptly named female characters, Mrs. Badger and Wolverine Griffin, harassing the newly returned Tom

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<sup>212</sup> The fact that in the gender-reversed world the maid character still works in the kitchen most of the time is in itself an interesting aspect of the play; while she does enjoy the opportunity to serve as a juror, only the women who are not from the servant class are represented as gender-crossing on a daily basis, working in “male” careers. On the one hand, this might establish “Biddy” in an intriguing way as more inherently feminine than her “betters,” but on the other hand, it might imply that her class is negligible, that in the world-turned-upside-down of the play, she is not fully included in the reversal.

Carberry. While the women in the former play merely perform their new tasks somewhat ineptly and retain their femininity, all but one of the women in the latter are represented as serious gender trouble. They are aggressive and corrupt in their new positions, and are apparently masculine in appearance as well as behavior. While Goodfellow's Will Brown was intrigued by the ticket agent and the baggage mistress, referring to the former as "quite a heart-breaker" and the latter as "a saucy little baggage" (9), the Curtises' Tom Carberry is repulsed by all the women in his much-changed Boston except for one young girl who fantasizes about the old times and doesn't, according to her mother and aunt, "appreciate the blessings of emancipation" (60). When he first arrives, he encounters Mrs. Badger, the tax assessor, who is wearing Bloomers and asks for a light for her cigar; "Queer-looking female!" (57), he exclaims in surprise. *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*, like the marriage role reversal plays mentioned above, offers an unsubtle and unlovely depiction of the woman who concerns herself with women's rights. In the plays that hinge upon a role reversal plot of one sort or another, women are depicted as either comic flops experimenting beyond their capacities or as vile failures at womanhood.

In presenting their lessons about the dangers of "backsliding" into gender arrangements that dismiss or corrupt separate spheres ideology, anti-suffrage plays often employ two techniques that bypass the need for lengthy character and plot development by drawing on what the audience "already knows." This economy of information coincided usefully with the economy of staging discussed earlier to facilitate the delivery of the plays' lessons as quickly and easily as possible. The first of these techniques is the use of *antonomasia*, or telling names, as a way to convey information about a character to the audience immediately.<sup>213</sup> Such names, according to Patrice Pavis, are "potentially expressive of [a character's] entire psychology," and

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<sup>213</sup> When written programs were used, this technique would allow the audience to form an opinion even before the character ever appeared on stage

while they create a comic effect, the technique also “gives an indication of the dramatist’s point of view, prepares our critical judgment and facilitates abstraction and reflection on the basis of a particular aspect of the story narrated” (27). An audience at a performance of Ida B. Cole’s *Wagner at the Smallville Woman’s Club* (1906), for example, would find itself prepared by the presence in the cast list of a suffragist character named Miss Mann to draw upon his or her sense of the “wrongness” of a “manly” woman and pass judgment; even before the character speaks a line, she is represented as “aberrant,” and the audience is warned not to take her words too seriously. In this way, the play’s pedagogy relies on an understanding co-created by the text and the audience, as spectators are asked to draw on common knowledge to “fill in the blanks” in order to create the meaning and cement the lesson.

Many anti-suffrage playwrights use this naming technique for one or more characters. In Dumont’s *The New Woman’s Husband*, it is no surprise that Mr. Sheep is ruled by his wife. And in Fowle’s *Woman’s Rights*, it is linguistically logical that it is Mrs. Manly who is fed up with proper gender roles and her “womanly” sister Myrtilla who advises her to give up the role reversal experiment and return to her own sphere. Names can also be used as a shortcut when a playwright wants to contrast suffragists and anti-suffragists quickly. This is effective in Thomas F. Anderson’s *The Trials of a Country Editor* (1889), in which a busy newspaper editor, having recently printed an editorial expressing the opinion that women are not “fit to be entrusted with the vote” (11), is visited in his office first by suffragist Abigail Blizzard and then by anti-suffragist Mrs. Sweethome.<sup>214</sup> “First we have a Dakota blizzard, and next a gentle spring zephyr” (12), the editor comments; and it should be immediately clear which woman’s visit

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<sup>214</sup> While the cast list includes a “Mrs. Sweethome,” this character is labeled “Mrs. Sweetbone” later in the play. It is unclear whether the name change was effected in the typesetting or was a slip on the author’s part. Either way, the name in both spellings offers a strong contrast to the cold harshness of a “Blizzard.”

contributes to his choice to quit the newspaper business. Names are sometimes used, as in *The Spirit of Seventy-Six*'s Mrs. Badger and Wolverine Griffin, as a shortcut to vilify any female character who seeks the vote or who holds a position of power. And at times, this technique is used simultaneously to critique actual women involved in the struggle for women's rights and the fictional woman who is a character onstage in an anti-suffrage play. Frank Dumont's *Election Day* (1880), for instance, has only one female character, the aggressive Susan Woodhaul, whose name combines the names of prominent suffragist Susan B. Anthony and controversial Presidential candidate Victoria Woodhull.

Female characters like these also illustrate a second technique that helps anti-suffrage plays deliver their gender lessons without the need for long explanations or introductions: the use of caricature.<sup>215</sup> Many of the suffragist characters to be found in the genre are represented as exaggerated and simplified types. Some of them threaten men literally as well as figuratively, at times even attacking them physically onstage. Anderson's Abigail Blizzard speaks "sharply" (10), scolds the newspaper editor, and cancels her subscription in a foul humor because of his editorial; calling him a "wretch," she then warns him that the Beanville<sup>216</sup> Woman Suffrage League will "take [his] case in hand" (11). Dumont's Susan Woodhaul, too, is a caricature of the women's rights advocate. She is described as wearing "'woman's rights' costume, spectacles, etc." (Dumont, *Election Day* 2); her clothing (which is assumed to be so typical as to need no further description) and spectacles serve as an iconic shortcut, conveying to the audience that she is unattractive and probably unruly. And she is. When the election inspector informs her that

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<sup>215</sup> It is important to note that anti-suffragist playwrights were not the only ones to employ these techniques. Suffragists, too, used antonomasia and stereotype, and, as I discuss later, sometimes employed caricature in their representations of the "antis."

<sup>216</sup> The name of the town is perhaps a play on Boston, a center of women's suffrage activism and, at the time this play was published, the home also of the burgeoning anti-suffrage movement.

women aren't allowed to vote, she asks, "What's the matter with you?" and hits him with a stick (5). Then, when he immediately changes his tune, inviting her to drop in her ballot, or even a handful if she so wishes, she struts about and says, "That's the kind of feller, I am" (6), thus cementing for the audience her aberrant gender identity. The threatening and sometimes violent "masculine" suffragist is only one of the many forms of caricature employed by the playwrights. There are also lesser versions of this type in the form of the scold, who is often a wife or a mother-in-law. And the plays also offer other types, including the occasional old maid character, the silly deaf woman, the naïvely ambitious wife or young girl (who will later learn to embrace her proper place), the busybody clubwoman, the incompetent woman official or professional, and the upstart servant.

These images had power because they touched a nerve. Afraid that some of the supposed "advances" for their sex represented a step backward rather than a step forward, that women and men might be changed for the worse if norms were pushed in the wrong way, anti-suffragists held firmly to the ideal of binary gender roles and separate spheres.<sup>217</sup> And anti-suffrage playwrights embraced caricature as a method of "containing" the gender trouble represented by suffragist women. Martha Banta explains that caricature functions both by "othering" and by mockery:

[Caricatures] derive their authority through unspoken reference to accepted norms . . . [and] their force on the social scene derives from their devotion to depicting the abnormal, what differentiates "we" from "they." Aesthetic by nature and acting in Nature's name, caricature functions through formulas of distortion to

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<sup>217</sup> So strong was the attachment to binary gender roles that the authors of anti-suffrage plays seem especially fond of the image of a world in which the roles are swapped entirely, creating a distortion of the usual binary rather than a more complicated blurring of roles.

mock the correct forms ordained by Nature's laws. It mocks in order to warn others that they mock these laws at their peril. Caricature is held as proof of the presumed rightness and literal value of the eternal ideals it visually challenges. (4)

Although, as I discuss in the next section of this chapter, containment efforts did not always fully succeed, by depicting voting women or activist women as "other," their "henpecked" husbands as abnormal, anti-suffrage playwrights were able to issue warnings; by representing in exaggerated form the "wrong," they were able to advocate the "right" ways of performing gender.

Because these caricatures were present already in the culture, their inclusion in anti-suffrage plays also would have drawn power from sheer repetition. In pedagogical terms, the audience was encouraged through the repeated use of these caricatures to engage in rote learning and "get" the plays' gender lessons by heart.<sup>218</sup> On the one hand, audiences were encouraged to memorize the lesson, illustrated by so many examples, that suffragists were abnormal women who would bring devastating changes to society. But on the other hand, they were frequently encouraged to see suffragist characters as candidates for salvation, individuals who could be brought back into the fold, either through their own budding awareness of the wrongness of their unfeminine performance, or through the actions of one or more devoted friends or family members self-appointed to "school" the wayward woman back into a more correct performance of gender. Playwrights made ready use of both caricatures; they depict the suffragist in some instances as naively foolish and in others as brutally repellent.

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<sup>218</sup> I don't mean to suggest here that the anti-suffrage plays' pedagogy was simplistic or unsophisticated, or that it was characterized *only* by rote memorization; rather, I wish to note that this use of rote learning further naturalizes normative gender patterns by suggesting that they are basic, foundational building blocks.

Sometimes, though not always, the representations correlate with the character's age and beauty; young, pretty women are often depicted as silly misguided creatures who can be re-established as fully "natural" women with a little help. Interestingly, the young female characters in both pro- and anti-suffrage plays are very often represented as smart, plucky, attractive, and reasonable – as if suffragists and remonstrants alike wanted to claim all the best qualities of the "new woman" type for their respective causes.<sup>219</sup> In Goodfellow's *Vice Versa*, all of the women officials are young (they are referred to as "girls" in the stage directions), and they appear to be more than ready to embrace normative gender roles should they be given the chance. But sometimes mothers and "old maid" characters are represented as redeemable as well. Kavanaugh's *A Converted Suffragist* shows Miss Hopkins as at least properly concerned with her appearance; a "woman of fifty," she "wears a handsome street costume" (3). She has banished her nephew for marrying against her wishes, but when he initiates a plot to leave his new baby at her house so she will find it and fall in love with it, her "natural" love of babies takes over, and not only is the family reunited, but suffrage suddenly seems superfluous as well. "Oh, bother the suffragists," Miss Hopkins exclaims; "I'm going to stay home and take care of the baby" (8).

As all of the above examples illustrate, anti-suffrage plays repeatedly present aberrant gender performances in order to shore up normative roles and behaviors. The suffragist characters perform gender incorrectly to the entertainment of an audience well schooled in recognizing the problems with the performance. In addition to being a form of entertainment, of course, the plays were pedagogical texts; anti-suffragists and suffragists alike would have been

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<sup>219</sup> The "New Woman" idea had negative connotations for many anti-suffragists, and was frequently used as a pejorative term; yet the concept of a feisty, pretty young female had too much allure to be let go entirely. Anti-suffragists' ambivalence about this surfaces in the plays, which reveal an inconsistency in attitude toward the concept, if not the term.



familiar with the notion that parlor plays were meant to instruct. Indeed, the argument that theatrical performances were educational was one strategy whereby publishers of dramas attempted to assure the country that amateur theater was respectable, and the introductions to collections of plays often emphasized their educational aspect (Dassori 303). And, because the scripts were so readily accessible and the plays were staged so simply as to be not too difficult to perform, they were an ideal vehicle for anti-suffrage pedagogy. To each new audience, anti-suffrage playwrights delivered lessons about the proper roles of men and women, the dangers of unbalancing the “natural” system with female suffrage or other innovations, and the incompetence (or, alternately, the insidiousness) of the women suffragists. In this way, they upheld the values of the women who campaigned actively against the vote.

## 5.2 ACCIDENTAL PEDAGOGY IN ANTI-SUFFRAGE PLAYS

Although anti-suffrage drama is saturated with normative gender lessons, I do not wish to suggest that the plays and their performances should be read as a form of indoctrination. The lessons were already familiar ones, and their reiteration in the plays might more accurately be understood as ongoing maintenance to a system that was never *fully* in power in the first place. New challenges to separate spheres ideology were always arriving, and a “new woman” had even appeared on the scene in the late nineteenth century to further confuse things. So, while audiences may have been receptive to comfortable images that cemented normative, “natural” identities, their reactions to the plays would have varied, and it is important to take their agency into consideration. Judith Fetterley’s concept of “the resisting reader” is particularly useful here. She argues that “to read the canon of what is considered classic American literature is perforce to

identify as male” (xii) and that “the first act of the feminist critic must be to become a resisting rather than an assenting reader” (xxii). Like Fetterley, writing in 1978, audiences during the suffrage era would also have found themselves positioned within a framework that assumes the universal to be male, and even when reading or watching anti-suffrage plays, which often have female characters and/or female authors, this would have influenced their engagement with the texts. As Fetterley explains, there is a cost to this, especially when literature plays a role in defining identity:

To be excluded from a literature that claims to define one’s identity is to experience a peculiar form of powerlessness – not simply the powerlessness which derives from not seeing one’s experience articulated, clarified, and legitimized in art, but more significantly the powerlessness which results from the endless divisions of self against self, the consequence of the invocation to identify as male while being reminded that to be male – to be universal, to be American – is to be *not female*. (xiii)

For American women during the suffrage movement, working from differing ideological camps to claim their own identities as citizens, to define what it meant to be both American and female, it would have been impossible to construct a coherent vision of “self” without becoming at least occasionally the “resisting reader.”

As Bruce A. McConachie points out, the resisting reader concept may be less applicable to theater spectatorship than to reading because it “demands a level of consciousness and awareness that most people do not exercise when they enjoy a performance” and because “you can’t put a play down and think about it, as you can a book.” People do not necessarily buy into the ideology of the play as they watch, he explains, but they do “tend to find what they want to

enjoy and often ignore the rest.”<sup>220</sup> And yet, I would like to suggest, anti-suffrage plays did invite thought. For one thing, the simple fact that they are often very short means that it was usually not all that long before audiences were given an opportunity to step outside the fictional world and consider what they had seen. And besides that, the plays participated in broader conversations about gender, rights, and identity that were both compelling and very much unresolved, and which could be taken up immediately by an audience after a performance ended. There is no practical way to determine the extent to which those who read, watched, or performed in anti-suffrage plays questioned or resisted the gender lessons in which they were steeped; still, the plays themselves, and the information available about the requirements for staging them, can reveal ways such lessons were undermined. In both the texts and the performances, there are moments of ambiguity and ideological tension that create gaps in the narrative, footholds that invite an audience member to resist the conservative overall message and question or refuse its gender lessons. Turning now to some examples, I consider more concretely the variety of ways in which pro-suffrage lessons erupt from the scripts and performances of anti-suffrage drama, thus serving as “accidental pedagogy.”

The pat moralizing at the end of Fowle’s *Woman’s Rights*, for instance, appears at first to shore up “proper” notions of gender relations. When Mr. and Mrs. Manly decide it is time to end their role reversal experiment, Mrs. Manly’s sister says, “I am not surprised at the result of your experiment. The hen was never made to swim” (53). Her comment seems all right at first; it is not surprising when stories in which the main characters err and then set things right end in a moral – especially a homey moral involving animals. And surely a swimming hen offers a comical and somewhat “unnatural” image. It is easy to find resolution where it is expected; yet

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<sup>220</sup> One could argue, of course, that not buying into the ideology of the play while they are watching it *is* precisely what it means to be a resisting reader, but McConachie’s reminder about the human capacity to ignore is important.

the invitation is there, and a resisting reader, by finishing the implied analogy, arrives at the equally strange image of a swimming rooster. If the hen is trespassing by trying to swim, in the binary of the play's storyline, doesn't that make the water male terrain? Yet there is no logic in this, if hen is to rooster as man is to woman. Perhaps the moral merely indicates that leaving one's sphere is a bad idea. But the hen is so clearly a gendered figure (especially in a genre so reliant on the trope of the "hen-pecked" husband), and Mrs. Manly's efforts in the "wrong" sphere are so clearly presented as a greater failure than her husband's, that this doesn't add up either. What does it mean? Questions arise, and the mind is thus set to work on a fascinating problem. The ideology of separate spheres, with its clear, "natural" gender roles, is no longer patly reinforced.

This is just one example, though a particularly humorous one, of the accidental lessons that sometimes accompany and contradict the gender lessons in anti-suffrage plays. These take many forms, but some patterns can be identified. Anti-suffragists often based their arguments on essentialist claims about men's and women's "natures," drawing support for these claims from medical and biological ideas that were in circulation at the time,<sup>221</sup> and anti-suffrage plays parallel this move. Their humor relies on the startling or titillating effect of watching men and

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<sup>221</sup> For more on the use of biological and medical arguments as a way to legitimize gender roles, see Carroll Smith-Rosenberg and Charles Rosenberg's "The Female Animal: Medical and Biological Views of Woman and Her Role in Nineteenth-Century America." Camhi describes some of the biological reasons the anti-suffragists used to explain why woman should remain in her sphere. Dr. Charles Dana, who was considered by the women in the anti-suffrage movement to be "one of the world's leading neurologists" (Camhi 251, n. 50), compared the skeletal and nervous systems of the sexes and concluded that "women are rather more subject than men to the pure psychoses. If women achieve the feministic ideal and live as men do, they would incur the risk of 25 percent more insanity than they have now" (qtd. in Camhi 18). Others feared that social changes would cause women to degenerate sexually, in ways that ranged "from atrophy of the reproductive organs as a result of disuse to the debasement of motherhood" (Camhi 19). Dr. Edward Clarke (who had been a Harvard professor), believed that even increased access to higher education had a cost; drawing on clinical evidence, he argues in his book, *Sex in Education* (1872), that "the active use of the brain required more blood than usual and that in the case of women this blood would be drawn from the nervous system and the reproductive organs. Not only would they then be unable to fulfill their ultimate function, but women who went to college were likely to suffer mental and physical breakdowns and possible sterility" (qtd. in Camhi 24).

women on the stage behave in ways that are assumed to be abnormal. At the same time as they rely on and reinforce essentialist ideas about gender, however, they also frequently challenge the “naturalness” of gender identities by inviting the audience to think more carefully about what actually makes a man or a woman. Dumont’s *The New Woman’s Husband*, for example, offers images of a husband and wife performing gender incorrectly. As the short satire begins, Mr. Sheep is discovered in a kitchen, with a washtub and washboard in view and various other domestic accoutrements arranged around him. He is on his knees with a scrub brush and pail, in the act of cleaning the floor, and he wears a checked apron. From the first, the audience is informed that he is aware of the “wrongness” of his gender performance. His first words (which I used to preface this chapter) are, “Here’s a nice position for a man.” And his wife is a tyrannical parody of “masculine” authority. When she arrives, she begins to scold and berate him as if he were a delinquent child:

Ah! There you are! Idling your time away, of course, instead of doing your work. Go to work this minute or I’ll box your ears. (*She slaps his face.*) Don’t talk back to me. You men have had your way long enough. Now we women are going to rule. Cook that dinner—rock the cradle—wash the clothes—bake the biscuits, and scrub the floor before I come back or I’ll give you the worst whipping you ever had in your life. (6)

Mrs. Sheep’s character is clearly a warning, to return to the *New York Times* quotation I mentioned in the previous chapter, that women will create “havoc” if the men are not “masculine enough” to prevent it. While offering a lesson about the dangers that await when men and women deviate from their proper roles, however, the play also calls attention to the hierarchical relationship between husband and wife, illuminating the subservient and child-like role imagined

by some to be the “place” of woman. Dumont’s harsh depiction thus invites audience members to contemplate the denigration of the woman’s role. While some may have simply laughed at the easy humor, any woman who privately bristled at infantilizing treatment or physical abuse from men might readily pick up on this alternate “lesson.”<sup>222</sup>

Although Mr. Sheep decides in the end to “be a man and defy her” (7), he has little success. His mother-in-law arrives to team up with her daughter, and they sic a dog on him as the play ends. In some role-reversal plays, however, the “henpecked husband” rebels more successfully. George Rugg’s one-scene farce *The New Woman* (1860) relies on the same argument that by marrying a new woman, man is destined for domestic drudgery; Maria Simpkins, an attorney, bosses and bullies her cringing husband Darius, who toils in the kitchen. This play climaxes, however, when Darius finds a mouse behind the stove and Maria and her two friends are terrified. Gender order is restored, and Darius makes a grand speech, throwing out his chest and strutting in front of the women: “Cowards! Poltroons! After all, you are only women! Darius is a man again” (133). Women attempt to trespass on male terrain, Rugg implies, but eventually their natures will out. Yet this play, too, invites critique. The utter lack of ferocity of the great beast Darius faces is part of the comedy, but it invites laughter at the entire concept of manliness, not simply at the follies of those who try to interfere with “nature.” If the ability to conquer a single small rodent is the measure of a man, then really, the play invites its audience to ask, is man so very impressive?

Merriman’s *A Pair of Artists*, too, presents a “henpecked husband” who eventually takes a stand. Mr. Scott, though meek and in awe of his wife, is not as fully feminized as the husbands

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<sup>222</sup> The fact that the new woman character refers to her own husband as Mr. Sheep, while he calls her “my love,” also offers interesting food for thought. Although clearly meant to reveal her further as a cold and distant character, this too contains multiple layers; if he is given a title and she a pet name, then, linguistically, he retains some level of authority and respect, despite his current status.

in the two plays mentioned above. Although he does appear onstage doing dishes and other housework, it is because his niece cajoles him into putting off his farm chores and helping her in the house (29), not because he has swapped responsibilities with his wife. Still, the suffragist character is presented as both formidable and unwomanly; Mrs. Scott wears “bloomers, rubber boots, [and a] man’s hat” (2), a costume meant to convey at a glance both her suffragist identity and her gender transgression. She is also criticized in the play for “masculine” behaviors like using her tools to repair a broken chair; as she works, the “true woman” houseguest comments in surprise, “What funny work for a woman” (13). Mrs. Scott is both mocked aloud for doing the work and mocked silently, in the physical comedy of the play, as she injures herself in the process, apparently not actually capable of the job;<sup>223</sup> thus, Merriman works it two ways at once, arguing that the character is on the one hand, too manly, and on the other, not manly enough. When Mrs. Scott’s husband does rebel, though, it is not in response to her dress or her efforts at repair work, but – ironically – to her actions as a parent. When she takes their son by the ear and says, “I’ll teach you to run away from home, young man,” Mr. Scott intervenes on the boys’ behalf. “You’ll teach him in a gentler way than that, madam, or not at all,” he says, before proclaiming, “From this on, I am master in my house” (47). Interestingly, it is by attempting to perform her feminine duty of child-rearing that Mrs. Scott most angers her husband. And it is through tender, traditionally maternal, feelings for his child that Mr. Scott reclaims his masculinity. On one level, this reinforces the anti-suffragists’ claim that women’s positive moral

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<sup>223</sup> This failure offers an additional gap for a potentially resisting audience member to take hold of; the representation of a farm wife taking care of minor repairs around the house would not be so surprising to any woman who had done such tasks herself, and thus would invite her to ask herself why such behavior should be so mocked.

influence could only exist *because* it was protected within the home,<sup>224</sup> and that women who ventured into politics would be changed for the worse; Mrs. Scott can be seen as one such “warped” woman. Yet on another level, the scene confounds gender expectations, with Mr. Scott’s rebellion a surprising twist on the usual trope of parental love enabling the female parent to respond with ferocity and strength to a threat to the offspring. He claims his masculinity by claiming his femininity.

In addition to raising questions about the logic of essentialist arguments about women’s and men’s “natures” and “spheres,” the accidental pedagogy to be found in anti-suffrage plays also functioned in several other ways. Sometimes the accidental lessons that disrupt the narrative occur because caricature, used so often by the anti-suffragist playwrights, is an unruly form. According to Banta, caricature has significant power; it is an “expression of the culture that creates [it],” and it “influence[s] how groups within the culture conduct their affairs” (3). Yet its power is not automatic, not a direct transmission of cultural control. As Banta explains, caricature is “part of a complex system of tools of communication developed over the centuries” and is therefore “as susceptible to misreadings as other modes by which cultural exchanges are put into practice” (4). It “mimic[s] the conduct of people directed by what they think they know they are seeing, even though this knowledge may prove to be as much illusion as reality” (1). Besides being susceptible to misreadings, the caricatures used in anti-suffrage plays also contradicted one another. In some plays, like Helen G. Ludington’s *The Suffragette* (1909), the woman who works for the vote is merely comic, a bungling or otherwise impotent source of humor. And in Rachel Baker Gale’s *Coats and Petticoats* (1910), “the suffragist” is simply one

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<sup>224</sup> As Camhi explains, “[w]hile the Antis were willing to accept the idea that women might be men’s moral superiors, they believed that woman’s special virtue could operate only within the carefully circumscribed limits of the home and family” and that “[i]n the battlefield of politics this virtue had little chance for survival” (42-43).



of several comic and risqué roles available to the young women who are putting on a home theatrical performance. In other plays, however, the woman suffragist is vilified, represented as a dangerous and ominous non-woman. Laura M. Parsons's *The New Woman's Reform Club* (1902) in particular depicts women reformers ominously; their club is a secret society with all the trappings, including a skull and crossbones club emblem, and the members threaten death to any man who invades their meeting space. With anti-suffrage playwrights and others making frequent use of the device, working from different perspectives and at different moments, it is easy to see how contradictory caricatures surfaced. Yet such images were so prevalent that any single representation of a suffragist in an anti-suffrage play could only be read in relation to the many other images so readily available in the media. The audience of a play that used one version of the caricature could not help but be exposed to the opposite version elsewhere, which raises the question: are suffragists merely incompetent fools, easy to laugh at and dismiss? or are they dangerous and threatening?

Also, at times, these caricatures would have hit a little too close to home, since many of the women anti-suffragists were themselves active reformers; plays advocating a wholesale rejection of woman's competence and effectiveness in reform efforts would have run contrary to their own experiences, once again inviting a resisting reader (or viewer) to take another look, to question the ideas that were presented onstage. Anti-suffrage plays frequently depicted women holding positions of power or responsibility as inherently corrupt or as incompetent. Yet these images did not align with the lived realities of anti-suffragist women, who held many official positions in areas of civic reform.<sup>225</sup> There are many examples of this type of caricature. In Agnes Electra Platt's *When Women Rule* (1913), Mary Madison, private secretary to the female

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<sup>225</sup> In Massachusetts, for example, "beginning with the appointment of Clara Temple Leonard to the State Board of Health, Lunacy, and Charity, trustees of hospitals and correctional institutions were often women" (Camhi 59).

President of the United States, comments that she is left to run the country on her own because the President is “off spending her seventy-five thousand a year, on royal bridge and bargain sales” (3). Similarly, in Lilian Clisby Bridgham’s *A Suffragette Town Meeting* (1912), women hold all the various local offices, but are too fond of spending money and too self-interested to attend to their duties in a responsible manner; the superintendent of streets, for example, uses up the entire road budget fixing up the streets in her own neighborhood (18). In another play by Bridgham, *The Famous Brown vs. Brown Separate Maintenance Case* (1912), the reliability of a female justice system is called into question as an all female court selects its jury members based on such suspect criteria as whether they are bringing their daughters up to be suffragettes (12). Although such plays assert that woman’s “true nature” makes her unfit for all these roles, the “text” of actual women’s experiences runs contrary to this lesson.

The caricatured women appearing in anti-suffrage plays sometimes offer additional fodder for the resisting reader by making statements or observations that undermine the play’s overall ideological position. In these instances, a character takes on a complicated “truth-speaker” role, her utterances appearing at times to be functioning at a level beyond the playwright’s control. These moments offer yet another opportunity for resistance by making it possible, even if only momentarily, for an audience member to align with the “wrong” character. Mrs. Manly, in Fowle’s *Woman’s Rights*, for example, sometimes inhabits this female truth-speaker role. The play begins when, tired of trying to cajole money out of her husband, she tells her sister that she is determined to revoke her promise “to serve, to honor, and obey.” She advises her sister not to make the mistake of getting married, but Myrtila is engaged and is not sympathetic with Mrs. Manly’s complaints:

MYRTILLA . My word is given, and this very moment, as you know, my future is expected. Shall I renounce him?

MRS. MANLY. Better so than wear his chain. I tell you, sister, matrimony is a balance, and the weight is ever in one scale.

MYRTILLA. What matters it which weight is highest?

MRS. MANLY. Every thing. The moment you ascend, you lose your foothold, and must swing as the greater weight commands. (47)

Mrs. Manly's metaphor provides a vivid image of inequality, one not easily forgotten, and Myrtilla's question therefore works more to cue the coming explanation than to serve as the voice of reason. With the image of an unbalanced scale, Fowle invokes a solid gender hierarchy, but it is one in which the "higher" position has both literally and figuratively less weight. Mrs. Manly's dramatic breaking up of the word "every thing" further emphasizes the effect of such an imbalanced relationship. And the image itself calls into question claims that women's "elevation" was a form of reverence and admiration; there is something stark and ominous in the picture of a woman raised up where she can get no footing, always at the "command" of "the greater weight." Mrs. Manly dismisses the idea that men and women were "made" to be on different levels, or that such a difference is innate or natural, asserting baldly that "He made us equal" (47).

Not only did such characters make it possible for the audience to hear another perspective, they also offered the women performing them an opportunity to "try on" the voice of a woman who rebels against traditional ideas about gender. Female servant characters sometimes afforded this opportunity as well, allowing actors to take on the role of rebellious woman or dangerous truth-speaker. Like the women's rights advocates, these characters were

depicted as caricatures, and their roles sometimes made space for both actors and audiences to occupy the position of resisting reader. This adds an especially intriguing layer of complexity to some of the plays, since the domestic workers were usually depicted as upholders of middle-class values and normative gender patterns. The maid Eliza, in Kavanaugh's *A Converted Suffragist*, for instance, knows better than her misguided suffragist employer what constitutes appropriate womanly behavior, and she sets the clocks to the wrong time so that Miss Hopkins will miss her suffrage meeting (3); when confronted, she states that she doesn't approve of attending suffrage meetings or of "spoutin' speeches" (4) and proceeds to school her employer in what it takes to be perceived as a "lady" (5). Even when they are positioned as maintainers of normative binary gender roles, however, these caricatured domestic workers sometimes disrupt that very project, offering satisfying or troubling moments of rebellion.

In her study of Irish domestic workers in anti-suffrage drama,<sup>226</sup> Maureen McCarthy notes that "the popularity of the [unruly] Bridget<sup>227</sup> character suggests that the ability to pronounce the speech of the Irish maid" – and thus enjoy the "luxury of speaking out of turn" or even "the thrill of insulting their male counterparts" – indulged anti actresses' unconscious desire to rebel" (67). The Bridget character appears in two different forms, according to McCarthy: the

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<sup>226</sup> In the current form of her study, McCarthy examines the roles of Irish domestic workers in seven plays: *The Champion of Her Sex* (1874), by George M. Baker; *The Clinging Vine* (1913), by Rachel Baker Gale; *The Sisterhood of Bridget* (1908), by Robert Elwin Ford; Bridgham's *A Suffragette Town Meeting*; Fowle's *Woman's Rights*; Goodfellow's *Vice Versa*; and Ludington's *The Suffragette*. Because she intends to prepare the study for publication, expanding the scope to include non-Irish domestic employees as well, I do not discuss the representations of working-class women at length here. On class relations in British pro-suffrage plays, see Christine Woodworth's "Cleaning House: Working-class Women and Suffrage Drama." The first half of her essay addresses the role of working-class women, historically, in the suffrage movement; the second half is devoted to an exploration of four suffrage plays in which a working-class woman is featured in "a structurally prominent role that furthers the suffrage cause" (25-26).

<sup>227</sup> "Bridget" was "the generic name for an Irish maid-of-all-work" (McCarthy 27). A number of anti-suffrage plays and other plays from the era under consideration in this study include Bridget characters, though their actual domestic responsibilities do vary; variations of the name "Kitty" (or "Katie," or "Katty") also appear frequently. Although Bridget and Kitty are ordinary female names, because of the tensions about maintaining control of one's servants in this era of high Irish immigration, they actually would have had the same sort of power as the more obvious examples of *antonomasia* discussed earlier in this chapter.

“docile” and the “dangerous.” One knows her place, respects social conventions, and “espouses the ideology of the anti-suffragists” (46), often appearing as a foil to the women’s rights character. (The African American Eliza, discussed above, has much in common with this “Bridget.”) The other is “a direct threat to the social order” (47), an “unreliable trickster” (46) or upstart who represents anti-suffragists’ fears of Irish servants’ agency. McCarthy offers a Bakhtinian reading of the Bridget character in anti-suffrage plays, arguing that “Bridget’s marginalized voice actually rises into dialogue with the text, challenging its final message” and that “Bridget’s agency is manifested either through her disobedient and disrespectful language or through her ability to speak the ‘truth’ from a liminal position” (56). Explaining that in contrast to single-voiced passages, double-voiced passages contain an awareness of their own relationship to earlier texts, McCarthy notes that while an author “retains control over” passive double-voiced discourse, he or she is “challenged and sometimes even defied by” active double-voiced discourse (60), which “escapes” his or her control (61). She identifies the Bridget character in Fowle’s *Woman’s Rights*, a defiant and independent domestic worker who gets angry with Mr. Manly during his stint as house-husband and upsets the gender hierarchy as well as the class hierarchy of the household by ordering him around, as one example of this active double-voiced discourse (60). The idea that playing such a role could fulfill fantasies of female agency and disruptive speech for middle-class women is a compelling one, but middle-class women were not the only ones who could find “accidental” lessons in the domestic workers’ roles. Although not the primary intended audience for anti-suffrage plays, domestic employees would nonetheless have encountered the plays if asked to help with costumes or props, serve refreshments, or even participate in putting on a home performance. As members of an audience the playwright had

not addressed, they would have been positioned ideally to become resisting readers – or, rather, viewers – of anti-suffrage drama.

And it is not only within the texts themselves, but also in their performances that a resisting reader/viewer can identify paradoxical or ambiguous elements that offer an alternative or accidental lesson. Many anti-suffrage plays mock women who attempt to organize *as women*, whether their clubs are devoted to self-improvement or to women's rights.<sup>228</sup> Crane's *The Bachelor Maids' Reunion* includes many jibes at the silly "old maids" who can't seem to quiet down and stop their gossiping so the meeting can begin (7). And Parsons's *The New Woman's Reform Club*, with its secret rites, its initiation ritual, and its threats of violence and death, indicates that when women *do* succeed in getting themselves organized, they do so in a twisted, deviant manner. Even female attempts to appreciate the arts earn scorn in anti-suffrage plays. In Cole's *Wagner at the Smallville Woman's Club*, Miss Von Culture has been invited to a club meeting in order to arrange a series of talks, but the women object to every topic she proposes, and Miss Mann insists that they should not be spending their time on Wagner at all because he is a man (9). Similarly, Eugene Latour's *A Meeting of the Young Ladies' Club* (1899), which focuses on the younger generation, shows a group of schoolgirls who have decided to form a music club, with the object of "real improvement, and cultivation of the best music" (4). Anna Anderson, the main character, notes that the boys laugh at girls who join the "Girl Bachelors'

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<sup>228</sup> There are a number of useful studies of the women's club movement. For historical information about nineteenth century clubs and their work, see the extensive 1898 *The History of the Woman's Club Movement in America*, by Mrs. J. C. Croly ["Jennie June"]. On women's clubs and the arts, see Karen J. Blair's *The Torchbearers: Women and Their Amateur Arts Associations in America, 1890-1930*, especially chapter 2, "Arts and Activism: An Overview of Women's Clubs, 1890-1930." On African American women's clubs, see *A History of the Club Movement Among the Colored Women of the United States of America*, published in 1902 by the National Association of Colored Women's Clubs, and Floris Barnett Cash's study on *African American Women and Social Action: The Clubwomen and Volunteerism from Jim Crow to the New Deal, 1896-1936*. For a study that examines women's clubs in the south, see Joan Marie Johnson's *Southern Ladies, New Women: Race, Region, and Clubwomen in South Carolina, 1890-1930*.

Club” or the “Girls’ Emancipation Club” and prides herself that they will “surely not dare laugh at us, nor will they feel inclined to” (4). It appears that even this minor level of female organizing was perceived as threatening, since as the play progresses, the audience is clearly meant to laugh at the girls’ efforts. Anna and her friends are unable to get their club off the ground; each girl votes for herself for president, and the subsequent argument ends when they all proclaim, “if I cannot be president, I will resign” (15). Woman, the play implies, is incapable of serious organization or leadership; and if women cannot even vote fairly for leaders in their own clubs, how can they be trusted to vote for leaders of the country?

Yet a successful staging of the play offered visible evidence that women *could* in fact organize effectively. Latour’s play, like many others, has an all-female cast, and audience members would have received a comic “lesson” about women’s inherent incapacity for leadership and organization even as the eight female cast members working together onstage illustrated the opposite. Even if this disparity did not register for members of the audience at a conscious level, the embodiment of female cooperation and organization being enacted before their eyes would have offered a “lesson” contradictory to the one within the text of the play. And the actors themselves underwent an experiential lesson in what can be accomplished when women work together as a group. In her essay, “When We Dead Awaken: Writing as Re-Vision,” Adrienne Rich describes the act of re-vision, of “seeing with fresh eyes, of entering an old text from a new critical direction.” She explains that “[u]ntil we can understand the assumptions in which we are drenched we cannot know ourselves” (35). I’d like to suggest that anti-suffrage plays’ accidental lessons helped make the assumptions about gender in which their audiences were “drenched” visible, at least some of the time. While the plays themselves were new works of literature written in the years of the suffrage campaign, the overall narrative about

gender in which they are all positioned was even then an “old text.” Resisting readers who could find a foothold that would enable them to see this text with fresh eyes could then use their new sight to define better what it meant to be female, to be a citizen, to be American. In Rich’s words, they could use the old text “as a clue to how we live, how we have been living, how we have been led to imagine ourselves, how our language has trapped as well as liberated us; and how we can begin to see – and therefore live – afresh” (35). In this way, plays delivering conservative gender lessons could also help audiences see “afresh” and question the ways they had “been led to imagine” their roles and identities.

### 5.3 ANTI-SUFFRAGE ARGUMENTS AS HUMOR IN SUFFRAGE THEATER

I’d like to end this chapter by returning briefly to the pro-suffrage literature as a way of illustrating that some audience members were indeed receptive to the anti-suffrage plays’ alternative lessons. In addition to delivering normative gender lessons that participated in a general project of maintaining social order, anti-suffrage drama had the potential to make inadvertent contributions to the suffrage cause in the ways I have described above by offering opportunities for resistance. While it isn’t possible to determine the extent to which the audience at a performance of one of these plays was influenced by its accidental pedagogy, the degree to which anti-suffrage rhetoric was taken up and imitated by pro-suffrage playwrights indicates that they, at least, were attentive to these other lessons. Like the anti-suffragists, they harnessed the power of telling names and caricature to call attention to the “wrongness” of their opponents – in this case, to the wrongness of their logic rather than the wrongness of their gender performance. Suffrage playwrights accepted the “invitations” they perceived in anti-suffrage plays and



elsewhere, becoming resisting readers themselves. They saw the moments of paradox or faulty logic as having great comic potential, and they sometimes adopted them into their own works, developing a tradition of delivering anti-suffrage arguments “straight” as a form of humorous entertainment.<sup>229</sup> Ultimately, the effect was to defuse the power of the anti-suffragists’ claims. Sheila Stowell observes this occurrence in her study of British suffrage theater; she divides the plays produced by the Actresses’ Franchise League and the Women Writers’ Suffrage League into two categories, separating the “gritty social dramas designed to expose women’s victimization within a social hierarchy that habitually de-valued them” from the comedies, which were farces that “attempted to destroy through laughter the positions of suffrage opponents” (*A Stage* 45-46). And the American plays, too, include a number of satires and farces in which the humor hinges upon what the playwrights perceived as the flawed logic of the “antis.”

I want to call attention here to two examples of suffrage plays that work in this manner; their authors were carefully attuned to the gaps in logic that could offer a resisting reader a foothold, and they employed some of the same techniques used by the anti-suffrage playwrights. The first is Mary Shaw’s *The Woman of It* (1914). One popular suffrage trope was the accidental conversion of an anti-suffragist (or someone undecided) when an encounter with anti-suffragists pushes her firmly over to the other side. Suffragists enjoyed joking that their opponents were winning them allies because their position was so untenable, and Shaw depicts three young undecided visitors who attend an anti-suffrage meeting and are thereby converted to suffrage. Her play caricatures anti-suffragist women as well as their arguments. Characters with name like

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<sup>229</sup> It is important to note that the suffragists were not the only ones to view the arguments of the opposing side as illogical. Helen Kendrick Johnson, who edited the *American Woman’s Journal* in 1883-84, was not involved in the anti-suffrage movement before she became editor; but when pro-suffrage articles began pouring in, she explains, she read them “with what I tried to make absolutely fair editorial eyes – that is, with eyes which endeavored to find the false and see the true” and “discovered, working as I am sure I did, without prejudice, that most of the pro-suffrage arguments were illogical and otherwise unworthy” (qtd. in Camhi 44).

Mrs. Allright, Mrs. Sweet, and Mrs. Pure-Drivel repeat their pledge and motto that there are only two great moments in a woman's life – one when she first kisses her lover, the other when she first kisses her own baby. Mrs. Allright then rehearses a speech in which she states, “A woman's proper place is at home. No true woman would ever leave it to come here and wrangle about politics.” One of the visitors points out the contradiction, asking, “Don't these men think it's funny that you do not stay at home, then?” Annoyed, Mrs. Allright asserts that the men know she is “dragged here to uphold the cause of true womanhood.” This is a justification the actual anti-suffragists employed, but Shaw uses it to create a gap one of her characters can take hold of by taking the verb literally; she asks, “Why, who drags you here, Fanny?” (288). After several such exchanges, the three visitors emerge convinced that they are, in fact, suffragists (296). Unable to believe that the antis are serious, they see the performance as a comedy act:

MISS MOORE. Everybody says you make more converts to equal suffrage than the suffragists do.

MISS BERRY. Do you always do it so quickly? It is wonderful!

MRS. ALLRIGHT. What are you talking about?

MISS MOORE. Well frankly, ladies, we have discovered your secret.

MRS. ALLRIGHT. Our secret?

MISS MOORE. Yes; and it's awfully clever. I must congratulate you. Ha! Ha!

MISS FOSTER. We thought at first you really meant it all, didn't we? [*Laughs*].

MISS MOORE. Then it dawned on us that it was all a delicious farce. (296)

In this play, Miss Moore, Miss Berry, and Miss Foster model the resisting and questioning audience member, paying careful attention to the anti-suffrage arguments presented before them at the club meeting, but interjecting with their own thoughts and responses.

Marie Jenney Howe's *Anti-Suffrage Monologue* (1913) also caricatures anti-suffragists and their logic. Howe isolates and juxtaposes incompatible anti-suffrage claims, combining them in revealing couplets. One of the wittiest and most playful suffrage dramas written, this monologue capitalizes on the arguments of anti-suffragists simply by pairing them up and letting the contradictions speak for themselves. One such pairing states, "My first argument against suffrage is that women would not use it if they had it. You couldn't drive them to the polls. My second argument is, if the women were enfranchised they would neglect their homes, desert their families, and spend all their time at the polls" (255). Juxtaposing these two supposed truisms does more than simply invite a laugh; it also defuses anti-suffrage argument in general by rendering it ridiculous and illogical. Although Lisa Tickner notes that "suffrage artists . . . used all the rhetorical devices at their disposal (analogy, parody, hyperbole, reversal) to impugn the motives and puncture the arguments of their opponents" (152), Shaw's monologue implies that a suffragist actually need only repeat those arguments in order to "puncture" and flatten them. This type of mockery of anti-suffrage logic, like the anti-suffragists' caricatures of their opponents, can be read as an attempt to contain that which is perceived as a threat. While the tone is light in Shaw's monologue, for instance, the careful mining of anti-suffrage rhetoric for examples shows an attentiveness to anti claims that belies the apparent easy dismissal. If this level of attentiveness left pro-suffrage playwrights primed and ready to pick up on any accidental lessons to be found in the anti-suffrage texts, it also suggests that they were all too aware that the plays' more overt, conservative lessons had significant cultural power.

In conclusion, both pro-suffrage and anti-suffrage plays participated in the project of educating their audiences about gender and about women's roles as citizens. While their authors approached this project from different positions, and while the genres' lessons often differ

significantly, however, there are also similarities that show not only that these texts emerged out of a shared cultural context, but also that each genre's playwrights were concerned about and familiar with the other's lessons. As I have shown, anti-suffrage drama played two broad, opposing pedagogical roles in the shaping of public opinion about women's suffrage. In its straightforward role as a vehicle for cultural maintenance, it reinforced traditional gender norms and taught that women's suffrage would be a threat to those norms. At the same time, however, anti-suffrage plays also sometimes offered lessons that undermined these more traditional teachings. They can therefore be seen as contributing to the pro-suffrage cause in several important ways. First, their scripts and performances sometimes contained moments of paradox or truth-telling that had the potential to arouse resistance in members of the audience; this may also have helped to inspire the creation of pro-suffrage drama. Additionally, anti-suffrage drama provided material rich with irony for the suffragists to parody. And, finally, the production of anti-suffrage plays that were written, acted, and directed by women proved that women could work together to produce something of value. Thus, the accidental pedagogy of anti-suffrage drama makes them an important complement to pro-suffrage drama.

## 6.0 CONCLUSION: THE ART OF CITIZENSHIP AND THE PROMISE OF A PAST

“For women . . . poetry is not a luxury. It is a vital necessity of our existence. It forms the quality of the light within which we predicate our hopes and dreams toward survival and change, first made into language, then into idea, then into tangible action.”

-Audre Lorde<sup>230</sup>

“I believe in art’s social presence – as breaker of official silences, as voice for those whose voices are disregarded, and as a human birthright.”

-Adrienne Rich<sup>231</sup>

“some art don’t care about you,  
what you say or what you do  
my art’s the Mona Lisa  
and she’s looking straight at you.”

-Alix Olson, “Built Like That”

I’d like to end by offering a few conclusions about what it might mean to reclaim suffrage literature as part of an intellectual and artistic heritage. As educational texts, as acts of citizenship, and as theory made flesh, the literature and performances discussed in this study offer a way of understanding current-day conversations about roles and rights as existing within a broader historical context. The plays, pageants, poems, and songs of the women’s suffrage movement both posed direct challenges to the status quo, offering alternative ways for women to construct individual and coalitional identities, and moderated those challenges strategically, working in some ways within expected categories of gender in order to gain a hearing. Their social pedagogy, which I have defined as “pedagogy as social action,” had to negotiate

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<sup>230</sup> From her 1977 essay “Poetry is Not a Luxury.” See p. 37.

<sup>231</sup> From the 1997 “Why I Refused the National Medal for the Arts.” See p. 99.

significant public censure and conservative backlash which could include, at times, harsh personal attacks on individual leaders. This censure was itself a form of cultural education, in which lessons about the “natural” roles of men and women – and warnings about what the “unnatural” looked like – appeared with great frequency. And, like the suffragists’ efforts, this censure also offered, simultaneously, lessons that might seem contrary to its project, the anti-suffrage plays, especially, offering images of women challenging tradition and working in coalition. In short, both the suffrage literature and the context out of which it was produced invite us to consider, not only what it means to have a past, but also what it means to teach, to write, to act.

Although suffrage literature did not make it into the literary canon, and anthologies do not introduce high school or college students to the wit of an Alice Duer Miller poem, the disturbing symbolism of a Mary Shaw play in which the characters are parrots in a cage, or the passion of an elegy celebrating the life and legacy of Inez Milholland Boissevain, there has been a rekindling of interest in the women’s suffrage movement and its art in recent years. Efforts to reprint and/or anthologize suffrage literature have begun, and a small body of scholarship on these texts has already appeared. Additionally, the broader conversation about what it means to produce art as a citizen has not lost momentum in the shift from the twentieth century to the twenty-first. Audre Lorde and Adrienne Rich, whose words are quoted above, both explored this question at length over the span of several decades. Interestingly, Lorde’s claim that poetry is what makes it possible to transform “hopes and dreams toward survival and change” into language, ideas, and then “tangible action” seems a direct extension of the suffragists’ efforts. Similarly, Rich’s 1997 assertion that art is “crucial to the democratic vision” (“Why I” 103) and her characterization of herself as “a poet and essayist and citizen” who is “drawn to the interfold

of personal and public experience” and concerned with “whatever it was this country had ever meant when it called itself a democracy” (100) establish her as a participant in conversations that concerned the suffrage writers as well.

The suffragists carried these conversations from the nineteenth century into the twentieth, and Rich and others carried them into the twenty-first. A 2003 conference organized by the New Hampshire Writers’ Project and the Academy of American Poets brought poets laureate from 30 states, politicians, and educators together in New Hampshire to discuss “the role of poetry in society” and to explore “poetry’s capacity to bring about social, political, and cultural change” (“Poetry and” par. 1). Course enrollment in a college class on “American Protest Literature” that was first offered at Harvard in 2002 more than tripled in four years (Stauffer xi), and Zoe Trodd’s anthology of *American Protest Literature*, which had its origins in this course, appeared in print in 2006. And the July/August 2008 issue of *Poetry* included an article by David Orr on “The Politics of Poetry.” I offer these few examples simply as a way of indicating that interest in the question of art and its social role is very much alive today. And, despite efforts in the press to inform us that feminism is “dead,” an awareness of sex and gender discrimination is central to a number of turn-of-the-twenty-first-century activist artists’ projects. Emerging out of the 1990s riot grrrl (feminist punk) movement, for example, the band Le Tigre greeted the 2000s with energized feminist anthems that both claim a heritage<sup>232</sup> and call upon listeners to work for change. Their most direct call to action, “Get off the Internet,” expresses concern that political activism could seem “dated” to citizens of the new century. “It feels so 80’s / Or early 90’s / to be political,” the lyrics proclaim. But the tone here is not one of acceptance; the next line is

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<sup>232</sup> The song “Hot Topic,” for instance, includes a roll call / tribute list of foremothers, and the song “FYR” invokes Shulamith Firestone’s reference in *The Dialectics of Sex* to the “fifty years of ridicule” between women’s winning the vote in 1920 and feminism’s “second wave.”

insistent in its demanding call-out: “where are my friends?” (verse 1). The chorus speaks directly to the audience, calling for coalition (“I’ll meet you in the street”), calling for listeners to “Get off the internet!” and “destroy the right wing.”

Like Le Tigre, slam poet and queer activist Alix Olson, too, greeted the new century with a combined interest in women’s rights and struggles<sup>233</sup> and in the role of art as an essential component of social change. In “Built Like That,” which I have quoted in part at the head of this concluding chapter, she explores and refuses the idea/ideal of inaccessibility in art:

some art’s just like a teacup,  
when you’re looking for a beer  
some art, some art, it scares you and some,  
some art’s about the fear.  
some art is a highbrow thing  
some art’s about the eyebrow ring  
some art’s about the tattoo  
some art’s about the artist  
and that art’s not meant for you

In a refrain that is echoed throughout the piece, Olson counters, “my art’s not built like that.” Addressing her audience directly, Olson offers something different – an art that is engaged in the world and the people that inhabit it, that *does* care about its audience members, their words, and their actions; she also confounds the high art / low art divide by claiming that this engaged art is the Mona Lisa and simultaneously reclaims “the gaze” for women by depicting it as wielded by that famous female entity. Art, she suggests, not only has agency in the world, “she” also has the

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<sup>233</sup> See Olson’s “Eve’s Mouth” for a feminist exploration of women’s lives and struggles that considers the female characters in familiar fairy tales and other cultural mythology.



power to bear witness, a power that can be both empowering, affirming the existence of an audience often composed of “outsiders” to mainstream American society, and also challenging, suggesting an expectant gaze that is waiting to see what that “you” will do.

I could continue to list examples of feminist politics and activism for human rights for women and other “others” in the art of late twentieth and early twenty-first century writers and performers,<sup>234</sup> but I want to return to the topic of suffrage literature here in order to pose the question, *where does reclaiming this heritage get us?* There are several possible answers to this question. First, I’d like to suggest, it helps us put women back in the picture, not just as inheritors but also as originators of the kinds of ideas that make up what bell hooks has labeled “education as the practice of freedom.” For suffrage literature and performances did, as I have shown here, offer a type of pedagogy that was very much invested in questions of freedom and democracy. Kathleen Weiler points out that education feminists, like other feminist theorists, “have been profoundly influenced by” male theorists like Paulo Freire, John Dewey, Antonio Gramsci, and Michel Foucault; yet while their work has proved useful, Weiler explains, “there is a continuing tension in feminist appropriations and use of the ideas of male theorists who are themselves unconcerned with questions of gender” (1). Certainly, it has been possible – even highly productive and empowering – to turn their ideas about education, about power, about social control, to the topic of feminist education. Hooks speaks for many when she expresses gratitude for Freire’s role in making it possible to “think deeply about the construction of an identity in resistance” (46). But there is also value in seeing that these ideas about pedagogy and

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<sup>234</sup> The phenomenon of Eve Ensler’s *Vagina Monologues*, for instance, is worth mention. First performed in 1996, it soon launched “V-Day,” a “global activist movement to stop violence against women and girls” (“About V-Day” par. 1). It has been performed on many college campuses around the country, and its impact has extended across the globe; in 2010, a total of 5,400 V-Day benefits took place in the U.S. and around the world (par. 2). Ensler’s work as a playwright and performer has continued to address issues of sex and gender, including violence against transgendered people.

about power, however well expressed they might be in the texts of these more well-known male thinkers, did not arise out of a vacuum – that women activists had also been thinking and working along similar lines.

Second, this revised picture, which establishes the suffragists not only as anticipating the ideas of some well-known male theorists, but also as anticipating a number of ideas that appeared in later feminist theory and pedagogy, is usefully humbling. In beginning to fill in a timeline of ideas, for instance, about the role of the audience and the power of the gaze, what emerges most strongly is a clear understanding that much of what we attribute to our own time has already been thought, in some form. Realizing this creates a productive position from which to continue – a sense of humility that just might make it possible to see beyond accepted versions of the story of intellectual thought and ask the right questions, the ones that would allow us to discover just whose ideas have been overlooked, and at what moments in history, and perhaps even why. I suggest this as one aspect of the usefulness of the recovery of the pedagogical and theoretical work of the suffragists not to argue that they are “the” forgotten voices whose thinking, once restored, will make our intellectual history complete, but rather, to propose that their inclusion can illustrate for us that there are additional blanks in this history.

And, finally, I’d like to suggest that reclaiming this heritage affords useful perspectives on the actual work of education for change, both within and beyond the traditional, institutional classroom. Having a longer and more inclusive timeline – even if still an incomplete one – against which to consider current ideas about teaching can make it possible to consider not only what has changed, but also what has remained constant or has re-emerged periodically over time: what pedagogical methods and ideas have been part of a longer tradition than we may have previously realized. It invites us to imagine looking beyond Dewey, for example, when asking

what it has meant in the past to position the learner as a “citizen.” As Radhika Rao notes, in the twenty-first century, “interest in citizenship education is once again growing in U.S. schools” and “the language of citizenship is finding its way back into academic and lay discourse in education” (549). It is a timely moment, then, to consider how the social pedagogy of suffrage literature, with its sustained and careful attention to the roles, responsibilities, and rights of the citizen, can illuminate current discussions about education. And, in a society still characterized by much injustice, it is always a timely moment to consider what an earlier activist movement might have to teach us about the art of educating ourselves and one another for change.

## APPENDIX A

### A SAMPLING OF SUFFRAGE THEATER PERFORMANCES IN AMERICA

- Jan. 9, 1909      The play *Votes for Women*, by Elizabeth Robins, was read by Mrs. Marion Craig Wentworth of Boston at the Berkeley Theatre in New York, under the auspices of the Equality League for Self-Supporting Women
- Mar. 15, 1909      Opening of the play, *Votes for Women*, at Wallack's Theatre in New York, produced by the Actors' Society [or by the Actor's Alliance of America?], with Mary Shaw in the role of Vida Levering
- 1910              A suffrage play, *A Mock Legislative Session*, written by Mrs. S. L. W. Clark of Seattle, was given in the State House in Seattle, Washington. It was also repeated in other cities. (Document 69 in Mari Jo Buhle and Paul Buhle's *Concise History of Woman Suffrage* discusses the Washington Campaign efforts for 1910. See p. 388-89 for mention of the play.)\*
- 1910              A flier for a performance of four plays is enclosed in the book containing the meeting minutes of the Woman Suffrage Study Club (president, Gertrude Foster Brown), right before the Oct. 10, 1910 entry. There is no date on the flier, but its placement suggests that the performance took place on or near this date. Cast lists are included on the flier, and the plays are: *The End of the Battle*, by Jane Stone; *The Speed Girl*, by Lena R. Smith and Mrs. Vance Thompson; *Mary's Maneuvers*, by Alice E. Ives; and *The Parrots' Cage*, by Miss Mary Shaw, with a song by Miss Ida Mülle.\*
- Dec. 18, 1910      A letter by Annie Nathan Meyer in the *New York Times* notes that a suffrage play (unnamed) was performed at Barnard College on Dec. 17th. (The letter appears under the headline "Barnard Girls and Suffrage.")
- Feb. 16, 1911      A "special matinee performance" of three British plays (*Before the Dawn*, by Bessie Hatton; *A Woman's Influence*, by Gertrude Jennings; and *How the Vote Was Won*, by Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John) was give at the Broad Street Theatre in Philadelphia. According to the program, "Votes for Women: Program of Suffrage Plays," the performance was directed by Mrs. Otis Skinner and Miss Beatrice Forbes-Robertson, and was given "under the auspices and for the benefit of" three organizations: the Pennsylvania Limited Suffrage League, the Equal Franchise

Society of Pennsylvania, and the College Equal Suffrage League. The program includes cast lists and “A Short History of the Pennsylvania Limited Suffrage League.”\*

- Jan. 1912 *An Impressionistic Sketch of the Anti-Suffragists*, by Mary Shaw, was performed by the Twenty-Fifth District Players (a group organized by Marie Jenney Howe) at an Equal Suffrage meeting held in the Hotel Astor. (See Auster, p. 83).\*
- Feb 19, 1912 The Woman Suffrage Study Club put on two plays (*The Home-thrust*, by Mrs. Chas. H. Caffin, and *An Impressionistic Sketch of the Anti-Suffragists*, by Mary Shaw) at the rooms of the Professional Woman’s League, 1999 Broadway. A flier, glued into the club’s minutes book, also indicates that a song (“The California Suffragette Campaign Song” [possibly “Reuben and Rachel”?]) was performed between the two plays.\*
- Mar. 3, 1913 The pageant *Allegory*, by Hazel MacKaye, was performed on the steps of the U.S. Treasury Building in Washington, D.C. in conjunction with a parade. It was commissioned by NAWSA, and Alice Paul.
- May 2, 1913 The pageant *A Dream of Freedom* [by Margaret Tuttle?] was staged at the Metropolitan Opera House by the New York Woman Suffrage Party
- Feb. 20, 1914 A benefit performance of two British suffrage plays (*Before Sunrise*, by Bessie Hatton and *How the Vote Was Won*, by Cicely Hamilton and Christopher St. John) was held at the Columbia Theater [originally slated for the Belasco Theater] in Washington, D.C., presented by the Congressional Union, under the management of Mrs. Randolph Keith Forrest
- May, 1914 The pageant *A Dream of Freedom* [by Margaret Tuttle?] was staged in Cleveland, and signatures were collected for a petition both before and after the performance.
- 1914 The pageant *The American Woman: Six Periods in American Life*, by Hazel MacKaye, was performed at the Seventy-first Regimental Armory. It was sponsored by the New York City Men’s League for Equal Suffrage.
- Aug. 7, 1915 An article in *The Suffragist* titled “New Suffragist Play to be Staged” announces that *Back of the Ballot*, by George Middleton, will soon be staged in a Broadway theater and that Mrs. Raymond Brown, of Bellport L.I. is directing rehearsals.\*
- Dec. 13, 1915 The *Pageant of Susan B. Anthony*, by Hazel MacKaye, was first performed for the Congressional Union’s convention in Washington, D.C., and was planned to coincide with the convening of the Sixty-fourth Congress.
- Feb. 18, 1916 The suffrage opera *Melinda and Her Sisters*, by Mrs. O. H. P. Belmont and Elsa Maxwell, was performed in the grand ballroom of the Waldorf-Astoria in New York.

\*performances not discussed in this chapter.

## APPENDIX B

### SUFFRAGE PLAYS PUBLISHED IN AMERICA IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

- 1883 \*Thayer, Ella Cheever. *Lords of Creation: Woman Suffrage Drama in Three Acts*. Boston: Geo. M. Baker & Co., Publishers.
- 1885 \*Freeman, Eleanor. *When the Women Vote: A Colloquy*. Cincinnati: Standard Publishing Company.
- 1887 Robinson, Harriet H. *Captain Mary Miller: A Drama*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1896 \*Ives, Alice E. *A Very New Woman*. In *The Woman's Column* 9.11 (14 Mar. 1896).
- 1911 \*Gilman, Charlotte Perkins. *Something to Vote For: A One Act Play*. In *The Forerunner* 2.6 (June 1911): 143-53.
- \*McCulloch, Catherine Waugh. *Bridget's Sisters: or, The Legal Status of Women in 1868*. Chicago: Illinois Equal Suffrage Association.
- 1912 \*Fargo, Kate Mills. *A Voting Demonstration: or, An Election in Primerville (A Farce in One Act)*. Redlands, Calif.: privately printed.
- \*Thompson, Alice C. *A Suffragette Baby: A Comedy in One Act*. Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company.
- \*Lewis, Emily Sargent. *Election Day: A Suffrage Play (A Comedy in One Act)*. Philadelphia: privately printed.
- 1913 \*Winsor, Mary. *A Suffrage Rummage Sale*. Haverford P.O., Penn: privately printed.
- \*Howe, Marie Jenney. *An Anti-Suffrage Monologue*. New York: National American Woman Suffrage Association.
- \*Kiper, Florence [Frank]. *Cinderelline: or, The Little Red Slipper*. Chicago: Dramatic Publishing Company.

- 1914 \*Shaw, Mary. *The Woman of It: or, Our Friends the Anti-Suffragists (A Satirical Comedy in One Act)*. Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company.
- \*Shaw, Mary. *The Parrot Cage: A Play in One Act*. Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company.
- 1915 \*Johnson, Hester N. *On to Victory: A Play in Two Acts*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- \*Middleton, George. *Back of the Ballot: A Woman Suffrage Farce in One Act*. New York/London: Samuel French. [copyright 1971 by David Middleton]
- Wormwood, Edyth M. *The New Woman in Mother Goose Land: A Play for Children*. Franklin, OH and Denver, CO: Eldridge Entertainment.
- 1916 \*Belmont, Mrs. O. H. P. and Elsa Maxwell. *Melinda and Her Sisters*. New York: Robert J. Shores, Publisher.
- n.d. Lambert, Madeline. *Count the Cost: A symbolical play in three acts, dealing with the cost of universal suffrage in America at the present time*. Newton, Iowa: Allen Printing Co.
- n.d. Hoose, Della. *How Ten Women Were Converted to Suffrage*. Painesville, OH: pamphlet by Della Hoose, President of Lake County W.C.T.U. no date, but it is after 1910.

\* indicates plays that are reprinted in the Friedl anthology.

## APPENDIX C

### AMBIVALENT OR AMBIGUOUS SUFFRAGE PLAYS PUBLISHED IN AMERICA IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

[these plays discuss suffrage or include suffragist characters, but they either don't clearly choose a side or they represent both suffragists and anti-suffragists negatively]

- 1868 Bush, Wm. *Sorosis! or, The Onward March to Freedom: A Drama in Four Acts*. Chicago: S. S. Jones.
- 1876 Baker, George M. *Shall Our Mothers Vote?* Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1882 Drey, Sylvan. [of the Baltimore Bar] *Woman's Rights: A Strictly Original Comedy in Three Acts*. Baltimore: ?
- 1911 Lisanti, G. F. *Little Harold, or The Suffragette: A Play in Four Acts*. New York: Nicoletti Bros. Press.
- 1912 Kelley, Jessie A. *The Suffragettes' Convention: An Entertainment in One Scene*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1913 MacMillan, Mary. *The Futurists: An Early Woman's Club Meeting*. In her *Short Plays*. Cincinnati: Stewart & Kidd Co., 1917. [third edition]
- 1914 Buford, L. E. *The House of Lords: An Equal Suffrage Play in One Act*. Montvale, Va: ?
- 1915 Slocumb, Eudora Hollinshead. *The Woman's Convention, Punkville, U.S.A.: An Inconsistent Brochure of Fun and Folly in One Act*. New York and London: Samuel French.
- 1916 Long, Walter S. *When De Womenfolks Debate: A Darkey Sketch for Women or Men Impersonating Female Characters*. Franklin, Ohio and Denver, Colo.: Eldridge Entertainment House.



## APPENDIX D

### ANTI-SUFFRAGE PLAYS PUBLISHED IN AMERICA IN THE AUTHOR'S COLLECTION

- 18?? Ele, Rona. *Woman's Lefts: A Drama in Three Acts*. Philadelphia and Boston: Geo. Maclean [New York: Maclean, Gibson & Co. also listed on same copy].
- 18?? Spring, Retlaw. *Women's Rights: A Comedietta, In Two Acts*. New York: Happy Hours Company.
- 1856 \*Fowle, William B. *Woman's Rights*. [in his collection] Boston: Chase and Nichols.
- 1860 Brokmeyer, Henry Conrad. *A Foggy Night at Newport*. St. Louis: Gray & Crawford.
- \*Curtis, Ariana Randolph Wormeley and Daniel Sargent Curtis. *The Spirit of Seventy-Six; or, The Coming Woman, A Prophetic Drama*. Boston: Little, Brown, and Company.
- 1874 Baker, George M. *The Champion of Her Sex*. [in his collection] Boston: Lee and Shepard, Publishers. [New York: Lee, Shepard, & Dillingham also listed on same copy]
- 1880 Dumont, Frank. *Election Day: An Ethiopian Farce, In Two Scenes*. New York: De Witt, Publisher.
- 1884 Buxton, Ida M. *Matrimonial Bliss: A Scene from Real Life*. Clyde, OH: A. D. Ames, Publisher.
- 1889 Anderson, Thos. F. *The Trials of a Country Editor: An Original Sketch*. Clyde, OH: Ames' Publishing Co.
- 1892 Goodfellow, Mrs. E. J. H. *Vice Versa: A Comedy in Three Acts*. Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company.
- Merriman, Effie W. *A Pair of Artists: A Comedy in Three Acts*. Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company.
- 1896 Locke, Nellie M. *A Victim of Women's Rights: Monologue*. Clyde, OH: Ames' Publishing Co.

- Rugg, George. *The New Woman: A Farcical Scene with One Act, One Scene and One Purpose*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- Fraser, J[ohn]. A[rther]., Jr. *Bloomer Girls; or, Courtship in the Twentieth Century*. Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company.
- 1899 Latour, Eugene. *A Meeting of the Young Ladies' Club: A Comedy in One Act*. Chicago: The Dramatic Publishing Company.
- 1902 Parsons, Laura M. *The New Woman's Reform Club: A Humorous Entertainment in One Act*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1906 Cole, Ida B. *Wagner at the Smallville Woman's Club: An Entertainment in One Scene*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- Crane, Eleanor Maud. *The Bachelor Maids' Reunion: An Entertainment in One Scene*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald.
- 1908 Ford, Robert Elwin. *The Sisterhood of Bridget: A Farce in Three Acts*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1909 Ludington, Helen G. *The Suffragette: A Comedy in One Act for Seven Females*. New York: Samuel French. [London: Samuel French, Ltd. Also listed on same copy]
- 1910 Esmond, H. V. *Her Vote: A Comedy in One Act*. New York: Samuel French. [London: Samuel French, Ltd. Also listed on same copy]
- Gale, Rachel Baker. *Coats and Petticoats: A Comedy in One Act*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1911 Meyer, Annie Nathan. *The Dominant Sex: A Play in Three Acts*. New York: Brandu's.
- See, Anna P. *When Women Vote: A Farce in Two Acts*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1912 Hughes, Elizabeth. *Women For Votes: A Farce in Three Acts*. New York: E. P. Dutton & Company.
- Kavanaugh, Katharine. *A Converted Suffragist: A Play in One Act for Female Characters*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald.
- Bridgham, Lilian Clisby. *A Suffragette Town Meeting: An Entertainment in One Act*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- Dumont, Frank. *The New Woman's Husband: A Satire in One Scene*. Philadelphia: The Penn Publishing Company.
- Bridgham, Lilian Clisby. *The Famous Brown vs. Brown Separate Maintenance Case: A Woman's Suffragette Mock Trial*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co.
- 1913 Gale, Rachel Baker. *The Clinging Vine: A Comedy in One Act*. Boston: Walter H. Baker & Co. [there is a copyright date of 1889 on one page, and 1913 on another. Unclear.]

Platt, Agnes Electra. *When Women Rule: One Act Farce*. New York: Dick & Fitzgerald.

Allen, Inglis. *The Suffragette's Redemption: Play in One Act*. New York: Samuel French.  
[London: Samuel French, Ltd. also listed on same copy]

\* indicates plays that are reprinted in the Friedl anthology.

## APPENDIX E

### POEMS AND SONGS THAT APPEARED IN *THE SUFFRAGIST*

#### E.1 SERIOUS POEMS

Jan. 10, 1914	“The Sword of Flame”*	by Elizabeth Waddell
Jan. 24, 1914	“The Mother Follows”*	by Sarah N. Cleghorn
Jan. 31, 1914	“Coming”**	by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Aug. 24, 1914	“The Soldier’s Mother”	by M. M. A. (Marietta M. Andrews)
Feb. 13, 1915	“To Susan B. Anthony”***	by Alice Duer Miller
Sept. 30, 1916	“‘The New Freedom’ for Women”****	by Ruza Wenclaw (Rose Winslow)
Dec. 30, 1916	“To Inez Milholland Boissevain”	by Ruth Fitch
Mar. 3, 1917	“On the Picket Line”	by Beulah Amidon
Apr. 14, 1917	“Susan B. Anthony and The Revolution”	by Vivian Pierce
Oct. 27, 1917	“The Empty Cup”	by Katharine Rolston Fisher
Nov. 10, 1917	“Democracy” (to A. P.) (written in jail)	by Kate Cleaver Heffelfinger
Nov. 24, 1917	“‘Winter’s Tale’”	by Hazel B. Poole
Dec. 8, 1917	“To One in Prison” (to Mrs. Lawrence Lewis)	by Frank Stephens
Jan. 19, 1918	“Alice Paul”	by Katherine Rolston Fisher
Feb. 16, 1918	“To Susan B. Anthony, 1820-1918”	by Beulah Amidon
Feb. 16, 1918	“A Picket Song”	by Kathryn Lincoln
Mar. 16, 1918	“To the Generation Knocking at the Door”	by John Davidson
Mar. 26, 1918	“From the East to the West”	by Alice D. Van Cleve
Apr 6, 1918	“Nothing But a Woman”	by S.E. Kiser, Editor <i>Dayton News</i>
May 11, 1918	“To the Women of the Future”	by Kate Cleaver Heffelfinger

June 15, 1918	“Battle Hymn of Women War Workers”	(no author listed)
July 13, 1918	“To Woodrow, Who May Command Me Anything”	by Mary Winsor
Sept. 7, 1918	“To the United States Senators Opposed to Suffrage”	by Elliot Gherard Colgan
Sept. 14, 1918	“Thoughts in Jail”	by Katharine R. Fisher
Sept. 21, 1918	“A Feminist Portrait”	by Buckner Kirk
Nov. 30, 1918	“Militants to Certain Other Women”	by Katharine Fisher
Jan 25, 1919	“To A Comrade”	by Elizabeth Kalb
Feb. 1920	“Susan B. Anthony”	by Katharine Fisher
May 1920	“Woman Freed”	by Gertrude Boyle?
Sept 1920	““Women Are Free at Last in All the Land””	by Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Oct. 1920	“To Alice Paul”	by A.L.W.
Oct. 1920	“Now That You’ve Got It”	by Stacy V. Jones
Jan/Feb 1921	“1420 F Street” and “Cameron House” and “14 Jackson Place”	by Katharine Fisher

\*from *The Masses*

\*\*from her paper, *The Forerunner*

\*\*\*from the *New York Tribune*

\*\*\*\*from *Pueblo*, September 22

## E.2 SONG LYRICS

May 2, 1914	lyrics to “The March of the Women,” by Ethyl Smyth (included an article called “Nation-wide Demonstration”)
May 9, 1914	lyrics and sheet music to “The March of the Women”
Oct. 2, 1915	partial lyrics to “The March of the Women” (included in an article called “The Farewell to the Woman Voters’ Envoys”)
Oct. 2, 1915	lyrics to “Song of the Free Women” (set to the tune of the “Marseillaise”), by Sara Bard Field (also included in “The Farewell to the Woman Voters’ Envoys”)
Mar. 3, 1917	lyrics to “Camping Tonight” (included in an article called “The Seventh Week of the Suffrage Picket”)
Nov. 10, 1917	lyrics to an untitled song [“We Worried Woody-wood”] set to the tune of “Captain Kidd” (included in an article called “Over the Top”)
Feb. 9, 1918	lyrics and sheet music for a suffrage version of “Alive, Oh,” by Beulah Amidon
Aug. 31, 1918	lyrics to “A New Prison Song” (set to the tune, “We’ve Been Working on the Railroad”)

E.3 RHYMES AND POEMS (MOSTLY COMIC) PRINTED IN THE  
“COMMENTS OF THE PRESS” SECTION

Dec. 25, 1915	“Botheration” and “On a Hearing Before a Committee” [ <i>New York Tribune</i> ]	by Alice Duer Miller
Mar. 11, 1916	untitled “When every nation....” [ <i>New York Tribune</i> ]	by Alice Duer Miller
June 17, 1916	untitled “The ‘Suffs’ are here...” [ <i>Chicago (Illinois) Herald</i> , June 8, 1916]	anonymous
July 29, 1916	“Feminine Logic” [ <i>Brooklyn Daily Eagle</i> , July 8, 1916]	by J.A.
Aug. 20, 1916.	“Hughes and the Suffrage Cause.” [ <i>Des Moines (Iowa) Evening Tribune</i> , August 9, 1916]	Martha Hart
Jan 24, 1917	“There are Pickets by the Fence” [ <i>Washington Herald</i> , January ?]	by Anon Y. Mous
Mar 3, 1917	“Washington Patter Song” [ <i>New York Sunday Tribune</i> Feb. 25]	by Alice Duer Miller
Mar 17, 1917	“Ingratitude” [ <i>New York Sunday Tribune</i> Mar. 4]	by Alice Duer Miller
June 16, 1917	“The Apt Pupil” [ <i>The New York Sunday Tribune</i> June 3]	by Alice Duer Miller
July 17, 1917	“Lines on an Olympian” [ <i>New York Tribune</i> July 1]	by Alice Duer Miller
July 17, 1917	“The Week in History” [ <i>New York Call</i> , July 1]	by C.W.
Aug. 4, 1917	“The Petty Whim” [ <i>The New York Tribune</i> July 29]	by Alice Duer Miller
Aug. 11, 1917	“Advice to Rebels” [ <i>New York Tribune</i> July 29, 1917]	by Alice Duer Miller
Aug. 18, 1917	“An Ode on Our Envoy” [ <i>Washington Times</i> , August 11, 1917]	by Mary Winsor
Feb. 9, 1918	“Inspired to Verse” [ <i>Denver (Col.) Post</i> , Jan 6]	anonymous
Feb. 16, 1918	“The Donkey and the Elephant” [ <i>Christian Science Monitor</i> Feb 7]	anonymous
Sept. 28, 1918	“Soldiers and Senators” [ <i>New York American</i> ]	by Katharine Fisher

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- . “On the Picket Line.” *The Suffragist* 5.58 (3 Mar. 1917): 6. Microfilm. Schlesinger Library. Radcliffe Institute, Harvard University.
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