

**PRINT AND PROTEST:
A STUDY OF THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT
IN NINETEENTH-CENTURY ENGLISH PERIODICAL
LITERATURE**

By

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ABSTRACT

The journey toward equal citizenship for women in England during the nineteenth century was a complex one, characterized by many failures and some successes. This journey can be traced through the writing of women in periodical literature during the nineteenth century, with particular attention to periodical literature between 1850 and 1900, where debates over women's suffrage contributed to broader arguments about women's rights as citizens and the power that denied them those rights. Suffragist discourse in periodical literature was a conscious strategy used to negotiate increased political rights and influence middle-class opinion, but also one that failed to lead to obvious results. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of suffragist debates found in the periodical contributed to a growing awareness of the arguments for women's rights among the English middle classes, making the periodical a unique testament to the power of protest through print.

KEYWORDS

Women's Suffrage Movement, History, Nineteenth-Century English Periodicals

Suffragists, Periodical Literature, Nineteenth-Century England

Women's Rights, Nineteenth-Century Feminism, England

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DEDICATION

*This thesis is dedicated to my grandchildren
Naomi and Karsten
with the hope that they will never take their right to vote
in a democratic society lightly or for granted.*

*It is also dedicated to my husband
Vic
who unfailingly encourages me to achieve my goals
and makes it possible for me to pursue
my dreams.*

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PROLOGUE

To those perched in the Lady's Gallery of the House of Commons much is visible. From them few secrets, whether of the head or of the heart, can be concealed. Beneath their searching gaze every bench lies open, every Member of the House has to run the gauntlet of their observation, and only one figure (that of the Speaker) is for them a veiled mystery.

Grille

The National Review, 1898

During the construction of a new House of Commons after a fire in 1844, debate ensued amongst parliamentarians over whether accommodation for ladies should be made in the new building. Previously, women had been allowed to peer down a ventilation shaft if they wished to catch a glimpse of the proceedings. It was decided that a ladies' gallery should be built, an innovation that included a large brass grating, or grille, as a compromise to those members who were opposed to exposing women to the workings of government.¹ Over the intervening decades, women visiting the House of Commons would continue to be barred from the purely masculine and public world of national politics. The grille was a potent symbol of patriarchal authority that clearly defined the socially constructed limitations placed on women in English society. It can also be viewed as a metaphor for the political disabilities of women, a formidable form of containment that would not be dismantled easily.

The symbolic importance of the grille in the history of the women's suffrage movement is characteristic of the complexity of experiences that would shape the overall journey of women toward enfranchisement. Although the women's suffrage movement is a well-researched field of study, there are facets to the movement that remain unexplored. For instance, histories of the suffragist movement between 1850 and 1900 have not focused on the writing of middle-class suffragists in periodical literature as a strategy for advancing their ideas. Jane Rendall's seminal work, *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914* was meant to uncover the broader aspects of women's political culture and

¹ Ray Strachey, *"The Cause": A Short History of the Women's Movement in Great Britain* (Port Washington, N.Y.: Kennikat Press, 1928), 361.

history, and the articles in her study do not deal directly with the suffrage movement.² While Olive Banks made considerable academic contributions to the history of English feminism, they took the form of either a biographical dictionary or addressed the progress of feminism after suffrage.³ Similarly, Barbara Caine's well-researched examination of four prominent Victorian feminists took the form of biographical studies in *Victorian Feminists* (1992). More recent studies that include discussions of women's writing do not concentrate on the women's suffrage movement. For example, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (2003) addresses women as writing subjects and readers of the periodical but emphasizes broader feminist issues.⁴ While the editors of *Votes for Women* focus on the women's suffrage movement by recovering stories of lesser-known feminist activists such as Lily Maxwell, they do not specifically situate their study within the context of women's writing.⁵

This study looks at how the journey toward equal citizenship was negotiated by suffragists in periodical literature. The periodical was a public forum where dialogue and debate between suffragists and their opponents took place. Participation in the periodical press jettisoned women into a distinctly male preserve, exposing male intellectuals to suffrage ideology while publicly undermining their arguments for a continued resistance to any expansion of women's rights. Between 1858, when the first feminist journal began publication,

² Jane Rendall, *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987),

1.

³ Olive Banks, *The Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists, Vols. I and II* (New York: Harvester, 1985); *The Politics of British Feminism, 1918-1970* (Aldershot: Edward Elgar, 1993).

⁴ Hilary Fraser, Stephanie Green & Judith Johnston, *Gender and the Victorian Periodical* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

⁵ June Purvis & Sandra Stanley Holton, eds. *Votes for Women* (New York: Routledge, 2000).

and 1900 with the end of the Victorian period, suffragists used the periodical as a strategy to agitate for increased political rights. The debates found in periodical literature not only contribute to our understanding of the successes and failures of the suffragists but underscore the importance of their cumulative impact, even though the strategy failed to gain the vote for women.

The journey toward equal citizenship for women has its roots in the ideologies and writings of radical eighteenth-century feminists who laid a foundation for the full expression of women's rights by nineteenth-century suffragists. The expansion and clarification of these early intellectual arguments over the issue of women's rights gained currency in the early decades of the nineteenth century, despite an intense period of conservatism in England that further limited women's participation in the public realm. This development would prepare the way for greater participation by women in the periodical press after mid-century when an organized suffrage movement would emerge. During the last thirty years of the century, suffragists began to search for new strategies after numerous pieces of suffrage legislation failed in Parliament. Not only did suffragists establish their own feminist publications, but they made regular contributions to periodical literature on the issue to agitate for legislative reform. However, their efforts proved to be futile and suffragists began to look to their eighteenth-century feminist predecessors for inspiration during times of intense frustration with the parliamentary system. In the process they began to record a formal history of their movement that would later be challenged by Edwardian suffragettes writing a competing version of events.

The intransigence of Parliament over women's rights by the end of the nineteenth century created a growing impatience among some suffragists and old ineffective strategies would give way to more militant tactics in the early years of the twentieth century. In October 1908, suffragette Muriel Matters would chain herself to the grille of the ladies' gallery and manage to deliver a speech to the House of Commons before being forcibly removed and arrested. The grille, as a symbol of male hegemony to which women were bound by chains had replaced the periodical as a site of contestation. Although the strategy of writing in periodical literature in the nineteenth century failed to produce the desired results, it did contribute to a growing awareness of arguments for women's rights that a new generation of suffrage activists, such as Muriel Matters, would build upon as they developed new forms of protest in the twentieth century.

CHAPTER ONE

PIONEERS: EIGHTEENTH-CENTURY FORERUNNERS OF THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

*Would men but generously snap our chains, and be content
with rational fellowship instead of slavish obedience, they would
find us more observant daughters, more affectionate sisters, more
faithful wives, more reasonable mothers – in a word, better citizens.*

Mary Wollstonecraft

A Vindication of the Rights of Woman, 1792

The history of the women's suffrage movement in England during the nineteenth century is a long and complex one. For almost one hundred years the debate over a woman's right to vote was a recurrent feature of the English political landscape. At times, it incorporated a number of varied social and political causes which frequently intersected and occasionally opposed one another. The membership of suffrage societies often overlapped with other groups creating a complex network of people, ideas and strategies. The suffrage movement not only enflamed and enraged people but it also encouraged women and men from all classes of English society to assert their individual rights as citizens. The complexities involved in chronicling the journey of a movement characterized by as many lows as highs has often proven to be a challenge for historians who have sought to contextualize the women's suffrage movement within a broader historical framework.

During the last twenty-five years, historians of feminism and gender have generally agreed that the beginnings of an effective and organized suffrage movement in England occurred at mid-century. For example, Patricia Hollis argued in 1979 that the true beginning of the entire feminist movement, which included suffrage activities, occurred in the 1850s with the formation of the Ladies Institute at Langham Place and the founding in 1858 of the *English Woman's Journal*. In 2000, Jane Rendall pinpointed May 1866, the year that the Reform Bill for England and Wales was introduced to Parliament, as the

beginning of the struggle for suffrage.⁶ Also in 2000, Joyce Marlow extended these dates further by situating the struggle for suffrage between 1832, when the first women's suffrage petition was presented to the House of Commons, and 1928 when the full enfranchisement of women was finally realized.⁷ As these examples illustrate, historians are revising the historiography of women's suffrage and in the process challenging the idea that the so-called 'first wave' of feminism originated with the Victorians. Certainly an organized political movement based on the single issue of suffrage did not exist until 1866 when the first Women's Suffrage Committee was formed in London with a branch in Manchester.⁸ However, feminist ideas, including ideas about women's suffrage, were in existence long before then, and indeed long before 1832.

Feminist ideas and demands were formulated in a variety of terms such as "emancipation," "the woman question," "feminism" and "women's rights," all of which were understood to mean the increased social, political, legal and civil rights for all women. Individually, terms such as "women's suffrage" and the "women's franchise" reflected just one aspect of the broader aims of the feminist movement. Although the word "feminist" was not in usage in England until 1894, my understanding of the term is based on a definition provided by Jane Rendall who uses the term to "describe women who claimed for themselves the right to

⁶ Patricia Hollis, *Women in Public, 1850-1900: Documents of the Victorian Women's Movement* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1979), vii; Jane Rendall, "The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867," *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867*, edited by Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland & Jane Rendall (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 119.

⁷ Joyce Marlow, ed. *Votes for Women: The Virago Book of Suffragettes* (London: Virago, 2000), ix.

⁸ Strachey, 104.

define their own place in society, and a few men who sympathised with that claim."⁹ I also adopt Karen Offen's useful definition as "the name given to a comprehensive critical response to the deliberate and systematic subordination of women as a group by men."¹⁰ Offen carefully distinguishes between the word "subordination" and the word "oppression" because subordination can be identified historically whereas oppression is a highly subjective response, a position I find more appropriate than other historical approaches. It is also useful to remember that feminism to the Victorians and their predecessors did not always signify equality between the sexes, as the word came to be represented later in the twentieth century. As we shall see, eighteenth-century women viewed equality in terms of morality, access to education, and the ability to demonstrate rational thought and behaviour. With these parameters in mind, I apply the word "feminist" to eighteenth-century women who advocated for the right to define their own place in society.

The concept of feminism did exist prior to and during the eighteenth century,¹¹ although feminists were not organized into formal groups with official organs and stated strategies as they were later in the nineteenth century. Central

⁹ Jane Rendall, *The Origins of Modern Feminism: Women in Britain, France and the United States, 1780-1860* (Chicago: Lyceum Books, 1985), 1.

¹⁰ Karen Offen, *European Feminisms, 1700-1950* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2000), 20. Offen further elaborates that the "concept of feminism (viewed historically and comparatively) can be said to encompass both a system of ideas and a movement for socio-political change based on a refusal of male privilege." Ibid. For earlier arguments surrounding the term "feminism" see Offen, "Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach," *Signs* 14:1 (Autumn 1988), 119-157. In response to Offen, see Nancy F. Cott, "Comment on Karen Offen's 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach'," *Signs* 15:1 (Autumn 1989), 203-05; Ellen Carol DuBois, "Comment on Karen Offen's 'Defining Feminism: A Comparative Historical Approach'," *Signs* 15:1 (Autumn 1989), 195-97.

¹¹ Barbara Taylor states that although the term was not in use for "at least a century prior to the entry of the actual word into popular political discourse there existed the ideology which it described." Barbara Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1983), x.

to understanding the development of the suffrage movement in Victorian England is an awareness of the activities of intellectual women from the eighteenth century who contributed to a growing feminist discourse over the subordination of women and patriarchy.¹² This discourse was more than a method of self-expression; it was one way women became intellectually engaged with their culture and entered into debate with the male intelligentsia. A number of women would contribute to this discourse through their feminist writing: playwright Joanna Baillie, historian Catharine Macaulay, novelist Frances Burney, actress Sarah Siddons and botanist Priscilla Wakefield would each demonstrate "the true dignity of a rational being" in their writing.¹³

The cultural contributions of these women were significant enough to be recognized in a painting by Richard Samuel, exhibited in 1779 titled, "The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain." Historian Norma Clark describes the painting as "depicting nine contemporary women of arts and letters as 'Muses' in the Temple of Apollo" arranged in various poses. Singer Elizabeth Linley strums a lyre while writers Charlotte Lennox, Elizabeth Montagu, Hannah More, Anna Barbauld, Elizabeth Griffith, Elizabeth Carter and historian Catharine Macaulay assume

¹² Several excellent sources treat this subject in detail: Norma Clarke, *Dr. Johnson's Women* (London: Hambledon and London, 2000) also *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters* (London: Pimlico, 2004); Mary Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer: Ideology as Style in the Works of Mary Wollstonecraft, Mary Shelley, and Jane Austen* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984); Catherine Gallagher, *Nobody's Story: The Vanishing Acts of Women Writers in the Marketplace, 1670-1820* (Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1994); Lynne E. Withey, "Catharine Macaulay and the Uses of History: Ancient Rights, Perfectionism, and Propaganda," *The Journal of British Studies* 16:1 (1976), 59-83; Bridget Hill, "The First Feminism," *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity, Vol. II: Minorities and Outsiders*, ed. Raphael Samuel (London: Routledge, 1989).

¹³ Fiona Robertson, ed. *Women's Writing, 1778-1838: An Anthology* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 193.

dignified positions, with scrolls of paper and quills in hand.¹⁴ The painting's depiction of women of letters and the arts dressed in classical clothing and situated in the Temple of Apollo, the Roman god of light, healing, music and poetry confirms the cultural status they had achieved.¹⁵ The activities of these women of letters represent an early intellectual phase of feminism in England where a critique of English society flourished, a proto-feminism which lays a foundation for a later ideology, of which women's suffrage is a part.¹⁶ Further, their activities challenge the theory of a separate spheres ideology which often portrays Victorian women and their eighteenth century predecessors as bound

¹⁴ Norma Clarke, *Dr. Johnson's Women*, 224.

¹⁵ Elizabeth Eger offers a detailed analysis of the painting's importance. She argues that "few critics have considered the implications of the fact that the muses, a resonant image of cultural harmony, are female." Further, she claims that the "idea that it is possible to consider the relation between the real and symbolic forms of woman in a positive sense runs counter to the instincts of contemporary feminism" where images in the twentieth century have portrayed muses as voiceless and passive sources of inspiration for male creativity (108). In the eighteenth century Mary Hays frequently made links "between [her] mythical and real historical predecessors" (111). Hays afforded equal treatment to women such as Catharine Macaulay, Sappho and Zenobia in her *Dictionary of Female Biography* (1803). Elizabeth Eger, "Representing Culture: 'The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain' (1779)," *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere, 1799-1830*, edited by Elizabeth Eger, et al (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001). The suffragettes would follow suit. Sylvia Pankhurst's *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement, 1905-1910* (1911) found historical precedents in figures such as Joan of Arc but also in mythical women warriors. Maria DiCenzo, "Justifying Their Modern Sisters: History Writing and the British Suffrage Movement," *Victorian Review* 31:1 (2005), 47. In the twentieth century American historian Mary Ritter Beard would do the same in *Woman as Force in History: A Study in Traditions and Realistics* (New York: Macmillan, 1947).

¹⁶ Elaine Showalter's idea that there are three stages to women's literary advancement, feminine, feminist and female, has been useful in clarifying my understanding of the development of feminist writing as it applies to suffrage activism in the Victorian period. Showalter argues that each stage points to "periods of crisis when a shift of literary values occurred." She organizes these periods into the feminine phase, occurring during the 1840s and lasting until the death of George Eliot in 1880; the feminist phase as being 1880-1920; and the female phase as beginning in 1920 and lasting until the present. Elaine Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own: British Novelists from Bronte to Lessing* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1977), 13. I argue in this chapter that a feminine phase existed as early as the late eighteenth century. In chapter two I will argue that a feminist phase, based on Rendall's and Offen's definitions, was achieved as early as the 1830s in the writings and ideas of the Owenites and Unitarians. Although my arbitrary dates differ from Showalter's, and my focus is the suffrage rather than literary advancement, her organization of these stages has been very useful in solidifying my idea that feminism existed in the eighteenth century and can be viewed as the 'first wave' of feminism.

exclusively to the private realm. Amanda Vickery effectively argues that the separate spheres ideology was in reality a reaction against "an unprecedented *expansion* in the opportunities, ambitions and experience of late Georgian and Victorian women" rather than a repression.¹⁷ In addition to the activities of women of letters and the arts, women from the elite classes emerged as a considerable political force during this period. The 1784 election campaign in the riding of Westminster illustrates just how politically active elite women were. Dorothy Thompson observes that in the eighteenth century "real influence remained more closely tied to property and family than to the exercise of constitutional rights," a factor that allowed women, as possessors of influence through family and wealth, the opportunity to engage in politics in a variety of ways.¹⁸

The riding of Westminster was unusual for its large franchise of 18,000 voters and its close proximity to Parliament, which meant that it received particular attention from the press. Westminster was also noteworthy for the political activities of Georgiana, the Duchess of Devonshire. A well-known political confidant and fundraiser, the Duchess shared loyalties with the Duke, an ardent Whig who felt it his duty to "defend the People, and the popular part of the

¹⁷ Amanda Vickery, "Golden Age to Separate Spheres? A Review of the Categories and Chronology of English Women's History," *The Historical Journal* 36:2 (1993), 400. For a discussion on the origins of the separate spheres ideology see Linda K. Kerber, "Separate Spheres, Female Worlds, Woman's Place: The Rhetoric of Women's History," *The Journal of American History*, 75:1 (1988). On the idea of a separate spheres ideology as an organizing concept see Lenore Davidoff and Catherine Hall, *Family Fortunes: Men and Women of the English Middle Class, 1780-1850* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1987).

¹⁸ Dorothy Thompson, "Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: The Problem of Authority," *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 75.

Constitution" to keep royalty in check.¹⁹ During the six weeks of polling in Westminster the Duchess organized groups of elite women to canvass on behalf of Charles Fox, the Whig candidate. Amanda Foreman describes how the women, who used their rank, beauty and celebrity "dressed in blue and buff with foxtails in their hats, [to solicit] votes from bemused shopkeepers."²⁰ Many observers were shocked to see women of rank engaging in undignified behaviour by walking through the cobbled streets of Westminster. Bluestocking Elizabeth Montagu disapproved of the Duchess crossing the lines of propriety noting, "[t]he Duchess of Devonshire has been canvassing in a most masculine manner, and has met with much abuse."²¹ The Duchess's personal celebrity made her a regular target of the press and during the campaign she was frequently lampooned and accused of selling her body for votes. The Tory government paid newspaper editors to attack Fox through the use of anti-Georgiana propaganda, an indication of the influence she wielded and notoriety she had received.²² Although women of social rank and property such as the Duchess had no formal role in national politics, they became informal and invaluable participants in a system where patronage and wealth dominated all aspects of government. Ironically, the riding of Westminster would once again become the focus of national attention when suffragists would publicly campaign for John Stuart Mill in 1865.

¹⁹ Amanda Foreman, *Georgiana: Duchess of Devonshire* (London: Harper Collins, 1999), 290.

²⁰ *Ibid*, 143.

²¹ *Ibid*, 147.

²² *Ibid*.

Concurrent with the expansion of women's public activities was a strengthening of patriarchy which argued for the further subordination of women. How was it possible that the two could occur simultaneously? What provoked women to attack members of their own sex who deviated from their subordinated position? Political scientist James C. Scott's sees any form of domination as the embodiment of "formal assumptions about superiority and inferiority" that are regulated by strict rules of etiquette to control public conduct, rules that were broken by the Duchess and her canvassers.²³ These formal assumptions were not only perpetuated by men, but were reinforced by elite and educated women such as Elizabeth Montagu who attacked the Duchess for her involvement in political activities. That Montagu appears to acquiesce to subordination is confusing given her own success and financial independence in the very public occupation of writer. An explanation may be found in Scott's study where he argues that subordinates often seek goals "well within their understanding of the ruling ideology," making them "falsely conscious subjects" who are nevertheless capable of revolutionary activities.²⁴

Montagu would react in the same way many anti-suffrage women would in the next century, operating well within their understanding of the dominant ideology by resisting emancipation to avoid social conflict. Scott theorizes that patriarchy operates on the assumption that the acquiescence of subordinates will automatically diminish social conflict.²⁵ Consequently, by the nineteenth century,

²³ James C. Scott, *Domination and the Arts of Resistance: Hidden Transcripts* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 21.

²⁴ *Ibid*, 78.

²⁵ *Ibid*, 77.

the activism of the suffragists was perceived as transgressing socially constructed codes of conduct for women, transgressions which posed not only a serious threat to the assumed superior position of men but to the social harmony of the nation.

The regulation of the conduct of women gained greater currency as the nineteenth century approached. Historians continue to struggle to explain the emergence of an increased conservatism in England following the French Revolution. For example, Mary Poovey argues that the issue of women's rights intensified in the post-revolutionary decades and the "social and political turmoil generated a conservative backlash that eventually buried the issue altogether."²⁶ Alternatively, Amanda Vickery rejects the idea that the revolution was the sole origin of the conservative backlash against women in the public sphere noting that "texts extolling domestic virtue and a clear separation of the realms of men and women circulated long before 1789."²⁷ Vickery laments the fact that historians such as Poovey have assumed that the French Revolution automatically signalled the curtailment of women's rights. As we have seen in the example of the Duchess of Devonshire, strict codes of conduct for women were very much in evidence prior to the Revolution. Nevertheless, the Revolution is an important consideration in understanding the curtailment of women's public activities.

²⁶ Poovey, *The Proper Lady and the Woman Writer*, 36. Barbara Taylor agrees with this view and characterizes these years as ones of "counter-revolutionary panic" in *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, 11.

²⁷ Vickery, 398.

Initially the French Revolution figured prominently in the texts of enlightened thinkers on both sides of the English Channel who linked the revolution to the advance of civilization and the spread of knowledge.²⁸ But as the revolutionary government sought to limit the rights of women through legislation, their agenda began to be viewed as regressive. Radical intellectual Mary Wollstonecraft, for one, became inflamed by the young republic's restrictions on women, and in response published *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792. Wollstonecraft remains an enigmatic figure for historians and her work often appears contradictory, misogynist and poorly written. However, during the eighteenth century Wollstonecraft was known for her idea that the liberal principles of freedom and rationality could be extended to women through education which would release them from economic dependence on men. "Wollstonecraft's dilemma," as political scientist Carole Pateman has called it, is that she assumes that for women to become full and active citizens, they must become like men: educated, rational and independent thinkers.²⁹ Pateman observes that "there [was] no vision available within political theory of the new democratic woman," for eighteenth-century radical thinkers like Wollstonecraft.³⁰ Wollstonecraft's assumption that men were the standard measurement of citizenship often contributes to our perception that her writing was misogynist in nature.

²⁸ Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, 155-56.

²⁹ Carole Pateman, *The Disorder of Women: Democracy, Feminism and Political Theory* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1989), 14.

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Yet studies of the Victorian women's movement mention Wollstonecraft as the first feminist or as the influential author of a founding feminist text.³¹ Barbara Taylor is one exception. She hesitates to call Wollstonecraft a feminist or to view her thoughts as anticipating nineteenth and twentieth century feminist arguments. Taylor sees this connection as problematic because it has meant the neglect of other aspects of Wollstonecraft's character, notably her ethics and her religious beliefs, a neglect which often results in the "misrepresentation of her as a bourgeois liberal."³² Taylor makes the additional point that the imposition on Wollstonecraft of a "heroic-individualist brand of politics [is] utterly at odds with her own ethically driven case for women's emancipation."³³ As we shall see in chapter four, there was a tendency at the end of the nineteenth century to cast Wollstonecraft as a feminist hero, especially when suffragists began to record the history of the movement. For example, in 1890 Elizabeth Robins Pennell would style Wollstonecraft as "the first woman who braved public opinion and lifted up her voice to declare that woman had rights as well as a man".³⁴ As Karen Offen observes, "[h]ow mistaken Pennell was about 'firsts'; how little was known. . . about the history of feminism in England" at the time.³⁵ Nevertheless, Pennell was not the only Victorian feminist to revisit the works of Wollstonecraft.

³¹ A specific review of Wollstonecraft's writings lies outside the parameters of this study. For a recent and thorough analysis of Wollstonecraft's writings and her contributions to feminist thought see Barbara Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003). Wollstonecraft was not alone in addressing issues of women's ignorance, their preoccupation with marriage, dress, social manners and what they considered to be irrational behaviour. Clara Reeve, Catharine Macaulay, Charlotte Smith and Priscilla Wakefield (to name a few) also addressed the same themes in their writing in the eighteenth century. See Robertson, *Women's Writing, 1778-1838: An Anthology*.

³² Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, 12.

³³ *Ibid.*

³⁴ Elizabeth Robins Pennell, "A Century of Women's Emancipation," *Fortnightly Review*, 48 n.s. (1890), 408.

³⁵ Offen, *European Feminisms*, 181.

Periodical literature reveals attempts by several authors to revise the history of Wollstonecraft's life and writings by the end of the century. Notable examples are publisher C. Kegan Paul's sympathetic defence of Wollstonecraft, titled "Mary Wollstonecraft: A Vindication" in the June 1878 edition of *Fraser's Magazine*. Poet and suffragist Mathilda Blind also defended Wollstonecraft's reputation by placing a positive spin on her personal life in the *New Quarterly Magazine* one month later.³⁶

As the dates of these publications suggest, a long period of time had passed between Wollstonecraft's death and a renewed recognition of her accomplishments. Why was it that Victorian feminists refused to openly acknowledge Wollstonecraft's contributions until the last decades of the century? Barbara Caine observes that very "few mid-Victorian feminists read Wollstonecraft, and even fewer did so in their early or formative years."³⁷ In fact, Emily Davies, Frances Power Cobbe, Millicent Garrett Fawcett and Josephine Butler all insisted that their feminist views were developed from their own experiences and observations.³⁸ Caine sees this reluctance to admit to a radical feminist tradition as due to the fact that mid-Victorian feminists were grappling with both a life story and a text when they were dealing with Wollstonecraft. It was her life story that posed the greatest problem for suffragists and reformers alike. Wollstonecraft's unconventional sexual relationships, an illegitimate child and a suicide attempt, all recorded posthumously by her husband William

³⁶ Blind was also a biographer who published a biography of George Eliot in 1883. In 1888 she published *Ascent of Man*, a book on evolution. Blind used the pseudonym "Claude Lake." Showalter, *A Literature of Their Own*, 335.

³⁷ Barbara Caine, *Victorian Feminists* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1992), 23.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Godwin in 1798, were viewed as scandalous and caused Victorians to distance themselves from her work entirely. Nevertheless, these suffragists and reformers were the direct beneficiaries of Wollstonecraft's ideas for, as Mathilda Blind asserted in the closing decades of the nineteenth century, "the spirit that animates [her writings] has, to a great extent, become part of the thought of our age."³⁹

Blind's assessment was accurate and proof is found in the 1891 edition of *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* where suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett produced an "Introduction" to the new edition. The fact that Fawcett associated herself at all with Wollstonecraft demonstrates the degree to which public opinion about her, especially among suffragists, had changed. However, Fawcett's praise of Wollstonecraft is limited. She is reluctant to acknowledge Wollstonecraft as the author of a founding feminist text, but does credit her with the "'first conscious expression' of the need for women's rights in England,"⁴⁰ another "first" that indicates just how little many Victorian suffragists knew about their eighteenth-century predecessors. Nevertheless, Wollstonecraft is an important historical actor in any history of the women's suffrage movement not only for her feminist ideas but also for the way in which mid-century suffragists originally distanced themselves from her work and ultimately from their own feminist history.

³⁹ Mathilde Blind, "Mary Wollstonecraft," *New Quarterly Magazine* 10 (July 1878), 412.

⁴⁰ Caine, 25. Historians and literary scholars today would generally agree that many others preceded Wollstonecraft in expressing a greater need for women's rights in England. For example, see Eva Figes, *Sex and Subterfuge: Women Writers to 1850* (New York: Persea Books, 1982); Robertson, ed. *Women's Writing, 1778-1838: An Anthology*; Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters*; Elizabeth Eger et al, eds. *Women, Writing and the Public Sphere*.

It is clear from a twenty-first century perspective that Wollstonecraft can be linked to the mid-century suffrage movement in a variety of ways. On the question of suffrage specifically however, direct links become less obvious. Why is it that Wollstonecraft, and her feminist contemporaries, failed to take their arguments for emancipation in the direction of suffrage? Although much of their writing did not address the issue of representation directly, there is evidence that women of letters were thinking about the subject. In 1772, Clara Reeve critiqued English politics in her preface to *The Phoenix*: "Since England is become a nation of politicians, and men of all ranks and degrees believe themselves capable of investigating the art of government, and since women have written with success upon the subject, the editor thought herself at liberty to aim a blow at popular error."⁴¹ The error Reeve refers to is the supposition that men and women from all classes should participate in government. Although Reeve was clearly not democratic, she was thinking and writing about the subject of representation. So was poet and novelist Charlotte Smith, who described the paradoxes facing women who "are censured . . . if they happen to have any understanding [of political issues] or despised as insignificant triflers if they have none" in the preface to her 1792 novel, *Desmond*.⁴² Mary Wollstonecraft in *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* would also broach the subject of representation, albeit very briefly, dying before she could pursue her ideas:

I cannot help lamenting that women of a superiour cast have not a road open by which they can pursue more extensive plans of usefulness and independence. . . I mean to pursue [the idea at]

⁴¹ Quoted in Clarke, *The Rise and Fall of the Woman of Letters*, 102-03.

⁴² Robertson, 73.

some future time, for I really think that women ought to have representatives, instead of being arbitrarily governed without having any direct share allowed them in the deliberations of government.⁴³

Historian Catharine Macaulay also wrote several radical political pamphlets in addition to her major work, *History of England*. In fact, Edmund Burke would posthumously acknowledge Macaulay as the "greatest champion" of radical reform despite her critique of his *Reflections on the Revolution in France* (1790).⁴⁴ Yet Macaulay was considered an anomaly for writing on historical and political subjects and she experienced intense criticism for undertaking subject matter that was a distinctly masculine preserve. The *Monthly Review* of 1763, reviewing the first volume of her *History*, wondered at Macaulay's writing style which was "so correct, bold and nervous, that we can discover no traces of a female pen . . . we might suspect that her husband and she were joint Historians."⁴⁵ Hannah More viciously commented that Macaulay was "not feminine either in her writings or her manners; she was only a tolerably clever man," evidence of the degree to which intellectual women were judged for crossing socially constructed boundaries.⁴⁶

Although the examples of eighteenth-century women writing directly about representation are few, I suggest this has more to do with ideas of subordination and respectability rather than a lack of interest or an ignorance of the subject. Further, ideas about equality among eighteenth-century women differed

⁴³ Mary Wollstonecraft, "A Vindication of the Rights of Woman," *The Vindications: The Rights of Men, The Rights of Woman*, eds. D.L. Macdonald & Kathleen Scherf, (Peterborough: Broadview, 1997), 285.

⁴⁴ Taylor, *Mary Wollstonecraft and the Feminist Imagination*, 48.

⁴⁵ Robertson, xxiii.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

significantly from ours. Radical women emphasized the strength of women's morality and their ability to acquire rational thought through education, as qualifications for citizenship on the same terms as men. What is clear is that women who were political and radical were increasingly portrayed as dangerous members of society and were frequently linked with the "revolutionary humanism" of the French Revolution and, consequently, were outside the limits of liberal opinion.⁴⁷

The experiences of eighteenth-century feminists are important to my discussion of women's suffrage because, like their predecessors, Victorian feminists would be required to challenge these identical assumptions whenever they appeared in the periodical press. In 1889, man of letters Grant Allen would write "Plain Words on the Woman Question" for *The Fortnightly Review*. In his attempts to assign intellectual and emotional instability to women who agitated for suffrage reform through their writing, Allen posits that certain "truisms" about the female sex were "much overlooked . . . by a certain type of modern lady writers."⁴⁸ One such truism was that "while women are crying for emancipation they really want to be left in slavery; and that it is only a few exceptional men . . . who wish to see them fully and wholly enfranchised."⁴⁹ Allen's views are important because they demonstrate how entrenched patriarchal assumptions about the inferiority of women had become in English culture. More importantly for the purposes of this study, the similarities between the experiences and

⁴⁷ Taylor, *Eve and the New Jerusalem*, 275-76.

⁴⁸ Grant Allen, "Plain Words on the Woman Question," *The Fortnightly Review* 52 o.s., 46 n.s. (1889), 448.

⁴⁹ *Ibid*, 452.

activities of feminists from two different centuries clarify our understanding of just how complex, uneven and yet very familiar the road to suffrage was.



How did feminist ideas remain alive in English culture during the repressive first decades of the nineteenth century only to become a part of the thought of the age later on? It was the novel and women's dominance of the genre that facilitated, in part, a continued awareness of women's rights.⁵⁰ Jane Austen's work, for example, is increasingly portrayed as one of the ways women writers remained intellectually engaged with their culture during a time when their public activities were being curtailed. Eighteenth-century novelist Charlotte Smith (mentioned above) was one of Austen's favourite writers and clearly an influence.⁵¹ Barbara Caine argues that Austen was influenced by Wollstonecraft's writing since many of Wollstonecraft's major themes of women's education, financial independence, marriage and primogeniture figure prominently in each of her novels.⁵² Admittedly, this is conjecture since Austen herself did not reveal having a personal knowledge of Wollstonecraft's work.

But Austen's importance as a feminist figure lies in the fact that she reintroduced the issue of the social disabilities of women into polite discourse during the early decades of the century through the use of humour in her writing.

⁵⁰ For a discussion on the importance of the woman novelist in the late seventeenth and eighteenth centuries see Jane Spencer, *The Rise of the Woman Novelist: From Aphra Behn to Jane Austen* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1986). Chapter three in particular offers an interesting history on the public acceptance of women writers.

⁵¹ Robertson, 73.

⁵² Caine, 26. Elizabeth Barrett Browning and George Eliot would acknowledge reading Wollstonecraft and admit to her influence later in the century. Caine, 27.

In *Pride and Prejudice* (1813) Austen uses humour to portray the plight of impoverished gentlewomen and their mother's attempts to marry them off. In the novel, Mrs. Bennett's main objective in life is to make successful marriages for each of her five daughters, a desire that results in numerous sub-plots that frustrate the frequently comic actions of the characters. As this example illustrates, Austen's writing is a commentary on the social realities that imposed a double standard on women, one that refused them employment and demanded their economic reliance on male relatives until marriage.

Similarly in 1862, Frances Power Cobbe would critique society's practice of confining women to marriage while ridiculing mothers whose sole objective is to find husbands for their daughters, in *Fraser's Magazine*. In "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?" Cobbe is outraged by the jests and "unending satire and amusement" against mothers who work to find good matches for their daughters when marriage is the only vocation for a woman and the only opportunity to obtain a secure financial future.⁵³ Cobbe's essay, when compared to Austen's fiction, demonstrates the extent to which women had moved beyond Austen's methods of negotiating their rights in public by mid-century. By articulating through reasoned argument (as eighteenth-century women of letters had done) in the periodical press, mid-century feminists no longer had to rely on humour to directly challenge the patriarchal assumptions assigned to the female sex. However, as both texts illustrate, the subject matter remained the same; the form of expression and the genre were the only differences.

⁵³ Frances Power Cobbe, "What Shall We Do With Our Old Maids?," *Fraser's Magazine* 66 (1862), 596.

Female novelists at the beginning of the century could not escape public censure from the male intelligentsia for keeping feminist ideas alive in public discourse. The famous English literary critic William Hazlitt, reviewing Frances Burney's novel *The Wanderer* for the *Edinburgh Review* in 1815 could not refrain from theorizing on the nature of female novelists:

The surface of their minds, like that of their bodies, seems of a finer texture than ours; more soft, and susceptible of immediate impression. They have . . . less power of continued voluntary attention – or reason – passion and imagination . . . The intuitive perception of their minds is less disturbed by any general reasonings or causes . . . They learn the idiom of character and manner, as they acquire that of language, by rote merely, without troubling themselves about the principles.⁵⁴

Like many male *literati*, Hazlitt operates on the assumption that women writers were inferior by nature, taking his argument one step further by commenting on Burney's physical appearance. He observes that Burney's body "like her writing has seen better days," and that young, pretty novelists were much more interesting to review.⁵⁵ His ungracious comment about Burney's physical appearance (she was sixty-three years old by this time) is evidence that Hazlitt was susceptible to the same passions and emotions he assigns to women in this review. Obviously the meaning behind Richard Samuel's painting "The Nine Living Muses of Great Britain" had escaped Hazlitt's notice. His disturbing disrespect of one of England's best loved female novelists may be indicative of the degree to which the cultural contributions of women of letters had become trivialized by the early nineteenth century. More importantly, his comments are

⁵⁴ Robertson, xxx.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, xxxi.

examples of the undermining tactics employed by intellectual males to publicly subordinate women who had achieved success. These tactics indicate the effectiveness of female novelists at challenging assumptions about a woman's inferiority and her subordinate position in society. They are also worth noting because suffragists would be required to challenge and dismantle the same assumptions in arguing for their right to vote.

Feminist ideas also remained alive through the activities of a number of reform movements that flourished during the 1830s and 1840s. The Chartist commitment to the enlargement of the franchise for men and women is a case in point. The Chartists are important for the purposes of this discussion primarily because Chartism illustrates how women's emancipation had become "wedded to the political and intellectual history of the times."⁵⁶ It is especially noteworthy for its inclusion (and eventual omission) of a proposal to extend the franchise to women in its charter, the first reformist expression of women's suffrage from an identifiable group. Finally, it is notable for the fact that the demand for the vote for women had crossed class lines.

Chartism as a cohesive and organized movement is the subject of an ongoing debate among historians. The Chartists have often been viewed as miscellaneous clusters of people whose inability to organize merely reflected their diverse origins. However, historians such as Dorothy Thompson see the Chartist movement differently. For Thompson, the movement involved entire communities from manufacturing districts where "men, women and children

⁵⁶ Offen, *European Feminisms*, 113.

demonstrated shared values."⁵⁷ This interpretation was later revised by Thompson to conclude that Chartism differed from previous radical movements because of its size and spread, rather than its program.⁵⁸ However, Thompson's study of the early Chartist period is useful in understanding how feminist ideas regarding suffrage flourished and crossed class lines. She identifies the Peterloo massacre of 1819 as a period when working-class women actively participated in political agitation on a large scale, and where the idea of women's suffrage began to occupy a place in the political consciousness of the working classes.⁵⁹ Thompson specifically cites women's political activism in the radical organizations of the manufacturing districts in the 1830s, and the revival of female associations following the anti-Poor Law demonstrations of 1837, as examples.

Although accounts of working women from this period reiterate that women were more concerned with the care and health of their children and their homes, Thompson has unearthed some evidence to the contrary. In 1838, a letter signed "A Real Democrat" appeared in the *Northern Star* specifically demanding the vote for women:

Fellow Countrywomen – I address you as a plain working woman – a weaver of Glasgow. You cannot expect me to be grammatical in my expressions, as I did not get an education, like many other of my fellow women that I ought to have got, and which is the right of every human being . . . It is the right of every woman

⁵⁷ Dorothy Thompson, *The Chartists: Popular Politics in the Industrial Revolution* (London: Temple Smith, 1984), 120.

⁵⁸ Eugenio F. Biagini, *Liberty, Retrenchment and Reform: Popular Liberalism in the Age of Gladstone, 1860-1880* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 9. See Thompson's *Outsiders: Class, Gender and Nation* (London: Verso, 1993), particularly chapter one "Chartism and the Historians," for this revision.

⁵⁹ Thompson, *Outsiders*, 80-81.

to have a vote in the legislation of her country, and doubly more so now that we have got a woman at the head of the government.⁶⁰

The weaver from Glasgow echoes a familiar eighteenth century theme of a woman's right to an education but with one significant difference: she links women's rights with the right to vote, a rare argument for this time period. Thompson further notes that Chartists re-published the works of Mary Wollstonecraft, evidence that Chartist women had an ideological affinity with radical feminists from the eighteenth century.⁶¹ While the evidence to support the fact that Chartist women were specifically discussing suffrage is slim, the fact that working-class women were using expressions and ideas previously espoused by middle-class elites illustrates how mainstream these ideas had become.

Chartist men also helped to keep the issue of women's suffrage alive prior to mid-century. In 1842 John La Mont suggested that Chartists include a clause in the first draft of the People's Charter demanding the extension of the suffrage to women. After the draft was circulated to all of the working men's associations the proposal was rejected on the grounds that the amendment might retard the agitation for universal male suffrage.⁶² Although the amendment was eventually defeated, it is clear that the subject of women's suffrage was an important consideration. Prominent Chartists such as R.J. Richardson would write *Rights of Woman*, supporting an extension of the franchise to unmarried women and widows. Similarly, John Watkins would write in *Address to the Women of*

⁶⁰ Ibid, 87.

⁶¹ Thompson, *The Chartists*, 149.

⁶² Ibid, 124.

England that women should be allowed to vote, but not wives because they were considered to be one with their husbands.⁶³ As the contents of these pamphlets suggest, Victorian middle-class men were far from the first to argue against married women having political rights apart from their husbands. Surprisingly, Victorian suffragists would also adopt the same approach to married women's enfranchisement, a policy that would become a source of contention and cause divisions within the movement.

Despite these advances, the participation of working-class women in political reform was brief. By the end of the 1840s Chartist women fade from the movement and from Chartist literature altogether.⁶⁴ The involvement of working-class women at Peterloo, and their brief involvement in the Chartist movement, disputes the claim that the struggle for women's rights has always been the preserve of middle-class women. Further, the limited number of references to the suffrage by Chartist women does not prove that the issue was not a part of their consciousness; instead it suggests that the struggle for the enfranchisement of working-class women was seldom recorded.



As the eighteenth century drew to a close, the subordination of women became imperative as proposals for women's emancipation were met with

⁶³ *Ibid*, 125.

⁶⁴ Thompson offers a number of possible reasons for this change such as the abandonment of mass demonstrations by the movement (which women actively participated in) and an emerging middle-class emphasis on respectability, temperance and gentility which the working classes sought to emulate. See *The Chartists*, 128-32.

resistance in England on a number of fronts. In 1797, Charles James Fox raised the issue of an extension of the franchise for women in the British Parliament:

It must be the genuine feeling of every gentleman who hears me, that all the superior classes of the female sex of England must be more capable than the uninformed individuals of the lowest class of men [to vote] . . . yet why has it never been imagined that the right of election should be extended to women? Why? But because by the law of nations, and perhaps also by the law of nature, that sex is dependent on ours; and because, therefore, their voices would be governed by the relation in which they stand in society.⁶⁵

Fox was evidently unfamiliar with the writings of his feminist contemporaries in assuming that the political rights of women had never yet been imagined. Indeed they had. Clearly Fox's proposal was meant to emphasize financial independence as a qualification for the vote. However, in his determination to link sex with suffrage he unwittingly introduced the idea that property should be the criteria for extending the suffrage, a concept that Lydia Becker and the Manchester suffragists would seize on in 1867 to argue that female property owners who paid taxes were constitutionally entitled to vote.⁶⁶ Fox could little imagine that one day women would forcefully resist the idea that their voices should continue to be governed by the relation in which they stood in society.

⁶⁵Offen, *European Feminisms*, 73.

⁶⁶Rendall, "The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867," 142-146.

CHAPTER TWO

GROUNDWORK: MIDDLE-CLASS FEMINISTS, INTELLECTUALS AND WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE IN THE FIRST HALF OF THE NINETEENTH CENTURY

It will add to the surprise with which many will receive this intelligence, that the agitation which has commenced is not a pleading by male writers and orators for women, those who are professedly to be benefited remaining either indifferent or ostensibly hostile; it is a political movement, practical in its objects, carried on in a form which denotes an intention to persevere. And it is a movement not merely for women, but by them.

Harriet Taylor
The Westminster Review, 1851

The debate over women's rights during the eighteenth century circulated amongst an elite and closed circle of radicals who wrote for a middle-class intellectual audience. Indeed, many intellectuals such as Mary Wollstonecraft and Clara Reeve believed that any extension of political and civil rights for either gender should be reserved for educated members of a "superiour cast."⁶⁷ Did the issue of women's rights remain a specifically middle-class debate following the demise of Chartism? If so, how did arguments for women's rights, especially the right to vote, expand to become a characteristic feature of the political landscape by the end of the nineteenth century?

I have argued that continuity existed between the ideologies and writings of a network of feminist activists from the eighteenth century that spilled over into the early decades of the nineteenth. This continuity contributed to a "particular reforming outlook – shared by men and women alike" that would facilitate a growing public awareness of feminist issues, including the issue of suffrage.⁶⁸ During the first fifty years of the nineteenth century feminist challenges to patriarchy took a variety of forms. Many strategies often died away only to be replaced by new methods of activism. As Mary Poovey concludes, the "middle-class ideology we most often associate with the Victorian period was both contested and always under construction; because it was always in the making, it was always open to revision . . . and it developed unevenly."⁶⁹ As we have seen with the Chartist example, the journey to full citizenship for women can be

⁶⁷ Wollstonecraft, 285.

⁶⁸ Kathryn Gleadle, *The Early Feminists: Radical Unitarians and the Emergence of the Women's Rights Movement, 1831-51* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1995), 3.

⁶⁹ Mary Poovey, *Uneven Developments: The Ideological Work of Gender in Mid-Victorian England* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), 3.

characterized as an inconsistent and uneven journey that was often punctuated by a series of setbacks and failures as well as significant advances.

In addition to Chartism, a number of social movements that considered women's emancipation⁷⁰ a central component of a modern and socially progressive society emerged in the 1830s and 40s. The issue once again became dominated by the middle classes with the diminished participation of the working classes in the debate. The middle classes had remained engaged with the suffrage question during the Chartist years and occasionally elite women ignored social convention to agitate for their rights on an individual basis. For example, in August of 1832, thirty-five years after Charles James Fox would facetiously raise the issue of property as the criteria for extending the suffrage in the Parliament, and immediately following the passing of the Reform Act excluding all women from the franchise, Mary Smith from Stanmore, a "lady of rank and fortune," petitioned Parliament for the right to vote.⁷¹ Smith argued that since she paid taxes and was subject to the same laws of England as a man, she ought to have a voice in creating legislation.⁷² Smith's petition was presented in the House of Commons by "Orator" Hunt, an advocate of universal suffrage.

⁷⁰ The term "emancipation" is indicative of a number of terms that were often used interchangeably by early feminists to describe the attainment of women's rights. Just as suffragism reflected one aspect of the broader aims of the feminist movement, so too did the term "women's emancipation." For example, the Women's Emancipation Movement, a group of feminists who organized in 1891, "associated the rights of married women with the pursuit of full citizenship." See Christine Bolt, "The Ideas of British Suffragism," *Votes for Women*, edited by June Purvis and Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 35. Suffragists such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett would use the term "emancipation" to convey the idea that women needed educational, economic, political, social and legal independence from men to develop their "individual powers and gifts." Millicent Garrett Fawcett, "The Emancipation of Women," *The Fortnightly Review* 56 o.s., 50 n.s. (1891), 674. My understanding of the meaning of the term for the Victorians is based on Fawcett's interpretation.

⁷¹ Strachey, 32.

⁷² Offen, *European Feminisms*, 94.

Parliament responded by substituting the word "male" for the word "person" in the original bill, making sex a criterion for the vote for the first time. Women were effectively disenfranchised as a result of Smith's efforts. Despite this outcome, Mary Smith recognized that she was well positioned to demand her rights from Parliament based on her ownership of property and as a taxpayer, an important distinction that illustrates how arguments for suffrage had shifted from eighteenth-century concerns with a woman's right to education, her morality and her ability to be rational.

The debate over women's rights also remained alive in intellectual circles and the periodical press facilitated ongoing discussions that would clarify the debate. In 1841, the *Westminster Review* published "Woman and Her Social Position" signed by "P.M.Y." While the author remained anonymous at the time of publication, she was later identified as a Mrs. Mylne.⁷³ Mylne, who would later admit that her inspiration for the essay came about through the study of the works of Jeremy Bentham, raises several familiar issues about the disabilities of women: life in the private sphere, economic dependence on men, and marriage as the only acceptable occupation available to women. In addition to Bentham, Mylne was also inspired by the writings of radical eighteenth century feminists, mentioning specifically Mary Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* and "other older works" while observing that "some good hard blows have been struck in our own day by Miss Martineau for the cause of female

⁷³ Strachey, 32. When the article was reprinted in 1872 the preface revealed that a "Mrs. Mylne" was the author. Strachey erroneously lists the original date of publication as being 1831 but it was not published until January, 1841.

freedom."⁷⁴ Mylne clearly relied on a prior feminist history in addition to finding inspiration from her own contemporaries. For Mylne, the Reform Bill (of 1832) amounted to a "needless, if not prejudicial inequality, to exclude women altogether from representation."⁷⁵ Mylne's example illustrates that not only were middle-class women frustrated with their lack of political rights, but some chose to resist the injustice by voicing their objections in periodical literature, a strategy Victorian suffragists would also adopt.

Middle-class men were also involved in advancing feminist ideas while the Chartist movement was active. The Owenites developed a feminist platform that included the enfranchisement of women. Robert Owen, businessman, philanthropist and social reformer was a visionary who maintained that there was not a social or political right that women were not entitled to. Central to his theories was the idea that the education of all citizens, especially women, was necessary in a cooperative society of social equals.⁷⁶ Owen's communities became showpieces that refuted the necessity of Christian marriage which he criticized as "permanent bondage with virtually no escape for a woman except death," an idea that feminist Frances Power Cobbe would echo later in the century.⁷⁷ William Thompson, an Owenite disciple, also made feminism a central component of his radical theories. In 1825, Thompson published *Appeal of One-*

⁷⁴ P.M.Y., "Woman and Her Social Position," *The Westminster Review* 35 (1841), 25.

⁷⁵ *Ibid*, 37.

⁷⁶ Sylvia Strauss, *'Traitors to the Masculine Cause': The Men's Campaigns for Women's Rights* (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1982), 22.

⁷⁷ Strauss, 22. Cobbe's views on marriage are clearly expressed in "Wife-Torture in England," *The Contemporary Review* 32 (April 1878). Cobbe's article, where she would famously identify specific areas of England as the "kicking districts," was written to lobby for the passing of the Matrimonial Causes Act which proposed that violence against women were grounds for legal separation. (57).

Half the Human Race in association with Anna Wheeler, a work that is now considered to be the first to clearly articulate a socialist feminist position.

Thompson and Wheeler refute the earlier work of James Mill and his argument that a woman's interests were inherently included as a part of men's rights.

Thompson argued that since "freedom is never received as a gift from the masters," women should be afforded the same political rights as men and become involved in the political struggle to achieve their liberation ⁷⁸

George Jacob Holyoake, an Owenite and self-proclaimed "father" of the feminist movement, saw the advancement of women's rights as necessary to ushering in a new social order. He was frequently amazed that women accepted public humiliation without demur and often critiqued feminist strategies, or the lack of them, during the Chartist years. He challenged women to organize and take matters into their own hands: "But where are women's political unions – self-originated and self-sustained? If they want political rights, why do they not themselves ask for them?"⁷⁹ Heated controversy over Holyoake's challenges ensued and radicals were often divided over how best to launch a political attack for women's rights. For instance, Harriet Taylor, active in Unitarian circles at this time, responded that unlike negroes women's slave status was a unique one: "Domestic slaves cannot organize themselves – each one owns a master, and this mastery which is usually passive would assert itself if [women] attempted [emancipation]."⁸⁰ Socialists did not always agree on the specifics of women's

⁷⁸ Strauss, 20.

⁷⁹ Gleadle, 83.

⁸⁰ Ibid, 84.

suffrage and the debate among radical intellectuals over the issue of rights was always complex and not often clear.

But it was Holyoake's contact with two future feminists in particular that would have a profound impact on the suffrage movement beyond mid-century. Barbara Smith, the granddaughter of Unitarian Member of Parliament William Smith, and Bessie Parkes, the great-granddaughter of Unitarian preacher Joseph Priestly, were urged by Holyoake to publish a journal advocating women's rights. The title suggested by Holyoake, *The Englishwoman's Journal (EWJ)*, was envisioned by him as advancing the rights to women from women's viewpoint.⁸¹ Parkes and Smith would launch the journal in 1858 and Parkes would later maintain that the *EWJ* was "designed as a print platform for the infant women's movement."⁸² It became the first feminist publication funded, published and written by women.

In addition to the Owenites, the Unitarian movement supported feminist claims, especially for a woman's right to vote. During the 1830s the Unitarians attracted a number of radical intellectuals from the world of letters, both male and female, who united under the teachings of leader W.J. Fox. A number of well-known intellectuals such as John Stuart Mill, Harriet Taylor, Charles Dickens, Harriet Martineau, G.H. Lewes, William Godwin, as well as number of scientists and lawyers, were attracted by Fox's charisma. In 1831, Fox began publication of

⁸¹ Strauss, 28.

⁸² Sheila R. Herstein, "The *English Woman's Journal* and the Langham Place Circle: A Feminist Forum and Its Women Editors," *Innovators and Preachers: The Role of the Editor in Victorian England*, ed. Joel H. Wiener (London: Greenwood Press, 1985), 69.

the Unitarian journal the *Monthly Repository* which he envisioned as a "radical, non-denominational forum for literary and current affairs" that would reach intellectual men.⁸³ The periodical began a bold campaign on behalf of the rights of women, especially attacking traditional views of marriage.

Apart from publishing their own organs, Unitarians also sought publication in middle-class periodicals to broaden their influence to include intellectual elites.⁸⁴ In 1832, Fox published "Representative Reform" in the *Westminster Review*, an article noteworthy for its discussion of the idea that representation should be linked to property, not gender. Fox asks, "Shall women vote, or is sex a political exclusion? . . . [S]hall inability to read and write be an exclusion? Or living in a house of lower rent than 10£ a year?"⁸⁵ Fox reiterates that historically in England property was the only qualification for voting in Parliament until the reign of Henry VII, when a charge of 40s per annum was exacted to ensure that order was maintained at parliamentary meetings. Fox cogently observes the irony of the fact that what was originally meant as "a restriction on the franchise" was eventually transformed into a "potent means for its extension" since the rate allowed for knights of shires to attend Parliament, making it representative for the

⁸³ Gleadle, 33.

⁸⁴ Influencing intellectuals was a specific Unitarian strategy. Reaching a larger readership was not necessarily their goal since Unitarian publications such as *Howitt's Journal* and the *People's Journal* had a combined circulation of over 20,000 by the mid-1840s (Gleadle, 43), a statistic that rivalled those of popular periodicals. For example, the *Nineteenth Century* had an average monthly circulation of 20,000 by 1884. See Priscilla Metcalf, *James Knowles: Victorian Editor and Architect* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1980), 285. The *Fortnightly Review* had 30,000 monthly readers in 1873. See Christopher Kent, *Brains and Numbers: Elitism, Comtism, and Democracy in Mid-Victorian England* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1978), 115. By comparison, *Eliza Cook's Journal*, with its strong feminist leanings, had a circulation that reached between fifty and sixty thousand by 1849, evidence that feminist ideas were becoming more widespread by mid-century (Gleadle, 43-44).

⁸⁵ W.J. Fox, "Representation Reform," *Westminster Review* 57o.s., 1n.s. (1852), 32-33.

first time.⁸⁶ As we shall see, the ancient rights of English men and women as participants in representative government would become a trope adopted by suffragists such as Helen Taylor by mid-century.

The relationship between the Owenites, the Unitarians and the Chartists was a complex one for a number of reasons, not the least of which was a consciousness of class differences. The Owenites and Unitarians had very little in common with the Chartists outside of their common interest in the political enfranchisement of women. As a matter of fact, Kathryn Gleadle comments that many Chartists were "extremely hostile to any middle-class involvement in the [Chartist] movement" although radical Unitarians endorsed the aims of the Chartists.⁸⁷ Sylvia Strauss claims that middle-class Owenites such as Holyoake "infiltrated" the Chartist movement, dispensing advice on how to achieve feminist goals through "moral force" or by petitions and organizing.⁸⁸ While Strauss's interpretation is debatable, there is evidence that some Chartists welcomed middle-class participation. For a brief period, Chartists such as William Lovett recruited members of the Unitarian intelligentsia by establishing the National Association for Promoting the Political and Social Improvement of the People in 1841. The purpose of the National Association was to unite under one umbrella all those desirous of promoting political and social improvements for all people,

⁸⁶ Ibid, 10.

⁸⁷ Gleadle, 75. Gleadle's argument regarding the historiography of Chartism is worth considering. She takes exception to histories that focus exclusively on the role of women in the Chartist movement, such as Dorothy Thompson's. Gleadle argues that in their attempt to recover the lives and experiences of Chartist women, some historians have neglected the feminist activities of male radicals such as those involved in the Unitarian movement (77-78).

⁸⁸ Strauss, 171.

and for preparing "our oppressed countrymen for the proper exercise of th[e] franchise."⁸⁹

While many Unitarians joined Lovett's organization, other Unitarians became openly hostile to Chartism once the terms of the People's Charter, which excluded the demand for the enfranchisement of women, became known. The same year that Lovett was recruiting middle-class radicals to his organization, Catherine and Goodwyn Barmby openly criticized the Chartists for their failure to consider the rights of women, printing a tract to publicize the issue. The "Declaration of Electoral Reform" demanded that the People's Charter be amended to include female suffrage, "in the names of Mary Wollstonecraft and Charlotte Corday."⁹⁰ The Barmbys insisted that Chartist men were imposing the same restrictions on women that the Whigs and Tories had imposed on the working classes.

The Chartists, Unitarians and Owenites all served the suffrage cause well by contributing to a reforming outlook, particularly through their writings, and by increasing public awareness of the need for women's suffrage. As well, their engagement with intellectual elites intensified as mid-century approached and the issue of women's political rights was being more clearly articulated in the press. More importantly, the origins of some of England's most prominent feminist activists can be traced to these early reform movements.

⁸⁹ Ibid, 77. The National Association admitted women to its membership on the same terms as men and strongly supported the inclusion of women in the franchise.

⁹⁰ Gleadle, 80. Charlotte Corday (1768-1793) was sent to the guillotine for the murder of French revolutionary leader Jean Paul Marat in 1793.



How did feminist ideology develop from the early arguments advanced by the Owenites and Unitarians, into arguments advanced by suffragists later in the nineteenth century? The answer to this question begins with two of the most formidable feminists to emerge from the Unitarian movement: Harriet Taylor and John Stuart Mill. Mill's life and work has been the subject of innumerable studies and a detailed examination of his work lies outside the scope of this paper. In order to contextualize my argument however, a brief mention of a few of his intellectual contributions to the women's suffrage movement is necessary. Mill's radical background stems, in part, from his involvement with Unitarians W.J. Fox and William Thompson as a young man.⁹¹ As early as 1826, Mill understood that real slavery for women was constituted in the effects of patriarchal subordination, not in the drudgery of hard labour as the Chartists had maintained.⁹² The slavery metaphor to illustrate the origins of women's perceived oppression reveals the influence of Unitarian principles on Mill's thinking.

However, Mill's work, despite its affinity with Unitarian thought, evolved from that of early radicals in a number of significant ways. Although Mill continued to describe the social and political disabilities of women in terms of a woman's rationality and access to education, his definition of citizenship revolved around the idea of self-improvement, "not self-interest or natural right, [but] a self-improvement which was undertaken in a patriotic spirit," open to women as well

⁹¹ Catherine Hall, Keith McClelland & Jane Rendall, "Introduction," *Defining the Victorian Nation: Class, Race, Gender and the British Reform Act of 1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 68.

⁹² Jane Rendall, "The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867," 124.

as to men.⁹³ Especially relevant in Mill's new definition of citizenship was the importance of individual freedom for man and for woman.

The periodical press informs us of significant shifts in feminist ideology that were influenced by Mill's philosophies and writings. One example is Mill's earliest published essay entitled "Modern French Historical Works – Age of Chivalry" published in the *Westminster Review* in 1826. In this article, Mill traces the evolution of women's rights from the earliest savage societies, which he calls "Asiatic kingdoms," to modern Western nations.⁹⁴ In doing so, Mill links the progress of civilized societies with women's emancipation. The evolutionary process of women's advancement, or a lack of it, was a new feature of feminist discourse that would persist throughout the century.

In addition to his periodical contributions, Mill's books such as *On Liberty* (1859) would explore the necessity for individual self-development and freedom from the power of the state as conditions for human progress. *The Subjection of Women* (1869) discusses the disempowerment of women who are excluded from all occasions of self-development and were therefore unable to achieve their full potential. Mill's works were not without their weaknesses, however. Although Mill defended a woman's right to full citizenship with a place in the political community, he also assumed that married women would continue to "see their future not in the world of employment but within the home."⁹⁵ Further, Mill shared

⁹³ Hall, McClelland & Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 63. Mill's views on democracy and his concept of civilization shaped his philosophy on citizenship which was not the "same as those of Disraeli or the Reform League." Ibid, 64.

⁹⁴ Rendall, "The Citizenship of Women and the Reform Act of 1867," 123-24.

⁹⁵ Hall, McClelland & Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 67.

an affinity with eighteenth-century predecessors such as Mary Wollstonecraft: he was fearful of the majority of the English masses who lacked the necessary education to participate in the democratic process. For Mill, democracy had its limits. Nevertheless, his liberalism was highly influential and was to become an integral part of the suffrage debate.

But Mill is also important for the purposes of this discussion for his collaboration and association with his wife and step-daughter who also contributed to the advance of suffragism in significant ways. Mill's relationship with Harriet Taylor began in 1830 when they met through Unitarian William Fox. Taylor had clearly developed ideas about women's subordination and was influenced by the theories of Owenite feminists prior to meeting Mill.⁹⁶ Much has been debated by historians on the degree of influence Taylor had on Mill's writing and visa versa. Many of their contemporary critics took exception to their friendship, especially since Taylor was married. As with Mary Wollstonecraft's life, it was difficult for the Victorians to separate the life stories from the texts, and it was especially difficult for the male intelligentsia to accept the influence of a woman on the genius of one of the most famous liberal philosophers in England. Indeed, Thomas Carlyle declared that Taylor was a "silly woman" who should confine herself to darning socks.⁹⁷ Despite objections to the contrary, the fact remains that Taylor and Mill collaborated on a number of books and articles about the rights of women.

⁹⁶ Olive Banks, *The Biographical Dictionary of British Feminists: Volume One, 1800-1930* (London: Harvester Press, 1985), 209.

⁹⁷ Jo Ellen Jacobs, *The Voice of Harriet Taylor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2002), 220.

While evidence of Taylor's writing as an individual is scarce,⁹⁸ her greatest contribution to the woman's movement is found in the *Westminster Review*. The "Enfranchisement of Women" was originally published in July of 1851 under Mill's name. The essay's main theme is that the enfranchisement of women is a sign of an advanced and civilized nation. Taylor uses the American example where women formed a political movement to resist the "aristocracy of sex," as evidence for this claim.⁹⁹ Taylor contributes many ideas to the theory of women's emancipation: the creation of a proper sphere where all human beings can achieve their highest potential; the fitness of women for the highest social functions throughout history; the right of woman to be educated; the injustice of forcing one-half of the human race to live life in a state of subordination. She also utilizes ideas that had a long feminist tradition. For example, she likens the power of husbands as reaching that of the power of kings, an idea advanced in 1706 by Mary Astell.¹⁰⁰

The article is also interesting for Taylor's digression to literary women and their views of women's rights. Taylor claims that literary women in England "are ostentatious in disclaiming the desire for equality or citizenship, and proclaiming their complete satisfaction with the place which society assigns to them" because it is in their personal interest to "profess whatever opinions they expect will be

⁹⁸ Taylor's papers were destroyed by a fire during the blitz of London in World War II. Ibid, 1.

⁹⁹ Harriet Taylor, "Enfranchisement of Women," *Westminster Review* 55:2 (1851), 292.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid, 302-03. Astell wrote, "If Absolute Sovereignty be not necessary in a State, how comes it to be so in a Family? . . . For if Arbitrary Power is evil in itself, and an improper Method of Governing Rational and Free Agents, it ought not to be Practis'd anywhere; . . . If all Men are born free, how is it that all Women are born Slaves?" Mary Astell, *Reflections Upon Marriage*, 1706. Quoted in Bridget Hill, "The First Feminism," *Patriotism: The Making and Unmaking of British National Identity*, 130-31.

agreeable to men."¹⁰¹ Taylor observes that literary women depend on "men's opinion for their literary as well as for their feminine successes" and consequently are willing to give the appearance of submission to prevent "vulgar" men from saying that learning makes women unfeminine and bad wives.¹⁰² Taylor clearly interprets the reluctance of literary women to write on women's issues as a weakness, but justifies their neglect, in part, on their economic reliance on the men who would review their work. The fact that Taylor addresses the role of literary women in society at all is an acknowledgement of their influence and their potential to advance the rights of women through their writing.

Taylor might have had novelists such as Elizabeth Gaskell and Charlotte Brontë in mind when writing her remarks. In personal correspondence to Gaskell dated September 20, 1851, Brontë comments after reading Taylor's essay in the *Westminster Review* that "I thought it was the work of a powerful-minded, clear-headed woman, who had a hard, jealous heart, muscles of iron, and nerves of bend leather; of a woman who longed for power, and had never felt affection."¹⁰³ Brontë's comments, apart from the personal criticism of Taylor, are useful in understanding that literary women read and knew of each other's work and were intellectually engaged with the middle-class debates taking place in periodical literature. It is clear that not all women of letters agreed on the need for suffrage

¹⁰¹ Taylor, 310.

¹⁰² *Ibid.*

¹⁰³ Elizabeth Gaskell, *The Life of Charlotte Brontë* (London: Penguin Books, 1985), 458.

since they enjoyed personal success and were usually financially independent.¹⁰⁴

As James C. Scott suggests, dominated people only give the appearance of acquiescence and often seek goals within their understanding of the dominant ideology.

After mid-century, the work of Taylor's daughter Helen serves as a summary of the philosophies of both Taylor and Mill and illustrates how their feminist ideas were passed on to a new generation of women agitating for the vote. Helen Taylor incorporates major themes used by her parents in "The Ladies' Petition" published in the *Westminster Review* in 1867. Mill's petition, presented to the House in June of 1866, was specific in its demand that the "possession of property in this country carries with it the right to vote in the election of representatives in Parliament: that the exclusion from this right of women holding property is therefore anomalous."¹⁰⁵ The petitioners, 1,521 eminent English women such as Octavia Hill, Barbara Bodichon and Elizabeth Garrett, did not ask for the franchise for all adult women but only for those who owned property. Jane Lewis states that the claim to property was a narrow argument since a relatively few women owned sufficient property to qualify for

¹⁰⁴ George Eliot is one example. Eliot often prevaricated on specific women's rights issues. She admired Mill's speech to Parliament in 1867 on the extension of the franchise to women householders, hoping that good would come from this "serious presentation of women's claims." However, Eliot refused to publicly support the suffrage issue and personally felt that emancipated women would become "unfeminine" and "unsexed." Frederick Karl, *George Eliot: A Biography* (London: Flamingo, 1996), 423; 428.

¹⁰⁵ Ibid, 63. Taylor worked with Barbara Bodichon, Emily Davies and canvassers from the Kensington Ladies Debating Society to circulate the petition in 1866. In November 1865, five women, including Bodichon and Taylor, had presented papers on women's suffrage to the members of the Kensington Society. At this meeting the idea of forming a committee to work specifically towards the enfranchisement of women surfaced. It was not until October 20, 1866 however that a suffrage committee made up of women from the Kensington Society and Langham Place would first meet in London. Rendall, "The Citizenship of Woman and the Reform Act of 1867," 131-32.

the franchise.¹⁰⁶ Indeed, this early petition was far from democratic. But Helen Taylor anchors her discussion in ancient constitutional history by arguing that the intelligence and the property of Englishwomen were necessary to advancing the nation.

The argument of ancient constitutional rights of women was a common trope used by suffragists after mid-century. As we have seen, W.J. Fox also used this argument in 1832. But at the end of 1867, constitutional lawyer and suffragist Thomas Anstey revived this line of reasoning, uncovering two important points of contention on which suffragists' claims to ancient rights were based: Lord Brougham's 1832 Reform Act used the term "man" to include "woman," and freeholding voters' rights had been based on property since the days of Henry VI. These examples were rooted in histories of Anglo-Saxon nationhood, and suffragists such as Helen Taylor and Lydia Becker would appeal to their constitutional heritage as grounds for their enfranchisement.

In October of 1865, Helen Taylor published "Personal Representation" in the *Westminster Review*. In this essay she links representation with the advance of superior civilizations. But the significant difference between this article and the work of her mother is that Helen moves away from emphasizing the suffrage as simply a class issue to viewing class as an evolutionary process that is socially constructed.¹⁰⁷ By 1867, with the publication of the "Ladies' Petition," Helen's ideas had solidified. The most interesting element of Helen's later article is her

¹⁰⁶ Jane Lewis, *Before the Vote was Won: Arguments For and Against Women's Suffrage, 1864-1896* (London: Routledge, 1987), 3.

¹⁰⁷ Helen Taylor, "Personal Representation," *Westminster Review* 84 o.s., 28 n.s. (1865): 307-08.

comparison of universal suffrage, personal representation and class representation. She notes that universal suffrage, by its very name, includes women; personal representation affords every individual with an interest in the country a hearing; and class representation includes women since women are a class.¹⁰⁸ Like Mill and her mother before her, Helen argues that those who insist on grouping all women together as wives and mothers by virtue of their sex must in consistency admit that they constitute a class of vital importance since their numbers are greater than those of men.¹⁰⁹



How influential and effective were the various tropes employed by suffragists in their writing for the periodical press?¹¹⁰ The examples of John Stuart Mill and Harriet and Helen Taylor have been discussed at length because their writing exemplifies the central arguments and themes that would continue to dominate the opinions of both suffragists and anti-suffragists until the end of the

¹⁰⁸ A clarification of the terms "virtual" and "actual" representation is necessary here. Jane Lewis states that the Victorian theory of political representation adopted the "virtual" position because it "stressed the importance of the fitness of any particular individual . . . to represent the whole community. From this they were able to derive the idea that non-electors could be adequately represented by the leading men of the community." Lewis, *Before the Vote Was Won*, 3. Mill, in his speech on the enlargement of the franchise in 1867, dismantled the argument that women were virtually represented by their husbands since the number of women beaten and kicked to death by their male protectors was evidence to the contrary. Hansard, *Representation of the People Act (1867)*, Series 3, Vol. 190, 826-28. My understanding of "actual" representation is based on Helen Taylor's definition that personal representation is "the effort to secure a hearing to every individual interest or opinion in the nation, however insignificant or obscure." Helen Taylor, "The Ladies' Petition," *Westminster Review* 87 o.s., 31 n.s. (January 1867): 68.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁰ I differentiate between the periodical press, whose history dates back to the eighteenth century, and the feminist press which first emerged in 1858. The periodical was owned, published and edited by men, and the majority of the contributors were male intellectuals from the middle classes. The first articulation of a middle-class feminist platform was the *English Woman's Journal*, launched in 1858, with the single issue focus of employment for middle-class women. In 1870, the *Women's Suffrage Journal* began publication with the single issue of women's suffrage as its focus. Both of these feminist journals were funded, written and edited by women.

century. It is within this context that the debate in periodical literature emerges as a significant resource, one that captures the tenor of the Victorian middle-class mindset toward women's rights in the final decades of the century. However, the sheer volume of periodical literature devoted to the single issue of the enfranchisement of women makes it impossible to thoroughly explore the entire debate. With this limitation in mind, I have chosen four articles, all published in the *National Review* in 1885 and 1888, to demonstrate how writers on both sides of the issue utilized several of the central themes advanced by Mill and the Taylors decades after they were first published. Two articles are written by Conservatives on both sides of the issue, and two by Liberals. I will endeavour to illustrate how the debate over women's suffrage was clarified in the periodical press, the degree of interest in the issue by both political parties, and the extent to which all of these themes were utilized by the authors, no matter which side of the debate they occupied.

Early in 1885 Cecil Raikes and Philip Vernon Smith, both Conservatives, engaged in a debate over the enfranchisement of women in the *National Review*. In the January issue, Raikes, a politician,¹¹¹ expresses considerable concern that his party will vote for extending the franchise to women in the hopes that women will vote Conservative, thereby securing the future of the party's political fortunes.¹¹² Raikes argues that women are unfit to exercise the franchise and

¹¹¹ Henry Cecil Raikes founded the *National Review* in March 1883 with Alfred Austin. The purpose of the *Review* was to "provide a public forum for the discussion of Conservatism." See H.C.G. Mathew & Brian Harrison, eds. *The Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 800-802.

¹¹² Henry Cecil Raikes, "Women's Suffrage," *The National Review* 4 (1885): 632. Politicians were increasingly cognizant of how tenuous their hold on power was. In 1870 the Liberals held a

that an extension of the suffrage would result in social upheaval. He further invokes Mill's argument about "Oriental" societies whose supposed lack of civilized advancement is evidenced by their treatment of women. To counter accusations that the British civilization was not advancing, Raikes reminds his readers that the ancient communities of Greece and Italy were "much nearer to the pagan savages of modern Africa or Polynesia in their estimate of the consideration due to women."¹¹³ Further, he argues that women's desire for a "direct and separate representation" in Parliament is a libel upon the male sex and an outrage to common sense.¹¹⁴

Finally, the idea that men frame laws specifically to oppress women is nothing more than the "*partheno-genesis* of the distempered brain of some splenetic spinster" according to Raikes.¹¹⁵ It is interesting to note that Raikes names several prominent women in his article such as George Sand, Harriet Martineau, Florence Nightingale, Frances Power Cobbe, Helen Taylor and Elizabeth Garrett Anderson. His fear that the votes of these women would be "submerged under the flood of washerwomen and sempstresses" is more than elitist bias.¹¹⁶ In drawing attention to the accomplishments of these famous women intellectuals and reformers, in comparison to women from the working

majority of 240 seats and the Conservatives held 223. In 1874 the Conservatives defeated the Liberals winning 288 seats and the Liberals returned with just 171. In 1880 the Liberals would return to power winning 256 and the Conservatives 203 seats. These statistics partly explain why politicians indulged in partisanship and feared women's votes. J. Vincent and M. Stenton, eds. *McCalmont's Parliamentary Poll Book: British Election Results, 1832-1918* (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1971), 332B. Ray Strachey confirms that there was a fear among both parties over how women would vote. Strachey, 282.

¹¹³ Raikes, 635.

¹¹⁴ *Ibid*, 640.

¹¹⁵ *Ibid*, 639.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid*, 637-38.

classes, Raikes echoes familiar middle-class arguments that some women were indeed of a more superior class, as Wollstonecraft believed. More importantly, his mention of these famous women indicates the level of esteem and influence they had achieved for their literary and philanthropic accomplishments.

Two months later, Philip Vernon Smith offers a point by point rebuttal to Raikes's article titled "Women's Suffrage: A Reply." Smith begins with a discussion of virtual representation, documenting how the franchise has been "entrusted to a limited number of members of the community, to be exercised by them for the benefit of the nation at large."¹¹⁷ Smith points out that by the end of the year it is expected that the franchise will be extended to every man who has inhabited a house. As such, the "trustee classes have abdicated their trust."¹¹⁸ Why then, should female householders be denied the right to exercise the suffrage? Smith challenges Raikes's assertion that female householders, such as the washerwomen and sempstresses he belittles, are unfit to vote by pointing out that it is women, and not men, who manage the household finances and the survival of the working class family; that the men merely earn the wages to accomplish the task. He speculates that if men were to attempt the task for a week, a "speedy and hopeless breakdown of domestic resources" would occur.¹¹⁹ He further argues that there is nothing unfeminine about casting a ballot into a box in a polling booth, as Raikes asserts, because in much the same manner women "step into the post-office and write a telegram at one of the

¹¹⁷ Philip Vernon Smith, "Women's Suffrage: A Reply," *The National Review* 5 (1885): 61.

¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 64.

compartments."¹²⁰ Smith concludes on a philosophical note, stating that he envisions that other Conservative statesmen will concur with his views and will eventually acknowledge that the issue of women's suffrage will become not just a matter of "abstract justice, but of high State policy."¹²¹ Smith relies on personal opinion rather than factual or empirical evidence but with reasoned persuasion, in contrast to Raikes who relies on indignation and elitist assumptions.

Three years later in 1888, Goldwin Smith, journalist and historian, tackled the issue of women's suffrage in "Conservatism and Female Suffrage" in *The National Review*. Smith is described by Millicent Garrett Fawcett as a Liberal Unionist "who is opposed to women's suffrage."¹²² Smith amazingly speculates that only "radical women" who were discontented and restless would vote if the franchise were extended. He maintains that women such as "contented" Conservative women would most likely stay at home, and Irishwomen would "all vote under the dictation of their priests."¹²³ He also argues that the aspirations of the female sex are not political, maintaining that women are not "a class, but a sex, and their interest is completely identified with that of their husbands, brothers, and sons."¹²⁴ Clearly Smith is in agreement with virtual representation claiming that women are not capable of upholding government or enforcing the law. But his most important comment has to deal with property and the right of

¹²⁰ Ibid, 66.

¹²¹ Ibid, 70.

¹²² Millicent Garrett Fawcett, "Women's Suffrage: A Reply," *The National Review* 11 (1888): 44.

¹²³ Goldwin Smith, "Conservatism and Female Suffrage," *The National Review* 10 (1888): 736.

¹²⁴ Ibid, 739.

women property owners to vote. Smith uses the argument that since women are a sex and not a class, their claims to the franchise based on property are void.¹²⁵

Millicent Garrett Fawcett, suffragist and a Liberal, was a prolific writer and debater in the periodical press. In "Women's Suffrage: A Reply," she dismantles Smith's arguments. In answer to his claim that the Conservative party had hoped to benefit from the extension of the franchise, Fawcett presciently remarks that women "are not nearly so much tied and bound by party allegiance as the majority of men are."¹²⁶ Instead, women will "rally to the side of the maintenance of the authority of the law," no matter which party is in power.¹²⁷ Fawcett refutes Smith's idea that women are not a class but a sex. Echoing the arguments advanced by Mill and the Taylors, Fawcett states women, "though naturally not a class at all, are artificially created into a class by imposing special legislative disabilities and disadvantages on them."¹²⁸ In answer to Smith's claim that only revolutionary radical women would cast a vote, Fawcett points to examples such as the Isle of Man, where women had been voting in elections since 1880, noting that "nothing of the kind had taken place."¹²⁹ Similarly, Toronto and Wyoming had women's suffrage and the overthrow of social order had yet to occur. Finally, Fawcett points out Smith's error in assuming that women base their claim of representation on abstract, or inherent, rights. She argues that advocates of

¹²⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁶ Fawcett, 45. Many suffragists and suffragettes would abandon the Liberal party for its inaction over the suffrage issue. The Pankhursts would abandon both the Liberal the Labour parties by the end of the century when working within the party system appeared to be futile. As we shall see, militancy would emerge as a new tactic for gaining the vote in the twentieth century. Strachey, 289-90.

¹²⁷ Fawcett, 45.

¹²⁸ Ibid, 49.

¹²⁹ Ibid, 46.

women's suffrage "support it because they believe the admission of women would be for the welfare of the nation at large," a departure from arguments about the ancient rights of English women.¹³⁰

As these examples from *The National Review* aptly illustrate, the strategy of negotiating the right to vote in the periodical press clarified middle-class debates on the enfranchisement of women. Although themes, tropes and arguments were consistent with arguments from the eighteenth century and early decades of the nineteenth, the debate over the enfranchisement of women was continuously under construction. Following another rejection of the Women's Suffrage Bill by Parliament in 1891, journalist and politician Leonard Courtney, Baron of Penwith, was clearly frustrated at the loss of the Bill by a "feeble majority of 23."¹³¹ Courtney's assessment of the political times in which he was writing was sagacious, if not prophetic:

Society cannot be reformed unless woman's lot be regarded in another fashion . . . Working men do not provide for their dependent women, and it is idle to say that they ought . . . and we shall arrive in fairer havens when women's labour is frankly recognised, trained, and organised as part of the economy of the world . . . the recognition of woman as a voter are part of one and the same movement.¹³²

As we shall see in the next chapter, the unevenness of the struggle would continue as new strategies emerged and older approaches were abandoned.

¹³⁰ Ibid, 47.

¹³¹ Leonard Courtney, "The Women's Suffrage Question," *The Contemporary Review* 61 (1892): 768.

¹³² Ibid, 771-73.

CHAPTER THREE

STRATEGIES: MIDDLE-CLASS WOMEN AND THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE CAMPAIGN AT THE END OF THE CENTURY

*The Parisian woman of the Revolution will be repeated
wherever analogous conditions exist; and to admit women into
active participation in politics will certainly be to increase disorder
and add fuel to the fire of strife.*

Eliza Lynn Linton

The Nineteenth Century, 1891

During the final thirty years of the nineteenth century, the quest for votes for women appeared to stagnate in a political quagmire. With the failure of numerous bills and amendments supporting the limited enfranchisement of women in the House of Commons, suffragists began to search for new strategies that would apply pressure on Members of Parliament. In *The Cause*, suffragist Ray Strachey observes with great understatement that although petitions increased and the number of people interested in women's suffrage grew, the "passive resistance of Government after Government, and the steady hostility of the rank and file," made suffrage activism a "disheartening" task.¹³³ Despite the best efforts of supporters such as radical Jacob Bright, appeals to the intellects of the majority of the members of the House were usually overridden by partisan politics. The uncertain impact of the female vote on the political fortunes of each party often governed how members voted. Conservatives felt sure that women would vote Liberal and Liberals were convinced that women would vote Conservative. Did the argument for women's suffrage become diluted once intellectual arguments had been advanced and appeared to have failed?

Suffragists had hoped to prove their case to the government on intellectual grounds but when the Suffrage Bill was defeated in 1870, they turned to influencing public opinion which they now viewed as a necessary strategy. Central to converting public opinion was the role played by the press in their treatment of the issue of women's suffrage. The press was very influential in

¹³³ Strachey, 265. This was true for much of the women's rights legislation winding its way through the House. Political posturing and delaying tactics by both political parties were endemic. Gladstone alone made twenty-nine speeches, "some of them of characteristic length, in opposition to a single clause of the [Marriage and Divorce] Bill." Strachey, 74.

Victorian society, and the nineteenth century is sometimes referred to as the great age of the periodical since the Victorians published over 25,000 journals as well as an estimated several hundred reviews, magazines and weeklies during Victoria's reign.¹³⁴ Prior to 1870, women were generally denied access to the press which meant that debate on the "Woman Question" from a woman's perspective was usually restricted. As we have seen, there were a few notable exceptions at mid-century such as Harriet and Helen Taylor. Nonetheless, suffragists were concerned that the press had diluted, if not outright ignored, the political and critical expression of women's rights they sought to articulate.

Their concerns were not unfounded. The periodical press was often complicit in creating parliamentary deadlocks over proposed legislation due to the fact that many periodicals held specific political affiliations. For example, the *Nineteenth Century* was known for being politically liberal, while the *Westminster Review* was widely known to be a radical publication. Further, the periodical remained the preserve of male intellectuals who continued to exercise social and political influence through their essays and reviews. Suffragist Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy would complain that "we suffer . . . at the hands of the Press."¹³⁵ Similarly, Josephine Butler, leader of the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts would comment that "[t]he conspiracy of silence of the press had done us this service . . . it has forced us to create a literature of our

¹³⁴ Walter E. Houghton, "Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes," *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, edited by Joanne Shattock & Michael Wolff (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 3.

¹³⁵ Philippa Levine, "'The Humanising Influences of Five O'Clock Tea': Victorian Feminist Periodicals," *Victorian Studies* 33:2 (Winter 1990): 299.

own."¹³⁶ In response to this "conspiracy of silence," Victorian feminists chose to publish their own journals, creating opportunities to advance an undiluted and uncompromising political debate over women's rights.¹³⁷ In addition, the organization of a distinctly feminist press created a sense of community among middle-class women concerned with women's rights. As Solveig Robinson notes, these publications laid the groundwork for an "emergent feminist critical tradition" while providing a framework where "Victorian women of letters could successfully translate feminist politics into a feminist criticism."¹³⁸ Philippa Levine agrees, saying that the "creation of a feminist press was a distinctive move, asserting both the importance of women's issues and an understanding of the need for a women's voice."¹³⁹ The feminist press was a middle-class venture that often reiterated bourgeois assumptions. Since suffragists officially endorsed a

¹³⁶ Quoted in Susan Hamilton, *Criminals, Idiots, Women, & Minors* (Toronto: Broadview, 1995), 9.

¹³⁷ Although many studies of women's suffrage mention the feminist press in passing, their importance to the advancement of women's rights during the nineteenth century is gaining recognition. For detailed studies of specific feminist publications see: Philippa Levine, "'The Humanising Influences of Five O'clock Tea': Victorian Feminist Periodicals," *Victorian Studies* 33:2 (Winter 1990): 293-306; Solveig C. Robinson, "'Amazed at Our Success': The Langham Place Editors and the Emergence of a Feminist Critical Tradition," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29:2 (Summer 1996): 159-172; Maria Frawley, "Feminism, Format, and Emily Faithfull's Victoria Press Publications," *Nineteenth Century Feminism* 1 (Fall/Winter 1999): 39-63; Cynthia L. Bandish, "Bakhtin's Dialogism and the Bohemian Meta-narrative of Belgravia: A Case Study for Analyzing Periodicals," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 34:3 (Fall 2001) <<http://www.utpjournals.com/>> (25 August 2003); Janice Schroeder, "'Better Arguments': The *English Woman's Journal* and the Game of Public Opinion," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 35:3 (Fall 2002): 243-271. For an overview of Victorian women's magazines, including feminist publications, see Margaret Beetham & Kay Boardman, eds., *Victorian Women's Magazines: An Anthology* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2001).

¹³⁸ Solveig C. Robinson, "'Amazed at Our Success': The Langham Place Editors and the Emergence of a Feminist Critical Tradition," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 29:2 (Summer 1996): 161.

¹³⁹ Philippa Levine, "'The Humanising Influences of Five O'clock Tea': Victorian Feminist Periodicals," *Victorian Studies* 33:2 (Winter 1990): 294. The feminist press also provided jobs for middle-class women. The Victoria Press, run by Emily Faithfull, produced eighty pamphlets and books in addition to three feminist magazines during fifteen years of operation. Although men read proofs and worked the presses, Faithfull trained approximately three dozen women as compositors. Angela V. John, ed. *Unequal Opportunities: Women's Employment in England, 1800-1918* (London: Basil Blackwell, 1986), 9.

franchise based on narrow property qualifications, they did not seek to expand their policy to include working-class women.

As Helen Taylor's article "Personal Representation" demonstrated, it was common to portray all women as a class, a trope that was well established by 1865. To twenty-first century historians, the portrayal of all women as united by virtue of their sex is a dangerous assumption because it fails to mirror the reality of English society. As Fletcher, Mayhall and Levine assert, the reality was that "there was no simple celebration of global sisterhood, no universal strategies upon which women could rely for their individual struggles, but a slippery and constantly negotiated series of exchanges" in Victorian England.¹⁴⁰ But to Victorian feminists from the middle classes such as Amelia Lewis, editor of *Woman*, class and gender intersected: "Woman has had no representation as a *Class*, had had no public voice as a *Class*, had had no means of education as a *Class*, but has been deemed sufficiently provided for in our social system by being acted *for* by man."¹⁴¹ Lewis assumes the position of spokeswoman for all women despite the reality that she gave little thought to working-class women, a shortcoming she shared with most middle-class suffragists.

In spite of this failure, Lewis's language demonstrates that feminist publications attempted to cultivate a sense of solidarity among middle-class readers. As Benedict Anderson theorizes, print culture creates an "awareness of being imbedded in secular, serial time," engendering the need for a "narrative of

¹⁴⁰ Ian Christopher Fletcher, Laura E. Nym Mayhall & Philippa Levine, eds. *Women's Suffrage in the British Empire: Citizenship, Nation and Race* (London: Routledge, 2000), xiv.

¹⁴¹ *Ibid*, 304.

'identity'.¹⁴² This narrative of identity generated an imagined community¹⁴³ amongst readers of the feminist press, creating solidarity among middle-class women. More importantly, the feminist press expanded women's lived experience beyond the limitations of the private sphere exposing them to the public realm and the male domain of politics.

The value of a distinctly feminist press was perhaps best articulated by mid-Victorian feminist Bessie Rayner Parkes. Parkes observed that a special interest periodical would contribute to the success of organized feminism: "It is not this or that number of a magazine, this or that article from a given pen, which does the work: it is partly the effect of repetition – line upon line – and partly the knowledge that there is in the world a distinct embodiment of certain principles. . . [that] may be a rallying point."¹⁴⁴ Parkes clearly understood the power of print culture to unite women through her experience as the editor of the *English Woman's Journal (EWJ)*, the first feminist pressure group periodical to facilitate the exchange of feminist ideas between middle-class readers nationally.¹⁴⁵ Established in September 1858 by Barbara Leigh Smith and Parkes, the *EWJ* had been a rallying point for middle-class feminists at mid-century. Its effectiveness was quickly validated when essayist William Roscoe critiqued Parkes and the *EWJ* in the *National Review* one month after the journal's

¹⁴² Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities*, rev. ed. (London: Verso, 2003), 205.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, 133.

¹⁴⁴ Quoted in Susan Hamilton, "Making History with Frances Power Cobbe: Victorian Feminism, Domestic Violence, and the Language of Imperialism," *Victorian Studies* 43:3 (Spring 2001): 437.

¹⁴⁵ Herstein, 61. The *English Woman's Journal* was formed under a limited company in February, 1858. By November the rapidly expanding company appointed William Johnson Fox as auditor, demonstrating the existence of an ongoing relationship between mid-century feminists and the Unitarian movement. The *EWJ* ceased publication in 1864. Jane Rendall, "A Moral Engine? Feminism, Liberalism and the *English Woman's Journal*," *Equal or Different*, 119; 133.

debut.¹⁴⁶ Roscoe criticized Parkes for advocating the employment of middle-class women insisting that feminists had "no right whatever to judge of the nature of all women, and the field of circumstance best adapted to them . . . It should be remembered that of women these are the least truly women, and that it is most misleading to assume them as representatives of their sex."¹⁴⁷ Roscoe's review is noteworthy not only for its critique of Parkes and the newly launched *EWJ*, but for introducing the contents of the *EWJ* to the periodical reader. Roscoe's extensive quotations of Parkes's writing in his article unwittingly exposed his primarily male intellectual audience to a feminist voice. As a strategy, the publication of the *English Woman's Journal* produced positive and immediate results.

Similarly, the *Women's Suffrage Journal* produced immediate results when it was established in 1870. This monthly paper was edited by the energetic Lydia Becker, leader of the Manchester chapter of the National Society for Women's Suffrage.¹⁴⁸ When the Municipal Franchise Bill became law in 1869, suffragists like Becker felt sure that the vote for women was imminent. To expedite the process, Becker launched the *Journal of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage* in March 1870, changing the name to the *Women's Suffrage*

¹⁴⁶ The *EWJ* enjoyed a steady success rate, culminating in a respectable circulation of 1,000 copies a month in early 1860, "a figure never achieved by the more long-standing *Englishwoman's Review*." Levine, 296. By comparison, the quarterly periodical *The National Review*, first published in 1855, had reached a circulation of 1500 by 1861. Schroeder, 251.

¹⁴⁷ W.C. Roscoe, "Woman," *National Review* 7 (Oct. 1858), 350.

¹⁴⁸ Lydia Becker became interested in women's suffrage after hearing Barbara Bodichon speak in Manchester on "Reasons for the Enfranchisement of Women," at a congress of the National Association for the Promotion of Social Science in 1866. In 1867, Becker published her first periodical article, "Female Suffrage," which appeared in the *Contemporary Review*. It was later reprinted as a pamphlet and widely distributed. Audrey Kelly, *Lydia Becker and The Cause* (Lancaster: University of Lancaster, 1992), 11; 15.

Journal when it became a national publication a year later. Like her predecessor Bessie Rayner Parkes, Becker recognized the value of a rallying point. The stated aim of the *Women's Suffrage Journal (WSJ)* was to "extend to every well-wisher the firm grasp of an outstretched hand," an objective meant to create a sense of solidarity and community among suffragists.¹⁴⁹ Commercial advertising and circulation fees became a regular source of revenue for the journal, an acknowledgment of the size of the readership and extent of the journal's reputation.¹⁵⁰ This reputation was largely due to the editorial capabilities of Becker who dutifully reported on minutes from individual suffrage societies, parliamentary speeches, items reprinted from the popular press, and the full text of suffrage debates in Parliament. Becker also frequently dissected parliamentary division lists, analyzing for her readers which way individual members voted, who had changed their vote, and critiquing those who opposed the franchise all in an effort to exert public pressure on MPs.¹⁵¹

The extent of the *WSJ's* influence, especially among politicians, became evident early on. In 1870 Becker wrote to the Liberal member for Caernarvonshire, with the unusual name of Love Jones Parry, to query him as to why he voted against the proposal to enfranchise women, even though he had promised to vote for women's suffrage during his campaign. Parry replied that

¹⁴⁹ Kelly, 39.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid*, 40.

¹⁵¹ The importance of applying public pressure on MPs and the effectiveness of this strategy in changing votes in Parliament became noticeable in 1871 during the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts. Ray Strachey comments that "several members of the commission, who had formerly supported the Acts, were brought to change their opinions by the evidence they heard, and not only signed the report but publicly announced their adherence to the other side." Strachey, 203.

partisan politics had influenced his decision. Fearing that the Conservative Bill would win female electors to that party, Parry voted against the measure.¹⁵²

Becker dutifully reported her correspondence with Parry in the *WSJ*, educating her readers about the inner workings of partisan party politics while meticulously recording for historians the uneven progress of potential suffrage legislation.

Similarly on June 1, 1871, correspondence from a Mr. Baines appeared in the *WSJ*. Originally printed in *The Times* as a letter to the editor, Mr. Baines found it necessary to defend his actions after inadvertently voting against Jacob Bright's Women's Disabilities Bill.¹⁵³ Baines insisted that he was prevented from hearing the debate in the House and "believing from what I heard in the excitement of the division that the Bill would give votes to married women generally, irrespective of their being ratepayers or holders of property, I went into the lobby against it."¹⁵⁴ In her accounting of the defectors who had changed sides, Becker notes that Mr. Baines "has explained that his vote was given under a misapprehension" and she is satisfied that the "adverse vote of Mr. Baines is not likely to be repeated."¹⁵⁵ Becker's response is revealing because it demonstrates how narrowly focused middle-class suffragists were in claiming only a limited franchise for women. Nonetheless, the reaction of Mr. Baines is indicative of an increased sensitivity to public opinion and suffragists' demands. By holding parliamentarians to account in the *WSJ*, Becker strategically

¹⁵²Roger Fulford, *Votes for Women: The Story of a Struggle* (London: Faber and Faber, 1956), 79.

¹⁵³For the division see Hansard, Series 3, vol. 201, 239-240.

¹⁵⁴Edward Baines, "To the Editor of *The Times*," *Women's Suffrage Journal* 2:16 (June 1871): 68.

¹⁵⁵Lydia Becker, "Editorial," *Women's Suffrage Journal* 2:16 (June 1871): 53.

conducted a campaign that kept politicians on their toes and her readers well-informed.

Further evidence of the level of influence that Lydia Becker and the *WSJ* had obtained is found in the May 1, 1886 issue. Becker reports that a Mr. Hardcastle, the Conservative MP from Lancashire, was "so impressed by the *Women's Suffrage Journal's* arguments about women working in the coalmining industry that he decided to strike a bargain – if the editor was prepared to use her powerful organization to prevent 'this piece of selfish cruel legislation' he would readily support and promote the suffrage cause in return."¹⁵⁶ Hardcastle's comments illustrate just how effective the new strategy of converting public opinion through the feminist press had become and how important suffrage organs such as the *WSJ* were in advancing the cause. When Lydia Becker died in 1890, the *WSJ* disappeared, leaving a considerable gap in the history of the suffragist movement.¹⁵⁷ It was not until 1909 when Manchester suffragist Helena Swanwick would found the *Common Cause* that the strategy of establishing a suffragist organ would be revisited. The establishment of a feminist press fulfilled a function in the lives of readers interested in the issues advanced by the burgeoning women's movement. As Kathryn Shevelow observes in *Women and Print Culture*, print culture produces a need "for engagement and identification," a

¹⁵⁶ John, 153-54. The legislation in question was the Coal Mines Regulation Act (1872) Amendment Bill, introduced by Gladstone's Liberals in February, 1886. The Amendment sought to exclude women from any kind of colliery work and was meant to protect the jobs of male colliers, even though women only worked at surface jobs around the pit mouth and not underground (the result of the Mines and Collieries Act of 1842). The plight of the "pit brow lasses" would gain national attention thanks to the London media and the feminist press, particularly the *WSJ*. Ibid, 138; 150.

¹⁵⁷ Jill Liddington & Jill Norris, *One Hand Tied Behind Us: The Rise of the Women's Suffrage Movement* (London: Rivers Oram Press, 2000), 6.

need that ultimately rendered the suffrage periodical indispensable to its audience.¹⁵⁸



Although a distinctly feminist press played an important role in advancing suffrage ideas, the periodical is also a reliable guide to understanding the suffrage movement. The periodical would become a part of the movement's systematic propaganda, and consequently, the importance of this strategy cannot be underestimated. Shevelow sees the periodical as a "principal site of ideology formation . . . that has influentially represented cultural norms" to its audience, a contention that was not lost on Victorian feminists.¹⁵⁹ Suffragists worked to align their movement with the male middle-class political culture by contributing to the periodical rather than subverting it. Susan Hamilton observes that women writing in the popular press, whether feminist or not, contributed to the "legitimizing of women's participation in public discussion of political issues . . . and help[ed] to produce a public, professional identity for women as social and political critics."¹⁶⁰ Women who expressed their ideas in the periodical, irrespective of their topic or their politics, symbolized the significant social gains women had made. However, overcoming resistance to women as political reviewers and social commentators was still extremely difficult.¹⁶¹ *The Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*

¹⁵⁸ Kathryn Shevelow, *Women and Print Culture: The Construction of Femininity in the Early Periodical* (London: Routledge, 1989), 195.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶⁰ Hamilton, *Criminals, Idiots, Women & Minors*, 12-13.

¹⁶¹ Susan Hamilton, "Locating Victorian Feminism: Frances Power Cobbe, Feminist Writing and the Periodical Press," *Nineteenth Century Feminisms 2* (Spring/Summer 2000), 52.

records that just 13% of the 11,560 authors listed between 1824 and 1900 were women.

As a principal site of ideology formation for middle-class male intellectuals, editors of periodical literature ensured that feminist challenges to patriarchal authority were limited. One trend becomes obvious, however, to the researcher of the Victorian periodical: after 1870 there is a noticeable increase in the number of articles signed by women. Two periodicals, the *Westminster Review* (1824-1914) and *The Nineteenth Century* (1877-1950) illustrate this point.¹⁶² The *Westminster*¹⁶³ was known for its focus on gender but as Laurel Brake observes most of the known writers on gender reform for the periodical at mid-century were primarily male.¹⁶⁴ Indeed, there are just twelve signed articles by women writing on the subject of emancipation between 1850 and 1875. However, between 1875 and 1900 the number had increased to sixty-nine. In *The Nineteenth Century*¹⁶⁵ signed articles by women on women's rights do not appear until June of 1878, one year after the periodical's launch. But between 1878 and 1900, an amazing one hundred and twenty-seven signed articles by women were published.

¹⁶² These periodicals were chosen for their political leanings and innovative editorializing. The *Westminster* was a radical intellectual journal that supported women's suffrage. *The Nineteenth Century* was liberal, influential in its reviewing, and was known for abandoning the practice of anonymity for signed articles. The totals here are for articles written by women on the topic of women's rights (including suffrage, social and marriage reform, education, emancipation and divorce) and do not include literary reviews, travelogues, poetry or fiction. All totals are derived from title entries published between 1850 and 1900 and listed in the *Wellesley Index to Victorian Periodicals*.

¹⁶³ The *Westminster Review* had a circulation rate of 4,000 in 1860. By comparison, *Blackwood's Magazine* had a circulation of 10,000 and *Fraser's Magazine* 8,000. Houghton, "Periodical Literature and the Articulate Classes," 7.

¹⁶⁴ Laurel Brake, *Print in Transition, 1850-1910: Studies in Media and Book History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2001), 105.

¹⁶⁵ The *Nineteenth Century* was selling over 10,000 copies per issue by 1870. Houghton, *The Wellesley Index*, Vol. II, 624.

The increase in the number of signed articles by women indicates a shift in the editorial practices of some periodicals.¹⁶⁶ Not all changes were altruistically motivated. There is little doubt that profitability was a key motivator: coverage of controversial issues usually meant an increase in sales. But it is also possible that the advent of the feminist press and its mission to influence public opinion forced periodical editors to choose sides in the debate over women's suffrage. Whatever editors' motivations, there is little doubt that women's voices were gaining a hearing and that their credibility was growing. As Brian Harrison observes, "the battle for press support, or at least attention, explains much of the strategy adopted by . . . the movement for women's suffrage."¹⁶⁷ Periodical literature reveals just how successful the strategy to target the press was in terms of the increased presence of women's voices in political debates and a growing public identity for suffragists.



The strategy of targeting the periodical press facilitated ongoing debates over the suffrage issue between men and women. But how did women interact with each other over the issue? Of course, not all middle-class women were sympathetic to the suffrage cause at the end of the nineteenth century. Two

¹⁶⁶ Some periodicals resisted the idea of publishing works by women writers on women's rights. *Macmillan's Magazine* had a total of seventy-three articles published by women between 1850 and 1900 addressing topics such as travel, biography, philanthropy and children but generally ignoring the issue of women's rights. For example, although feminist Barbara Bodichon published in *Macmillan's* in 1867, her essay, with the telling title "A Dull Life," was an account of her wedding trip to New Orleans and did not address feminist issues. Barbara Bodichon, "A Dull Life," *Macmillan's Magazine* 16 (May 1867), 47-53.

¹⁶⁷ Brian Harrison, "Press and Pressure Group in Modern Britain," *The Victorian Periodical Press: Samplings and Soundings*, eds. Joanne Shattock & Michael Wolff (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1982), 273.

prominent women in particular, Eliza Lynn Linton and Mona Caird, exemplified this trend when they expressed their disagreements with each other in print. Linton and Caird were chosen as examples for this study because each had successful writing careers, each held views that were diametrically opposed to one another, and their age difference demonstrates the importance of generational viewpoints to the suffrage debate. Linton is notable for her accomplishments in the male-dominated profession of journalism and for her strong anti-suffrage sentiments. Mona Caird was a committed feminist and progressive social thinker who also earned her living through her writing, publishing five novels between 1883 and 1915.

Eliza Lynn Linton was the first woman journalist in England to receive a fixed salary with a national daily paper, the *Morning Chronicle*, where she worked as a reviewer and leader-writer between 1849 and 1851.¹⁶⁸ During her younger years Linton was a passionate advocate of women's rights, a theme that resonated throughout her first two historical novels. In 1851 she published a third novel, *Realities*, for which she received notoriety for its attack on Victorian respectability.¹⁶⁹ Linton even expressed praise for Mary Wollstonecraft in an article titled "Mary Wollstonecraft," published in the radical journal *The English Republic* in 1854.¹⁷⁰ Personally, when Linton married in 1858 she insisted on

¹⁶⁸ Barbara Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000), 229.

¹⁶⁹ Nancy Fix Anderson, "Elizabeth Lynn Linton," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography: From the Earliest Times to the Year 2000*, eds. H.C.G. Matthew & Brian Harrison (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004), 941.

¹⁷⁰ Linton called *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* "one of the boldest and bravest things ever published." Deborah T. Meem, ed. *The Rebel of the Family: Eliza Lynn Linton* (Toronto: Broadview, 2002), 15.

keeping her birth name in addition to her married name, styling herself as E. Lynn Linton, a daring undertaking for a woman during this period.

However, in the late 1860s, Linton achieved a national reputation by writing a series of sensational articles for the *Saturday Review* where she assumed the role of critic of women, whom she now characterized as the "shrieking sisterhood" for demanding the right to vote.¹⁷¹ As a strong opponent of women's rights in her later years, Linton's attacks on women became increasingly strident, a seemingly hypocritical position given her own status as a financially independent single woman with a very public persona.¹⁷² Dorothy Thompson speculates that Linton's opposition to women's rights was rooted in the fear that increased political rights would result in the "loss of authority in the private sphere of family life and morality."¹⁷³ Historians Fraser, Green and Johnston observe that Linton's views crystallized the "convoluted and contradictory sexual politics of a binaried gender model," that was popular with the middle classes at the time.¹⁷⁴ Whatever her reasons, Linton's apparent flip-flop from her earlier emancipationist attitudes to her defence of traditional roles for women, found an audience in the periodical press where she published a number of essays on the subject.

¹⁷¹ Ibid.

¹⁷² Linton and her husband William James Linton separated permanently after nine years of marriage when he moved to the United States in 1867. They never divorced and Linton lived the rest of her life in London. When Linton died in 1898 she left an estate of £16,574, a measure of her financial success and hard work. Anderson, 941-42.

¹⁷³ Dorothy Thompson, "Women, Work and Politics in Nineteenth-Century England: The Problem of Authority," 59. Thompson also notes that Linton's traditional views of marriage and motherhood were shared by George Eliot, even though both never "experienced the role in the form in which they advocated it." Ibid.

¹⁷⁴ Fraser, Green and Johnston, 9.

Linton's anti-suffrage opinions dominate a series of three controversial essays titled "The Wild Women," appearing in *The Nineteenth Century*. In "The Wild Women: No. I: As Politicians," published in July 1891, Linton claims that the right to vote would erode the traditional values associated with motherhood and marriage and only women "whose instincts are inverted, or whose anti-sexual vanity is insatiable" would aspire for greater political rights.¹⁷⁵ Valerie Sanders comments that Linton thought that the vote would render women discontent with their home lives and would ultimately weaken the empire.¹⁷⁶ For Linton, a "woman's own frame is barren. It begins and ends with herself. Reflected from her husband or her son, it has in it the glory of immortality."¹⁷⁷ In Linton's view, men are the assumed standard under which women would be but a reflection operating in the private sphere.

That these arguments for the maintenance of woman's traditional role in society would emanate from an anti-suffragist pen is not surprising. However, what is surprising is how Linton catches the middle-class suffragist ideology on its weakest point: their advocacy of a limited franchise for women. Linton rightly argues, albeit with sarcasm, that limiting the vote to widows and single women is an impossibility if the ideals of citizenship, property and taxation are to be upheld, for "why should marriage carry with it the penalty of disfranchisement? . . . The Married Woman's Property Act . . . reduces this disfranchisement to an injustice

¹⁷⁵ Eliza Lynn Linton, "The Wild Women, No I: As Politicians," *The Nineteenth Century* 30 (July, 1891): 80.

¹⁷⁶ Valerie Sanders, "Eliza Lynn Linton and the Canon," *The Rebel of the Family: Eliza Lynn Linton*, ed. Deborah T. Meem (Toronto: Broadview, 2002), 480.

¹⁷⁷ Linton, *Wild Women, No. I*, 80.

as well as an absurdity."¹⁷⁸ The suffragist policy of endorsing a limited franchise caused considerable tension and disagreement within the suffrage movement. Ray Strachey would later justify this stance as a suffragist tactic used to keep the "noisy and indecent fanatics" at bay within the movement.¹⁷⁹ Many suffragists were fearful that the movement might turn into a crusade against the male sex.¹⁸⁰ Suffragists were also fearful of being labelled as extremist, and consequently shied away from the notoriety that a platform advocating universal female suffrage might bring. While suffragists were cognizant of the merits of picking their battles, anti-suffragists such as Linton would capitalize on their reticence and use it to their advantage.¹⁸¹

In October 1891, Linton published her second essay, "The Wild Women as Social Insurgents," notable for the full articulation of her middle-class biases. Linton unapologetically compares wild women with the pit-brow women from the North who smoke "black cutty-pipes . . . [and are] withered and unsightly, worn out, and no longer women in desirableness or beauty."¹⁸² Her masculinization of pit brow women not only undermines them as women but clearly illustrates Linton's virulent objection to any female form of gender transgression, real or imagined. Linton further comments that "one can hardly say that pit-brow women,

¹⁷⁸ Ibid, 85.

¹⁷⁹ Strachey, 104; 267.

¹⁸⁰ Fulford, 80.

¹⁸¹ Many suffragists felt they had to be strategic when supporting specific pieces of legislation. Sylvia Pankhurst would later record correspondence between Lydia Becker and Elizabeth Elmy, written in 1874, discussing which piece of legislation to raise funds and lobby for: the Married Women's Property Bill or the Women's Suffrage Bill which had the majority of MPs claiming to support it. Becker comments in her letter that the majority support is an "unmistakable indication of which question is the right one to push while the present Government retain office." E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 49.

¹⁸² Eliza Lynn Linton, "The Wild Women, No. II: As Social Insurgents," *The Nineteenth Century* 30 (Oct. 1891): 597.

excellent persons and good workers as they are in their own way, are exactly the glasses in which our fine ladies find their loveliest fashions."¹⁸³ Linton's efforts to characterize women who agitated for political rights as possessing masculine characteristics, just as the pit-brow women did, is an emotional response based on middle-class ideas of social superiority and an ignorance of the lives of working-class women. Further, her denigration of suffragists as masculine is a familiar argument of last resort commonly used by men.

In her third and final essay, Linton critiques the supporters of women's rights in "The Partisans of the Wild Women." Here Linton is at her acerbic best. The wild women and their partisans are depicted as "dupes, fatally deluded, or as zealots still more fatally mistaken."¹⁸⁴ It is interesting to note that Linton characterizes suffrage reformers as mistaken zealots, a characteristic that suffragists had taken pains to avoid, according to Strachey. Linton portrays male partisans as lacking in intellectual dignity and as being "hysterically susceptible to outside influences; they prefer emotion to reason; they champion the individual as against the law and the community . . . All these, the characteristics of women, are the characteristics also of certain of these mentally unsexed partisans."¹⁸⁵ One can only assume that Linton does not consider these socially constructed assumptions about the characteristics of women as being applicable to her. When Linton resorts to calling men who support suffrage "unsexed," she utilizes a common eighteenth-century epithet frequently levelled at intellectual

¹⁸³ Ibid.

¹⁸⁴ Eliza Lynn Linton, "The Partisans of the Wild Women," *The Nineteenth Century* 31 (Mar. 1892): 457.

¹⁸⁵ Ibid.

women like Mary Wollstonecraft by the male intelligentsia. In fact, Linton's comments are reminiscent of William Hazlitt's misogynist critique of Frances Burney in 1815. Her sensational and emotional appeals fuse to make for interesting reading rather than the rational argument valued by her radical predecessors. As a result, Linton's gender inversion attempts to keep male suffragists in their place by assuming emasculation and feminization, thereby contributing to a discourse that seeks to naturalize male hegemony and reinforce the assumption that being male is the standard measurement of citizenship.¹⁸⁶ Further, as Anna Clark comments, when women demanded the vote "they implicitly challenged the very basis for the vote for men – the notion that citizens were rightfully male heads of households who virtually represented their women's interests. The independence of the male voter therefore required the

¹⁸⁶ Citizenship remained an ambiguous concept for the Victorians who were in the process of transitioning from subjects to citizens as England democratized. Victorian citizenship is an expanding field of study and a number of histories exist on the subject. Therefore, a detailed discussion of citizenship will not be undertaken here. However, it is worth noting the complexities inherent in ideas of citizenship during this period. James Vernon explains that as arguments for property qualifications for citizenship became weakened when women demanded the vote for female property holders, the "property of reason" then became an "alternative source of virtue for the aspiring citizen." Aspiring citizens referred only to men because they had a "moral and intellectual independence" that women were incapable of possessing. This helps to explain why suffragists often emphasized the rational capabilities of women in their writing. James Vernon, *Politics and the People: A Study in English Political Culture, c. 1815-1867* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 105. Vernon also comments that when reason, virtue, and independence became the criteria for citizenship "mass political participation had to occur within the private realm of the home, a setting conducive to rational political debate and thought" where the "official political subject was redefined in the image of print," an observation that not only emphasizes the importance of Victorian print culture but calls into question the veracity of the idea that the private and public spheres remained distinct and separate from each other. Ibid, 107. For another helpful discussion on the evolution of Victorian citizenship see Hall, McClelland & Rendall, *Defining the Victorian Nation*, 55-62. The authors list four criteria for citizenship that were common: "property; gender; nationality; and the nature of the 'free person'," all of which were invoked during debates in Parliament on electoral reform in 1867/68. Ibid, 58. For the changing ideas of women as citizens after 1918 see Barbara Caine, *English Feminism, 1780-1980* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1997), particularly chapter five "Feminism and the Woman Citizen in the Interwar Years." Since the Victorians were unclear about what it meant to be a citizen, I have refrained from attempting to define the term as they would have understood it.

dependence of women."¹⁸⁷ Women's suffrage not only violated the separate spheres ideology which Linton so enthusiastically supported but inadvertently called into question the right of men to vote, an idea that posed a threat to social order.

Although Linton assumed that men were the standard of citizenship, as did Wollstonecraft, Wollstonecraft maintained that liberating women politically would have little effect as long as they remained under subjugation in the private sphere and without education. For middle-class Victorians such as Linton, labour in the home, reproduction, and family care were not considered socially necessary work and were therefore outside the public realm of citizenship. Moira Gatens notes that this "sexual division of labour is inherent in the rationalism of the liberal paradigm."¹⁸⁸ Consequently, Linton assumes that women are inherently excluded as citizens from English society for the sake of the private sphere, whereas Wollstonecraft understood women's rights as being implicit with those of men.

In May of 1892, feminist Mona Caird responded to Linton's essays in *The Nineteenth Century*. Caird, like Linton, was a successful woman who earned a living as a journalist and novelist. Unlike Linton, Caird was a committed radical liberal feminist who became known nationally for an article she published in the *Westminster Review* in August, 1888 titled "Marriage." In the article, which

¹⁸⁷ Anna Clark, "Gender, Class and the Nation: Franchise Reform in England, 1832-1928," *Re-reading the Constitution: New Narratives in the Political History of England's Long Nineteenth Century*, ed. James Vernon (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 246.

¹⁸⁸ Moira Gatens, "'The Oppressed State of My Sex': Wollstonecraft on Reason, Feeling and Equality," *Feminist Interpretations and Political Theory*, eds. Mary Lyndon Shanley & Carole Pateman (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1991), 122.

elicited a large and emotional response in the form of letters and articles to the press, Caird argued that Victorian marriage was a failure and she proposed a number of ideas for transforming the institution.¹⁸⁹ So controversial were her successive articles on the subject that they were collected into a single volume titled *The Morality of Marriage* and published in 1891.¹⁹⁰ Caird was also an outspoken critic of large families and multiple pregnancies and felt that the so-called "maternal instinct" ideology was a tool used to subordinate women.¹⁹¹ She was also a member of the Personal Rights Association which advocated radical individualism, and was, by her own admission, influenced by J.S. Mill.¹⁹²

In "Defence of the So-Called 'Wild Women'," Caird opens her attack on Linton's arguments by pointing out that Linton's resistance to new ideas is the result of generational differences. Caird, who was in her thirties at the time of the debate notes that Linton, who was seventy-six years old, belongs to a generation whose views were "arrived at [during] some happy and infallible epoch in history."¹⁹³ Linton's insistence on the supremacy of motherhood is an "antique and variegated creed" to Caird, one that is illogical since men have been fathers since the beginning of time yet "they have not made fatherhood the keynote of their existence" as women have had to do.¹⁹⁴ This theme of generational difference is carried throughout the text to the closing paragraphs, where Caird

¹⁸⁹ Caird was married in 1877 to J.A. Henryson-Caird. Lucy Bland, "The Married Women, the 'New Woman' and the Feminist: Sexual Politics of the 1890s," *Equal or Different: Women's Politics, 1800-1914*, ed. Jane Rendall (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1987), 146.

¹⁹⁰ Onslow, *Women of the Press in Nineteenth-Century Britain*, 218.

¹⁹¹ Bland, 153.

¹⁹² *Ibid*, 146.

¹⁹³ Mona Caird, "A Defence of the So-Called 'Wild Women'," *The Nineteenth Century* 31 (May 1892): 811.

¹⁹⁴ *Ibid*, 819.

summarizes that the debate between Linton and her opponents is simply the "time-honoured quarrel between yesterday and to-day, between reaction and progress, between decaying institutions and the stirrings of a new social faith."¹⁹⁵ Ironically, in 1870, Linton acknowledged the same problem in *Ourselves: Essays on Women* where she states that "Our whole state here is a compromise between antiquated laws and modern feeling," an assessment Caird echoes.¹⁹⁶

Caird's impatience with the "old order" is similar to that of feminists who were becoming disillusioned with suffragist strategies at the end of the century. Sylvia Pankhurst, in describing the reasons for the dissent within the suffrage movement, would later claim that the "people who had gained control of the Suffrage Societies were not the dynamic natures who create new great currents in public life. Their policy was narrow and trivial."¹⁹⁷ It is clear that differences between generations impacted the strategies of the suffrage movement. Therefore, it is surprising that Caird fails to address the issue of women's suffrage directly in her response, given that Linton writes extensively about the issue in each of the "Wild Women" articles. But Caird writes under the assumption that women's suffrage is closely tied to their emancipation. In addition, she takes her argument one step further by linking women's rights with the emancipation of the manual labourer and the solving of future economic problems, progressive social ideas that stand in stark contrast to Linton's middle-class ignorance of the working classes and her insistence on the maintenance of separate spheres. By failing to directly address the question of suffrage, Caird

¹⁹⁵ Ibid, 828.

¹⁹⁶ Sanders, 486.

¹⁹⁷ Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 92.

illustrates how Victorian feminists often combined a number of women's issues under the umbrella of women's emancipation.

Caird's article is noteworthy for another important reason: she makes the same argument about socially constructed ideas of manners and respectability that Mary Wollstonecraft had made one hundred years earlier. Caird argues that the real tyrant in the debate over the rights of women is the woman who relies on artifice to survive in life, who "makes a weapon of her womanhood . . . living by her wits," who lacks personal dignity, and who only differs from other classes of women by virtue of her surroundings and her ideas about respectability.¹⁹⁸ In *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman* in 1792, Wollstonecraft argued that the "false system of female manners . . . robs the whole [female] sex of its dignity. . . thus understanding, strictly speaking, has been denied to woman; and instinct, sublimated into wit and cunning, for the purposes of life."¹⁹⁹ Caird capitalizes on an argument advanced by Wollstonecraft to make her point against Linton's endorsement of artifice as a true womanly quality. Indeed, as poet Mathilda Blind observed, Wollstonecraft's ideas had become part of the thought of the Victorian age.

Finally, Caird seizes on the one major weakness of Linton's argument: the reality of her own life. Caird takes issue with Linton's assumption regarding the supposed masculine appearance of wild women and pit brow lasses, an attack that Caird calls "galling if somewhat inconsequent attack upon the personal

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid*, 813.

¹⁹⁹ Wollstonecraft, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, 167-68.

appearance, which is the last resort of outraged juvenile nature."²⁰⁰ In response, Caird points to Linton's unfeminine occupation of writing as being contrary to Linton's own standards about what is modest and womanly. It is likely that Caird had Linton's own gender transgressions in mind. In 1885, Linton had published *The Autobiography of Christopher Kirkland*, her most famous piece of writing, where she inverts most of the sexes creating a "fictionalized" autobiography, a strategy that allowed her to assign the troubles of her life to a male persona.²⁰¹ Caird asserts that if Linton were living in the type of society that enforced the private sphere ideology she advocates, she would be living a life of seclusion where the "strictly unfeminine occupation of writing articles would be denied her."²⁰² The contradictions between Linton's own life and her didactic representations in the periodical press, and Caird's attack on them, illustrate the level of intensity debates between women on the subject of emancipation could reach. As Michel Foucault maintains, "discourse transmits and produces power; it reinforces it, but also undermines and exposes it, renders it fragile and makes it possible to thwart it."²⁰³ Both Caird and Linton, indeed all of the writers we have examined this far, recognized the power of discourse in advancing their ideas and opinions. They were also cognizant of the fact that contestation made it possible for their adversaries to thwart that power by exposing weaknesses in their arguments.

²⁰⁰ Caird, 824.

²⁰¹ Sanders, "Eliza Lynn Linton and the Canon," 484.

²⁰² Ibid.

²⁰³ Michel Foucault, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction, Vol. I* (New York: Vintage Books, 1990), 101.

It is clear from the example of Caird and Linton that both sides of the issue continued to rely on arguments that had been in existence for more than one hundred years, proving that arguments for women's suffrage had not become diluted once intellectual arguments had been advanced and had failed legislatively. More importantly, Caird's writing represents a shift away from Linton's emotional writing style to advance an argument. Instead, feminists such as Caird adopted the rationality of the male middle-class intelligentsia in their discourse specifically to illustrate that there were no intellectual differences between men and women and that it was possible for a woman to make rational, informed choices at the polling booth.



The importance of the periodical as a strategic site of contestation was being questioned at the end of the nineteenth century. As mid-Victorian suffragists aged, a younger generation would begin to critique the ineffectiveness of their strategies. Reliance on the parliamentary system and the goodwill of politicians was falling out of favour with younger suffragists who were no longer content to wait for political reform in a "lady-like" manner as their predecessors had.²⁰⁴ As a result, more militant tactics were being proposed in the battle for public opinion.

²⁰⁴ Suffragist Helena Swanwick would justify the older generation's approach to legislative reform in 1929: "Not easily can young women now reconstruct English society in the 1860s and grasp two of its most important conditions for a successful feminist movement. First and foremost the leaders must be lady-like and modest . . . Secondly it was a time when people still believed in the appeal to reason, and there was a very widespread belief that women could not reason." Marlow, 271.

CHAPTER FOUR

HINDSIGHT: WRITING THE HISTORY OF THE WOMEN'S SUFFRAGE MOVEMENT

And so it is that doctrines, which in the eighteenth century were held to be subversive of all morality, are now thought to be its very basis. If practically there is nothing more to be learned from Mary Wollstonecraft's Vindication of the Rights of Woman, since all its theories have become facts, the new edition so soon to appear will have served its purpose, if it remind women of the old state of slavery from which they have so recently been freed.

Elizabeth Robins Pennell
The Fortnightly Review, 1890

The issue of the enfranchisement of women remained unresolved as the nineteenth century drew to a close. Despite the advance of intellectual arguments and new strategies for pressuring politicians, suffrage legislation continued to be stymied in Parliament, where partisan politics often guided the activities of political parties. On July 7, 1897, debate on the Verminous Persons Bill dominated the proceedings of the House of Commons and a lengthy discussion of the various types of vermin ensured that debate on the women's suffrage question would be non-existent. The Women's Suffrage Bill was slated to be the second order of business that day, and when a division was taken before the end of the session, sixty-eight members voted for closure but eighty-two voted against, defeating the legislation.²⁰⁵ Why was it that politicians refused so steadfastly to grant the vote to women? Why was it that individual MPs were prepared to sponsor bills but political parties refused to pass suffrage legislation?

Suffragists themselves would often try to account for the continual failure of suffrage bills in the periodical press. One notable example is the writing of feminist Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, who in October of 1897 vented her frustration with the parliamentary system in the *Westminster Review*. By 1897 Elmy was a well-known and respected radical feminist who was considered to be the main force behind the success of the Married Women's Property Act of 1882.²⁰⁶ She was also the first secretary of the Manchester National Society for Women's Suffrage and a strong advocate of contraceptive rights for women. Elmy became famous in 1894 and 1895 for writing two books on sex education,

²⁰⁵ Ignota, "Women's Suffrage," *Westminster Review* 148 (Oct. 1897): 368. "Ignota" was a pseudonym used by Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy.

²⁰⁶ Bland, 160-61.

under the pseudonym of Ellis Ethelmer.²⁰⁷ Elmy achieved notoriety within suffrage circles for living openly with Ben Elmy in the early 1870s, refusing to marry him until she became pregnant with their first child, a decision she was encouraged to take by suffragists who were fearful that the scandal would hurt the suffrage cause.²⁰⁸ Elmy's 1897 article, "Women's Suffrage," is important for historians for two reasons: first, it outlines why suffrage legislation continued to fail; second, it is a historical record of the progress of nineteenth-century suffrage legislation as it wound its way through the parliamentary system.

In "Women's Suffrage," Elmy is amazed at the defeat of the proposed legislation and cannot refrain from juxtaposing the success of the Verminous Persons Bill with the defeat of the Women's Suffrage Bill, concluding that "there were only sixty-eight members of the house of commons who held that the consideration of the claims of half the nation to political justice were of more importance that would-be comic discussion as to the distinction between various kinds of vermin."²⁰⁹ Elmy attributes the continuous defeat of suffrage bills to four reasons.

The first is the "natural fear and jealousy of human justice entertained by privileged male officialdom," the blame for which she lays at the feet of the

²⁰⁷ It is unclear whether Ellis Ethelmer was the pseudonym used by Elizabeth, her husband Ben Elmy (also a feminist and writer on sex education and marital reform), or both. See Bland, 154-55 for evidence supporting all three possibilities.

²⁰⁸ Elmy, according to Sylvia Pankhurst, was inspired to remain unmarried by the "example and teaching of Mary Wollstonecraft." Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 31. Following Elmy's marriage, Millicent Garrett Fawcett wrote to Elmy asking her to resign her secretaryship of the Married Women's Property Committee on the grounds that her personal lifestyle (becoming pregnant out of wedlock) would hurt the cause. Elmy ignored Fawcett's request. Bland, 160.

²⁰⁹ Ignota, 368.

leaders of both political parties.²¹⁰ Secondly, Elmy claims that the contents of the 1897 Bill were misrepresented as enfranchising only rich, idle women. Suffragists were still struggling over the narrow property qualification issue, and Elmy does her best to answer this criticism arguing that the Bill would in fact "enfranchise an overwhelming proportion of hard-working women" compared to wealthy women who had inherited property.²¹¹ Elmy's stance over a limited suffrage for women seems contradictory given her advocacy of property rights for married women, but may be explained by the persistent suffragist belief that a gradual extension of the franchise to married women would become reality once a limited suffrage for single and propertied women had been achieved. Carole Pateman believes this contradiction is at the heart of democratic theory and that the continued silence "about the status of wives is testament to the strength of the union of a transformed patriarchy with liberalism."²¹² Although liberalism, theoretically, promised women equal standing with men as individuals, the socio-economic reality in the nineteenth century was that the subordination of wives continued to be seen as "natural" rather than historically or culturally specific.

Third, Elmy points to the ignorance of women themselves, noting that few women had the experience of "carrying any measure in Parliament further than the stage of second reading" and were, therefore, misled into thinking that subsequent stages would pass despite the fact that third and final readings were

²¹⁰ Ibid, 369.

²¹¹ Ibid.

²¹² Pateman, 213. Pateman asserts that this view persists today and is reinforced by democratic theorists who routinely ignore the problem of women's subordination to their husbands in liberal societies. Ibid. The theoretical tension between liberalism and the feminist movement remains outside the scope of this study but Pateman's work is an excellent source on the topic.

the most crucial stages of any piece of legislation.²¹³ As a result, women had failed to continue to lobby and work hard for the passing of the Bill during its critical final stages. Finally, Elmy attributes the defeat of the 1897 Bill to Queen Victoria's jubilee celebrations, where men and women "jaded themselves with excitement and entertainments."²¹⁴ The jubilee celebrations were particularly galling to Elmy who proposed that if the Queen's subjects had truly wished to honour her, "recognition of her services by the enfranchisement of her sex" would have been a fitting memorial.²¹⁵ Elmy uses the Queen, who was adamantly opposed to women's suffrage,²¹⁶ as an example of the fitness of women to take part in political affairs. Arguing that Victoria "is essentially a commonplace woman, educated by the special circumstances of her life," Elmy notes that although "a great woman might easily be a great Queen . . . the reign of Victoria is evidence enough that the average woman has political aptitudes,"²¹⁷ a comment that consigns the Queen to the female "class" despite her social rank as sovereign. Elmy's emphasis on the political capabilities of the Queen also calls into question the socially constructed assumption that ordinary women should be consigned to live as idealized objects of worship within the private sphere, where a position of domestic influence negated the necessity for political and civil rights in the public realm.

²¹³ Ignota, 371.

²¹⁴ Ibid, 372.

²¹⁵ Ibid.

²¹⁶ The Queen had famously called women's rights agitation "mad, wicked folly." American suffragist Elizabeth Cady Stanton, in her 1898 autobiography, recalls being irritated by British suffragists' tributes to Victoria at their meetings, noting that the queen had never "done anything to merit the approbation of the advocates of suffrage for women." Quoted in Bolt, "The Ideas of British Suffragism," 34.

²¹⁷ Ignota, 372.

Elmy's arguments are logical and argued with a great deal of precision, but they are not without their limitations. What is curious about Elmy's reasoning is that she fails to see that politicians were basically unsympathetic to any movement which involved a reassessment of the relationship between men and women.²¹⁸ As we have seen in the writing of prominent Victorians such as Eliza Lynn Linton, a disruption in social order brought about by reconstructed relations between the sexes was a familiar trope in anti-suffrage literature. It is another reason, in addition to partisan politics, why legislators would claim to find no fault with early drafts of suffrage bills, only to vote against them in the final stages. Elmy fails to directly discuss the underlying social reasons for repeated legislative failures, reasons that strengthened her opponents' resistance to women's suffrage.

Elmy's history of suffrage legislation in the *Westminster Review* is also an important record of the numerous defeats of several pieces of suffrage legislation since mid-century. Beginning with John Stuart Mill's election to Parliament in 1865,²¹⁹ Elmy offers a systematic and detailed account of the legislative history of numerous suffrage bills and suffragists' struggle with a parliamentary system that had proven to be a formidable opponent. More significantly, Elmy's essay is also one example of a conscious effort by a suffragist to record a history of the movement. In the opening paragraphs, Elmy explores the origins of suffrage thought. She recounts the days when peeresses were "summoned to attend

²¹⁸ Banks, *The Politics of British Feminism*, 86.

²¹⁹ Elmy recalls being present at the meeting in St. James Hall where Mill declared his candidacy for Westminster in 1865. Ignota, 358.

Parliament, and women filled the functions of high sheriffs, keepers of castles, rulers of large districts" during medieval times.²²⁰

As we have seen, women's ancient rights under English law had become a well-established trope. Elmy characterizes the loss of these ancient rights as occurring during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, brought on by the Restoration period where women were devalued in English social life. However, Elmy observes that despite this period of repression a "brilliant succession of women writers" would claim equality with the other half of the human race, a claim that is "sometimes supposed to be the original demand" of women's rights.²²¹ In addition, Elmy credits the survival of ideas about women's rights to the writing of intellectual women from preceding centuries, such as Mary Astell (1678-1731), up to and including Harriet Taylor's article published in the *Westminster Review* in 1851.²²² Elmy is clearly searching for the origins of the feminist ideology, the "original demand" she wholeheartedly embraces. In doing so, she sees the writing of intellectual predecessors as a necessary source of feminist thought which Victorian feminists were able to build upon.

Elmy, in assigning credit to her predecessors, also notices that these early pioneers did not address the issue of women's suffrage specifically. She

²²⁰ Ibid, 357.

²²¹ Ibid.

²²² Elmy is careful to acknowledge the role of the *Westminster Review* in her short history of women's rights. In commenting that the *Westminster* was responsible for publishing Taylor's article in 1851, she completes the sentence by stating that there has been "no period without its woman-voices crying in the wilderness" as a result, a comment that directly links the periodical with women's expressions of emancipation. Ibid. In doing so, she acknowledges the influential role periodical literature played in the history of the women's movement in England. The *Westminster* also frequently published Elmy's work, so she may have had an economic motivation for acknowledging the periodical.

theorizes that these early feminists did not demand suffrage rights since the question was not a matter of "life and death" until the nineteenth century when men began to demand enfranchisement. Since a woman's legal disabilities were shared by the "overwhelming majority of the nation," men and women alike during the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, the issue was not as urgent for women.²²³ Elmy's analysis offers a plausible explanation for why the issue of suffrage is seldom discussed at length, if at all, by radical eighteenth-century feminist writers such as Wollstonecraft.

Elmy was not the first Victorian feminist to revisit the contributions of the early pioneers. Elmy's close friend, suffragist Harriet Mcllquham, also explored the activities of her feminist predecessors. Mcllquham initially encountered suffrage ideas at a lecture given by Owenite George Jacob Holyoake in 1856.²²⁴ She later became a national suffrage figure through her speaking and writing and is notable for becoming the first married woman poor-law guardian in England, being elected to the position by a large majority in Boddington in 1881 despite the fact that married women were legally barred from being nominated or elected at the time. Mcllquham also gained a national reputation for her scholarly essays on the history of feminist writing, such as an essay for the *Westminster Review* entitled "Mary Astell: A Seventeenth Century Advocate for Women" published in April 1898.²²⁵

²²³ Ibid, 358.

²²⁴ Linda Walker, "Harriet Mcllquham: Local Politician and Suffragist," *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* <<http://www.oxforddnb.com/>> (25 October 2005). Mcllquham is another example, along with Bessie Rayner Parkes and Barbara Bodichon, of how a generation of Victorian suffragists were influenced by key figures from the Owenite and Unitarian movements.

²²⁵ Ibid.

In addition to the article on Astell, McIlquham also wrote "Sophia, A Person of Quality: The Eighteenth Century Militant Champion of Women's Rights," published in the *Westminster Review* later that same year. In this essay, McIlquham analyzes a pamphlet, published in 1739, by "Sophia: A Person of Quality." McIlquham acknowledges that although Sophia's identity remains a mystery, her "pamphlets show conclusively that her keen intelligence had pierced beyond the veil with which the folly and frivolity of her times had half hidden the subjection of her sex."²²⁶ Sophia's motive for writing the pamphlet was in response to an article appearing in a periodical called *Common Sense* in September, 1739.²²⁷ The article, titled "The Province of Women" was written by "A Gentleman" who asserted that "man's province is universal and comprehends everything. . . [and] the graces of women should be trimmed to the strength of men."²²⁸ The gentleman's assertion that women should be measured by the male standard demonstrates how deeply rooted in English culture the assumption was, a trope that Eliza Lynn Linton continued to fully embrace at the end of the nineteenth century. Significantly for the purposes of this study, Sophia's response to the Gentleman demonstrates that not only was she reading periodical

²²⁶ Harriet McIlquham, "Sophia, A Person of Quality: The Eighteenth Century Militant Champion of Women's Rights," *Westminster Review* 150 (Nov. 1898): 533.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 535.

²²⁸ *Ibid.* McIlquham speculates at the end of the article that "Sophia" may have been Lady Mary Wortley Montagu (1689-1762), and that the "Gentleman" may have been political satirist Alexander Pope (1688-1744). *Ibid.*, 543. Pope and Montagu were engaged in bitter political feuds with each other in print. Pope unflatteringly satirized Montagu as "Sappho" in his *Epistles to Several Persons* published in the 1730s. Interestingly, in 1911 Sylvia Pankhurst also referred to Montagu's work particularly her memoirs and her account of how "Peeresses of the eighteenth century had frequently disturbed the serenity of the House of Lords debates" to illustrate how disruptive acts by women in Parliament had historical precedence as a strategy. Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, 71.

literature, but that she used the forum of the written word as a means of protest, and as a springboard for public dialogue over the issue of women's rights.

McIlquaham undertakes an in-depth analysis of Sophia's tract by quoting large sections from her pamphlet, leaving us with an ideologically important example of eighteenth-century feminist writing. For example, Sophia challenges the culturally specific characteristics assigned to women, particularly false flattery, manners and sensuality, the same arguments that would be advanced by Wollstonecraft fifty-three years later. McIlquaham also connects Sophia's argument as being in "precisely the same manner" as John Stuart Mill's argument about women and manners, creating a link between eighteenth and nineteenth-century feminist thought.²²⁹ McIlquaham's article is also unique for its use of primary source material.²³⁰ Further, her work reveals how Victorian feminists were searching for an identity in history, for role models, and for sources of the ideas that they were currently embracing. McIlquaham concludes with the hope that her article will stimulate others to research Sophia's identity, thereby suggesting the need for a feminist canon.

Similarly, feminist Elizabeth Robins Pennell would write "A Century of Women's Emancipation," appearing in the *Fortnightly Review* in September 1890. Pennell offers a review of the recent publication of a new edition of Wollstonecraft's *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Pennell opens with an examination of the origins of feminist thought by tracing the "doctrine of women's

²²⁹ Ibid, 547.

²³⁰ It appears that McIlquaham reviewed several of Sophia's tracts, often referring to "pamphlets" when discussing Sophia's writing. Ibid, 533.

rights" to Henry VIII's religious break with Rome and with the advent of the Reformation, where the right to exercise "private judgment" began to release people from the political, religious and social chains that bound them.²³¹ She also credits the French and American Revolutions with the advancement of arguments for the rights of women by contributing to a growing awareness of individual rights during the second half of the eighteenth century.

Pennell spends the remainder of her article examining the work of Mary Wollstonecraft. She says that although *A Vindication* had been all but forgotten, it is historically and socially important because "it helps one to realize the social change a century has wrought, many of its most daring statements having become the commonplaces of to-day."²³² Here, Pennell conflates the past with the present to explain the origins of the ideas that had become commonplace at the end of the century. She anticipates that Wollstonecraft's writings will be confusing to the nineteenth-century reader, much as they can be for today's reader. To ameliorate this problem, she assumes the role of guide for her readers, interpreting why Wollstonecraft afforded so much space to the issue of female manners while at times castigating women for their weaknesses. Pennell explains that the issue of manners, which seemed to be "the apotheosis of silliness" to the nineteenth-century reader, was a real cause for concern for eighteenth-century feminists since "weakness, ignorance, and deference" in a woman were considered to be "the highest feminine qualities" at the time.²³³ She

²³¹ Elizabeth Robins Pennell, "A Century of Women's Emancipation," *Fortnightly Review* n.s. 48 (Sept. 1890): 409.

²³² *Ibid.*, 408.

²³³ *Ibid.*, 412.

also elaborates that Wollstonecraft was concerned about the immorality of female education since it only taught girls the art of pleasing men.

Further, Wollstonecraft's difficult writing style and numerous grammatical errors are explained by Pennell's use of a quote from George Eliot who commented that "Mary Wollstonecraft, we imagine, wrote not at all for writing's sake, but for the pressure of other motives."²³⁴ Finally, Pennell attributes the rejection of Wollstonecraft's work for almost a century to the biographical entry of Wollstonecraft in *Chalmer's Dictionary*, where a description of the "immorality of her doctrines" and "unwomanliness of her conduct" fostered a negative critique of her personal life to the detriment of her philosophical accomplishments. Pennell is correct in noticing that Wollstonecraft's ideological legacy had been unfairly impacted by perceptions about her personal life. Although Pennell fails to fully explore the cultural, social and political ramifications of Wollstonecraft's work and Victorian responses to it, she must be credited for her attempts to understand Wollstonecraft's notoriety and the historical significance of her contributions to feminist thought.

Efforts by nineteenth-century feminists to search for the origins of feminist thought and to revisit the histories and writings of feminist pioneers is a noteworthy development unique to the end of the nineteenth century, as the writing of Elmy, McIlquham and Pennell demonstrates. Perhaps their search for their ideological roots was born out of their frustration with the decades-long parliamentary stalemate over the suffrage issue. Nevertheless, evidence from

²³⁴ Ibid, 413.

periodical literature confirms that earlier feminist voices were indeed ignored by Victorian suffragists until the end of the century. In doing so, mid-century suffragists complicated their journey to enfranchisement by inadvertently reinforcing the hegemony that subordinated them. Yet, in their search for the philosophical underpinnings of feminism, Victorian suffragists created a narrative at the end of the century that educated the reading public. In the process, they contributed their own voices to a developing feminist canon while waiting for parliamentary change.



By the end of the century it had become abundantly clear that political parties were not prepared to extend the franchise to women. New strategies were needed and suffragists didn't waste time in re-organizing following the defeat of the 1897 bill. Two developments distinguish the suffrage activism of the Victorian period from that of the Edwardian. One was the formation of the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) in 1897, which reunited a number of suffrage organizations that had been splintered into various factions since the mid-1860s.²³⁵ Under the presidency of Millicent Garrett Fawcett, the NUWSS would bring the constitutionalist perspective of suffrage into the twentieth century.²³⁶ The second development occurred in 1903 when Emmeline

²³⁵ Historian Roger Fulford estimates that approximately 500 affiliated societies amalgamated under the NUWSS. Fulford, 134.

²³⁶ Sandra Stanley Holton defines the "constitutionalist" perspective as being concerned with the reinstatement of women to the place they had once held within the ancient origins of the British constitution. Sandra Stanley Holton, "The Making of Suffrage History," *Votes for Women*, eds. June Purvis & Sandra Stanley Holton (London: Routledge, 2000), 16. Roger Fulford characterizes constitutionalists as being more moderate and leaning towards conservatism. Fulford, 134.

Pankhurst proposed a new tactic that would gain publicity and challenge the country's legal system: violence.

The rise of the Pankhursts and the establishment of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) is a well-documented and studied development that does not need further reiteration here. However, for the purposes of concluding this study of the suffrage movement, acknowledgement of the emergence of a new site of contestation between suffrage activists must be made. As we have seen, the periodical was often a site of contestation between women during the final decades of the Victorian period. However, by the beginning of the twentieth century the historical narrative had emerged as a new site of contestation and it became immensely important to both suffragists and suffragettes to tell their version of events and secure their place within historical discourse. Consequently, suffragists and suffragettes were not only engaged in power relations with anti-suffragists but they were also engaged with each other for power over the history of the movement. Michel Foucault theorizes that "discourses are tactical elements or blocks operating in the field of force relations; there can exist different and even contradictory discourses within the same strategy."²³⁷ Foucault theorizes that competing viewpoints and objectives historically found expression in war in Western societies until force relationships "gradually became invested in the order of political power."²³⁸ Given the emphasis on writing a history of the movement by both groups, it is probable that feminists from both camps began to sense that political victory was near and

²³⁷ Foucault, 101-02.

²³⁸ Ibid, 102.

singular claims of winning political rights for women became more appealing than ever.

How did these histories differ and what are the ramifications for how we presently think of the history of the suffrage movement? Edwardian suffragists, building upon previous suffragist histories, can lay claim to producing the first book-length history of the suffrage movement written by Helen Blackburn in 1902. In *Women's Suffrage*, Blackburn uses biography, specifically the life of Lydia Becker, editor of the *Women's Suffrage Journal*, to describe the suffragists' constitutionalist perspective. However, Blackburn's version of events is problematic and illustrates how the suffragist perspective was not without its biases. For example, historian Sandra Stanley Holton discusses how Blackburn minimizes the contributions of radicals such as Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy and ignores the suffragist origins of the campaign to repeal the Contagious Diseases Acts in 1870.²³⁹ Blackburn also fails to discuss the problem of the exclusion of married women from the demand for suffrage, even though it was "one of the main issues that eventually fragmented the movement in the late 1880s."²⁴⁰ She also carefully avoids references to the movement's more controversial members or to those specific strategies that would contribute an appearance of disunity, irrationality or disorder.

For five years the constitutionalist perspective would remain the only historical account of the suffrage movement until the establishment of the WSPU,

²³⁹ Holton, 16. Elmy's contributions were most likely minimized due to her radical personal life. Elmy would defect from the NUWSS to join the WSPU in 1905.

²⁴⁰ Ibid.

which offered a competing perspective on how the vote was won. In 1907, the official organ of the suffragette movement,²⁴¹ *Votes for Women*, featured in its first number "The History of the Suffrage Movement" written by Sylvia Pankhurst.²⁴² Sylvia would contribute a number of articles on the movement's history to the paper until 1909, after which time the articles were expanded into a book titled *The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement: 1905-1910*, published in 1911. Although the history appearing in *Votes for Women* originally contained major nineteenth-century events and persons "dating back to the Reform Act of 1832," this material was omitted from the book version.²⁴³ Instead, the formation of the WSPU in 1903 is situated as the suffrage movement's starting point.

In contrast, in 1931 Sylvia would write *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals*. This version, written to "estimate character and intention in the mellowing light of intervening years," opens with an entire first chapter devoted to the feminist activities of Pankhurst's father, Richard

²⁴¹ The term "suffragette" was coined by a reporter for the *Daily Mail* in 1906 which frequently covered the activities of the WSPU. Originally meant to be derogatory, the militants adopted the term for, as Cristabel Pankhurst recalled in her autobiography *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote*, the name had a "spirit" that differentiated the militants from "the notion conveyed by the older appellation" of suffragist. Quoted in DiCenzo, 48. Similarly, Sylvia Pankhurst in her 1911 history confirms that the *Daily Mail* used the new name to distinguish between the WSPU and the older suffragists "who strongly objected to our tactics." E. Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*: 62; f.n. 1. I understand the terms as the Pankhurst sisters have explained them and also use them to differentiate between constitutional suffragists and their militant counterparts.

²⁴² *Votes for Women* was a successful suffragette publication. In April 1908, monthly circulation figures were 5,000; by early 1910 the journal was a weekly publication enjoying a circulation of 30,000 per week. Cristabel's journal *Suffragette* would also claim a weekly circulation of 30,000 in 1912. Harrison, 278. The rapid increase in circulation numbers is indicative of the growing interest in suffrage issues and the effectiveness of suffragette tactics in calling attention to women's lack of political rights. Brian Harrison also notes that *Votes for Women* spent most of its newsprint justifying the movement's violent methods and often failed to detail how winning the vote for women would promote women's emancipation, a central difference between suffragette and suffragist periodical literature. Ibid, 285.

²⁴³ DiCenzo, 46.

Pankhurst, who is portrayed as a central actor during the nineteenth-century suffrage movement.²⁴⁴ In the second chapter, Sylvia briefly considers other feminist pioneers by tracing the movement's origins to ideas of emancipation advanced by Mary Astell and Mary Wollstonecraft.²⁴⁵ She also devotes half a page to nineteenth-century suffragists such as John Stuart Mill, although this information only serves as an introduction to a short history on the contributions of Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy, who left the constitutionalists to join the suffragettes in 1905. Sylvia correctly notes that Elmy was "one of the very few original suffrage pioneers to welcome and join the young militant movement," an important legacy that is omitted from suffragist accounts and perhaps would have been lost to history if not for Sylvia's acknowledgement.²⁴⁶ In both of her histories, like the suffragists before her, Sylvia's account is problematic for its omissions, particularly any detailed account of the work of the nineteenth-century suffragists, who she mentions simply as "the old Suffrage workers [who] had lost heart and energy in the long struggle."²⁴⁷ Sylvia also "glossed over" dissent and division within suffragette ranks in both versions, omitting the contributions of feminists who resisted the dictatorial nature of the Pankhursts' leadership, such as Teresa Billington-Greig and Charlotte Despard, who would go on to form the influential Women's Freedom League in 1907 following their ouster from the WSPU. Sylvia's own expulsion from the WSPU in 1914 is the exception. Sylvia

²⁴⁴ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London: Longmans, 1931), vii.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 30.

²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 32. Elmy was seventy-seven years old at the time of her defection. Suffragist Ray Strachey only makes two passing references to Elmy in her 1928 history, *The Cause*. Strachey, 274; 292.

²⁴⁷ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette*, 11.

was expelled at Cristabel's request for her continued involvement with the socialist movement and she devotes an entire chapter to the rift with her mother and sister in her 1931 book.²⁴⁸



During the last decade historians have begun to examine the histories of both suffragists and suffragettes because, as we have seen, they remain important documents as much for what they don't say as for what they do. In "The Making of Suffrage History," Sandra Stanley Holton offers an insightful summary of the differences between both histories: whereas suffragette history revolves around the heroic acts of two central leaders who overthrow the established order in the street and the prison cell, suffragist histories portray suffragists as proponents of a "steady, organic process" where the narrative is organized in terms of politics within the House of Commons and discussions in the drawing room.²⁴⁹ Holton's distinction is critical to our present understanding of the two groups and their historical representations. It explains why suffrage histories often took the form of biography or autobiography where heroic figures become central to the text. It also explains why Millicent Garrett Fawcett carefully portrayed nineteenth-century feminists and the NUWSS as an organized movement of women steadily progressing toward enfranchisement in *Women's Suffrage: A Short History of a Great Movement* (1912).

²⁴⁸ Holton, 19. Cristabel would inform the press of Sylvia's ouster saying that "since the W.S.P.U. does not exist for the mere purpose of propaganda, but is a fighting organization, it must have only one policy, one programme and one command . . . the policy and the programme are framed, and the word of command is given by Mrs. Pankhurst and myself." Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 519. In 1959 Cristabel would publish *Unshackled: The Story of How We Won the Vote*, where no mention is made of her estrangement with Sylvia. Holton, 20.

²⁴⁹ Holton, 21-22.

Sociologist Roger V. Gould explains these differing approaches as characteristic of events where a tendency to highlight collective identities is usually done at the expense of others.²⁵⁰ Historian Laura E. Nym Mayhall concurs, arguing that suffrage feminists often constructed meaning for themselves at the expense of silencing others.²⁵¹ Consequently, during times of political turmoil "hundreds of thousands of would-be shapers of events compete to provide definitive interpretations" of what has taken place.²⁵² Further, networks of social ties help to create a collective identity that define people, which was why the history of the movement had deep personal significance for most Edwardian feminists.²⁵³ As a result, counter-claims to their version of events were often seen as personally threatening.

For suffragettes the emergence of new discursive identities represented a noticeable shift from the identities suffragists had carved out for themselves within periodical literature in the preceding century. Indeed, the emphasis on the importance of the written word remains one of the few common denominators between the two groups. To ensure that the historical claims of the militant movement would survive, the Suffragette Fellowship was formed in 1926 by former members of the WSPU and the Women's Freedom League. The Fellowship was anxious to counter suffragist renderings of the WSPU, particularly following the release of Ray Strachey's *The Cause* in 1928, where

²⁵⁰ Roger V. Gould, *Insurgent Identities: Class, Community, and Protest in Paris from 1848 to the Commune* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 200-02.

²⁵¹ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, "Creating the 'Suffragette Spirit': British Feminism and the Historical Imagination," *Women's History Review* 4:3 (1995): 334.

²⁵² Gould, 201.

²⁵³ *Ibid.*

militant activity was portrayed as being instigated by a "small group of people" who had "not any obvious ways of influencing public men."²⁵⁴ The Fellowship's primary role was to encourage former suffragettes to write autobiographical histories of the movement. In most of these accounts, three themes dominate the discourse: First, as Hilda Kean points out, these accounts always de-emphasized personal life prior to feminist contact. Instead, a protagonist's encounter with suffrage feminism at a specific time is highlighted and is usually described as an epiphany for the individual woman. During this period, "women's individuality and own identity were bound up in publicly recognised events."²⁵⁵ This approach ensured that the suffrage experience, rather than the individual journeys of those women outside of the movement's leadership, dominated the discourse.

Second, the motif of the older suffragette "converting" the younger at rallies and meetings appears in many of the narratives, even though most never met each other personally.²⁵⁶ Finally, rather than portraying the suffragette as passive victim enduring forcible feedings while imprisoned, as was common pre-war, post-war portrayals now exalted the comradeship of the participants through their acts of militancy.²⁵⁷ As Roger Gould has theorized, this portrayal highlights a collective identity that essentially rendered imprisonment and forced feedings as the criteria for inclusion into the community of militants. In addition to these three themes, histories of the Suffragette Fellowship selectively presented

²⁵⁴ Strachey, 292.

²⁵⁵ Hilda Kean, "Searching for the Past in Present Defeat: The Construction of Historical and Political Identity in British Feminism in the 1920s and 1930s," *Women's History Review* 3:1 (1994): 59.

²⁵⁶ *Ibid*, 69.

²⁵⁷ Mayhall, 330.

suffragette violence as violence against property. Assaults against individuals were not recorded although several prominent WSPU members were involved in physical assaults between 1909 and 1914.²⁵⁸ Other suffragette forms of civil disobedience that did not involve violence or incarceration, such as property tax resistance, were also ignored.

The efforts of the Suffragette Fellowship during the 1930s ensured that suffragist contributions would be eclipsed by the activities and personalities of the militant movement for much of the twentieth century. Evidence of this can be found in London, where a portrait of Emmeline Pankhurst occupies a place in the National Portrait Gallery of London in a section reserved for distinguished political figures of the Edwardian period.²⁵⁹ And in 1930, Prime Minister Stanley Baldwin dedicated a statue of Emmeline Pankhurst in Victoria Tower Gardens, located next to the Houses of Parliament.²⁶⁰ The portrait and the statue perpetuate the perception that Emmeline Pankhurst was single-handedly responsible for the enfranchisement of women, an issue that caused controversy both within, and outside of, militant suffrage circles at the time. As recently as 1958, a committee was formed to make additions to the site of Pankhurst's statue in the form of a bronze medallion honouring Cristabel and a bronze replica of the Holloway prisoners' brooch.²⁶¹ This over-emphasis on the four short years of militancy not only impacted public opinion but has consequences for how we view the history of the suffrage movement today.

²⁵⁸ Ibid, 331.

²⁵⁹ Kean, 57.

²⁶⁰ Mayhall, 335.

²⁶¹ Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860-1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), 137.

The abandonment of militant activity during WWI by the WSPU and their support of the war tended to supersede the activities of the pre-war women's movement.²⁶² The fact that suffragettes had the ability to participate in public spectacle and create a history of their own can also be attributed to the hard work and years of suffragist discourse in periodical literature that allowed for the growing acceptance of women's participation in public affairs. Representations of the differences between the suffragist and suffragette experiences are another testament to the complex and uneven nature of the suffrage movement. Their histories were usually highly subjective and often adversarial in nature and both groups were complicit in shaping history to suit their political aspirations and manipulate public opinion. While their histories were contemporary in the events they described, the accuracy of their interpretations are sometimes questionable. Fortunately for historians many examples of both versions are extant and taken together they provide a view of a movement that was dynamic and fluid, especially when contrasted with the obstinacy of the House of Commons.



Today, Victorian periodical literature provides us with contemporary accounts of the uneven progress of the women's suffrage movement, allowing us to re-evaluate how we view the suffrage movement and its relationship to feminist history. Unfortunately, twentieth-century representations often serve to dichotomize the suffrage movement into constitutional versus militant camps, minimizing the work of earlier feminists who dedicated their lives to the cause.

²⁶² Ibid, 138-39.

Nonetheless, the periodical press gave space to women's voices and provided the opportunity for a public dialogue to take place between men and women on both sides of the issue. In the process, suffragist discourse contributed to a history of the ideological underpinnings of the nineteenth-century suffrage movement and to broader arguments for women's emancipation. The writing of nineteenth-century suffragists in the periodical should be viewed as a "complex and unstable process whereby discourse can be both an instrument and an effect of power" used to gain recognition for women's rights.²⁶³ Only then can the cumulative impact of suffrage discourse in the nineteenth century, and its relationship to the enfranchisement of women in the twentieth, be fully understood.

²⁶³ Foucault, 101.

EPILOGUE

Perhaps the women born in the happier days that are to come, while rejoicing in the inheritance that we of to-day are preparing for them, may sometimes wish that they could have lived in the heroic days of stress and struggle and have shared with us the joy of battle, the exaltation that comes of sacrifice of self for great objects and the prophetic vision that assures us of the certain triumph of this twentieth-century fight for human emancipation.

Emmeline Pankhurst

The Suffragette: The History of the Women's Militant Suffrage Movement, 1905-1910, 1911

There is a great deal of truth to the argument that militancy and violence worked to sway public opinion in favour of granting women the suffrage during the Edwardian period. It can also be argued that politicians finally became persuaded of women's competency as citizens as a direct result of their contributions to the war effort. Indeed, these early twentieth-century circumstances undoubtedly played a large part in achieving the vote for women. But these factors are not the entire story. Women's political equality was also achieved through a century of work and sacrifice by untold numbers of women who would not live to realize their dream of equal citizenship. Although many Edwardian suffragettes would cast votes in national elections,²⁶⁴ few of the prominent nineteenth-century suffragists would live to see the enfranchisement of women.²⁶⁵ Nevertheless, their discourse, and its use as a strategy for obtaining increased rights for women, broadens our understanding of the nineteenth-century suffrage movement, failures and all.

During the first fifty years of the nineteenth century, feminist challenges to patriarchy took many forms but the one common thread throughout the period was feminist writing. The origins of nineteenth-century feminist ideas can be traced to the writings of eighteenth-century feminist intellectuals such as Mary

²⁶⁴ In a strange turn of events Emmeline Pankhurst would miss the opportunity to cast her vote in the general election of 1918 having moved to Canada in 1917. However, she would return to England in 1926 to run unsuccessfully as a Conservative candidate in the general election of 1928. She died in June of that year just weeks before the Representation of the People Act became law in July.

²⁶⁵ Bessie Rayner Parkes, one of the founders of the *Englishwoman's Journal*, would live to see the partial enfranchisement of women before passing away in 1925. Emily Davies, education reformer and founder of Girton College for women, would also cast her vote in the general election of 1918. Mona Caird would live to see universal suffrage become a reality before dying in 1932. Millicent Garrett Fawcett would also live to see both the 1918 and 1928 Acts become law before her death in 1929.

Wollstonecraft, whose emphasis on the rational capabilities of women and demand for equal access to education, was considered the first feminist expression of women's rights by many late-Victorian suffragists. The writing of novelists such as Jane Austen kept emancipationist ideas alive during a prolonged period of ultra-conservatism in England at the turn of the century — works that suffragist Elizabeth Wolstenholme Elmy would later characterize as the "original demand" for women's rights. In the 1830s and 40s, a number of social movements such as the Unitarians published journals which argued that women's emancipation was a central component of a modern and socially progressive society. The writings of prominent socialists Catherine Barmby and Anna Wheeler would contribute to a growing feminist canon that was not without influence among the middle classes. At mid-century, Harriet Taylor would acknowledge the power of literary women to effect social change in the "Enfranchisement of Women," arguing for the creation of a sphere where it was possible for all humans to achieve their highest potential.

Suffragist writing in the periodical was a conscious effort to intellectually engage with men and women at the highest levels of society. Participation in the periodical press allowed suffragists to express their views within a male-dominated context, exposing male intellectuals and politicians to suffrage ideology while undermining their arguments. Periodical literature was a public forum that also allowed for an exchange of ideas between women on both sides of the issue, such as Eliza Lynn Linton and Mona Caird, who would rely on intellectual arguments that had been in existence for more than one hundred

years, a testament to the importance of the writing of their eighteenth-century forerunners. Although the strategy of writing in periodical literature failed to gain the vote for women the cumulative impact of these debates called attention to women and their lack of political and civil rights, contributing to our knowledge of the uneven development of the suffrage movement.

Despite the importance of the periodical to the history of the women's suffrage movement, it has often been overshadowed by the writings of Edwardian suffragettes and their autobiographical accounts of the movement's history in the twentieth century. In many ways, Emmeline Pankhurst was right to remark that the tactics of the suffragettes, as originators of militant protest for women's rights, had prepared the way for future generations of militant feminists. But she erred in assuming that it was the Pankhurst strategy alone that had laid the groundwork for the enfranchisement of women since the strategy of militancy also failed to obtain the vote. Suffragist writing in periodical literature suggests that there was an evolution towards the enfranchisement of women, and that it was fraught with more failures than successes. Nonetheless, the periodical contributed in a variety of ways to broader arguments about the rights of women and remains essential reading if a history of the women's suffrage movement and its complexities are to be more fully understood. Only then will we be able to rejoice, in the way that Emmeline had hoped, at the rich inheritance left to us by more than a century of suffrage writing.



When suffragette Muriel Matters chained herself to the grille of the ladies' gallery in October 1908, the House attendants were forced to cut out large pieces of the grille to remove her. As a result of the ensuing melee, fourteen women were imprisoned and the Speaker ordered the closing of the galleries to both men and women.²⁶⁶ The protest prompted the Attorney-General to propose the Brawling Bill, which would make disrupting the House an illegal act. The Bill failed and the galleries were re-opened at the end of April 1909, but with conditions. Male visitors were required to sign a pledge to refrain from disturbance. Women also had to sign the same pledge, but they could only gain admission to the ladies' gallery if they were relatives of MPs, who were now required to obtain seats for them by ballot.²⁶⁷ It is assumed that the missing pieces of the grille had been replaced by this time.

On the morning of June 28, 1917, Members of Parliament received a petition, not from suffrage activists, but from the wives of two hundred and sixty-four MPs. The petition urged the parliamentarians to vote favourably for a motion, scheduled for later that day, authorizing the removal of the iron grille from the ladies' gallery. The Members voted in favour of the resolution and the grille was quietly dismantled.²⁶⁸ The removal of the grille was a portent of good things to come: the enfranchisement of women would become a reality just six months later.

²⁶⁶ Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement*, 293-94.

²⁶⁷ *Ibid*, 295.

²⁶⁸ Strachey, 362.

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