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Writing the Vote

Suffrage, Gender and Politics

In the last two decades, revisionist historical accounts have illuminated crucial links between the pre-War suffrage movement and interwar feminism, whether by analysing post-1918 feminist organisations or scrutinising the suffrage roots of the women's wings of the main political parties.[1] Yet the continuous narrative of feminist activism is still seldom brought to bear on British women's literary history, and women writers of the 1920s and 30s are rarely seen in relation to suffragists. A prevailing perception is that the works of other writers whose careers flourished during this period, such as Rose Macaulay, E. M. Delafield, Nancy Mitford, Rosamond Lehmann, Mary Agnes Hamilton, Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O'Brien, Naomi Mitchison, Ivy Compton-Burnett, Sylvia Townsend Warner and Virginia Woolf, to name a few, emerged as part of a new modernist, 'intermodernist' or 'feminine middlebrow' print culture of

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1 See Cheryl Law, *Suffrage and Power: The Women's Movement 1918–1928* (London: I B Tauris, 1998), Laura E. Nym Mayhall, *The Militant Suffrage Movement: Citizenship and Resistance in Britain, 1860–1930* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003).

the interwar period, rather than as a continuation of the suffrage legacy. Seen in this light, women's literature of the interwar period is reduced to individual expressions of a highly personal set of preoccupations and isolated from the collective political agency that gave rise to a period of prolific literary innovation. What follows in this chapter is a retracing of the relations between pre-War and interwar women's writing and a reconsideration of the connection between political activism and literary production.

I

For a snapshot of the connections between pre-War political activism and women's interwar literature we might look to the relations between the 'radical' *The Freewoman/New Freewoman/The Egoist* (1911–19) and the 'orthodox' *Time and Tide* (1920–79). These two feminist periodicals offer paradigmatic vantage points from which to survey and map a burgeoning feminist print culture and the making of a newly evolving feminist political consciousness, and equally the ways in which shifting political awareness shaped literature and publishing, from the turn of the twentieth century to the achievement of full enfranchisement in 1928.

At first glance, they appear poles apart. The *Freewoman*, in its various guises, revelled in taboo topics, not least sexual matters, while the more conservative feminist weekly, Lady Rhondda's *Time and Tide*, primarily sought to educate its readers on issues relating

to women’s interests and aimed for parliamentary reforms. However, as Rebecca West – a contributor to both periodicals – observed, one made the condition for the other possible. In her essay on ‘The Freewoman’ published in the July 1926 issue of *Time and Tide*, West draws a direct connection between that early feminist publication and contributors and readers of *Time and Tide* itself:

> I think there are probably hardly any subscribers to the quiet orthodox woman’s weekly of today, *Time and Tide*, who do not take it for granted that it is degrading to woman, and injurious to the race to leave the financing of the mother and her children to the double-barrelled caprice of the father and the father’s employer. They may differ regarding the specific remedies they propose to end this state of affairs, but hardly any of them would defend it. I am convinced that this change of outlook is partly due to the strong lead given by the ‘Freewoman’.[2]

West registers a significant moment of reflection on the feminist and literary legacy of the *Freewoman*, recognising that the ‘change of outlook’ was the culmination of a long collective movement which continued unbroken in the textual presence of former suffrage

2 Reprinted in Dale Spender, *Time and Tide Wait for No Man* (London: Pandora, 1984), 65.

leaders such as Cicely Hamilton, Elizabeth Robins and Christopher St John, who, like West, became *Time and Tide* authors.

Suffrage networks and publishing practices were foundational during the early years of interwar periodicals. As Catherine Clay has outlined, traditions of political and educational writing, and woman-centred literary culture – the 'hallmarks of suffrage literature' – were continued in them.[3] *Time and Tide*, for example, published a range of women poets, including Winifred Holtby, Frances Cornford, Naomi Mitchison, Edith Sitwell, Sylvia Townsend Warner, E. M. Delafield, Stella Gibbons and Freda C. Bond.[4] Many of these writers also wrote feminist commentary, literary reviews and short fiction.[5] New literary contributors were cultivated from the late 1920s to mid-30s, writers including Elizabeth Bowen, Kate O' Brien and Jean Rhys – the so-called 'middlebrow' novelists.[6] Modernist writers including Virginia Woolf also featured as contributors and subjects for review. Woolf's short story 'The Sun and Fish' appeared in the pages of *Time and Tide* in 1928 as did two excerpts from *A Room of One's*

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3 Catherine Clay, '"On Not Forgetting Everything Else": Feminism, Modernism and *Time and Tide* (1920–1939)', *Key Words* 8 (2009), 21–2.

4 Jane Dowson (ed.), *Women's Poetry of the 1930s: A Critical Anthology* (London: Routledge, 1996), 182.

5 For a glimpse of the diverse writers and their stories published in the periodical during this period, see Victoria Kennedy, 'Short Fiction in *Time and Tide*, May 1920-1929', http://interwarfeminism.omeka.net/exhibits/show/timeandtide/shortfiction (last accessed).

6 Clay, 'On Not Forgetting', 27.

Own in 1929. This latter text was reviewed by Theodore Bosanquet, one of a considerable list of writer/reviewers for *Time and Tide* including Rose Macaulay, Mary Butts, Naomi Mitchison, Clemence Dane, Sylvia Lynd, Mary Agnes Hamilton M. P. and Rebecca West. There were other feminist magazines that offered publishing opportunities to several of these writers too, including *The Woman's Leader*. Described as 'the most substantial and vigorous feminist periodical of the 1920s, campaigning for equal franchise, abolition of the marriage bar, equal knowledge of birth control, equal pay, and many other feminist issues', it also nurtured and promoted women's literature.[7] Contributors included 'old feminists' such as Elizabeth Robins and younger writers, Rose Macaulay among them, whose short stories and poetry – for example, 'The Future of the Woman's Movement' and 'The Work of the League of Nations' – appeared alongside political discussion. Continuities between pre-War and postwar feminism are demonstrable then through these writers who came to prominence during the 20s and 30s through feminist periodicals but who were politicized by the suffrage campaign.

Some of these writers featured in a 1928 David Low cartoon depicting a new version of Genesis in *The Evening Standard*.[8]

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7 Maria DiCenzo draws on David Doughan and Desnise Sanchez's *Feminist Periodicals, 1885–1984* (New York: New York University Press, 1987) in her introduction to this periodical in interwarfeminism.omeka.net/collections/show/4 (last accessed).

8 David Low (1891–1963), celebrated New Zealand-born political cartoonist, published extensively in the British press from 1919.

Published on the eve of the full enfranchisement of women in Britain, Low's cartoon identifies continuities between pre- and postwar feminism, while illustrating connections between female empowerment and print culture, and satirizing latent (mainly male) anxieties provoked by this empowerment.[9]

4.1 David Low, 'Adam and Eves – New version, in modern dress', *Evening Standard*, 18 Feb 1928. DL0056, Associated Newspapers Ltd. / Solo Syndication, British Cartoon Archive (www.cartoons.ac.uk).

The women Low chose to feature as the new Eves in his cartoon illustrate a highly visible 1920s feminist culture operating in diverse fields – politics, the theatre, literature and journalism. Significantly too, several of these women were connected through their earlier suffrage affiliations – Rebecca West (novelist, journalist and feminist activist) and Sybil Thorndike (actress, feminist and pacifist) were both briefly members of Mrs Pankhurst's WSPU, and Ellen Wilkinson (journalist and novelist, elected a Labour MP in 1924) had been an organiser for the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (NUWSS) between 1913 and 1914. They were also connected through their continued feminist activities during the 1920s. West, Wilkinson and Clemence Dane (novelist and playwright) were all contributors at various times to *Time and Tide*,

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9 The Bill was introduced in March 1928 and passed on 2 July 1928.

and novelist Sheila Kaye-Smith was a prominent interlocutor in the public debate on the ‘modern woman’ during the 1920s.[10]

Perceived division between these and other women writers of the period, framed in part by generational differences between ‘old’ and ‘new’ feminists, was reported most acutely in the popular press, feminist periodicals and fiction. ‘Old Feminism’, or equality feminism, was defined by its ‘single focus and stress on cooperation rather than division between the sexes’, while the ‘New Feminism’ was understood as realigning ‘the priorities of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizen-ship (NUSEC) away from egalitarian calls for equal work for equal pay to more specifically woman-centred policies of birth control, family endowment and protective legislation’.[11] But leaving aside the details of the debate between ‘old’ and ‘new’, what is pertinent here is that the flourishing of diverse positions in the 1920s emerged from a print and periodical culture that the pre-War political campaign helped create. For a sufficient analysis of women’s writing in the 1920s, it is necessary to see how it was inextricably intertwined with the great shifts in the literary world that were produced by the suffrage campaign.

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10 See Clay, ‘On Not Forgetting’, 20–37, for a fuller discussion of these and other writers who contributed to *Time and Tide*.

11 Lisa Regan, *Winifred Holtby’s Social Vision: ‘Members of One Another’* (London: Routledge, 2012), 6–7.

II

Few historical milestones paint a clearer picture of progress than women's winning of the vote.[12] Yet, as recently as a century ago, women's suffrage was tenaciously opposed, not least by women themselves.[13] While organised campaigns began in 1867 in Britain, and all the major socialist thinkers throughout the nineteenth century acknowledged the systematic subordination of women and the need for their liberation, direct representation of women was by no means agreed upon as an essential constituent of the British nation-state.[14]

The appeals both for and against suffrage over the course of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were conducted through the medium of print. By the early twentieth century, the literary field was awash with an unprecedented quantity of suffrage fiction, drama, burlesques, sketches, short stories, poetry, essays,

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12 The suffrage movement refers to the period from 1867, when the National Society for Women's Suffrage (NSWS) was founded, to 1928, when women were given equal franchise. The suffragette movement refers to the years from 1906 to 1914 when the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) and the Women's Freedom League (WFL) used radical militancy as their mode of campaigning.

13 For the history of the anti-suffrage movement, see Brian Harrison, *Separate Spheres: The Opposition to Women's Suffrage in Britain* (London: Routledge, 1978) and Julia Bush, *Women Against the Vote* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

14 Harriet Taylor Mill's essay, *The Enfranchisement of Women*, was published in 1851, eighteen years before her husband, J. S. Mill's classic, *The Subjection of Women* in 1869.

tracts and memoirs. These were written by both pro-suffrage activists and anti-suffragists; first-time writers and established luminaries; high modernists as well as 'scribblers'.[15] Women printers and distributers played key roles in pioneering a modern print culture through suffrage presses that enabled publishing and distribution for and by women, marking a significant point in the professionalization of women's writing in British literary history. That print defined, shaped and enabled suffrage politics has been the subject of several detailed studies, which have analysed a political movement deeply-rooted in reading, writing and publishing.[16]

If there is a distinct trait that comes into sight from the varied mix of suffrage literature, it is the fact that most writers were expressing more than a personal point of view. The process of questioning women's subordinate status, resisting the rules of patriarchy and reaching an understanding of one's position in society as an active political participant was never an isolated process. The encounter with texts that radicalized and awakened a

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15 For a selection of key suffrage novels, dramas and short stories, see Katharine Cockin, Glenda Norquay and Sowon S. Park (eds.), *Women's Suffrage Literature*, 6 vols. (London: Routledge, 2007). For representative anti-suffrage texts, see Ann Heilman and Lucy Delap (eds.), *Anti-Feminism in Edwardian Literature*, 6 vols. (London: Bloomsbury, 2006).

16 See Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette Movement: An Intimate Account of Persons and Ideals* (London: Longman, 1931), Jane Marcus (ed.), *The Young Rebecca* (London: Macmillan, 1982), Martha Solomon (ed.), *A Voice of Their Own: The Woman Suffrage Press* (Tuscaloosa, AL: University of Alabama Press, 1991).

feminist consciousness in the activist took place in a context of shared reading practices, in a constant process of interchange with other minds and embedded in collective actions. Nowhere was this more evident than in the abundant records of textual influence in suffrage memoirs and autobiographies. Typical is Vera Brittain's autobiography *Testament of Youth* (1933) where she records the reading of Olive Schreiner's *Woman and Labour* (1911), '[t]hat "Bible of the Woman's Movement"': 'I can still tingle with the excitement of the passage which reinforced in me … my determination.' She attributes her 'final acceptance of feminism' in her path of political awakening to this book, which, for her, was 'a trumpet-call summoning the faithful to a vital crusade'.[17] Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, editor of *Votes for Women* and treasurer of the WSPU, speaks for a large community of feminist converts when she describes *Woman and Labour* as a 'gospel'.[18]

The psychological mechanism that emerges in a range of recollections produced in the 1920s and the 1930s is the new identification of self as an agent of political change, from Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence's (1938) *My Part in a Changing World* (her husband Frederic Pethick-Lawrence published a later memoir in 1943, *Fate has been Kind*) to Helena Swanick's *I Have Been Young* (1935) to Annie Kenny's *Memories of a Militant* (1924). The

17 Vera Brittain, *Testament of Youth: An Autobiographical Study of the Years 1900–1925* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1933), 28.

18 Emmeline Pethick-Lawrence, *My Part in a Changing World* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 187.

manifestation of this new self-perception and the abundant records written by 'feminist converts' during the interwar years illuminate the shifts in the shape of the stories women told each other and themselves about who they were through the stories they read. Rebecca West's 1922 novel, *The Judge*, is an early and significant example, recovering suffragette stories through the dual perspectives of the naïve and enthusiastic suffragette Ellen Melville, who sells *Votes for Women* on street corners, and the more cynical male perspective of the suffrage supporting but critical Richard Yaverland, who attends a suffrage meeting with her. Mrs Ormiston (clearly based on Emmeline Pankhurst), observed by adoring Ellen, is presented in terms of her storytelling:

> Her hoarse, sweet North-country voice rushed forth like a wind bearing the sounds of a battlefield, the clash of arms, the curses hurled at an implacable and brutish enemy, the sight of the dying – for already some had died; and with a passion that preserved her words from the common swift mortality of spoken things she told stories of her followers' brave deeds which seemed to remain in the air and deck the hall like war-tattered standards.[19]

An alternative perspective, one which West shared, is offered through Richard's impatient response to a speech on immorality, reflective of the narrowing and extremist turn the WSPU had taken

19 Rebecca West, *The Judge* (London: Virago, 1980), 50.

before it disbanded altogether to support the war effort: ‘it was not puritanism at all that would put an end to this squalor and cruelty, but sensuality’.[20] Ultimately, this is a novel through which, as Nancy Paxton argues,

> West acknowledges the unspoken contradictions faced by modern women like Ellen in their efforts to reorganize the public and private spheres in the post war world of the 1920s, problems that were not adequately addressed by the award of the vote.[21]

West’s critical tribute to the Ormistons, ‘In the pursuit of liberty they had inadvertently become a troupe; but they had fought like lions’, was already a reminder of what women had challenged through revolt: ‘the refusal to women of a generous education, of a living wage, of opportunities for professional distinction; the meanness that used a woman’s capacity for mating and motherhood to bind her a slave either of the kitchen or of the streets’.[22] West returned to the story of Mrs Pankhurst and women’s suffrage again in 1933, lamenting the erasure of history and particularly a feminist history:

> It is all forgotten. We forget everything now. We have forgotten what came before the war. We have

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20 Ibid., 66.

21 Nancy L. Paxton, ‘Renegotiating the Public and Private Divide: Reconsidering Rebecca West’s *The Judge*’, in *Rebecca West Today: Contemporary Critical Approaches*, ed. Bernard Schweizer (Newark, DE: University of Delaware Press, 2006), 202.

22 West, *The Judge*, 62, 53.

> forgotten the war. There are so many newspapers so full of so much news, so many motor-cars, so many films, that image is superimposed on image and nothing is clearly seen. In an emptier age, which left more room for the essential, it would be remembered that Emmeline Pankhurst with all her limitations was glorious.[23]

Significantly in this memoir she casts a critical eye over her contemporaries, who were, to some extent, benefitting from a flourishing publishing culture for women writers and journalists.[24] For example, as a contributor to *Time and Tide* and the feminist Six Point Group, Rose Macaulay nonetheless had doubts about the campaign for women's suffrage and its usefulness politically, while poet and novelist Stevie Smith voiced ambivalence towards both the 'Old' and 'New Feminism'.[25] As a counterpoint to this increasing

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23 Rebecca West, 'A Reed of Steel', in *The Young Rebecca*, ed. Marcus, 260.

24 Delap and DiCenzo argue that 'this was not a period of decline for feminist activists and thinkers' (*Transatlantic Print Culture*, 52), and Catherine Clay adds that in fact 'the 1920s and 1930s were years in which women writers and journalists experienced increased opportunities for participation and influence within the public sphere.' (Catherine Clay, 'Winifred Holtby, Journalist: Rehabilitating Journalism in the Modernist Ferment', in *Winifred Holtby: A Woman in her Time: Critical Essays*, ed. Lisa Regan (Newcastle upon Tyne: Cambridge Scholars, 2010), 68.

25 Alice Crawford, *Paradise Pursued: The Novels of Rose Macaulay* (Madison, NJ: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1995), 89, and Laura Severin, *Stevie Smith's Resistant Antics* (Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997), 6, respectively.

scepticism about the potency and relevance of feminism during this period, West observes wryly that:

> Women novelists who want to strike out a line as being specially broadminded declare they think we are no better for the vote; if they spent half an hour turning over pre-war newspapers and looking out references to women's employment and legal and social status, they might come to a different opinion.[26]

West's texts provide one example of some of the ways in which the discursive community of former suffrage activists continued to provide an alternative record well beyond the achievement not only of partial franchise in 1918 but also into the 30s after the full enfranchisement of 1928, as the debates about feminism and the backlash against its achievements continued. Ellen Wilkinson, whose name and red hair may well have provided ingredients for West's Ellen Melville, threads a suffrage narrative through her 1929 novel, *Clash*. Focused around the General Strike of 1926, it features Mary Maud Meadowes, modelled on Lady Rhondda. Acknowledging that 'the Women's Movement has been the only thing I ever really cared about', Mary Maud reflects on feminist gains but also yearns for even greater progress:

> but what I mean is that now so much has been won, the vote, open professions, and all that there must be some women in this generation who will put their job

26 West, 'A Reed of Steel', 260.

> first and who will tackle some of these problems that are left lying around – the very question you mention of whether we can stretch the old Victorian codes to fit, or whether we should throw codes over altogether, or whether the modern woman can evolve a new code and a new etiquette to suit her new status.[27]

Debate around the direction of the newly achieved full franchise for women in 1928 and the 'New Feminism' continued to be refracted through stories of the 'old feminism' and thinly veiled portraits of those who had participated, particularly in the militant movement.

These stories featured in the work of other women writers during the interwar years. Virginia Woolf may have famously urged the incineration of the word 'feminist' in *Three Gunieas*, but this did not preclude her from repeatedly returning to the subject of the female activist from her earliest fiction onwards. The portrait of Evelyn Murgatroyd in *The Voyage Out* (1915) is satirical: 'Questions that really matter to people's lives, the White Slave Traffic, Women Suffrage, the Insurance Bill, and so on. And when we've made up our mind what we want to do we could form ourselves into a society for doing it.'[28] However, a more sympathetic perspective is evident in the portrayal of the 'constitutional suffragist', Mary Datchet, in her second novel, *Night and Day* (1919), and Woolf's contrasting

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27 Ellen Wilkinson, *Clash*, ed. Ian Haywood and Maroula Joannou (Nottingham: Trent Editions, 2004), 57.

28 Virginia Woolf, *The Voyage Out* (New York: Dover, 2006), 185.

depictions of Rose and Eleanor Pargiter in *The Years* (1937) marks a reconsidered judgement of the suffrage movement years later, placing her politics firmly in the pacifist wing of the constitutionalist suffragists, against the militancy and militarism of the WSPU.

If Winifred Holtby, the first biographer of Woolf, served as model for Kitty Malone and possibly for Eleanor too in *The Pargiters* and *The Years*, as Marion Shaw speculates, Holtby paid her own less ambivalent tributes to suffrage and the shaping of the modern woman in fiction and non-fiction published during the 1920s and 30s.[29] In *South Riding* (1936) the resemblance of Sarah Burton, headmistress, single educated woman and feisty redhead, to former suffragette and labour activist, Miss Ellen Wilkinson, becomes the subject of conversation and the impetus for Sarah to declare her own allegiances:

> There are certain things I hate – muddle, poverty, war and so on – the things most intelligent people hate nowadays, whatever their party. And I hate indifferentism, and lethargy, and the sort of selfishness that shuts itself up into its own shell of personal preoccupations.[30]

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29 Marion Shaw, '"Alien Experiences": Virginia Woolf, Winifred Holtby and Vera Brittain in the Thirties', in *Rewriting the Thirties: Modernism and After*, ed. Keith Williams and Steven Matthews (London: Routledge, 1997), 43.

30 Winifred Holtby, *South Riding* (London: Virago, 1991), 104. Ian Haywood and Maroula Joannou also argue that Wilkinson is a model for Holtby's Sarah Burton, in their 'Introduction' to Wilkinson,

The feminist sources of her vision are revealed later in the novel through her choice of holiday reading for the senior girls:

> Lady Rhondda's autobiography *This Was My World*, commending especially to them an old Spanish proverb quoted there: 'Take what you want', said God. 'Take it – and pay for it'. To choose, to take, with clear judgment and open eyes; to count the cost and pay it; to regret nothing; to complete responsibility for their own decisions – this was the code which she attempted to impress upon the children who came under her influence – the code on which she set herself to act.[31]

Even more overt is the dedication of her 1934 polemic, *Woman and a Changing Civilization*, to the 'old feminists', Dame Ethyl Smythe and Cicely Hamilton. It is a work which, by evoking the 'old feminism' voices concern about how 'the "march of women" towards an equal and valued place as citizens within civilised society was threatened by an anti-feminist backlash at home which had disturbing synergies with the rise of fascism abroad'.[32] Like West in her fiction and memoir of Emmeline Pankhurst, Holtby's text contributed to what amounted in the end to a collective project of writing women's history. In fact, as Diana Wallace has illustrated,

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Clash, vii.

31 Holtby, *South Riding*, 161.

32 Diana Wallace, 'The March of the Women: Winifred Holtby's Women and a Changing Civilization as History and Propaganda', in *Winifred Holtby*, ed. Regan, 219.

the 'interwar years, particularly after the Equal Franchise Act of 1928, saw the production of an impressive number of books and articles which attempted to write women's history in a variety of different forms'.[33] Vera Brittain, not an original 'feminist convert' but, like Winifred Holtby, an advocate of the 'old feminism' among the younger generation of women writers, also contributed to this chronicling of women's suffrage history in her journalism, as a way of reflecting on the contemporary scene. In her reminiscence of 'Mrs Pankhurst and the Older Feminists' she observes ruefully that they were luckier because 'Before 1914 you wanted a vote or you did not, and though you might differ as to methods, your object was the same. Suffragists and anti-suffragists were, on the whole, so much less complicated than feminists and anti-feminists.'[34]

These chronicles – as pamphlets, newspaper articles, feminist histories, suffrage memoir and autobiography, and a cross-section of fiction – constitute a distinct thread through the broader tapestry of women's writing published during the interwar period. This considerable body of female-authored literature produced during the 1920s and 30s included drama, poetry, short fiction and fiction that crossed a diversity of generic boundaries. Fiction ranged from the experimental to the popular, from 'women's fiction', as Nicola Beauman defined it, to fiction with socialist and feminist inflections, historical and crime fiction, and fiction that fits into none of these

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33 Ibid., 220.

34 Vera Brittain, *Testament of a Generation*, 101.

categories or crosses some of them, and was often written by women who relied on flourishing journalistic opportunities to earn a living.[35] Female-centred and often feminist-inspired periodicals established during this period, ranging from the popular, *Woman's Outlook*, to the specialist, *Woman Engineer*, to the most highbrow and successful *Time and Tide*, also provided space for women to engage in both political and literary discussion, to continue to occupy the 'countersphere' established by earlier suffrage publications.[36] Of what, exactly, that earlier countersphere was constituted is the focus of the next section.

In the pre-War and interwar period, we find a new phase of women's writing in which women were writing not for themselves alone but for a shared worldview forged through what they endured and what they overcame. Literature made the transition from a private pleasure and an individual education to a shared public

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35 For a detailed illustration of the range of publications during this period see, for example, Maroula Joannou (ed.), *The History of British Women's Writing, 1920–1945* (London: Palgrave, 2015), Nicola Beauman, *A Very Great Profession: The Woman's Novel 1914–39* (London: Virago, 1983) and Jan Montefiore, *Men and Women Writers of the 1930s: The Dangerous Flood of History* (London: Routledge, 1996).

36 See Alice Staveley's discussion of the *Woman Engineer* in 'Marketing Virginia Woolf: Women, War and Public Relations in *Three Guineas*', *Book History* 12 (2009), 295–229.

engagement. The impact of suffrage organisations on this transition should not be underestimated. Suffrage politics galvanised each society to produce its own official publications, often in the form of weekly newspapers. The key official periodicals were *Votes for Women* (1907–18) of the WSPU, edited by Emmeline Pankhurst and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence, then Evelyn Sharp; the *Vote* (1909–33) of the WFL, edited by Charlotte Despard; and the *Common Cause* (1909–20) of the NUWSS, edited by Helena Swanwick, then Clementa Black and Maude Royden. On the anti-suffrage side there was the *Anti-Suffrage Review* (1908–18), possibly edited by Mrs Humphry Ward.[37] In addition there were the *Common Cause* (1909), *Conservative and Unionist Women's Franchise Review* (1909), *Men's League for Women's Suffrage* (1909), *Church League for Women's Suffrage* (1912), *Suffragette* (which became *Britannia*; 1915), *Irish Citizen* (1912), *Woman's Dreadnought* (1914), *Catholic Suffragist* (1915) and *Suffragette News Sheet* (1916). Even more crucially, feminist publications in the 1920s and 1930s, such as *Women's Leader* (1920–32), *The Woman Journalist* (1920–45) and *Germinal* (1923–4), as well as the many feminist periodicals which had been started in support of suffrage and still continued publication – *The Common Cause* (1909–29), *The Englishwoman* (1909–21), *JUS Suffragii* (1906–29) and the *Vote* (1909–33) – reveal the extent to

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37 The *Anti-Suffrage Review* does not state the editor. The Countess of Jersey, Mrs Massie, Gertrude Bell and Mrs Humphry Ward are listed among the committee members.

which women writers identified themselves as political and collective agents. Being a woman reader and a woman writer after the suffrage movement offered a way of engaging with the world as a group with a collective sense of identity, and the multiple voices emerging from this prolific periodical culture expressed how women writers saw themselves in relation to a new public world which they themselves helped create.[38]

These diverse textual expressions were more than expressions of individual points of view. They were powerful political acts which became part of a social event, serving, as DiCenzo, Delap and Ryan have pointed out, as 'a hub, even an irritant or counterpoint, for a wider range of groups involved in social, economic, and political reforms'.[39] The proliferation of suffrage writing was received, reproduced and contested by a range of publications driven by an array of imperatives, connecting disparate and sometimes antagonistic literary spheres into a new feminist literary network. For example, the issue of suffrage produced feminist magazines and journals that were antagonistic to the official periodicals, as well as forming a major part of the rapidly growing daily newspaper market. Some feminist literary journals, that were more up-market, highbrow and individualist, tended to reject an overt pro/anti position on suffrage and could be up to

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38 See Maria Dicenzo in Maria DiCenzo, Lucy Delap and Leila Ryan, *Feminist Media History: Suffrage, Periodicals and the Public Sphere* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010), 87.

39 DiCenzo, Delap and Ryan, *Feminist Media History,* 14.

twelve times the price of a standard suffrage publication, which was a penny. In their pages we find, as Ryan and DiCenzo have written, 'an impressive repository of original literary contributions and cultural commentary which has been almost completely ignored in arts scholarship on the period'.[40] Representative was *The Englishwoman* (1909–21), a monthly review edited by Mrs Grant Richards. It adopted a moderate pro-suffrage stance in politics but was interested in wider women's issues and was more focused on the arts and culture than the official periodicals, as declared in the first issue: '*The Englishwoman* is intended to reach the cultured public.' The contributors included suffrage leaders such as Millicent Garrett Fawcett, Elizabeth Robins and Beatrice Webb, but also household names like John Galsworthy, G. B. Shaw and Laurence Housman.

In addition to Dora Marsden's *The Freewoman*, discussed at the beginning of this chapter, was the self-consciously masculine the *New Age* (1907–38), edited by A. R. Orage, an 'Independent Review of Socialist Politics, Literature and Art'. This built on its earlier life as a Fabian publication. It was decidedly against women's suffrage. Yet it provided space for vigorous debate about feminism

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40 The editorial committee of the *Englishwoman* included Frances Balfour, J. M. Strachey, Cicely Hamilton, Mary Lowndes and Elisina Grant Richards. The riches of this hitherto neglected feminist magazine have only recently been foregrounded by scholars. See DiCenzo, Delap and Ryan, *Feminist Media History*, 121. Further explorations await.

and the role of women. Beatrice Hastings, then partner of Orage, often took different stances on the subject through the use of multiple pseudonyms, serving to expose differences within the feminist movement and generate further discussion.[41] Likewise, the *English Review* (1908–37), one of the most celebrated 'little magazines' and dedicated to publishing young unknown writers under the brief editorship of Ford Madox Ford (1908 to 1910), took up women's suffrage, carrying regular reportage and commentary on the subject, and offering up Mrs Pankhurst as a model of 'a consummate ability and of a consummate organizing power'.[42]

Perhaps even more important than the diverse publications related to women's suffrage and feminist debate was the role of societies as publishers, not only of their official periodicals but often of suffrage and feminist fiction, plays, essays, memoirs and autobiographies. As discussed in the previous section, the print culture launched by the suffragette movement far exceeded the publication of the official organs, which were in themselves substantial. Simone Murray lists at least eleven pro-suffrage presses

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41 Hastings was also the self-claimed 'shadow co-editor' of the *New Age* (1907–1914). See Ann Ardis, 'Debating Feminism, Modernism and Socialism: Beatrice Hastings' Voices in *The New Age*', in *Gender in Modernism: New Geographies, Complex Intersections*, ed. Bonnie Kime Scott (Urbana, IL and Chicago, IL: University of Illinois, 2007), 161.

42 See Cliff Wulman, 'Ford Madox Ford and *The English Review*', in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, 229. E. R., 'The Critical Attitude: Militants here on Earth', *English Review* 3.9 (1909), 137–42.

operating in London alone between 1905 and 1914 and goes on to explore the political and ideological implications of a thriving feminist publishing culture.[43] She writes:

> An appreciation of suffrage publishing also enhances understanding of feminist press activism in the later decades of the twentieth century, contextualising modern feminist presses within a historical framework and disproving the received view that second-wave feminist publishing exploded without precedent on to the literary marketplace.[44]

The nexus of suffrage organisations enabled and galvanized a whole generation of women to launch their literary and journalistic careers through suffrage. It also provided a model and impetus for women to mass-publish, market and distribute their work for the first time in literary history, creating a new dynamic in literary print culture. Vera Brittain's account of her initiation, along with Winifred Holtby, into the most vibrant legacy of suffrage in the early 20s through Lady Rhondda's *Time and Tide* is indicative:

> One of the first groups of possible subscribers to receive specimen copies of *Time and Tide* were the students at the women's colleges, so Winifred and I

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43 Simone Murray, 'Deeds and Words: The Woman's Press and the Politics of Print', *Woman: A Cultural Review* 11.3 (2010), 197–222, 199. Murray lists the presses of the NUWSS, WWSL, ASL, NSWS, IWSA, CUWFA, CLWS, WFL, WSPU, ISS and WPS.

44 Ibid., 201.

> already knew of the paper's existence before we went down from Somerville. As a journalistic innovation made exclusively by women the experiment intrigued us, and we often bought copies to read in Doughty Street. It was through *Time and Tide* that we first heard of Lady Rhondda's other foundation, the Six Point Group, and at a mass meeting of the Group in Queen's Hall that we both saw her for the first time.[45]

Targeted through savvy marketing skills acquired partially through tactics deployed by earlier suffrage papers, Holtby and Brittain soon became contributors and, in the case of Holtby, Director of the paper in 1926.[46] Once involved editorially, Holtby set about addressing and attracting a larger feminist readership by turning to the tactics, such as the printing of large headlines, 'used by an earlier generation of feminists "making news" at the height of the suffrage era'.[47]

Rebecca West and Margaret Storm Jameson had cut their feminist literary teeth in pre-War publications that fostered debate around suffrage, particularly militant feminism and socialism, forging a public feminist identity early in their journalistic careers and providing subject matter for their earliest fictions. West started writing for the *Freewoman* in 1911, and Storm Jameson, having

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45 Vera Brittain, *Testament of Friendship: The Story of Winifred Holtby* (London: Virago: 1980), 165.

46 See Clay, 'What We Might Expect', 63–4.

47 Clay, 'Winifred Holtby, Journalist', 71.

turned down for personal reasons Marsden's invitation to contribute to her magazine, started publishing her work in the *New Age* in 1913. Never a supporter of militant feminism as West had briefly been, Jameson's early work was nevertheless pro-suffrage, and she engaged with feminist issues, sometimes with ambivalence, in her fiction. In one of her earliest novels, *The Happy Highways* (1920), Margaret gets involved in a suffrage demonstration but returns home ashamed and dismissive: 'It had nothing to do with the vote – all that. Nor freedom, nor anything. It was just kicking about in petticoats.'[48] *The Pot Boils*, published in 1919, registers the ferment of these times and the backlash towards the gains and legacy of early twentieth-century feminism, voiced early in the novel by a group of bitter men: 'After all, it is a woman's age' and

> I hate these women [...] Look at them. They've forced their way into industry and cut men's wages down to starvation level: such of them as have attained a degree of intellect affect an insufferable conceit and spread their imitated ideas all over literature.[49]

Athenais, the central protagonist, offers a tentative counter-voice to this male resistance, defending women's movements because:

> not only have they wrought such spiritual changes that the mental outlook of women – and of men on

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48 Storm Jameson, *The Happy Highways* (London: Heinman, 1920), 50.

49 Storm Jameson, *The Pot Boils* (London: Constable, 1919), 8.

> women – will never be the same again, but that they're not alone in making and clamouring for change. Behind them are the thousands – the hundreds of thousands of women – some in suffrage and socialist societies, some not out of college, and some – like me – just females at large, who can never get back into the kitchens …[50]

The changes and transformations initiated by women's suffrage, whether viewed negatively or positively, constitute part of the fabric of fiction written during the 20s and 30s.

No less significant is the literature about suffrage that proliferated in the wider print culture. Presses such as Harmsworth, Mills and Boon, and D. C. Thomson established themselves in the market by targeting a politicized readership through publishing suffrage-themed novels. And all popular papers dedicated themselves to securing women readers, who were approached through women's pages and women's supplements, some of which were devoted to fashion, recipes and 'society' news and some ostensibly directed towards the political reader. From the politically conservative the *Times* and *Telegraph* to the more liberal and supportive *Manchester Guardian* and *Daily Chronicle*, suffrage was a key issue. The *Standard* (now the *London Evening Standard*) offers a prime example. Their 'woman's platform' began as a two page spread in October 1911 following the standard women's page format under the editorship of William Woodward. But it soon grew

50 Ibid., 191.

to three, sometimes four, pages by providing detailed reports of suffrage meetings and deputations, and gave space to suffrage debates, articles and letters. In the high volume of reports, discussion and interpretation in existing media, a new female literary class came into view. The highly charged climate of increasingly fierce pro- and anti- debates produced feminist interventions, which ranged from impactful debates in the letters page of the *Times* between the anti-suffragist Mrs Humphry Ward and the WWSL President Elizabeth Robins, to public repudiations of 'androcentric' bias in the media. The circulation of daily national newspapers doubled in the years following 1918, with two-thirds of the British population regularly reading a daily paper. The focus on the woman reader established during the suffrage campaign did not change in intensity, only in focus, after 1918. As Adrian Bingham has noted, newspapers such as the *Daily Mail* and *Daily Express* continued their 'insistent journalistic fascination with modern women and the changes in femininity'.[51]

Newspapers were not the only forum for debate about the modern woman, women writing and the future of feminism. As this chapter has outlined, an array of woman-centred magazines and

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51 Adrian Bingham, 'Enfranchisement, Feminism and the Modern Woman: Debates in the British Popular Press, 1918–1939', in *The Aftermath of Suffrage: Women, Gender, and Politics in Britain, 1918–1945*, ed. Julie V. Gottlieb and Richard Roye (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 87. Billie Melman, *Women and the Popular Imagination in the Twenties: Flappers and Nymphs* (London: Macmillan, 1988).

journals flourished, offering an alternative print culture. Some were established in support of women's suffrage and continued into the 20s and 30s, while others were established in the aftermath of the 1918 franchise. Weekly (later monthly) reviews such *Time and Tide* and *The Woman's Leader* navigated both new opportunities for women in journalism and the growing resistance to these developments. They also provided invaluable support to women writers who were often excluded from the more conservative, male-dominated literary magazines such as T. S. Eliot's *The Criterion* or Edgell Rickword's *The Calendar of Modern Letters*.[52] But the impact of suffrage on literature both before and after the War was not restricted to women's writing and a feminist print culture. The politics shifted the contours of the broader literary field itself, turning women's writing and reading from private practice to a very public activity. Tracing the ways in which literature engaged with the rapid political upheavals of its time restores the vital connection between the flourishing print culture of the 1920s and the underlying social and political processes that produced it.

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52 Eliot could not be persuaded to publish work by Katherine Mansfield, for example. See Jason Harding, 'The Idea of a Literary Review: T. S. Eliot and *The Criterion*' in *The Oxford Critical and Cultural History of Modernist Magazines*, 353.