

OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS

OXFORD ENGLISH DRAMA

THE NEW WOMAN

AND OTHER EMANCIPATED WOMAN PLAYS



OXFORD WORLD'S CLASSICS



The New Woman
and Other Emancipated Woman Plays

SIDNEY GRUNDY

The New Woman

ARTHUR WING PINERO

The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith

ELIZABETH ROBINS

Votes for Women!

JEAN CHOTHIA

Oxford New York

OXFORD UNIVERSITY PRESS

Oxford University Press, Great Clarendon Street, Oxford OX2 6DP
Oxford New York
Athens Auckland Bangkok Bogota Bombay Buenos Aires
Calcutta Cape Town Dar es Salaam Delhi Florence Hong Kong
Istanbul Karachi Kuala Lumpur Madras Madrid Melbourne
Mexico City Nairobi Paris Singapore Taipei Tokyo Toronto Warsaw
and associated companies
in Berlin Ibadan

Oxford is a trade mark of Oxford University Press

Editorial matter © Jean Chothia 1998

First issued as an Oxford World's Classics paperback 1998

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form or by any means, without the prior permission in writing of Oxford University Press. Within the UK, exceptions are allowed in respect of any fair dealing for the purpose of research or private study, or criticism or review, as permitted under the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act, 1988, or in the case of reprographic reproduction in accordance with the terms of the licences issued by the Copyright Licensing Agency. Enquiries concerning reproduction outside these terms and in other countries should be sent to the Rights Department, Oxford University Press, at the address above.

This book is sold subject to the condition that it shall not, by way of trade or otherwise, be lent, re-sold, hired out or otherwise circulated without the publisher's prior consent in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published and without a similar condition including this condition being imposed on the subsequent purchaser

Performing rights in The Notorious Mrs Ebb Smith are controlled by Samuel French Ltd.

British Library Cataloguing in Publication Data

Data available

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication Data

*The new woman and other emancipated woman plays / edited by Jean Chothia.
(Oxford world's classics)*

Includes bibliographical references (p.).

Contents: The new woman / Sidney Grundy—The notorious Mrs Ebb Smith / Arthur Wing Pinero—Votes for women! / Elizabeth Robins—The last of the De Mullins / St John Hankin.

1. Women—Suffrage—Great Britain—Drama. 2. Suffragists—Great Britain—Drama.
3. Feminism—Great Britain—Drama. 4. Women—Great Britain—Drama.
5. English drama—20th century. 6. English drama—19th century. I. Chothia, Jean.

II. Series: Oxford's world's classics (Oxford University Press)

PR1259.S93N48 1998 822'.8080352042—dc21 97-31284

ISBN 0-19-282427-9

3 5 7 9 10 8 6 4 2

*Typeset by Jayvee, Trivandrum, India
Printed in Great Britain by
Cox & Wyman Ltd, Reading, Berkshire*

OXFORD ENGLISH DRAMA

General Editor: MICHAEL CORDNER

Associate General Editors: PETER HOLLAND · MARTIN WIGGINS

THE NEW WOMAN AND OTHER EMANCIPATED WOMAN PLAYS

THE 'Woman Question' was the recurrent, the obsessive, subject of late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century drama. This volume contains four of the most interesting examples, three of which appear for the first time in a modern edition. Between them these plays demonstrate the marked shift that took place both in arguments about female emancipation and in the kind of plays that were performed on the English stage of the period. All four dramatists include 'New Woman' characters but whereas these women are variously satirized and problematized in the work of Sidney Grundy and Arthur Wing Pinero, in their Society Plays of the 1890s, only a decade later they are heroized in the plays of Elizabeth Robins and St John Hankin, two of the most stimulating writers of the Edwardian 'New Drama'.

JEAN CHOTHIA is a Lecturer in the English Faculty of Cambridge University and is a Fellow of Selwyn College. Her publications include *Forging a Language: A Study of the Plays of Eugene O'Neill* (1979), *Directors in Perspective: André Antoine* (1991), and *English Drama of the Early Modern Period: 1890-1940* (1996).

MICHAEL CORDNER is Reader in the Department of English and Related Literature at the University of York. He has edited editions of George Farquhar's *The Beaux' Stratagem*, the *Complete Plays* of Sir George Etherege, and *Four Comedies* of Sir John Vanbrugh. His editions include *Four Restoration Marriage Comedies* and he is completing a book on *The Comedy of Marriage 1660-1737*.

PETER HOLLAND is Professor of Shakespeare Studies and Director of the Shakespeare Institute, University of Birmingham.

MARTIN WIGGINS is a Fellow of the Shakespeare Institute and Lecturer in English at the University of Birmingham.

OXFORD ENGLISH DRAMA

- J. M. Barrie
Peter Pan and Other Plays
- Aphra Behn
The Rover and Other Plays
- George Farquhar
The Recruiting Officer and Other Plays
- John Ford
'Tis Pity She's a Whore and Other Plays
- Ben Jonson
The Alchemist and Other Plays
- Christopher Marlowe
Doctor Faustus and Other Plays
- John Marston
The Malcontent and Other Plays
- Thomas Middleton
*A Mad World, My Masters and
Other Plays*
- Arthur Wing Pinero
Trelawny of the 'Wells' and Other Plays
- Richard Brinsley Sheridan
*The School for Scandal and
Other Plays*
- J. M. Synge
*The Playboy of the Western World and
Other Plays*
- John Webster
*The Duchess of Malfi and
Other Plays*
- Oscar Wilde
*The Importance of Being Earnest and
Other Plays*
- William Wycherley
The Country Wife and Other Plays
- Court Masques*
ed. David Lindley
- Four Jacobean Sex Tragedies*
ed. Martin Wiggins
- Four Restoration Marriage Comedies*
ed. Michael Cordner
- Four Revenge Tragedies*
ed. Katharine Maus
- The Lights o' London and
Other Plays*
ed. Michael R. Booth
- The New Woman and
Other Emancipated Woman Plays*
ed. Jean Chothia
- Trilby and Other Plays*
Four Plays for Victorian Star Actors
ed. George Taylor

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I WOULD like to thank the staff of the Manuscripts Department of the British Library and, for assistance with particular notes, Lucy Chothia, Nicholas Cranfield, Mary Doran, Heather Glen, Elsie Duncan-Jones, Chris Greenwood, Nigel Leask, John Ray, and Manuela Tecusan. I am grateful to Michael Corder for meticulous commentary on text and notes, and to Jane Kingsley-Smith for checking the text.

I am grateful to Mabel Smith and the Trustees of Backsettown for their kind permission to include Elizabeth Robins's *Votes for Women!* in this edition.

This edition is for Sue Spencer, Tamsin Palmer, and Penny Wilson.

J.C.

INTRODUCTION

HOWEVER Ibsen himself may have represented *A Doll's House* (1879) or *Hedda Gabler* (1890), his English contemporaries saw them as works about emancipated women. First produced in England in 1889 and 1891 respectively, and vehemently attacked by conservative critics, they figured in popular imagination as depraved works. Elizabeth Robins was accused by Clement Scott, the leading theatre critic of the day, of having 'glorified an unwomanly woman' in her performance as Hedda.¹ Denunciations in the press linked characters and members of their audiences together as 'desexed . . . the unwomanly, the unsexed females, the whole army of unprepossessing cranks in petticoats . . . educated and muck ferreting dogs . . . effeminate men and male women.'²

The association of female emancipation and distorted sexuality was recurrent in the late nineteenth century. Efforts of women towards education and social or economic emancipation were often taken as denials of 'natural' gender roles even by writers otherwise considered advanced. Strindberg, whose *Miss Julie* (1888) was much too shockingly explicit to permit performance on the English stage, makes it clear in the preface to his play that Julie was an example of the emancipated woman, the man-woman, feared by much contemporary medical science and figured in such seemingly advanced works as Kraft-Ebbing's *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1889). Patrick Geddes and J. Arthur Thomson in *The Evolution of Sex* (1889) described men as naturally *katabolic*, active, energetic, variable, and women as *anabolic*, passive, sluggish, and stable, while Havelock Ellis in *Man and Woman* (1894) claimed that biology confirmed man's role as initiating and creative, woman's as nurturing and supportive.

Questions and opinions about female emancipation—rights to education, to earning and retaining one's own income, the ability to make decisions, and, increasingly, the right to participate in democracy by means of the vote—were of pressing interest in the 1890s. They were so because women, albeit mightily slowly, were progressing towards emancipation. In 1894 they gained the right to vote in local government elections. Notable campaigners, such as Annie Besant, were emerging into public life and women such as Beatrice Webb and Charlotte Payne Townsend were prominent in the recently founded Fabian Society.

¹ *Illustrated London News*, 25 Apr. 1891.

² Quoted by William Archer, *Pall Mall Gazette*, 8 Apr. 1891.

INTRODUCTION

Somewhat more than 25 per cent of the female population was employed. Although most jobs open to them were menial, the typewriter and the development of large department stores had extended the options. In Lancashire, the cotton industry was relatively stable and well paid. Women who had had access to education, numbers of girls' schools having been established from the 1860s onwards, were increasingly entering the professions, notably teaching and medicine. There were women students in almost all the faculties of English universities and as many as one-third of those graduating from London University were women. Although, notoriously, the vote to enable women to proceed to degrees in Cambridge failed in 1897, they were allowed to attend lectures and to take the examination. After Agnata Ramsay had become the only candidate to reach the first class standard in the Cambridge Classics Tripos in 1887 and, even more startlingly, Philippa Fawcett was placed above the top man in Part I of the Maths Tripos in 1890, the educational success of women students was newsworthy.

Following the introduction of sympathetically represented emancipated woman characters in Sarah Grand's novel *The Heavenly Twins* and George Egerton's *Keynotes* in 1893, came a flood of fictional investigations with such works as Mona Caird's *Daughters of Danaus*, Annie Holdsworth's *Joanna Trail, Spinster*, and Ella Hepworth Dixon's *Story of a Modern Woman* in 1894, and emancipated women also made their appearance among the characters of more established male novelists, George Gissing's *The Odd Women* (1893) and Thomas Hardy's *Jude the Obscure* (1895). The term, 'the new woman', which seems to have been introduced by Grand in 1894,³ soon became ubiquitous, partly through the efforts of male satirists who were quick to respond to all this activity. Throughout the 1890s, *Punch* both reflected and considerably shaped the habit of addressing female emancipation and educational success as subjects for glorious mirth, while, in September 1894, *The Idler* ran an Advanced Woman number with advice on how to court such creatures and invited eight women of different persuasions to comment on the species. Although much of the humour might seem feeble now, its omnipresence suggests that it answered a need.

Emancipated women had already begun to figure on the stage, usually in comic form. Arthur Wing Pinero's *The Weaker Sex* (1888) and *The Amazons* (1893) make sport with the notion of girls seeking emancipation or being educated as boys. The heroine of W. S. Gilbert's comic opera *Utopia Limited* (1893) is Girton-educated Princess Zara, returned

³ Sarah Grand, 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', *North American Review*, 158 (Mar. 1894), 271.

home to reform her father's kingdom (curiously, it was always Girton in comedy, Newnham not really figuring until the more serious representations of the Edwardian period). The pace quickened and the stereotyping hardened with the success of Sidney Grundy's *The New Woman*, which opened on 1 September 1894 and featured a whole set of caricatured proponents of female emancipation: writers of medical tomes, feminist novels, and tracts on marriage. The subplot of Henry Arthur Jones's *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, which appeared later in the autumn of the same year, concerns Elaine, who is described in the stage directions as 'a raw, assertive, modern young lady'. Neurotic and shrill, she is, moreover, accompanied like Grundy's feminists by a parody aesthete, a man of mincing speech and effete manner. Elaine's declaration that she and her like will correct nature draws a much repeated statement from the play's *raisonneur*, Sir Richard Kato:

By changing your sex? Is that what you ladies want? You are evidently dissatisfied with being a woman. You cannot wish to be anything so brutal and disgusting as a man and unfortunately there is no neuter sex in the human species. (Act 3)⁴

Oscar Wilde, not surprisingly wanting to play too, gives new woman traits to both his heroines in *The Importance of Being Earnest* (1895), and Bernard Shaw, having flexed his muscles by introducing the formidably emancipated Julia and setting Act 2 of *The Philanderer* (1893) in 'The Ibsen Club', took the representation a stage further in *Mrs Warren's Profession* later in 1893. With her strong handshake, cigar smoking, and extreme rationalism, Vivie Warren, the co-protagonist, who, being lazy, has settled for *second* place in the Cambridge Maths Tripos, is the type writ large, although her independence and self-sufficiency are clearly offered for admiration by Shaw and the humour is with rather than against her. She remained unknown to the theatre-going world of the 1890s, however, since, although published in 1898, the play, refused a licence, was not performed until 1902, when the Stage Society circumvented the ban by mounting a private performance for its own members in what was known as a 'closed-house' production.

The four plays in this collection all figure emancipated women as central characters. Grundy satirizes them, suggesting that all they really need is the love of a strong man. Pinero, more ambivalent, gives his leading character a certain strength and principle but, to the disappointment of his leading actress, Mrs Patrick Campbell, drives her to penitent retreat to a country vicarage. In contrast with this, only a decade later,

⁴ Reprinted in Russell Jackson (ed.), *Plays of Henry Arthur Jones* (Cambridge, 1982), 153.

Elizabeth Robins and St John Hankin, like other Stage Society and Court Theatre writers of the Edwardian 'New Drama', heroize their emancipated woman characters. Women characters in three of the plays are 'platform-' or 'public-women', who proselytize for the female cause. Grundy's are writers. Pinero's audience learns that Agnes Ebbsmith, described by one character as having 'Trafalgar Squared' him, gained notoriety speaking in meeting-halls and at Speaker's Corner, while Robins presents Vida Levering in action, in Trafalgar Square itself, quelling a rowdy meeting with a heartfelt speech in support of women's suffrage. Hankin's Janet De Mullin, although neither a speaker nor writer for the cause, is its representative in her life as single mother and successful business woman. The shift from reported to enacted event, from notoriety to fame, reflects the shift in approach to female emancipation that occurred between 1890s West End Drama and the Edwardian Drama as represented here. It also demonstrates the marked change in the English theatre brought about by the creation of such independent organizations as the Stage Society and the Barker-Vedrenne company which had reduced the commercial pressures on new drama. Robins's play, moreover, was the trigger of a new dramatic mode—the suffrage drama—that surged into existence after 1907 and stimulated numbers of women to write for the theatre.

The account of female sexuality had changed radically in the space of a decade. Although one play is a comedy, the other a serious drama, the emancipated women in both the 1890s plays reprinted here are represented as deeply confused, predatory, aspiring to a relationship of the spirit but vulnerable to the needs of the flesh and driven by the desire for male protection. The heroines of the two Edwardian plays, by contrast, like Shaw's Ann Whitefield (*Man and Superman*, 1905), the title roles of his *Major Barbara* (1905) and of Elizabeth Baker's *Edith* (1912), and the courageous young women who take a stand against the old ways in Granville Barker's plays, are nothing if not self-possessed.

The woman question addressed most consistently in 1890s theatre centred on errant sexuality: women engaged in or tempted by sexual activity outside marriage or the attempt of a fallen woman to 'get back' into society. *Mrs Warren's Profession* excoriated the sentimentalities of current stage representations of the buying and selling of sex, as exemplified by Dumas fils's *La Dame aux camélias* (1852), and the titillation of stage representations of the 'double standard', which demonstrated its inevitability even while encouraging audiences to weep over it, as exemplified in the other overwhelmingly popular production of the early 1890s, Pinero's *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893), in which

Mrs Campbell had made her name. Despite their evident differences of tone, female transgression is a central theme of both of the 1890s plays included here; but, after the turn of the century, at least in the advanced drama, it was no longer the pressing issue. In so far as the woman-with-a-past theme surfaces, as it does in both the Edwardian plays included here, it is demonstrably unimportant, except in distinguishing the attitudes and assumptions of the protagonist from a more conservative older generation. Attention focuses instead on women's social and economic role, the quality of male-female relationships and choices about marriage, particularly for women who were educated or had financial independence.

The New Woman

Sidney Grundy's *The New Woman* ostensibly offers itself as a Society Drama and has clearly responded to the interest generated by *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* and the Ibsen productions as well as the current heated discussion of female emancipation, but it draws shamelessly on the conventions of old-fashioned Victorian Comedy. Grundy had, indeed, gone into print in 1891 to argue against the 'new school of philosophers', the 'modern theorists' who

contend that the drama ought to be the study of human nature on the stage, the analysis of character pure and simple—no 'plot', there is none in nature—no 'situations', they are artificial—no 'pictures', they are childish—no 'points', they are theatrical. They do not want a story; an episode is sufficient.⁵

The 'pictures' to which Grundy refers were the tableaux into which actors would freeze to emphasize an emotional climax, usually at the end of an act or scene; 'points' entailed the use of vocal emphasis or a judiciously placed pause to underscore significant lines of dialogue and alert the audience to cruxes in the plot—both were common performance conventions of mid-Victorian theatre.

Grundy's output was huge. He was one of the more successful West End dramatists, and author of innumerable farces and melodramas adapted from the French; but very few of his plays—with the exception of *A Pair of Spectacles* (1890), which became a vehicle for John Hare—were much revived after their first production. It was, however, a rare season that included no play by him. They were all but guaranteed to make the profitable minimum of a six-week run. *The New Woman*,

⁵ Sidney Grundy, 'The Science of the Drama', *New Review*, 5: 26 (July 1895), 89.

which was one of the great successes of 1894, allows fascinating insight into the popular response to contemporary ideas. Female education, interest in art, questions about the sexual double standard are all held up for mirth, and, as Clement Scott put it, 'the audience tingled to the fun and were exhilarated by it'.⁶

The play is a telling example of the regular fare of the London theatre in the 1890s, its hybrid nature being one of its most interesting features. Grundy draws on the patterns and language of melodrama—his *desiderata* of 'plot', 'situation', 'pictures', and 'points' all being well in evidence. He uses the curtain line in a classically melodramatic way. Margery's declaration that she will obey closes Act 1; the thud as she falls to the ground having overheard Gerald's declaration to Mrs Sylvester and his cry of 'Margery!' as he pulls back the curtain to reveal her inert form end Act 2; the third act culminates in the rival and parallel declarations of love of Mrs Sylvester and Margery, while the final curtain closes on the declaration of belief in the future of the womanly woman reconciled with the now confidently masculine man. The language in each of these sequences is notably melodramatic, as it is whenever characters express emotion. So Gerald's speech expressing his regret for the Margery he has betrayed in Act 3 exhibits such characteristics of melodramatic style as the use of parallel syntactical structures; the repetition of Margery's name to punctuate the speech; the frequent repetition of the guilty first person pronoun ('it is I who . . . I who . . . I see . . . I feel . . . I ask . . .'); the use of rising inflections to end each clause, and recourse to rhetorical questions ('How much did Margery give up for me? . . . What do all these things matter? What is a man worth who sets such things above a love like hers?')

Older dramatic forms are evident, too, in the sequences of anti-emancipation humour and the flirtations that accompany it. If the problem plays of Pinero and Jones hold firm to the new fourth wall convention, Grundy repeatedly breaks it, for all he apes the themes and settings of Society Drama. His self-conscious theatricality includes recourse to soliloquy to reveal a character's state of mind, the use of asides to point the action or invite audience complicity, the introduction of choric speech and concerted action, evident in such stage directions as '*all shiver*', and duologues which, conducted with increasing fervour, are really comic turns interrupting the progress of the plot.

The satiric energy of the play is located in Grundy's representation of the clutch of feminists, Victoria Vivash, Enid Bethune, and Dr Bevan,

⁶ *Illustrated London News*, 8 Sept. 1894, 296.

particularly when the formidable dowager, Lady Caroline, is pitted against them. They might be thought of as modern humours figures: once set before the audience, each will respond in an exaggerated and predictable way. Grundy's comedy often works by such simple reversals of normally accepted gender roles as Enid's cry, 'A man in distress! I must help him'; by verbal twists of the 'Nothing can stop it', 'No, it stops at nothing' type; by the kind of parody, that has Victoria, in her fervour for equal rights, declare that women must 'reek with infamy' too, or by the use of farcical action to expose the essential femininity of the feminists as when, Colonel Cazenove having crept off-stage in Act 3, Enid and Dr Bevan are left sighing languorously at one another.

Cazenove functions as the *raisonneur*, the right-thinking figure who guides audience response in the well-made Society Drama, although he tends rather to broad innuendo than the witty sophistication found in the *raisonneurs* of Wilde, Pinero, or Henry Arthur Jones. The sexual suggestiveness and nudging humour that inform this play are characteristic of much contemporary comedy. Bernard Shaw, for one, was incensed that such works were tolerated while serious plays were subjected to the interference of the Examiner of Plays. Indeed, this anomaly fuelled the battle against censorship which was engaged with increasing intensity in the years between 1890 and the First World War.

Shaw identified this and comparably satiric plays as reactions to the shock of *A Doll's House*, commenting that 'it is not possible to put the new woman seriously on the stage in her relation to modern society without stirring up, both on the stage and in the auditorium, the struggle to keep her in her old place'.⁷ But it is worth noting that Clement Scott, for all his notorious hostility to Ibsen's drama, suggested that the auditorium might be ready for something stronger than Grundy was offering. Finding the unsympathetic representation of Mrs Sylvester to be the play's one flaw, he argued that 'if we are to discuss the "New Woman" let her be fairly discussed. Mrs Sylvester might have been a true as well as a new woman and thus shown us the earnest side of the movement in contrast to the ridiculous side of it'.⁸ These observations by Scott on Agnes Sylvester may well have pointed Pinero to his representation of Agnes Ebbsmith the following year.

⁷ Bernard Shaw, introduction to William Archer, *The Theatrical World of 1894* (1895), p. xxvi.

⁸ *Illustrated London News*, 8 Sept. 1894, 296.

The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith

Having made his name in farce and romantic comedy, Pinero turned to Society Drama in the 1890s, thereby consolidating his position as the leading dramatist of his day. Unlike Grundy and Henry Arthur Jones, who were hostile to Ibsen's writing from the outset and became increasingly embittered as they saw their work becoming passé, Pinero was interested in Ibsen from the time of the Achurch–Charrington *Doll's House* in 1889 and was consistently supportive of such initiatives as Grein's Independent Theatre, Barker's Court seasons and schemes for a National Theatre, and even the Actresses' Franchise League, being among those who sent a telegram of support at its foundation in December 1908. Pinero's well-made Society Dramas seemed to many of his contemporaries to offer the English answer to Ibsen. Although he endured the fiercest of critical assaults from Bernard Shaw, who saw him as a rival to his own dramatic initiative, he was heralded as a major dramatist by William Archer, the leader of the new generation of drama critics.

The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith was something of a landmark in 'English Ibsenism' and accordingly offended some sensibilities. The *Quarterly Review* critic complained that it 'exacted a story so revolting as to double the arguments against the play' and was offended by the conception of Agnes, 'the cold theorist, the blue stocking misbehaved, Girton astray'.⁹ A more serious play than Grundy's, it presented the type of the new woman much more sympathetically, although, in the end, it is hard not to agree with Shaw that it lacked the courage of the convictions it seemed to espouse in the first two acts. The difficulty, as both Shaw and Archer immediately perceived, as well as the originality of the play, lies in the representation of Agnes, the new woman, although both admitted that Mrs Campbell's remarkable performance and tendency to play against the role in the later scenes disguised this. By comparison, Clement Scott praised the play unreservedly for its originality as well as its depth.

The play is concerned, as is *The Second Mrs Tanqueray*, with a socially inappropriate union, but Pinero breaks new ground by proposing as his heroine a freethinker who despises the allure of femininity and, unlike Paula Tanqueray or Wilde's Mrs Erlynne in *Lady Windermere's Fan* (1892), has no longing to embrace social convention. In differentiating Agnes from the conventional woman-with-a-past, Pinero suggests a theoretical as well as an emotional basis for her affair with Lucas. She is a 'new woman' intent on forming a 'free union'. The plot bears strong

⁹ Oct. 1895, 422–7.

resemblance to that of Gissing's *The Odd Women*. Like Pinero's play, Gissing's novel, published two years earlier, includes the decision of a couple to live together in free union and a heroine, Rhoda, who eventually leaves her man, crushed by her recognition that, whereas she loves him, he lusts after her. Although in the early scenes Pinero attempts to flesh out the representation of the new woman, the needs of the plot, and probably his own fundamental attitudes, prevent him from sustaining this. While evidently more positive in approach than Grundy or Jones, he draws as they do on the stereotype in creating the Agnes of the first two acts. Thereafter, the typology becomes confused. Agnes must serve too many different purposes. New woman, fallen woman, and penitent succeed each other as, panicked by the prospective loss of Lucas, she has recourse to sexual seductiveness to attach him to her.

Even in the first two acts conflicting ideas inform the characterization. Although Pinero has picked up on the common association of the new woman with frigidity, the Cazenove view that 'what they really want is a husband' lurks near. The need to make Agnes sympathetic leads Pinero to angel-in-the-house womanhood, whose devotion and nursing skills have saved Lucas's life. So she must be sweet-voiced and gentle despite her history of shrillness in the public arena. She is self-sacrificing although she has a clear-sighted recognition of Lucas's failings. The audience *hears* of her writing and public speaking, but it *sees* her arranging flowers, threading her needle, worrying about Lucas's medicine. Her revolutionary-socialist-atheist background and alcoholic mother have inexplicably left her 'devout as any girl in a parsonage' before her marriage. The marriage having proved abusive, she has adopted her father's viewpoint, becoming both atheist and socialist, but crumbles when presented with a bible. As the action develops, she is shown to be well able to parry St Olpherts's sallies and notably clearer and firmer in her ideas than Lucas, but must renounce these for a country parsonage when the baser side of Society is revealed to her. For all the courage of Pinero's attempt to create a more characterful heroine, it is not easy to gainsay William Archer's comment that 'her spiritual history does not hang together. It is not probably constructed or possibly expressed'.¹⁰

The idiom in which Agnes describes her socialism is at once a significant marker of the improbability and a strong reflector of contemporary assumptions. The account she gives of her father's and, indeed, her own ideas is that of an outsider—her heterodoxy is expressed in the language

¹⁰ *The World*, 20 Mar. 1895.

INTRODUCTION

and from the point of view of orthodoxy. For all that, Pinero's originality in attempting to draw such a character sympathetically is evident in Mrs Campbell's memory of being 'fired and inspired' by the role. She found Agnes wholly believable in the first three acts and pointed out that 'she was a new and daring type, the woman agitator, the pessimist with original independent ideas—in revolt against sham morals'.¹¹ Agnes's thrusting of the bible into the fire at the end of Act 3 and the fevered grasping of it back again thrilled the first audiences, despite the fact that the sensationalism of that moment and the penitential conclusion are sequences from sentimental melodrama, at odds with the challenging situation Pinero seemed to be developing in the opening scenes of the play.

Pinero is notably innovative in pursuing further the implications of contemporary Society Drama. If the free-union liaison, the bible burning, and Mrs Campbell's transformation from glamorous actress to plain new woman and then to siren again, thrilled contemporary audiences, the clarity of the family's cynical proposition for preserving the socially respectable façade that would sustain Lucas's career was disconcerting. Pinero's real subject, it seems to me, is less female emancipation than social hypocrisy and the mismatch of male and female sexuality, a harsher version of his concerns in his two earlier Society Plays, *The Profligate* (1889) and *The Second Mrs Tanqueray* (1893). The central couple in the former, a debauched man and a puritanical woman, are finally reconciled, the man having, in a revision demanded by John Hare, resisted the further sin of suicide. The puritan in the later play, the step-daughter, learns generosity only after Paula Tanqueray's suicide. Many contemporary Society Plays conclude with reluctant acceptance of society's sexual double standard, but few make their audience face the implications as directly as *The Notorious Mrs Ebbsmith*, which does so partly because Pinero denies his audience a suicide to weep over or a sentimental reconciliation.

The characterization of Lucas Cleeve, which has a consistency that of Agnes lacks, is crucial in establishing the bleak tone of the play. Whereas Grundy has hardly introduced the suggestion of his hero's feminization before disclaiming it, Pinero presses home the idea of the neurasthenic male, making Lucas notably less sympathetic as the play proceeds. Characterized in the stage directions as having 'ambition without patience, self-esteem without confidence', the facile nature of his enthusiasms and egocentricity are increasingly apparent. The audience is led

¹¹ *My Life and Some Letters* (1922), 98.

to perceive his self-deceptions, his failure of responsibility in a marriage abandoned after only three years, his failure to keep faith with Agnes's ideas, his snivelling dependence on being admired, and, most distasteful of all, his willingness to acquiesce in the scheme to set Agnes up covertly as his mistress. The felt shallowness of the hero contributes to the play's account of the moral and sexual barrenness of Society as currently organized.

All the marriages mentioned in the play are dismal if not abusive; the only child to result from any of them has died in infancy. Male sexuality shows as invariably egocentric and rapacious, female as shrinking or frigid. Agnes, the object of her first husband's appalling lust as Gertrude was of hers, need only appear in a sexually suggestive dress to fire Lucas's baser passions, and Pinero's audience is left in no more doubt that this is knowingly done by Agnes, than Ibsen's is that the tarantella Nora dances in *A Doll's House* is a conscious strategy to distract Helmer by inflaming his passion. Indeed, the sell-out of the ending, which puts Agnes literally into a parsonage and implies that she will find sustenance in religion, looks like an attempt on Pinero's part to retreat from the moral bleakness and offer a sop of conventional comfort.

Shaw applauded Mrs Campbell for playing against the grain of the writing in the last two acts. Archer, more sympathetic to Pinero's notion of a woman having 'an hour', took issue with Mrs Campbell's way of wearing the glamorous dress as if it were a hair-shirt and of playing Act 3 in a state of deep hostility, complaining that 'the actress seemed to feel only the irony in Agnes's thoughts, not the genuine underlying joy. There was nothing but bitterness in her realisation that her "one woman's hour" had come.'¹²

Votes for Women!

If in the 1890s most representations of emancipated women were satirical or pitying, the situation shifted remarkably with the coming of the Edwardian New Drama. The heroines of the two remaining plays in this edition do not accept the obedience, selfless suffering, or penitent retirement of the 1890s characters. Joy does not lie in finding true love or erotic mutuality but in finding the confidence to be oneself and to stand alone. Indeed, Vida Levering in *Votes for Women!* takes almost exactly the role Agnes Ebbsmith had projected for herself, although her theme as orator is not the horror of marriage but the demand for female suffrage.

Robins's play, originally called 'The Friend of Women', was

¹² Shaw, *Saturday Review*, 16 Mar. 1895; Archer, *The World*, 27 Mar. 1895.