PRIFYSGOL ABERYSTWYTH UNIVERSITY

Aberystwyth University

‘I roll my cigarette, and cycle to my club’

Birch, Katy

Published in:
Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens

DOI:
10.4000/cve.11788

Publication date:
2022

Citation for published version (APA):
Birch, K. (2022). ‘I roll my cigarette, and cycle to my club’: Playing with Stereotypes and Subverting Anti-Feminism in New Woman Writers’ Contributions to Punch. *Cahiers victoriens et édouardiens*, *96*. https://doi.org/10.4000/cve.11788

Document License
CC BY-NC-ND

General rights
Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the Aberystwyth Research Portal (the Institutional Repository) are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

• Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the Aberystwyth Research Portal for the purpose of private study or research.
• You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
• You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the Aberystwyth Research Portal

Take down policy
If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.

tel: +44 1970 62 2400
email: is@aber.ac.uk

Download date: 23. Apr. 2025

‘I roll my cigarette, and cycle to my club’: Playing with Stereotypes and Subverting Anti-Feminism in New Woman Writers’ Contributions to *Punch*

Katy Birch

Aberystwyth University

The New Woman was initially named in the feminist periodical *The Woman’s Herald* in 1893 and then entered the mainstream press in two opposing articles by Sarah Grand and Ouida in the *North American Review* in 1894, but for much of the reading public it was in *Punch* magazine that the image of the New Woman was created (Tusan; Jordan). Patricia Marks credits *Punch* and other comic magazines with ‘popularizing the goals and manners of the New Woman’ (Marks 2). Talia Schaffer goes further by arguing that the New Woman was not just popularised in the pages of *Punch* but was invented there: ‘The “New Woman” was a comic fictional figure composed of *Punch* cartoons, much-vilified novels, and ominous warnings in popular articles’ (Schaffer 39). Although Tracy Collins has highlighted some positive visual images of the New Woman in *Punch*, most studies of *Punch*’s representation of this figure focus on its misogynistic depictions of a ‘nagging New Woman [who] can never be quiet’ (Collins 311; [Milliken] l.4).

The most enduring image of the New Woman in *Punch* is that of a masculine figure, smoking and wearing androgynous clothing, as represented in George Du Maurier’s cartoon ‘The New Woman’ (1895) (Fig. 1). In this image, the New Women’s bodies are lacking in softness or curves, and their lounging attitudes are unladylike. Their male companion is being driven from the room because he ‘can’t get on without female society’, demonstrating the fear of

New Women becoming 'unsexed'. However, these satires on the New Woman coexisted with contributions by female authors, some of whom could be described as New Women themselves. As the 1890s New Woman evolved into the suffragette, the depictions of this figure were similarly mixed. Owen Seaman, the editor of *Punch* from 1906 onwards, was anti-suffrage himself, and often ridiculed the suffragette in his writing.[1] Many *Punch* contributors, particularly in the early years of militant suffragism, depicted the suffragette as masculine and unattractive, using an image that had changed very little since the negative depictions of the 1890s New Woman. For example, the tie, tam o' shanter and plain, functional jacket worn by the serious-looking suffragette in Claude Shepperson's cartoon 'In the Cause of Our Working Sisters' (Fig. 2) contrast with the softer outline of the more traditional woman on the left of the image, with her elaborate feathered hat and furs highlighting her femininity. The cartoon represents the suffragette's campaigning as self-aggrandisement that harms other women by taking up space on the pavement and putting off the flower seller's potential customers. The more feminine woman is shown to be sympathetic and supportive to the working woman, while the suffragette enjoys the attention of being at the centre of a crowd.

Fig. 1: George Du Maurier. 'The New Woman'. *Punch* 108 (15 June 1895): 282. Image supplied by the National Library of Scotland and licenced under CC BY 4.0.

Fig. 2: Claude Shepperson. 'In the Cause of Our Working Sisters'. *Punch* 134 (11 Mar. 1908): 185. Image supplied by the National Library of Scotland and licenced under CC BY 4.0.

[1] See, for example, his 'A Holloway De Luxe', a poem that argues that prison reform is cruel to suffragettes because it takes away their sense of martyrdom.

However, Seaman also published multiple pieces by other authors and illustrators that expressed support for women's suffrage or presented a more positive image of the suffragette, to the extent that the prominent suffragist Millicent Garrett Fawcett wrote in her memoir that the staff of *Punch* had been 'true and faithful friends' of the suffrage campaign (Fawcett 77-8). In support of this statement, Fawcett cites several *Punch* contributions, including Jocelyn C. Lea's poem 'Mars and Venus', which responds to politicians' claim that 'the will of the people' is opposed to women's suffrage by asking 'has the idea ever entered your head/ That "the People" are not only male?' (Lea ll.3-4), and *Punch*'s 'first-rate pictures and cartoons' (Fawcett, 78), such as Leonard Raven-Hill's 'Excelsior!' (Fig. 3). In this image, a determined suffragist is depicted as Sisyphus, repeatedly pushing a rock labelled 'Women's Suffrage' up a hill representing 'Parliament' in a sympathetic depiction of the years of effort and the multiple setbacks that had been involved in bringing the, ultimately unsuccessful, 1910 Conciliation Bill before Parliament.[2] Although the suffragist's facial expression is purposeful, she is not depicted as hard or masculine like the New Women in the previous images. Her feathered hat and flowing skirt indicate conformity to gender norms, and her appearance is not used as a source of humour. Her direct eye contact with the viewer forges a connection and invites us to empathise with her struggle. The variety of attitudes to the New Woman and women's suffrage found in *Punch* makes it difficult to generalise about '*Punch*'s view' of this question, but the majority of *Punch*'s content in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries was conservative in its approach to gender and tended to reinforce the status quo. Consequently, this is not the place that one would

[2] This Bill would have granted the vote to around a million, largely unmarried or widowed, female householders. It passed a second reading on 12th July 1910, but was then referred to a Committee of the whole House and was not granted further time in that Parliamentary session. For further details see Rosen, pp.134-7.

generally look for supportive representations of the New Woman, and it can be surprising when we find New Woman authors choosing to write about the New Woman in *Punch*.

Fig. 3: Leonard Raven-Hill. 'Excelsior!'. *Punch* 139 (13 July 1910): 21. Image supplied by the National Library of Scotland and licenced under CC BY 4.0.

This article will focus on two pieces, published in *Punch* just over a decade apart, by women who were committed to the cause of women's rights: Rosaline Masson's poem 'The Reason Why' (1898) and Evelyn Sharp's short story 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' (1909). The authors of both of these texts poke fun at the stereotypes surrounding the New Woman without overtly criticising *Punch* for its frequent ridicule of this figure. After addressing the representation of the New Woman and the uses of humour in each of the two texts, I will explore the authors' seemingly paradoxical decision to publish in *Punch* rather than in a magazine with a more sympathetic attitude towards women's rights, and I will highlight the trade-off that required some authors to mute their feminism in return for a wider audience. The article will explore how these authors, who were both intelligent, independent women who earned money through their writing, used humour to subtly introduce a different perspective into a periodical in which such women were more often the targets of humour than the originators of it. This article is the first to highlight Masson's and Sharp's *Punch* contributions and the first to consider how New Woman writers contributed to the varied representation of the New Woman in *Punch*.

Before 1902, most *Punch* contributions were printed anonymously, but my archival research reveals that 'The Reason Why', subtitled '(By a New Woman)', was the last of three poems published in *Punch* by the Scottish author and women's suffrage campaigner Rosaline

Masson (*Punch* Contributors Ledger 1898-1901, f.16).[3] Prue, the narrator of Masson's poem, begins her story by aligning herself with another figure who was frequently ridiculed in *Punch* – the old maid:

> A plain old maid was I,
>
> With spectacles on nose;
>
> I wound my double-ply
>
> And knitted nephews' hose. (Masson 1898b, ll.1-4)

Masson's engagement with this stereotype presents the character as familiar and non-threatening, unlike the stereotypical mannish New Woman. Over the next ten stanzas, Prue highlights the difficulties of the life of the spinster who is at the beck and call of '[her] brothers' wives,/ And sisters who had spouses' (ll.5-6):

> And when MAB had the mumps,
>
> Or FREDDY had the fever,
>
> Or Baby got the jumps
>
> And Mother *had* to leave her,
>
> Why, then to me they'd send,
>
> "Please come at *once*, dear PRUE.
>
> I've so much to attend, -

[3] Masson's other *Punch* contributions were 'Science at Oxford' (1894) and 'Domestic Bliss' (1896).

You’ve nothing else to do!” (ll.33-40)

While the tone of this section is clearly humorous, underscored by Prue’s distillation of an old maid’s life to spectacle-wearing and knitting of hose, and by the comic rhymes such as ‘mumps’/ ‘jumps’ and ‘fever’/ ‘leave her’, Prue’s extensive recital of the trials of the single woman helps to explain her actions in the later stanzas of the poem. In ‘sudden wrath’ she rises up and ‘vow[s] a solemn vow/ That [she]’d revolt, and that/ [she]’d live [her] life’ by becoming a New Woman (ll.45, 50-2):

So now - - -

A modern spinster I
With latch-key for my Chubb:
I roll my cigarette
And cycle to my club;

For I have come to see
Each modern innovation
Can well put in the plea
“Done under provocation.” (ll. 52-60)

In Prue’s version of events, becoming a New Woman is a positive choice and a rational response to her treatment by her relatives. From these stanzas onwards, the punctuation shifts from the

predominantly end-stopped lines of the earlier stanzas to incorporate more frequent use of enjambment, including enjambment across stanzas. By breaking out of fixed lines, this use of enjambment suggests Prue's escape from the restrictions of her former life. The speed and lack of pauses in the resulting longer sentences imitate the energy and breathlessness with which she describes this escape. Like her assertion earlier in the poem that her spinsterhood was freely chosen and a source of joy to her – '[I] felt rejoiced I chose/ A spin. to live and die' (ll. 19-20) – Prue's descriptions of life as a New Woman emphasise freedom and possibilities, rather than the sense of lack or oddness that is often implied in depictions of the New Woman elsewhere in *Punch*.

Prue's description of the life of the 'modern spinster' partially overlaps with other *Punch* depictions of the New Woman through a focus on the external trappings of this figure, such as her bicycle and her cigarettes. However, the poem also gestures towards the more Utopian view of the New Woman put forward by feminist journals, such as *The Woman's Herald* and *Shafts*, and by Sarah Grand's 1894 article 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question' in the *North American Review*. For Grand, the aim of the New Woman is to bring about a world in which the 'man of the future will be better, while the woman will be stronger and wiser' (Grand 272). She describes women using their skills as mothers to teach man, who is 'morally […] in his infancy' (273), and as housekeepers to clean up the darker aspects of humanity and society: 'the first principle of good housekeeping is to have no dark corners, and as we recover ourselves we go to work with a will to sweep them out' (276). In Grand's representation, women do not seek education and freedom for their own benefit, but so that they can benefit the whole human race. In Michelle Tusan's words, this New Woman 'was the hope for England's future as she would take her skills as a domestic manager into public life' (Tusan 171).

Similarly, in Masson's poem, Prue's new life does not only involve a change of clothing and habits but also 'New duties', 'new aims', 'New books, new thoughts, new scopes,/ New friends, new spheres, new claims,/ New power for good, new hopes' (ll. 61-4). This stanza seeks to reassure the reader that the New Woman can still care for others and can have a wider social benefit than she could when her only sphere of influence was her own family. However, Prue's self-interested motivations for becoming a New Woman and her rejection of domesticity set her apart from the selfless, maternal New Woman found in Grand's article and the feminist press. For the most part, Prue is a more positive version of the *Punch* New Woman rather than a sister to the Utopian feminist New Woman, but this poem does, albeit briefly, give the reader of *Punch* an insight into an alternative vision of the New Woman that would be more familiar to readers of the feminist press.

Masson's more serious focus on the New Woman's 'power for good' soon gives way, in the final lines, to a renewed discussion of Prue's domestic situation and her family's disapproval:

And so my brothers' wives,
    And sisters who have spouses,
Must manage their own lives,
    Their children and their houses;

And this is why they toss
    Their heads, and, with acumen,
When they're found out, turn cross,
    And dub me "The New Woman." (ll. 65-72)

The strained final rhyme of 'acumen' and 'New Woman' helps to keep the ending light and comical, but these closing lines also make a serious point. They demonstrate Masson's awareness of the way that the 'New Woman' label was often used as a derogatory term to put rebellious women in their place rather than as a neutral description of reality. As Sally Ledger argues: 'the ideological discourses on the New Woman were undoubtedly promoted in order to ridicule and to control renegade women' (Ledger 9). Prue makes it clear that her relatives' displeasure at her new life stems from the loss of a useful dogsbody, meaning that they must 'manage their own lives,/ Their children and their houses' (ll.67-8), and that it is this that causes them to 'turn cross' and, in retaliation, 'dub me "The New Woman"' (ll.71-2). Although the ostensible focus of this stanza is Prue's family, Masson cannot have been unaware of the way that *Punch* itself frequently used negative stereotypes of the New Woman to pressure women into staying in their allotted sphere. As Ellen Jordan argues, *Punch* was foremost among those publications whose 'attacks on the new generation of feminists […] us[ed] ridicule as a weapon rather than moral outrage' (Jordan 19). Like Prue's family, many *Punch* contributors were inconvenienced or alarmed by the behaviour of younger feminists, and they produced unflattering depictions of the New Woman in response. Masson's poem does not explicitly criticise this tendency in *Punch*, but she uses the magazine that was the source of much of the anti-New-Woman humour to put forward the New Woman's perspective and to suggest that anxiety about the loss of unpaid female labour resulting from greater freedom for women was an ulterior motive behind such negative depictions of the New Woman.

Another New Woman author who chose to write for *Punch* to question its representation of the New Woman from inside was the journalist and fiction writer Evelyn Sharp, whose short

story, ‘The Wreck of “The Ark”’, was her only *Punch* contribution. Sharp – ‘the war correspondent of militant suffragism’[4] – started off writing children’s literature and stories for *The Yellow Book* but in the first decade of the twentieth century she switched her focus to stories that focused on the suffrage campaign and provided sympathetic depictions of suffragettes’ everyday experiences. These stories were published in periodicals and newspapers before being collected into books. She belonged to the Women’s Social and Political Union (WSPU) and was a founding member of the Women Writers Suffrage League, a group of authors who pledged to use their writing to further the cause of women’s suffrage (John 53, 43). As well as supporting the cause through her writing, Sharp also took part in militant action and was briefly imprisoned in 1911 and 1913 (John 62, 70).

In ‘The Wreck of “The Ark”’, a group of friends go for a trip in a motor boat, but the boat runs aground and gets stuck because the tide is going out, so the men gallantly propose that the women and child should go ashore in a dinghy while they stay with the boat. The women walk the four miles back home with a tired child and then sit up ‘through the watches of the night, a prey to horrid thoughts’ about the fate of the men, who do not return until the following afternoon (Sharp 1909, 257). When the men come back they are ‘overwhelmed […] with feminine sympathy. Could anything, we asked, be more cruel than the way brave men were sacrificed to duty, while women and children in the shelter of their homes merely sat up all night for them?’ (257). Eventually, the men sheepishly admit that they left the boat and spent the night comfortably in a hotel, a revelation that is met by ‘one of those long deep pauses which make England’s homes what they are’ (257). This story is not overtly about women’s rights, although, as I will go on to demonstrate, it does allude to the idea of separate spheres and the discourse of

[4] *Manchester Guardian*, 12th July 1910. Qtd in John, 51.

protection of women. Its main significance to this article is in its inclusion of a suffragette character, who is simply known as ‘the Visitor’.

As in other pieces in *Punch* by writers who were less committed to the cause of women’s suffrage, the Visitor is identified as a suffragette by external features such as her clothing. For example, when the boat gets stuck and the motor stirs up mud, the story implies that the Visitor wears the WSPU colours of purple, green and white all of the time, and not just for suffragette marches, when she comments that ‘it was a blessing purple didn’t mark, though white and green did’ (254). Apart from this reference to her clothing, Sharp does not describe the Visitor’s physical appearance. She does not appear to be unfeminine or unattractive, and the story does not single her out from the other, more conventional, female characters, such as the Captain’s Wife, who is discussed only in terms of her relationship to her husband and child and who does not express any opinion on women’s rights within the story. Just enough references are made to the Visitor’s politics to remind the reader that she is a suffragette but she does not present a genuine threat to the established order. When the women are sitting up all night waiting for the men to return, the Visitor speaks admiringly about male courage and comments that ‘never until women were placed on the same, etc., etc.’ [sic.], implying that women cannot claim true equality as long as they do not face the same hardships as men (257).

In this wavering commitment to gender equality and in the focus on external symbols, such as clothing, rather than activism, the Visitor could almost be classed with more negative depictions of suffragettes in *Punch*, such as the main character of Ina Garvey’s story ‘A Suffrage Comedietta’, who joins the suffrage campaign through youthful enthusiasm for a fashionable cause but soon moves on to other concerns (Garvey 188). However, the Visitor’s presentation of a womanly image aligns her with the WSPU’s approach to public campaigning. As well as

taking part in militant actions, the WSPU also fought a propaganda war through their members' appearance, insisting that they must be smart and well-dressed to prove that suffragettes were not unattractive and unfeminine like the frequent caricatures of them in *Punch*. As Katrina Rolley puts it, the WSPU 'evidently realized that in order to gain an active place *within* society, they had to appear socially acceptable' (Rolley 54). Sharp's story continues in this vein by depicting a suffragette who is sometimes gently mocked but who is a more sympathetic character than many portrayals of suffragettes by other writers, and who never resembles the 'ugly suffragette' stereotype that can be found elsewhere in *Punch*.

It is also notable that the Visitor is allowed to be funny herself, rather than simply being the target of humour. When the boat is threatening to sink and one of the passengers suggests throwing something overboard to lighten the load 'the Visitor was heard to regret the absence of Cabinet Ministers among the ballast' (254). Sharp's suffragette's sense of humour is significant because, alongside the charge of mannishness, another key accusation often levelled at the New Woman was humourlessness. This is exemplified in Ouida's claim, in her response to Grand's 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question', that 'For the New Woman there is no such thing as a joke' (Ouida 611). *Punch* often expressed this idea, as in a 1907 article that claims that those with a sense of humour are less likely to attain success than those without one, but reassures readers that a sense of humour is rarer than people imagine, citing 'the behaviour of the suffragettes' as evidence (Sykes 71).

When historians discuss the theme of humour in the suffrage campaign, they tend to focus on anti-suffrage propaganda and the use of humour to ridicule and undermine the suffragettes. As Lisa Tickner observes, 'Most jokes […] in public circulation had been drawn up by men. […] Humour in this respect was on the side of the antis' (Tickner 63). But humour was

also a tool used by the suffragettes themselves. Krista Cowman argues that 'In many aspects of their public campaigning, suffragettes could be seen actively deploying humour as a deliberate tactic; to diffuse hostility, to gain suffragettes a hearing, or to emphasise the ridiculous aspects of their more inflexible opponents' (Cowman 261). Cowman's article focuses on the use of humour in suffragette campaigning and militant actions but suffragette writers, including Sharp, also made use of humour and for similar reasons to those given by Cowman. As Margaret D. Stetz argues, the use of humour to create connection and defuse hostility is particularly significant in New Woman comedy because 'women's comedy […] had to remain palatable to a male audience in order to achieve publication at all' (Stetz 228). This is particularly true of women's writing for *Punch*, a publication with exclusively male editors and a largely male readership. Both Masson's and Sharp's pieces use humour to forge a bond with the reader and to make their female characters' anger amusing rather than threatening or alienating. In Masson's poem, Prue sidesteps the accusation of being a 'nagging New Woman' (Milliken, l.4) by presenting her anger at her situation in a comical form. One way that she does this is by using the 'nephews' hose' that she is twice seen knitting in the early stanzas of the poem to stand in metonymically for women's dissatisfaction with domestic drudgery (ll. 4, 17). When these garments are ceremonially burnt in line 47, Prue's anger is expressed but is safely directed towards a trivial object, provoking laughter rather than anxiety. Similarly, the Visitor's comment about cabinet ministers invokes the threat to traditional femininity posed by militant suffragism by implying women's potential for anger and violence, but takes the sting out of it by transforming it into a good-natured joke between friends. Both Prue and the Visitor are able to laugh at themselves and their situations, and both pieces use humour to disarm the reader and make them more open to seeing an alternative point of view.

The fact that these authors used humour in their writing about the New Woman is noteworthy in itself, but the targets of their humour are also significant. Women's writing for *Punch* in the long nineteenth century, particularly if it was written in a female voice, often relied on self-deprecation or mockery of other women to avoid alienating male readers (Birch 357). To some extent, both Masson's and Sharp's pieces make the New Woman or suffragette character the target of their humour. In Masson's piece, the comic rhymes, such as 'latch-key for my Chubb' and 'cycle to my club' invite amusement from the reader and suggest that Prue is mocking herself (ll.54, 56). The more earnest tone adopted in the description of her 'New power for good, new hopes' does not entirely erase this sense of self-mockery (l.64). In Sharp's story, the Visitor is sometimes gently mocked when she tries to promote her political perspective: '"Privileges, forsooth!" scoffed the Visitor. "Give me penalties – I mean RIGHTS!"' (254). This Freudian slip perhaps suggests some ambivalence about surrendering her privileged feminine position in pursuit of equality and depicts her as a less-than-perfect activist.

However, the New Woman is not the only target of the humour in these pieces. Both Masson and Sharp mock conservative characters and the status quo at least as much as they do the New Woman. Masson's poem exposes the self-interest of Prue's relatives, who require her 'to chat/ For hours of babe or cook' (ll. 31-2) while showing no interest in her life, and who expect her to carry out their tasks for them 'Unhonoured and unpaid' (ll. 43-4). The poem makes it very clear that their sole motivation in opposing her new life is that her new interests mean that she is less available to work for them, and implies that public hostility towards the New Woman is motivated by the self-interest of those who benefit from unpaid female labour. In a similar vein, despite some jokes at the Visitor's expense, much of the humour in Sharp's piece works to puncture male pride and undermine separate spheres ideology, and most of the characters are

gently ridiculed at some point. Sharp makes effective use of the mock-heroic throughout the story, beginning with the use of a dramatic title for a story about everyday events. Indeed, much of the humour of the story arises from the hyperbolic language used to discuss the male characters' 'heroism', and the disparity between such language and the reality of the situation: 'the Crew dramatically proposed that the women and children should be landed, while the men remained at the post of danger. This proposition sounded magnificent until one came to examine it, when it appeared that the women and children would have to go without their second cups of tea and their cake […] while their natural protectors sat and smoked until what time the tide should rise and bear them gallantly homewards' (254).

In its use of the mock-heroic, 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' subtly exposes the hollowness of chivalry and of the claim that strictly delineated gender roles offer protection to women. Here, this point is expressed humorously, in the incongruity between the elevated language and the mundane subject matter and in the way that the men's wish to be seen to be protecting the women results in greater hardships when the women are left to walk home alone. However, in another of Sharp's stories, 'Shaking Hands With the Middle Ages' from *Rebel Women* (1910), this incongruity takes on a darker note when a steward who holds rigid views about gender roles is carried away with emotion and strikes a suffragette while trying to remove her from a political meeting but then, with comically misplaced priorities, immediately apologises for treading on her skirt (Sharp 1910, 37). He is unable to recognise that his violence undermines his claims to chivalry and the argument that women do not need the vote because they have men to protect them: 'He did not seem to understand when she told him gently that he was the man who had boasted of protecting women since the world began' (37). 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' makes a similar point but more subtly. Without addressing these concepts directly, Sharp pokes fun at the

ideas of chivalry and separate spheres that underpinned anti-suffragism by demonstrating how they work in reality. In this way, through their depictions of conservative characters, both Masson and Sharp direct some of their humour at the status quo, and not only at the New Woman who threatens to disrupt it.

Furthermore, it is often the case that, in the parts of these texts that appear to mock the New Woman, these authors are actually ridiculing the stereotypes surrounding the New Woman rather than the female characters themselves, and, in so doing, they implicitly draw attention to *Punch*'s role in shaping the public image of the New Woman. In both texts, the characters are gently mocked for adhering too closely to the New Woman stereotype. Through the focus on this stereotype, both Masson and Sharp depict the New Woman as a semi-fictional creation. Rather than depicting New Woman tendencies as innate in their characters, they show these women self-consciously taking on the persona of the New Woman or the stereotypical suffragette, and consequently assuming an identity that was partially created by *Punch*. Prue, in 'The Reason Why', chooses to become a New Woman to escape the life of the useful spinster, and she deliberately adopts behaviours and symbols that align her with the New Woman as depicted in *Punch*, such as smoking, cycling and possession of a 'latch-key'. Her performance of this role intentionally signals her rebellion against traditional gender roles so that her family will cease to view her as a useful and non-threatening old maid. Sharp's Visitor dresses in suffragette colours in her everyday life and makes performative speeches about votes for women to remind her listeners of her allegiance to the cause. In both cases, this focus on visual symbols and performance playfully reminds the reader of *Punch*'s role in helping to shape the image of the New Woman that both characters play up to. In both texts, these characters adopt the positive aspects of the New Woman image, such as independence and political commitment, without

engaging with the negative depictions of this figure as a 'grotesque buffoon' (Schaffer 39). However, both authors were clearly aware of the negative side of the New Woman as depicted in *Punch*. As I have already noted, the final lines of Masson's poem, in which Prue's family members angrily 'dub [her] "The New Woman"' show Masson's awareness of the way that the 'New Woman' label could be used as a term of abuse to put rebellious women in their place. Sharp's story does not address the negative stereotypes of the New Woman directly but her depiction of the Visitor as witty, feminine and compassionate implicitly refutes representations of the suffragette as masculine and humourless.

In her autobiography, *Unfinished Adventure*, Sharp describes the ease with which respectably dressed women could enter political meetings in order to disrupt them because the people responsible for security expected suffragettes 'to look like nothing on earth – or like the *Punch* cartoons of them' (Sharp 1933, 138). Sharp's decision to use *Punch* as one of the publications in which to demonstrate that suffragettes do not look like the caricatures in *Punch* cartoons is worthy of further exploration. Although Sharp was a regular contributor to *Votes for Women*, she also published work in mainstream newspapers and periodicals to try to reach a wider audience, and she wrote letters to anti-suffrage papers like the *Daily Mail* to correct inaccuracies in their reporting or offer an alternative perspective (John 60). It was probably in the same spirit of trying to reach the unconverted that she contributed a story to *Punch.* Publishing in *Punch* allowed Sharp to contest the stereotype of the suffragette as a humourless spinster by showing an ability to laugh at herself and her suffragette character. It also allowed her to reach a larger and more diverse audience than she could in a specialist pro-suffrage publication, but she may have been constrained by the need to produce work that would be acceptable to a

conservative editor and his readers, which could explain why this piece is less overtly political than her other work.

Comparing 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' with the stories in Sharp's *Rebel Women*, published the following year, in 1910, demonstrates similarities and differences in the tone and approach that Sharp adopted when writing for *Punch*. The use of humour is central to the stories in *Rebel Women*, as it is to 'The Wreck of "The Ark"'. The suffragettes in *Rebel Women* often use jokes to connect with their audience, such as the woman in 'Dissension in the Home', who addresses a meeting in the home of a new convert to the cause, and who uses humour to win over the hostile members of the audience: 'the most obdurate Anti-suffragist could scarcely have remained proof against the wit and good temper of the girl who stood there, undaunted by the atmosphere of opposition that filled the room, turning the laugh against her opponents with every point that she made' (Sharp 1910, 128). Sharp does not mock or stereotype the suffragettes in *Rebel Women* but her narrators do sometimes ruefully laugh at themselves, like the narrator of 'Patrolling the Gutter', who, after parading with a sandwich board in the rain to promote a suffrage meeting, remarks that 'the glories of a militant campaign still remained rather spiritual than actual': 'Our hair was damp and straight, our cardboard armour limp and bent; our skirts were caked with mud, and our boots strongly resembled those that one sometimes sees sticking out of river sand at low tide' (82). Due to their self-consciousness about their dishevelled appearance, the narrator and her fellow campaigners are almost pleased to be jeered at for being overly privileged by the passer-by who argues that they only care about 'Votes for a few rich women'. She remarks that 'Under the circumstances, it was very pleasant to be mistaken for representatives of the rich and cultured classes' (82). The narrator invites laughter at her own expense, both by drawing attention to her untidy appearance and by acknowledging the residual

vanity that leads her almost to prefer being viewed as out of touch by the people she is trying to reach to being seen as poorly turned out.

Rebel Women includes stories that had previously been printed in newspapers and periodicals but 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' is not among them. This is likely due to the less sustained focus on female suffrage in this story and the differences in the portrayal of the suffragette. For example, unlike the stories in *Rebel Women*, 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' does not show the Visitor actively campaigning for the vote. The suffragettes in *Rebel Women* are generally shown as activists: making speeches, selling suffrage newspapers, interrupting a political meeting or trying to rush the House of Commons. In contrast, the Visitor is depicted in her leisure time and, as I have already observed, is not shown to be as committed to the cause as the characters in *Rebel Women* are. However, 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' shares *Rebel Women*'s focus on humanising the suffragette as well as its use of humour. Sharp's decision to depict the Visitor during her leisure time and to highlight her friendships with more traditional women makes her more familiar and less threatening to conservative readers of *Punch*. As Angela John argues, Sharp's stories aim to 'explain how suffrage intersected with daily life, to convey ordinary conversations and the way that people worked for suffrage on a daily basis' (John 58). This can be seen in 'The Wreck of "The Ark"' in the way that the Visitor brings topics such as her dislike of cabinet ministers into ordinary conversation. Consequently, although this story waters down the representation of the suffragette in comparison to Sharp's *Rebel Women* stories, it serves a larger purpose of helping to overcome public fear and hostility towards the suffragette.

In contrast, I have been unable to find any evidence of Masson publishing in feminist periodicals or overtly using her writing to try to further the cause of women's rights. Many of her later publications were biographies of predominantly male writers and celebrities (Masson 1922;

1923; 1934), and she does not appear to have seen her writing as a tool for promoting the cause of women's rights in the way that Sharp and other members of the Women Writers Suffrage League did. Masson's other short publications in the 1890s sometimes address the theme of women's rights but generally in a detached way and with a stronger focus on humour than on furthering the cause. For example, Masson's second collection of short stories, *A Departure from Tradition and Other Stories*, published in the same year as 'The Reason Why', begins with two stories in which the New Woman can be read as being the target of the humour. In the book's title story, the experiment of a husband managing the household so that his wife, Edith, can pursue her intellectual work ends in disaster, and Edith ultimately finds fulfilment in adopting her 'proper' feminine role: 'ours was the most charming house in all England and my wife the best housekeeper in the world' (Masson 1898a, 29). In the second story, 'A Modern Alcestis', the protagonist, May, who responds to the accusation of being a New Woman by agreeing that she is 'Comparatively new: twenty-three', refuses a marriage proposal on the grounds that she does not intend 'to enter the domestic service', drawing parallels between the drudgery of being a lower-class servant and the drudgery of a socially sanctioned higher-class marriage (33). May's suitor's arguments help her to realise, like Prue in 'The Reason Why', that women are constantly expected to sacrifice themselves for others, whether they are married or not. Instead of relenting and agreeing to marriage, as her suitor had hoped, May determines to leave her father's house and take lodgings so that she can live only for herself, but her loneliness and limited means lead her to come to the conclusion that marriage to a good man, who at least recognises women's sacrifices, is preferable to living entirely alone (62).

In both cases, these stories raise questions about the balance of power between the sexes and show that the way things always have been is not necessarily the way they always must be.

However, in both cases the status quo is ultimately restored and the New Woman ends up fulfilling her old role. Consequently, unlike Sharp, for Masson there is no body of work from other publications that suggests that she would have preferred to express her support for women's rights more openly but was required to mute her feminism to fit in with *Punch*'s usual tone. In fact, Prue's experiment in rejecting her conventional role proves more successful than the endeavours of Edith and May in *A Departure from Tradition* because, at least within the poem, Prue does not suffer for her choices or see the error of her ways. I have argued elsewhere that *Punch*'s convention of publishing work anonymously until the early twentieth century could be liberating for female writers and allow them to express themselves in a way that would be impossible in their own voices (Birch 352). It may be that, for Masson, this anonymity gives her more freedom than in signed publications and her chosen genre of comic poetry gives her more space to play with ideas and voices. Comic poetry's release from the demands of realism may have enabled her to go further in imagining a happy ending for the New Woman without addressing the social and financial circumstances that often made such happy endings impossible.

Although *Punch*'s posthumous reputation as 'one of the most potent and long-lasting barometers of masculine antagonism towards women' is not entirely undeserved (Fraser, Green and Johnston 168), the presence of multiple contributors, including female contributors, means that it was far from speaking with a single voice on the phenomenon of the New Woman. Not all women who wrote for *Punch* used this platform to question the negative depictions of the New Woman, but for those, like Masson and Sharp, who did choose to use their work in this way, writing for *Punch* gave them a larger readership and an opportunity to oppose negative stereotypes of the New Woman from the pages of the very publication that had helped to create

these stereotypes. Although, at least in Sharp's case, publication in *Punch* meant damping down her feminism in order to use her humour to forge a connection with *Punch*'s largely conservative readers, both of the pieces examined in this article contest *Punch*'s frequently negative portrayals of the New Woman and present a more positive version of this figure. Both of these authors mock the negative stereotypes that were often used against the New Woman, rather than the New Woman herself, and in doing so they highlight the role of *Punch* in helping to shape the popular image of the New Woman in the first place.

Bibliography

BIRCH, Katy. 'Gender, Anonymity and Humour in Women's Writing for *Punch*'. *Women, Periodicals, and Print Culture in Britain, 1830s-1900s*. Eds. Alexis EASLEY, Clare GILL, and Beth RODGERS. Edinburgh: Edinburgh UP, 2019. 351-364.

COLLINS, Tracy J. R. 'Athletic Fashion, "Punch", and the Creation of the New Woman'. *Victorian Periodicals Review* 43.3 (Fall 2010): 309-335.

COWMAN, Krista. '"Doing Something Silly": The Uses of Humour by the Women's Social and Political Union, 1903-1914'. *International Review of Social History* 52 (2007): 259-274.

DU MAURIER, George. 'The New Woman'. *Punch* 108 (15 June 1895): 282.

FAWCETT, Millicent Garrett. *The Women's Victory and After: Personal Reminiscences, 1911-1918*. London: Sidgewick and Jackson Ltd., 1920.

FRASER, Hilary, Stephanie GREEN, and Judith JOHNSTON. *Gender and the Victorian Periodical*. Cambridge: CUP, 2003.

GARVEY, Ina. 'A Suffrage Comedietta'. *Punch* 144 (5 Mar. 1913): 188.

GRAND, Sarah. 'The New Aspect of the Woman Question'. *The North American Review* 158 (Mar. 1894): 270-6.

JOHN, Angela V. *Evelyn Sharp: Rebel Woman, 1869-1955*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 2009.

JORDAN, Ellen. 'The Christening of the New Woman: May 1894'. *Victorian Newsletter* 63 (Spring 1983): 19-21.

LEA, Jocelyn C. ‘Mars and Venus’. *Punch* 136 (2 June 1909): 392.

LEDGER, Sally. *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the Fin de Siècle*. Manchester: Manchester UP, 1997.

MARKS, Patricia. *Bicycles, Bangs and Bloomers: The New Woman in the Popular Press*. Lexington, KY: UP of Kentucky, 1990.

[MASSON, Rosaline]. ‘Science at Oxford’. *Punch* 106 (23 June 1894): 291.

[MASSON, Rosaline]. ‘Domestic Bliss’. *Punch* 111 (8 August 1896): 64.

MASSON, Rosaline. *A Departure from Tradition and Other Stories*. London: Bliss Sands & Co., 1898a.

[MASSON, Rosaline]. ‘The Reason Why’. *Punch* 114 (12 Mar. 1898b): 111.

MASSON, Rosaline (ed.). *I Can Remember Robert Louis Stevenson*. Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd., 1922.

MASSON, Rosaline. *The Life of Robert Louis Stevenson*. Edinburgh: W & R Chambers Ltd., 1923.

MASSON, Rosaline. *Poets Patriots and Lovers: Sketches and Memories of Famous People*. London: James Clarke and Company, [1934].

[MILLIKEN, Edwin James]. ‘The New Woman’. *Punch* 106 (26 May 1894): 252.

OUIDA. ‘The New Woman’. *The North American Review* 158 (May 1894): 610-19.

Punch Contributors Ledger 1885–1898. Add Ms 88937/4/2. British Library, Western Manuscripts.

Punch Contributors Ledger 1898-1901. Add Ms 88937/4/3. British Library, Western Manuscripts.

RAVEN-HILL, Leonard. ‘Excelsior!’. *Punch* 139 (13 July 1910): 21

ROLLEY, Katrina. ‘Fashion, Femininity and the Fight for the Vote’. *Art History* 13.1 (Mar. 1990): 47-71.

ROSEN, Andrew. *Rise Up, Women! The Militant Campaign of the Women’s Social and Political Union 1903-1914*. London and Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1974.

SCHAFFER, Talia. ‘“Nothing but Foolscap and Ink”: Inventing the New Woman’. *The New Woman in Fiction and Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms*. Ed. by Angelique RICHARDSON and Chris WILLIS. Houndmills: Palgrave Macmillan, 2002. 39-52.

SEAMAN, Owen. ‘A Holloway De Luxe’. *Punch* 139 (27 July 1910): 56.

SHARP, Evelyn. ‘The Wreck of “The Ark”’. *Punch* 137 (13 Oct. 1909): 254, 257.

SHARP, Evelyn. *Rebel Women*. London: A. C. Fifield, 1910.

SHARP, Evelyn. *Unfinished Adventure: Selected Reminiscences from an Englishwoman’s Life*. London: John Lane, 1933.

SHEPPERSON, Claude. ‘In the Cause of Our Working Sisters’. *Punch* 134 (11 Mar. 1908): 185.

STETZ, Margaret D. ‘The Laugh of the New Woman’. *The Victorian Comic Spirit: New Perspectives*. Ed. by Jenifer A. WAGNER-LAWLOR. Aldershot: Ashgate, 2000. 219-241.

SYKES, A. A. ‘A Warning to Humorists’. *Punch* 132 (23 Jan. 1907): 71.

TICKNER, Lisa. *The Spectacle of Women: Imagery of the Suffrage Campaign 1907-14*. London: Chatto and Windus, 1987.

TUSAN, Michelle Elizabeth. ‘Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics During the Fin-de-Siècle’. *Victorian Periodicals Review* 31.2 (Summer 1998): 169-182.