

Uptake and genre: The Canadian reception of suffrage militancy

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Synopsis

From 1909 onward, the Canadian suffrage debate was heavily influenced by reports on suffrage militancy from Great Britain and the United States. Militancy played an influential role in Canadian suffrage history not through its practice—there was no Canadian militant campaign—but through an ongoing discussion of its meaning. Using Anne Freadman's notions of genre and uptake, this paper analyzes the discursive uptake of suffrage militancy—from news reports on front pages, to commentary on women's pages, to reviews of Emmeline Pankhurst's Canadian speaking engagements. The Canadian debate about militancy is a fertile site for drawing out the roles of genre and uptake in the political positioning of both suffragists and suffrage sceptics. Talk about militancy serves as a way to regulate the uptake of this particular genre of political action, whereby both sides tended to share the optimistic view that Canadian suffragists were not yet in need of militancy.

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The militant activism of English suffragettes between 1903 and 1914 was well reported in the Canadian press. In fact, it was one of the few occasions when suffrage issues made it onto the front pages of Canadian newspapers. Canadian suffrage news received limited coverage in mainstream media and, compared to British feminists, Canadian suffragists produced only a very small number of suffrage magazines and books. News about women's rights activities in Canada reached the public mostly through meetings of women's organizations, through speeches by Canadian, American, and British women's suffragists, and through short reports in women's pages of various newspapers. In the absence of prominent suffrage news from Canada, the public perception of suffragism was guided largely by newspaper commentary on English militant activities and American suffrage campaigns. Reports on the militancy which occurred in other countries became an integral part of the public perception of the Canadian suffrage movement.

Canadian newspaper reports of suffragette activities allow us to witness the manner in which the idea of militancy reached across the Atlantic. We are able to see

how these activities were refigured in a Canadian context, calling for a positioning of Canadian suffragism in relation to English militancy. Lecture tours in Canada by English suffragettes Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst made this positioning more imperative. Their visits left behind one of the lingering questions of Canadian suffrage research: even though Emmeline Pankhurst was well received in Canada, why did Canadian suffragists not adopt some of her forms of militant political protest? Why did they not engage in this genre of political action? Was there something particularly conservative about Canadian suffragism? I approach these questions through an analysis of how suffrage and anti-suffrage commentary positioned Canadian feminism in relation to suffrage militancy. Such an analysis adds a new dimension to the historical work which traces the organizational and personal links between suffrage activities in Britain, the United States, and elsewhere (see, e.g., Adickes, 2002; Fletcher, 2000; Holton, 1994; McFadden, 1999).

In her study of English suffragettes in Canada, Deborah Gorham (1975) points out that women in England fought

much longer and in more radical ways for suffrage than Canadian women. Britain had a suffrage movement from the 1860s on; this movement manifested itself in the form of numerous political organizations for women, and was propagated in various publications, magazines, and novels. By the measure of its own mass publishing and public campaigning, Canadian suffragism was much less overt. Yet, English women were granted the vote at roughly the same time as Canadian women. Given this discrepancy, Gorham wonders if the more radical activities of English suffragettes were unnecessary. She concludes that this is not the case; instead, Canadian suffragists gathered strength from the struggles of women elsewhere and used them to their advantage. In terms of the relations between British militant and Canadian moderate suffragists, she suggests that “suffragettes’ supporters in Canada simply ignored those facts from which they did not feel they could draw strength” (Gorham, 1975, p. 109).

What Gorham describes as a selective gathering of strength I will consider as processes of positioning through genre and uptake. I use the terms genre and uptake in the way Anne Freadman (1994, 2002) has defined them. Texts become identified as being of a certain genre in their interaction with other texts. When a text finds a respondent, the text’s generic identity can be confirmed, but it can also be modified. Freadman’s understanding of genre as residing in the interrelations between texts and utterances is particularly appropriate for the Canadian discussion of militancy. While militancy can be said to have played an influential role in Canadian suffrage history, it has done so less through its practice and more through an ongoing discussion of its meaning. In Freadman’s terms, the issue of militancy received a great deal of uptake. Uptake in this sense is the selection of a discursive object. It can be the choosing of an answer to a question or invitation, the agreement or disagreement following a proposition or, in more concrete terms, an editor’s decision to include a report in a newspaper. Uptake crosses the boundaries between institutions and discourses; it mediates between genres.

Suffrage militancy in England received uptake in the political reporting of Canadian newspapers. In turn, the news reports encouraged uptake by both suffragist and anti-suffragist columnists and letter writers, with suffragist uptake often challenging the generic status of the original news report (see my section on Genres of response). In the process of this uptake, respondents articulate their stance in relation to militancy. When suffragists discuss militancy, they also orient themselves toward larger questions of femininity and politics, women’s social role, or the nature of progress. The introduction

of issues of militancy into the Canadian context thus appears not so much as an act of support from across the Atlantic. Rather, it is one of the factors which determined how Canadian suffragism oriented itself within its discursive context.

The rhetorical function of militancy

I follow roughly the convention of distinguishing between suffragists and suffragettes according to their use of activist methods. The term “suffragist” tends to describe women and men who were mildly sympathetic as well as key organizers and officeholders who campaigned within the boundaries of accepted female conduct; “suffragette” refers to those who used what were described as militant methods. In Canada the distinction was used not only to differentiate methods of political engagement but also to set Canadian suffragists apart from English suffragettes. Our contemporary use of the distinction between militant and non-militant methods carries its problems. Many of the activities by militants would not have been called thus and would not have drawn as much indignation if they had been carried out by men. Between 1903 and 1908 during the British campaign, asking a question at a public meeting, or interrupting a speaker, caused one to be labelled a militant suffragette. As we adhere to militancy as a concept of its time, we do not wish to repeat its gendered biases.

Recent work has questioned the way in which the term “militant” is still used to set apart certain branches of the British suffrage campaign (most notably the work of the Women’s Social and Political Union) from what are called the “constitutional” suffragists, those emphasizing more conventional, or constitutional, action to the exclusion of protests and hunger strikes. As Sandra Stanley Holton says in *Feminism and Democracy* (1986, p. 4), it is the “mode of campaigning, a style of agitation” that is held as the distinction between the two, not questions of suffrage as such. Holton argues that, if militancy involved “simply a preparedness to resort to extreme forms of violence,” then many constitutionalists would also be militants (Holton, 1986, p. 4). Even if we take “militant” to mean membership in particular organizations, this assumption is complicated by the fact that many women belonged to a number of diverse suffrage societies. The distinction between militant and constitutionalist is not only difficult to apply, it “also tends to obscure those currents within the suffrage movement which cut across it” (Holton, 1986, p. 4).

In *The Militant Suffrage Movement* (2003), Laura Nym Mayhall observes that, even though scholars have long questioned the validity of a simple dichotomy

between militant and constitutionalist, this dichotomy remains a powerful organizing principle for understanding the differences between suffrage societies. Mayhall notes that some historians characterize militancy as an aberration, “a period of excess in women’s political activism, and one not particularly productive,” while others see it as both “a culmination and a transcendence of late-Victorian women’s political activism” (Mayhall, 2003, p. 7). To understand militancy as the most commemorative aspect of suffrage activity is to “accept one extreme end of the campaign as the whole campaign and to miss the continuum along which suffragettes practiced militancy” (Mayhall, 2003, p. 7). We should ignore neither “the vital debate within the suffrage movement itself,” nor the wider political culture of the late 19th century which was “steeped in the constitutionalist idiom and infused... with a popular consciousness of the right of resistance to political tyranny” (Mayhall, 2000, pp. 342–343). According to Mayhall, suffragists borrowed from a longstanding tradition of radicalism, including middle and working-class movements, trade unionists, intellectual radicalism, and Ulster unionism.

The large spectrum of, and fluid membership between, militant and constitutionalist organizations in Britain did not quite have an equivalent in Canada. Militancy tended to be a spoken-about practice from afar, an unusual genre of political action for women. Militancy was a practice against which Canadian suffragism was contrasted, most notably by its opponents. It mattered little to the commentators to which specific and multiple organizations suffragette women belonged. The complex relations that existed between British suffrage organizations thus appeared flattened from the Canadian vantage point, particularly in the newspaper debates which are the focus of this study. Commentators often spoke of militancy in a way that confirmed the view that it was potentially violent and presumed a neat division between militancy and other forms of political activity.

By 1909 in Canada, criticism of militancy regularly included detailed mention of the militant activities of which the writers disapproved. In a letter to the *Toronto World* in November 1909, one of the paper’s readers calls suffragettes “the aggressive and dissatisfied ones” (J.E.M.S., 1909). They are “wielding their tongues and their pens and are using their clenched fists and physical violence.” In the face of these acts, “all right-thinking women of the old land as well as Canada are bowing their heads in sorrow and pain, because of the indignity that is being heaped upon their sex.” In the same month, a *Toronto Globe* editorial declares that Canadians disapprove of:

Endangering people’s lives by throwing acids, or of breaking up political meetings, or of mobbing the Prime Minister of the Empire, or of horse-whipping another Minister in the presence of his wife on a railway platform, or of smashing with missiles the ornamental windows of an historical hall, or of striking policemen whose disagreeable duty is to make both men and women keep the public peace.... (The Militant Suffragette Movement, p. 6).

Newspaper readers would recognize such level of detail as referring to what had been reported about some of the activities of the British suffrage campaign. It is because the *Globe* writers felt that Canadian suffragists, like British suffragettes, might have been disposed to these very specific militant actions that they attempted to proscribe them.

Where Holton and Mayhall emphasize the continuities between militancy and constitutionalism, Canadian commentators at the time insisted on observing a gap widened by questions of femininity and morality. Militancy produced a division of womanhood, one in which aggressive, unwomanly women were seen to discredit all women through their behaviour. In 1912, *The Champion*, Canada’s only suffrage magazine, asked Mrs. Pethick-Lawrence the following question: “One of the most frequent objections brought forward here [in Canada]...is this, that the conduct of the Militants in England proves the unfitness of Canadian women to vote” (Interview with Mrs. Pethick Lawrence, 1912, p. 14). It is in relation to this division between militancy and proper femininity that Canadian suffragists are asked to declare their opinions on militancy. Therefore, it is to this division that I will refer to when using the term “militancy.” In highlighting historical understandings of militancy, my aim is not to resurrect a questionable distinction, but to analyze how this division functions rhetorically. From our contemporary viewpoint, there are no clear or stable boundaries between what are or were considered militant or non-militant activities, and by whom, and at what point—but there were imagined boundaries which speakers tended to portray as stable. It is precisely as a continually re-imagined boundary, a boundary between different genres of political engagement, that the distinction between militancy and non-militancy becomes a productive site for an analysis of genre.

The genre of news reports

Canadian suffrage debates gained great prominence when Emmeline and Sylvia Pankhurst visited Canadian cities as part of speaking tours organized by American

suffrage organizations. Emmeline Pankhurst first came to Toronto in November 1909. Three years later, in 1911, she went on a more extensive tour across Canada. Her first visit came at a time of increasing suffrage activity in Canada. Only 5 months before, in June 1909, Toronto had hosted the fourth International Congress of Women. The congress was attended by feminists and suffragists from Canada, the US, and various European countries. John Castell Hopkins writes in his *Canadian Annual Review of Public Affairs* (Hopkins, 1910) that the question of woman suffrage “came in 1909 as, practically, a new issue to Canadians.” He explains:

The real shock of agitation, however, will date historically from the interest aroused in Canada by the ‘force’ platform of the Suffragettes in England during this year. There had been Societies in Canada for urging the question on public attention but, though earnest in their efforts, they had not been conspicuous or powerful. (Hopkins, 1910, p. 244).

Hopkins’ comments indicate that newspaper readers who were not themselves active in the suffrage movement came to view all suffrage—the British, American, and Canadian campaigns—through the reports on militant activities.

The Canadian debate on suffrage militancy coincided with the growing importance of women’s pages in Canadian newspapers. Since a number of women’s page editors were feminists, women’s pages increasingly discussed the politics of social reform and the activities of women’s organizations. For instance, Sara Curzon (co-founder of the Women’s Canadian Historical Association and Women’s Art Association, author of the feminist comedy “*The Sweet Girl Graduate*” [Curzon, 1887a] and the drama “*Laura Secord, the Heroine of 1812*” [Curzon, 1887b]) had a women’s issues column in the *Canada Citizen* for 2 years and also worked as its assistant editor. Flora MacDonald Denison (President of the Canadian Suffrage Association) wrote a weekly column on women’s rights in the *Toronto Sunday World*, and Lillian Beynon Thomas (key member of the Political Equality League of Manitoba) wrote as Lillian Laurie for and also edited the woman’s page at the *Manitoba Free Press*.

However, as Marjory Lang (1999) has shown, female journalists remained limited to the woman’s page despite these inroads into the profession. They were not invited to write on political or economic issues in other parts of the newspaper. Women’s journalism was considered inferior, gossipy, and personal; good for the newspaper’s sales, but not for its front page. As well, there were restrictions on how political the writing on women’s pages could become. Lang explains that

women’s page editors were often allowed to run their pages as they saw fit, except for when they ventured into topics such as national and international politics (Lang, 1999, p. 151). Barbara Freeman (2001) suggests that Faith Fenton was fired from the women’s department of the *Toronto Empire* for her suffragist views, while the more cautious, less outspoken feminist, Kit Coleman, was allowed to stay on.

The division between political reporting on the front pages and commentary by female journalists on the woman’s page created unique conditions for the reception of suffrage militancy. Before women’s page writers could take a position on militant events, dispatches from London and New York reported about them on the news pages. These were among the few occasions that suffrage issues received front-page attention. Between newspapers, reports varied in subtle ways in the language used to describe militant activities. On February 19, 1909, for instance, both the *Toronto World* and *Globe* reported on an attempt by women of the Women’s Freedom League to gain access to British Prime Minister Asquith. In the process, 24 women were arrested and eight received jail sentences after refusing to pay fines. The *World*, one of the most pro-suffrage newspapers in Canada, titles the event a “Determined Attempt to Break in on Asquith,” highlighting the conviction of those involved (*Suffragettes fight the police*, 1909). The *Globe*, on the other hand, stresses the failure when subtitled “Another Unsuccessful Suffragette Raid” (*Women used their fists on police*, 1909). Similarly, on June 30, 1909, the *World* emphasizes Asquith’s desire to be shielded from women activists with the headline “*Army of Police Protect Asquith from Suffragettes*” (1909). The *Globe*, in contrast, points to the resulting incarceration: “*London police have Mrs. Pankhurst in the toils*” (1909). Both headlines are followed by the same dispatch from the Associated Press.

The reporting on suffragette activities on newspapers’ news pages conjoins the tradition of partisan reporting with developments relating to the idea of journalistic objectivity. Canadian newspapers at the turn of the century were steeped in their partisan tradition. Paul Rutherford (1982, p. 213) calculates that by 1900 there were 37 politically independent Canadian dailies (with a combined circulation of 572,461) compared to 77 partisan papers (with a combined circulation of 660,699). Publishers and editors were still deeply invested in politics. Andrew M. Osler (1993, p. 92) suggests that objectivity as a journalistic principle arose more from “the demands of technology and economics than social philosophy.” For instance, Osler argues, the great wire services enabled by the telegraph, such as the Associated Press, found the appearance of objectivity to be a necessary condition.

They would otherwise not have been able to serve their wide variety of client newspapers, each representing different social and political beliefs. Time constraints and the limited reliability of telegraphic transmission also forced a briefer, to-the-point kind of reporting. As for economic reasons, publishers recognized that too much political partisanship could limit their readership; and they were increasingly dependent on maintaining and expanding readership for the purposes of securing advertising revenue. Minko Sotiron (1997, p. 115) alerts us to the fact that at the turn of the century “independence” did not mean an absence of party affiliation, but the financial freedom that increasingly allowed proprietors to “shrug off direct party control” while still remaining politically interested.

Until well into the First World War, Canadian political parties were notorious for neither declaring themselves in favour of suffrage nor rejecting it outright. Party leaders most commonly claimed that they would support suffrage if they were convinced that it was a pressing political issue and that the majority of women would want it. In turn, suffragists tended not to affiliate with or lobby for any particular political party. We could interpret a newspaper's tacit support of or resistance to suffragism as either an expression of a non-official feeling within the respective party or a sign of editorial independence from party politics. Most notably, the front pages were no longer the place for political commentary, including on women's issues, that they had been in the 19th century. Instead of attracting readers with fervent political opinions, as they had done in the past, newspapers increasingly recognized the sales value of spectacular news. News reports focussing on unusual events came to replace political opinion pieces on Canadian front pages. Sotiron (1997, p. 106) observes that “competitive pressures led to graphic innovations, sensationalism, and entertainment and reduced political comment.”

News reports on suffragette activities are thus part of a currently evolving genre, reflecting technological and economic changes to the practice of newspaper writing. The conditions of the genre frame the reporting on suffrage, but the activities of militant suffragettes also lend themselves favourably to certain kinds of newspaper reporting, in particular to the reporting of the spectacular. Barbara Green (1997) argues that British feminists managed not only to align spectacularity, publicity, and femininity, but also to exploit that alignment for their ends. The “spectacles of suffrage”—pageants, processions, sandwich boards, postcards, pins, photographs, confessional writings—were intended to advertise feminism, to win public attention, and to manipulate the codes of commodity culture. Newspaper reporting—getting onto front pages as

well as writing their own accounts—was an integral part of suffragists' tactics.

Genres of response

News page reporting on spectacular suffrage activities in Britain calls for and sets the stage for a response to these activities by Canadian suffragists. In Anne Freedman's terms, news reports offer an invitation for genres of response. In “Anyone for Tennis?” (1994), Freedman rejects thinking of genres in the sense that “a text is ‘in’ a genre” (that a text is describable in terms of the rules of one genre) as well as the sense that “genre is ‘in’ a text” (that the features of a text will correspond to the rules of the genre) (Freedman, 1994, p. 48). Instead, she proposes to think of genres as pairs or groups of texts. It is in the relation, the interaction, between texts that genre becomes defined—in the movement from, for instance, question to answer, invitation to response, theory to refutation, brief to report. In this way, texts play their partners: they can call for a particular genre as respondent; they can make other genres less likely to occur in their wake; or they can play several games at once, inviting multiple partners into the dialogue.

It is now a tradition in new-rhetorical genre theory to view genres not as formal or stylistic categories, but in their function of producing “social action” (Miller, 1984), “shaping written knowledge” (Bazerman, 1988), or forming “discourse communities” (Swales, 1990). In her definition of genres as residing in relations between texts, Freedman is guided by the idea that we do things with words, that rhetoric is “socially effective speech” (Freedman, 2002, p. 41). Genre has memory and produces culture, she says. Genre comes through the constant “adaptation of remembered contents to changed contexts,” and a good deal of politics is involved in the crossing of generic boundaries, in the interplay between texts (Freedman, 2002, p. 41).

News reporting on English suffragettes with its emphasis on breaking parliamentary rules, resisting police, risking arrests, and carrying out hunger strikes, produced a sensationalist image of suffragism. Such a perspective overshadowed reporting on the day-to-day gathering, speech-giving, and petitioning. Sensational news reporting called most prominently for some kind of refutation as its respondent. This could take the form of refuting either militant practices per se or the sensational characterization of suffragettes. One prominent generic response which refuted the characterization of suffragettes in front-page news was a conversion account: the narration of a first-person encounter with a real-life suffragette, an encounter which convinced the

writer that suffragettes were not who they appeared to be in the news reports.

In leading up to an example of such a conversion as refutation, let me first provide you with a short account of what was published in the preceding days in the same Canadian newspaper. On July 1, 1909, the *Manitoba Free Press* ran a report on “*Suffragettes Once More in Action*” (1909). It was subtitled “Lively Skirmishes Between Police and Women—Scratching, Biting and Kicking,” describing how suffragettes attacked members of the House of Lords and Commons. The report said that the majority of suffragettes “carried stones, and tricked the police by wrapping them in paper or their handkerchiefs,” that they “scratched, bit and kicked,” and when they were unable to get through police lines, they “dropped to the street and rolled in the dust.” The report tells us that 116 suffragettes were arrested. On July 10, 1909, the paper printed a follow-up article, explaining that the London police court had ruled the suffragette protest unconstitutional and had fined the leaders of the raid, Mrs. Pankhurst and Mrs. Haverfield, \$25 or a month’s imprisonment (*Miss Pankhurst Fined*, 1909).

Seven days later in the *Manitoba Free Press* women’s section, Lillian Beynon Thomas (writing as *Lillian Laurie*, 1909, 17 July) narrates her encounter with a suffragette. In a cross-country tour following the International Congress of Women in Toronto, Thomas, along with other suffragists, takes a train ride with Miss MacMillan, a Glasgow suffragist, who is asked to explain the difference between a suffragist and a suffragette. As Miss MacMillan recounts the history of the suffrage movement in Scotland, Thomas comments that a chance traveller “would not have believed that the modest, brown-eyed girl who spoke so moderately and reasonably of her country belonged to the much maligned class of suffragettes.” To tell the truth, “in all the women who spoke at that little meeting, and there were representatives from seven or eight nations, there was not one woman who could by even the most prejudiced be called ‘mannish,’ and yet they were all business-like and practical women, devoted to securing what they believe is justice for those of their own sex.” In the course of the discussion, Mrs. Grandion speaks up, explaining that the majority of “the accounts in the papers of the measures to which the suffragettes have resorted... are yellow journalism of the most despicable kind.” When Mrs. Grandion describes her participation in a street parade, Thomas exclaims: “It appeared impossible to me. She was so modest, so cultured, such a thorough lady... I felt if she and those other women had been in a street parade that the street parade was a pretty good thing and was a necessary thing or they would not have been there.” Thomas concludes her article by expressing pity that not

more Canadians had “an opportunity to see real suffragettes and learn that the women in England who are fighting for justice are not doing so because they like to, but because they feel they should.”

Thomas’ account answers to more than one generic partner. It is positioned at multiple generic junctures: responding to newspaper reports such as the above cited, as well as to the oral accounts by the suffragettes on the train which are here translated into writing for a larger audience, and to the anti-suffrage commentaries and letters to the editor which evoke the mannish and unsexed woman as a consequence of women’s involvement in politics. Thomas counters preceding accounts which are critical of militant suffragism with her first-hand experience of the ethos of the suffragette speaker. Through her experience, she is so convinced by these women’s accounts that she can conclude that any street parade which counts them among its participants, even if such an event is a spectacle, must be a worthwhile and necessary political event. The suffragette’s reputation—as a militant, mannish woman—is here set apart from her real-life speech and appearance. The act of experiencing, of being an eyewitness to, the demeanour of the suffragette on the train provides proof of their very unsexuality and their unquestionable femininity. The attention to suffragette ethos brings into focus the aims of suffragette activities—concern for women’s rights and social reforms—rather than their methods.

The principle of the refutation account as centred on questions of ethos is one we can also observe in the reporting on Emmeline Pankhurst’s visits to Canada. After the suffragette has been unfavourably portrayed in news reports, her very presence provides proof of an unexpectedly agreeable ethos. Elements of this very presence are her clothing, facial expressions, elocution, and manner. The reports of Emmeline Pankhurst’s visits to Canada are particularly remarkable for the frequency with which they mention her physical appearance and style of speech. Journalists appear surprised to not find a “hatchet-faced old dame...whose speech was punctuated with strong epithets; a woman to whom menace was a stock in trade, and browbeating a diversion.” These are the words of one of the more anti-suffrage editorialists, the Colonel of *Saturday Night* (1909, 17 Nov.). Instead, the Colonel encountered “a lady, singularly attractive in appearance, graceful in carriage, dignified in bearing, and a public speaker of culture as well as force.” On its front page, the *Toronto Globe* describes Pankhurst as a “slight, intellectual-looking woman of splendid voice, and possessing remarkable power as a speaker” (*Ready to Sacrifice Lives*, 1909). In an editorial on the same day, the *Globe* also praises how the “discussion of her

theme was characterized by perfect self-possession, unflinching command of material, a ready sense of humor, white heat enthusiasm, and surprising self-control” (*The Militant Suffragette Movement*, 1909). During her second visit, 2 years later, the *Manitoba Free Press* gives an even more impressive account of Pankhurst’s ethos and power of persuasion:

A pale, slight woman, with a somewhat tired expression on her countenance, Mrs. Pankhurst on first appearance seems to give the lie to the expectation that she is a born leader or champion of any cause. But on rising to speak she becomes all on a sudden the most animated of platform speakers. Her eyes sparkle with a lively glow as she warms to the subject and as at times she speaks of the sadder things, her voice has a mellow, tender note, impressive beyond the power of any written word. She has none of the quips and tricks of oratory but in simple and direct language she speaks her message forth. Here and there is a sally of naïve wit, here and there a defiant challenge, but none of the rough and ready bolsterous [sic] eloquence which is so often connected with the political platform. (*Mrs. Pankhurst addresses large Winnipeg audience*, 1911, p. 1).

In these examples, Emmeline Pankhurst’s performance is repeatedly compared to the assumptions she does not fulfil: instead of appearing a born leader she is pale, slight, and somewhat tired; instead of dazzling with tricks of oratory her language is direct and simple; instead of rough and boisterous eloquence, she shows wit and defiant challenge. It is as if her commentators—from the anti-suffragist Colonel in *Saturday Night* to the sympathetic news editors of the *Manitoba Free Press*—cannot help but be astonished by the way in which she defies what is expected of a militant suffragette. This astonishment, being made explicit in detailed comparisons of expectation and experience, alerts us to the fact that these journalists are aware of how their accounts relate to those published earlier. They understand that while their response plays, in Freadman’s terms, *with* the genre of Pankhurst’s performance, it also plays *against* the genre of previous, sensational news-reporting on suffragette militancy. Such a journalistic position has important implications: it lends credence to Pankhurst’s political ideas; and it portrays the journalist as being persuaded by Pankhurst’s performance.

While the writers of these commentaries show themselves as surprised, compelled, and to some degree persuaded by Pankhurst, we should not imagine there to be a chain of persuasion leading from Pankhurst’s intention to her performance, and then to the journalists’

commentary. For, as Freadman (2002, p. 48) says, “Uptake is first the taking of an object; it is not the causation of a response by an intention.” Uptake occurs from a set of possibles. Freadman critiques speech-act theory for attempting to erase these possibles, for setting aside “the heterogeneous antecedents and sequels of an utterance in the interests of philosophical rigor and classificatory unity” (Freadman, 2002, p. 48). Part of the heterogeneity of antecedents is that they are valued differently. While in this historical instance many readers might have expected, and valued, uptake to come in the form of harsher criticism of Pankhurst, the more likely form of uptake happened to be praise for her oratory (albeit with reservations, as we will see). From the perspective of speech act theory, the similarity with which different journalists responded to Pankhurst’s speeches might appear an inevitable result of Pankhurst’s performance. Freadman’s emphasis on the heterogeneity of antecedents, however, makes us realize how unusual the similarity of the different journalists’ responses is, and invites us to ponder why the responses were so alike.

Genres for political action

My argument in this article is that the rhetorical function of “militancy” in Canadian suffrage debates can be most lucidly analyzed by thinking about it in terms of genre. So far I have discussed genres of speaking about militancy—how they play each other and how in doing so they position participants in the debate. When they discuss militancy, these genres aim to lay out the conditions of another genre, the genre of militancy as a political practice. The discussions of militancy function as what Janet Giltrow (2002) calls “meta-genre”: they are part of a prolific tradition of talk about genre, of the wordings and explanations which surround a genre and aim to control its production. Returning to the earlier cited discussions of militancy by Holton and Mayhall, we can explore some of the ambiguities of the use of the term “militancy” when we listen to comments about militancy with an ear to what they say about genre. Holton and Mayhall themselves occasionally conceive of militancy as genre. When Holton says that militancy was defined as a mode of campaigning (rather than a kind of suffrage), this is a reference to genre. When Mayhall insists on militancy being derived from other, male, instances of political radicalism and constitutional argument, she locates it within a tradition of genres of political protest. In doing so, Mayhall traces the uptake of militancy from what Freadman calls “heterogeneous antecedents.” In this case, uptake travels the boundaries of gender-specific genres of political activity.

Pankhurst herself phrases the history of militancy in the terms of genre and uptake. When telling the history of the suffragette movement to her Canadian listeners, she assures her audience that militant action was not taken “except under strong provocation” (*Mrs. Pankhurst addresses large Winnipeg audience, 1911*, p. 1). She details some of these provocations: since the 1860s, women had been campaigning yet the prime minister said “he had no time to hear the women as he was occupied with the voters”; when after a minister’s speech two suffragists displayed their banners and asked “Will the Liberal government give women the vote?” they were “dragged from the hall with their clothes torn and their hands bleeding...flung into the street and there they held a meeting of protest and were immediately arrested” (*Mrs Pankhurst, 1911*, p. 14). Throughout their campaign, “the women never took a single step forward without being pushed back first of all by their opponents” (*Mrs Pankhurst, 1911*, p. 14). When repeated petitions, deputations, and questions—each a more widely accepted genre of female political engagement—found no listeners, and were in fact punished, suffragettes asked themselves: what would men do in such a situation? Pankhurst points out that when men fought for suffrage, they were impatient and at times violent. In contrast, “Our methods are but mild and moderate compared with theirs and were only resorted to after all conciliatory and patient methods had been quite exhausted” (*Mrs Pankhurst, 1911*, p. 14).

Freadman (2002, p. 45) suggests that perhaps “the most important thing about our knowledge of genres is our knowledge of the difference between genres,” that there is “a significant politics involved both in the crossing of generic boundaries, and in their closing” (2002, p. 45). Pankhurst’s careful way of describing the uptake of militant methods indicates that she understands that the movement is at a critical junction of uptake: the use of political genres that are acceptable for men but not for women. In this respect, we can identify the question of this uptake as the crux of the Canadian militancy debate. The commentators previously quoted as impressed by Pankhurst’s performance were very alert to the issues of gender-specific uptake and identify such uptake as the source of their reservations. In its 1909 editorial on the occasion of Pankhurst’s first visit to Toronto, the *Toronto Globe* observes that Pankhurst spent by far the greatest amount of her talk saying what “might have been said by any advocate of woman suffrage who was opposed to resorting to what she very aptly called ‘civil war’” (*The Militant Suffragette Movement, 1909*). The editorial here makes a clear distinction between endorsing what Pankhurst says as an advocate of women’s suffrage, and what she says as an advocate of militancy. The fact that Pank-

hurst did not exactly promote militant methods in her speeches all the more raised the question of their purpose and justification. Consequently, the editorial warns Mrs. Pankhurst that the people of Canada do not approve of her methods and that the cheers she received for her speech were only for her eloquence and effective pleas for women’s suffrage.

The threat of women taking up political genres that are exclusive to men provides occasion for separating Pankhurst’s effective appeals for female suffrage from her choice of activist genre. But how can this separation convincingly be made when Pankhurst details so carefully that it was the lack of success of more accepted female actions which drove suffragettes to militancy? Several commentators suggest that the Canadian situation is sufficiently different to prevent such a lack of success. That is, these writers forecast that Canadian suffragists will not fail if they pursue suffrage through moderate means. A number of journalists argued that if Canadian suffragists were to adopt militant methods, that strategy would actually be detrimental to their gaining the vote. They believed that women’s position and men’s relationship to women in Canada was so much more conducive to the improvement of women’s rights that more conventional means would inevitably lead to suffrage. The Colonel in his editorial in *Saturday Night* muses:

Here, on the North American continent, we neither invite nor desire our mothers, sisters and wives to mix themselves up in political affairs. They take no part in campaigns of this character.... We hold out women to be above such things.... we of the North American continent may compliment ourselves on the fact that we have elevated women to a position which they do not occupy in any other part of the world. It may be a mistake, perhaps it is, but we men are nevertheless rather proud of the fact that chivalry in its best and deepest sense has not been altogether lost. (1909, 27 Nov., p. 1).

He continues: “Canadian men and American men are about the last on earth to treat women cavalierly or unfairly. If a majority of American and Canadian women really desire an equal franchise with men, they will unquestionably obtain it” (Colonel, 1909, p. 1).

For suffrage sceptics, the pressing question in terms of genre and uptake is: how to deter Canadian women from taking up the practice of militancy? Editorials like the Colonel’s tacitly acknowledged the legitimacy of the suffrage campaign while at the same time attempting to regulate its means of political activism. Such tentative embrace of women’s rights in most cases included the condition that first suffragists needed to prove that a

majority of Canadian women actually wanted the vote. In fact, Ontario Premier Whitney, a staunch anti-suffragist, announced that once suffragists can convincingly demonstrate a female majority, he would not stand in the way of the female franchise. The underlying estimation was that this would not be the case anytime soon, as an editorial in the *Toronto World* explains: “Sir James Whitney has expressed himself ready to accord equal liberties to women when they desire them. It must be said, however, that he appeared to assume that there was no immediate prospect of the pledge being claimed” (*The Enfranchisement of Women*, 1909). As anti-suffragists find themselves compelled to denounce militant actions, they tend not to denounce female suffrage as such. When suffrage sceptics encouraged Canadian suffragists to pursue their aims by non-militant means, they tacitly declared their tentative endorsement of the outcome achieved by such means.

The optimistic assessment that Canadian men might be friendlier toward women’s rights was shared by many suffragists. The women’s page editor of *Saturday Night*, for instance, writes in one of her editorials: “Suffragette methods are masculine methods on occasion here in Canada.... If woman is to be a reforming force in politics, she must preserve her dignity. More than that, she must learn to govern her own emotions if she would make her influence felt” (*Madame*, 1909, 27 Nov.). Only a very small number of Canadian suffragists considered the practice of militancy for Canadian purposes (see Bacchi, 1983, p. 34; Sperdakos, 1992, pp. 290–294). Suffrage supporters and opponents both participated in a proscription of militant genres. Many of the suffrage writers explained that, while militancy might be in order in Britain, Canadian women did not need such extreme measures yet. However, they also cautioned that in the case that petitions, public meetings, and deputations to politicians did not achieve their goal, then Canadian women would not be hesitant to take up more controversial measures. What unites suffragists and suffrage sceptics in the debate about militancy is the desire to discursively establish predictable relations between political methods and their effects. This is particularly necessary in the face of methods which are new and controversial and which challenge established conventions. The participants in this discussion are deeply concerned with the conditions for uptake. They attempt to regulate patterns of uptake: what are the conditions that could justify Canadian women drawing from the repertoire of militant activism?

What makes the Canadian militancy debate such a fruitful venue for drawing out the roles of genre and uptake in the game of political positioning is the fact that it is so ostensibly and self-consciously concerned with the politics of genre and uptake. Between 1900 and

1918, women’s journalism and women’s suffragism were still relatively new fields of female engagement in public life. This newness created the opportunity for questions of genre to arise—questions about the genres for political writing on women’s pages as well as for women’s public campaigning in relationship to male political campaigns. The reporting on suffrage militancy in Britain, therefore, raises far-reaching concerns for Canadian discourse at the time, concerns that go beyond the direct contact which suffragettes like Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst had on their Canadian speaking tours. Freedman’s notion of genre as residing in the interrelationships between texts and utterances allows us significant insight into the wide-reaching discursive effects which English militant activism had on the Canadian suffrage campaign.

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