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# TABLOID SENSATIONALISM OR REVOLUTIONARY FEMINISM? The first-wave feminist movement in an Irish women's periodical

Sonja Tiernan

## Introduction

IN 1928 VIRGINIA WOOLF described idly reading a copy of an evening newspaper, observing that:

The most transient visitor to this planet, I thought, who picked up this paper could not fail to be aware, even from this scattered testimony, that England is under the rule of a patriarchy. Nobody in their senses could fail to detect the dominance of the professor. His was the power and the money and the influence. He was the proprietor of the paper and its editor and sub-editor. He was the Foreign Secretary and the judge. He was the cricketer; he owned the racehorses and the yachts. (1929: 50)

Woolf illustrated a simple fact: newspapers reflect the reality of a country's social, political and economic situation. By 1928 women had achieved many of the objectives of the first-wave of the feminist movement. They had secured political franchise in general elections, girls benefitted from improved access to education and working women were gradually experiencing better conditions in the workplace. However, Europe remained under the rule of a patriarchy and newspapers were controlled by men within that system.

The drive to secure votes for Irish women had begun in earnest in 1876 when Anna and Thomas Haslam founded the Dublin Women's Suffrage Association. Suffragists believed that the vote for women could be achieved through constitutional means. In order to promote the activities of the Suffrage Society, members often sought out journalists to cover stories of suffrage meetings, petitions and other society events. However, the activities of suffragists rarely inspired the dramatic headlines that sell newspapers. This situation changed at the turn of the twentieth century when a group of women in Britain, under the auspices of the Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU), began staging militant and outrageous protests. Newspapers reacted by regularly printing details of their activities. Ireland soon followed suit and a militant suffrage organisation – the Irish Women's Franchise League – was founded by Hanna Sheehy-Skeffington and Margaret Cousins in 1908.

The actions of militant feminist organisations were often reported in the newspapers of the time, creating an accessible archive for historians. If researchers were to document the history of feminism solely through newspaper sources, it is likely we

would now have quite a tainted view of the origins of the feminist movement; the first wave of which would be recalled as being led largely by militant bands of women who chained themselves to railings, disrupted political meetings and vandalised public property. Suffrage historian Jill Liddington has devoted decades to uncovering the histories of forgotten suffrage activities in Britain. In one of her earliest studies, written with Jill Norris, Liddington addresses the lack of primary source material available for such research. While newspapers generally provide vital information regarding the activities of, or attitudes towards, political movements, Liddington notes that:

Contemporary newspapers are not particularly helpful. It was a period when the mass circulation dailies, like the *Daily Mail*, the *Daily News* and the *Daily Mirror*, were building up tremendous readerships ... But of course non-militants seldom provided good copy; peaceful tactics seemed rather dull compared to slapping policemen on the face or being thrown out of Liberal party meetings, and unlike the suffragettes the radical suffragists seemed to fight shy of any kind of newspaper publicity. (Liddington and Norris, 1978: 16)

In a related article, 'Rediscovering Suffrage History' (1977), Liddington highlights the paucity of newspaper accounts of non-militant suffrage activities as a major concern for recovering an accurate and complete account of feminist history. The abundance of newspaper articles focusing on the militant activities of some feminist organisations at the turn of the twentieth century has had far reaching consequences. Reports in mainstream newspapers have almost defined the first wave of the feminist movement in the contemporary public imagination.

### ***Urania*: A Vital Historical Source**

Recognising the importance of propaganda, a group of radical thinkers led by the Irish poet and radical suffragist, Eva Gore-Booth, began to monitor newspapers in 1916. The group established their own periodical, *Urania*, in which they reprinted newspaper reports concerning gender equality. Studies of Gore-Booth's literature generally disregard this extraordinary journal, focussing instead on specific aspects of her mainstream literature – such as her plays (Lapisardi, 1991); her poetry (Ní Dhuibhne, 1995 and Donoghue, 1997); or her theosophical literature (Condren, 2002). Similarly, biographical studies such as those by R.M. Fox (1935), Rosangela Barone (1991) and Dermot James (2004), often overlook *Urania*. Specific studies on Gore-Booth which mention the journal often offer underdeveloped and frequently inaccurate readings, such as Gifford Lewis's joint biography of Gore-Booth and Esther Roper (1988) and John Hawley's biographical entry (2001). Alison Oram has recognised the importance of *Urania* as a journal of radical sexual theory and has written two articles in the context of British sexual culture (1998 and 2001). An article authored by Angela Ingram and Daphne Patai (1993) focuses on one of the editors of *Urania*, Thomas Baty.

The lack of intensive research on *Urania* is due mainly to the fact that original copies of the journal are difficult to source. No ordered catalogue of *Urania* exists, and the surviving seventy-three issues are distributed randomly across three different archives at the London School of Economics, the Women's Library at the

London Metropolitan University and the Glasgow Women's Library respectively. It has been shown to be valuable as an informative literary text (see Tiernan, 2008, 2008a, and 2009) and this article will evidence its importance as an historical source.

The study of *Urania* is part of ongoing work on a monograph biography of Eva Gore-Booth for a Government of Ireland post-doctoral fellowship. To date there is no such dedicated biography of Gore-Booth and therefore this research is principally based on primary source material. Newspapers and periodicals which record Gore-Booth's activities or provide a contextual base for her life have become an important aspect of this research and *Urania* is a vital historical resource in this regard.

This article traces Gore-Booth's turbulent relationship with the printed media from her early years in Sligo through to her final days in London. This account elucidates the reasons for Gore-Booth's having established *Urania* and how she employed it as an effective propaganda tool. The contents of the journal are described and it is identified as a radical archive of alternative feminist thought. Recent studies (for example, Mercer, 2005) have begun to examine propaganda as a vital aspect of the suffragette movement. From such research it is clear that propaganda was at the very heart the suffragette movement's militant activities. By contrast, the non-militant campaign received little if any media attention. This article will show that Eva Gore-Booth recognised the power of the media; an insight which prompted her to launch her own unique propaganda campaign.

### **The Gore-Booth Family and Social Reform**

Eva Gore-Booth was born into a landed aristocratic family in County Sligo in 1870. Like many Anglo-Irish families, the Gore-Booths received their land as a reward from the British crown for conquering and controlling its Irish inhabitants. Eva's generation of the Gore-Booth family was the first to question British rule over Ireland. Eva's older sister Constance Gore-Booth, later Countess Markievicz, dedicated her life to the fight for Irish independence. Eva's brother, Josslyn, became a key organiser of the co-operative movement, which emerged under the promotion of fellow Anglo-Irish landowner, Horace Plunkett. Eva was an avid supporter of Irish nationalism and appreciated the importance of economic reform; however, she became most interested in the campaign to achieve equality for women. In 1896 she met Esther Roper, a prominent suffrage activist from Manchester. Eva was inspired by Esther's politics and immediately set about organising a local campaign for women's franchise in Sligo.

Eva arranged a public meeting at Breaghwy Old School in Ballinfull in December 1896. There are no records of this meeting in the Gore-Booth family papers or amongst Eva's personal and political manuscripts. The only account of the meeting is contained in an issue of a local weekly newspaper, the *Sligo Champion*. The *Champion* confirms that it was decided at this meeting to establish the Sligo Women's Suffrage Association (19 December 1896: 9). Eva was elected Secretary, Constance was elected President and their younger sister Mabel was elected Treasurer of the Association. This was a significant development, as before this date the suffrage campaign in Ireland had had very little momentum. The Dublin Women's Suffrage Association had been inactive from 1886 to 1895. The society's annual report for 1896 maintains that this inactivity was due to 'the present condition of political controversy in Ireland, as well as other causes' (Crawford, 2006: 259).

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By 1896 the DWSA had only 43 members (Cullen, 2009: 3). That same year the Women's Poor Law Guardian (Ireland) Act enabled Irish women who adhered to certain property qualifications to act and vote as Poor Law guardians. This slight improvement in women's access to the political sphere stirred the Association back into action. Members of the Dublin Association urged others to form local branches around the country. The Sligo Association was one of the first to be established.

### **'Amusing Proceedings' in the *Sligo Champion***

Eva called the first official meeting of the Sligo Association on Friday 18 December 1896 at Milltown National Protestant School in Drumcliffe (*Sligo Champion*, 26 December 1896: 7). A complete account of the meeting was printed in the *Sligo Champion* of 26 December. The report, headlined 'The Women's Suffrage Movement' describes 'eloquent speeches for and against the question'. The subtitle of the article exhibits the journalist's prejudice on the issue, characterising the meeting as 'amusing proceedings'. This report includes the most wonderful detail about the first ever meeting of the Sligo branch of the Suffrage Association and provides a prime example of the importance of newspapers for historical research. Such detail would otherwise remain unknown. The journalist reports that the hall was packed with attendees, over two thirds of whom were men apparently against the idea of female suffrage. The walls of the meeting hall were decorated with banners carrying slogans and framed in evergreen foliage: 'Who would be free themselves must strike the blow'; 'No taxation without representation'; and 'Liberality, justice, and equality'.

The article relates details of each proposal made at the gathering and every response is noted. When a proposal was put forward to 'try to awaken in Irishwomen a sense of their responsibilities', the resolution was seconded by a Mr. E. Rowlette. There were several moves in opposition presented by various men in the crowd. Unshaken by a boisterous response Eva took the chair and was received with warm applause. She brought the meeting to order and made a forthright resolution that she and the Society 'demand ... the extension of the parliamentary franchise to women'. Inspired by the success of her brother's local co-operative creamery, she called on 'Irishwomen to follow the example of the farmers of Drumcliffe, and to insist, in spite of opposition, in taking affairs into their own hands'. At this point the crowd reportedly became rowdy in appreciation and someone shouted 'We'll back you up Miss', while another voice called out, 'Three cheers for Lissadell.' Lissadell was the Gore-Booth family estate and was one of the largest estates in the West of Ireland, covering nearly 32,000 acres. Eva's father was a powerful landlord, local employer and MP for the county – it is little wonder, then, that the *Sligo Champion* published a long and favourable report of a suffrage meeting held by three female members of his family.

The national newspapers adopted a different approach when reporting the event. The *Irish Times* ridiculed the Sligo Suffrage Society's meeting in a column entitled 'Talk of the Town' authored by 'A Lady'. The events are narrated as 'an amusing account [which] comes all the way from Sligo of a meeting held there by three young ladies, "all on their own responsibility"' (*Irish Times*, 30 January 1897: 4). The Gore-Booth sisters are mocked through a description of their privileged lifestyle. In Sligo 'they ride to hounds and otherwise demonstrate their personal courage and physique – and in London ... they are members of several societies and clubs, and share in all

the intellectual life of the town' (*Irish Times*, 30 January 1897: 4). It is clear from such news reports that Eva's actions would never be judged objectively in Ireland. Journalists reporting for both the *Champion* and the *Times* were swayed by the fact that she was a member of the Anglo-Irish aristocracy. It is not surprising that the national newspapers did not take the meetings seriously, as the suffrage movement certainly did not seem relevant in Ireland at the time. It was mainly controlled by educated middle class women who sought equality with men. Achieving the vote for women who owned property would not impact on the lives of many Irish women nor would it gain Irish independence from Britain.

Some months later Eva made a decision which changed the course of her life forever and which profoundly affected the lives of countless others. In 1897 she rejected her privileged lifestyle at Lissadell and moved to the industrial quarters of Manchester, where she witnessed first-hand the social problems caused by industrialisation there. She immersed herself in social reform activities, determined to better the lives of the working classes in Manchester; a high percentage of whom were Irish refugees. She joined the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies and established various organisations and trade unions to improve the lives of working class women. Eva campaigned for her various causes through constitutional means. She organised petitions to the House of Commons, staged rallies and led a focused campaign of letter writing to various newspapers. In this way she befriended C.P. Scott – a local MP, an avid supporter of Irish home rule and the editor of the somewhat avant-garde *Manchester Guardian* newspaper.

### The *Daily Mail* Suffragette

According to various newspaper reports in Manchester, Eva was a successful suffrage campaigner and enlisted thousands of dedicated supporters. One noteworthy ally was Christabel Pankhurst, whom Eva mentored from 1901 until 1904. Christabel's mother, Emmeline Pankhurst, founded the Women's Social and Political Union in 1903. The WSPU influenced the way in which newspapers reported on suffrage activities. In 1905, Emmeline Pankhurst warned then British Prime Minister, Arthur Balfour, 'that if facilities for the passing into law of the Women's Enfranchisement Bill were not granted, the WSPU would work actively against the Government at the next General Election' (Pankhurst, 1931: 15). Balfour was not moved into action by this threat and so the WSPU began a campaign of militancy in October 1905.

Within days of Emmeline's threat Christabel and another WSPU member, Annie Kenney, arrived at a Liberal party meeting at the Free Trade Hall in Manchester. The women, holding a WSPU banner, put the question to MP Edward Carson: 'Will the Liberal government give votes to women?' When he did not reply, the two women loudly repeated their question; again, he did not reply. Christabel and Annie began heckling the speakers from the gallery. The women were dragged from their seats and brought outside where they addressed a gathered crowd. Christabel was intent on being arrested to highlight the suffrage cause. As she writes in her book *Unshackled*:

I was in the grip of a policeman and surrounded by stewards. I thought I must bring the matter into Court, into prison. For simply disturbing the meeting I should not be imprisoned. I must 'assault the police.' But how was I to do it? The police seemed to be skilled to frustrate my purpose. I could

not strike them, my arms being held. I could not even stamp on their toes. Yet I must be arrested. The vote depended on it. With my limbs helpless, I decided to be arrested for spitting at a policeman. (1959: 128)

The two women were arrested and ordered to appear for sentencing the next day. Christabel was charged with 'spitting at a police superintendent and a police officer and hitting the latter in the mouth' (*Times*, 16 October 1906: 4). Both women were fined and after refusing to pay were transferred to Strangeways prison. This case gained the desired effect and attracted huge media interest. It was the first time that suffrage campaigners had adopted militant tactics and the first time a member was imprisoned. The media attention positively impacted on the WSPU, and their membership grew.

Balfour resigned before the end of the year and a general election was called for January 1906. Two days before the election the *Daily Mail* reported that 'it was not surprising that Mr. Balfour should receive a deputation of the Suffragettes' (10 January 1906). This is the first recorded use of the term suffragette; a new and rather unflattering term used to describe women who adopted militant tactics in pursuit of the female franchise. In contemporary popular discourse the term suffragist – a non-militant campaigner – is often confused with the term suffragette.

From 1906 on Irish newspapers carried numerous reports of suffragette activities in Britain. In March of that year the *Daily Mirror* dedicated an entire front page to the women of the WSPU. Over the next decade suffragettes became increasingly frustrated with the campaign's lack of progress. The WSPU's militant activities became more radical, as evidenced by a report in the *Leitrim Observer* with the headline 'Cathedral Desecrated by Women'. The article describes how suffragettes broke into an English Cathedral and 'daubed [messages] in white paint over the pillars, floors, pew fronts, side galleries ... Even the beautiful Burne-Jones window was not respected. The words "Votes for Women" were painted across the middle' (28 March 1914: 3). From newspaper reports it is clear that suffragette activity in Ireland increased around this time. The *Irish Times* reports that eight members of the Irish Women's Franchise League were arrested for breaking windows in government buildings (14 June 1912). The next month a number of headlines in the Irish *Sunday Independent* relate how Dublin was thrown into disarray at various stages. One such article simply announces that the suffragettes are 'At It Again' (28 July 1912: 5).

Suffragette activities were not purely acts of targeted vandalism. Groups of women instigated highly organised operations in order to cause public disruption and gain recognition for their plight. Newspapers constantly covered these stories in a negative light. A campaign in 1913 to tamper with the mail in Dublin saw the *Free-man's Journal* announce, 'Letters Destroyed; Suffragette Outrage at Dublin Pillar Boxes'. The article details how numerous postboxes on Haddington Road and Fitzgibbon Street were damaged by corrosive acid (17 December 1913: 7). Such newspaper articles alienated the suffragettes from public sympathy. Reports rarely analysed why suffragette activities were becoming increasingly militant; instead articles tended to focus on the disruption caused.

Irish republican journalists often denigrated Irish suffragettes for aligning with English activists. An article in the Irish weekly paper the *Leader* notes that 'the movement in Ireland smacks rather of imitation of the English, and we do not regard

it as a native and spontaneous growth' (19 March 1910). D.P. Moran, editor of the *Leader*, used the derogatory terms 'Suffs' and 'Suffers' to describe the suffragettes (Cullen-Owens, 1984: 45). Negative news reporting had far-reaching consequences for the suffrage campaign. Months after the postbox operation a group of Irish suffragettes wrote to MP John Redmond 'asking for an interview during his stay in Ireland'. Redmond declined, stating that 'he received several [suffragettes] in the past which only led to unpleasantness' (*Irish Independent*, 6 June 1914: 5).

### ***Urania*: An Alternative Media Archive**

From 1906 onwards newspaper articles sensationalised militant suffragette activity; stories of women attempting to blow up castles or destroying public property sold newspapers. Although suffragists continued to campaign for political franchise using non-militant tactics, these activities did not sell newspapers and were rarely reported on. This void in reportage – largely created through bias – means that historians have access to an abundance of news reports about suffragette activities, but very little on non-militant feminist campaigns. That said, newspapers are undeniably valuable when recording the history of the women's movement. Through research of newspapers alone it is possible to gain vital information regarding the social, political and economic history of a country.

As the National Library attests, newspapers 'provide a contemporary commentary of the major occasions in the political, religious, sporting and cultural life of the nation'. They are:

... a major source of information on everyday life. Advertisements, reports of social events, accidents, court proceedings and inquests, all the mundane and exciting details that made up the daily lives of our ancestors are recorded in newspapers. ([www.nli.ie](http://www.nli.ie))

Through articles concerning court proceedings and social events it is often possible to document the development of the radical ideals which enhanced the progress of the first wave feminist movement. Aware of this, a group of radical thinkers, led by Eva Gore-Booth, began to monitor the printed media. The group included Esther Roper, suffrage activist; Dorothy Cornish, a Montessori educator; Jessey Wade, an animal rights campaigner, and Thomas Baty, an international legal scholar. Under the direction of Eva they established the periodical *Urania* in 1916. This remarkable journal reprinted newspaper articles concerning gender equality.

*Urania* constitutes an alternative archive of radical feminist thought which demonstrates the possibility of using periodicals and newspapers as a vital source for uncovering history. The journal was privately printed and circulated until 1940. Unfortunately it has not been possible to source a distribution list, but the journal boasted a circulation of over two hundred and fifty. As with any newspaper circulation, the readership would have been significantly higher than this figure, especially given that many university libraries subscribed to *Urania* – amongst them Girton, Newnham and Lady Margaret Colleges in Britain, and Vassar and Wellesley in America (*Urania* 14, 1919: 3). The principles expressed in *Urania* thus reached hundreds of intellectuals with every issue. Initially the journal was published bi-monthly, however due to increased printing costs publication was reduced in 1921 to three times a year.

*Urania* did not simply reproduce press clippings. The journal is carefully written and edited, and each year a detailed index of the journal's content was compiled, suggesting that the editors were assembling *Urania* as an alternative archive. Most issues contain editorial comments on the reprinted newspaper reports. In their original context in mainstream national and local newspapers these reports were intended to be sensational. Stories of boys who mysteriously changed into girls or women who cross-dressed as men were included in newspapers as a form of scandalous amusement. In *Urania*, the sensationalism was significantly altered through a careful process of analysis and editing.

Each issue follows a similar pattern. The journal opens with a quotation from a poem or a psalm, followed by an editorial commentary, then a letter section, book reviews, and progress reports on co-educational schools. Various reprinted articles from Britain, Ireland, India and Japan follow. Most issues include a 'Star Dust' section. This section comprises republished newspaper articles from around the world, placed under different headings including 'Military', 'Business', 'Athletics', 'Academic', 'Dress', 'Art' and 'Music'. Women who had achieved success in traditionally male areas – the first woman to receive a BA in science, the first female doctor in a certain speciality and so on – feature frequently.

Articles in the Star Dust section did not simply list an increase of women in certain occupations; they were chosen to highlight the fact that innate differences do not exist between the sexes. This was of prime importance at a time when women's access to career and educational opportunities was restricted on the grounds of perceived biological inadequacy. One such article listed under 'Athletics' exhibits *Urania's* unique approach. The case of nineteen-year-old Mitsuko Sakamoto – who woke to discover a burglar in her bedroom – notes how Sakamoto:

...with a deft twist of her soft hands took [the burglar] ... off his feet and placed him on a quite unrelated part of his anatomy. Not caring for this pose, she tried him in another position, which brought his face into violent contact with the mat ... Sakamoto, as the burglar now knows, has devoted much of her time to the study of jujutsu. (*Japan Advertiser*, 22 March 1926)

As originally published in the pages of the *Japan Advertiser* this story would have been sensationalised. *Urania's* including this report in their Athletics section alters the significance of the story. The message in *Urania* is clear: women can achieve the positive aspects of masculinity, such as assertiveness and strength, while overcoming the negative feminine characteristics of passivity and weakness.

In addition to republished items, there are many original articles, some of which strike directly at the aspirations of the mainstream suffragette movement. One such article discusses the British general election of December 1918, which was a turning point for both suffragists and Irish nationalists. It was the first time that women were allowed to vote in a British general election and it was the first time that the vote was given without a property qualification, dramatically increasing the Irish electorate. The election resulted in a coalition of Conservatives, Liberals and a minority number of Labour and Independent MPs forming a government led by Lloyd George as Prime Minister. The old Irish political party was virtually wiped out in the election and the Irish republican party, Sinn Féin, was victorious at the

polls. This election had a special significance for Eva because her sister, Constance Markievicz, stood for election as a Sinn Féin candidate for St. Patrick's Division of Dublin. Constance triumphed at the polls and became the first woman ever to be elected to the British House of Commons. In line with Sinn Féin policy, Constance refused to swear allegiance to the British throne and therefore rejected her seat at Westminster.

Christabel Pankhurst stood for election in the Smethwick constituency of Staffordshire as a Women's Party candidate. She had established the Women's Party with Emmeline Pankhurst following the dissolution of the WSPU in 1917. She was defeated by 778 votes. Therefore, in the first British election to grant women the vote only one woman was elected to Parliament and she refused to take her seat. This must have been a bitter disappointment for the suffragette movement; a fact that the editors of *Urania* gloried in.

An article in *Urania* signed by the pen name Irene Clyde was published in January 1919, directly after the vote count. Clyde points out that gaining votes for women was not a suffragette victory; rather it was a political move in an election campaign. The article announces with delight Countess Markievicz's election as MP and her refusal to attend Westminster. Clyde rejoices in Christabel's defeat on the grounds that that lady would likely 'do something wild', which would be duly reported in the newspapers:

Entry into the polling-booth of course meant entry into Parliament. For the Coalition relied on the feminine vote and saw that it got it. Christabel Pankhurst nearly won: the most sedate publicists are to be found wishing she had quite won. They would like to have had the novel and inexpensive sensation of a lady member. Perhaps they were not without hope that Christabel would sooner or later do something wild which would set back the feminine clock. (*Urania* 13, 1919: 2)

### **Women as Men: Gender as Performance**

Newspaper articles were chosen carefully for inclusion in *Urania*. Articles were reprinted to prove that women could, if given the opportunity, accomplish the same things as men. Of course, women were rarely afforded the same opportunities as men in the 1920s – unless they assumed a male appearance. Historically there is evidence to suggest that women cross-dressed for various and often practical reasons: to find employment; to access education; to protect themselves; or to travel. The editors of *Urania* were fascinated by accounts of women who masqueraded as men and they reprinted newspaper reports of such cases. In their original context these newspaper articles would have provided light entertainment or a sensational read. The intention behind reprinting these articles with editorial comment was threefold. Firstly, to show that women could achieve anything if they were not constrained by their socially expected gender behaviour and the legal restrictions of the era. Secondly, to highlight that gender was not innately linked to sexed bodies; it was simply a masquerade, a performance which either gender could overturn. Finally, cross-dressing highlighted the fact that people were not always content with their assigned gender and consequently chose to adopt the opposite role.

The most detailed article on this subject has the title 'Women as Men' and was

originally written by Edwin Arnold for the *Weekly Scotsman (Urania)*, 69 & 70, 1928: 4). The article provides a detailed and favourable portrayal of twelve individual women who masqueraded as men. One of the first accounts is of Irish born James Barry. Arnold notes that Barry became

Inspector-General of hospitals, fighting several duels during his career, making love to women, bullying the War Office of the time, no one doubting that he was a masterful and high-spirited man until 'he' died.

After Barry died it was discovered when 'his' corpse was laid out, that 'he' was in fact biologically a woman. In fact James Barry was the first female doctor in England. This alters the record of history – Elizabeth Garrett Anderson is listed as the first female to graduate in medicine. Anderson graduated in 1865 – the same year that Barry died. No London newspaper carried her obituary, but on 14 August, 1865 a Dublin paper, *Saunders's News-Letter and Daily Advertiser*, published an account under the heading 'A Female Army Combatant'.

'Women as Men' also details accounts of cross-dressing from the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries – something which appears to have inspired the editors of *Urania* to keep a detailed record of cross-dressers within their own era. The editors trawled through newspaper reports of such cases and printed a tally in a 1931 issue with the title 'And Many More?' The article celebrates a total of twenty-six 'cases of highly successful assumption of the dress and habits of the contrary sex in our own day'. These cases were often reprinted from mundane court case reports such as the case of 'Colonel Sir Victor Barker'. Barker was summoned to court on a bankruptcy charge, and having failed to show was arrested on 28 February 1929 (Doan, 2001: 222 n17). Upon a medical examination at Brixton prison, Barker was discovered to be female and was transferred to Holloway women's prison.

### **Marriage in the News**

Highlighting gender as performance was a key objective of *Urania*. The editors of the journal advocated for the deconstruction of gender and sexuality. Within this remit the institution of marriage was recognised as a system at the very heart of gender stereotyping. The idea of political spinsterhood became a realistic choice when the feminist movement achieved suffrage for women. Political franchise saw the establishment of many rights for women, including the right of access to education. Women entered professional careers and gained financial independence from men; often they chose a career rather than matrimony. These independent career women were commonly referred to as 'New Women' in the early twentieth-century. The rise in the number of spinsters caused societal concern, especially in regard to the birth rate, with women expected to replenish a decreasing population. Historian Lillian Faderman points out that 'the "redundant" or "superfluous" woman, which is what unmarried women were called in nineteenth-century England, became a social problem of vast proportions' (1981: 178). Unmarried women became the focus of sexological research, which in turn contributed to the expression of anti-spinster sentiment in mainstream newspapers. In retaliation *Urania* reprinted articles from newspapers which challenged the prevailing negative notion that women who remained unmarried were simply undesirable.

One such article reprinted from the *Exchange* and entitled 'Why We Marry' confronts the idea that due to a lack of prospective husbands after World War I, undesirable women remained unmarried against their will:

Although there are 2,000,000 surplus women in England, do not let us run away with the idea that these are all spinsters against their wills. No. Some of the most-sought-after women never marry and some of the least-sought-after do. Among the women who have not married will be found some of the most charming, the most attractive, and the best-looking of their sex. (*Urania* 51 & 52, 1925: 2)

From the outset articles relating to marriage appeared in *Urania*. One of the earliest recorded is in an issue from 1919; one year after Marie Stopes published her book *Married Love*. *Urania* reprinted an article from the *London Evening News* headed, 'Do Unmarried Women Miss the Half of Life?' The commentary argues that single women have a rounder, fuller life than their married counterparts: 'It is the married woman who too often only sees one side of life – the domestic side. The single woman sees all the others, and she knows as much as she wants to know of the married woman's preserve ... To very few single women love has not come with all its broadening education' (*Urania* 14, 1919: 6). This article offered a challenge to Stopes's book, which although controversial at the time of publication, expressed a conventional morality. Where *Married Love* offers the view that marriage is the ideal state for women and that 'marriage should be crowned by children' (McKibbin, 2004: i), *Urania* portrays spinsterhood as the ideal state for women, and emphasises the fact that unmarried women are not exempt from finding love.

The editors of the journal pursued a campaign to represent marriage as a bad institution, especially for women. *Urania* included vivid articles aimed to shock, such as an account reprinted from Stella Benson's column in the *London Star*. In this article Benson describes a scene she witnessed while visiting a small rural village in South China. Benson passed a bridegroom waiting by the side of the road. She describes 'a tall, heavy man ... wearing a long black robe' (*Urania* 49 & 50, 1925: 3). Half a mile further down the road, Benson encounters the bride, a girl approximately fourteen years old, travelling in the back of a 'peasant's dung-cart ... still encrusted with dung'. The article continues:

... [the bride] was crying into a magenta cotton handkerchief – not so much crying as screaming with terror, shuddering and holding out her disengaged hand to her mother. The mother, also crying but saying nothing, was dressed in a black robe and hood; she sat beside the victim ... trying to sooth her, caressing and clasping the brightly-colored shaking shoulders. Behind the cart walked three or four men and boys of the family, solemn, but, in expression, entirely remote from the affair, paying no apparent attention to the wild and childish roaring of the bride. (*Urania* 49 & 50, 1925: 3)

By reprinting this profoundly sad article in *Urania* the editors were determined to vividly expose marriage as a sham which survived mainly because it was the culturally expected norm.

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In an attempt to prove that marriage was becoming redundant the editors of *Urania* monitored marriage and birth rates throughout the world, celebrating when a reduction was experienced. In 1930 it featured an unsigned article entitled 'Marriage Decline in France' which notes that the number of marriages dropped by 1,600 between 1927 and 1928. The article offers an explanation for the decrease in marriage rates:

There are many reasons for this. An important one is that since the war the young French girl is more independent than before. She is entering the professions, business, special branches of industries and is even accepting manual labour. Women who got jobs in the subway or on the street-cars when the male population was at the front, have kept them. (*Urania* 81 & 82, 1930: 2)

An article in a 1930 issue provides an exception to *Urania's* focus on unmarried women. The article, entitled 'Ireland Leads the World' states that 'the Irish Free State has a higher percentage of unmarried men than any other country, according to figures recently issued by John Hopper, Director of Statistics' (*Urania* 79 & 80, 1930: 2). The reports did not just concentrate on Europe. In a 1926 issue *Urania* refers to a survey in Japan of sixth year local elementary schools (*Urania*, 57 & 58, 1926: 3). In a piece titled 'Not Maternity, Thank You!' figures are quoted that indicate that 65 per cent of girls want to 'strive for women's rights and become leaders in society. Only 2.32 per cent say that they hope to become wives and mothers.'

*Urania* even printed announcements of broken engagements. One such article appears in a 1929 issue, announcing: 'The marriage arranged between Captain Geoffrey Fielden and Miss Jean Anderson will not take place' (*Urania* 77 & 78, 1929: 11). This announcement was first published in the *Cumberland News*, as it involved a high profile family. Captain Fielden was the son of a Manchester Exchange MP. *Urania* reprinted the news as a cause for celebration.

## Conclusion

Many of the articles in *Urania* originally appeared in mainstream newspapers, where they were often viewed as comical tabloid sensationalism. These articles were in essence meant to amuse the reader, and certainly not meant to inform or to educate. When the same articles were published together in a journal, with an editorial commentary, the content was expected to impact differently on readers. The editors of *Urania* carefully monitored and printed figures relating to marriage and birth rates, the employment and education of women, and cases of transvestism and transsexuality. These facts and figures now provide historians with an alternative archive of radical feminist thought. This is a remarkable feat considering that in 1928 Virginia Woolf described finding only rare references to women in her newspaper. Perhaps Woolf would have been surprised to learn that the editors of *Urania* managed to extract and reprint newspaper articles related to gender equality in a periodical which survived for over twenty-four years, spanning three decades.

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