



***READING AND WRITING SKILLS FOR STUDENTS OF
LITERATURE IN ENGLISH: MODERNISM AND MODERNITY***

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4.2. Cicely Hamilton, *How the Vote Was Won* (1909)

Reading Skills

I

1. Look at the opening stage directions: what time of year is the play set in? Comment on the symbolic quality of the season and the significance of it in relation to the play.
2. What sort of woman is Mrs. Horace Cole depicted as in the stage directions and how is what is depicted here borne out in the play?
3. Comment on the description of Winifred in contrast.
4. How is Lily depicted?
5. Lily mentions "Miss Christabel". Who is she referring to?
6. What is the significance of Winifred and Lily singing the "Marseillaise"?
7. Horace reads the title of a book he has just taken off his shelf, *Where's the Wash-tub now?* which, he explains, carries a preface by Lord Curzon of Kedleston. Identify Lord Curzon in relation to the movement for women's suffrage.
8. Comment on Agatha's definition of a lady.
9. What sort of woman is Molly?
10. Why does Horace regard Maudie as "the skeleton in the cupboard of a respectable family"?
11. Maudie reports that "the men ... are running down to the House of Commons like lunatics, and blackguarding the government for not having given us the vote before!" What does this indicate with regard to the impact achieved through the strike?
12. Comment on Mollie's remark: "Since this morning Suffragettes have become women".
13. On what grounds does Horace come to conclude that "The Government are narrow-minded idiots!" and to speak of "rotten Cabinet Ministers"?
14. What has caused Horace and Williams to perform a *volte-face* by the end of the play?
15. Hamilton's play may be regarded as having a didactic function. What is being taught?

II

1. Explain the distinction between suffragette and suffragist.
2. *How the Vote Was Won* was the first outstanding success put on by the AFL (The Actresses' Franchise League). Outline the aims of the League.**
3. What was the NWSPU?
4. Early on in the play, Ethel quotes her husband as saying: "every broken window is a fresh nail in the coffin of women's suffrage". What broken windows are being referred to?

5. “Horace is a straw man, beaten back on every front by the women’s moral and intellectual superiority; ...”. (Darby Lewes, *Dream Revisionaries: Gender and Genre in Women’s Utopian Fiction, 1870-1920*. Tuscaloosa and London: University of Alabama Press, 1995. p. 113). Comment on the description of Horace as “a straw man” and the “moral and intellectual superiority” of the women depicted in the play.

Writing Skills

1. “The women of *How the Vote Was Won* are triumphant because they ignore class distinctions ...”. Would you agree with the above view or not? Argue your case in the light of the play as a whole.
2. Following the first performance of *How the Vote Was Won* at the Royalty Theatre on 13 April 1909, the *Pall Mall Gazette* reported that audiences were “brimming with excitement and in roars of laughter.” How do you account for the audiences’ enjoyment?
3. Find out information about “The Men’s League for Opposing Women’s Suffrage”. Explain why men might have opposed women’s suffrage and how such men might be regarded today.
4. Discuss the view that the play is naively binary in the way that men and women are represented.

[** The 3 aims of the League were: (i) To convince members of the theatrical profession of the necessity of extending the franchise to women; (ii) To work for women’s enfranchisement by educational methods; (iii) To assist all other Leagues wherever possible.]