

Parade's End: Valentine Wannop - the male fantasy suffragette

She's pretty, meek and uncomplainingly devoted to the man she loves. Surely only a man could have created this suffragette, says Chris Harvey.



Adelaide Clemens as suffragette Valentine Wannop in Parade's End.

By Chris Harvey

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Has anyone else noticed something strange about the young suffragette Valentine Wannop in Parade's End? As played by Australian actress Adelaide Clemens, she has, quietly, with principle, brought all the pangs of true love thwarted to Friday nights on BBC Two. She's worn some great clothes, too. But isn't she just a little bit, well, unsuffragette-y?

Winsomely pretty, gentle, meek and uncomplainingly devoted to the man she loves, surely Wannop has to be the male writer's perfect suffragette. In Tom Stoppard's adaptation of Ford Madox Ford's novels, she resembles one of the women who were imprisoned, force fed on hunger strike and even killed for the right to vote about as much as Katie Melua resembles Pussy Riot.

She has at one point, it is true, made the mildest of rebukes to her beloved Christopher Tietjens (Benedict

Cumberbatch), for taking part in a war in which a generation of young men were sacrificed to appalling deaths. We've even been shown glimpses of her fierce intelligence when she has gently corrected some of her friends' Latin verbs. But that's about it.

Compare and contrast the way, Clemens herself went about winning the role of Wannop. She had to fight for it, having become "obsessed" with the book. "I put myself on tape every weekend and kept getting a 'No thank you very much you're not British'," she told this newspaper. She took to bombarding White with begging letters, even flying over to see her; and finally turning up to the audition in period garb.

If Valentine Wannop had applied half that determination to the struggle for women's votes, she might have been celebrating with Tietjens, with champagne if not a kiss, long before 1918.