

A woman with dark hair pulled back, wearing a black, long-sleeved, textured dress with a ruffled waistband and large, dark, spherical earrings. She is standing in front of a large, abstract mural with geometric shapes and a figure on the right side. The text is overlaid on the image.

British Art Studies

March 2019

**Theatres of War: Experimental
Performance in London, 1914–1918 and
Beyond**

**Edited by Grace Brockington,
Impermanence, Ella Margolin and
Claudia Tobin**

British Art Studies

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Theatres of War: Experimental Performance in London, 1914–1918 and Beyond

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Cover image: Film still, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018.. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

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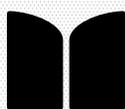
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Contents

Theatres of War: Experimental Performance in London, 1914-1918 and Beyond, Grace Brockington

Performing Pacifism, Grace Brockington

Inspirations, Grace Brockington

London's Little Theatres, Grace Brockington and Claudia Tobin

Beyond London & the War, Grace Brockington

The Ballet of the Nations, Impermanence

Costumes and Production, Ella Margolin and Pam Tait

Composing, Robert Bentall

Directing and Choreography, Roseanna Anderson and Joshua Ben-Tovim

Cinematography, Ella Margolin and Jack Offord

Theatres of War: Experimental Performance in London, 1914–1918 and Beyond

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In autumn 1915, the writer Vernon Lee marked a year of global warfare by publishing a pacifist satire titled *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality*, with a “pictorial commentary” by the artist Maxwell Armfield.¹ Lee’s text imagines war as a diabolical dance which degenerates into a massacre, choreographed by Satan and his Ballet Master Death to the Music of the Passions, and locking the Nations of the world into an endless cycle of slaughter and mutilation. Her story still challenges readers through its graphic descriptions of bloodshed and its discomfiting insights into the psychology of war; the ways in which people can be seduced into acts of violence and self-destruction by language that appeals to their sense of beauty, heroism, and moral outrage, as well as by instincts of fear and greed. It speaks to us also in its final warning that “the Ballet of the Nations is still a-dancing”. Already, in 1915, it was clear to Lee that the Great War would generate yet more conflict, despite initial public optimism that it would be “the war to end war”.²

The quality, and indeed the peculiarity, of Armfield’s “pictorial commentary” are immediately striking. Printed in dense red-orange, the images dominate the page visually, embedding Lee’s text in a series of theatrical tableaux which often relate only tangentially to her allegory. Men march naked with puppet strings attached to their wrists and ankles, or leap, blindfold and priapic, across the stage. Women kneel before them knitting socks, or strike strange, hieroglyphic poses suggestive of some secret ritual. The drawings are remarkably similar to designs that Armfield made for his own theatre productions around this time, often in collaboration with other “little theatres” and dance groups, in London and in the USA. In this context, it becomes clear that his illustrations to Lee’s *Ballet* elaborate their own narrative of heroism, exploitation, and modernist dance, raising questions about the function of art in times of conflict, and drawing us into a forgotten world of experimental performance that survived through the dark days of the war. It is those questions, and that world, that this exhibition brings to public attention.

This special issue of *British Art Studies* is conceived as an online exhibition. At its heart is the first-ever staging of *The Ballet of the Nations*, a film made by Impermanence in 2018, which brings Lee’s theatre-of-war to life a century after it was first imagined. Lee intended her book for publication rather than performance and took no steps to dramatise it.³ Yet the prospect that it might finally be realised as dance theatre, so long after her prophecy of endless war has been fulfilled, was irresistible. I approached Impermanence as a company that had recently worked with literary text, and they emphasised the importance of maintaining a relationship between the book and its historical and archival contexts. The exhibition and film presented here developed out of conversations with them, their partners, and *British Art Studies*. Online display has enabled us to embed the film permanently in

the visual and musical cultures of the little theatres, exposing the archeology of a creative and curatorial collaboration that has grown out of historical research and that references those sources on multiple levels. The exhibition is organised into five “rooms”:

1. “Performing Pacifism”, which tells the story of the publication of *The Ballet of the Nations*.
2. “Inspirations”, which explores the roots of the experimental theatre movement in Britain.
3. “London’s Little Theatres”, which examines each of the theatre groups in turn.
4. “Beyond London and the War”, which follows their fortunes in the immediate aftermath of the conflict.
5. “*The Ballet of the Nations*”, which displays the dance film alongside documentation of its making. Interviews with members of the production team describe the creative relationship that can develop between art history and art practice. They are interspersed with photographs and commentary by Ella Margolin, who was present throughout the shoot to record an otherwise fragmentary process.

The film develops still further the collective, multimedia project that was the *Ballet* by elaborating its own “performative commentary” on Lee’s text, Armfield’s pictures, early twentieth-century dance culture, and dance film as a genre distinct from live performance. The shockingly brutal nature of Lee’s narrative poses a challenge in performance. In the film, violence is implicit: mangled bodies are suggested by a tangle of cloth, the blood of battle by red ribbon, the trampled body of a child by a scattering of paper flakes—an image which is all the more shocking for what it requires us to imagine. Against this, the satire of Lee’s writing translates into moments of comedy and camp; the Orchestra of the Passions passing the bottle, Billy Zane checking his French on Google. Tension builds through dance solos, and sequences staged by an anonymous Chorus, which suggest both the choric element of Greek tragedy and the detached world of Armfield’s illustrations. Production design by Pam Tait evokes the richly eclectic world of Lee’s orchestra of the Human Passions who are “dressed, or in some cases undressed, in classical, medieval, biblical or savage costumes”. Rob Bentall’s score takes its cue from the cacophony suggested by Lee’s orchestration—“penny-whistles and fog-horns and a cracked storm-and-massacre bell”—and from composers such as Eugene Goossens, who worked with the wartime little theatres.

Different sections of the exhibition present objects and recordings relating to the little theatres as the original context for the making of the *Ballet*, and as a movement of great significance to the history of the arts in the twentieth century. A subculture of experimental performance developed in London during the First World War, against the grain of mainstream theatre, and

often in sympathy with the dissenting politics of the wartime peace movement. It took its lead from European symbolists such as Maurice Maeterlinck and Edward Gordon Craig with their emphasis on the *Gesamtkunstwerk* and the *Übermarionette*, from the Hellenic dance rituals of Raymond and Isadora Duncan, and from the cosmopolitan version of Noh theatre developed by Japanese performers such as Ito Michio and Khorī Torahiko. After the war, it generated a new wave of community theatre that had much in common with the little theatre movement in America, and that impacted on the development of the British stage throughout the twentieth century.

An historical map of the key locations, curated by Claudia Tobin, makes visible the geographical reality of the community and the close connections between the groups involved. They included the Margaret Morris Theatre, run by the dancer Margaret Morris and her husband, the Scottish colourist J.D. Fergusson; the Greenleaf Players, run by Maxwell Armfield and his wife, the writer Constance Smedley Armfield; the Choric School, run by the poet and dancer Hester Sainsbury; the Plough Club, founded by C.R. Mackintosh and E.O. Hoppé; the Pioneer Players, run by Edith Craig; and a circle of Japanese artists and performers who worked with Ezra Pound and W.B. Yeats, and who also collaborated with several of those listed above. In the Bohemian districts of Chelsea and Covent Garden, they would meet in each other's studios and in the public spaces of cafés and theatres, where they staged performances and debates and formed a free-thinking, creative community which held together at a time when wartime conditions made such networks particularly difficult to sustain. After the war, some of these groups continued, others dispersed, while new societies—the Arts League of Service, the British Drama League—emerged to continue their work.

All of these groups have been discussed elsewhere in isolation; the Margaret Morris Movement and the Pioneer Players in depth, others more schematically. This exhibition is different because it brings them together into one space and shows how they operated as a network with a significant collective presence. The fact that many of those involved were women has contributed to their subsequent obscurity, as has their alignment with political groups which challenged the status quo—women's suffrage, anarchism, and organisations which questioned the conduct of the war. While their party loyalties ranged across the political spectrum, those involved in the little theatres shared a commitment to freedom of information and expression, which became increasingly controversial as the war prolonged itself.

The material trace of their art and community is scattered through disparate archives, illustrated books, press reports, flyers, programmes, posters, memoirs, stage designs, film and audio recordings, and art collections, both public and private. The purpose of this exhibition is to excavate and collect

that material, showing how objects, music, and movement connected in an intricate, sometimes entangled, pattern of collaboration and signification. Threads running through the different sections include the new religion of Theosophy with its theology of universal brotherhood; the Bomb Shop on Charing Cross Road with its list of radical literature; the photographer E.O. Hoppé as an active participant in the little theatres, who also photographed its leading players; Arthur Ransome, whose first successful book was a cultural history of Chelsea; the launch of new magazines during the war such as *Colour* and *London Vogue*; and a distinctive performance style which emerged from both a shared commitment to ideas of artistic synthesis and natural movement, and comedic qualities of lightness and naivety that point to a more serious underlying aesthetic. All the exhibits presented here tell stories which connect them with the artistic and political ambitions of the London little theatres. Cumulatively, they work to change the story of the arts in Britain in the early twentieth century, by demonstrating the reach, persistence, and vitality of experimental theatre in the period of the First World War.

Footnotes

- 1 Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality*, with a Pictorial Commentary by Maxwell Armfield (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915). The book is unpaginated; some subsequent quotations from the text will not be footnoted.
- 2 H.G. Wells' collection of essays *The War That Will End War* was published in 1914 (London: Frank & Cecil Palmer). In his book *In the Fourth Year: Anticipations of a World Peace* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1918), he noted that the phrase "the war to end war" had caught hold "amidst much sceptical comment. It was a phrase powerful enough to sway many men, essentially pacifists, towards taking an active part in the war against German imperialism, but it was a phrase whose chief content was its aspiration", Wells, *In the Fourth Year*, 4.
- 3 When she returned to the project after the war, she republished it as the extended, unillustrated edition titled *Satan the Waster: A Philosophical War Trilogy* (London: John Lane, 1920).

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- Lee, V. (1920) *Satan the Waster: A Philosophical War Trilogy*. London: John Lane.
- Wells, H.G. (1914) *The War That Will End War*. London: Frank & Cecil Palmer.
- Wells, H.G. (1918) *In the Fourth Year: Anticipations of a World Peace*. New York: Macmillan Company.



Performing Pacifism

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Introduction

The Ballet of the Nations was an odd book to publish in the midst of the First World War, when pacifists were a persecuted minority and the publishing industry was struggling under the pressures of paper rationing, censorship, and mobilization.¹ The story of its production points to an intersection between the peace movement and the London little theatres and is worth recounting as evidence of those overlapping networks. The author, Vernon Lee (1856–1935), was a cosmopolitan writer, known for her essays on travel and aesthetics, her ghost stories, and her erudition as a polyglot and scholar of the Italian Renaissance. She was also politically radical, a pacifist and campaigner for women’s suffrage whose outspoken objections to war alienated much of her readership and exacerbated her later obscurity as a writer.² She joined the Union of Democratic Control (UDC), a pressure group which formed in 1914 to scrutinize British foreign policy and war aims, and which opposed conscription, censorship, and the restriction of civil liberties that were increasingly a feature of the war.³ It was through the UDC that *The Ballet of the Nations* came to the attention of publishers. In the first instance, Lee brought the script to her friends, the writer Constance Smedley Armfield (1876–1941) and her husband, the artist Maxwell Armfield (1881–1972), whom she knew through the International Lyceum Club for Women Artists and Writers, which Smedley had established a decade earlier.⁴ The Armfields arranged for Lee to recite *The Ballet of the Nations* at a UDC meeting, which they hosted in their studio in Chelsea, and then at another meeting in the more public forum of the Margaret Morris Theatre on the King’s Road, which the peace campaigner Kate Courtney noted in her diary as follows:

UDC Meeting in theatre, corner of Flood St. “Vernon Lee” gave her striking allegory, “The Ballet of the Nations”, for second time. Ch. Trevelyan spoke, and a Miss Cooper Willis gave us an interesting selection from Burke and Fox about peace with revolutionary France—very apt. I was in chair. Very so-so. Audience interested—all polite.”⁵

Amongst the audience was Geoffrey Whitworth, a theatre critic and editor at Chatto & Windus, who commissioned the book for publication (Fig. 1). Armfield illustrated the text with a “pictorial commentary”, which gives the book its striking appearance. This exhibition takes the making of *The Ballet of the Nations* as the starting point for an exploration of the overlapping networks and working relationships that formed around Armfield, Morris, Whitworth, and their students and collaborators, in and beyond Chelsea

during and after the First World War. The excavation of visual and aural material begins here with Lee and Armfield's book, and with the record of the personal and political commitments that drew them together.

Exhibition

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality, with a Pictorial Commentary* by Maxwell Ashby Armfield (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915). Digital image courtesy of Digital facsimile courtesy of Chatto & Windus, Penguin Random House UK, and The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.

Vernon Lee did not like Maxwell Armfield's "pictorial commentary" on her *Ballet*. A letter from her publisher suggests a showdown between artist and author: the illustrations did not "altogether meet with [Lee's] approval", because she felt that "the pictures should be realistic embodiments of the dancers in the Ballet", and "thoroughly *expressive*" as well as "decorative" in their treatment of the subject matter.⁶ Armfield proposed his friend, Norman Wilkinson of Four Oaks, as an alternative,⁷ and later commented that Lee would have preferred something in the manner of the Victorian Symbolist, George Frederic Watts.⁸ He himself felt that his rendering was faithful to the narrative. "I tried to give a sense of the horror of the bombing (not yet seen in London)," he explained, "the streams of fugitive women and children going this way and that; the exhaustion, and the final starting all over again."⁹ Yet contemporary reviewers were struck by the discrepancies between text and illustration, and by what they called Armfield's "exaggerated avoidance of the brutal".¹⁰ A century later, it is these very differences of subject matter and visual aesthetic that make the book such as a powerful witness to cultural debates during the First World War. They expose fundamental disagreements about the role of art as a weapon against war and point our attention to the world of experimental theatre in which Armfield operated.¹¹



Figure 2.

John Singer Sargent, Vernon Lee, 1881, oil on canvas, 53.7 × 43.2 cm. Collection of Tate (N04787). Digital image courtesy of Tate (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 [Unported]).

John Singer Sargent inscribed his portrait of Vernon Lee: “To my friend Violet”. They had met as children in Nice where their families were spending the winter, and they had in common a childhood spent travelling in a leisurely way across Europe, moving with the seasons between France, Germany, and Italy. Lee spent most of her life in Florence, moving to Chelsea only for the duration of the First World War. Her objections to war grew out of her cosmopolitan sensibility and way of life. She experienced, deeply and at first-hand, the European civilisation that seemed to be self-destructing through the waste of war and the breakdown of international relations.

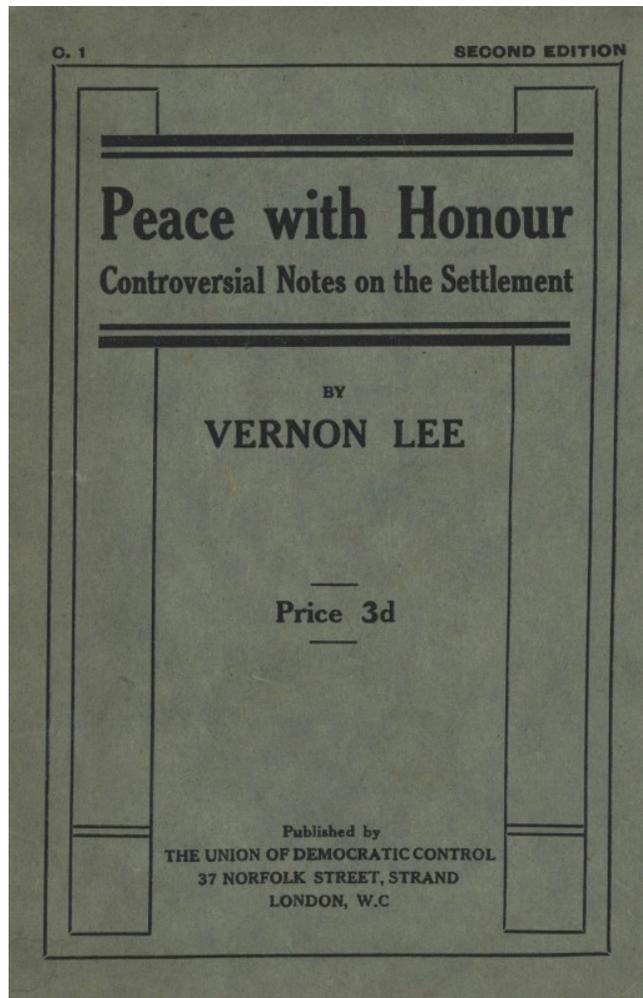


Figure 3. Vernon Lee, *Peace with Honour: Controversial Notes on the Settlement*, (London: Union of Democratic Control, 1915), front cover. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Lee campaigned against war in pamphlets and newspaper articles, as well as in the fictional form of *The Ballet of the Nations*. Her views were controversial and often unwelcome, particularly her contention that both sides of the conflict were equally to blame. She complained about the censorship of German liberal opinion in Britain and made a point of reading the German press—even when it became hard to obtain. Her pamphlet *Peace with Honour*, published by the UDC, made a long-sighted case for a non-punitive peace settlement with Germany and for freedom of debate as an active measure against war.



Figure 4.

Unknown photographer, Maxwell Ashby Armfield and Constance Smedley Armfield, undated, photograph. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

The Armfields formed a close creative partnership, as shown in this photograph of the couple at work together. Here we see her sewing and him typing, although she is better known as a writer, feminist, and founder of the Lyceum Clubs, and he as a painter in tempera. Both had attended the Birmingham School of Art at the turn of the century, then a centre for the Arts and Crafts Movement, and their work was deeply informed by Arts and Crafts techniques and ideas, as well as by Smedley's commitment to Christian Science and her encounters with European symbolism. Their move into theatre began after their marriage in 1909, when they settled in the Cotswolds and established the Cotswold Players, a company which survives to this day. At the outbreak of the First World War, they moved to Chelsea and became closely involved with the London little theatres through their new company, the Greenleaf Players.

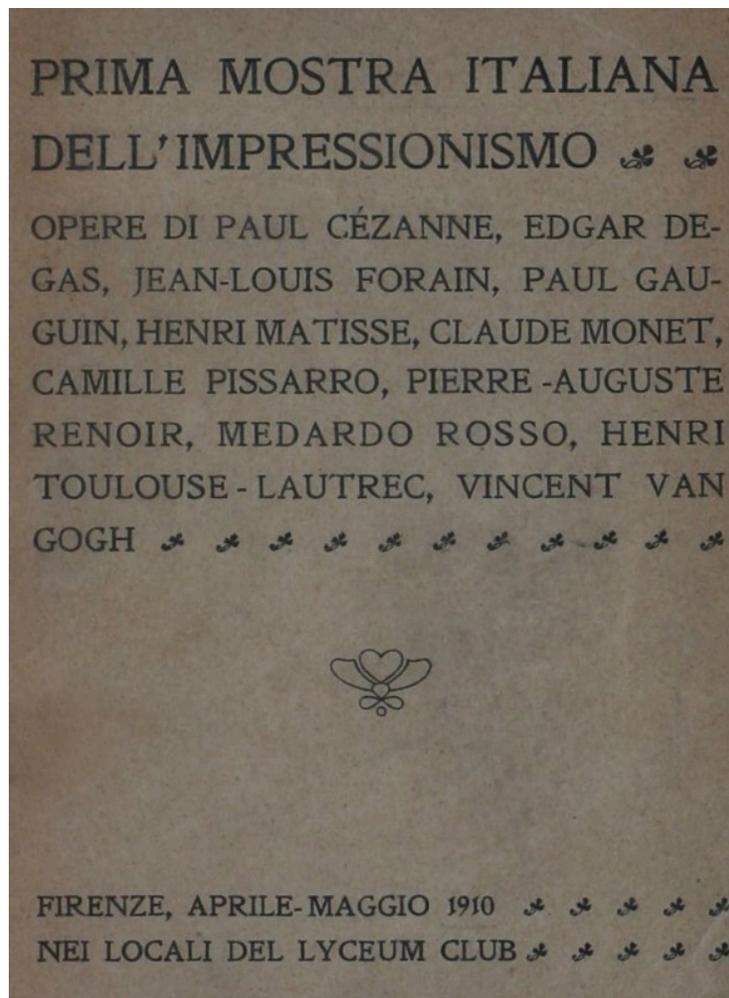
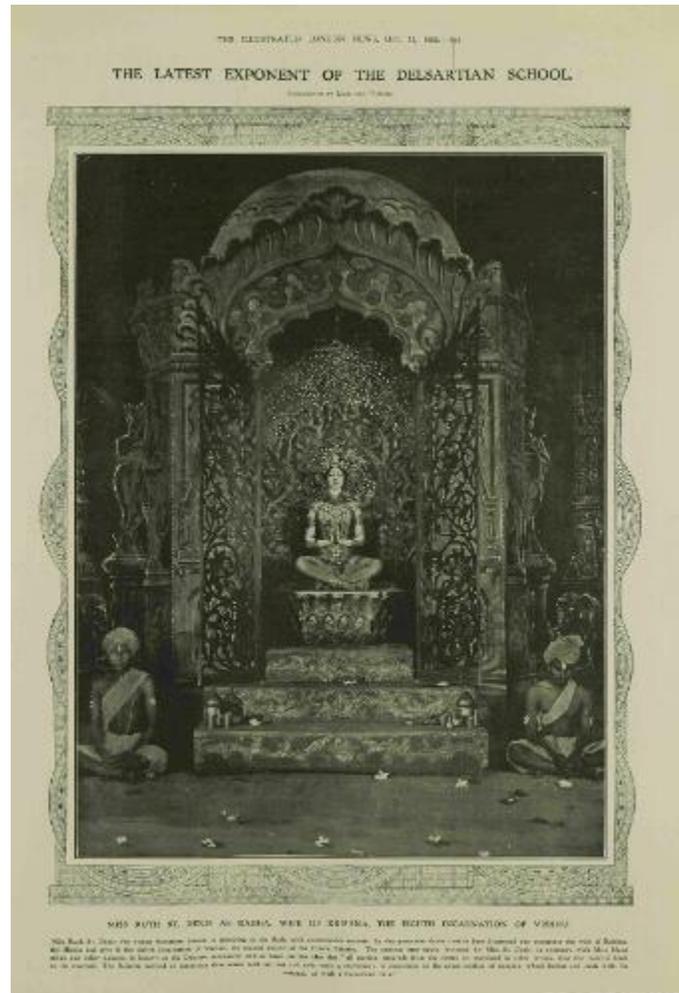


Figure 5.

First Italian Exhibition of Impressionism, Lyceum Club, Florence, April-May 1910, front cover. Collection of The Lyceum Club, Florence. Digital image courtesy of The Lyceum Club, Florence.

Vernon Lee first met Constance Smedley and her fiancé Maxwell Armfield in Florence in January 1908. Smedley wrote to her parents that she found Lee “very clever and charming and exclusive” and that they “talked about the Club”—in other words, the new branch of the International Lyceum Club for Women Artists and Writers, which was shortly to open in Florence.¹² Smedley had founded the Lyceum in 1903 as a global resource for educated women, a worldwide network of cultural and professional centres which promoted female emancipation and international cooperation, and which spread across Europe, Australasia, and North America.¹³ The image shown here is the catalogue for the *First Italian Exhibition of Impressionism*, which took place at the Florence Lyceum Club in spring 1910, and included work by Cézanne, Degas, Forain, Gauguin, Matisse, Monet, Pissarro, Renoir, Rosso, Toulouse-Lautrec, and Van Gogh—a mixture of Impressionists and those

whom we would now classify as Post-Impressionist, a term coined by the critic Roger Fry for his exhibition *Manet and the Post-Impressionists*, which opened in London six months later. ¹⁴ It is a measure of the Lyceum's cultural ambition that it was prepared to host this pioneering display of modern art from France.



[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 6.

Eliss and Walkry, "The Latest Exponent of the Delsartian School: Miss Ruth St Denis as Radha, Wife of Krishna, the Eighth Incarnation of Vishnu", photograph, *The Illustrated London News*, 31 October 1908, 16. Digital image courtesy of Illustrated London News Group.

Constance Smedley's shift into theatre began during her tenure as Honorary Secretary of the Lyceum Club. Ruth St. Denis, pioneer of modern dance in the United States, was a crucial influence; they had first met through the Berlin Lyceum in 1905. ¹⁵ In 1908, Smedley promoted St. Denis's season of Indian dances at the Scala Theatre, London by organising a celebrity Gala night. ¹⁶

Smedley remembered St. Denis as “the broadest-visioned artist I have ever met”.¹⁷ St. Denis was equally impressed, calling Smedley “a radiant personality [...] In her presence nothing was impossible.”¹⁸ This is notable, because, in most other cases, there is little to corroborate Smedley’s own account of her life’s work—she has largely fallen out of the historical record.

[mul]

The “Music of the Passions” is important to Satan’s scheme to incite war in *The Ballet of the Nations*: hatred carries a “huge double-bass”, Rapine, Lust, Murder, and Famine are “fitted out with bull roarers and rattles and other cannibalistic instruments”, Science has “a first-rate gramophone tucked under her arm”—between them, they stir the Nations to a frenzy; and when they flag, it is the voice of Pity “like the welling-up notes of many harps” that revives them to a fresh lease of slaughter. Music was key to Lee’s thinking about art and it permeates her writing—both fiction and non-fiction.¹⁹ In her ghost story, *A Wicked Voice*, a composer is haunted by the voice of the eighteenth-century singer Zaffirino, which was said to be so ravishing that it could kill a woman—another case of art wreaking destruction in human lives.²⁰ Running through the story is the old Venetian air *La Biondina in Gondoleta*, which the composer sings at a soirée and then hears being sung by an unidentified, androgynous voice “of intense but peculiar sweetness”—the ghost of Zaffirino himself?

Footnotes

- ¹ For an account of the economic problems facing publishers during the First World War, see Jane Potter, *Boys in Khaki, Girls in Print: Women’s Literary Responses to the Great War 1914–1918* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2005), 52–87; and Imogen Gassert, “Collaborators and Dissenters: Aspects of British Literary Publishing in the First World War, 1914–1918” (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 2001).
- ² The literature on Lee is considerable, but see in particular Gillian Beer, “The Dissidence of Vernon Lee: *Satan the Waster* and the Will to Believe”, in Susan Raitt and Trudi Tate (eds), *Women’s Fiction and the Great War* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997), 107–131.
- ³ Sally Harris, *Out of Control: British Foreign Policy and the Union of Democratic Control 1914–1918* (Hull: University of Hull Press, 1996); Marvin Swartz, *The Union of Democratic Control in British Foreign Policy During the First World War* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1971).
- ⁴ Smedley and Armfield both give accounts of their collaboration with Lee in their memoirs, which are broadly, though not entirely, consistent with each other. Constance Smedley Armfield, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs. Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 223; and Maxwell Armfield, “My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War”, (1970, unpublished), Tate Gallery Archives, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10, 49–52.
- ⁵ Kate Courtney, *Extracts from a Diary During the War* (London: privately printed by the Victor Press, 1927), 50. Charles Trevelyan was a Liberal politician who founded the Union of Democratic Control together with Ramsay MacDonald. His brother, the poet R.C. Trevelyan, sheltered John Rodker when he was on the run as a conscientious objector (see the section on the Choric School part three of this exhibition). Irene Cooper Willis was Lee’s friend and eventually her executor, who published a study of the British liberal press during the First World War; see Irene Cooper Willis, *How We Went into the War: A Study of Liberal Idealism* (Manchester: National Labour Press, 1918).
- ⁶ Geoffrey Whitworth, letter to Violet Paget, 29 July 1915, University of Reading Modern Publishing Archive, Chatto & Windus, 86: 1034.
- ⁷ Whitworth, letter to Violet Paget, 29 July 1915.
- ⁸ Maxwell Armfield, “My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War” (unpublished, 1970), 50, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- ⁹ Armfield, “My World and I”, 51.

- 10 Anon., "Various War Books", *The Manchester Guardian*, 27 November 1915, 4. The book was also reviewed in *The Evening Standard*, *The Athenaeum*, and *The Times Literary Supplement*.
- 11 These debates are discussed in more detail in Grace Brockington, *Above the Battlefield: Modernism and the Peace Movement in Britain, 1900–1918* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 116–129.
- 12 Constance Smedley, letter to William T. Smedley, 26 January 1908, quoted in Armfield, "My World and I", 37c. In 1911, they met again, when the Armfields spent the summer in Florence, "renewing and improving our friendship with 'Vernon Lee'"; Armfield, "My World and I", 24. The history of the Lyceum Club in Florence is narrated in Donatella Lippi, "The Story of the Lyceum Club Internazionale di Firenze", 2016, <https://lyceumclubfirenze.it/chi-siamo/history-lyceum-club-firenze.html>, accessed 10 December 2018.
- 13 Grace Brockington, "A World Fellowship: The Founding of the International Lyceum Club for Women Artists and Writers", *Transnational Associations* 1 (2005): 15–22. Clubhouses opened in London (1904), Berlin (1905), Paris (1906), Florence (1908), Athens (1910), Stockholm (1911), Geneva (1912), Melbourne (1912), Auckland (1922), Amsterdam (1923), Toronto (1930), Helsinki (1932), and Vienna (1937). This list is not exhaustive. In many of these countries, more clubhouses were to follow in other cities; see www.lyceumclubs.org.
- 14 The Lyceum exhibition is discussed in Flavio Fergonzi, "Firenze 1910—Venezia 1920: Emilio Cecchi, i quadri francesi e le difficoltà dell' Impressionismo", *Bollettino d'Arte* 6, no. 79 (May–June 1993): 1–26; and Jean-François Rodriguez, *La réception de l'impressionnisme à Florence en 1910* (Venice: Istituto veneto di scienze, lettere ed arti, 1994).
- 15 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 134–140.
- 16 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 184–185. Supporters included Auguste Rodin and George Bernard Shaw.
- 17 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 140.
- 18 Ruth St. Denis, *An Unfinished Life: An Autobiography* (London: George G. Harrap & Co., 1939), 92, 116.
- 19 See Shafquat Towheed, "'Music is not Merely for Musicians': Vernon Lee's Musical Reading and Response", *Yearbook of English Studies* 40, nos 1–2 (2010): 273–294; and Shafquat Towheed, "The Science of Musical Memory: Vernon Lee and the Remembrance of Sounds Past", in Katharine Ellis and Phyllis Weliver (eds), *Words and Notes in the Long Nineteenth-Century* (Woodbridge: Boydell & Brewer, 2013), 104–122.
- 20 First published in Vernon Lee, *Hauntings* (London: W. Heinemann, 1890).

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Inspirations

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Introduction

Maxwell Armfield's "pictorial commentary" on *The Ballet of the Nations* relates only loosely to Vernon Lee's text. Its real subject is rather the plays that he was producing with his own theatre company at around the same time, and the wider culture of experimental performance that informed his work as a stage designer. That culture was European in its orientation and anti-realist in its aesthetic, rooted in the symbolist experiments of Maurice Maeterlinck and Edward Gordon Craig, the Hellenic choreography of Isadora Duncan, and the revolutionary productions of the *Ballets Russes*. This section of the exhibition draws attention to these sources of inspiration and explores their impact in Britain before the First World War, when the little theatre scene was beginning to emerge. It shows the different ways in which the work of European practitioners was experienced in Britain, and it demonstrates a close connection between the London little theatres and the circle of artists and writers who promoted the *Ballets Russes* to a British audience. During the war, the persistence of these ideas in the work of the little theatres was to acquire a more dangerous, political significance, as commitment to European-wide movements became associated with pacifism. Theatre which might otherwise have seemed dreamy, archaic, or abstracted became implicated in topical debates about the conduct of the war and the shape of international organisation. It mattered, therefore, that the London little theatres continued to experiment with dramatic form after 1914, and to make theatre which was, as John Rodker explained, "marionette-like but with the dolls speaking" and devoted to "the evocation of a pure emotion." ¹

Exhibition



Figure 1.

Flyer for a week of performances by Mrs Patrick Campbell at the Prince of Wales' Theatre, Birmingham, 1-6 October 1900, 11.5 x 9 cm. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Symbolist theatre of the 1890s projected dream-like, spiritual worlds in which stage realism and the personality of the actor gave way to ritual movement and a unity of aesthetic effect across all elements of the production. It initiated a revolution in theatre practice, which spread across Europe from the Théâtre de l'Œuvre in Paris to the Moscow Art Theatre.² The playwright Maurice Maeterlinck was particularly important to the development of the movement in Britain, where he influenced playwrights from W.B. Yeats to Harley Granville-Barker.³ His *Pelléas and Mélisande* (1892) was key, made famous in Britain by the actress Mrs Patrick Campbell in the role of Mélisande. When Maxwell Armfield saw the play in Birmingham in 1900, he experienced it as a religious revelation, what he called "the raising of the

veils" onto spiritual reality.⁴ Afterwards, he "dreamed all night long of strange pale-faced ladies with never-ending black tresses and voices like morning water, and of flaxen haired youths and love and beautiful sorrows."

⁵ The flyer for that Birmingham production, exhibited here, was found among the papers of his wife, Constance Smedley Armfield.

[mul]

Mrs Campbell commissioned the French composer, Gabriel Fauré, to write the incidental music for the London premiere of *Pelléas and Mélisande* in 1898, and returned to his score each time she revived it.⁶ For an English audience, Fauré was therefore the "sound" of Maeterlinck, although over the next decade other major composers – Debussy in 1902, Schoenberg in 1903 and Sibelius in 1905 – were also drawn to compose for the play. These various musical interpretations, all different in their approach to the text, are now better known than *Pelléas and Mélisande* itself, but they give a measure of Maeterlinck's importance at the time, and of the suggestive ambiguity of his work.

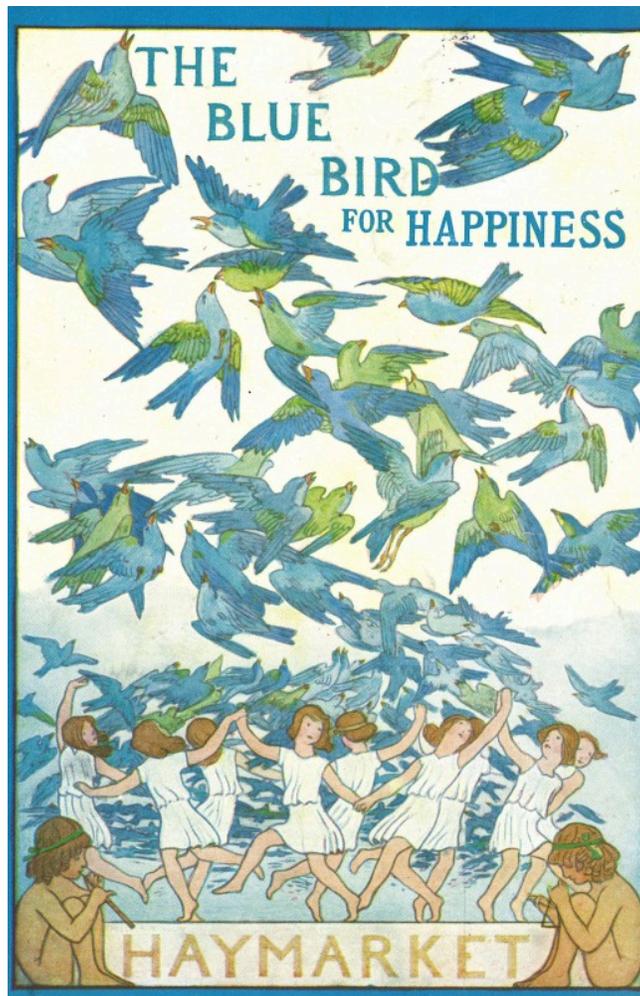


Figure 2.

Postcard reproduction of a poster for Maurice Maeterlinck's play "The Blue Bird", staged at the Haymarket Theatre, London, 1909-10. Designed by Frederick Cayley Robinson. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Maeterlinck's work was popularised in Britain through a staging of his play *The Bluebird* at the Theatre Royal, Haymarket, in 1909-1910.⁷ The cast included a young Margaret Morris as the soul of Water, in which role she was instructed to dart "streaming, disheveled and tearful" across the stage and provoke a fight with Fire.⁸ Stage instructions indicated that the characters of Water and Light should both be dressed in "Neo-Grecian or Anglo-Grecian (*a la Walter Crane*)".⁹ Morris brought something of her own to the performance by incorporating the Greek dance positions that she learned from Raymond Duncan and his student Annea Spang at around this time, when she attended some of his classes in London.¹⁰ "He explained that these positions, with their accentuated opposition of arms and legs, must have

been the basis of the athletic training and the dance of the ancient Greeks,” she later related. “In a way they have become the equivalent, in the M.M. technique, of the daily barre practice.” ¹¹

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 3.

Maurice Tourneur (director), Maurice Maeterlinck (playwright), *The Blue Bird*, 1918, silent film, 1 hour 15 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Film courtesy of Paramount Pictures.

Maurice Maeterlinck’s *The Blue Bird* imagines two children chasing the bluebird of happiness through a magical, symbolic landscape before discovering that it was waiting for them at home all along. The play was first staged at the Moscow Art Theatre in 1907 and quickly became an international success, touring to London (1909), New York (1910), Paris (1911), and Berlin (1912). The first film adaptation was made in England in 1910; the second was made in New York in 1918 by the prominent French director Maurice Tourneur. Tourneur’s film was rich in visual references: “six reels of what might be described as living etchings in color”, as the critic for the *Chicago Daily Tribune* observed. ¹² It was billed as an antidote to war in Europe, “a mighty cheer from the great Belgian author to this war-torn nation”. ¹³

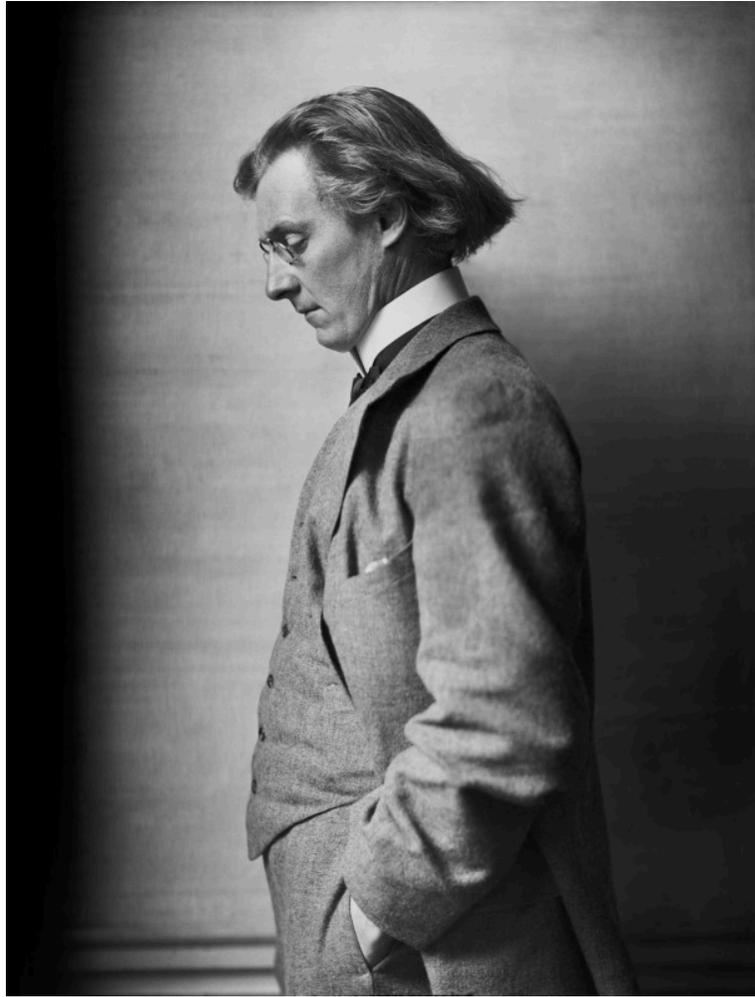


Figure 4.

E.O. Hoppé, Edward Gordon Craig, 1911, print on sepia-toned veribrom paper, 25.4 × 20.3 cm. Collection of National Portrait Gallery (NPG 132913). Digital image courtesy of E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection/Curatorial Assistance Inc. (All rights reserved).

Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966) was a leading exponent of symbolist theatre and a crucial influence on the little theatre movement, famous for his theory that the actor should function as an *Übermarionette*, a super-puppet, controlled by the director and working in harmony with all the other elements of the production to deliver a *Gesamtkunstwerk*, or total work of art. He began his career in London but moved to Germany in 1904, settling in Italy from 1906, where he established his own school of theatrical design. ¹⁴ His work was generally considered to be impracticable and was rarely produced. Nonetheless, he attracted a cult following amongst young British artists, who followed his work through exhibitions of his drawings and models, and in publications such as *The Mask* (1908–1929), the theatre journal, which he largely wrote himself. ¹⁵ He was, in the words of Paul Nash,

“the one really imaginative English artist of his generation [...] romantic, daring, scandalous and brilliant”, and enjoying “the dual distinction of *cher maître* and a voice crying in the wilderness.” ¹⁶ This photographic portrait by E.O. Hoppé conveys something of his charisma and of the stylised quality of his “Art of the Theatre” (the title of his seminal essay of 1905).

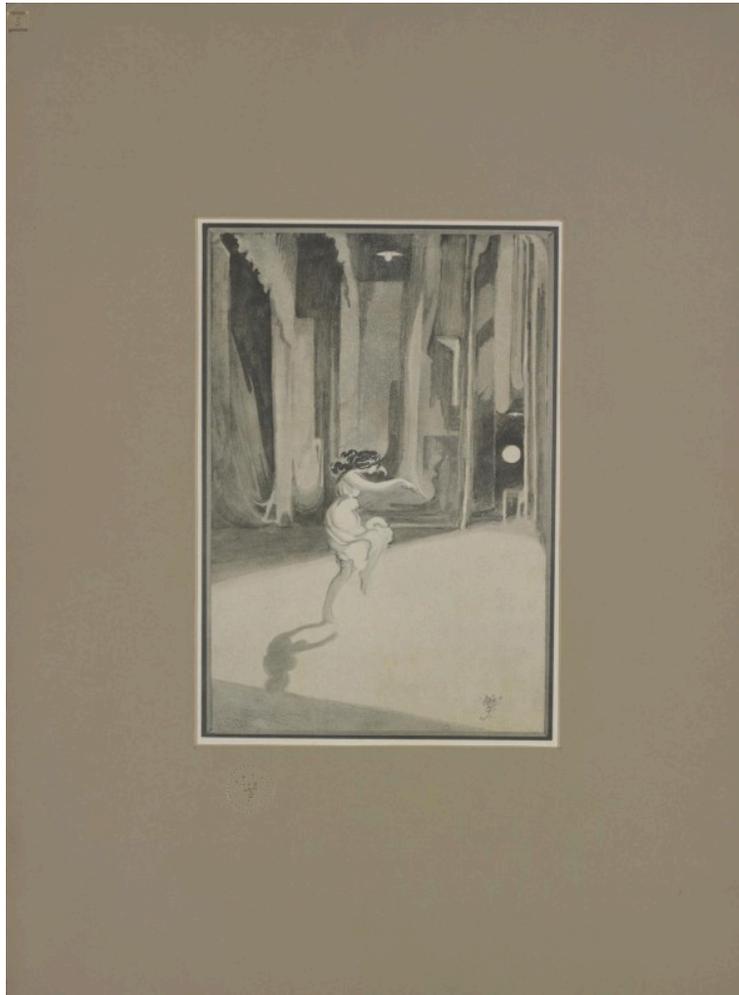


Figure 5.

Edward Gordon Craig, Study of Isadora Duncan Dancing, 1905, photo lithograph, 29 × 19.8 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (S.5300:6-2009). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 [Unported]).

Isadora Duncan (1877–1927) was a pioneer of modern dance in the West, who set out to restore art to its ancient condition as “the divine expression of the human spirit through the medium of the body’s movement”. ¹⁷ She rejected classical ballet, drawing her technique from ancient Greek vase painting, the observation of natural forces such as the sea, folk and social dancing, and modern athletics. ¹⁸ Other artists, including Michel Fokine at

the *Ballets Russes* and Edward Gordon Craig, were crucially influenced by her work.¹⁹ Craig believed that she had rediscovered a universal language of movement which could communicate profound emotional truths and rejuvenate the theatre.²⁰ The print shown here is one of six studies that he made of the dancer in motion.²¹ It conveys the flowing, improvised quality of her movement, as well as his own characteristic attention to stage lighting and shadow.



Figure 6.

E.O. Hoppé, Tamara Karsavina in *The Firebird*, 1911, reproduced in *Studies from the Russian Ballet*, (London: Fine Art Society, 1912), plate 2.

The photographer E.O. Hoppé (1878–1972) was the leading photographic portraitist of his day, whose work has recently been reinstated after decades of accidental neglect.²² This exhibition contributes to the reassessment of his work by highlighting his role in London’s cultural networks during the First World War, as a portraitist, as co-founder of the Plough Club, and as art

editor of *Colour* magazine from its launch in 1914. *Studies from the Russian Ballet* was his first major publication. It comprises fifteen portraits of dancers from the *Ballets Russes* posing in character in different performances from the company's repertoire. The two photographs of Nijinsky were provided by Auguste Bert as Nijinsky had not yet posed for Hoppé.²³



Figure 7.

Pamela Colman Smith, Scheherazade, illustration in Ellen Terry, *The Russian Ballet* (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1913), 3. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Ellen Terry (1847–1928) was one of the most celebrated actresses of her day and the mother of Edward Gordon Craig and Edith Craig, both of whom were key to the cultural networks explored in this exhibition. Her book *The Russian Ballet* is inflected by a commitment to internationalism in the arts, which also shaped the politics of the wartime little theatres. The *Ballets Russes* was an “international possession”, she insisted, the impact of which was particularly strong in Britain, but which was “neither the property of a nation nor the result of patriotism”.²⁴ Her illustrator, Pamela Colman Smith, also worked for

Edy Craig's theatre company, the Pioneer Players.²⁵ As Terry herself pointed out in her Introduction, Smith's pictures for *The Russian Ballet* relate only tangentially to the text, and they agreed to share equal rights to the book.²⁶ The approach, then, is similar to that taken by Armfield in his indirect "pictorial commentary" on *The Ballet of the Nations*.

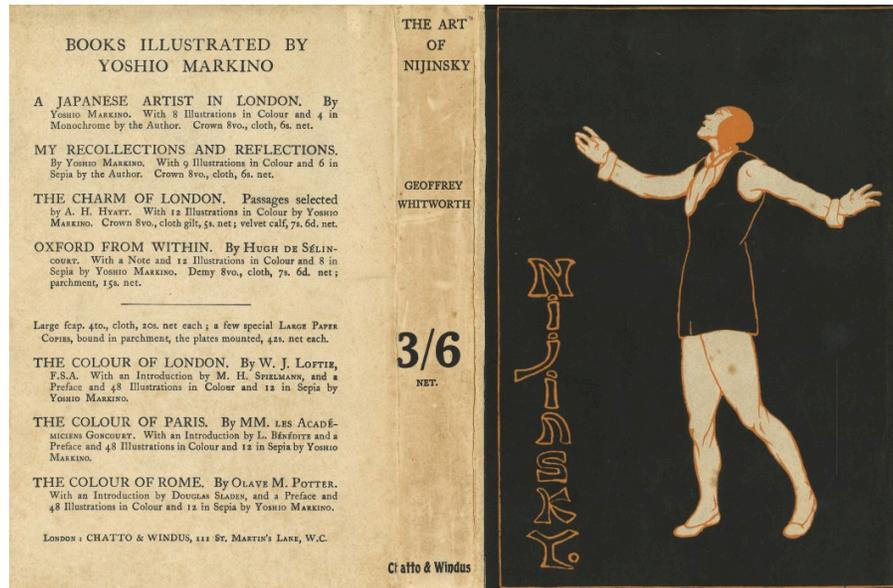


Figure 8.

Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Art of Nijinsky*, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), cover design by Dorothy Mullock. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Geoffrey Whitworth (1883–1951), the editor at Chatto & Windus who commissioned *The Ballet of the Nations*, published this study of Vaslav Nijinsky when the dancer was at the height of his fame. It was in 1913 that Nijinsky performed *The Rite of Spring* in Paris, and it was also the year that he fell out with Diaghilev and left the *Ballets Russes*. Whitworth was intent on establishing a National Theatre in Britain, a project which became his life's work, after it was initially scuppered by the outbreak of war in 1914.²⁷ He explained that he wrote *The Art of Nijinsky*, with the dancer's cooperation, in order to "preserve an impression" of an ephemeral art form, and he was one of the few critics to give an appreciative account of *The Rite of Spring*.²⁸ Little is known about the illustrator, Dorothy Mullock (1888–1973), except that she worked also with the writer Clifford Bax, illustrating his set of *Studio Plays* (published 1918–1923).²⁹ Bax was an active member of the Plough Club, which was part of the network of theatre groups in London during the war.



Figure 9.

David Bomberg, Russian Ballet Lithographs iv 'Impressions crowding collide with movement round us', circa 1914-1919, lithograph on paper, 13.4 × 21.5 cm. Collection of Tate (P07011). Digital image courtesy of Tate (All rights reserved).

Around 1914, the Vorticist artist David Bomberg made a series of abstracted drawings of modern dance, some based on the *Ballets Russes*, which was then performing in London, and some based on a Margaret Morris summer school in Bournemouth.³⁰ One of the drawings was reproduced as the cover design for John Rodker's *Poems* (1914). Others he converted into lithographs in 1919 and incorporated into a book with a short poem of his own evoking the experience of watching the *Ballets Russes*:

*Methodic discord startles...
Insistent snatchings drag fancy from space,
Fluttering white hands beat—compel. Reason concedes.
Impressions crowding collide with movement round us—
—the curtain falls—the created illusion escapes.
The mind clamped fast captures only a fragment, for new illusion.*

David Bomberg³¹

Footnotes

- ¹ John Rodker, "The Choric School", *The Drama* (August 1916): 436-445.
- ² Frantisek Deak, *Symbolist Theater: The Formation of an Avant-Garde* (Baltimore, MD: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993).
- ³ Anne Cnudde Knowland, "Maurice Maeterlinck and English and Anglo-Irish Literature: A Study of Parallels and Influences" (DPhil diss., University of Oxford, 1984); Patrick McGuinness, *Maurice Maeterlinck and the Making of Modern Theatre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000).

- 4 Maxwell Armfield, "My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War" (unpublished, 1970), 34, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- 5 Maxwell Armfield, "The Confessions of a Painter, II" (unpublished, n.d.), unpaginated, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/1/11.
- 6 Robert Orledge, "Fauré's 'Pelléas et Mélisande'", *Music & Letters* 56, no. 2 (April 1975): 178.
- 7 Jane Munro, *Chasing Happiness: Maurice Maeterlinck, the Blue Bird and England* (Cambridge: The Fitzwilliam Museum, 2006).
- 8 Margaret Morris, *My Galsworthy Story* (London: Peter Owen, 1967), 28. Maurice Maeterlinck, *The Blue Bird: A Fairy Play in Six Acts* trans. Alexander Teixeira de Mattos, illustrated by F. Cayley Robinson (London: Methuen, 1911, first published 1909), 24.
- 9 Maeterlinck, *The Blue Bird*, xi-xii.
- 10 Margaret Morris, *My Life in Movement* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), 20. For the lessons with Annea (Annie) Spong, see *Margaret Morris Movement Magazine* 2, no. 4 (June 1936), 5, cited in Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Lois Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 493, note 11.
- 11 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 20-21.
- 12 Mae Tinée, "The Blue Bird", *Chicago Daily Tribune*, 6 May 1918, cited in Kristian Moen, *Film and Fairy Tales: The Birth of Modern Fantasy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2013), 101-102. Moen argues that Tourneur drew particularly upon the murals of Pierre Puvis de Chavannes (99-102).
- 13 Advertisement in *Variety*, 29 March 1918, quoted in Moen, *Film and Fairy Tales*, 111.
- 14 Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig* (Hoboken, NJ: Taylor and Francis, 2013).
- 15 Between 1911 and early 1915, there were at least ten exhibitions of Craig's work at galleries in London, Manchester, Leeds, and Liverpool. There was then a gap before the next showing of his work in the UK, at the *International Theatre Exhibition* in London in 1922, which features in this exhibition in the section on the British Drama League.
- 16 Paul Nash, *Outline: An Autobiography and Other Writings* (London: Faber & Faber, 1949), 166, 167, and 171.
- 17 Isadora Duncan, *My Life* (New York: Boni and Liveright, 1927), 75.
- 18 Duncan, *My Life*, 2. See also Ann Daly, *Done into Dance: Isadora Duncan in America* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1995). Isadora Duncan researched ancient Greek vase painting together with her bother Raymond.
- 19 Richard Buckle discussed her influence on Fokine in his Introduction to Valentine Gross, *Nijinsky on Stage* (London: Studio Vista, 1971). For her influence on Craig, see Edward Gordon Craig, "Memories of Isadora Duncan", *The Listener* 47, no. 1214 (5 June 1952): 913-914; Christopher Innes, *Edward Gordon Craig: A Vision of Theatre* (Amsterdam: Harwood Academic Publishers, 1998), 113-116; and Irène Eynat-Confino, *Beyond the Mask: Gordon Craig, Movement, and the Actor* (Carbondale, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987), 62-71.
- 20 Jennifer Buckley, "'Symbols in Silence': Edward Gordon Craig and the Engraving of Wordless Drama", *Theatre Survey* 54, no. 2 (May 2013): 210.
- 21 They were published as Edward Gordon Craig, *Isadora Duncan: Six Movement Designs* (Leipzig: Insel-Verlag, 1906). The plate shown here is number five in the set, and was based on a watercolour and pencil drawing which is also in the V&A collection (museum number S.196-2008).
- 22 E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection: "Biography", www.eohoppe.com/about, accessed 11 December 2018. Recent exhibitions of his work include *Hoppé Portraits: Society, Studio & Street* (National Portrait Gallery, London, 2011), and *Rediscovered Fotos: Emil Otto Hoppé* (The Gemeentemuseum Helmond, 2016).
- 23 Andreas H. Bitesnich, "E.O. Hoppé and Bert, Studies from the Russian Ballet, 1913", www.achtung.photography/e-o-hoppe-and-bert-studies-from-the-russian-ballet-1913/, accessed 11 December 2018. Bitesnich based his analysis on Hoppé's diaries. Email to the author, 11 December 2018.
- 24 Ellen Terry, *The Russian Ballet*, illustrated by Pamela Colman Smith (London: Sidgwick and Jackson, 1913), 1 and 15.
- 25 Katherine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players, 1911-1925* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001), 177-178.
- 26 Terry, *The Russian Ballet*, 4. The contract between artist and author of 9 June 1913, in which they agree to be joint proprietors of *The Russian Ballet* and divide the returns equally, is preserved in the Ellen Terry Archive. ET-D2179 Memorandum of Agreement. British Library.
- 27 Geoffrey Whitworth tells his story in *The Theatre of my Heart* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1930) and *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951).
- 28 Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Art of Nijinsky*, illustrated by Dorothy Mullock, (London: Chatto & Windus, 1913), 6, 88-100.
- 29 The plays were: *The Rose and the Cross* (1918), *The Cloak* (1921), and *Prelude & Fugue* (1923). They were published together as *Studio Plays* (London, 1924).
- 30 The making of the series is described in William Lipke, *David Bomberg: A Critical Study of his Life and Work* (London: Evelyn, Adams and Mackay, 1967), 115, note 37; and Richard Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, Vol. 2 "Synthesis and Decline" (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), 392; both cited in the Tate online catalogue entry for this item: <https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bomberg-i-p07008>.
- 31 Bomberg's own account of the making of the book is quoted in Lipke, David Bomberg, 50.

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London's Little Theatres

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“Chelsea, dotted with groups of studios, full of small streets, and cheap lodgings, is alive with artists and writers, and rich with memories of both.”¹ Thus wrote a young Arthur Ransome in his whimsical study *Bohemia in London* (1907). By 1914, Chelsea was well established as a cultural quarter. Over the decades, it had been home to artists and writers from Turner to Sargent, from Swift to Michael Field. Rossetti and Swinburne had shared a house on Cheyne Walk, where they kept a personal zoo. Whistler lived a few doors from Wilde on Tite Street and painted Wilde’s ceiling with a design of peacock feathers. By the time Ransome arrived in the neighbourhood, in 1901, it had “begun to deserve its reputation as a battlefield and bivouacking ground for art and literature.”² At the outbreak of the First World War, an influx of artists and writers from the provinces and from abroad gave the area a new lease of life, just at the point when the London art world was entering a phase of cultural reaction and the avant-gardes were breaking up in reaction to the conflict.

The artists, writers, and performers who gathered around the Margaret Morris Theatre on the King’s Road formed a close community. Morris lived at 1 Glebe Place, her partner, the artist J.D. Fergusson, at 14 Redcliffe Road. The Choric School operated from a “quaintly decorated house” on Royal Hospital Road, where Khori Torahiko and Fujita Tsuguji lived at different points during the war.³ The Armfields set up their Greenleaf Theatre in a studio on Glebe Place, a few doors away from Charles Rennie Mackintosh and Margaret Mackintosh. The Ballets Russes dancer Serafina Astafieva opened a dance school at 152 King’s Road. Vernon Lee and Geoffrey Whitworth lived on Oakley Street; George Plank lived on Cheyne Row. The Blue Cockatoo restaurant on Cheyne Walk, overlooking the river, was a favourite haunt, and close to Jacob Epstein’s lodgings and Edward McKnight Kauffer’s studio. E.O. Hoppé was a short walk away on Cromwell Place in South Kensington. Slightly further afield, there were significant locations near Covent Garden—Henderson’s Bookshop on Charing Cross Road, the Union of Democratic Control on Norfolk Street, the Pioneer Players on Bedford Street and, after the war, the Arts League of Service on Robert Street.

It was an actual community rather than an imagined one, formed by personal collaborations, social gatherings, and chance encounters in and around Chelsea and the Strand. Such familiarity shaped the nature of their work together and generated a sense of solidarity in the otherwise inhospitable cultural climate of the First World War. The map presented here, curated by Claudia Tobin, is intended to conjure up the *genius loci* that Vernon Lee evoked in her travel writing. It was made in 1913 by C. Smith & Son and is marked with key locations—homes, studios, libraries, theatres, and other places of work and entertainment. Many of these sites are linked to recent or

historical photographs, prints, or paintings to create a virtual tour of a neighbourhood which, even after a century of rebuilding, may still seem half-familiar.

The Margaret Morris Theatre

The Margaret Morris Theatre was central to the development of experimental theatre in London and became a gathering point for artists, writers, and musicians more widely during the war. It was opened in June 1914 by the dancer Margaret Morris (1891–1980) and her partner, the artist J.D. Fergusson (1874–1961), on the first floor of the Temperance Billiard Hall on the corner of the King's Road and Flood Street.⁴ The couple had met in Paris in 1913, where Morris was visiting to perform with her “Dancing Children” and Fergusson lived as an avant-garde artist. At the outbreak of the First World War, he moved reluctantly to London where they both missed the Parisian café culture and set about trying to recreate it.⁵ The Margaret Morris Theatre became a substitute for the music halls, cafés, and studios of bohemian Paris. It staged productions by the Margaret Morris School and other little theatres, and hosted the Margaret Morris Club, which met thrice monthly for performances, debates, and social dancing. The Club was attended by many of the leading artists and intellectuals of the day, including the architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and his wife, the designer Margaret Mackintosh, who moved from Glasgow to London in 1915; Vorticists such as Wyndham Lewis, Jacob Epstein, Edward Wadsworth, and Ezra Pound; the writers Katherine Mansfield and John Middleton Murry, and the artist Anne Estelle Rice, all of whom were involved in the modernist magazine *Rhythm*; composers such as Eugene Goossens, Cyril Scott, and Constant Lambert, and the photographer E.O. Hoppé. Many of these figures recur elsewhere in this exhibition as part of the closely involved network of little theatres and related projects operating in London during the war.

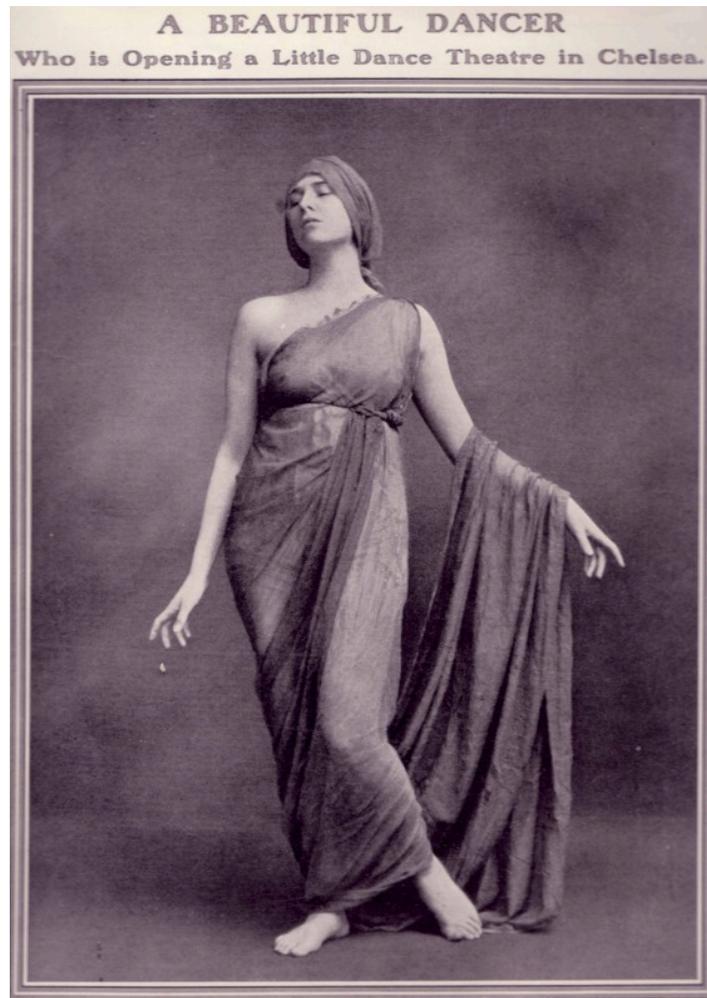


Figure 1.

Margaret Morris, "A Beautiful Dancer who is Opening a Little Dance Theatre in Chelsea", *The Tatler* 56, no. 725 (19 May 1915), 201. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

This photo portrait of Margaret Morris, advertising her theatre in the pages of *Tatler*, shows off the Grecian aesthetic that underpinned her dance method. She trained as a child in classical ballet but, like other dancers of the day—Isadora Duncan, Ruth St Denis, Loïs Hutton—she felt drawn to more natural systems of movement. She learned the basic positions of her technique from Raymond Duncan, brother of Isadora, who worked from Hellenic vase painting to recreate the dance rituals of ancient Greece.⁶ The "Margaret Morris Movement", as it became known, celebrated dance as a return to the idea of rhythmic movement rooted in religious ritual. Costumes were diaphanous and the dancers barefoot and often out of doors.



Figure 2.

J.D. Fergusson, *Café-Concert des Ambassadeurs*, 1907, oil paint on board, 37.5 × 41.3 cm. Collection of Tate (N05880). Digital image courtesy of The Fergusson Gallery, Perth and Kinross Council. Photo: Tate (All rights reserved).

Fergusson's painting of a Parisian *café-concert* tells us a lot about the culture that he and Morris were seeking to recreate in London during the war. The *café-concert*, or *café chantant*, was popular across Europe at the turn of the twentieth century as a place to meet, eat, and enjoy the entertainment, usually out of doors.⁷ Fergusson's painting conveys a vivid impression of one such establishment—the golden glow of light around the dancers against a bright blue sky, and the swirl of spectators in the shadowy foreground, who are themselves part of the spectacle.



Figure 3. Margaret Morris Theatre Programme, 2 June 1915, illustration by Margaret Morris. Collection of Margaret Morris Movement International Limited. Digital image courtesy of Margaret Morris Movement International Limited.

The Margaret Morris School of Dancing staged a number of performances during the war. This theatre programme, designed by Morris herself, shows off the distinctive costuming that characterised her productions. Morris is pictured on the left in an elaborate headdress and the dancer to the rear holds out an enormous skirt decorated with an all-over leaf-like pattern. The dancer to the front gestures in a way that was typical of the style of movement practised in the London little theatres at this time—wrists and elbows flexed and pointing hieroglyphically to one side.

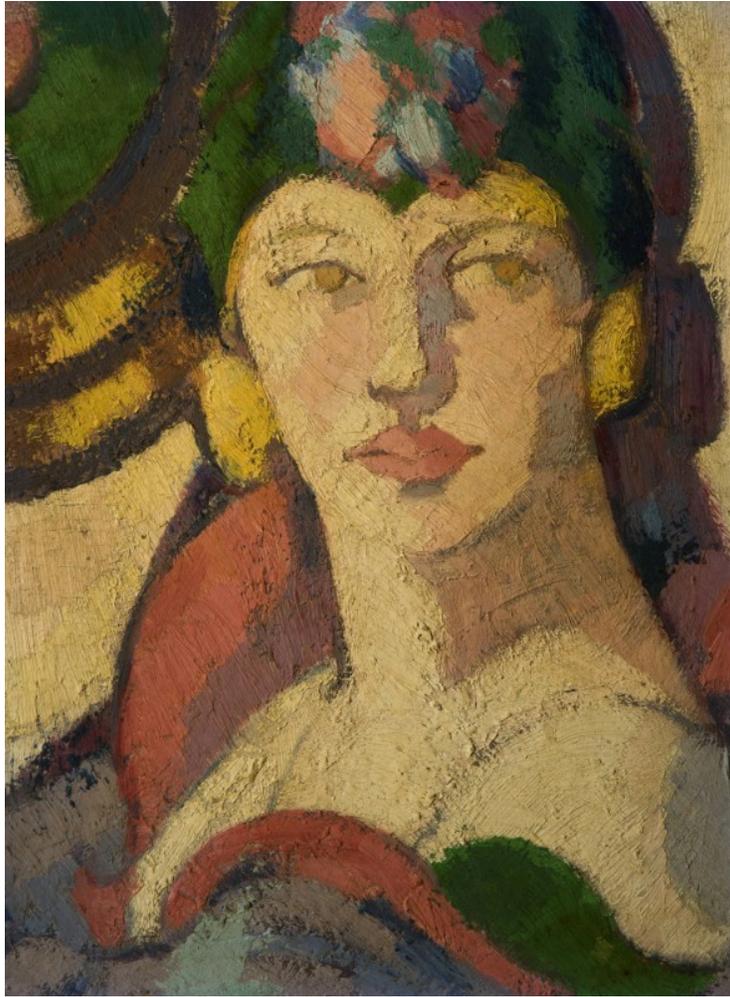


Figure 4.

Margaret Morris, *Kathleen and Mirror*, 1915, oil on card on board, 42.5 × 34 cm. Collection of Perth and Kinross Council (2011.31). Digital image courtesy of Margaret Morris Movement International Limited. Photo: Perth and Kinross Council (All rights reserved).

Margaret Morris encouraged her students to practise a range of art forms—painting, music, and writing, as well as dance—and to treat them all as aspects of a single, integrated practice. In this respect, her work drew on the idea of the total work of art that was promoted by other groups across Europe, from the Ballets Russes to Der Blaue Reiter. Painting at the Margaret Morris School was taught by J.D. Fergusson, Morris’s partner, and her portrait of Kathleen Dillon, shown here, recalls his fleshy, highly coloured, stylised modelling of the human figure. Dillon was one of Morris’s original “dancing children” and taught at the Margaret Morris School from 1917.⁸ She formed her own group, the Choric School, together with the dancer Hester Sainsbury and the poet John Rodker, and performed also with the Greenleaf Theatre.⁹

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The composer Eugene Goossens was a regular at the Margaret Morris Club, where he would “sit down and improvise on the piano and generate a real excitement”, as Morris later recalled.¹⁰ Two of his wartime compositions explore ideas of play and puppetry that were important to the little theatres: *Four Conceits* (1917), which includes “Dance Memories” and “The Marionette Show”; and *Kaleidoscope* for piano (1917), a set of twelve miniature compositions which follow a child’s day from “Good Morning” to “Goodnight”. “March of the Wooden Soldier”, “The Punch and Judy Show”, and “The Clockwork Dancer” are among the entertainments, while “Lament to a Departed Doll” picks up on the elegiac associations with toys and puppets that were prevalent at this time.¹¹ Both sets of music were taken up by members of the Ballets Russes after the war. In 1919, Diaghilev used *Four Conceits* as a “Symphonic Interlude” for the Ballets Russes season at the Alhambra Theatre. In 1920, Goossens orchestrated “The Hurdy Gurdy Man” from *Kaleidoscope* for the prima ballerina Tamara Karsavina.¹²

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The Greenleaf Theatre

Constance Smedley and Maxwell Armfield founded the Greenleaf Players when they moved to London in early 1915 as a step towards joining the little theatre movement in the USA.¹³ Their involvement in theatre had begun some four years earlier when they lived in Minchinhampton, in the heart of the Cotswolds, and staged the *Gloucestershire Historical Pageant of Progress* (1911) as a rural extravaganza starring hundreds of local people from the surrounding villages.¹⁴ It led to the formation of their first company, the Cotswold Players, which toured the village halls in an effort to reach audiences as widely as possible—beyond a conventional theatre-going audience. Their style of production was inspired by the holistic “art of the theatre” promoted in Edward Gordon Craig’s journals *The Mask* and *The Marionette*.¹⁵ They saw themselves working in the tradition of the medieval troubadours, much as William Morris sought to revive the artists’ guilds of the Middle Ages. The style they wanted to achieve was harmonious, ritualistic, and anti-naturalistic—folk and fairy tales performed against simple, portable sets, using strictly choreographed movements and a carefully scripted, chanting intonation. When they started up in London, they were exhilarated to find other groups striving for a similar effect. “I shall never forget,” wrote Smedley in her memoirs,

the thrill of wonder and rapture when the curtains drew back and we beheld for the first time the drama of our dreams: voice and movement and picture accurately synthesized, depending on the rhythmic pattern for charm and interest instead of on the emotional exercise of the players' personality. ¹⁶

This section of the exhibition focuses on Armfield's illustrations, particularly those for his play *The Minstrel*, which he staged in Chelsea in summer 1915, as a crucial link between the London little theatres, the peace movement, and the publication of *The Ballet of the Nations*.



Figure 5.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield, *The Minstrel*, written and performed ca.1915 (London: Duckworth, 1922-1925), cover design. Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/7/1/12).

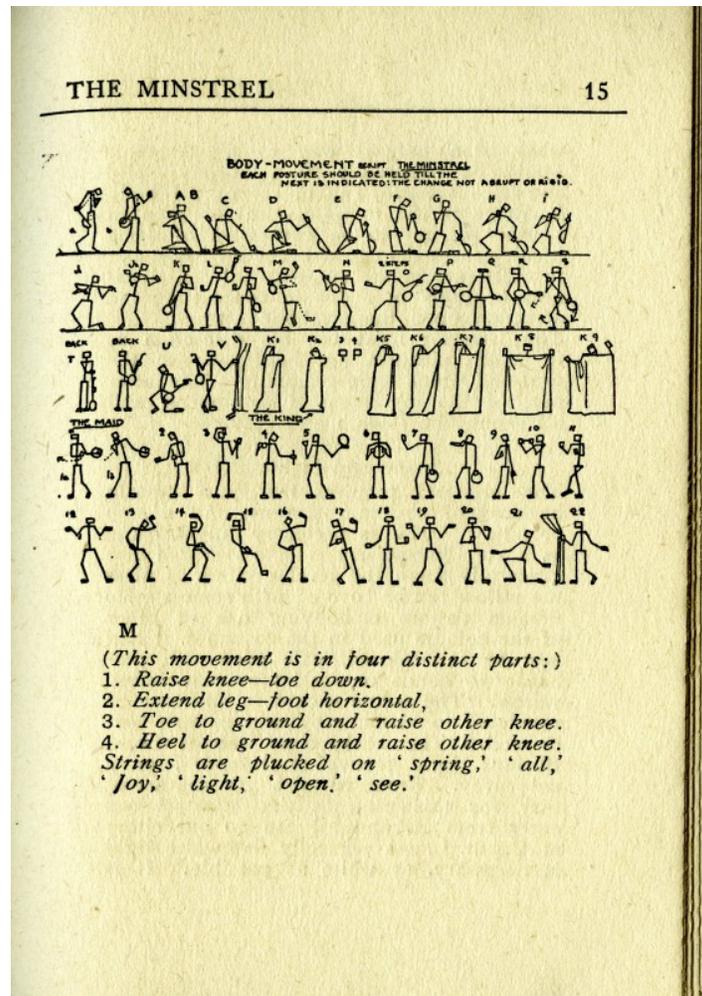


Figure 6.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield, *The Minstrel*, written and performed ca.1915 (London: Duckworth, 1922-1925), page 15 featuring "Body-Movement Script". Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/7/1/12).

Maxwell Armfield's play *The Minstrel* tells the tale of a wandering musician who finds a country ravaged by war and whose music restores it to peace and plenty. It is a coded reflection on Armfield's own sense of himself as an artist and pacifist, choosing to spend the war working in theatre but under increasing pressure to enlist—conscription came into force in Britain in March 1916, shortly before the Armfields left London for New York. After the war, they brought out their plays as a series of miniature pamphlets with cover designs that related closely to the Greenleaf aesthetic. The "body-movement script" which prefaces the text of *The Minstrel* shows how they sought to impose a strict choreography on productions of their work. It was most probably drawn by Smedley—Armfield states that her method was to make "hundreds of small drawings of movements and groupings, crystallising the continuous rhythmic structure of the play."¹⁷ Smedley herself claimed that

The Minstrel was the first play “to be completely worked out in formalised drawings, interpreted by the actors as musicians might interpret a score, or dancers a formal dance.” ¹⁸



Figure 7.

Unknown photographer, Maxwell Ashby Armfield with Phyllis Holt and Joyce Holt as the King, the Minstrel and the Maid, in Maxwell Ashby Armfield, *The Minstrel*, staged at the Maxwell Armfield studio, Glebe Place, London, 1915, photograph, 11.6 × 8.8 cm. Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/6/4). Digital image courtesy of Tate Archive and The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.

A remarkable set of photographs survives from the Greenleaf Players’ production of *The Minstrel* in 1915, demonstrating a direct connection between Armfield’s “pictorial commentary” on *The Ballet of the Nations* and the ideas about theatre that he was exploring at this time. The photographs are compiled in a home-made album labelled “London 1915”, stuck onto coarse blue paper and each surrounded by a hand-drawn, brightly coloured frame. Several of them are strikingly close to pages from *The Ballet*. The image shown here, for example, evokes a scene of conversation among the female nations of *The Ballet*, in its juxtaposition of seated and standing figures, the patterned, archaic costumes, and the gesturing of the hand, palm upwards. In her memoirs, Smedley described the production which took place first in the Armfield’s own studio, then by invitation at the Margaret Morris Theatre, where they “cleared the expenses and divided the profits among the actors, who received five shillings each!” (£25 in today’s terms). ¹⁹ Her account situates the performance within the little theatre network:

“Geoffrey Whitworth was again an enthusiastic colleague, and we found two delightful girls, Phillis and Joyce Holt, who were keen dance-students, working out their own old dances from scripts in the British Museum [...] Included in the framework of verse was a tribute to Hester Sainsbury, who had foreseen our vision and had been carrying it out while we had been struggling in the Cotswolds.” ²⁰

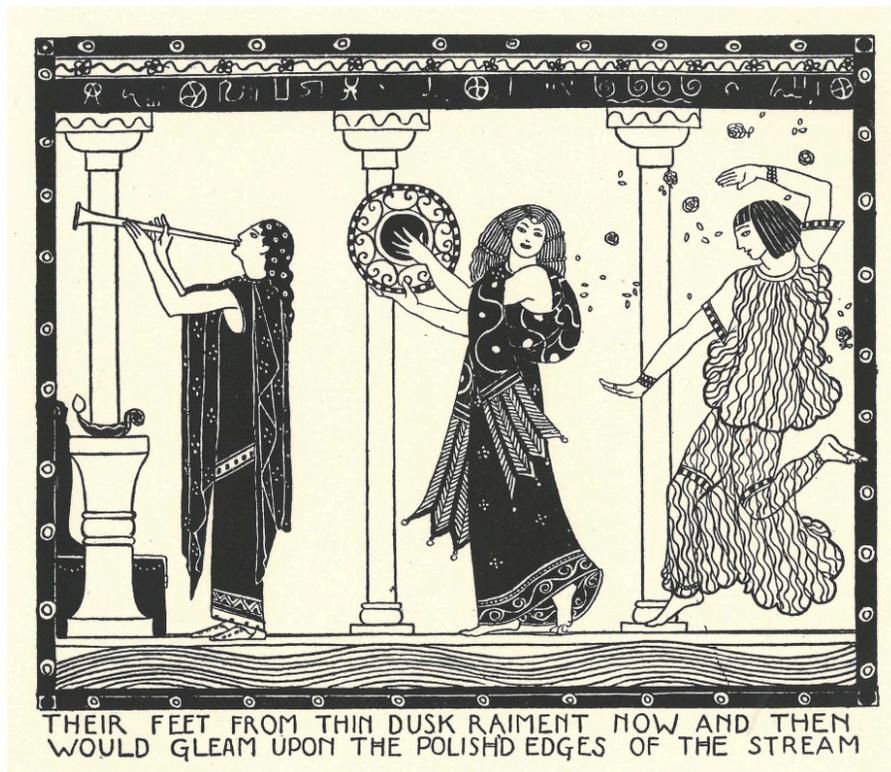


Figure 8.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield, “Their Feet from Thin Dusk Raiment Now and Then Would Gleam upon the Polished Edges of the Stream”, in William Morris, *The Life and Death of Jason* (London: Headley Brothers, 1915), opposite 274.

Armfield’s illustrated edition of William Morris’s epic poem was published in the same year as *The Ballet of the Nations* and uses the same visual language. His prefatory “Note on the Drawings” articulates his approach to book illustration at this time in a way which is strongly reminiscent of *The Ballet*:

“No attempt has been made in the drawings to convey an impression with line similar in kind to that conveyed by the words of the text [...] This point of view must consider the embellishment not so much as *illustration* proceeding *from* the text as a continuation of the binding and page purposing to *present* the text to the eye; or as a commentary on certain aspects of the matter not necessarily touched on at all by the author.” ²¹

The edition brings together two artists who were important to Armfield's work: William Morris as the leader of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and Edward Gordon Craig, whom Armfield evoked when he explained that:

“The persons are represented by broad types moving if at all with a sort of hierarchic precision reminiscent of the more dignified marionette, the broad simple ideas being conveyed not with eye and eye-brow, but with the gesture of the entire body.” ²²

The copy of the book from which this image is taken is inscribed to “Mr and Mrs Haddon Squire with best wishes for 1916 from Maxwell Armfield”. Haddon Squire was a neighbour on Glebe Place who featured in the life of the London theatre network as a member of the council of the Arts League of Service.



Figure 9.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield, Edward McKnight Kauffer, 1915, oil on canvas, 29.8 × 35 cm. Collection of National Portrait Gallery (NPG 4947). Digital image courtesy of Estate of Maxwell Armfield / Bridgeman Images. Photo: National Portrait Gallery (All rights reserved).

Armfield's friendship with the artist Edward McKnight Kauffer (1890–1954), or "K" as he called him, was important to his experience of living in Chelsea during the war.²³ Kauffer encouraged him as he worked on his illustrations for *The Ballet of the Nations*, and the two would go together to Chelsea Library and "pore over the journals in which were reproduced all the best Continental designs", particularly—and, in the context of the war, controversially—those from Germany.²⁴ When Armfield moved to the USA in 1916, Kauffer continued to send him art publications from Britain, including issues of *Colour*, which was a journal of some significance to the little theatre network in London.²⁵ Like several of those who feature in this exhibition, Kauffer moved to London at the outbreak of war in 1914, where he clearly felt at home with the pacifist avant-garde. He lived in Chelsea, sold his drawings at Roger Fry's Omega Workshops, and worked for the Arts League of Service.²⁶ Armfield's portrait of his friend standing against the trunk of a Californian pine points to the New World, which the Armfields hoped shortly to join. The depiction of the head in profile was characteristic of the hieratic style of portraiture which Armfield drew from various European sources, including ancient Greek vase painting.

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Greenleaf programmes consisted of small plays in a “connected tracery of song, dance, poem and antick”, a formula which was also used by other little theatres.²⁷ The Armfields favoured composers such as Edward Elgar, Percy Pitt, and Roger Quilter, then at the cutting-edge of British music, whom they appreciated for their “unusual harmonies”.²⁸ They also drew on traditional melodies at a time when Cecil Sharp was leading a revival of English folk song. Constance Smedley made her name as a music critic in the 1890s,²⁹ and music was important to the way that she thought about theatre as a form of rhythmic performance.³⁰ Her own Greenleaf plays were structured like sonatas, she explained:

“Allegretto, Andante, Largo, Trio or Scherzo, etc., the metre changing and the general structure of the different parts; this making a form that was satisfying in itself and which gave a curious sense of satisfaction to the audiences, quite apart from the dramatic content of the plays.”³¹

The relationship between song and movement was carefully mapped out. “Wander Song” was published together with a “movement script”. “The Green Tree”, which featured alongside *The Minstrel* when the company performed at the Margaret Morris Theatre in June 1915, was a “gesture-song”.³²

“The Artist’s Precept”, which prefaces *The Minstrel*, was supposedly written by a Chinese poet called Pai Ta-Shun. Armfield noted his “indebtedness to the translator of his poem from the Chinese, whose identity he has so far been unable to discover.”³³ In 1917, the mystery was solved. Pai Ta-Shun was unmasked as Frederick Peterson (the surname was simply transliterated), a white American physician and student of Chinese poetry—a flagrant case of the mixture of fiction and scholarship that characterised the invention of the Orient.³⁴

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The Choric School

The Choric School, sometimes known as the Clarissa Club, started in summer 1913 and remained active in Chelsea throughout the war.³⁵ Those involved included Hester Sainsbury (1890–1967), who led the group; Kathleen Dillon (1898–1990), one of Margaret Morris’s original “dancing children”; Evelyn Sainsbury (1891–1927), Hester’s friend and sister-in-law; and John Rodker (1894–1955), a poet of the Whitechapel Boys.³⁶ Their method was distinctive. Rodker described how “a party of young women in an old house in Chelsea” were “striving hard to take the art of dancing a step further ahead” through performances that were “marionette-like but with the dolls speaking and behind all a strong artistic reason.”³⁷ Sainsbury wanted to achieve what she called “a purely conventional method of representation both in acting and dancing” in order to express emotion, unadulterated by “impure” realism or “the equally destructive element of the performer himself.”³⁸ As an observer, Constance Smedley emphasised the ritualistic quality of their rhymed plays in which every element was “accurately synthesised, depending on the rhythmic pattern for charm and interest instead of on the emotional exercise of the players’ personality.” Their habit of performing in contemporary dress, she remembered, gave their productions a “curious modern flair, like the decorative fashion drawings of *Vogue* or *Vanity Fair*.”³⁹

By 1915, the group had established a base at 71 Royal Hospital Road, Chelsea, where Evelyn Sainsbury kept a studio.⁴⁰ Their soirées were “a great antidote to war weariness”, according to the society weekly, *The Sketch*: “One dances a few fox-trots, one smokes while gazing at the Futurist ceiling”, and it was there that one could “meet all the young artists who keep London humming like the big black beehive that it is.”⁴¹ The house was, notably, a meeting place for Japanese expatriates, and as such provides a link between the London little theatres and the experiments in Noh theatre which W.B. Yeats and Ezra Pound were conducting around this time.⁴² The painter Foujita (Fujita Tsuguji) lived at no. 71 during 1916.⁴³ From 1917, the playwright Kori Torahiko, who worked with Yeats, was also resident, after he and Sainsbury became partners; and the dancers Michio Ito and Kumé Tamijiro were regular visitors. Others included the illustrator Edmund Dulac, who made masks and costumes for Yeats’s play *At the Hawk’s Well*; and the sculptor Jacob Epstein, who, like Pound, was also a member of the Margaret Morris Club, and who designed the décor for a production at the Plough Club in 1919.⁴⁴ John Rodker, however, was compelled to leave Chelsea due to the precariousness of his position as a conscientious objector. He spent much of the war in hiding and then in prison on Dartmoor—an experience which he described in his pacifist testimonial, *Memoirs of Other*

Fronts (London, 1932). There is no trace of the Choric School after the end of the war, although its members continued to do interesting work: Sainsbury as a wood engraver, Dillon as a dancer with the Arts League of Service, and Rodker as a writer and publisher.



Figure 10.

Sherril Schell, Photograph of a Performance by the Choric School, undated [1913-1915]. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

As a visual record of little theatre in Britain in the early twentieth century, this photograph is a rare survivor. It was taken by the American photographer Sherril Schell, who kept a studio in London between about 1910 and 1915.⁴⁵ In 1913—the year that the Choric School began—he made a set of photographs of the poet Rupert Brooke that become iconic after Brooke died in active service in April 1915.

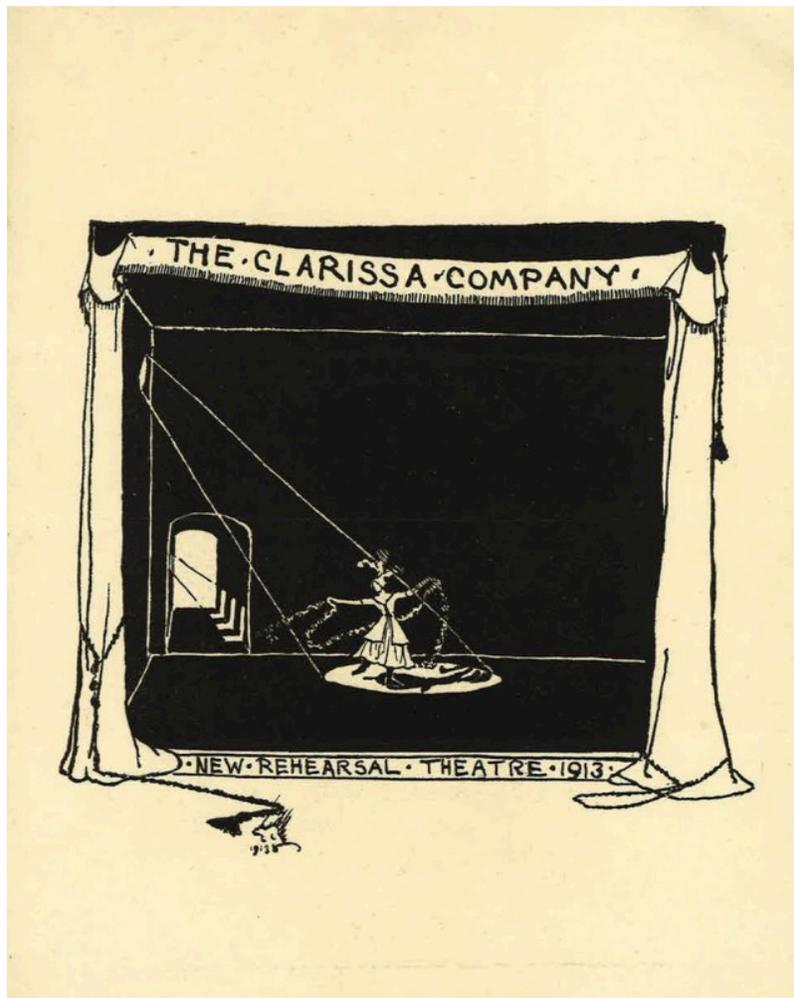


Figure 11.

Choric School programme, *Four Dramatic Poems and Sylvius—A Pastoral*, New Rehearsal Theatre, May 1913, front cover.
Collection London School of Economics and Political Science
Women's Library Collection (7HFD/A/03/26).

This programme for a run of performances by the “Clarissa Company” (another variation on their name) is a rare survival of their work before the First World War. The cover design is particularly interesting because it conveys a sense of their visual aesthetic, with minimal scenery, simple but dramatic lighting, and an emphasis upon expressive movement rather than the actor’s personality. The entertainment featured four dramatic poems—“The Idol”, “The Coquette”, “Mammon”, and “Venus and Adonis”—and a play titled *Sylvius—A Pastoral*. Hester Sainsbury was very much in charge of operations—she wrote and staged all the items herself and sold the tickets from her home at 52 Wimpole Street in Marylebone. It seems likely that she also designed the cover as she was an accomplished artist and is now better known for her work as an illustrator.⁴⁶ Tickets were

priced at 5s., 2/6, or 1s.—that is £28, £14, or £5.60 in today's currency. Four evening shows were scheduled between 13 and 17 May at the New Rehearsal Theatre, Maiden Lane.

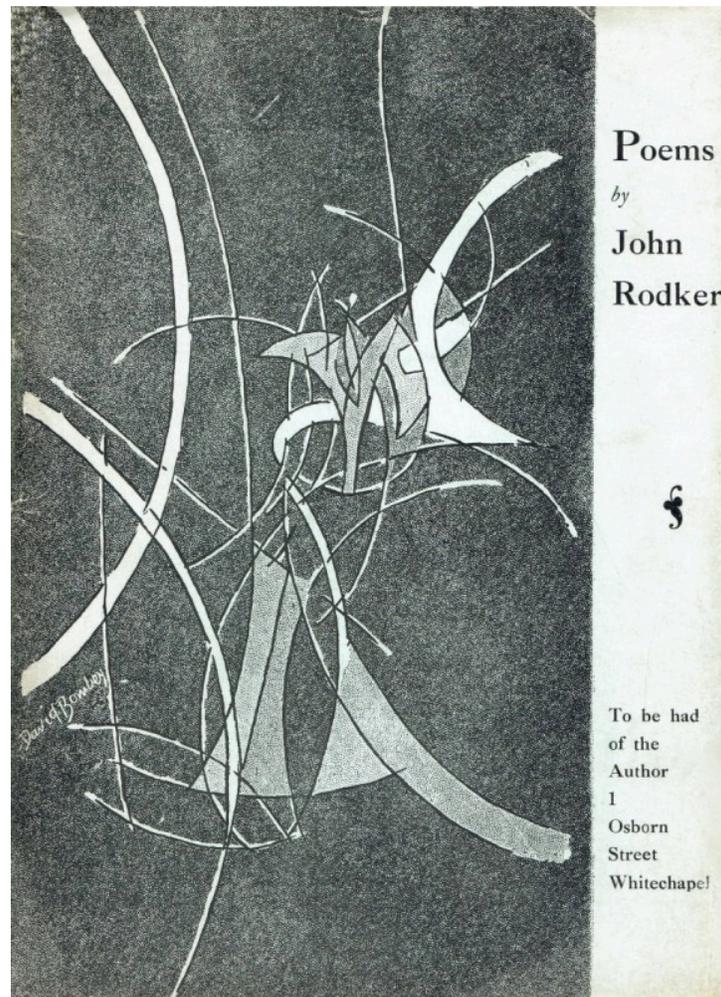


Figure 12.

John Rodker, *Poems*, (London: Ovid Press, 1914), cover design by David Bomberg. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Rodker produced this, his first collection of poems, in early 1914. Like much modernist literature, it was a modest publication—small, privately printed, “to be had of the Author 1 Osborn Street Whitechapel”, and no doubt of limited circulation. As an object, it stands out for its cover design by the Vorticist artist David Bomberg, also a “Whitechapel Boy”, who used the subject of modern dance as a way of investigating the new drive towards abstraction in the visual arts.⁴⁷ His design drew on studies that he made of Rodker’s girlfriend, Sonia Cohen—to whom the book is dedicated—dancing

with Margaret Morris. ⁴⁸ Cohen's later account of the episode is worth quoting for what it tells us about the connections between different groups at this time, and between abstraction and its real-life inspirations:

"In 1913, when I went down to Southbourne to join a summer school dancing out-of-doors on the cliffs with Margaret Morris, Bomberg followed me down there with a few friends. He was in here with me at the time, and thought it a great lark to watch us all cavorting around in the open-air camp. The "Dancer" watercolours came out of his interest in all this, and I think you can see the bodies' movement clearly in the designs." ⁴⁹

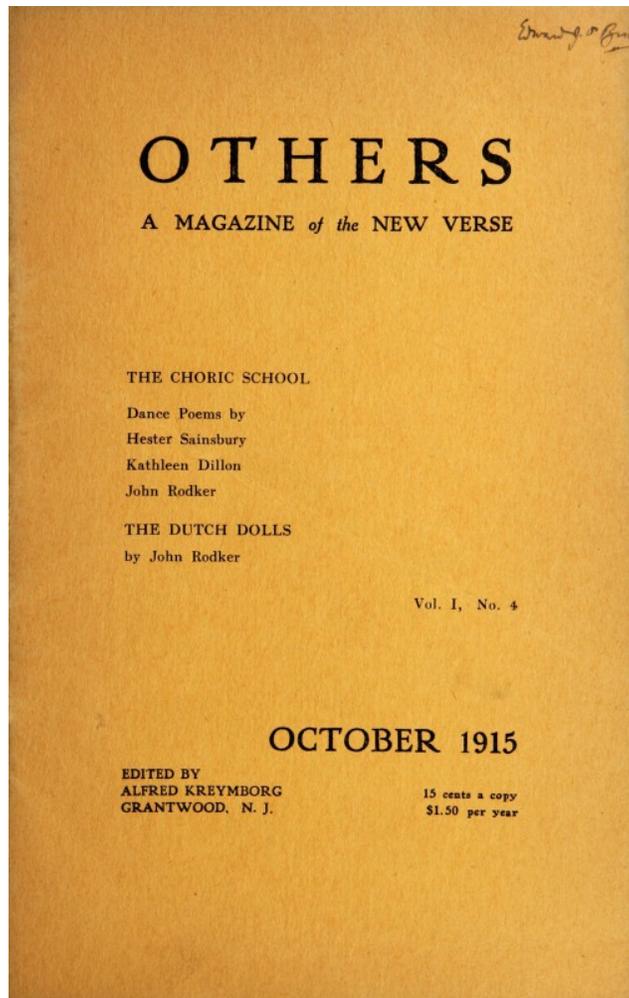


Figure 13.

Alfred Kreymborg (ed.), *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse*, 1, no. 4: "The Choric School" (Grantwood New Jersey: Alfred Kreymborg, 1915): cover. Digital image courtesy of The Modernist Journals Project, Brown University and the University of Tulsa.

In October 1915, the New York modernist, Alfred Kreymborg, devoted a whole issue of his little magazine *Others* to the Choric School, with a Foreword by Ezra Pound. It contained a selection of "Dance Poems" written by Sainsbury, Dillon, and Rodker, and Rodker's play *The Dutch Dolls*. Pound was drawn by the "aroma" of their work, which to him seemed "sensuous and naïvely sophisticated." He felt that the pairing of word and movement in their performances had the potential to "reanimate" modern poetry, just as dance song had transformed European poetry in the Middle Ages. ⁵⁰

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"[I] consider it is a wrong idea that dance must be assisted by music. A dance can be equally successful with metre used as time and words as melody", declared Hester Sainsbury. ⁵¹ For Ezra Pound, her practice of dancing to spoken verse was revelatory because it fused word and movement together into a total work of art. Indeed, he only began to understand their poetry when he saw Sainsbury and Dillon perform: "I then understood the curious breaks and pauses, the elaborate system of dots and dashes with which this new group is wont to adorn its verses." ⁵²

CLARISSA CLUB,
71, ROYAL HOSPITAL ROAD,
CHELSEA, S.W.

March 23rd 1915

Dear Mr. Cornfield - Next
Tuesday is an entirely "by invitation"
affair - no tickets or anything like
that! Our paying performance
was in Mar. We so much enjoyed
seeing you and your husband
on Sunday and I don't
believe we said a word about
much we liked and admired
the program. We shall love to
come to the Tempora show -
we shall only have about
~~half~~ half-a-dozen of our own
friends on Tuesday - so bring as
many as you like, perhaps
we had better ~~make~~ make the
limit 12 as we want everyone to see
well. This is all right

Figure 14.
Hester Sainsbury, Letter to Constance Smedley, 23
March 1915.

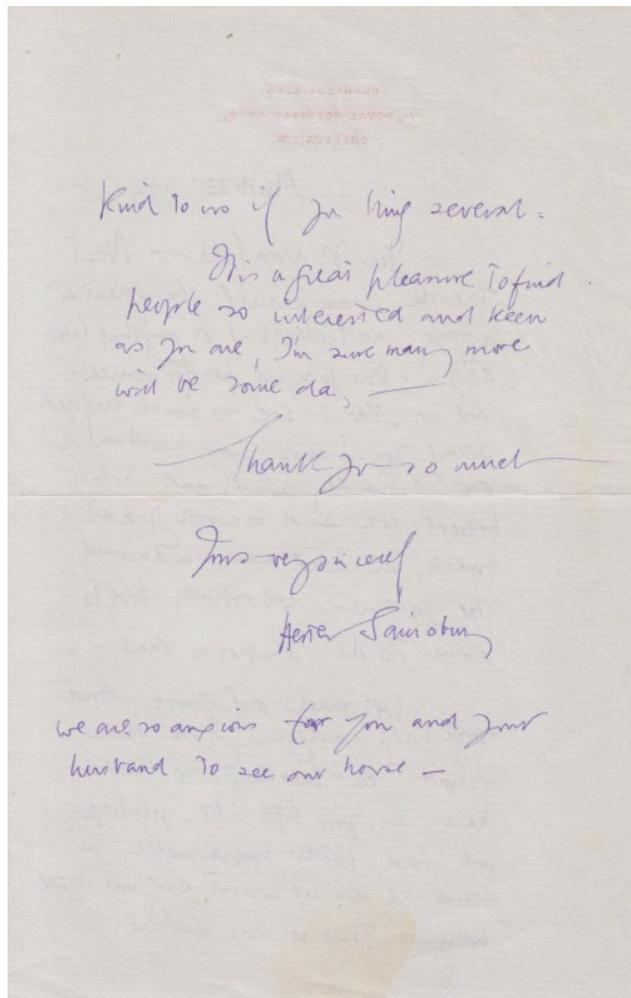


Figure 15.

Hester Sainsbury, Letter to Constance Smedley, 23 March 1915.

This note is important because it corroborates Smedley's later claim that the Armfields mixed with members of the Choric School on their move to London, and that they "co-operated by attending each other's theatres".⁵³ In the letter, Sainsbury invites the Armfields to a private viewing of a performance and suggests that they might help to attract an audience. She has enjoyed seeing their art and looks forward to an exhibition of Maxwell Armfield's paintings in tempera. She ends on a note of solidarity: "It is a great pleasure to find people so interested and keen as you are, I'm sure many more will be some day."⁵⁴

For their part, the Armfields remembered the Clarissa Club as "the most entirely thrilling and 'different' of the various experimental dramatic groups" in London at that time.⁵⁵ Smedley created what appears to be a fictional version of the group in her wartime novel, *Justice Walk* (written 1915,

published 1925), in which she imagined two innocent, pretty, idealistic young women setting up a children's theatre in Chelsea where they perform "poetical plays" of their own invention.⁵⁶ Their home is painted like a stage set (the ceilings in "fantastic colours"), they dress flamboyantly ("stockings patterned in broad rings of emerald and white"), and they "melt out of one movement into another as instinctively as their voices melt from one note to another in a sort of speaking tune."⁵⁷

The Plough Club

The Plough Club was established in December 1917 "for the purpose of stimulating interest in good art of an unconventional kind".⁵⁸ Like other experimental theatres, it was inspired by ideas of aesthetic synthesis and encouraged a collaborative approach amongst all those involved in making a performance. Its programme aligned it with the symbolist aesthetic and dissident politics that characterised the wartime little theatres more widely. The repertoire included works by Émile Verhaeren, the Belgian symbolist poet and pacifist, who moved to England at the outbreak of the war; Maurice Maeterlinck, including the first English-speaking production of his play *Joyzelle*, with stage designs by Charles Rennie Mackintosh; Khorī Torahiko, the Japanese playwright who was instrumental in bringing Noh theatre to European modernism; and Miles Malleson, a conscientious objector, who worked for the No Conscription Fellowship, and whose pacifist plays were seized by the police.⁵⁹ Seasons at the Plough alternated plays and music, and the concert repertoire gives us a flavour of the sort of music that was favoured by the little theatres—Frederic Austin, Granville Bantock, Arnold Bax, Eugene Goossens, Julius Harrison, Gustav Holst, and Cyril Scott amongst contemporary British composers; Claude Debussy, Maurice Ravel, Igor Stravinsky, Joseph-Guy Ropartz, Nikolay Karlovich Medtner, Isaac Albéniz, Joaquín Turina, Gabriel Grovlez, Roger Penau, and Alexander Sergievich Tanieff amongst the Europeans.

The Plough was the brainchild of the Scottish architect Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the German photographer Emil Otto Hoppé. The organising committee included eminent representatives from the worlds of music (Granville Bantock, Eugene Goossens, Arnold Bax), literature (Clifford Bax, Laurence Binyon), theatre (John Drinkwater, George de Warfaz), photography (Alvin Langdon Coburn), and the fine arts (Jacob Epstein, Glyn Philpot). The membership for 1918 reveals a lot about the club's demographic. Of the 188 members, 116 were women; most worked in the arts. The next most significant group was the aristocracy, suggesting that the Plough had a certain social caché—Hoppé would have worked his connections as a society portraitist. Those titled members included several patrons of the avant-garde: Baroness d'Erlanger, who supported Sergei Diaghilev; Lord Howard de

Walden, who financed the bohemian Crab Tree Club and was “blessed” in the Vorticist magazine *Blast*; and Lady Maud Warrender, one of the foremost music patrons of the early twentieth century. Other members stand out because they offer us a glimpse of the causes of the day: Havelock Ellis, who wrote pioneering studies of homosexual and transgender identities; Marion Halsey, who promoted women’s Freemasonry; and Louis Garvin, the newspaper editor who campaigned for a fair peace settlement with Germany. There is much overlap between the Plough and other little theatres in London: Mackintosh and Hoppé were members of the Margaret Morris Club; Khori staged Noh plays with the Pioneer Players; Epstein had links with the Choric School; Drinkwater was a friend of Maxwell Armfield; Goossens worked closely with Margaret Morris from 1915 onwards; and the Pioneer Players and the Margaret Morris School collaborated in a Plough Club production of *The Sneezing Charm* (June 1918).⁶⁰ The Plough flourished into the early 1920s but then “died of its own vitality”, as Hoppé put it, as its members left to take up other work.⁶¹

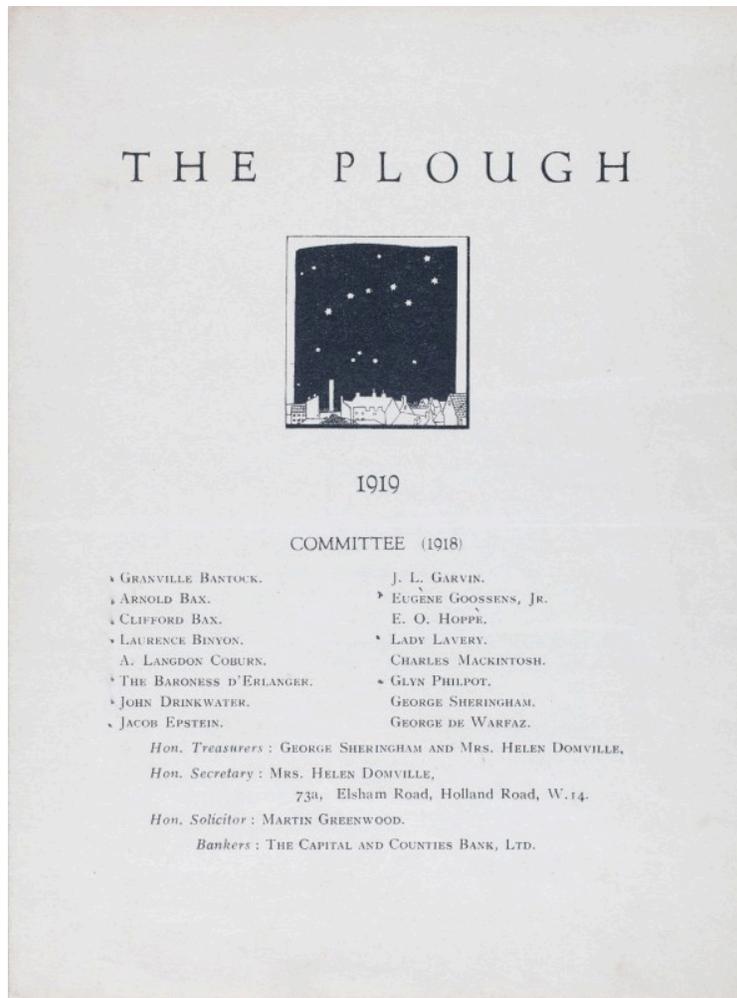


Figure 16.

Prospectus for the Plough Club, 1919. Collection of E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection and Curatorial Assistance Inc. Digital image courtesy of Hoppé Estate Collection and Curatorial Assistance Inc. (All rights reserved).

Few records of the Plough Club survive, so this leaflet provides important evidence of its constitution and activities. The name, we discover from the frontispiece drawing, comes from the constellation. The leaflet outlines the aims—to promote “unconventional” art of “merit and originality”—and it enables us to measure them against the programme of events that took place in 1918-1919. We learn also that members paid two guineas per annum to attend six performances—about £50 in today’s terms—and that concerts and plays were equally weighted. Events took place on a Sunday at irregular intervals, suggesting that the programme was somewhat improvised.

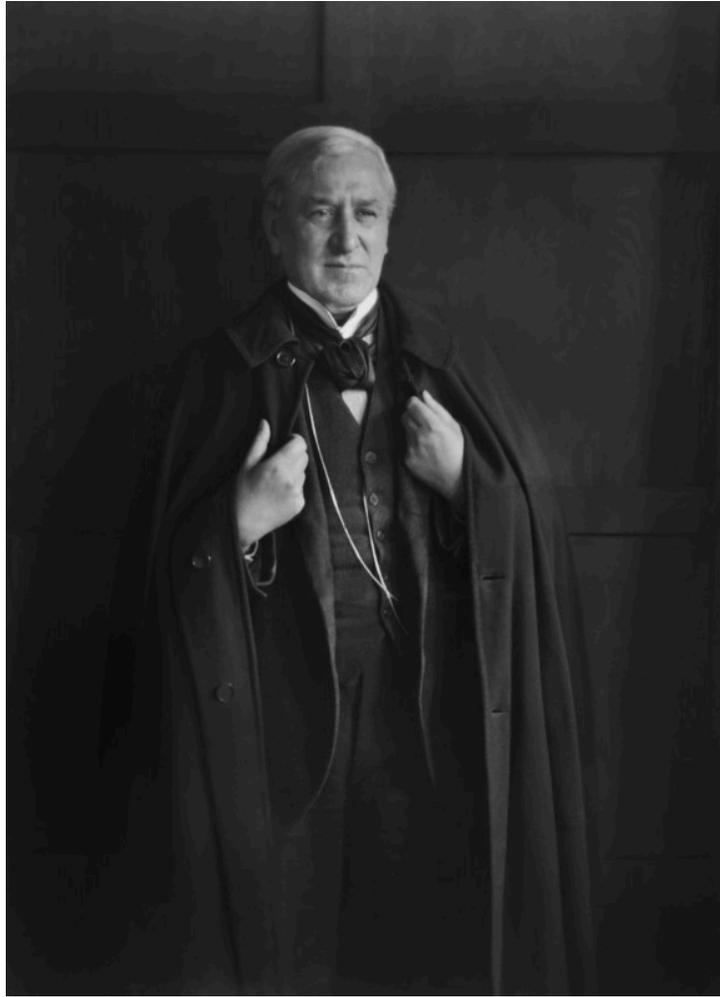


Figure 17.

E.O. Hoppé, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, 1922, photograph. Collection of E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection and Curatorial Assistance Inc. Digital image courtesy of Hoppé Estate Collection and Curatorial Assistance Inc. (All rights reserved).

Hoppé's portrait of Mackintosh, silver-haired and magisterial, testifies to their joint venture in setting up the Plough Club. At the time, Hoppé was the more successful of the two artists, although the situation is very different now. When Mackintosh moved from Glasgow to London in 1915, his career as an architect was at a low point. Connections that he made through the Plough led to several commissions and helped to revive his fortunes.⁶² Hoppé, by contrast, was a celebrity whose work has recently been rediscovered after a period of posthumous neglect.⁶³ He photographed many leading figures of his day from the arts, politics, and high society, and his work acts as a thread that connects the sections of this exhibition.



Figure 18.

George Sheringham, Mesaur the Chief Executioner, costume design for *The Sneezing Charm*, Royal Court Theatre, June 1918. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (S.1709-1986). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 [Unported]).

One of the first productions at the Plough Club was Clifford Bax's *The Sneezing Charm* (Royal Court Theatre, 9 June 1918): "an Arabian Nights Fantasy in rhyme" designed by George Sheringham and with music "expressly composed" by Gustav Holst.⁶⁴ Several of Sheringham's costume designs survive, including this sketch of the Chief Executioner who was played by the Indian actor, H.B. Bushra.⁶⁵ "Mr. George Sheringham's costumes and scenery were quite the up-to-date thing in beauty," reported the theatre critic Herbert Farjeon, himself a conscientious objector during the First World War. "What our drama needs, above all things, is the quality of delight; and the Plough merits our thanks for endeavouring to supply it."⁶⁶

[mul]

Gustav Holst composed the incidental music to Clifford Bax's play *The Sneezing Charm*, which was performed by the Plough Club on 9 June 1918. He then adapted the score for a ballet titled *The Perfect Fool*, which was first performed in 1921.⁶⁷ The ballet music falls into four sections: "Invocation" (Andante), "Dance of the Spirits of Earth" (Moderato-Andante), "Dance of the Spirits of Water" (Allegro), and "Dance of the Spirits of Fire" (Allegro Moderato-Andante).



Figure 19.

Colour Magazine, 8, no. 5, June 1918: cover design featuring *Summer* by J.D. Ferguson. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Colour was not intended to be a wartime magazine but, when it launched in August 1914, it became one. As an art journal, it stood out for the quality of its colour reproductions and its coverage of contemporary British art, including war artists. Through the appointment of E.O. Hoppé as art editor, it

also became a forum for artists who worked with the London little theatres, such as Maxwell Armfield, J.D. Fergusson, and Anne Estelle Rice. It is striking that the magazine was prepared to publish Armfield's article "Art and Patriotism" (March 1916), which made the case for art as a form of anti-war service—evidence of a dissenting current within the journal, although the editorial line overall was not pacifist.⁶⁸ This cover image by J.D. Fergusson signals the magazine's decision to promote him as a leading artist on the British scene.

The Pioneer Players

The Pioneer Players was founded in 1911 by Edith Craig, who was famous in her own right as an actress, designer, and producer, and by association as the daughter of Ellen Terry and the sister of Edward Gordon Craig. Her aim at the outset was "to produce propaganda plays" on a range of progressive issues—principally women's suffrage, but also censorship, prostitution, workers' rights, housing, vegetarianism, and Polish independence.⁶⁹ Indeed, in its early years, the company was accused of making feminist tracts rather than dramatic art, a criticism that Craig shrugged off by arguing that the suffrage movement was in itself intrinsically dramatic.⁷⁰

It is something of a puzzle that in 1915 the company began to reinvent itself as an art theatre, experimenting with new techniques of production, staging foreign-language plays in translation, sometimes for the first time, and responding to the challenge of the European avant-garde—symbolism, futurism, expressionism—in ways that were deliberately eclectic; all this alongside plays which continued to explore topical problems such as desertion from the army and accidental bigamy.⁷¹ The change began in March 1915 with a triple bill of symbolist plays by European dramatists and a declared intention to "create a dramatic atmosphere by means of colour, form and lighting".⁷² Critics made much of the lighting effects: the backdrop to Isi Collin's play *Sisyphus and the Wandering Jew*, which showed "the bleak summit of the hill with a gnarled tree outlined against the shifting colours of a sunset sky"; the use of lights and gauzes to simulate the nudity of a dancing girl in Pierre Louys' *The Girl and the Puppet*; faces looming out of intense darkness behind "a glowing red space which appeared to pulsate owing to an effect of light" in Nikolai Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul*.⁷³

The historian Katharine Cockin has argued persuasively that the Pioneer Players' shift to art theatre and foreign plays was a gesture of political defiance against the cultural conditions of the war, which the society's Annual Report described feelingly as a "khaki-clad and khaki-minded world".⁷⁴ She points out also that the society was an open church which actively

promoted freedom of expression; the apparent inconsistencies in its repertoire, and the range of opinion represented by its membership, manifested deep political commitments. ⁷⁵ The present exhibition brings another explanatory context to bear on the question of why the Pioneer Players embraced art theatre in the middle of the war, by situating them in the network of the free-thinking London little theatres. There are multiple connections: Margaret Morris and Eleanor Elder danced in *The Theatre of the Soul*, while the Margaret Morris Theatre was used for a Pioneer Players' AGM; ⁷⁶ the Pioneer Players took out a subscription to the Plough Club, and several of its members performed in a Plough Club production of *The Sneezing Charm*; ⁷⁷ the playwright Torahiko Khorī, who staged two plays with the Pioneer Players, also worked with the Choric School; ⁷⁸ and Henderson's Bookshop was the publisher of choice for the Pioneer Players as for other artists and writers involved in the little theatre network. ⁷⁹ By 1920, the Pioneer Players was failing. It was incorporated into the British Drama League—itsself an offshoot of the wartime little theatres—and, apart from a single performance in 1925, ceased to operate. ⁸⁰

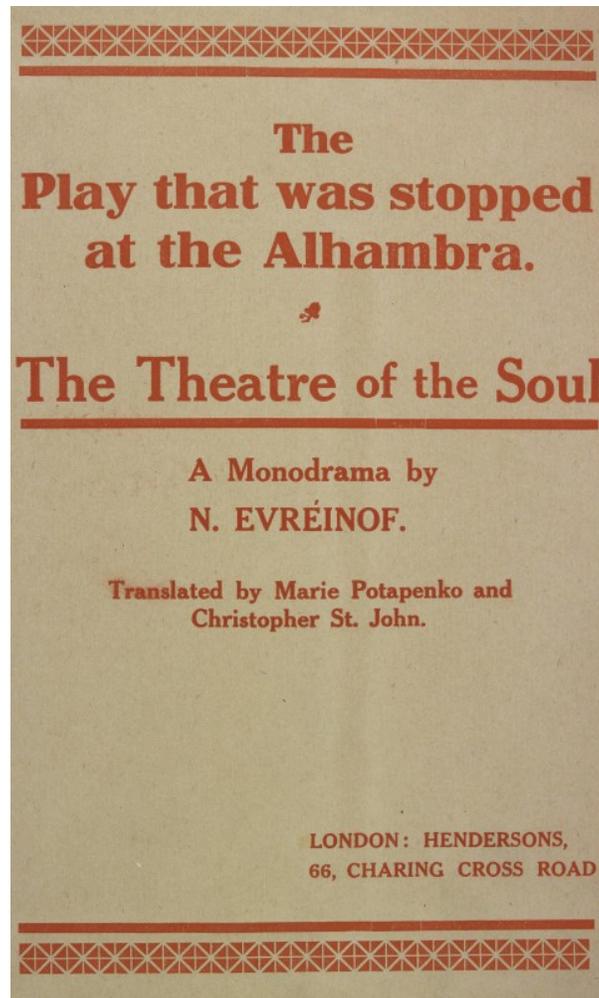


Figure 20.

Envelope for the sale of Nikolai Evreinov, *The Theatre of the Soul*, (London: Hendersons', 1915). Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

A production of Nikolai Evreinov's symbolist play *The Theatre of the Soul* was scheduled to take place at the Alhambra in November 1915 as part of a royal matinée celebrating Russia's Day.⁸¹ The production was particularly important to the Pioneer Players, signalling as it did their commitment to new and experimental work by foreign playwrights.⁸² Yet it was cancelled at the last moment for no apparent reason except that it was unsuitable for an Alhambra audience.⁸³ The Pioneer Players objected vociferously but made the most of the scandal by advertising it on the envelope for their edition of the play which was published by the radical bookshop Henderson's.⁸⁴ They were already known for their resistance to the institutionalised practice of stage censorship.⁸⁵ The setback at the Alhambra reinforced their reputation for controversial work.

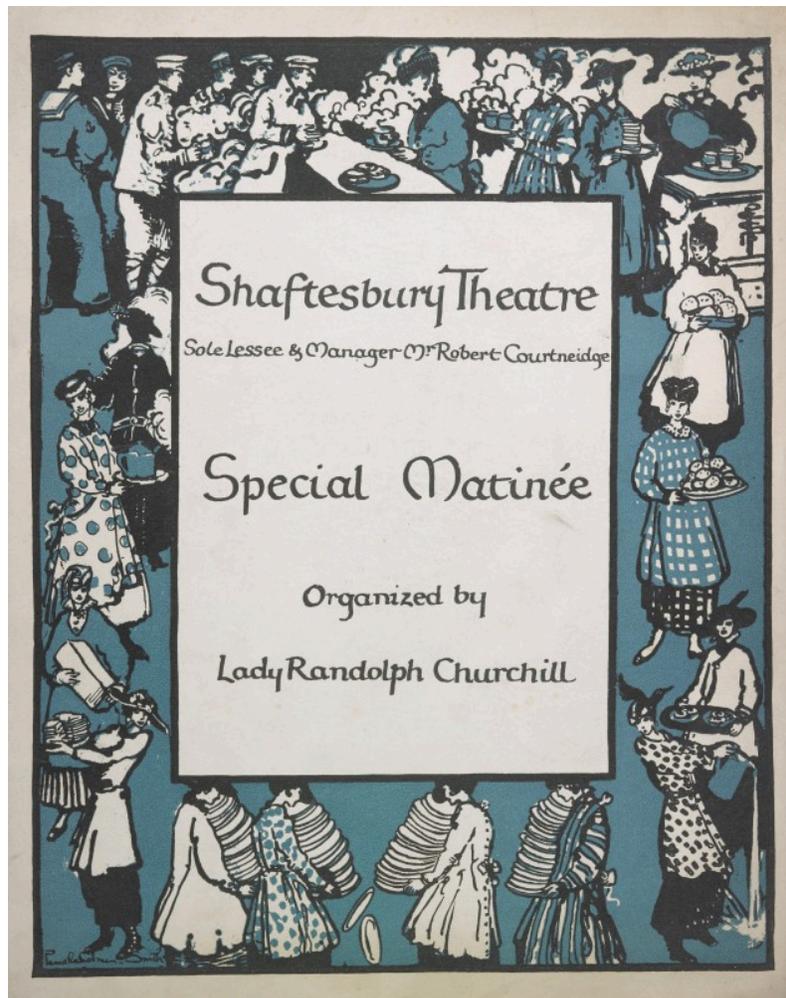


Figure 21.

Pamela Colman Smith, Cover design for the programme of a special matinée at the Shaftesbury Theatre, 3 December 1915. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

The artist Pamela Colman Smith was closely involved in theatre and a particular friend of Edith Craig and her circle.⁸⁶ Her illustrations for Ellen Terry's *The Russian Ballet* are shown elsewhere in this exhibition. With the Pioneer Players, she designed costumes, illustrated programmes, and sat on the Executive Committee.⁸⁷ Her cover for this charity matinée programme shows women hard at work, carrying trays of food and plates, piled precariously high. The list of those serving at the event was distinctly aristocratic, yet here they all pitch in. The Pioneer Players used the occasion to restage *The Theatre of the Soul*—redeeming the recent cancellation at the Alhambra—and to printed a statement of their new direction as an arts theatre.



Figure 22.

George Plank (costume design), E. O. Hoppé (photograph), Far More Merry than Deadly: A New Musical-Comedy Star in "The Merry Death", recently Produced by the Pioneer Players, *The Tatler*, no. 772 (12 April 1916): 43. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of Illustrated London News Group and The British Library Board.

The American artist George Plank is best known for his iconic cover illustrations for *Vogue*. He was a friend of Edith Craig and her family and, after his move to Britain in 1914, worked with the Pioneer Players, designing costumes, serving on the Council, and even taking his turn on the stage.⁸⁸ His design for Cicely Hamilton's costume as Columbine in Nikolai Evreinov's *A Merry Death* (2 April 1916, Savoy Theatre) has much in common with his *Vogue* covers, as does Hamilton's pose in this portrait by E.O. Hoppé. Extravagant skirts—"Columbine is arrayed—one might almost say, incarcerated—in a voluminous flounced skirt of the crinoline type," as *The Sketch* reported—feature also on the April 1916, August 1916, and June 1917 issues of the magazine.⁸⁹ There are other connections between *Vogue* and

the London little theatres. Elspeth Champcommunal, the first editor of the British edition which launched in September 1916, was a member of the Margaret Morris Club; and Hoppé, who co-founded the Plough Club, supplied the magazine with photographs, including the frontispiece of the first British issue. ⁹⁰



Figure 23.

George Plank, Cover design for the programme of "Smokes for the Wounded", Savoy Theatre, 7 April 1916. George Plank Papers, Beinecke Rare Book and Manuscript Library. Digital image courtesy of Yale University.

George Plank's cover for the programme of *Smokes for the Wounded* (Savoy Theatre, 7 April 1916) follows the pattern of his designs for *Vogue*. For this charity event, the Pioneer Players repeated their production of Evreinov's *The Theatre of the Soul*.

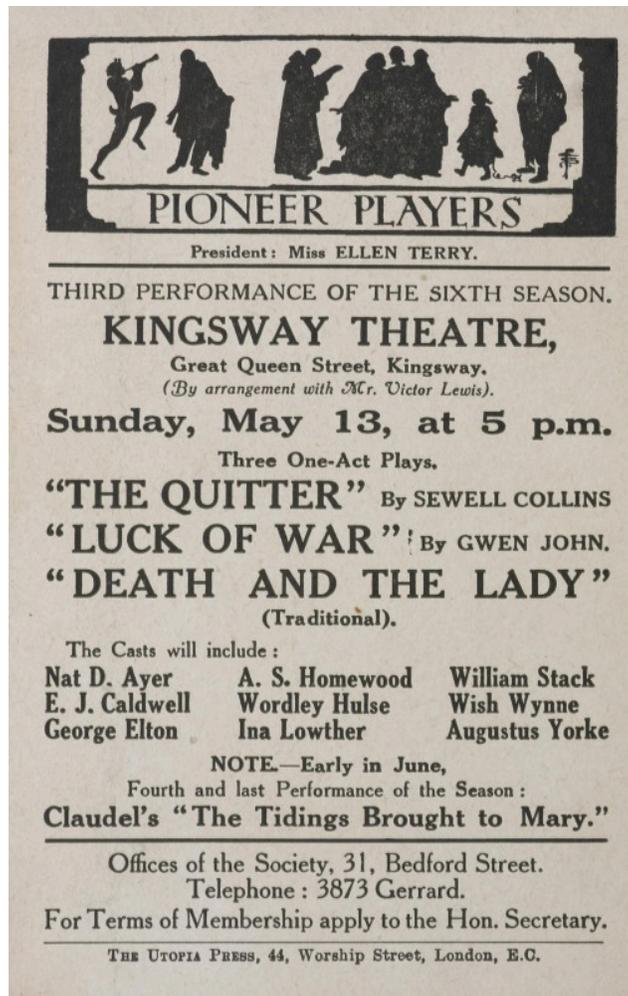


Figure 24.

Flyer for the Pioneer Players’ performance at the Kingsway Theatre, 13 May 1917, heading designed by Pamela Colman Smith. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of Illustrated London News Group and The British Library Board.

Pamela Colman Smith designed the Pioneer Players’ illustrative motif at the top of this flyer, as can be seen by her signature on the right-hand side. The programme for 13 May 1917 was distinctive because it featured two plays which tackled the moral and social problems of the war: Gwen John’s *The Luck of War*, which imagined a soldier returning home to find his wife remarried; and Sewell Collins’ *The Quitter*, which examined the experience of an army deserter. As Katharine Cockin shows, both plays are ambivalent in their treatment of these contentious subjects. ⁹¹

[mul]

Edith Craig was an accomplished musician, and as a director she was on the lookout for like-minded musicians to work with—“must be someone who knows about theatres”, as she noted to herself on the back of a flyer for the Pioneer Players.⁹² The composer Ethel Smyth was a close friend and collaborator.⁹³ Before the war, they campaigned together for women’s suffrage and, in the 1920s, Craig produced two of Smyth’s operas: *The Wreckers* (1902–1904) and *The Boatswain’s Mate* (1914).⁹⁴ The sample of Smyth’s music given here is taken from this second work, which was first performed in January 1916 at the Shaftesbury Theatre, London. Craig’s own production took place at Leeds Arts Theatre, as part of a double-bill with Beatrice Mayor’s play *Thirty Minutes in a Street* (1926).⁹⁵

Japanese artists in London

When W.B. Yeats discovered Japanese Noh theatre in London in summer 1915, it marked a turning point in his practice as a dramatist. This section of the exhibition shows how his experiments in Noh interlinked with London’s little theatres and how those theatres became a home for a diaspora of Japanese modernists. Yeats first saw Noh performed by three cosmopolitan Japanese: the dancer Ito Michio, the painter Kumé Tamijiro and the playwright Khori Torahiko, which inspired him to write his “Celtic Noh” play *At the Hawk’s Well* (performed 1916).⁹⁶ Six months later, Ito danced at the Margaret Morris Theatre under the direction of John Rodker of the Choric School.⁹⁷ It is through the literature on Khori that we discover that 71 Royal Hospital Road, home of the Choric School, was also a base for Japanese expatriate artists.⁹⁸ During the war, Khori lived there with Hester Sainsbury, the poet and dancer who ran the Choric School, and his partner until his death in 1924. The painter Foujita (Fujita Tsuguji) was also a resident when he spent a year in England in 1916.⁹⁹ While little is known about his London episode—other than that he painted a mural at an artists’ club in Chelsea—it is documented that when he moved to Paris in 1913, he was fascinated by the Greek dance revival led by Raymond Duncan and, like Duncan, took to wearing a toga in the city streets.¹⁰⁰ It seems likely that he would have been drawn to the Choric School and the Margaret Morris Theatre, where dance was based on the Duncan system.¹⁰¹ Ito and Kumé were regular visitors at 71 Hospital Road, as was Edmund Dulac, who designed the costumes and scenery for *At the Hawk’s Well* and composed the music.¹⁰² The first performance starred Ito as the Hawk, in which role he was photographed by Alvin Langdon Coburn, who joined the Plough Club when it opened in the following year.¹⁰³ Khori also brought Noh to an English-speaking audience through his play *Kanawa the Incantation*, which was staged by the Pioneer

Players in December 1917. ¹⁰⁴ Shortly afterwards, Khori was appointed to the society's Managing Committee, and in 1922, they staged his play *The Toils of Yoshimoto*.

These activities should be seen in the context of a wider community of Japanese artists, writers, and performers who gathered in London in the early twentieth century and who worked to bridge the divide between East and West. They included the writer Yone Noguchi, who challenged Yeats to study Noh theatre ten years before the production of *At the Hawk's Well*; the poet Komai Gonnosuke, whose book *Fuji from Hampstead Heath* (1925) described Japan from the vantage-point of London; the artist Yoshio Markino, who became something of an Edwardian celebrity through publications such as *The Colour of London* (1907) and *A Japanese Artist in London* (1910); and Matsuyama Chuzo, who exhibited regularly at the Royal Academy from 1916, and who volunteered for the local Red Cross, teaching drawing to injured soldiers. ¹⁰⁵ In Arthur Ransome's cultural history of Chelsea, the narrator calls on an old friend—a Japanese artist who has recently moved to London and shares rooms with an English actor whose buffoonery causes them both great amusement. ¹⁰⁶

To put this in perspective: the number of Japanese immigrants to Britain was small compared with most other groups, and the proportion of artists and performers amongst them even smaller. The 1911 census records about 500 Japanese nationals in the UK. More arrived during the First World War because of the increased trade between Britain and Japan and because of the conflict in Europe. ¹⁰⁷ Yet when a group of ten Japanese artists exhibited together at the Brook Street Art Gallery in July 1917, they comprised the majority of Japanese artists in London at the time. ¹⁰⁸ Nonetheless, the Japanese exerted considerable cultural influence in Britain, partly because of the residual attraction of *Japonisme*, and partly because of the unusual demographic of the Japanese immigrant community, which tended to be wealthy and educated. Their practice was to assimilate into British society, while serving as proud ambassadors for their country. ¹⁰⁹ The life of a Japanese artist in London was a balancing act between the need to satisfy a Western desire for the Orient, to fit in, and to remain oneself—that is, a Japanese cosmopolitan. ¹¹⁰ The Noh artists who collaborated with Yeats and the London little theatres managed just this sort of negotiation in their work and relationships.



Figure 25.

Alvin Langdon Coburn, Michio Ito as the Hawk in “At the Hawk’s Well” by W.B. Yeats, 1916, digital positive from the original gelatin silver negative, 9 × 12 cm. Collection of George Eastman Museum (1976.0154.4806). Digital image courtesy of George Eastman Museum.

The dancer Ito Michio saw Isadora Duncan dance in Berlin and trained with Émile Jacques-Dalcroze at the Hellerau School of Eurhythmics, Dresden, before moving to London at the outbreak of the First World War. His synthesis of traditional Japanese and modern European dance methods was instantly attractive to British audiences and he became a celebrity in the London dance world.¹¹¹ His relationship with Yeats was crucial to the poet’s creation of “Irish Noh”, particularly to the first staging of *At the Hawk’s Well* in April 1916.¹¹² Ito based his choreography on the motion of a hawk in flight. As the photographer Alvin Langdon Coburn recalled: “Yeats and Ito went to the London Zoo to study the postures of the Hawks there, and Ito amazed the visitors by performing a dance for all to admire, especially Yeats”.¹¹³ He drew also on the diverse cultural sources that inspired his dance: traditional Noh theatre, modernist Greek dance, and ancient Egyptian murals.¹¹⁴

[mul]

At the Hawk’s Well was Yeats’ first experiment in “Irish Noh”—a play which used the conventions of Japanese Noh theatre to recount the legend of Cuchulain, the hero of Irish mythology who features in the stories of the medieval Ulster Cycle. The play was written in 1915–1916, and first

performed on 2 April 1916 in Lady Cunard's drawing room before a small invited audience. Ito Michio designed the choreography, and the scenery consisted of a screen by Edward Gordon Craig. ¹¹⁵

[mul]

As scenographer and composer, Edmund Dulac worked closely with Yeats through the making of *At the Hawk's Well*. ¹¹⁶ His music "was in itself an exposition of method", Yeats explained, "for it was written after a number of rehearsals and for instruments that have great pictorial effect"—flute, harp, drum, and gong in different combinations, with voice singing or speaking through the music. ¹¹⁷ The effect was to reinforce the "idea of great simplicity of execution underlying the whole spirit of the performance" and "to emphasise the spoken word". ¹¹⁸ In some versions of the working draft, Yeats asked that the movements of the Old Man be marked by drum taps, so that he would appear to move like a marionette; ¹¹⁹ a nod, perhaps, to Edward Gordon Craig and his idea that sound and movement should work together in a total effect of puppet theatre.



Figure 26.

Torahiko Kōri, *Kanawa: The Incantation*. A Play for Marionettes, (London: Gowans & Gray, Ltd: Boston, MA: LeRoy Phillips, 1918), front cover. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Khori first wrote *Kanawa: The Incantation* in Japanese as a modern version of the Noh play *Kanawa*, fused with the language and preoccupations of the European *fin de siècle*.¹²⁰ He then translated it into English with Sainsbury's help. In the prologue, which he recited himself at the play's first performance in 1917, he reflected on the significance of the puppet in this "play for marionettes", as he called it on the title page. The cultures of Europe and Japan are alien to one another, he reminded his audience, so much so that foreigners may sometimes "remind you of poor marionettes that dance and scream before you". He urged compassion towards his own "beloved marionettes", and for a moment of kinship between viewers and performers: "that the strings which handle their fortunes may catch and draw the marionettes that are in you too, that for a while we may all complain their woes and loves as if they were our own, let them be never so strange."¹²¹

Afterwards, he told Craig how proud he was of this “sincere effort at the unaffected interpretation of Japanese rhythm”, although he acknowledged that it may not have pleased the “dilettanti orient-mongers” in the audience. 122

The script of *Kanawa: The Incantation*, with Khori’s prologue and details of the first production, were published in 1918 in the fragile little booklet shown here. The paper cover is encased in a stiffer, semi-transparent Japanese paper on which is printed this striking design (artist unknown) of a demon mask against a fiercely contrasting black and red abstract pattern.



Figure 27.

Sato Takezou, Portrait of Gonnosuke Komai, reproduced in *Colour Magazine*, Vols 8-9, August 1918: 24. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Images reproduced in *Colour* were sometimes accompanied by an editorial statement explaining their significance. The caption for Sato Takezou’s portrait of the writer Komai Gonnosuke makes explicit the universalising tendencies of *Japonisme* at this time. “This picture shows in a striking way

the affinity there is between Eastern and Western art the moment you get below the imitative realism which often obscures the latter," it states. "It is very 'Japanese', but leaving out the background, also very like Holbein." ¹²³ *Colour* began to publish the work of Japanese artists and writers in 1916. They used the journal to publicise their work and to reflect on—and shape—their Japaneseness; hence Yone Noguchi's article on "The Colour of London Seen by a Japanese Poet", (April 1916), and Komai himself on "Samurai Spirit of Japan" (September 1917).

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Figure 28.

Advertisement for the Formosa Oolong Tea-Rooms, *The Tatler*, no. 783, 28 June 1916: 33. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of Illustrated London News Group and The British Library Board.

There were three main haunts for Japanese artists in London during the First World War: the Café Royal on Regent Street, 71 Royal Hospital Road in Chelsea, and the Formosa Oolong Tea-Rooms at 36 Piccadilly. ¹²⁴ The Tea-Rooms opened in 1912 under Japanese management, and were equally

popular with servicemen and their girls. “The Woman About Town” column in *The Sketch* called it a “rendezvous of khaki, blue, and petticoats—oh, we still wear them, though they are under orders to depart again.”¹²⁵ That clientele is addressed in this illustrated advertisement in *Tatler*, one of many which appeared regularly in the British press. It is noticeable that these featured Western customers with just an occasional glimpse of a waitress in a kimono.

Footnotes

- 1 Arthur Ransome, *Bohemia in London* (Chapman and Hall, 1907), 11.
- 2 Ransome, *Bohemia in London*, 33.
- 3 The quotation is taken from Marthe Trolly-Curtin, “Bouquet en Casserole”, *The Sketch*, 11 April 1917, 26.
- 4 Richard Emerson establishes the chronology of Morris’ use of the premises on the King’s Road in his book *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Lois Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 26–27 and 31–33. Morris rented the space as a dance school from December 1913, with the theatre opening six months later, and the club opening in 1915.
- 5 Margaret Morris, *My Life in Movement* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), 32–35.
- 6 Caradec and Weill, *Le Café-Concert (1848–1914)*, 20–21.
- 7 François Caradec and Alain Weill, *Le Café-Concert (1848–1914)* (Paris: Fayard, 2007).
- 8 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 563.
- 9 Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 220.
- 10 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 33.
- 11 Grace Brockington, “Puppetry and Ambivalence in the Art of Paul Nash”, in Kamil Kopania (ed.), *Dolls and Puppets: Contemporaneity and Tradition* (The Aleksander Zelwerowicz National Academy of Dramatic Art in Warsaw, 2018).
- 12 John France, review of *Goossens: Orchestral Works* (Chandos, 2013), in *Music Web International*, www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2013/Apr13/Goossens_orchestral_CHSA5119.htm, accessed 21 January 2019.
- 13 See their memoirs: Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 194–225. Maxwell Armfield, “My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War” (unpublished, 1970), 26–36 and 40–53, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- 14 Angela Bartie, Linda Fleming, Mark Freeman, Tom Hulme, Alex Hutton, and Paul Readman, “Mid-Gloucestershire Pageant”, *The Redress of the Past*, www.historicalpageants.ac.uk/pageants/1130/. While the literature on the pageant credits Maxwell Armfield as artist, Constance Smedley is not mentioned at all, although her memoirs indicate that she played a prominent part. Smedley, *Crusaders*, 201–208.
- 15 Armfield, “My World and I”, 28.
- 16 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 217.
- 17 Maxwell Armfield, “Illustrators Notes” to Shakespeare, *The Winter’s Tale* (London: J.M. Dent, 1922), 94. He reflects also on her practice in “My World and I”, 31.
- 18 Constance Smedley, “The Greenleaf Theatre”, *English Review* 35 (July 1922), 58. In her memoirs, she states that Armfield wrote the play before they left the Cotswolds for London; see Smedley, *Crusaders*, 217.
- 19 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 218–220. The casting for the play was different at each of the venues, with the Holt sisters performing at the Greenleaf Studio, and Eleanor Elder and Kathleen Dillon taking over their roles at the Margaret Morris Theatre.
- 20 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 218–219.
- 21 Maxwell Armfield, “Note on the Drawings”, in William Morris, *The Life and Death of Jason* (London: Headley Brothers, 1915), vi.
- 22 Armfield, “Note on the Drawings”, v.
- 23 Armfield, “My World and I”, 44–45.
- 24 Armfield mounted a defence of German design in his article “The Value of Art in the Community”, *Colour* 2, no. 3 (April 2015): 86—a provocation given the current conflict with Germany.
- 25 Edward McKnight Kauffer, letter to Maxwell Armfield, ([n.d.], but internal evidence suggests 1917 as the letter mentions Armfield’s article “Domesticated Mural Painting”, *The Countryside Magazine and Suburban Life* [February 1917]), Tate Archive: TGA 976.

- 26 Kauffer also contributed to *Original Woodcuts by Various Artists* (London: The Omega Workshops, 1918). For his work with the Arts League of Service, see Mark Haworth-Booth, *E. McKnight Kauffer: A Designer and his Public* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1979), 28–29 and 41.
- 27 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 188.
- 28 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 200.
- 29 Charlotte Purkis, “Fin-de-Siècle Fantasy as Performative Memoir in Gertrude Hudson and Constance Smedley’s Writings on Music”, unpublished conference paper presented at *International Conference on Nineteenth-Century Music* (Royal Holloway and Bedford New College, 29 June–2 July 2000). I thank Dr Purkis for sharing her paper with me.
- 30 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 220 and 250.
- 31 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 222.
- 32 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 220.
- 33 Maxwell Armfield, *The Minstrel* (London: Duckworth, 1922), 20.
- 34 Peterson published as Pai Ta-Shun in *Harper’s Weekly* from March 1914. The poems were collected as Pa Tai-Shun, *Chinese Lyrics* (Shanghai: Kelly & Walsh Ltd, 1916). The story is related in “Mystery of Authorship of Chinese Lyrics Solved”, *The New York Times Sunday Magazine*, 4 March 1917, 4, sourced here from the *Sunday Magazine* website: <http://sundaymagazine.org/>.
- 35 The Choric School first came to public notice in May 1913 when it gave four performances at the New Rehearsal Theatre in Bedford Street, London. The programme for this event is exhibited here. The performances were listed in *The Times*, 12 July 1913, and *The Athenaeum*, 17 May 1913, 552. In June of that year, they danced at the opening of the Margaret Morris Theatre. Wartime reviews in *The Sketch* place the Club at 71 Royal Hospital Road (22 March 1916, 248; 11 April 1917, 26) and at the Margaret Morris Theatre (1 November 1916, 90; 30 January 1918, 92). These references are given in Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Lois Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 33 and 494, nn 32 and 34. In the Ellen Terry and Edith Craig archive, there is a programme for a Choric School performance at the Margaret Morris Theatre on 19 March 1916 (EC-D46).
- 36 Rodker is now the most famous of the group. His contribution to British and European modernism has attracted increasing attention since the publication of Andrew Crozier (ed.), *Poems & Adolphe 1920* (Manchester: Carcanet Press, 1996). Hester Sainsbury’s career is described by Peter Tucker in “Hester Sainsbury: A Book Illustrator of the 1920s”, *The Private Library* 3, no. 3 (Autumn 1990): 112–136; and “Hester Sainsbury: Some Further Notes”, *The Private Library* 5, no. 2 (Summer 1992): 80–89. There is scant scholarship on Kathleen Dillon and even less on Evelyn Sainsbury, but note the article by Dillon’s daughter, Elizabeth Panegourias, “Kathleen Dillon Morrison”, *Margaret Morris Movement Magazine*, no. 22 (Autumn 1990), 41–44.
- 37 John Rodker, “The Choric School”, *The Drama*, August 1916, 439.
- 38 Hester Sainsbury, quoted in Rodker, “The Choric School”.
- 39 Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 217–218.
- 40 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 35 and 494, n. 32.
- 41 Marthe Trolly-Curtin, “Phrynette’s Letters to Lonely Soldiers: Bouquet en Casserole”, *The Sketch*, 11 April 1917, 26; quoted in Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 35–36.
- 42 The Japanese connection is outlined in Yoko Chiba, “Kori Torahiko and Edith Craig: A Japanese Playwright in London and Toronto”, *Comparative Drama* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 431–451. The list of names given here is drawn from that article.
- 43 Sylvie Buisson, *T.L. Fouita: inédits* (Paris: À l’encre rouge Arhices artistiques; Fondation Nichido, ca. 2007), 62 and 66.
- 44 *Helen of Sparta* by Emil Verhaeren, listed in the Plough Club programme for 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA.
- 45 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 494, n. 33.
- 46 Tucker, “Hester Sainsbury: A Book-Illustrator of the 1920s”; and Tucker, “Hester Sainsbury: Some Further Notes”.
- 47 See Jenny Powell (ed.), *New Rhythms: Henri Gaudier-Brzeska: Art, Dance and Movement in London 1911–1915* (Cambridge: Kettles Yard, 2015), 125.
- 48 See the Tate catalogue entry for David Bomberg, sketches for *The Dancer*, ca. 1913–1914, published in *The Tate Gallery 1974–6: Illustrated Catalogue of Acquisitions* (London, 1978) and online at <http://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/bomberg-sketches-for-the-dancer-t01961>, accessed 19 December 2018.
- 49 Sophie Cohen (later Sonia Joslen), interviewed by Richard Cork, quoted in Cork, *Vorticism and Abstract Art in the First Machine Age*, Vol. 2 *Synthesis and Decline* (London: Gordon Fraser, 1976), 392.
- 50 Ezra Pound, “Foreword to the Choric School”, in *Others: A Magazine of the New Verse*, October 1915, n.p.
- 51 Sainsbury, quoted in Rodker, “The Choric School”, 439.
- 52 Pound, “Foreword to the Choric School”.
- 53 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 220.
- 54 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 220.

- 55 Maxwell Armfield, "My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War" (unpublished, 1970), 47–48, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10. Smedley corroborates his account in *Crusaders*, 217–220.
- 56 Constance Smedley, *Justice Walk* (London: George Allen & Unwin, 1925 [1915]), 168. One of the young women is called Edith. In her memoirs, Smedley remembered that the Clarissa Club was led by Hester and "Edith" Sainsbury—surely a slip for Evelyn.
- 57 Smedley, *Justice Walk*, 156 and 163.
- 58 Plough Club prospectus, 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA. Unless otherwise stated, information about the Club's aims, organisation, membership, and programme is taken from this document.
- 59 Verhaeren's play *Philip the Second* was staged on 29 September 1918 in translation by F.S. Flint, with designs by Glyn Philpot, music by Eugene Goossens and production by George de Warfaz. His *Helen of Sparta* was staged in 1919 with designs by Jacob Epstein. For the inclusion of Khorī, Maeterlinck, and Malleeson in the programme, see Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 206. Malleeson's prohibited plays were "D" *Company* and *Black 'Ell* (both 1916).
- 60 Margaret Morris names Mackintosh as a member of her club in *My Life in Movement* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), 34–35, where she also writes about her collaboration with Goossens; see 33 and 41–42. Epstein's association with the Choric School is mentioned by Yoko Chiba, "Kōri Torahiko and Edith Craig: A Japanese Playwright in London and Toronto", *Comparative Drama* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 434. Letters from Drinkwater to Armfield survive amongst the Armfield papers at Tate Britain. For the cast of *the Sneezing Charm*, see Katharine Cockin, *Edith Craig: Dramatic Lives* (London: Cassell, 1997), 129.
- 61 Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, 206.
- 62 Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement*, 206–215.
- 63 E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection: "Biography", www.eohoppe.com/about, accessed 11 December 2018. Recent exhibitions of his work include *Hoppé Portraits: Society, Studio & Street* (London: National Portrait Gallery, 2011), and *Rediscovered Fotos: Emil Otto Hoppé* (Helmond: The Gemeentemuseum, 2016).
- 64 Plough Club prospectus, 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA.
- 65 Herbert Farjeon, "The Sneezing Charm", *Era*, 12 June 1918.
- 66 Farjeon, "The Sneezing Charm".
- 67 Further, he then converted the ballet into an opera, which was first performed in 1923. "Music and History: Gustav Holst", www.musicandhistory.com/composers/8028, consulted 19 January 2019.
- 68 Maxwell Armfield, "Art and Patriotism", *Colour* 4, no. 2 (March 1916), 55. The editorial immediately following argued that it was unpatriotic to employ German colour printers.
- 69 "'Little Interviews': Miss Edith Craig at the Pioneer Players", *The Pall Mall Gazette*, 13 April 1912, 12. The historian Katharine Cockin makes the point that the Pioneer Players promoted a range of causes in addition to women's suffrage, in *Edith Craig (1869–1947): Dramatic Lives* (London: Cassell, 1997), 108, 109, 111, 113, and 115.
- 70 *Pioneer Players Annual Report 1911–12*, 7–8, quoted in Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players, 1911–1925* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 42. The review in *The Times* complained that "We had walked in so innocently, imagining that the pioneering of the Pioneer Players was to be dramatic, not (if we may be pardoned the ugly word) feministic"; see *The Times*, 9 May 1911, 13.
- 71 Various explanations for this change of direction are summarised by Cockin in *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 167–169. The Appendix to this book lists all the Pioneer Players' productions by season. Those which addressed the subject of war were: Gwen John, *Luck of War* (May 1917); Sewell Collins, *The Quitters* (May 1917); and George Bernard Shaw, *The Inca of Perusalem* (December 1917). Most of the foreign-language plays were translated from French and Russian. Paul Claudel, Nikolai Evreinov, and Anton Chekhov featured several times, as did the Dutch playwright Herman Heijermans.
- 72 The plays were: *Sisyphus and the Wandering Jew* by the Belgian playwright Isi Collin; *Two Pierrot* by the Frenchman Edmond Rostand; and *The Theatre of the Soul* by the Russian Nikolai Evreinov. The quotation is taken from the programme for *The Theatre of the Soul* (3 December 1915, Shaftsbury Theatre). Cockin argues that the principle of eclecticism was first stated here, signalling the company's change of direction: they wished to avoid "limiting their field of action to any particular school" and "refrained from proclaiming that revolutionary aesthetic formulae, as such, have any value"; see Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 166.
- 73 "Theatres and Music. Varied Emotions. Four Curious Plays at the Little Theatre. Real Pioneering", *London Standard*, 9 March 1915, 9; *The Girl and the Puppet* from Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869–1947)*, 127; *The Theatre of the Soul* from Christopher St John, "Introduction" to the edition of the play published by Henderson's Bookshop in 1915.
- 74 Pioneer Players' Annual Report, 1914–1915, 8–9. For Cockin's analysis see "Edith Craig and the Pioneer Players: London's International Art Theatre in a 'Khaki-clad and Khaki-Minded World'", in Andrew Maunder (ed.), *British Theatre and the Great War, 1914–1919: New Perspectives* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2015), 12 and 137.
- 75 As Cockin points out, attitudes to the war amongst members of the Pioneer Players varied enormously, from active pacifism to active support; see Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 137–142; Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869–1947)*, 117; and Cockin, "Edith Craig and the Pioneer Players", 122. She discusses the Pioneer Players' commitment to freedom of opinion in *Edith Craig (1869–1947)*, 111.
- 76 Elder and Morris feature on programme cast lists. Cockin notes the AGM in *Edith Craig (1869–1947)*, 206, n. 61.

- 77 The Pioneer Players feature on the membership list that is printed in the Plough Club prospectus, 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA. Cockin notes the connection with *The Sneezing Charm* in *Edith Craig (1869-1947)*, 129.
- 78 The Japanese connection is outlined in Yoko Chiba, "Kori Torahiko and Edith Craig: A Japanese Playwright in London and Toronto", *Comparative Drama* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1996): 431-451.
- 79 For example, Nikolai Evreinov, *The Theatre of the Soul* (London: Henderson's Bookshop, 1915).
- 80 Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869-1947)*, 130-131; Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 163-165; Cockin, "Edith Craig and the Pioneer Players", 137.
- 81 The programme is preserved in the Ellen Terry and Edith Craig archive: "Russia's Day Programme, 18 November 1915", D122.
- 82 Cockin explores the significance of the play in "The Pioneer Players: Plays of/with Identity", in G. Griffin (ed.), *Difference in View: Women and Modernism* (London: Taylor & Francis, 1994).
- 83 See Christopher St John's indignant account in her introduction to the published edition of the play.
- 84 The event was played up as a scandal in the press. For example, "Play Cancelled at Royal Matinée: No Explanation", *Daily Telegraph*, 19 November 1915, 9. Cockin describes the fall-out in *Edith Craig (1869-1947)*, 119-120.
- 85 Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869-1947)*, 11-13.
- 86 She worked closely with the Lyceum Theatre Group (led by Ellen Terry, Bram Stoker, and Henry Irving) and illustrated the work of Terry, Stoker, and W.B. Yeats. When Yeats and Edith Craig proposed to set up a new symbolist theatre called the Maskers in about 1903, Smith was also involved.
- 87 Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 177-178.
- 88 Plank also designed Mrs Christopher Lowther's costume in *Death and the Lady* (13 May 1917, Kingsway Theatre) and served on the Council in 1919-1920; see Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 178. In January 1919, he played St Crispin in *An Early English Nativity Play*; see Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869-1947)*, 128. His correspondence with Craig, her family, and friends is kept with the Plank papers at the Beinecke Library, Yale University, and his correspondence with the Ellen Terry and Edith Craig papers is kept at the British Library.
- 89 "Debenham—Not Free Body: A Skirt-Bound Columbine", *The Sketch*, 5 April 1916, 7.
- 90 Champcommunal is listed as a member of the committee of the Margaret Morris Club in the Club prospectus for 1918. Hoppé's portrait of Lady Eileen Wellesley appeared as the frontispiece to the first London issue.
- 91 Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage*, 145-148.
- 92 "Postcard handbill, 13 May [1917]", Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database, reference EC-Z3,514c, www.ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk. Craig studied at the Royal Academy of Music and took piano lessons with Alexis Hollander in Berlin. Other musicians she worked with included Lady Maud Warrender and Christopher Wilson. See Cockin, *Edith Craig (1869-1947)*, 123.
- 93 Their relationship is detailed in Katharine Cockin, *Edith Craig and the Theatres of Art* (London: Bloomsbury Methuen Drama, 2017), 104-111.
- 94 Productions are referenced in the Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database.
- 95 Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database, EC-D196.
- 96 The literature on Yeats and Noh is extensive. See, for example, Sylvia C. Ellis, *The Plays of W.B. Yeats: Yeats and the Dancer* (New York: St Martin's Press, 1995).
- 97 Ian Patterson, "Writing on Other Fronts: Translation and John Rodker", *Translation and Literature* 12, no. 1 (Spring 2003), 94. The performance, which took place in January 1916, was praised by the theatre critic Huntly Carter in his article "Spontaneities", *The Egoist* 3, no. 2 (1 February 1916), 29.
- 98 Yoko Chiba, "Kori Torahiko and Edith Craig: A Japanese Playwright in London and Toronto", *Comparative Drama* 30, no. 4 (Winter 1996-1997), 434.
- 99 Fojita moved to London on 8 January 1916 and lived with Kumé until 26 April, when he moved to 71 Royal Hospital Road. In the summer months, he spent some time in the country, returning to Royal Hospital Road in September, and back to France in January 1917. Sylvie Buisson, *T.L. Fojita: inédits* (Paris: À l'encre rouge Archives artistiques; Fondation Nichido, ca. 2007), 62 and 66.
- 100 Buisson, *T.L. Fojita*, 54-56.
- 101 My grateful thanks to Sylvie Buisson for this insight. Email to the author, 7 January 2019.
- 102 Chiba, "Kori Torahiko and Edith Craig", 434.
- 103 Plough Club prospectus, 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA.
- 104 The performance took place at the Criterion Theatre, Piccadilly, on 16 December 1917, as part of a triple bill with W.F. Casey's *Insurrection* and George Bernard Shaw's *The Inca of Perusalem*; Katharine Cockin, *Women and Theatre in the Age of Suffrage: The Pioneer Players, 1911-1925* (London: Palgrave, 2001), 202.
- 105 Keiko Itoh, *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain: From Integration to Disintegration* (Richmond: Curzon Press, 2001), 110-120.
- 106 Arthur Ransome, *Bohemia in London* (London: Chapman & Hall, 1907), 51-55.

- 107 Itoh, *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain*, 1–5. In 1915, a Japanese-language community monthly newspaper was launched, the *Nichiei Shinshi*, which provided a record of Japanese cultural activity until the paper folded in 1938.
- 108 Itoh, *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain*, 116.
- 109 Itoh, *The Japanese Community in Pre-War Britain*, 3–5, 11, 110, and 113–114.
- 110 Helena Čapková, “The Hawk Princess at the Hawk’s Well: Neo-Noh and the Idea of a Universal Japan”, in Charlotte Ashby et al. (eds), *Imagined Cosmopolis: Internationalism and Cultural Exchange, 1870s–1920s* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019).
- 111 Helen Caldwell, *Michio Ito: The Dancer and His Dances* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1977), 37–41.
- 112 Masaru Sekine and Christopher Murray, *Yeats and the Noh: A Comparative Study* (Gerrards Cross: Smythe, 1990), 86.
- 113 Alvin Langdon Coburn, *Alvin Langdon Coburn, Photographer: An Autobiography*, first published 1966 (New York: Dover Publications, 1978), 70.
- 114 Carol Fisher Sorgenfrei, “Strategic Unweaving, Ito Michio and the Diasporic Dancing Body”, in Erika Fischer-Lichte, Torsten Jost, and Saskya Iris Jain (eds), *The Politics of Interweaving Performance Cultures: Beyond Postcolonialism* (New York: Routledge, 2014), 212.
- 115 Caldwell, *Michio Ito*, 37–54.
- 116 W.B. Yeats, edited by Andrew Parkin, *At the Hawk’s Well and The Cat and the Moon: Manuscript Materials* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2010), xxxv–vi.
- 117 W.B. Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers* (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1921), vi–vii.
- 118 Yeats, *Four Plays for Dancers*, 90.
- 119 Yeats, *At the Hawk’s Well and The Cat and the Moon*, 185.
- 120 For a history and analysis of the play, see Chiba, “Kori Torahiko and Edith Craig”, 438–441.
- 121 Torahiko Kori, *Kanawa: The Incantation: A Play for Marionettes* (London: Gowans & Gray; Boston, MA: LeRoy Phillips, 1918), 9–10.
- 122 Torahiko Kori, letter to Edith Craig, 19 December 1917. The Ellen Terry and Edith Craig archive: EC-Z3,405a.
- 123 Sato Takezou, “Portrait of Goneske Komai”, *Colour* 8–9 (August 1918), 24.
- 124 Chiba, “Kori Torahiko and Edith Craig”, 434.
- 125 “The Woman About Town”, *The Sketch*, 13 March 1918, 28.

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Beyond London & the War

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Introduction

The life of the little theatres continued long after the war and their influence spread far beyond the limits of their studio audiences. This section of the exhibition examines aspects of the work of little theatres into the 1920s, under the changing conditions of the post-war settlement. The new political and social landscape was shaped by advances in mass communication and entertainment, notably through radio and cinema, increasing exposure to American culture, labour unrest culminating in the General Strike of 1926, financial crisis, women's enfranchisement, educational reform, and the demise of the aristocracy.¹ These massive demographic and economic changes—which had begun before the war but accelerated after it—changed the game for the little theatre movement, creating new political imperatives, audiences, and uncertainties.

The community of artists and performers that had drawn together in Chelsea during the war dispersed, but the recent experience of global conflict, and the possibility of shaping a new world in its aftermath, acted as a stimulus to their ambitions. New groupings and collaborations sprang up, committed to the project of rejuvenating the arts and making them available to as many people as possible. In this part of the exhibition, we watch the development of the Margaret Morris method as it grew into a worldwide movement with branches in health care, sport, and education, as well as in professional dance. It follows the Greenleaf Theatre to the USA, where the Armfields made their mark on the American Arts and Crafts and little theatre movements across the Atlantic, before returning permanently to the UK in the early 1920s. Two new groups feature in this display: the Arts League of Service, which held its inaugural meeting at the Margaret Morris Theatre; and the British Drama League, which was founded and led by Geoffrey Whitworth, the editor at Chatto & Windus, who published *The Ballet of the Nations* and whose name recurs in this exhibition as an active supporter of London's little theatres.

The Arts League of Service and the British Drama League developed directly out of the wartime little theatres, but others were arguably related. Miles Malleon's work with the Independent Labour Party (ILP) Arts Guild is a striking example. During the war, Malleon had published two pacifist plays with the Bomb Shop, which were confiscated by the police, and also worked with the Pioneer Players and the Plough Club.² His flat in Bloomsbury, known as the "Attic", became a gathering place for pacifists, including the philosopher Bertrand Russell, "Bomb" Henderson, Clifford Allen, Chairman of the No-Conscription Fellowship and later of the ILP, and the novelist Douglas Goldring.³ Immediately after the war, Malleon set up his own little theatre, the Experimental Theatre, which toured to the East End and other areas of London before finding a permanent home at the Everyman Theatre in

Hampstead.⁴ The Arts Guild, which was launched in 1925, was on a different scale, with its national network of theatre groups, screenings of foreign-language films, and weekly shows at the Strand Theatre. The Margaret Morris dancers contributed to its programme, as did Edith Craig.⁵ Connections such as these indicate a regrouping and expansion of the little theatre network between the wars, and a legacy which continues because the ideas and problems which they addressed are ongoing.

Margaret Morris Movement

Between the wars, the Margaret Morris Movement (MMM) went from strength to strength, expanding into education, health care, and physical training.⁶ Teaching had been at the heart of MMM from its earliest days, when Morris trained her troupe of “Dancing Children” over a milk shop in Covent Garden.⁷ After the war, her educational projects became increasingly ambitious, contributing to a progressive movement in education that had been gathering strength internationally since the late nineteenth century. Her School of Dancing (first in her house at 1 Glebe Place, then in larger premises off the Fulham Road) offered a full curriculum alongside an holistic training in the creative arts.⁸ The approach to discipline was liberated: “the teachers not to tyrannise over the children, nor the children over the teachers”, as the school prospectus dictated.⁹ Given the politics of post-war reconstruction, it is significant that the school’s aims were explicitly internationalist: “to give a child a wide and understanding outlook on life, and the relationship and inter-dependence of one nation to another by the study of international history, and the literature and art of all nations.”¹⁰ That internationalism was also evident in the setting up of sister schools in Paris and Cannes, and the increasingly global reach of MMM centres. By 1939, the movement was active in the USA, Australia, Belgium, Canada, Cuba, France, India, New Zealand, South Africa, Switzerland, and the West Indies, as well as the UK.¹¹

Morris became interested in the remedial possibilities of her system after she discovered yogic breathing.¹² Her ambition for her movement broadened, as she put it, into “a wider vision to include all humanity”, including those with disabilities, and she became convinced that an aesthetic approach to medicine could greatly facilitate the work of healing.¹³ Her idea was that physiological exercises could be made more enjoyable by incorporating them into dance. From the mid-1920s, she worked with the medical profession, running classes in London hospitals and qualifying as a physiotherapist herself in 1930. Her work with disabled children was pioneering because it enabled her patients to become performers in a way that anticipated much

more recent developments in dance practice, notably the work of the dance companies Dancing Wheels (founded 1980, the year of Morris's death) and CandoCo (1991).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

Margaret Morris (choreography), Topical Film Company (production), Miss Margaret Morris' Merry Mermaids, 1923, silent film, 2.40 minutes. Digital image courtesy of Digital file courtesy of BFI.

This short film of a Margaret Morris summer school shows off many of its best features—dancing barefoot on the beach, happy children, and Margaret Morris herself. Harlech was the school's first destination after the war, and Morris remembered that everything about it “was perfect—*except the weather!* It rained and rained.”¹⁴ They joined an artists' colony convened by the wealthy photographer George Davison, a founding member of the Linked Ring Brotherhood, who became managing director of Kodak UK and had anarchist connections.¹⁵ Several of the guests would have been familiar to Morris from the London little theatres, among them Harley Granville Bantock, Cyril Scott, Arnold Bax, Harriet Cohen, Alvin Langdon Coburn, and Eugene Goossens.¹⁶ It was Goossens who first introduced Morris to Davison, at the Margaret Morris Club. The Harlech schools were good for publicity. As the art historian Richard Emerson remarks, photographs taken by Coburn and Fred Daniels “mark a clear break with the past and were picked up immediately” by journals such as *The Tatler* and *The Dancing Times*.¹⁷

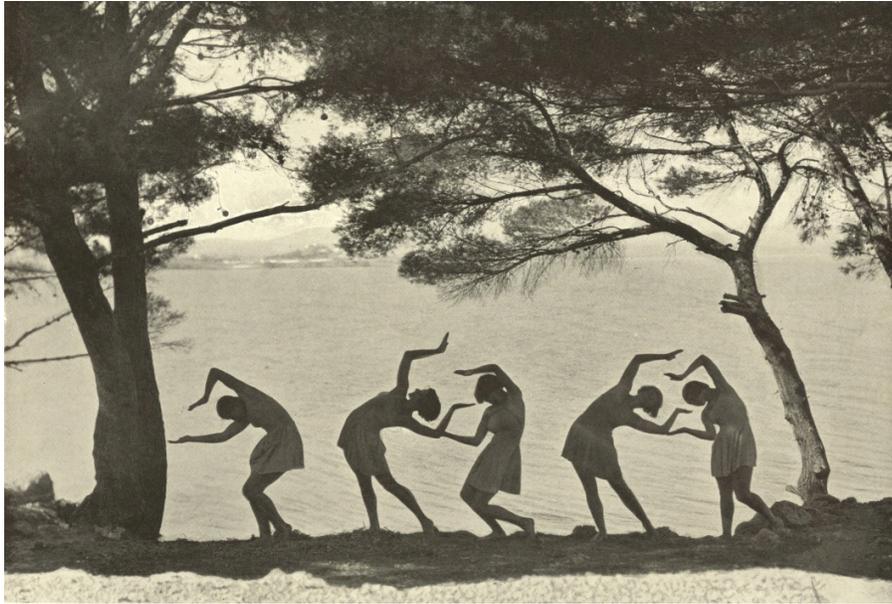


Figure 2.

Frieze Silhouette. A picture taken on the road to the Cap, with the fort and old town of Antibes in the distance, photograph, in Margaret Morris and Fred Daniels, *Margaret Morris Dancing* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1926), plate 30.

The summer school, which Morris started in 1917, continued annually at idyllic locations in Devon, Wales, and France.¹⁸ They inculcated a natural, holistic way of life, with classes in music and painting as well as dance, and as much time as possible spent out of doors. Students danced barefoot in woodland and on the beach, as in this image of a “frieze” of dancers—a borrowing from the visual arts—at a summer school on the French Riviera. Photographs such as this appeared in magazines like *Vogue* and *The Tatler* as a way of advertising both MMM and the Cap d’Antibes as a newly fashionable resort.¹⁹

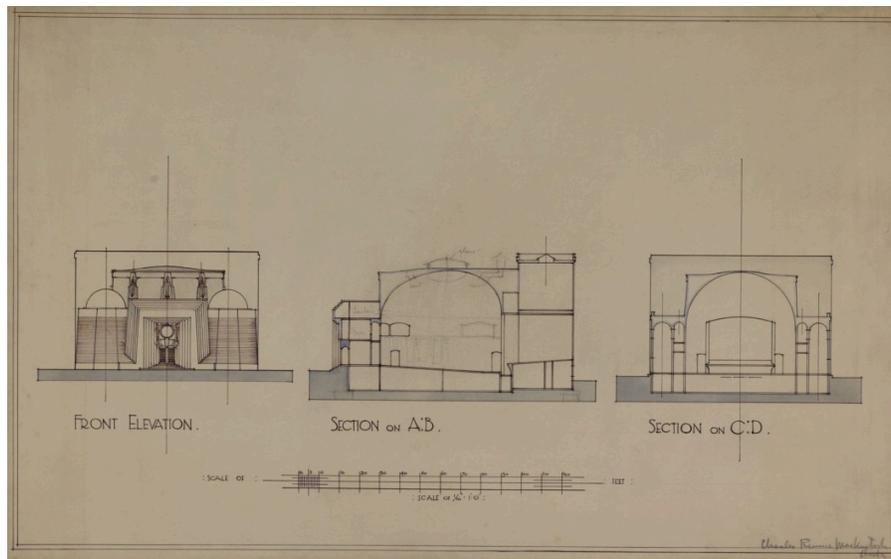


Figure 3.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Design for a Theatre for Margaret Morris, Chelsea, London, showing elevation and sections, 1920, pencil, ink, and wash, 43.9 x 72 cm. Collection of The Hunterian, University of Glasgow (GLAHA 52590). Digital image courtesy of University of Glasgow.

“The Scottish architect, Charles Rennie Mackintosh, with his wife Margaret, were frequent visitors at my Club”, remembered Margaret Morris in her memoirs, “and Fergus and I often dined with them at their studio in Glebe Place, or met them at the Blue Cockatoo or the Embankment.”²⁰ The friendship was important to them all and continued through the 1920s, with Mackintosh lecturing at Morris’s summer schools in the south of France.²¹ In summer 1920, he designed a new theatre for Morris, probably intended for a site between Glebe Place and Oakley Street for which he also designed studio-flats for the Arts League of Service. The project was never realized, but it indicates Morris’ ambitions for her little theatre movement after the war, and the extent to which Mackintosh’s involvement with the Chelsea community stimulated his architectural imagination.²² Plans for the new Morris theatre show a striking, windowless façade with a low central entrance framed by a massive architrave. It calls to mind the modern architecture of Central Europe, where Mackintosh had enjoyed his greatest success before the First World War.²³



Figure 4.

Children enacting a Margaret Morris tableau, in Grace Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals, Chailey, 1903-1948: Being an Account of the Pioneer Work for Crippled Children* (UK: Baynard, 1948), 83.

In 1926, Margaret Morris was invited to work with the Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals for Crippled Children at Chailey, Sussex, following demonstrations of her method to doctors in London.²⁴ Established in 1903 by the disabilities advocate Grace Kimmins, the Heritage provided poor, disabled children with medical care and rehabilitation, and a training in traditional craftwork to fit them for future employment.²⁵ Kimmins' roots in the social activism of the Arts and Crafts Movement, and her belief in the therapeutic benefits of outdoor exercise, drew her to Morris' natural system of movement and progressive approach to education. Morris was initially daunted by the severity of the children's deformities—as the historian Lisa Pruitt explains, “most of them had rickets, bone and joint tuberculosis, poliomyelitis, or congenital defects such as clubbed feet”—but developed a way of working that allowed the children to focus on their strengths and to complement one another in the overall design of a performance.²⁶ This photograph of laughing children enacting a Morris dance frieze in a meadow of ox-eye daisies conveys something of the joy that Morris remembered from these classes.²⁷

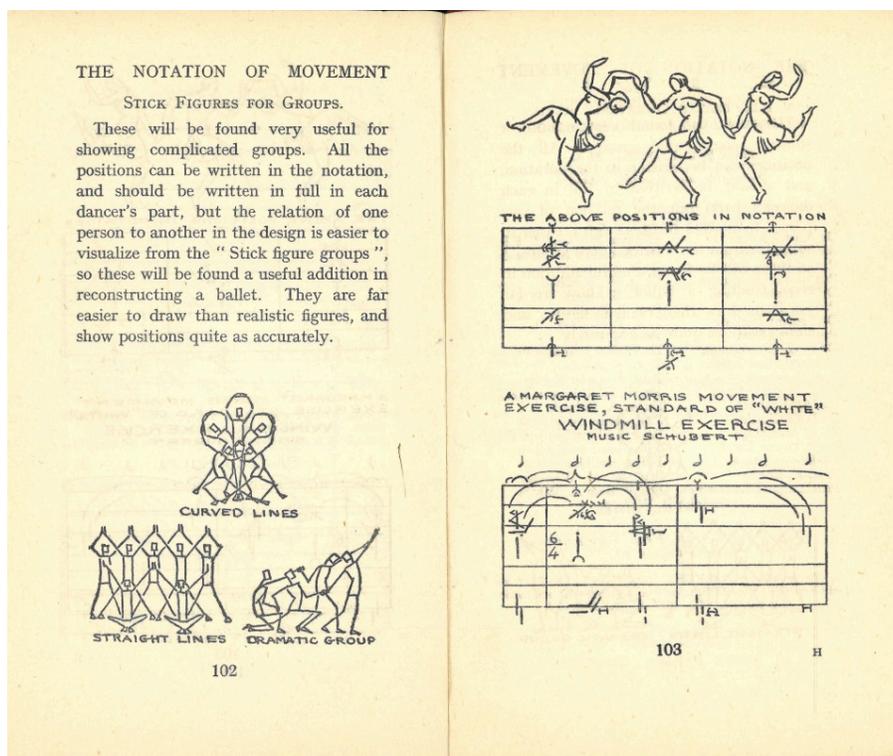


Figure 5.

Windmill Exercise, in Margaret Morris, *The Notation of Movement* (London: Kegan Paul & Co., 1928), 103.

Margaret Morris began to develop her own system of dance notation in 1913 and published it fifteen years later as *The Notation of Movement*.²⁸ Her editor was C.K. Ogden—a linguist, philosopher, free-thinker, and long-term supporter of MMM, who served on the committee of the Margaret Morris Club and lectured at Morris’ summer schools in the south of France.²⁹ The connection is suggestive. Ogden is best known for his creation of *Basic English*, a rare success amongst the many universal auxiliaries that were invented in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries.³⁰ His interest in Morris’ dance pasigraphy situates it within a universal language movement which was closely associated with pacifism.³¹

[mul]

The composer Eugene Goossens worked closely with several of the little theatres both during and after the war—the Plough Club and the Arts League of Service, but most particularly the Margaret Morris Movement.³² His *Three Greek Dances* (1926, originally titled *Three Pagan Hymns*) was composed specially for Morris.³³

The Greenleaf Players

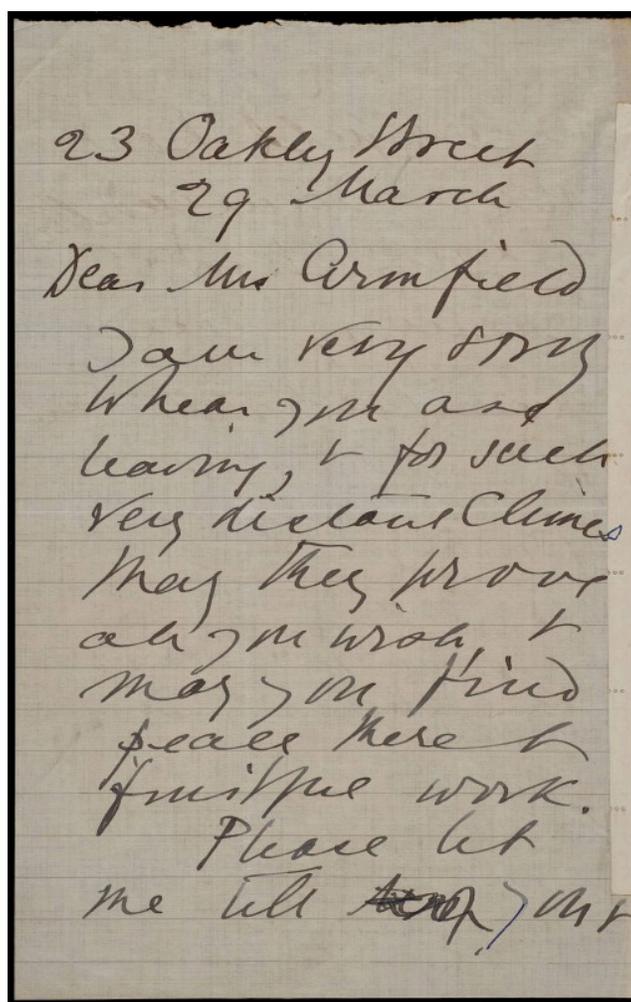
In spring 1916, the Armfields set sail for the United States to relaunch their Greenleaf Players in the “one place where Little Theatres and Community Drama were regarded seriously and where new ideas were being welcomed”.

³⁴ It was a risk, both personally and professionally—they were “chased all the way by Torpedo boats”. ³⁵ Yet they were exhilarated by Manhattan with its “enormous cliffs of glistening steel, concrete, and glass”, ³⁶ and by the internationalism of a country where you “touch and embrace and are part of the whole world in the most marvellous way”, as Smedley put it in a letter home. ³⁷ She spent many hours in the New York Public Library researching the folktales of different nations as a way of understanding what she called “the welter of races in the streets”. ³⁸

The Armfields quickly found their footing in the art, craft, and theatre worlds of New York and California. A new Greenleaf Studio at 13 Gramercy Park developed into a flourishing school and little theatre centre, and they taught their method at universities, theatres, and women’s clubs across America. ³⁹ Exhibitions of their work—Armfield’s paintings, joint shows of their embroideries—attracted favourable attention, including that of Christian Brinton, the critic and curator who was key to the promotion of modern European art in the USA. ⁴⁰ In spring 1918, they travelled by train to California and continued their work of teaching and creating in San Francisco. ⁴¹ The American Indian artefacts that Armfield encountered along the way were a revelation to him and he argued strongly that their designs were symbolic representations of their environment, rather than abstract decorations: “Their squares and zigzags are thunder and lightning, flower or mountains, quite as definitely as our squares and zigzags which we call letters are flowers and mountains to us.” ⁴² Significant too was his discovery of the artist Jay Hambridge and the theory of dynamic symmetry that Hambridge derived from his study of ancient Greek architecture, and that Armfield thenceforth adopted as the basis of his approach to composition, both on canvas and for the theatre. ⁴³ It underpinned his designs for a New York production of *A Winter’s Tale* (published as an illustrated book in 1920), and the staging of the Armfields’ own play, *Miriam Sister of Moses*, at the Greek Theater at Berkeley in 1919.

The Armfields returned to Britain for good in early 1922—to Armfield’s relief and Smedley’s regret—where they continued their work of writing and producing. On their return, Armfield mounted an exhibition of his American painting at the Dorien Leigh Galleries, a venue run by the photographer E.O.

Hoppé, who had played a prominent part in the wartime little theatres. Smedley wrote up her experience of teaching theatre in America in her book series *Greenleaf Theatre Elements* (1924-1926).

A photograph of a handwritten letter on lined paper. The paper is aged and has a slightly yellowish tint. The handwriting is in cursive and is written in dark ink. The letter is addressed to 'Dear Mrs Armfield' and is dated '29 March'. The sender is '23 Oakley Street'. The letter expresses sympathy for the recipient's departure for America and wishes her well. The text is as follows:

23 Oakley Street
29 March
Dear Mrs Armfield
I am very sorry
to hear of your
leaving, & for such
very distant climes
May they prove
all you wish, &
may you find
peace here &
fruitful work.
Please let
me tell ~~you~~ you

Figure 6.

Vernon Lee, letter to Constance Smedley Armfield on her departure for America, 29 March 1916. Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/7/1/41).

Mr Compell how
much I am indebted
to you & Mrs U.D.C.
camp, and
how grateful I am
for all you did
for my Ballet, which
without your
energy & resourcefulness
would still be
unpublished for
many a month.
With best regards
Yours truly
V. Lee

Figure 7.

Vernon Lee, letter to Constance Smedley Armfield on her departure for America, 29 March 1916. Collection Tate Archive (TGA 976/7/1/41).

This valediction from Vernon Lee to Constance Smedley as the Armfields prepared to leave for the United States is significant: it confirms the Armfields' recollections that they played a crucial role in bringing *The Ballet of the Nations* to publication, and it suggests that the couple regularly hosted meetings of the Union of Democratic Control, underlining the connections between the London little theatres and the wartime peace movement. ⁴⁴



Figure 8.
Unknown photographer, Maxwell Ashby Armfield's Studio in the USA,
undated, photograph.



Figure 9.
Unknown photographer, Maxwell Ashby Armfield's Studio in the USA,
undated, photograph.

When the Armfields arrived in New York in spring 1916, they rented a studio overlooking Gramercy Park.⁴⁵ This photograph offers a glimpse of their new life in the USA, and of Maxwell's work-in-progress. The large canvas on the easel conveys the ambition of his response to a cityscape which he described in terms of the American Sublime as a vista of "great glistening precipices".⁴⁶ He sent photographs to his friend, the American artist Edward McKnight Kauffer, who remarked on the difference in his work: "You have lost that which I used to think was very evident in your work (self consciousness) [...] I applaud *your* American point of view which is in every picture."⁴⁷ Armfield later explained that Kauffer had encouraged him towards a bolder, looser style which was "entirely suitable for the vast spaces of America."⁴⁸



Figure 10.

The Mother's Magazine, featuring embroidery by Constance Armfield, March 1917 (Chicago, IL: David C. Cook Publishing Co., 1917). Collection of Hathi Trust. Digital image courtesy of Hathi Trust Digital Library.

“Embroidery, like all other forms of art, is merely a means of expressing beautiful ideas”, declared Constance Smedley in an article explaining the cover design exhibited here. ⁴⁹ This is a work of art which reflects on its own making: a woman embroiders a picture of the “Bluebird of happiness”—a nod to Maeterlinck—while the real bird perches on the frame. The Armfields both took sewing seriously—a legacy of their training in the Arts and Crafts. They brought a number of embroideries with them from England and continued to make them during their years in America. These provided their first entry into the American art world, leading to exhibitions with the National Society of Craftsmen and at the Palace of Art in San Francisco, and a lecture series for Smedley. ⁵⁰



Figure 11.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield (design), *Miriam, Sister of Moses*, a biblical drama by Constance Smedley and Maxwell Ashby Armfield performed in the Greek Theatre, University of Berkeley, California, circa 1919, pencil and watercolour poster design, 20.3 × 29.2 cm. Collection of Tate Archive (TGA 976/3/2/4).

In 1919, the Armfields staged an epic production of their play *Miriam, Sister of Moses* in the Greek Theatre, Berkeley, starring the pioneering American dancers Ruth St Denis and Ted Shawn in the title roles, and produced by Sam Hume, a leader in the American little theatre movement. ⁵¹ The play was inspired by the paintings of Giovanni Segantini (1858–1899) and shaped by a Christian Scientist belief in spiritual healing. ⁵² The costume and gesturing of

the figures on Armfield's poster design, especially the "Pillar of Fire", with the all-over patterning of the robe and the hieroglyphic articulation of the hands and arms, call to mind earlier photographs of Greenleaf Theatre productions.

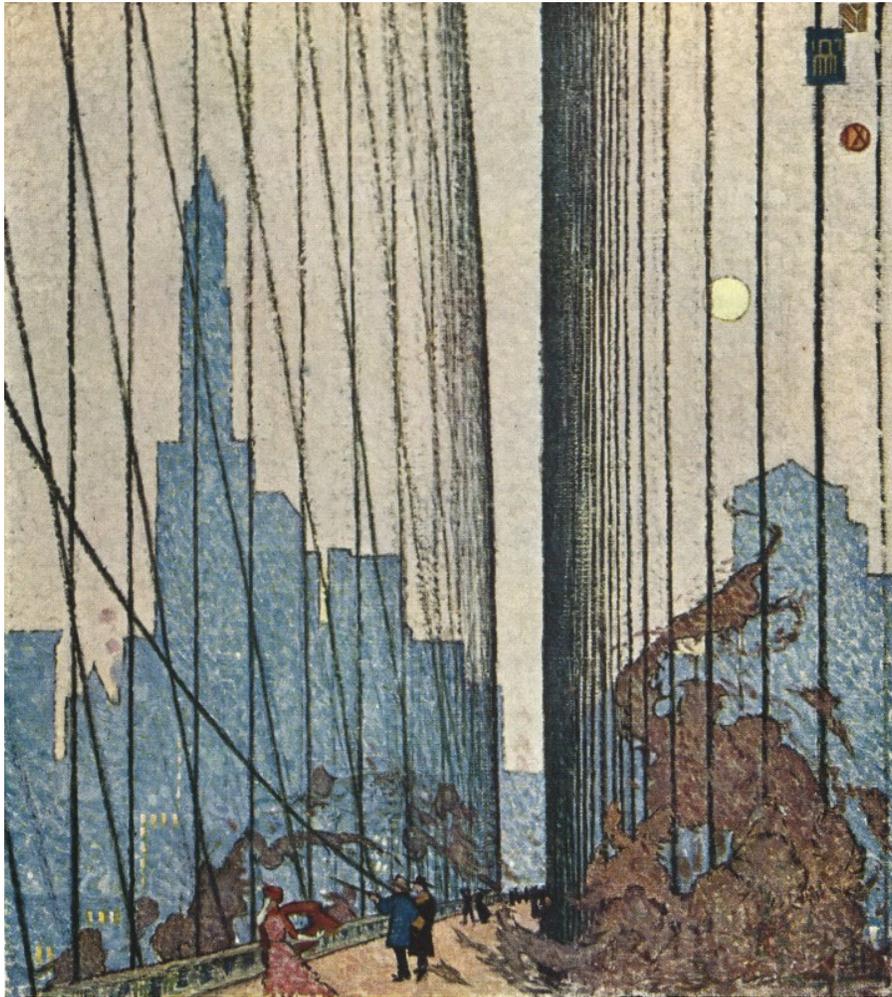


Figure 12.

Maxwell Ashby Armfield, *Brooklyn Bridge and Woolworth Tower*, 1917, in *Maxwell Ashby Armfield, An Artist in America* (London: Methuen, 1925), frontispiece. Digital image courtesy of Estate of Maxwell Armfield.

Armfield wrote up his journey from New York to California in articles for the *Christian Science Monitor*, which he collected and published after his return to Britain as *An Artist in America*, dedicated to Geoffrey Whitworth. He was unimpressed by the "European jargon" employed by contemporary American painters but excited by the conceptual qualities of indigenous design—there are echoes here of his training in the Arts and Crafts—and by the raw material of land- and cityscape.⁵³ The book evokes a brilliance and abundance of colour; after Europe's "misty golden glooms", the "pure gold of

burnt sedge and water-reed” in Connecticut.⁵⁴ Colour illustrations, such as this view of Brooklyn Bridge striated against the New York skyline, say as much again in paint.⁵⁵

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In 1927, the Armfields published a child’s guide to English folk song: *The Blue Bus Route. Being the Amazing Adventures of Kenneth and Barbara in the Folk-Song World*, which imagined the work of Cecil Sharp as a journey through a land of song. In the early 1900s, Sharp (1859–1924) led the movement to collect and revive English folk song that he encountered on his travels across England, and in the Appalachian Mountains in North America where English settlers had remained in isolated communities.

The Arts League of Service

The Arts League of Service (ALS) was launched from the Margaret Morris Theatre in May 1919 with a mission to promote “the unity of all the Arts” and to bring them “into everyday life”.⁵⁶ It signalled a new beginning for British theatre after the war, and a renewal of the ambition to bring art to as wide an audience as possible which had motivated the little theatres from their very beginnings.⁵⁷ It was, explains the art historian James Fox, “the most influential” of the cultural organisations to appear in the immediate aftermath of the war, “though one that has been virtually forgotten since the 1920s”; it finally folded at the outbreak of the Second World War.⁵⁸ Its activities were wide-ranging: a travelling theatre, public lectures on the arts, and exhibitions celebrating the modern and experimental—Jessica Dismorr, Marion Dorn, Frances Hodgkins, Edward McKnight Kauffer, Margaret Macdonald, Henry Moore, Paul Nash, Percy Wyndham Lewis, Anne Estelle Rice, and Edward Wadsworth were among those promoted.⁵⁹ It also ran an art library, a bank of contemporary drawings and prints for sale and circulation to schools, and a Service Bureau which offered advice and assistance to artists and writers.⁶⁰

The ALS was the brainchild of Eleanor Elder, a teacher at the Margaret Morris school, and the spirit of the London little theatres was manifest in the work of the travelling theatre. Several of those who feature elsewhere in this exhibition appear on the ALS Council—Laurence Binyon, John Drinkwater, J.D. Fergusson, Eugene Goossens, Edward McKnight Kauffer, Margaret Morris, John Middleton Murry, Nigel Playfair, and Lady Maud Warrender. The theatre programme featured sets and costumes by Kauffer, dance poems by Hester Sainsbury, and Margaret Morris dancing by the Baddeley sisters, “bare-footed and in filmy Greek draperies.”⁶¹ The structure and aesthetic of ALS

performances were strongly reminiscent of the little theatres: a mixture of short plays, songs and dances emphasising “rhythm, colour and form” and precise, dance-like choreography, “every gesture and movement being timed to the music.” ⁶² The overall effect was witty and fresh, and praised by critics who warmed to the “beauty and innocent mirth”, the “spontaneity and naturalness”, and the “sheer intellectual delight” of these latter-day strolling players. ⁶³



Figure 13.

Presentation of Harvest Hymn, in Eleanor Elder, *Dance, A National Art* (Wheaton, IL: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918), frontispiece. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.

Eleanor Elder’s idea for a professional touring company grew out of her experience of making theatre in India, where she spent the last two years of the war. In her memoirs, she explains that she organised some entertainments there for the Red Cross. ⁶⁴ She does not mention that she taught Margaret Morris dancing at the headquarters of the Theosophical Society in Adyar, Chennai, although this development is of considerable interest, given the cultural significance of Theosophy, and other connections between Theosophy and the London little theatres which emerge from the material of this exhibition. ⁶⁵ The performance photographed here was billed as a “Greek interpretation” of an “Indian Harvest Song”, and staged at a garden party hosted by Annie Besant, President of the Theosophical Society. ⁶⁶



Figure 14.

A.A. Pearson, Arts League of Service promotional postcard, 1920s. Digital image courtesy of Private Collection.

Postcards such as this staged the camaraderie of the ALS Travelling Theatre as they travelled up and down the country, bringing the arts “into everyday life” through makeshift performances in village halls.⁶⁷ The van which featured in much of their publicity was important to their image—first a motor wagonette lent by Muriel, Countess De La Warr (a Labour Party activist who used the vehicle to transport luggage and staff to her country house), then a reconditioned Air Force Crossley, and finally the Lancia pictured here, “half-van, half-bus, with seats for the weary players. It was anything but luxurious, but to us it was heaven [...] the words *Travelling Theatre* excited interest wherever we went.”⁶⁸

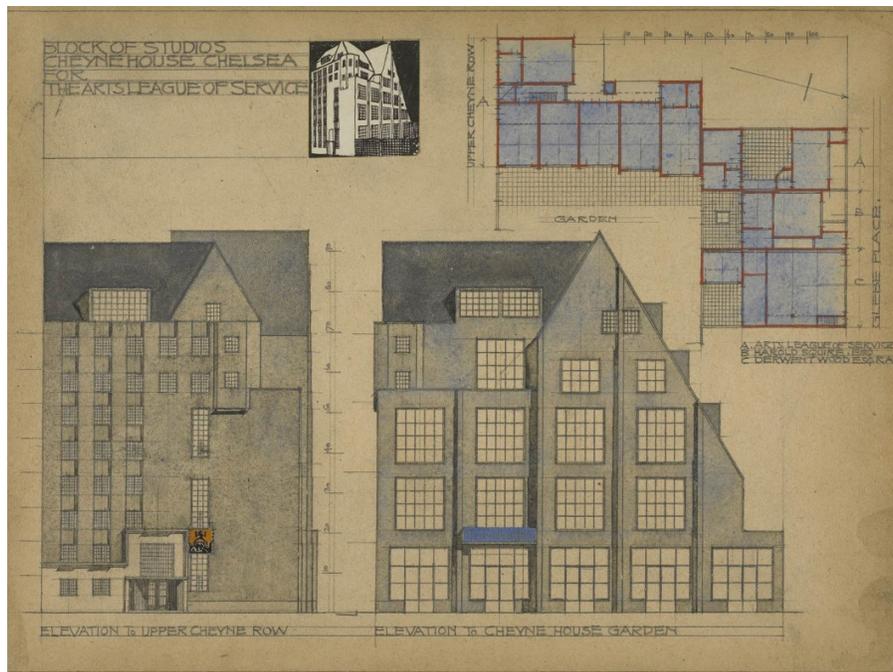


Figure 15.

Charles Rennie Mackintosh, Plans for the Arts League of Service studio-flats, 1920, pencil and watercolour, 27.6 × 37.2 cm. Collection of The British Museum (1981-12-12-24). Digital image courtesy of The Trustees of the British Museum.

The front cover of the first *Bulletin* of the Arts League of Service featured an architectural drawing by Charles Rennie Mackintosh: a strikingly asymmetrical block of flats with a sheer, eight-storey front elevation, a gable at the back which sloped dramatically from the roof to the ground, and huge, double-height windows on one side. This same sketch was reproduced in miniature on the sheet of plans and elevations that he exhibited at the Royal Institute of British Architects in December 1922. The *Bulletin* outlined the League's intention to build cheap, attractive accommodation for the exclusive use of artists', writers, and composers.⁶⁹ The project—which was intended for a site behind Glebe Place in Chelsea and also earmarked for a new Margaret Morris Theatre, but which was never realized—responded to an acute shortage of housing after the war.⁷⁰

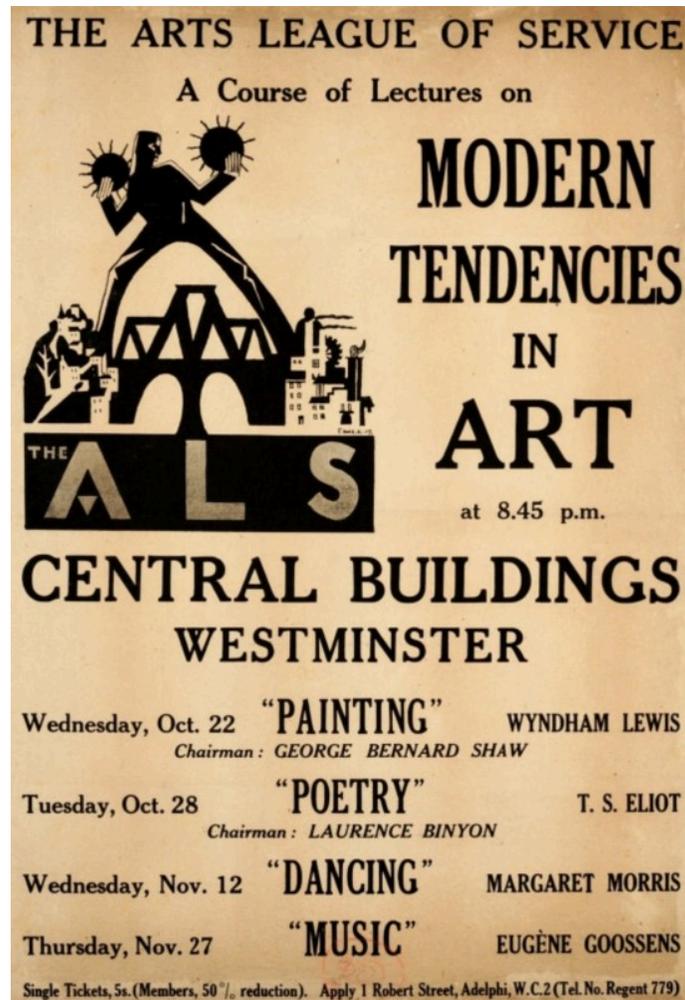


Figure 16.

Edward McKnight Kauffer, The Arts League of Service: A course of Lectures on Modern Tendencies in Art, poster design, 1919. Digital image courtesy of Antikbar.

“We claimed recognition for the modern artists, and the orthodox regarded us with suspicion as revolutionaries and extremists.”⁷¹ Eleanor Elder’s account of the League’s agenda helps to situate this course of lectures on “Modern Tendencies in Art”, delivered by Wyndham Lewis (painting), T.S. Eliot (poetry), Margaret Morris (dancing), and Eugene Goossens (music), and taking place within the first year of operations.⁷² Edward McKnight Kauffer’s design for the publicity poster features a colossus striding the bridge between a picturesque old town and an industrial centre.

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Eugene Goossens’ ALS lecture on “Modern Tendencies in Music” ranged internationally. Amongst contemporary British composers, he singled out Delius, Bantock, Vaughan Williams, Scott, Holbrooke, Ireland, Bax, Bridge,

and Berners. Bax had been involved in the wartime little theatres as a member of the Plough Club committee. His *Elegiac Trio* (1916) was written in response to the Easter Uprising.

The British Drama League

A key player in the production of *The Ballet of the Nations* was Geoffrey Whitworth (1883–1951), the Art Editor at Chatto & Windus, who heard Vernon Lee reciting her book in the little theatres of Chelsea and then commissioned it for publication.⁷³ He was already known as a mover in the world of theatre: in a small way as a writer, since he penned an early study of the *Ballets Russes*, lectured on drama and wrote plays; but most significantly he made his mark as an advocate and facilitator—a creator of systems and institutions which enabled theatre to flourish. Before and after the war, he campaigned for a national theatre in Britain, a project which eventually came into being in 1963.⁷⁴ To this end, he founded the British Drama League in 1919 “for the encouragement of the Art of the Theatre” and “the betterment of social life”.⁷⁵ This, then, was a campaign in post-war reconstruction which combined the aesthetic ambition of the little theatre movement—Edward Gordon Craig’s “Art of the Theatre”—with a socialist conviction that “the drama was the art *par excellence* of the people, and the theatre everybody’s business”.⁷⁶ During Whitworth’s thirty-year service as director, the League became an educational resource for theatre companies throughout the country, and it was important to its ethos that it served amateurs—groups which embodied the “spirit of community enterprise” that Whitworth most valued—as much as professionals.⁷⁷

“Who is this man named Whitworth?” asked George Bernard Shaw rhetorically in 1934.

What is he? He is not a great actor. So far as I know he has never acted in a play. If he has written any plays, I have not seen them. And yet, wherever I go I hear his name: Geoffrey Whitworth. He is one of the most important people in the theatre today.⁷⁸

Whitworth’s name recurs also in the material of this exhibition, weaving through the web of acquaintance and collaboration that held the Chelsea theatre community together. He lived in the neighbourhood, frequented the little theatres, and attended meetings of the Union of Democratic Control—the pressure group which questioned the government’s war aims, and which gives the clearest indication of the pacifist tendencies of the London little theatres.⁷⁹ Through his editorial work, he served also as a link

between Chelsea and the Bloomsbury group, that other island of cultural experimentation and political dissent during the war.⁸⁰ The internationalism of these wartime avant-gardes made its mark on his leadership of the British Drama League: on the League's ambition to build connections between British and foreign theatre,⁸¹ and on his own insistence that "the language of Art is universal".⁸²



Figure 17.

Roger Fry, Geoffrey Whitworth, 1934, oil on canvas, 76.2 × 61.4 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (S.114-2000). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

This portrait was commissioned by the British Drama League and presented to Whitworth by George Bernard Shaw. It was a tribute to Whitworth's service to theatre, a collective gift from the dozens of organisations and hundreds of individuals who had benefited from his work, including such distinguished signatories as Edith Craig and Edward Gordon Craig. It was also a personal tribute from Fry, the artist, who had been involved in the League from the

beginning, chairing its inaugural Committee meeting, and serving on its Plays and Publications Committee. This was one of the last paintings that he made—he died shortly before its public presentation. ⁸³

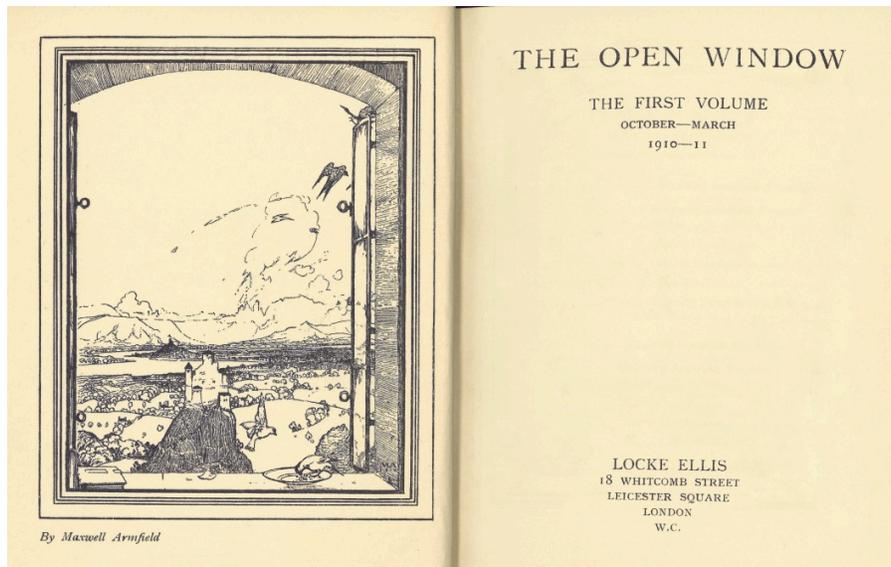


Figure 18.

Geoffrey Whitworth and Vivian Locke Ellis (eds), *The Open Window*, Issue 1 (London: Locke Ellis, 1910), frontispiece design by Maxwell Ashby Armfield. Digital image courtesy of The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.

Little magazines were crucial to the emergence of new art and writing in the early twentieth century, providing a platform for work that was too risky or obscure for commercial publication. *The Open Window* (1910–1911) was typical of the genre—short-lived, published from home, and revealing, through its list of contributors, a cross-section of the London art world as it appeared in 1910. As Editor to *The Burlington Magazine* and Chatto & Windus, Whitworth was well placed to attract interesting work. There is a glimpse here of the artists and writers who mattered to him and who later played a part in the little theatre network, among them Maxwell Armfield, Katherine Mansfield, Beryl de Zoete (the dancer and dance writer), Douglas Goldring, and Yone Noguchi.

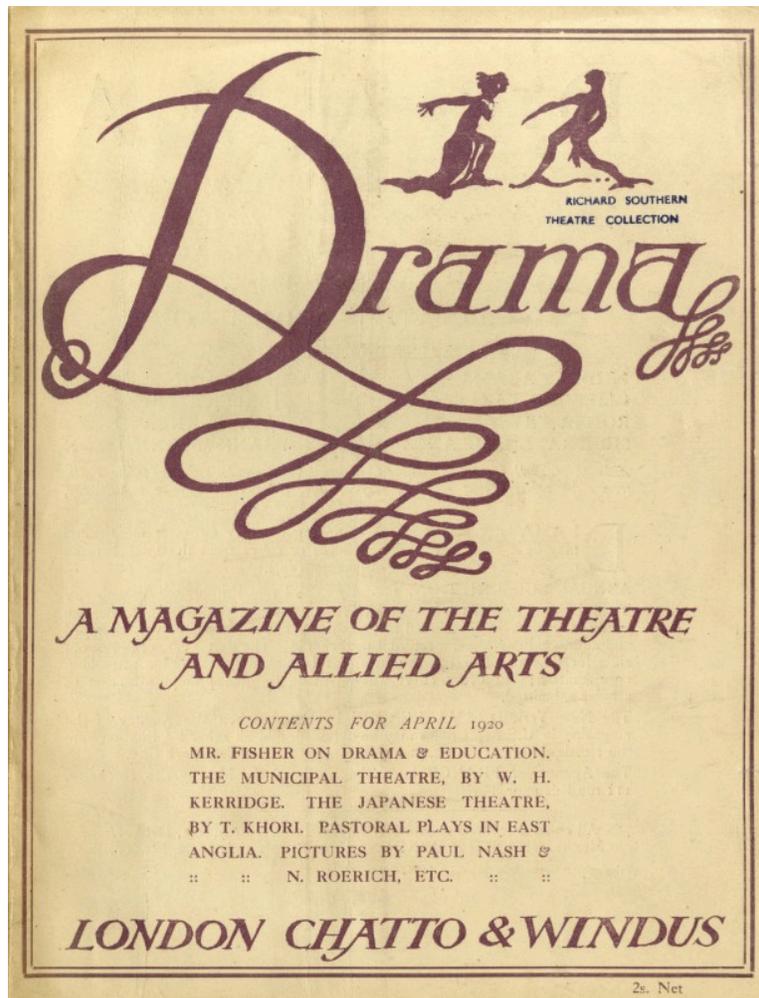


Figure 19.

Drama: A Magazine of the Theatre and Allied Arts, (London: Chatto & Windus, April 1920), front cover. Collection of the Bristol Theatre. Digital image courtesy of Bristol Theatre Collection.

Whitworth edited the magazine of the British Drama League throughout his career as director, and the publication became a focus for debate about British theatre in its international contexts. The issue shown here, for April 1920, lists an article by the Japanese playwright Torahiko Kori, who had been involved with the London little theatres during the recent war; Paul Nash, who turned his attention to stage design after his service as an official war artist; and Nicholas Roerich, the Russian artist and theosophist who designed the set and costumes for Sergei Diaghilev's production of *The Rite of Spring* (1913), and who worked briefly as a stage designer at Covent Garden Theatre after the war, before moving to the USA.

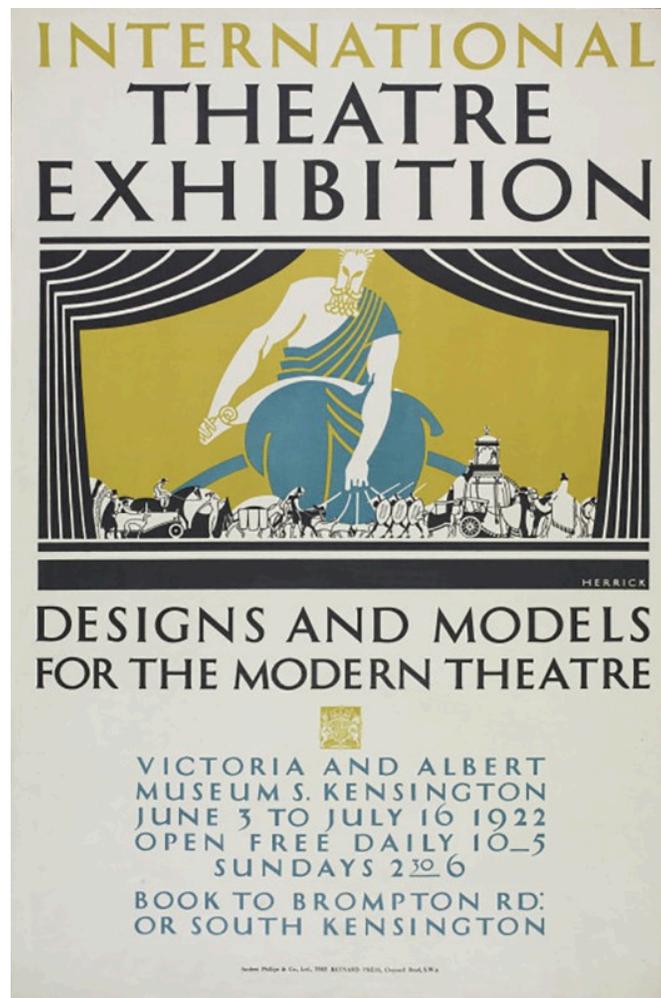


Figure 20.

Frederick Charles Herrick, *International Theatre Exhibition*, 1922, colour lithograph poster, 75 × 49.8 cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.1072-1922). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (All rights reserved).

It was important to Whitworth that the British Drama League should promote internationalism in the world of theatre, just as the League of Nations worked to improve international relations in politics. In 1922, he arranged for the *International Theatre Exhibition* to travel from Amsterdam to London where it opened at the V&A.⁸⁴ With its depiction of a togaed figure clutching a handful of puppet strings, the exhibition poster evokes ideas of classicism and puppetry which were important to modern European theatre. The Grecian frieze at the puppet master's feet incorporates a medley of post-war references, including marching soldiers and motor cars.



Figure 21.

Edward Gordon Craig, Set model, 1921, modelled and painted plaster, 32.4 high × 43 wide × 44 deep cm. Collection of Victoria and Albert Museum, London (E.146-1922). Digital image courtesy of Victoria and Albert Museum (CC-BY-NC-ND 3.0 Unported).

Edward Gordon Craig exhibited this set model at the *International Theatre Exhibition* (V&A, 1922), which travelled from Amsterdam on the initiative of the British Drama League. Craig's model demonstrates his method of using massive, vertical blocks to create dramatic contrasts of light and scale. At this point in his career, he was a veteran of European theatre though still prolific—some even complained, monomaniac—in his writing about the stage and how it should change.⁸⁵

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In the 1930s, the British Drama League published a series of recordings of British dialects, which have become a standard reference for actors and other researchers. The project was symptomatic of the League's interest in promoting regional variety in the theatre, particularly in the work of amateur groups which represented local cultures and communities, rather than the standard training of the major theatre academies.⁸⁶ There is something of the Arts and Crafts Movement in this initiative, as there is with so much of the material in this exhibition—an interest in the vernacular, combined with, and not contradicting, a commitment to cultural internationalism, and underwritten by a politics of peace and preservation.

Footnotes

- 1 Clive Barker, "Theatre and Society: The Edwardian Legacy, the First World War and the Inter-War Years", in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 4.
- 2 The plays were "*D*" *Company* and *Black 'Ell*—both published by Henderson's Bookshop in 1916. His association with the Pioneer Players included their production of his play *The Little White Thought* at the Shaftesbury Theatre, 3 December 1915.
- 3 See Douglas Goldring, *Odd Man Out: The Autobiography of a "Propaganda Novelist"* (London: Chapman and Hall, 1935), 141-142. Constance Malleson, *After Ten Years: A Personal Record* (London: Cape, 1931), 91-128.
- 4 Together with his wife, the actress Constance Malleson, and Norman McDermott; see Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 4.
- 5 Ros Merkin, "The Religion of Socialism or a Pleasant Sunday Afternoon?: The ILP Arts Guild", in Clive Barker and Maggie B. Gale (eds), *British Theatre between the Wars, 1918-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 162, 165, and 182.
- 6 Morris's publications in these diverse fields included *Skiing Exercises* (1934), *Maternity and Post-Operative Exercises* (1936), and *Basic Physical Training* (1937).
- 7 Margaret Morris, *My Life in Movement* (London: Peter Owen, 1969), 22.
- 8 Josephine Ransom, *Schools of To-Morrow in England* (London: G. Bell and Sons, 1919), 128. It is notable that Ransom was a theosophist, and that several of the schools reviewed in her book had links with Theosophy. See Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Lois Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 46.
- 9 Ransom, *Schools of To-Morrow in England*, 131.
- 10 Ransom, *Schools of To-Morrow in England*, 130-131.
- 11 Margaret Morris Movement website, www.margaretmorrismovement.com/about-us/history.
- 12 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 52-59.
- 13 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 53.
- 14 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 43.
- 15 Colin Harding, "Davison, George (1854-1930)", in John Hannavy (ed.), *Encyclopedia of Nineteenth-Century Photography* (London: CRC Press, 2008), 387.
- 16 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 42; and Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 57.
- 17 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 59.
- 18 They included Combe Martin (1917, 1918), Harlech (1919, 1921), Dinard (1920), Pourville (1922), and Antibes (through the 1920s). Morris remembers the summer schools in *My Life in Movement*, 41-48.
- 19 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 45; and Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, 168-170.
- 20 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 34. The friendship is described also in Alan Crawford, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh* (London: Thames & Hudson, 1995), 166.
- 21 Richard Emerson, "The Architect and the Dancer, Margaret Morris, Mackintosh and the South of France", *Charles Rennie Mackintosh Journal* (Spring 2014): 21-31.
- 22 This and other architectural commissions arising from Mackintosh's years in Chelsea are detailed in Thomas Howarth, *Charles Rennie Mackintosh and the Modern Movement* (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1977), 206-215.
- 23 The project and its architectural references are detailed in "M343 Design for a Theatre for Margaret Morris", *Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning*, University of Glasgow, 2014, www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk/catalogue/pdf/M343.pdf, accessed 12 March 2019.
- 24 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 57-59.
- 25 Grace Thyrsa Kimmins, *Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals, Chailey, 1903-1948: Being an Account of the Pioneer Work for Crippled Children* (n.p.: Baynard, 1948).
- 26 Lisa J. Pruitt, "The Heritage Craft Schools and Hospitals for Crippled Children", *Hektoen International: A Journal of Medical Humanities* 11, no. 1 (Winter 2017), <https://hekint.org/2017/02/23/3607-2/>.
- 27 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 59.
- 28 Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 60. She later called her system Danscript.
- 29 Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, passim.
- 30 The language was first published by Ogden as *Basic English: A General Introduction with Rules and Grammar* (London: Kegan Paul, Trench, Trübner, 1930). His work is discussed in W. Terrence Gordon, *C.K. Ogden: A Biobibliographical Study* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990); and James McElvenny, *Language and Meaning in the Age of Modernism: C.K. Ogden and his Contemporaries* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2018).
- 31 Arika Okrent, *In the Land of Invented Languages* (New York: Spiegel and Grau, 2009).

- 32 His work with the Margaret Morris Theatre is mentioned in Morris, *My Life in Movement*, 33 and 42; and detailed further in Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour*, passim. With the Plough Club, he was a member of the organising committee, arranged concerts, and contributed his own music (see Plough Club prospectus, 1919, E.O. Hoppé Estate Collection, Pasadena, CA). He served on the Council of the Arts League of Service, as stated in Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller Ltd, 1939), 263.
- 33 Gary Higginson, review of *Goossens: Orchestral Works* (Chandos, 2013), *Music Web International*, 13 July 2013, www.musicweb-international.com/classrev/2013/July13/Goossens_orchestral_v2_CHSA5119.htm, accessed 21 January 2019.
- 34 Constance Smedley, *Crusaders: The Reminiscences of Constance Smedley (Mrs Maxwell Armfield)* (London: Duckworth, 1929), 216.
- 35 Maxwell Armfield, "My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War" (unpublished, 1970), 52, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- 36 Maxwell Armfield, *An Artist in America* (London: Methuen, 1925), 10.
- 37 Constance Smedley, letter to Heddie Gardiner, 4 December 1916, collection of Nicola Gordon Bowe. American internationalism is discussed also in Smedley, *Crusaders*, 226; and Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 3.
- 38 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 229–230. Her retellings of these stories were published as a series of articles in *The Christian Science Monitor* and *Women's Magazine*, illustrated by Armfield.
- 39 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 233–246. Nicola Gordon Bowe, "Constance and Maxwell Armfield: An American Interlude 1915–1922", *The Journal of Decorative and Propaganda Arts* 14 (Autumn 1989), 6.
- 40 Their embroideries were exhibited at the galleries of the National Society of Craftsmen in New York and at the Palace of Art, San Francisco. Brinton organised two exhibitions of Armfield's painting at the Arlington Galleries, New York, the first in early 1917. See Gordon Bowe, "Constance and Maxwell Armfield", 21. For Brinton's career, see Andrew J. Walker, "Critic, Curator, Collector: Christian Brinton and the Exhibition of National Modernism in America, 1910–1945" (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1999).
- 41 Maxwell Armfield, "My Approach to Art", in A.A. Ballard and E. Ogborn (eds), *Maxwell Armfield 1881–1972* (Southampton: Southampton Art Gallery, 1978), n.p.
- 42 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 30.
- 43 John Michell, "Dynamic Symmetry in the Work of Maxwell Armfield", *Maxwell Armfield 1881–1972* (Southampton: Oak Knoll, 1978).
- 44 Constance Smedley and Maxwell Armfield both give accounts of their collaboration with Lee in their memoirs, which are broadly, though not entirely, consistent with each other. Smedley, *Crusaders*, 223; and Armfield, "My World and I", 49–52.
- 45 The address, no. 13, is given on the heading of letters from Constance Smedley to family and friends in Britain, now in the collection of Nicola Gordon Bowe.
- 46 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 12.
- 47 Edward McKnight Kauffer, letter to Maxwell Armfield, [n.d., but internal evidence suggests 1917 as the letter mentions Armfield's article "Domesticated Mural Painting", *The Countryside Magazine and Suburban Life* (February 1917)], Tate Archive: TGA 976.
- 48 Armfield, "My Approach to Art".
- 49 Constance Smedley, "The Cover Design", *The Mother's Magazine* 12, no. 3 (March 1917), 287.
- 50 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 229. Smedley mentions their New York exhibition in a letter to Heddie Gardiner, 4 December 1916, collection of Nicola Gordon Bowe. She studies embroidery and decoration with May Newall and May Morris; see Gordon Bowe, "Constance and Maxwell Armfield", 9). Exhibitions by the National Society of Craftsmen took place at the National Arts Club Galleries, 119 East 19 Street.
- 51 Ted Shawn (ed.), *Ruth St Denis, Pioneer and Prophet, being a History of her Cycle of Oriental Dances* (San Francisco, CA: John Howell, 1920), 83–85. Smedley, *Crusaders*, 245.
- 52 Smedley, *Crusaders*, 236.
- 53 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 4 and 27–37. For theories of language and design in the Arts and Crafts, see Morna O'Neill, *Walter Crane: The Arts and Crafts, Painting, and Politics, 1875–1890* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010).
- 54 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 9 and 18.
- 55 Armfield, *An Artist in America*, 57.
- 56 "To bring the Arts into Everyday Life" was subtitled to "Arts League of Service". The commitment to aesthetic unity was outlined by Laurence Binyon in *The Arts League of Service Bulletin* (1920) and quoted in the front matter of subsequent editions. The League's inaugural meeting is described in Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players: The Story of the Arts League of Service* (London: Frederick Muller, 1939), 7.
- 57 There was a socialist underpinning to the work of the ALS. See Elder, *Travelling Players*, 4 and 10. The ambition to bring art to the people is highlighted in *The Times*, 2 May 1919, 7. Paul Nash, "The Arts League of Service", *New Witness*, 23 May 1919, 72.
- 58 James Fox, *British Art and the First World War, 1914–1924* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2015), 149.

- 59 This list is drawn from Elder, *Travelling Players*, 5; Martin Hopkinson, "The Arts League of Service in London, 1919–1928", *Print Quarterly* 30, no. 2 (June 2013), 180; and the catalogue for the *Arts League of Service Exhibition of Practical Arts*, 17 November–6 December (London: Twenty-One Gallery, 1919). Hopkinson notes that the *Practical Arts* exhibition features Wadsworth's woodcuts made for John Rodker's Ovid Press—another Chelsea connection. Other notable ALS exhibitions included a group show of work by W.S. Murray, Cedric Morris, Frank Dobson, Marion Dorn, Ossip Zadkine, and Duncan Grant (1924) and a retrospective of Kauffer's posters (1925), both at 60 Gower Street.
- 60 For an account of ALS activities in the field of the visual arts, see Hopkinson, "The Arts League of Service in London".
- 61 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 13, 15, and 60.
- 62 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 13.
- 63 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 58, quoting the *Morning Post*; "The ALS Travelling Theatre", *Hendon & Finchley Times*, 15 January 1926, 9; *Travelling Players*, 21, quoting the *Westminster Gazette*. For a recent reimagining of the ALS, see *Players and Gentlemen* (2012), a play by Frank Hatt.
- 64 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 2. She states that the Travelling Theatre programme included "Columbine's Choice, a ballet-trio of the Pierrot-Harlequin type, that I had previously produced in India", Elder, *Travelling Players*, 31.
- 65 For the cultural history of Theosophy, see the research project *Enchanted Modernities: Theosophy, Modernism and the Arts, c. 1875–1960*, History of Art Research Portal, University of York, <https://hoaportal.york.ac.uk/hoaportal/enchanted-modernities.jsp>; and Christine Ferguson and Andrew Radford, *The Occult Imagination in Britain, 1875–1947* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2018). Margaret Morris and her mother were both members of the Theosophical Society. There were close connections between the Margaret Morris School and the Garden City Theosophical School (renamed the Arundale School), and both were promoted by the leading Theosophist, Josephine Ransom. See Richard Emerson, *Rhythm & Colour: Hélène Vanel, Lois Hutton & Margaret Morris* (Edinburgh: Golden Hare, 2018), 46. Elder mentions that there was a Theosophists circle within the Arts League of Service; see *Travelling Players*, 8. The Theosophist Daniel Nicol Dunlop was member of the Plough Club. The connections between Theosophy and the circle of W.B. Yeats are explored in Helena Čapková, "The Hawk Princess at the Hawk's Well: Neo-Noh and the Idea of a Universal Japan", in Charlotte Ashby et al. (eds), *Imagined Cosmopolis: Internationalism and Cultural Exchange, 1870s–1920s* (Oxford: Peter Lang, 2019).
- 66 "On the Watch-Tower", *The Theosophist: A Magazine of Brotherhood, Oriental Philosophy, Art, Literature and Occultism* 39, no. 1 (March 1918), 594. The event is described also in "Greek Dancing at Adyar", *Adyar Bulletin* (1918): 56–61. Elder published an article promoting Margaret Morris dancing: "Movement, and the Culture of Expression", *The Theosophist* (March 1918): 616–631, which was revised as *Dance: A National Art* (Adyar: Theosophical Publishing House, 1918). Both publications are illustrated with photographs of her students striking Margaret Morris poses.
- 67 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 7, and throughout for an account of ALS tours.
- 68 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 11, 30, 64, and 84.
- 69 *Bulletin of the Arts League of Service* (1920): 1–3.
- 70 For the housing problem, see Eleanor Elder, *Travelling Players*, 6. For the siting of these developments, see the catalogue entry: "M339 Design for a block of studios and studio-flats, Chelsea, London", *Mackintosh Architecture: Context, Making and Meaning*, www.mackintosh-architecture.gla.ac.uk.
- 71 Elder, *Travelling Players*, 5.
- 72 On the modernity of the Arts League of Service, see Fox, *British Art and the First World War*, 150. Goossens lecture was published as a pamphlet: *Modern Tendencies in Music* (London: Arts League of Service, 1919).
- 73 His role in the production of the book is recounted by Maxwell Armfield, "My World and I—the Cotswolds and London in War" (unpublished, 1970), 49–50, Tate Archive: TGA 976/3/2/10.
- 74 For the campaign for a National Theatre see Simon Callow, Helen Osborne, and Trevor Nunn, *The National* (London: Nick Hern Books, 1997). Whitworth tells his own story in *The Making of a National Theatre* (London: Faber & Faber, 1951).
- 75 *Drama: A Magazine of the Theatre and Allied Arts* (July 1919), inside back cover and 22.
- 76 Edward Gordon Craig, *The Art of the Theatre* (Edinburgh: T.N. Foulis, 1905). The League's library incorporated Craig's personal collection, see E. Martin Browne, "The British Drama League", *Education Theatre Journal* 5, no. 3 (October 1953), 204. Whitworth's declaration of the "Objects of the League" at its opening meeting is given in *Drama*, 22.
- 77 Geoffrey Whitworth, *The Theatre of My Heart* (London: Victor Gollancz, 1938), 14.
- 78 Daniel Rosenthal, *The National Theatre Story* (London: Oberon Books, 2013), 34.
- 79 Armfield remembered that "Geoffrey was one of [the Clarissa Club's] most enthusiastic admirers, as of ours"; see Armfield, "My World and I", 42.
- 80 In 1906, Whitworth secured his first editorial job at *The Burlington Magazine*, which had been co-founded in 1903 by Roger Fry, the artist and critic at the centre of the Bloomsbury group (see Fry's portrait of Whitworth below for their ongoing connection). As Editor to Chatto & Windus, Whitworth commissioned work by the Bloomsbury writers Lytton Strachey and Clive Bell, while Gilbert Cannan and E.M. Forster, also associated with the group, wrote for his magazine *The Open Window*.

- 81 The League's statutes included a commitment to: "undertake a research into theatrical movements and activities in Foreign countries. For this purpose a continual supply of Foreign literature bearing on subject will be secured, and arrangements will be made for correspondents in the principal cities of the world. It is hoped also, by means of these correspondents and otherwise, to promote a greater interest in good British plays on the Continent and elsewhere." *Drama: A Magazine of the Theatre and Allied Arts* (July 1919), front matter.
- 82 Geoffrey Whitworth, *Theatre in Action* (London: The Studio, 1938), 11. Whitworth's various internationalising projects are discussed in F.S. Boas, "The British Drama League and Its Founder", *Drama the Quarterly Theatre Review* 23 (Winter 1951): 14-16; and recorded in his file in the Bristol Theatre Collection (Mander and Mitchenson Collection). His *Who Was Who* entry (2007) notes his work for the Universal Society of the Theatre, and for UNESCO.
- 83 See the V&A catalogue entry, <http://collections.vam.ac.uk/item/O37609/geoffrey-whitworth-painting-fry-roger-eliot/>, accessed 24 December 2018.
- 84 Boas, "The British Drama League and Its Founder", 15.
- 85 Paul Nash complained of Craig's "monomania" in a letter to Gordon Bottomley, 20 March 1924, in Claude Colleer Abbott and Anthony Bertram (eds), *Poet and Painter: Being the Correspondence between Gordon Bottomley and Paul Nash, 1910-1946* (London: Geoffrey Cumberlege, Oxford University Press, 1955), 177.
- 86 Browne, "The British Drama League", 206.

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The Ballet of the Nations

Impermanence

Authors

Impermanence is a Bristol based dance company that has performed throughout the UK and in Europe.

Cite as

Impermanence, "*The Ballet of the Nations*", *British Art Studies*, Issue 11, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-11/botn>

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 1.

Impermanence, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018, 50 minutes.

This project was initiated by Dr Grace Brockington (University of Bristol) whose continued involvement has been instrumental. It has also benefited from partnerships with the Paul Mellon Centre for Studies in British Art, the University of Bristol, and the Unity Theatre Trust.

Based on the book *The Ballet of the Nations* by Vernon Lee

Directed by: Roseanna Anderson and Joshua Ben-Tovim

Director of Photography: Jack Offord

Production Design: Pam Tait

Composer: Robert Bentall

Producer: Gwenfair Hawkins, Kim Heron, Joshua Ben-Tovim, Roseanna Anderson

Executive Producer: Jack Tarling and Grace Brockington

Editor: Duncan Wood

Cast: Billy Zane (Narrator), Sonya Cullingford (Satan), Peter Clements (Ballet Master Death); Featured Dancers: Harry Alexander, Alessandro Marzotto Levy, Tilly Webber, Lennie, Roseanna Anderson, Joshua Ben-Tovim

Major Sponsor: Arts Council England



Costumes and Production

Ella Margolin and Pam Tait

Authors

Cite as

Ella Margolin and Pam Tait, "Costumes and Production", *British Art Studies*, Issue 11, <https://dx.doi.org/10.17658/issn.2058-5462/issue-11/costumes>

Interview

Production designer Pam Tait speaks with Ella Margolin about the costumes and set design of Impermanence's *The Ballet of the Nations*. How did the specifics of Vernon Lee's text and Maxwell Armfield's illustrations influence the look and feel of Tait's costumes, and how were aspects of visual culture across different periods used to characterise the players?

Ella: At what point did you first become involved in The Ballet of the Nations?

Pam: I heard about it around six months before we started. By the time we got the Arts Council grant, I had read Vernon Lee's text and had a good think—and that long lead-in was very valuable.

Ella: What sort of brief were you given?

Pam: We had an enormously productive first meeting with Grace. She gave us a lot of context and enshrined certain things before we started: that there should be costumes with patterning all over, in the manner of Maxwell Armfield's illustrations to *The Ballet of the Nations*—he was drawing here on his own practice as a costume designer; that the Nations should be in paper costumes, because they would have to tear each other to shreds; and that there should be references to “classical, medieval, biblical or savage costumes”, as Lee specifies in the text ([Fig. 1](#), [Fig. 2](#), and [Fig. 3](#)). We were closely following the text.

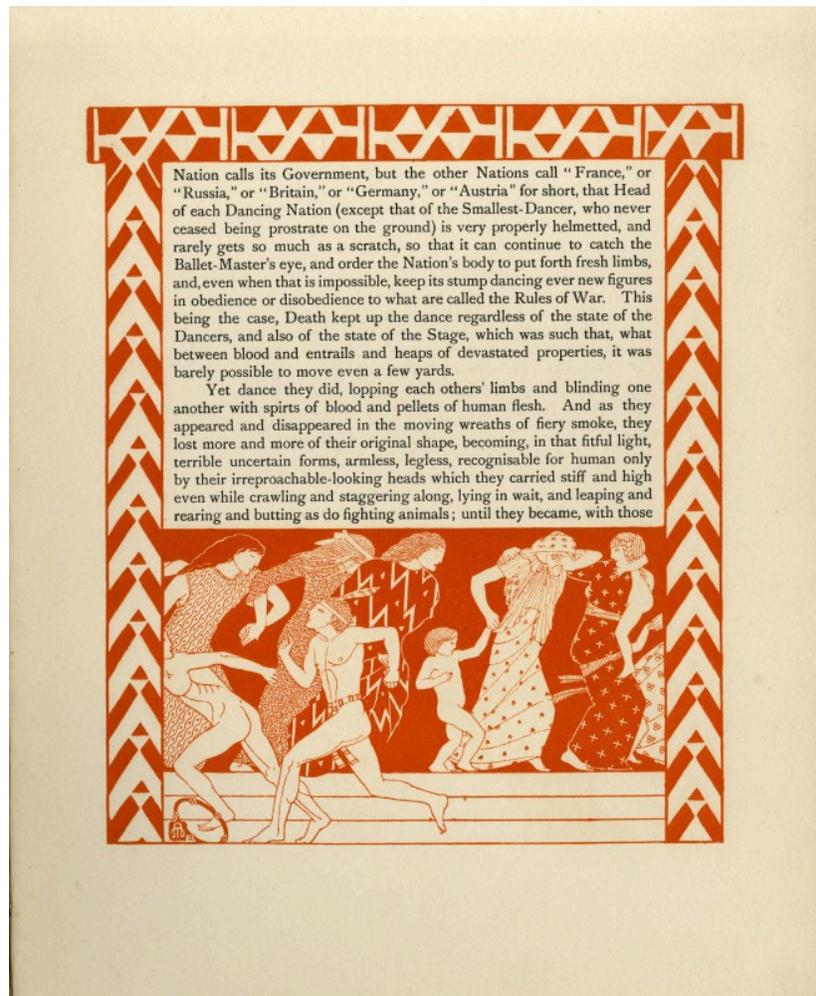


Figure 1.

Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality*, with a Pictorial Commentary by Maxwell Ashby Armfield (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), unpaginated. Digital image courtesy of Chatto & Windus, Penguin Random House UK/The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.



Figure 2.

Film Still, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Idealism and Adventure sit to the far left, behind blindfolded Heroism. Fear, Suspicion, and Panic wear costumes influenced by the patterned textiles in Armfield's illustrations. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

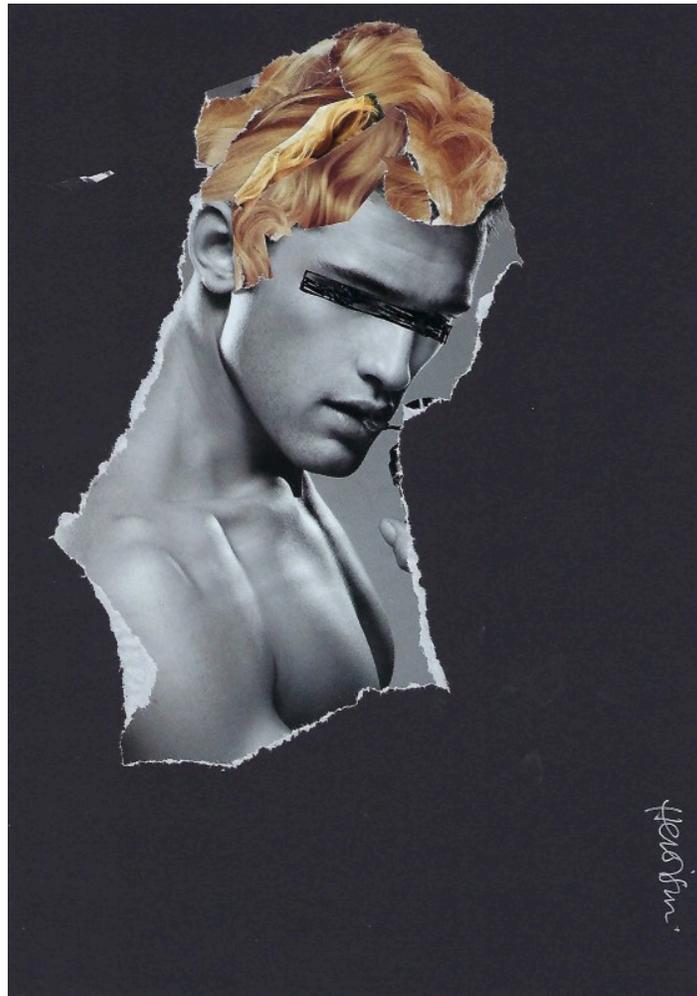


Figure 3.

Pam Tait, Sketch for *Heroism*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Pam Tait



Figure 4.
Pam Tait, Sketch for Adventure, 2018. Digital image
courtesy of Pam Tait.



Figure 5.

Pam Tait, Sketch for Idealism, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Pam Tait.

Ella: Alongside the text, did any particular visual source material inspire the costumes?

Pam: I teach costume history, and it was lovely to make things drawing on that knowledge. With *Self-Righteousness*, for instance, I was quite anxious to invoke some of the context of 1910, and thought about whom Vernon Lee would have looked back to as being self-righteous. The great religious controversies came to mind, and the preachers who earned hundreds and thousands of pounds in the 1870s, so I looked to the 1880s. *Idealism* and *Adventure* had to be medieval because in the text they are “very magnificent” and “of noblest bearing, if a little over-dressed” and they carry a silver trumpet and a woodland horn ([Fig. 4](#) and [Fig. 5](#)). The Nations are of course modelled after chess pieces, and the shape of the hats they wear is taken from the very earliest hood that was ever made in, I don’t know, the twelfth century. So, it was like a jigsaw. Often nobody will know the

references, but I like having some consonance between the layers, like in music, a theme that goes through. That is rather delicious for people, if they do notice.

Ella: How did you go about designing the costumes?

Pam: Well, for Satan, there is a line about the delicate metal tracery of his wings. I was very keen on representing that, and wanted to use melted bin bags because you can get them to resemble lace or wrought iron.

Originally, I was going to put Satan in a red under-gown with melted bin bag feathers on top ([Fig. 6](#)). But because it was Sonya, who is very delicate, it seemed ridiculous to put her in red. It wouldn't suit her colouring. Then you inevitably fall into evening wear, so she ended up being armoured because I wanted that thread running through the costumes, linking Satan to Idealism and Adventure ([Fig. 7](#), [Fig. 8](#), and [Fig. 9](#)). But I had to wait for the casting of both Satan and Death, because the character of the actor would necessarily dictate the costume, which is why they changed a lot between sketches and the final version ([Fig. 10](#) and [Fig. 11](#)).



Figure 6.

Pam Tait, Sketch for Satan, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Pam Tait.



Figure 7.
Pam Tait, Sketch for Satan, 2018. Digital image courtesy
of Pam Tait.

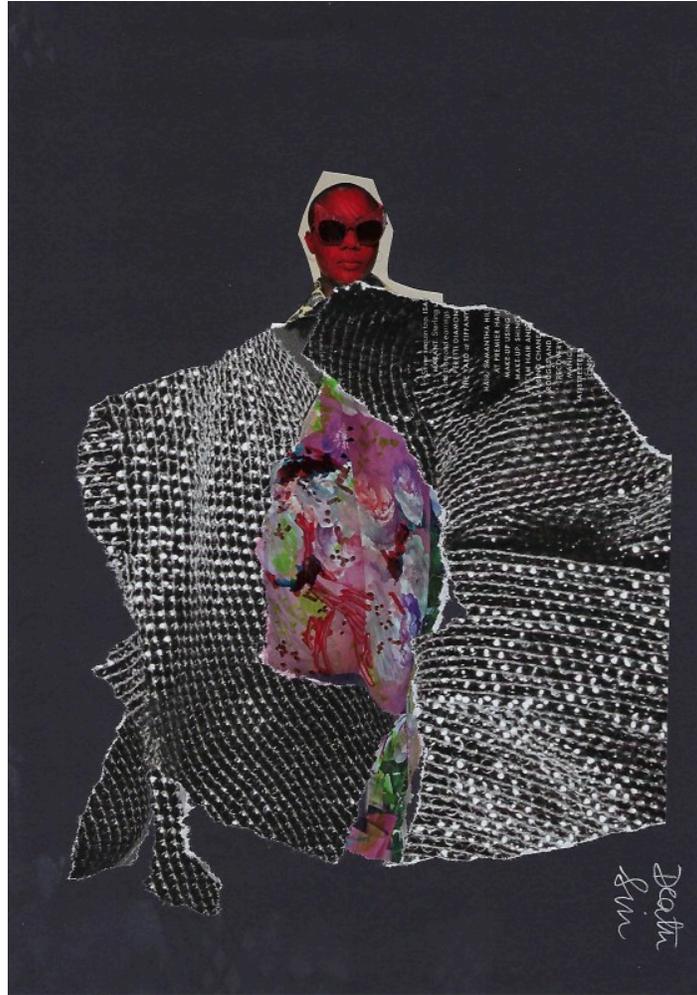


Figure 8.
Pam Tait, Sketch for Satan, 2018.



Figure 9.
Film Still, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.



Figure 10.
Pam Tait, Sketch for Ballet Master Death, 2018. Digital
image courtesy of Pam Tait.



Figure 11.

Film Still, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

Ella: Your process sounds similar to how Rob approaches composing, and even Impermanence choreography—quoting sources, deconstructing and then reconstructing them ...

Pam: Yes, absolutely. When you put good roots down, you get a good result. It is easy to be led astray but *you* have to be the still centre. You have to see the text and vision coming together.

Ella: Did attending the rehearsals influence your work?

Pam: I always like to be in rehearsal because there are practical elements that come out of it. You can propose a costume but dancers will always want their waists to show, so they immediately put waistbands on the Nations' costumes; and then you discover that their hats fall back or that the costumes are too hot (Fig. 12). At one point, I noticed a big mistake with the set. I thought we would use paper trees, which is ludicrous because there was loads of dancing going on, so I just went out and bought 54 metres of white nylon and painted it in one day (Fig. 13, Fig. 14, and Fig. 15).

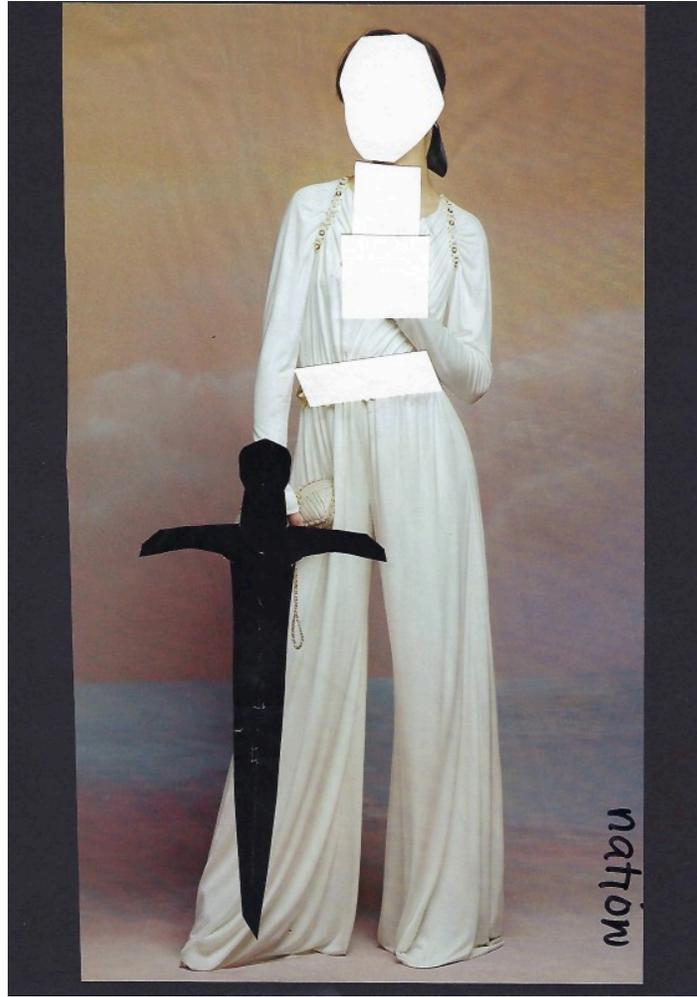


Figure 12.
Pam Tait, Sketch for the Nations, 2018. Digital image
courtesy of Pam Tait.



Figure 13.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Ray, Pam's assistant, works on the "trees" to be suspended from rigging in Jacobs Wells Baths. The 54 metres of white nylon were prepared in just one day. A meticulous production line was set up, and operated silently in the back of the hall whilst the dancers worked on choreography. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

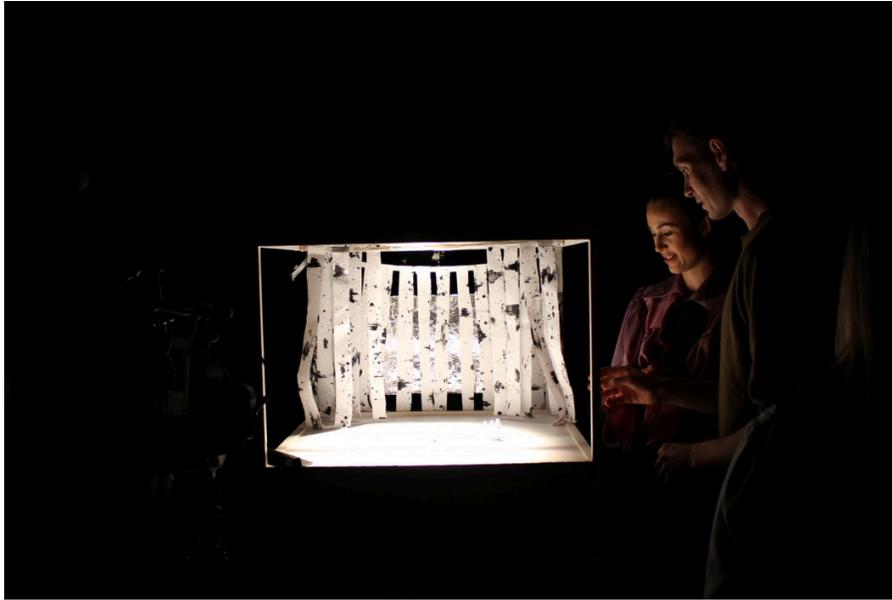


Figure 14.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Joshua and Roseanna pictured with the "toy theatre", a small-scale reconstruction of the Jacobs Wells Baths set design. The nations were symbolised by white pawns and manipulated on camera by Roseanna in Ballet Master Death's costume. The various positions of the dancers in the Nations' routines were transposed in miniature scale to create direct parallels between the dancers and chess pieces. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 15.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Alessandro performs his solo amongst the rigged paper “trees”. For this, the final day of shooting in the Baths, the nylon trees were replaced with the near-identical paper ones that had originally been planned, allowing the Nations to rip them down from the rigging. In the film, the difference between the two sets of trees is almost imperceptible. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

Ella: After the filming was done, what changed as a result of the edit?

Pam: In watching the rough cut, the chorus dancing—which you would imagine would be the cream of the crop—actually faded into the distance. Joshua and Roseanna had chosen a deliberately contextless black studio and white studio, and when those appear alongside scenes with plentiful context, they can just disappear. The film is kind of like a painting, or several paintings, and it works on different levels. The trick is how you control those levels. When the rough cut came, because it hadn’t been graded yet, all the costumes became kind of treacly and sepia. I was frustrated because they are intentionally quite strong colours: Pompeian, Roman, and Greek colours. I was really concentrating on getting that balance of colours, and limiting them. There are so many layers to the story. You have intimate conversations between Satan and Death, which are kind of arch and Edwardian and a bit difficult to understand. You have the dancing, the Dietrich, the classical chorus, and the orchestra, so the film is not consistent.

Ella: Do you think that your clothing influenced their dance?

Pam: Yes, Impermanence are really responsive. I always like to play with the kinetic effect of the costume and how it can become part of the dance, which doesn’t come naturally to a dancer because they’ve spent their lives in

leotards showing every inch of skin. And of course, it is very important in dance to see the line of the under arm and the waist because that orientates you to what that dancer is doing. But Impermanence are so versatile, you can push them. It is just gravy to watch somebody inhabit a costume and push it—I think a good costume will always take the performer beyond their comfort zone.



Composing

Robert Bentall

Authors

Cite as

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Interview

Composer Robert Bentall speaks with the *British Art Studies* editorial team about the score he wrote for Impermanence's *The Ballet of the Nations*. How was the composition shaped by sampling the sonic textures of the period? What musical information is contained within Vernon Lee's original 1915 text, and how did it influence Bentall's score?

BAS: How did you come to score The Ballet of the Nations?

Rob: In May 2017, I collaborated with Impermanence on the research and development phase of an adaptation of *Baal*, the first play by Bertolt Brecht. The collaboration was very successful, after which Joshua and Roseanna discussed *The Ballet of the Nations* project with me, suggesting that my music might fit the film. They subsequently invited me to meet Grace in November of that year. She talked us through the historic background of Vernon Lee's text, of which I knew very little. I was fascinated by Grace's description of the text, and Lee's life more broadly, and was keen to be involved. I came at the project from the angle of a creative practitioner who had some experience working with dancers, and was seeing the historic material for the first time.

BAS: Can you describe your practice prior to Baal? Had you made music for a dance production before?

Rob: No, my earlier compositional work was as a solo artist and stemmed from my practice as an electroacoustic composer, which developed during my doctorate at the Sonic Arts Research Centre at Queen's University, Belfast. I was writing fixed-media electronic music, exploring themes of genre hybridisation by blending elements of folk, ambient, pop, and *musique concrète* styles within multichannel surround sound compositions. In 2015, during a period supported by the charity Sound and Music through their Embedded Composer scheme, I started writing pieces for the *nyckelharpa*, a Swedish 16-stringed traditional fiddle, combined with electronic sound (Fig. 1). I had also begun collaborating on interdisciplinary projects—I worked with Knaïve Theatre on a production of Karel Čapek's *War with the Newts*, and with video artist Heather Lander on an audio-visual piece titled *Nearer Future*.¹



Figure 1.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Robert Bentall treats the cast to a short nyckelharpa concert outside of the Loco Club. Rob was present for much of the shooting and rehearsal process, allowing him to compose and adapt music in direct response to the material. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

BAS: How did the elements of collaboration and dance in The Ballet of the Nations change your approach to composing?

Rob: My composing for *The Ballet of the Nations* was driven firstly by the text, which is quite an unusual process. It isn't standard practice to score a film without having seen a cut of the video first. But all of us—in choreography, cinematography—were working on the same premise, which was thinking about Vernon Lee, and examining the quirks and intricacies of the text as a starting point for a creative piece. So, my first ideas for the sound were extracted from *The Ballet of the Nations* text. It's a rich source of sonic information; there are many instruments described as being performed by the cast of *Human Passions*, including the harmonium, pianola, woodland horn, and bass—all of these appear in the score. Some of the music, notably the sections for the Smallest Dancer, was written during the filming process.

The elements of dance also do change my approach to composing. When working on something for *Impermanence*, I am often thinking about textures or rhythms that might work alongside choreography. Working on a film was slightly different again—I was considering, in the score that some sections might want to be more muted, in order to let the dialogue sing through.

BAS: Joshua and Roseanna have described how deeply Grace's research shaped the choreography. Did that context inform the film's sound, as well?

Rob: Absolutely. I spoke with Grace about composers whose music was often scored for dance and ballet contemporary with Vernon Lee, and from around the time that Lee wrote *The Ballet of the Nations*, even if removed from her specific milieu. I fixated on that period, from 1914 to 1918, and Grace mentioned the work of a composer named Eugene Goossens, of whom I knew very little. His *Kaleidoscope Suite* (1917) for orchestra intrigued me with its rich, expressive opening chords. The opening scenes of the film, where Grace appears as Vernon Lee and describes the proverbially bourgeois Victorian age, are scored by computer manipulations of this composition. This music is constructed from a sample of one chord in the opening sequence of the *Kaleidoscope Suite*, which has been extended in length by approximately one thousand times via computer processing. The chord is then surrounded by an arrangement I made, featuring primarily double bass and bassoon sections suggesting harmonic changes against the static chord derived from Goossens.

BAS: You mentioned your academic training—what is your own research process like?

Rob: First, research is a process of listening. It's trawling through musical works to find appropriate material for use in a project; in this case, music relevant to dancing and to the period itself. Often research involves locating sounds lost, forgotten, or out of fashion. Second, research is practice—finding new combinations of timbres through arrangement, and examining how old and new technologies can be combined musically. As I mentioned before, for *The Ballet of the Nations*, I also explored links between text and music by extracting sonic material referenced directly in the prose.

BAS: Did you use a lot of samples for the soundtrack?

Rob: Absolutely, if you define sampling as reusing musical material from works created by other artists. One noticeable example in the score is my sampling of a song titled "Kaval Sviri" by the Bulgarian State Television Female Choir (Fig. 2) . I was looking to score the chorus sections of the dancers that appear at several points in the film, and Roseanna suggested something musically related to a "chorus". Singing of any sort was not mentioned by Lee, so I had free rein.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 2.

Film Clip, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018, 4.05 to 4.33. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

Eventually, I found this tune and slowed it down to half its speed in a digital sampler, added a synthesiser part, and looped a few of the sections I particularly liked so you never hear the whole track. It's basic language, and the sense of a powerful chorus is still there, but the harmonies feel more exposed given how long they take to elapse.

Another key sample is taken from Debussy's *Poisson d'or* (1907). I chose five piano chords, reordered them, and manipulated them to sound very distant, as if from within an ecclesiastical space (Fig. 3). The track jumped out at me because Grace found it had been used in the Chelsea theatres at the turn of the century.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 3.

Film Clip, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018, 32.30 to 33.30. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

BAS: How does that sit with being a composer of electronic music and sound?

Rob: Sampling is inherent to my recent working process; I often transform and reuse material from my own work, as well as from earlier pieces by other artists. Sampling often sits alongside digital processing, which changes the duration, texture, or timbre of the original sound. And of course, it's in conjunction with sounds I record and produce myself.

BAS: Sampling older material is quite interesting in relation to this project—Vernon Lee is not exactly a household name in the way that First World War poets like Wilfred Owen are, and pulling sounds out of the archive to give them new relevance seems like another facet of this approach.

Rob: Yes, there is a natural sympathy there. The internet, with resources such as YouTube and Spotify, has made an impossibly large archive of musical information very easy to access. It's easier to find things that you might otherwise never have discovered, but there is still far more than a listener will ever get through. The score—drawing upon Bulgarian choirs, instruments in the text, Russian folk songs, and the Swedish nyckelharpa—very much functions as a little archive of my musical inspirations during this project.

BAS: Is there a written score for electronic music?

Rob: Not as a score with notation in the Western classical sense. Instead, you can visualise the score as a series of layered sound clips organised in Ableton Live, my chosen software. Coloured rectangles each represent a different

block of sound (Fig. 4) and some notes can be represented within a digital piano roll (Fig. 5). The sounds in the score are either played into the computer with a MIDI controller (Fig. 6) or a MIDI keyboard (Fig. 7).



Figure 4.
Robert Bentall, A Portion of the Score for 'The Ballet of the Nations'
Visualised in Ableton Live, 2018.

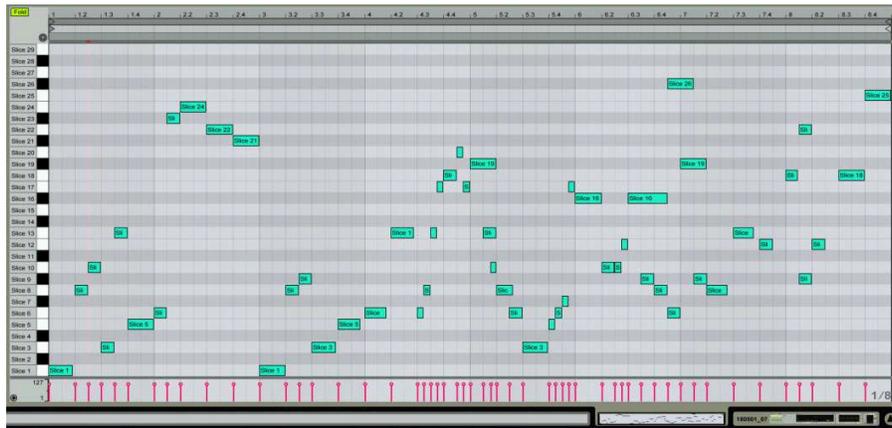


Figure 5.
Robert Bentall, A Portion of the Score for 'The Ballet of the Nations'
Visualised within a digital Piano Roll in Ableton Live, 2018.



Figure 6.

Robert Bentall, *Playing Sounds for the Score Using a MIDI Controller*, 2018.



Figure 7.

Robert Bentall, *Playing Sounds for the Score Using a MIDI Keyboard*, 2018.

BAS: You mentioned that several historic instruments are used in the score. Can you describe a few examples?

Rob: In the first half of the film, I drew on the sound worlds of the text itself, which mentions instruments including the harmonium, the woodland horn, the double bass, and the pianola. The harmonium plays a key role—it features prominently in the score when Ballet Master Death is starting the dance. For me, its sound conjures up a sort of infernal metallic quality that suits the scene. The harmonium presents an obsessive three-chord figure that mutates through a few stark modulations. You get a sense of pulsation and energy as the film’s narrative announces the start of war. I don’t play the harmonium that well, but got what I needed to score the film. This is in opposition to the nyckelharpa, which is a key part of the score and my musical practice more generally. The pianola, or player piano, is also an

unusual instrument to use in a score. For this sound, I used a mixture of piano and synthetic harpsichord timbres to generate a somewhat tinny keyboard sound that features prominently in a section of the choreography where the Nations dance together in formation ([Fig. 8](#)).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 8.

Film Clip, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018, 24.45 to 25.19. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

BAS: In that process of honing a sound, how many drafts or iterations might exist for a section like this?

Rob: It varies. The harmonium-led music came out very naturally and only featured minor changes from my first draft to the third and final one. The final version, which came about as Joshua and Roseanna were looking at the cut, involves a sharp silence when the Ballet Master waves his wand to create a pause—I learned a lot about linking dramatic effects in sound and picture whilst the film was being edited ([Fig. 9](#)).

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 9.

Film Clip, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018, 12.17 to 13.02. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

BAS: Did you introduce any new instruments to the sonic world that Vernon Lee describes?

Towards the end of the film, I drew more on my own creative practice with the introduction of the nyckelharpa, which is an 800-year-old 16-stringed Swedish traditional keyed fiddle.² The sound is very resonant, thanks to its twelve sympathetic strings. I discovered it whilst doing artistic residencies in Sweden in 2013–14 and started learning it soon after. In Lee’s text, and in the film, Satan describes the music for the ballet as being simultaneously too archaic and ultramodern, which I think the nyckelharpa articulates perfectly. It’s an ancient instrument that sounds surprisingly modern to my ear. I play it as an improvising contemporary musician, having also learnt some traditional performance techniques. For *The Ballet of the Nations*, I wrote some new melodies for the nyckelharpa, which are very present in the latter-half of the score. There are multiple recordings of the instrument layered on top of each other.

BAS: You were on set for the filming—what impact did seeing the dancing, on location, have on your choices for the sound?

Rob: Certain scenes were shot at Sandham Memorial Chapel, which has a mural cycle painted by Stanley Spencer commemorating the dead of the First World War. I had already composed some music for those sequences, but I took the nyckelharpa with me, and in the space, my ideas changed. My first sensation was of being overwhelmed and I was especially struck by the wall showing a mass of crosses. Listening to the acoustics of the space, I also wondered if the music I had planned originally would feel dense. So I got the instrument out and wrote something quickly, improvising around a new melody (Fig. 10). In the editing phase, I wove this new music around Satan's speech in the chapel, creating a kind of call and response between the instrument and Satan's dialogue and movement (Fig. 11).



Figure 10.

Ella Margolin, Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations, 2018. Robert Bentall works on a composition in Sandham Memorial Chapel. Two days prior to this shoot, Tilly Webber, a dancer, had said that the music reminded her of church music circa The comparison was not casual. Playing on liturgical elements in the text, Rob had utilised “hymn-like chord progressions” to evoke the grandeur and hymnal qualities to which she referred. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

[View this illustration online](#)

Figure 11.

Film Clip, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018, 33.31 to 35.13. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

BAS: Are resonance and that emotional quality connected?

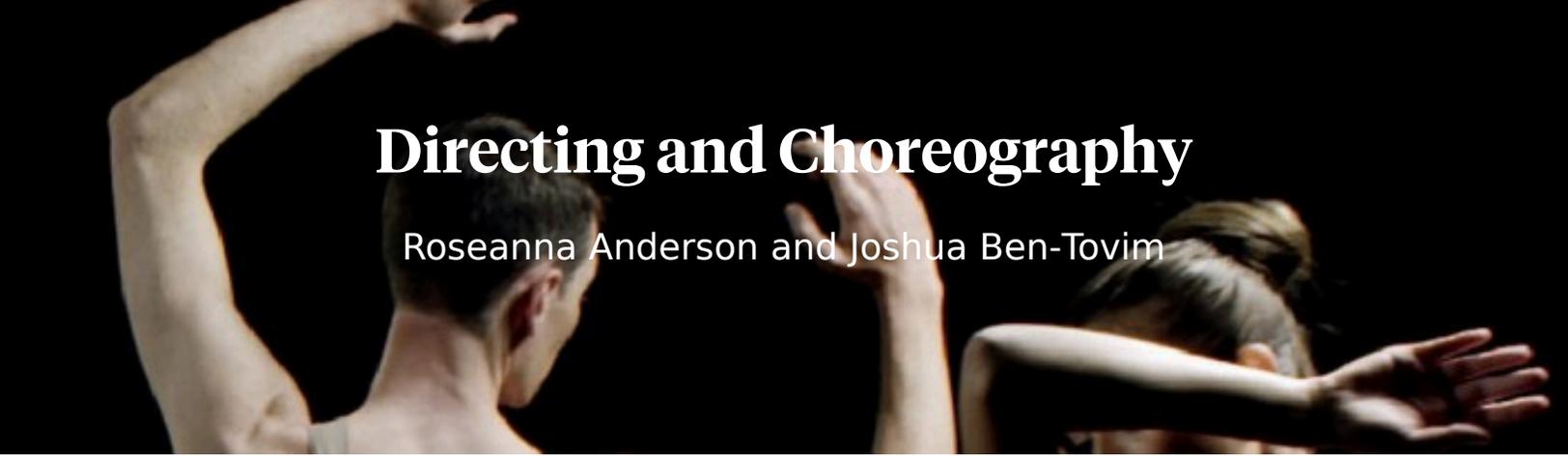
Rob: For me, the resonant quality of liturgical spaces is very emotive. I love hearing instruments played in churches and cathedrals. The intense resonance of the nyckelharpa makes it sound as if it's always being played in a chapel, and I find it elicits a real emotional and physical response. I hope this enhances the drama of the film, and conveys some aspect of my affective experience of making music to its viewers.

BAS: Sometimes it seems that the music you wrote complements the dance very closely. How much did you have to consider synchronising with the dancers, in a technical sense?

Rob: The score's ability to punctuate the dance really came about through my time spent on set, watching the action and the choreographed sections come to life. I could write music accordingly, or alter the tempo of music I'd already written to match the scenes better. But we also worked the other way around—the choreography for the section at 24:45 in the film is sequenced to music I wrote before filming. The process was collaborative, and on set I was tinkering with compositions, describing the score I envisioned, or just cogitating—watching the dancers and actors, and examining how they moved and spoke. All of that observation filtered into the final result.

Footnotes

- 1 *Nearer Future*, for nyckelharpa, electronics and video, has documentation here: <https://vimeo.com/247005482>.
- 2 A high-quality video of the nyckelharpa playing traditional Swedish music can be heard here: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WwCEl4Y8fDk>.



Directing and Choreography

Roseanna Anderson and Joshua Ben-Tovim

Authors

Co-founder of Impermanence

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Cite as

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Interview

Writers, directors, producers, and dancers Roseanna Anderson and Joshua Ben-Tovim speak with the *British Art Studies* editorial team about choreographing Impermanence's *The Ballet of the Nations*. How did art-historical research enable Impermanence to creatively rearticulate Vernon Lee's 1915 pacifist publication, and to what extent did this shape their collaborative working methods?

BAS: How did you first become involved with this project?

Joshua: Grace Brockington contacted us because somebody at Bristol University knew about our work. Initially, she wanted a dance company to help her interpret the *The Ballet of the Nations* and perhaps realise it. I had never really interacted with an art historian, and for that first year, each time we met, it felt like she was opening up a whole new way of thinking, looking at things, and remembering. She brought books and different pamphlets with her and gradually we grew more and more enchanted with this world that she was fascinated by.

BAS: So the collaboration started off being very broad and ideas-based. At what point could you imagine the reality of the project? Where you could see the bigger picture and how you might realise it?

Joshua: It crystallised slowly and organically. First, we imagined it as a live performance, perhaps in a gallery space alongside the objects associated with the text. But meeting *British Art Studies* as a potential partner was the real penny drop moment, which pushed us to envision it being hosted online. After that, rather than thinking of our output as a film of a live production, it made more sense to actually conceptualise it as material made specifically for a digital screen.

BAS: Had Impermanence worked in film before?

Roseanna: We have filmed aspects of our work in the past—interviews, or clips of us dancing—but we have never made a film as the core artistic product. The scale of this film was also completely different and new, working with a full film crew and the scale of production that comes with it.

BAS: How did choreographing for film differ from choreographing for a live performance?

Roseanna: I found it really different, because when you're staging something you can't control where a person looks. They're going to focus on wherever they feel drawn to, or watch the whole picture. So right from the start, it felt like an opportunity to decide which details we wanted to bring out in each

moment. In some scenes, we were really choreographing with a particular shot in mind, where the cameras would all come into focus on a detail of the movement, and then open back out. Another dimension was how the camera moved, and how that relates to the dancers moving and physically travelling through space. There's one bit where the camera is moving forwards to the dancers, and they move backwards in response. So that was fun to think about—a kind of dance with the camera.

BAS: And were there other models or sources of inspiration—in terms of dancing on camera—that helped you think through this project?

Roseanna: Oh, I like looking at Busby Berkeley films; they're definitely an inspiration (Fig. 1).

Joshua: Yeah, there is an amazing framing and logic in the way those old Hollywood films like *Singing in the Rain* show dance. Working on *The Ballet of the Nations*, we were really seeing those big musical numbers and iconic dance sequences in a new way.

Roseanna: And how they use the environment—they use all these different settings, and show how choreography can be really matched to the places where you're filming.



Figure 1.

Film still, *Gold Diggers of 1933*, scene choreographed by Busby Berkeley, directed by Mervyn LeRoy, 1933. Digital image courtesy of Granger and Bridgeman Images.

BAS: That's quite interesting, because those big Hollywood films are historic examples. Today, do you feel this film does something quite new in the realm of contemporary dance? Is filmed dance also happening elsewhere, or is the live event still seen as the main way to meet audiences?

Joshua: Filmed dance is happening elsewhere: Daniel Hay Gordon and Eleanor Perry, artists with whom we've worked closely in the past, have made beautiful short experimental dance films over the years. These definitely fed into the way we thought about colour, pace, framing, narrative, and abstraction in our film.

At the same time, at a recent university screening, one of the students said that our film mismatched her expectations, because there is a lot of dance film, or filmed dance, but less made in that older model, which is more akin to a musical, where you've got narratives, a plot, and characters as a base, and then dance intersecting with that. I think there's quite a lot of dance films made where bodies, camera movement, and editing are used to create a "pure aesthetic experience", but which can often feel too polished—like a big expanded selfie!

BAS: It seems that, in this style of film-making, you have an advantage being both choreographer and director, because you can plan the shots in relation to movements and other elements of the narrative. But were there any instances where you felt friction between those two roles?

Roseanna: There's sort of another layer as well, of being dancers in the film! I definitely felt the pull between directing and dancing, and it was quite a challenge to shift my focus back and forth, between performing the sequence and watching the take play back on the monitor, then communicating what choreographic and technical adjustments were needed... before checking my hair was still in place for the next take!

Joshua: In a sense, we had to give it a logic, which was that the dance follows the directing. We would highlight the mood or themes to be referenced in a section, in relation to the narrative, and the choreography would follow. It would be interesting to rework that directorial structure—to start with the dance and build the film around that.

BAS: Did you split the choreography between you?

Roseanna: We did, and with all the dancers in the film.

Joshua: We were all responsible for different sections, so that when we got into the studio we would bring some material ready, or at least a way of approaching the scene. Then we would each lead our sessions based on what the scene needed to tell, or the world it needed to inhabit. Sometimes it was

quite structured, with a leader, but often it was quite fun to play and team up, working together in a very relaxed way and building up movements (Fig. 2, Fig. 3, Fig. 4, Fig. 5, Fig. 6, and Fig. 7).



Figure 2.

Ella Margolin, Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations, 2018. Alessandro and Tilly work on a sequence inspired by the “excessive machine” in Roger Vadim’s *Barbarella* (1968). An opening discussion among the dancers about the spectacle of violence and the ejaculatory, orgasmic qualities associated with its display was followed by experimentation with the source material. The choreographed sequence, which was ultimately excluded from the film, closely quoted Jane Fonda’s movements and facial expressions as she suffered the euphoric violence of the “Orgasmatron”. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 3.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Working collaboratively, the dancers construct a series of tableaux, which would come to represent the violence immediately succeeding the destruction of the smallest Nation. Inspired by Rubens's whirling forms, the dancers created static compositions, working outwards from a central point. In rehearsal, Joshua noted that: "the actions need tension, otherwise they're just poses". Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 4.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. In chorus costume, Tilly, Joshua, Lenny, and Alessandro work on a series of poses to be interspersed throughout a mechanical Nations sequence. Alessandro, who lead the rehearsal, moulded and positioned the dancers such that their limbs were layered and distorted, echoing and displacing the violence played out between the Nations. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 5.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018.

Harry works on a routine, choreographed with Roseanna, that expresses elation, freedom, and goodwill. Roseanna choreographed their costumes into the dance as a central element, playing on the buoyancy of the chiffon to amplify the lift of the jumps, and using the floating and fluttering corners of the dress to heighten the flowing quality of the motion. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 6.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Roseanna leads the choreography of a sequence inspired by the song "We're in the Money" from Mervyn LeRoy's film *Gold Diggers of 1933* (1933). The dance pays tribute to the pseudo-Grecian illustrations in the text, and incorporates formations quoted directly from found images from the 1920s. Particular attention was paid in this dance to details such as gaze and posture. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 7.

Ella Margolin, *Behind the Scenes of The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. On the penultimate day of rehearsal, Joshua leads a session in which the dancers consolidate their work. The varying styles and parallel narratives of the film made the choreography difficult to comprehend as a singular unit, so recapping the dances orally and in chronological order served to situate each dance within the wider narrative. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

BAS: So when did you actually meet the book itself, The Ballet of Nations, as an object? Can you remember when you first saw it and whether its aesthetics made an impression on you?

Joshua: Grace brought one of the original copies, with all those beautiful orange-coloured illustrations (Fig. 8). It made a big impression on us—it felt like a real artefact, a relic, a rarity that had a special quality. But it was also Grace’s enthusiasm and the magical way she describes that time, the historic moment in which Vernon Lee was writing *The Ballet of The Nations*. It took a few reads to let the gravity of the text really sink in. The language is quite dense, but the completeness of the allegory, which describes the tragic nature of conflict and its roots in the collective unconscious, was so impressive.

Roseanna: We had already been reflecting on Impermanence’s collaborative working methods, and how it’s important to have a specific thing in the middle of a process—so that everyone can respond to something, rather than the central “idea” existing in someone’s head. And all of a sudden, Grace appeared and brought with her this incredible timeless object!

Joshua: Along with Grace, we ended up feeling the film should honour the book as much as possible, and illuminate the book itself, rather than just using it as a departure point. That's why we kept a lot of the original language in the script. But the story Grace told, about the disjoint between the Maxwell Armfield illustrations and the text—and how Vernon Lee wasn't enamoured by the original images, claiming that Armfield used it as a vehicle to display his own theatrical practice—gave us permission to riff off the notion of an incomplete book, a not totally representative portrayal of the text. It gave us some freedom in how we approached the film and a sort of agency to display our own techniques and aesthetics, rather than recreating something historical.

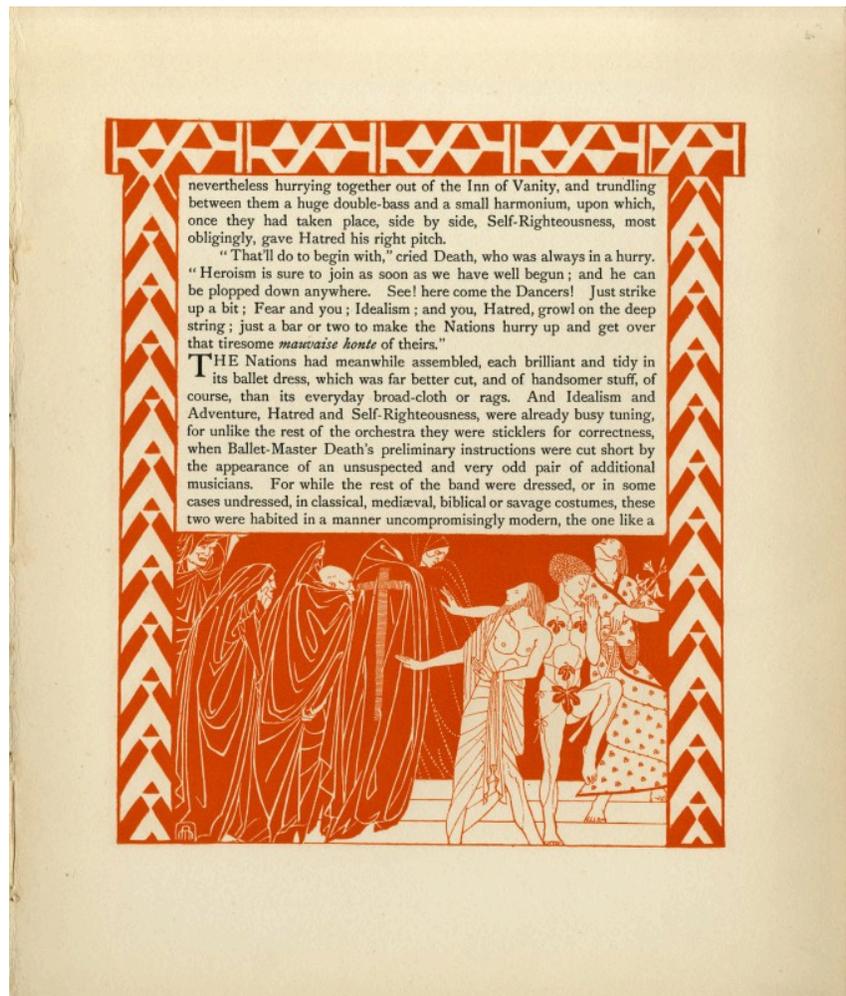


Figure 8.

Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality*, with a Pictorial Commentary by Maxwell Ashby Armfield (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), unpaginated. Illustration design by Maxwell Ashby Armfield. Digital image courtesy of Chatto & Windus, Penguin Random House UK and The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.

BAS: And how much did the context of the commemorations around the end of the First World War influence your thinking about aesthetic choices in the film?

Joshua: I have felt more and more conflicted about this, because to do this project was also to consider pacifism, which is where this text emerged from. I think sometimes pacifism is taken as a given within liberal artistic communities ... But who is actually a pacifist? What do I think about pacifism? What do we think about pacifism? It's a very particular standpoint that often isn't given full examination, but the context and timing of this project made it a brilliant way into thinking about these questions. There is still more mileage in that process for us. There's been such an enormous outpouring of work to commemorate the centenary ... but where does it all fit in relation to the glorification of war, or repainting the memory, or giving beauty to death? I'm really glad we made this film, because all of us had to personally reflect on the First World War and its realities. But it's conflicting and worrying, the amount of beauty and art that's been poured into remembering this awful thing.

BAS: The film ends with a list of all the wars that have taken place since the end of the First World War, a sort of war memorial of its own. When did that idea come about?

Roseanna: That came about in September, during the final weeks of editing. I was thinking about the last sequence, and how to bring it up to the present day. How could we show that this story was from the First World War, and acknowledge our own time, while gesturing to everything in between? We explored adding archival footage but I kept thinking about Vernon Lee's last line "and thus the ballet of the nations is still a-dancing." When we researched and discovered such a long list, it felt like a stark way to point at how the ballet keeps reshaping and reforming itself. Audiences so far have really responded with shock and horror as it conveys the idea of everything continuing ... which is the foreboding prophecy of the text.

BAS: Is there any specific imagery in the film drawn from Grace's research, and your own research, into the visual culture of the First World War?

Roseanna: There are lots of instances where that visual material influenced the choreography and production. As an example, I found footage of an American training video for the First World War online and transformed the movements happening into choreography for the final dance. That dance happens on a beach and we wanted to use the space, and I wondered how they would travel: what were the pathways? So we structured them around the shape of a military insignia from the era.

At another point, I also went to the British Library and requested weekly war magazines and newspapers from 1915, and it was incredible ... a lot of the sequences I choreographed are influenced by their illustrations. One article was about a tug of war, a game that soldiers played on the home front, and that turned into the red rope sequence. And then we also used this image of a soldier and a woman lighting a cigarette off each other, which was quite a romantic and glamorous picture; it was used as the front cover of a magazine ([Fig. 9](#) and [Fig. 10](#)). I was completely overwhelmed by the marketing being employed and there was something compelling about using this imagery as a historic truth.

Joshua: Grace also brought an incredible amount of visual material to the table. A lot of Margaret Morris' photographs inspired some of the poses and frieze-like movements, in the film ([Fig. 11](#)). A big part of our role, with the production designer Pam Tait, was to scan volumes of source imagery and then ask, how do we translate this material into something on bodies, in film, in a space, as part of the storyline? It's been an immensely collaborative project and we have always tried to pursue non-hierarchical and collective forms of authorship. The historical context obviously influenced the score, set design, and costumes, as well, and all of those exchanges were incredibly fluid.



Figure 9.

L'entente Cordiale, cover design (from an original drawing by J. Abbey) for *The War Pictures Weekly* and *The London Illustrated Weekly*, no. 27, Vol. II, 18 February 1915. Collection of The British Library. Digital image courtesy of The British Library Board.



Figure 10.

Film still, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.



Figure 11.

Two student dancers adopt a symmetrical pose at a summer school run by Margaret Morris and John Duncan Fergusson, 1920s, photograph in David Walker, "The Dancer from the Dance: Margaret Morris," *The Library Time Machine* (blog), Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Libraries Local Studies, 31 January, 2013.

<https://rbkclocalstudies.wordpress.com/2013/01/31/the-dancer-from-the-dance-margaret-morris/> Digital image courtesy of Royal Borough of Kensington and Chelsea Libraries Local Studies.

Roseanna: The exchange went in both directions, too. The front cover of *The Ballet of the Nations* has this sort of wrestling pose, with the two men, who have snakes around their thighs (Fig. 12). And it was when Joshua was researching Eadweard Muybridge's photographs, that he realised that actually Armfield had used a Muybridge photograph as the basis for that illustration—a connection that was new to Grace (Fig. 13). That was a really exciting moment, which made us look more into Muybridge's work. And then when we introduce the chorus of dancers, right at the beginning of the film,

the camera pulls away and two male dancers are making this pose from the front cover, followed by a series of chorus poses that all build on Muybridge's photographs (Fig. 14).

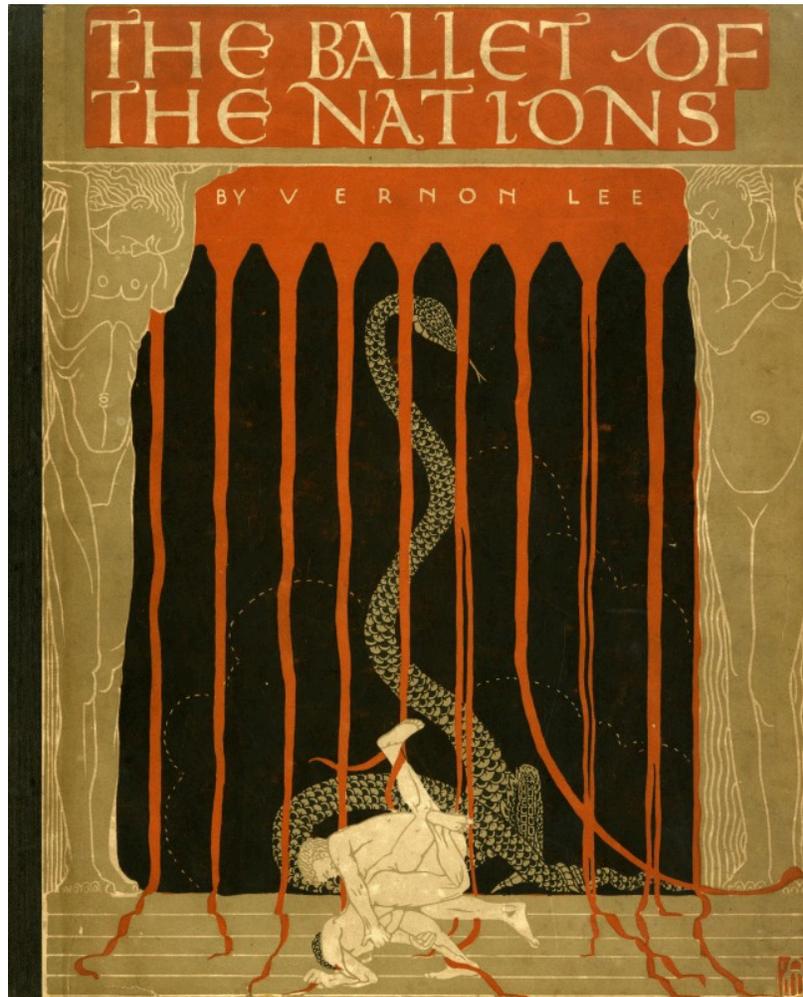


Figure 12.

Vernon Lee, *The Ballet of the Nations: A Present-Day Morality*, with a Pictorial Commentary by Maxwell Ashby Armfield (London: Chatto & Windus, 1915), unpaginated, cover design by Maxwell Ashby Armfield. Digital image courtesy of Chatto & Windus, Penguin Random House UK and The Estate of Maxwell Ashby Armfield.

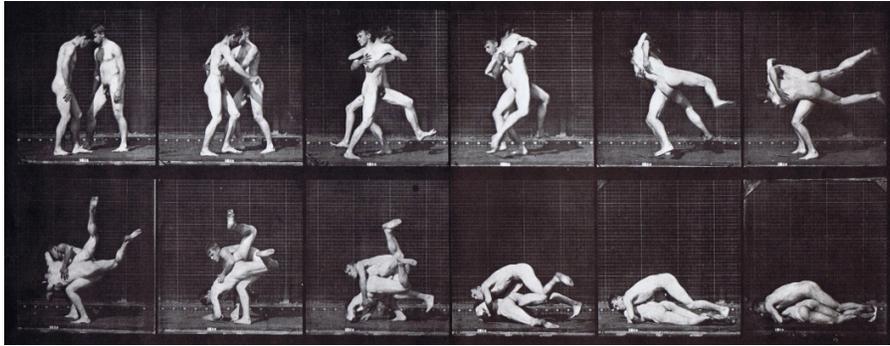


Figure 13.

Eadweard Muybridge, Wrestling; Graeco-Roman, 1887, collotype process. Plate from Eadweard Muybridge, *Animal Locomotion: An Electro-photographic Investigation of Consecutive Phases of Animal Movement, 1872–1885*, (Philadelphia: Published under the auspices of the University of Pennsylvania, 1887) pl. 347.



Figure 14.

Film still, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

BAS: Do you feel like this intensely archival and historical research process has changed your overall approach to choreography? Is the feel and style of the dance in this film very different from projects you've done previously—and how much will it influence your future projects?

Joshua: We want to work with an art historian on every project from now on! We often abstract different media into movement, but the quality, quantity, and relevance of the source material available on this project was incredible. In every new project we try to incorporate whatever techniques or skills we have learned previously, but within different parameters. Our last production for instance was in the round, and we thought a lot about foreground, middle ground, and background, and ensuring each moment could be seen from 360 degrees. So, that style of thinking came with us into the film—a lot of it's about the gaze, isn't it?

Roseanna: *The Ballet of the Nations* has broadened the kinds of atmospheres and feelings that we try to evoke with our movements. The idea that the nations are puppets, and replaceable, for example, really influenced sequences where the style of movement is quite stiff. The project also shifted the emphasis from seeking movements that are as challenging to the body as possible, to ones that fluidly convey an idea. It was more about the overall image, and saying “OK, this idea is being articulated right now, and the movement needs to make that as clear as possible.” And I think, through the collaboration with *British Art Studies*, it’s made us think about how to make our choreography sit more clearly within a narrative, and perhaps become more available to people, which will influence future projects.

BAS: What about communicating your vision as directors to all the various professionals on set? Were you mainly storyboarding?

Joshua: Well, the first thing to say is how incredibly the crew was—they were very supportive and all immensely skilled craftspeople. One of the biggest lessons from this project was realising how specific you need to be when directing a film of this scale. You drill down into incredible levels of detail because you cannot waste time once you’re on set. There are so many stages required to arrive at a shot list, which you then divvy up between the days. The person who really guided us through that was Kim Heron, the first assistant director. She does big-scale shoots and chooses one “charity project” a year to support—and that was us! We had an intense month of pre-production preparation, sketching—and resketching, and resketching—where each of the shots would be precisely on location, how they would be framed, and what should occur ([Fig. 15](#), [Fig. 16](#), [Fig. 17](#), [Fig. 18](#), [Fig. 19](#), and [Fig. 20](#)).

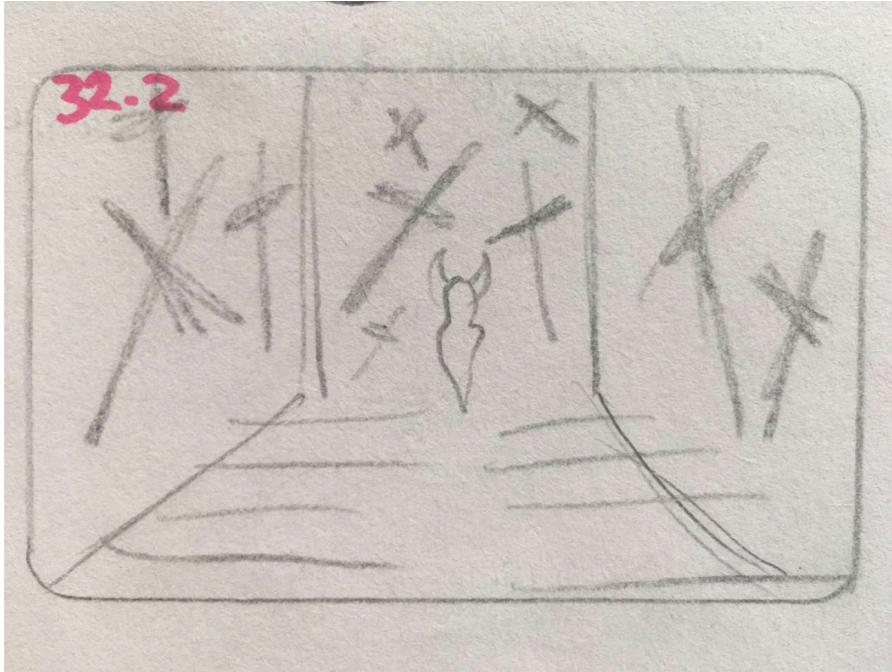


Figure 15.

Storyboard frame, Satan is Revealed in the Sandham Memorial Chapel, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

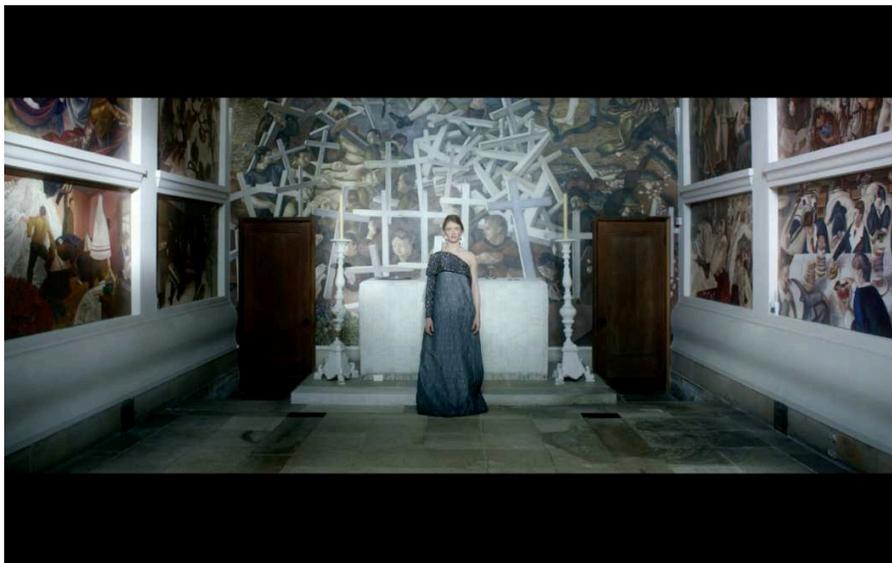


Figure 16.

Film still, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.



Figure 17.
Storyboard frame, Pity and Indignation Appear Amongst the Audience, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.



Figure 18.
Film still, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

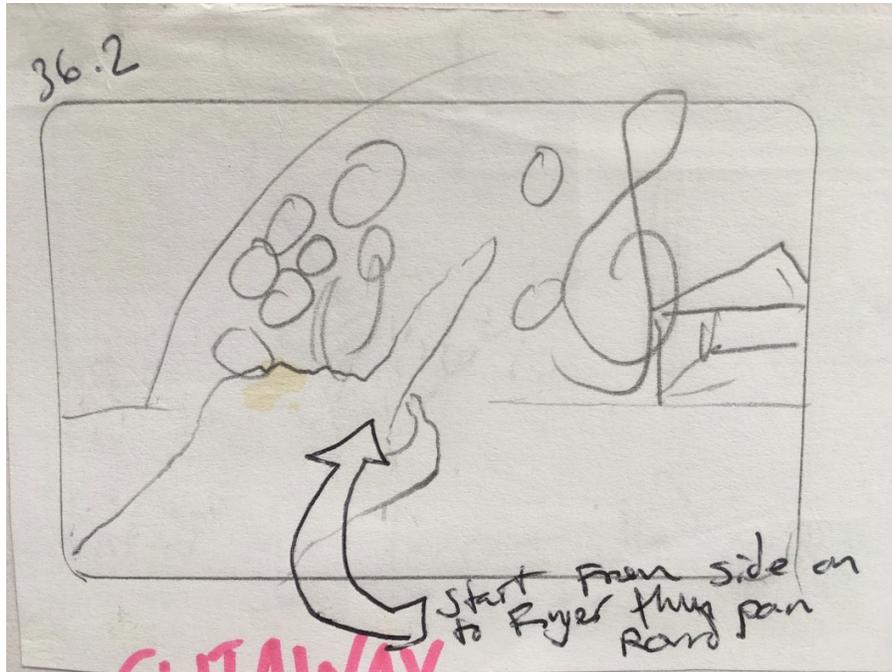


Figure 19.

Storyboard frame, A Follow Shot Along Satan's Arm as She Points to the Orchestra, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.



Figure 20.

Film still, The Ballet of the Nations, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

The other thing about the storyboard, which I found really exciting, is that because dance is so physical, to make it up you need a space. Yes, there are stories that Frederick Ashton used to make up ballets in his kitchen, but he could also go into the Royal Ballet studios whenever he wanted! With film, all

of a sudden, we could literally storyboard on a train in a notebook. It felt incredibly freeing because you can think very technically, physically, and creatively in the confines of a page. That felt like a great thing to discover.

Cinematography

Ella Margolin and Jack Offord



Authors

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Interview

Director of Photography, Jack Offord, talks to Ella Margolin about shooting and lighting Impermanence's *The Ballet of the Nations*. What kind of visual references, from both cinematography and art history, were brought to bear on the palette and lighting of the film? While depicting the staging of a dance, how does *The Ballet of the Nations* also acknowledge that it is itself a highly staged event?

Ella: How did you first become involved with The Ballet of the Nations?

Jack: Joshua and Roseanna invited me to be involved in a film they were making. They emailed some initial materials and we did research and development over two days with members of the creative team Pam, Rob, and Gwenni. Grace was there as well, and she introduced us to Vernon Lee's *The Ballet of the Nations*; we started thinking about the film we wanted to make. Then, fast forward, I think we did all the pre-production in three weeks before we shot.

Ella: And what did that pre-production involve from the camera perspective?

Jack: Joshua and Roseanna are very used to working collaboratively and they had their own ideas about what they wanted from the film. I felt it was my place to push them away from theatre and into a more cinematic style. In the pre-production, I really tried to tease a shot list out of them. So, Joshua and Roseanna did a storyboard—quite in-depth—which was great. I also asked them to make a colour document—a series of visual references for the colour of the film. They sent back a collection of, I don't know, thirty paintings and sculptures, all completely different to each other. Because the Impermanence style borrows from so many different sources, in the pre-production, I had to distil a visual style out of this absolutely enormous trove of material.

Ella: Pam said a similar thing—that when designing costumes, she was very focused on picking a colour scheme and limiting it.

Jack: Pam did a lot of the work for me in a way, when it came to the colour, because she sent through swatches of all the different materials she used for costumes and I went, "Right, that's our colour palette." So, we had the colour defined fairly early on in pre-production.

In pre-production, a lot of Joshua and Roseanna's storyboarding was in the style of theatre staging, looking end-on towards a scene because that's what they know; they're theatre makers and they're dancers and the piece itself is theatrically staged in the text, so that made sense. I was trying to develop a bit more of a cinematic take on that idea. Actually, a lot of the creative heavy

lifting I did was in the lighting plans and not necessarily in the shot list and the storyboard, partly because we were very ambitious in the amount we wanted to get done in an eight-day shoot.

Ella: Aside from The Ballet of the Nations, what sources did you draw on to design the lighting?

Jack: I was looking at very stylised portraits. It's almost a cliché to name painters like Caravaggio and Rembrandt but cinematographers take visual references from artists like them because the lighting is so striking. "Rembrandt lighting" is even a popular term within portrait photography because of the way that he painted the light on his subjects. I've very much gone down the same path to get a dramatic style.

But we also borrowed references from traditional theatre lighting, which is very front-on; from chiaroscuro-style painting, where the light's coming from one direction; and from film lighting where we tend to light from the top or the back. Those three things hopefully tie the film together visually. For example, we lit a lot from the back using what we call short lighting, where the light is on the opposite side of the actor from the camera; we lit a lot from the side; and when we were front lighting, it was in the style of Caravaggio, as if it's by candlelight ([Fig. 1](#) and [Fig. 2](#)).



Figure 1.

Ella Margolin, Filming *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Roseanna directs the dancers as they run their second Chorus number. The black box studio heightened the effect of the lighting, with one dancer remarking that the footage looked like a "moving Caravaggio". The chiaroscuro created by such strong, directed light accentuated the musculature of the dancers, linking back to Maxwell Armfield's illustrations. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.



Figure 2.

Film still, *The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Digital image courtesy of Impermanence.

Ella: Do you find that the filming of the dance changes it?

Jack: As soon as you bring a camera into dance something happens which can't happen live, which is you've got a moveable composition, whereas dance—unless it's got very clever set design—tends to be all on view all the time. In film, you're working with a frame, so you have what you see in that frame; what's going to come next; what you just saw; and what you can hear but is not in the frame. Early on, I said to Joshua and Roseanna, "I really don't think we should have much steadicam work, I don't think we should have a roaming, flying, moving eye as a camera." I didn't want this to be a showy-off "this is what the camera can do" project. It was more about, "what are we saying through the individual shots?"

Ella: Because there's already so much going on in each frame?

Jack: And because there are benefits to not seeing everything. While it's not strictly fair on the choreography, I think it's freed up by being translated onto film. You tend to see dance on-screen in music videos or advertising where it's rarely there to tell a story; it's more to illustrate an idea or an emotion or something like that, whereas really we're trying to tell a story through the dance.

Ella: The film is really self-reflective—there are lots of references to the film crew. How did that come about?

Jack: Very early on in the film, we have that shot where the camera starts at a mirror with the gimbal operator, James, pulling back to reveal the space reflected in it. As he moves back, you start to see the room itself, which is a beautiful and vast dance studio. In pre-production, it struck me as a really difficult space to film in, and then I thought maybe this mirror is interesting, and what if we could see the crew in it (Fig. 3)? In the film, this is where *The Ballet of the Nations* is staged. I thought it would be interesting to acknowledge this by saying that our film is also a staged event. So, I said “Well, let’s see the crew, why not?”

In the edit, Joshua and Roseanna took that idea and extended it, and started putting in bits of the clapper board or little bloopers and Billy Zane’s attempts to pronounce a bit of French, which gave the film a little bit of levity. I think that’s the Impermanence style; it’s a little bit camp and a little bit silly, even though they’re dealing with really dark things.



Figure 3.

Ella Margolin, *Filming The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. Alessandro performs his solo in front of the mirror in Jacobs Wells Baths. The camera crew, lights, and rigging are all visible in this shot of Alessandro’s solo, a play on the idea of the ballet as a self-conscious performance, as well as a way of navigating the practical restraints of the space. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

Ella: And how does that work with the music?

Jack: That’s one of my favourite things about the film. It’s very moving and there are these beautiful, daft, amazing costumes; with totally overblown dialogue; and high-concept, borderline ridiculous characters, yet it’s all

underpinned by this totally haunting music. It's nice that those two things exist side by side. Bringing out-takes and deliberate mistakes into the film helps to lift the mood while it also provides very rich, dark images.

Ella: On a practical level, what is the experience of shooting a film like this?

Jack: At this low-budget scale of film-making, everything is determined by practical elements; we couldn't carve out the time or the physical space to do everything we had originally planned without a big budget. With Pam's costume design and the choice of locations, we found a way to work with the practical constraints and not against them. Even down to the beach scene, we chose to shoot at a time of day where the tide would come in during the course of the shoot and that was part of the imagery of the stick crosses falling (Fig. 4). Just as in the dance studio, we worked with the giant mirror and not against it. I think anyone who's ever worked on a low-budget production will recognise that fluidity.



Figure 4.

Ella Margolin, *Filming The Ballet of the Nations*, 2018. The six core Nations, joined by students from Bath Spa University, perform their final number on Brean Sands, Somerset. The high tide, which was due in at 5pm, was not the only constraint that affected the day's work. The heat, changing light, loud aeroplanes, and dog walkers all slowed the shoot; but because such elements had been factored into the schedule, filming still finished on time. Digital image courtesy of Ella Margolin.

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