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ARTICLE

The Avant-Garde Practices of Gwendolen Bishop

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Gwendolen Bishop is a name that appears in the margins of my recent account of the English avant-garde theatre.[1] Prior to that she barely made it even into the margins, and then often with some rather significant indecision as to how actually to spell her name. The aim of this essay is to retrieve her from the margins and bring her more centrally into view. In doing so I consciously weave together her arts practices and her personal life, for these are deeply connected. The making of an avantist culture in early twentieth-century England was done not simply by arts experiments but also by kinds of behavior that challenged dominant ideas. In our Western twenty-first century we note and make much of Edwardian behaviors that contested assumptions about gender and sexuality, but we should note, alongside that, some equally striking challenges to ideas about class. Both are apparent in the Bishop story, which I tell more or less as a biographical narrative. The danger when one recovers a person from the shadows is that, in trying to situate them among their contemporaries, one writes overmuch about those contemporaries, such that our person fades again into the mists. With our biographical focus fixed solidly on her we can, I hope, discover how Gwendolen Bishop made her very particular contribution to this exciting cultural period on the eve of modernism.

1

On 10 May 1905 Oscar Wilde's *Salome* was performed in London. It was ten years since, in the same city, Wilde had been found guilty of gross indecency. In Berlin the play was staged in 1901 and ran for two hundred performances, but England was a different matter. Only gradually was Wilde's full literary reputation restored. As comic dramatist he reemerged when George Alexander revived *Lady*

Major thanks are due to Chris Whetton, who had already embarked on a study of Bishop—she being a former resident of his village of Speen—and who has been hugely generous in sharing his research. Thanks are also due to Maureen Bell for critiquing a draft, Tom Davies for his helpfulness at King's College Library, Cambridge, Nicholas Deakin for permission to quote from the papers of Havelock Ellis, Joan Dean for assistance with genealogical searches, Dan Fenton for permission to quote from Bax's letters, and Natalie Keymist for so generously facilitating my searches in Newham Archives. Every attempt has been made to trace the estate of Paul Corder (who was almost certainly not a professional photographer) and seek permission to reproduce the image of Bishop, even though the image, given its age, is now in the public domain.

Windermere's Fan in November 1904, but the more difficult, challenging Wilde was reinstated by the efforts, principally, of his executor and lover, Robbie Ross. When Ross published Wilde's text from Reading Gaol, *De Profundis*, early in 1905, there had been positive responses. The first English production[2] of that "sensual" and "gross" play *Salome*[3] was therefore a significant event.

Laurence Housman, suffragist, writer, and homosexual, lent various items for the staging and bought his tickets well in advance.[4] It was sensible to do so. Reporting on the production to his friends Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, who wrote together as Michael Field, the artist Charles Ricketts enthused: "I was greatly impressed by *Salome*. I went there almost as a duty" (he had been given tickets by Ross)[5] "fearing that the performance would be all that it should not be, but this was not the case. I was breathless with interest." The audience was densely packed into the cramped Bijou Theatre on Archer Street. "All little London and the intellect of England sat in a compact mass of 50 in the Gallery. The rest of the house was the very flower of the Divorce Court, men with tired purple lids and women with grey faces and lips of scarlet."[6] Not unexpectedly the show was attacked by newspaper reviewers, but Ross had lined up his associates to fight back. "I obediently wrote a note to the Editor of the Saturday [Review] last night on receiving your letter," said Sturge Moore, "As I am very willing indeed to defend the admirable performance though I have seen none of the attacks made on it."[7]

The particular fraction of little London assembled in the gallery is suggested by the names of the amateur players who did the show.[8] Salome was played by Millicent Murby. She had been active in Fabian Society discussions since early 1902 and from 1907 pushed for their support for the women's cause, lecturing on the "Woman Question" in 1908. The Fifth Jew was played by Frederick Lawrence, another Fabian, suffrage activist, and later member of the Union of Democratic Control.[9] And yet another socialist, Louise Salom, played Herodias. The Cappadocian was played by Charles Dalmon, poet and contributor to the *Yellow Book*, with an ambition, he told Michael Davidson, "to be *crushed* to death between the thighs of a guardsman."[10] The First Jew was played by F. Stanley Smith, "Freddie," friend and housemate of the homosexual campaigner George Ives. More significantly, after the show he met Robbie Ross, the first step to becoming his secretary and lover. A friend of Housman, the painter Herbert Alexander, played the Young Syrian, though I can't vouch for his sexuality. Herod was played by Robert Farquharson, who apparently based the delivery on Wilde himself.[11] The whole event was "stage managed" by Florence Farr, lover of Yeats and Shaw—and indeed of Farquharson—and for Shaw a model of the "new" woman. Salome's dance was choreographed by a woman called Gwendolen Bishop (1874–1926), who also played the male part of the Page of Herodias. The assembled company thus reached deep into both London's homosexual culture and Fabian socialism.

All the performers were part of an organization called the New Stage Club. Earlier that year, on 20 February 1905, their first show had been the premiere of Shaw's *The Philanderer*. Three of the company who played its fictional "new" women then appeared again in Wilde's play. Alongside Millicent Murby there was Louise Salom. She acted as club secretary in that she was in control of sending out the tickets required for the necessarily private staging of *Salome*. The third performer was Gwendolen Bishop.

Bishop's[12] offstage role was more significant than those of the others. Ross, who already knew her, is reported as saying that she seemed to be in charge of proceedings when he attended the performance.[13] But this information comes from an article written very soon after Ross's death in 1918 by one "Robert le Diable."[14] Edra Bogle suggests this was actually Alfred Douglas.[15] Certainly its virulently Tory and racist sentiments fit with his, and it easily slots into place as yet another of Douglas's almost psychotic attacks on Ross, which were continued even after his death but now extended to include his lover, Freddie Smith. The article's account of drama activity in relation to Ross is completely garbled, so it has dubious value for us. We know, however, that it was Bishop whom Ross contacted, somewhat formally, in April 1905 when he was anxious about the possible use of women to play male roles.[16] It was an anxiety Bishop ignored when she herself took one such part, but she clearly remained significant enough in the Ross network to be invited to the grand dinner in his honor in December 1908 and, one might add, to be singled out for mention in Robert le Diable's assault on Ross and Smith. That antipathy from Robert le Diable alerts us to the significance here of Bishop's role as changemaker. Her involvement with, indeed her organization of, the performance of *Salome* was part of the process that culturally pushed back against the vilification of Wilde and his sexuality.

As confirmation of her organizational initiative, Sturge Moore gives independent corroboration that she was the founder of the company and notes there was a management team of three. This presumably comprised Farr, who made the first approach to Ross about doing *Salome*;[17] Bishop, who herself negotiated the fee for the rights with Charles Russell & Co.; and Millicent Murby, who after the production paid the actors their dues.[18] Moore thought her comanagers constrained Bishop's choice of plays, though the methods of the company, he says, were "co-operative," with actors being employed as needed for each production. Later, when Moore imitated this management structure in forming his own Literary Theatre Society, the two people he chose to work with were "Mrs Emery [Florence Farr] and Mrs Bishop."[19] And then, having been much impressed with Bishop in Housman's *Bethlehem* (1902), he cast them both in his society's inaugural production, *Aphrodite against Artemis*, opening on 1 April 1906, with Farr as Phaedra and Bishop as Aphrodite—although, in Shaw's opinion, Bishop far outshone Farr's performance.[20] Indeed in both the New Stage Company and the Literary Theatre Society Bishop was a key performer.

The first of those companies followed *Salome* in November 1905 with Henrik Ibsen's *Love's Comedy*, performed at the Cripplegate Institute, a regular venue for amateur groups. This was its first staging in England, done by a company that could now be characterized as one "which holds advanced views in the domain of dramatic art."[21] It had the same core cast as *Salome*, with Bishop taking the part of Svanhild,[22] who rejects the role of the poet Falk's muse and takes an interest in him only when he actively attacks hypocritical marriage and is ostracized for it. They plan running away together, but she is driven to compromise and accept conventional marriage to a wealthy businessman. Svanhild was a role that, as we shall see, seemed to chime with Bishop's own approach to partnerships. Ibsen was followed in early April 1906 with the seminal symbolist play, Villiers de l'Isle Adam's *Revolt*, and a play by the English champion of symbolism, Arthur

Symons's *The Fool of the World*. At the end of November came a triple bill that included, for the first time on the English stage, plays by Strindberg: *Simoon* and *The Stronger Woman*. In the former Bishop performed Biskra, an Arab woman who torments a fugitive French soldier. Both actors "interpreted the morbid little tragedy with much intensity of feeling; but the more intense the players were the more horrible the play became."[23] After this, in April 1908, came two plays by another conspicuously "modern" dramatist, Arthur Schnitzler, and with them the New Stage Club ceased. But before we bid it goodbye we have to observe that Bishop, as an organizer of the company, had made something that was new in more than name. Over a brief four-year period she helped to pioneer a polemically innovative, and often shocking, repertoire from which the English theatre did not recover.

As short-lived, but less explicitly new, was Moore's Literary Theatre Society (LTS). Its opening production was followed by only two more: in June 1906 came a provocative second outing for *Salome* together with Wilde's *A Florentine Tragedy*, now completed by Moore, with Bishop not only playing Bianca in that but also, for *Salome,* making the Ricketts-designed costumes and metalwork (in which she had experience, showing jewelry designs in August 1905 at an exhibition of handicraft industries in her home village of Haslemere in Surrey).[24] In March 1907 LTS did Aeschylus' *The Persians* coupled with Granville Barker's *The Miracle*, in which Bishop played Margaret, directed by Farquharson. The selection of this 1902 verse play seems to have been driven by her. Moore didn't think much of it and says Ricketts pushed it, without consulting him—and that behind Ricketts, apparently, was Bishop. But here, apart from some Greek plays for the New Century and Court theatres, an occasional piece in Worcester College gardens, a charity recital in Ipswich, and a walk-on for Oscar Asche, the first main phase of Bishop's work stopped. She spent much of 1908 traveling the Middle East, starting with a visit to Baghdad with her brother Arthur Bernhard-Smith and his artistically well-connected wife, Molly, and then leaving them to make her own way home across the deserts.

2

The year 1908 marked an end to more than the first phase of Bishop's artistic work. It prepared the way for the formal extinction of Mrs. Bishop.

She had been christened, in Pimlico, in April 1875, Gwendolen Daphne Bernhard-Smith, the youngest of six children. Her father, a solicitor who employed four servants, died when she was six. Within about eighteen months of her mother's death, and before her oldest siblings, on 14 September 1896, at the age of 21, she married Gerald Michael Bishop. Described later by a mutual friend as a "theoretic socialist"[25] he was active in the movement to develop garden cities, important enough to be cited alongside the designer Walter Crane and the social reformer Samuel Barnett as a supporter of the inaugural meeting of Ebenezer Howard's Garden City Association on 27 October 1899, and thereafter fundraising toward the founding of Letchworth in 1903. In his day job he worked for Marion & Co., a photographic equipment company based in Soho Square of which his two uncles were directors. Photography was an enduring enthusiasm shared by both husband

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and wife, and in 1907 he became managing director of his company, while also in the same year becoming active in the Fabian Society.[26] This combination was still potent in 1913 when, at the annual dinner of the Congress of Professional Photographers, he commended "the advantages of co-operative effort in any trade or industry."[27] He also had an interest in new and experimental theatre. While his wife was in the Middle East in 1908 he was regularly attending Stage Society shows, among others, and discussing them with friends who included the more experienced Fabian activist Dr. Haden Guest, who in 1907–8 was reviewing drama for the progressive weekly journal *The New Age*. It seems that Gerald Bishop was, like the wine merchants William Lee Matthews and W. A. Pye, one of those commercial men who took an active interest in supporting new theatre.

But although they often socialized together he was not necessarily involved in his wife's projects. Neither partner seemed committed to the conventional model of marriage; he indeed was certainly not a Christian, and she, according to Housman, was "a Pagan."[28] Within a few years of marriage she was pursuing independent activities encouraged by her friend Janet Ashbee, wife of the founder of the Guild of Handicraft. The two young women went swimming together, and Gwen joined Ashbee's "river expeditions" on the Severn in the summers of 1900 and 1901, one of two women in a group of men. In her thinly disguised autobiographical novel Ashbee says: "In course of time Rachel [Janet Ashbee] discovered that this radiant creature had a husband somewhere in an office, but he was rarely mentioned,"[29] though by Christmas 1902 both Bishops were invited together to visit the Ashbees. But the marriage was already in difficulties. Gwen had just been in *Bethlehem* and had hoped it might tour to the United States. It didn't, so in January 1903 she set off on an educational tour to Paris and then Florence, without Gerald. As Ashbee put it later, Gwen was always "eager for fresh experiences."[30] Another way of putting it is that Gwendolen Bishop was an enthusiast for self-education. Quite apart from her skills in costume making, jewelry, and photography, she went to Paris to learn French. At around the same time she also arranged to practice French and sing with her friend Nanette Dalmas, a wealthy American in the Arts and Crafts circle. Gwen was away in France and Italy for eight months. Gerald, initially bitter about it, confided in Janet Ashbee, and in February they began a relationship that would have been understood as "rational asceticism," a form of sexual love not based in genital intercourse.[31] Gwen seems to have known about this[32] and didn't let it affect her relationship with Ashbee. And publicly both Bishops sustained their connection with the Handicraft Guild. In January 1904 Gwen played Lady Teazle in the Guild's *School for Scandal;*[33] at Whitsun the same year Gerald's *May-Day Interlude*, written for the children of Campden, was performed—under Janet Ashbee's direction.[34] In 1905, even as the New Stage Club was starting up, he moved out of their house. In 1909 when Gwen divorced him on grounds of desertion, Gerald was still communicating with Janet;[35] she then, however, returned to her original partner, and Gerald married again.

Janet Ashbee reported in September 1903 that Bishop returned from Florence "harder;—hard with a streak of bitterness—the obverse of which is a crystal laugh with the ghost of a sneer in it, that makes you shiver a little."[36] Nonetheless they remained friends. This, the first of three significant female friendships in Bishop's life, was perhaps what enabled her to get her first acting role. But it's not the role so much as the process of getting it that is perhaps of greater interest here, for one of the insights the Gwendolen Bishop story offers is an understanding of how a person of a particular class at this period might become involved in amateur, and from there semiprofessional, theatre. We first hear of Bishop performing in the context of a masque, *Beauty's Awakening*, curated by Walter Crane and done at Guildhall in late June 1899. Then, in summer 1902, she was one of a group of young women being taught acting, and more specifically chanting, by Thomas Sturge Moore. Others in the group included Roger Fry's sister Isabel; Fanny Johnson, daughter of a Cambridge philosophy don; Flora Mayor, daughter of a philosophy professor and clergyman at King's College London; and Mona Wilson, daughter of the archdeacon of Manchester who was also a lecturer in theology at Cambridge. This was a very specific class fraction in which Bishop found herself. Toward the end of 1902 she then appeared as Mary in Laurence Housman's *Bethlehem*, directed by Gordon Craig (who to Housman's horror cut all Mary's lines and much of the original music, so that for Bishop it literally was an "appearance"). Moore, describing her as "the best naturally endowed of any I have tried,"[37] was sufficiently impressed both by her work in his classes and her performance as Mary to propose her for the lead role in Yeats's *Countess Cathleen*, for a performance of which Yeats had been agitating. He was also encouraged by another Yeats associate, John Masefield, who had seen Bishop in a Guild of Handicraft play. But by the time Bishop returned from her trip to Paris and Florence, which took most of 1903, the *Cathleen* project had fallen through. We next hear of her in spring 1905 working with the New Stage Club, although at some point during this period she also cultivated the acquaintance of Janet Achurch. Achurch, with her husband, Charles Charrington, was a pioneer of the staging of Ibsen in England. Perhaps more important for a woman such as Bishop, Achurch and her husband were at the center of a network that reached out into noncommercial theatre groupings and practices, including the Stage Society. Bishop, it seems, had made an approach to Achurch with a project of doing a recitation.[38] Although I have no evidence that anything came of this, it does illustrate how Bishop, and many others, built a career in part by making contact with the best-placed people.

For instance, an association with Sturge Moore that began in a chanting class could have led to a high-profile role in a Yeats play. Moore was the person who could facilitate such a step because he was well connected in the literary and artistic worlds and had his own schemes for a theatre company. As it was, Bishop's crucial first step, the appearance in Housman's play, seems to have been facilitated not by him but by someone much less literary and theatrical. In February 1902 Housman had wanted Mary Anderson for his play. She was an American actress who had performed in London, and then retired to the Cotswolds, in England, resisting all invitations to perform, including that of Housman. We know this from Housman's communication to Ashbee, whom he had met a couple of years before. I infer that Ashbee had mentioned Bishop to Housman because later in 1902 he told her that "Mrs Bishop is beautiful and is to be the Madonna."[39] Ashbee had previously experienced Bishop's stage presence when they both appeared in Crane's masque, as two of the "Fair Cities," Florence and Rome.[40] Their participation in the show arose directly out of their current circumstances. The script for some of the masque was written by C. R. Ashbee, Janet's husband.[41] Perhaps more significant was that Walter Crane was actively involved in, and wrote essays for, the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union (HADU), where Bishop and Ashbee had met. Among the members of HADU whom Ashbee's Rachel describes as "either palpably immature, or else gloomy with the despair of frustrated middle age,"[42] Bishop's beauty was exceptional. This presumably made her appropriately decorative for a masque, and indeed for many future roles, in one of which she was described as an image out of an Edward Burne-Jones painting.

Beauty apart, she was also an organizer and campaigner. She became honorary secretary of HADU, and at a press briefing in May 1901 was asked to define its objectives, which she did "in a few concise terms": "The members are none of them asked to conform to a uniform mode of attire; indeed, they are encouraged to study their own individual requirements and the style that best suits them instead of running like sheep after the vagaries set up by fashion."[43] This was active organization of what Calvert calls a "counter-culture trend"[44] that would liberate both body and gender roles (Figs. 1 and 2). For Bishop it was more than sandals and a loose smock designed by the Dr. Jaeger's company. In going swimming together Ashbee's Rachel was "encouraged in her passion for nakedness."[45] This was celebrated more extensively on their river outing in August 1901: "we get up plunge naked into the amber water—we lie on the bank & get tanned all over—& even when we feel the thistles underfoot as we race up & down the meadow drying, we sing with pleasure."[46] The men in the party were doing the same round the next bend.

The exploration and enjoyment of a liberated body have connections with the exploration of performance expressivity, which Bishop got from her second major female friendship. It went back until at least summer 1902, when Bishop was introduced by Florence Farr to the experiments in chanting she was running with Moore's Literary Theatre Club, as it was originally known. By the winter of 1903–4 in Farr's new company, The Dancers, as the journalist Nevinson reported, "A Mrs. Bishop bounded about with splendid abandon."[47] Nevinson's cheery enthusiasm effectively occludes Bishop's more serious purpose. Again acting as a public spokeswoman, when she was interviewed in June 1904 she connected the Dancers project with that of HADU: "One cannot dance in modern dress. . . . Men ought to dance more gracefully than women, they are better-knit and more athletic." Against the dance of "elaborate steps and postures" Bishop set "spontaneous dancing." This was an early articulation of a dance practice that spread widely over the next two decades. She described it as "impromptu in its very essence," inspired not just by music but also by nature or the dancer's "passing mood": "Spontaneous dancing is intrinsically an ecstacy [*sic*]—an intoxication." Both of these were preferable to the current dance craze: the Cake Walk, she said, is "a dance for savages . . . performed by savages."[48]

The language of this attack on a dance of Black origins, albeit a dance possibly satirical of white slaveowners, gives us pause. But we have to be cautious about assuming an uninspected racism here. When Ashbee celebrated Bishop's qualities of "dreamy enjoyment & passivity" she says they were "brought to her by her Hindu blood."[49] This blood derived from one of the more benign methods by which the British leeched the wealth out of India. Her great-grandfather, William Robertson, a member of the East India Company, had married a Moghul princess, and from this the family obtained a lot of money, an inheritance that enabled her father to employ four servants. The interesting point here, I suggest, is not the qualities Ashbee attached to being Hindu but that she knew about it at all. In other words Bishop was public about her mixed-race heritage, and seemingly celebrated it by wearing Eastern-influenced jewelry. This aspect of her, quite apart from the dancing and chanting, found a parallel in Farr, herself with an interest in the East, for which eventually she left Britain.

That connection with Farr helped shape Bishop's career. In May 1904 she was brought into the Chorus for Farr's New Century *Hippolytus,* and on 17 January 1905 she played The Future, "a beautiful boy," in Farr's masque *The Mystery of Time* at the Albert Hall theatre. Even in minor roles—for example, in Mrs. Patrick Campbell's *The Thunderbolt* in October 1908—Bishop's name appears alongside Farr. Both she and Farr also attended the Poets' Club, where they mingled with leading experimental poets. While Farr had a friendship with F. S. Flint, one of Bishop's famous admirers was Ezra Pound. It was an admiration she returned. When she bumped into "my old 'flame' Ezra Pound" a few years later she was much taken, characteristically, with his "most marvelously dressing to [*sic*] poet's part, with a humourous [*sic*] smile. Hair fluffed out to halo, and the weak mouth and chin all covered away with a froth of beard and moustache."[50] The tone of this straightforward pleasure in a man's appearance, with no coyness, again finds parallels in Farr.

For the relationship between these women was based in much more than work. It was a friendship that continued until Farr departed for Ceylon (now Sri Lanka) in 1912, where she died. If with Ashbee she celebrated a bodily liberation, in Farr Bishop met a feminist who had separated from her husband and who assumed the right to pursue any sexual liaisons with men as and when she fancied, much to the somewhat hypocritical disapproval of Shaw. But while there is a similar sort of feminism in her disregard for conventional marriage, and indeed her selection of stage roles, Bishop differed from Farr in that she didn't seem to seek sexual activity with men. Her first marriage was childless; her second conceived a child, her daughter Undine, very soon after the wedding but with a man who claimed to dislike sex.[51] This difference will lead us to the third important woman in her life. But time must pass before we meet her.

3

Once she had returned from the deserts Bishop threw herself into another phase of theatrical activity. First there was the newly configured Dramatic Sub-Committee of the Lyceum Club, a club for women founded by playwright-artist Constance Smedley. Bishop had been a member since at least April 1905, when she used it as her address to write to Charles Russell about *Salome*. She used it again when she wrote to the *Saturday Review* in August 1907 on the current topic of a parliamentary bill to allow a man to marry the sister of his deceased wife, berating the journal for supporting the church establishment's opposition to the bill.[52] She became involved with the club's Dramatic Sub-Committee in autumn 1908, having returned from the Middle East. Indeed the Sub-Committee's engagement with actual theatrical production coincides fairly precisely with the moment of

Bishop's reemergence. Their inaugural production on 30 March 1909 was a double bill. Bishop performed in *A Decadent Dialogue*, written by Mrs. Haig Thomas, a suffrage activist who later would be imprisoned for igniting a postbox. In late February 1910 Bishop appeared again, in their third production, *Surprising Sermons*, being well reviewed on each occasion. By March the following year the Dramatic Sub-Committee was sufficiently established to organize an "At Home to actor-managers and women dramatists," at which Bishop was one of the hostesses.[53] Later, Bishop would become a regular at another club for women: The Three Arts, for professionals in music, drama, and the fine arts and crafts, which opened in December 1911 and was run by the painter Hilda Pocock, sister of the actress Lena Ashwell.

But alongside this central London activity she was working somewhere very different. On 22 January 1910 she appeared as Electra at Mansfield House, an educational settlement in Canning Town linked to Mansfield College, Oxford. This was the first production of the People's Free Theatre for Poetic Drama (PFT). In its review the local newspaper gave an account of the origin and purposes of the company:

> The performance was the first given by the People's Free Theatre movement—a movement started by Mrs. Bishop as a branch of the Theosophical Art Society. The movement has for its idea the institution of a theatre to which people can go free of charge to see the best of either old or modern plays. To aid her in this estimable work Mrs. Bishop . . . has enlisted the services of a number of cultivated men and women able to appreciate and interpret the really best things in art.[54]

A year or so later Bishop was rather more precise about the sort of work being staged and the purpose in doing so "by proving the appreciation of fine poetic drama by the 'masses', to draw attention to the need of a State-supported theatre, which would serve as a valuable instrument for instilling high moral principles into the public mind."[55] Her model was the theatres of ancient Greece and medieval Europe, reflected in the choice of plays. Mention of the Theosophical Society has vanished, for reasons we explore later.

Sophocles' *Electra* was followed in February 1911 by Maeterlinck's *Sister Beatrice* (in which Bishop had appeared with the Play Actors at the Court a couple of years before); in 1912 it was Matthew Arnold's anciently Greek *Merope*, followed by *Everyman* in 1913, and, significantly enough for the times, Euripides' *The Trojan Women* in 1914. Arnold's reworking of the Merope story departed from the original in positioning the heroine as an uncompromised widow. Indeed, what in the main links all these plays is not just poetry but a strong female stage presence[56] enacting stories where decisive action is taken by women characters—and playing this out in front of not the largely well-heeled female audience of West End radical theatre but the mixed communities of the East End, where women and girls engaged with these performances in the presence of their menfolk.

For each of these performances went on a small tour. *Sister Beatrice*, for example, began at the Mansfield House Canning Town, and thence to St. George's Town Hall, Stepney; Toynbee Hall; the Passmore Edwards Settlement, Tavistock Place; St. James's Parish Hall, Canonbury; then Collier's Rents Mission, The Borough (i.e., Southwark); and finally Ransford House Mission, Bethnal Green. Performances were often locally sponsored, *Sister Beatrice* and *Merope*, for example, being mounted by St. George's Popular Entertainment Society. Admission was free, and the shows were explicitly described as "quite unsectarian and non-political in character."[57] This was important within a context of initiatives to try to establish community interconnection independent both of the commercial dispensing of alcohol through pubs and the particular campaigns of religious or political factions. For example, the People's House evenings of Canning Town aimed to offer a place where people "could come to meet their friends and spend a pleasant evening away from their homes." The effort was to provide opportunity "on a large public scale, not confined to any particular body or society," indeed a "People's Hall."[58]

And it was in those people, in large numbers, that Bishop was interested. The newspaper coverage of her project was mainly focused on what they took to be the first production, at Toynbee Hall on 29 January 1910. At this performance, as one reviewer noted, the audience was stuffed full of "sympathetic outsiders,"[59] a number of them middle-class journalists. But actually Bishop had inaugurated her project a week before, in Canning Town, to a full house of dockworkers and their families. In private correspondence with the translator of *Electra*, Gilbert Murray, on the day before the performance she candidly described her nervousness about the experiment: "I am really nearly dead with work & shall look finely haggard as Electra!"[60] She had reason to be worried. Although Murray's Greek plays had been staged a few times since 1904, these were mainly in art theatres such as the Court. When Ben Iden Payne did *Hippolytus* for the touring Horniman company in 1908 it didn't move far beyond their home theatre, the Gaiety, apart from Murray's own town of Oxford. So Bishop's decision to play *Electra* before a dockworkers' community was pretty risky. Although nowadays the idea of playing serious drama to working-class audiences may seem commonplace, in Bishop's day this was very new. Indeed, as an agent of change, she may be said to have anticipated, by almost ten years, the moves in this direction that were more publicly articulated, and organized, in the aims of the British Drama League, formed in 1919.

But her innovatory practice worked. In a jubilant letter to Murray after the first performance she told him:

> Saturday night at Canning Town was a glorious success! I <u>knew</u> it would be. For 2 ½ hrs without a break the audience (about 360) sat chained, & at the close shouted & cheered again & again, and I had to make a speech! Various friends of the company, principally artists, including Miss Farr, were <u>delighted</u>, & I feel so proud of my company & utterly happy at proving my point,—that the uneducated are the true lovers of poetry. Your telegram was read out & greeted with cheers by the audience. I never knew the awful concentration that would be needed to act against three babies all crying at once; they had to go poor dears, the mothers very sadly. Toynbee Hall is smaller, but we look for equal success.[61]

For the press she put it more polemically: "I felt more flattered by their clamorous cheers than I should be by the polite applause of West End playgoers."[62] Her project not only rejected middle-class art theatre but aimed also at full and loud houses. Experiencing the Greek plays at the Court Theatre, Bishop observed, "they were being performed to houses a quarter full! To me that seemed the most ridiculous waste."[63] When they were invited back to Canning Town, to inaugurate the People's Hall in March 1910, it was full. It seated twelve hundred people. At the end of the first season they had played ten performances to five thousand people (Fig. 3).

The problem with the sparsely attended art theatre was that there was no clamor. Response was muted and contained. "I set out for the East End, with a belief in the existence of a primitive capacity for feeling big things."[64] And it was to that capacity for feeling that the theatrical effects were directed. My assumption is that these originated with Bishop. In its review of *Electra* the local newspaper claimed that it had been directed by W. G. Fay, an actor and director mainly associated with the Abbey Theatre in Dublin but by 1909–10 working in Manchester and then London at a series of one-off jobs. It may have been that Bishop's connection with Yeats led to an acquaintance with Fay and thus an opportunity to use his name in the inaugural production. But her correspondence with Murray clearly shows her own thoughts about staging, and above all, in her strong area, the design and color field of costumes. She described the dress rehearsal:

> The stage, quite a large one, is four & ½ ft high so that my ten charming chorus women look lovely in their white dresses, crimson cloaks, red strapped sandals & white wreaths, as they are formally ranged round the altar down below or in lines against the platform. It has been terrible work to teach them to move together, but they are very good & their songs sound fine! The two leaders & speakers are quite good, a tiny difference of stencilled cloak marks them out apart from their work. The chorus never come up on the platform except at the end to cover the body of the queen with their crimson mantles, & then to stand ranged against the deep blue backcloth like a row of caryatides, all white, & ready to make a long single file procession as the bier is borne off followed by Electra, then Orestes.[65]

These visual arrangements worked, it seems deliberately, to compensate for weaknesses in acting:

> Clytemnestra has a fine voice but not a good presence or movements, she looks splendid in orange purple & gold mantle over dark blue & gold under dress. Frankly, I feel that for simple grandeur of effect apart from acting (for my people are all quite untrained) our "show" has had no equal. Oh how good it is to have no scenery![66]

The visual production of grandeur was accompanied by an intensification of emotion. To achieve this, as she admitted to Murray, she interfered with his text. After describing how the production closed she says:

> From this you will see that I have committed sacrilege & sacrificed the gods themselves. . . . I felt we should never be able to explain their interference to any audiences, & that the remorse of Electra & Orestes was a fitting conclusion to a long play that has no interval (I do not approve of "curtains") please please forgive me for avoiding the anticlimax; another reason was that I could not get a god![67]

That final lame excuse doesn't really conceal the purposefulness of her production decisions.

And these decisions had the desired effect on large groups of people. When *Electra* was done at Toynbee Hall, on that very modern arrangement of a bare stage with curtains, it was initially treated with mockery, Dionysus' wooden altar likened to an orange crate. But from Bishop's entry as Electra "her mere presence sufficed to lift the East End audience to a higher plane." Once again it was primarily her own visual impact, her gestural language, which had "the grand, stern beauty of an antique marble." The audience was now "spellbound." The play was done without a break. For two and a half hours "the whole story was unrolled without one murmur either of disapprobation or approval. In spite of themselves, unconsciously they sat open-mouthed and wide-eyed, as the sublime melodrama of the ancients was pictured before them."[68] Challenged that a poor audience has troubles of its own without adding Greek tragedy, Bishop argued that "the play must be big enough to lift the people from their own surroundings." The sorrows must be of a heroic scale. Whereas the fashionable audience yawns at these, they are properly appreciated by the working man: "the longer the speeches the more he claps" and "he understands the big things."[69]

The gender of the pronouns is careful. "Women, on the whole," said Bishop, "do not make so good an audience as men do." This negative opinion of women's capabilities was a regular sentiment. "Their brains are not trained. When women predominate we find that the attention is not nearly so close. But they are more sentimental."[70] Her coworker on the project, the young Camden-based artist Dora Lyon, agreed. For these two middle-class, highly competent women, it's the training of the female brain, the valuing of attention over sentiment, that is crucial. They are women who have managed to be unlike most women. And this brings us to a central element of Bishop's life and career: the negotiations around her own gendered position. We get there via a new relationship.

4

The performance of *Electra*, suggested the *Daily News*, was "the result of an art movement which has been taken up by the Theosophical Society."[71] The society was an apolitical, nonsectarian organization committed to promoting the Universal Brotherhood of Humanity. And certainly there were links through the personnel involved. Clytemnestra was played by the artist Diana Read, and Orestes was played by the Fabian doctor Godwin Baynes, later to be the champion in England of Jung's writings. Both were to appear again, along with Bishop's sister, Hilda Eland, in *Sister Beatrice*. And both shared links to the same person. Read did the illustrations for *Poems Dramatic & Lyrical* published by the Orpheus Press, a Theosophical offshoot, which had already produced Bishop's *From Gardens in the Wilderness*, the poetical product of her Middle East tour. The author of *Poems Dramatic* was the editor of the journal of the Theosophical Art Circle: Clifford Bax, an artist of independent means whose very wealthy family lived in Hampstead. Godwin Baynes was his much admired close friend. But whereas Baynes and others of the circle became Fabians, Bax, in reaction, became a Theosophist.[72] The personnel of the People's Free Theatre, then, show a familiar association with Fabianism and suffragism, now combined with Theosophy. What is unclear to me is how Bishop got tangled into this circle. It is true that her very close associate Florence Farr had done work supported by the Theosophers back in 1906, and that, at some point, Bax had become a friend of her sister-in-law Molly, who networked with a range of artists. It's also true that these sorts of people offered opportunity to a woman of Bishop's views and ambition. Baynes was artistically creative as well as having a reputation for championing the poor, and Diane Baynes Jansen (his daughter) suggests Bishop persuaded him to open a medical practice in Bethnal Green.[73] Bax himself had, as he said, an "unfashionable adherence to romantic literature,"[74] together with a substantial income. However they got there, he and Bishop married in Venice in September 1910.

Soon after marrying a woman committed to poetic theatre, Bax, whose writings had hitherto shown little interest in drama, published *Poems Dramatic* and then actual verse plays: the comic *Poetasters of Ispahan*, premiered by Maurice Elvey's Adelphi Play Society, and the more mystical *Echo and Narcissus* and *The Marriage of the Soul*. These were premiered by the Theosophical Art Circle, with Bishop both directing and acting in the first, still under her stage name, though now slightly amended to Miss Gwendolen Bishop. When the latter play was restaged by the Morality Play Society in 1913 she acted in it, together with her old friend Farquharson. If her talents and contacts facilitated her husband's new creative project, his wealth and interests gave her a social role. When they moved to a manor house at Broughton Gifford in Wiltshire in spring 1911, as Mrs. Clifford Bax she became effectively lady of the manor, living on an allowance provided by him. In February 1912 she chaired a meeting of the Bath Lodge of the Theosophical Society, of which her husband was president, and accompanied him at an At Home, where activist Annie Besant spoke (arguing that industrial disputes could be easily settled if both parties had more regard to their duties than their rights, and other such twaddle). The following summer at a garden fair at Broughton Gifford Bishop repeated her Ipswich charity performance of Dowson's *Pierrot of the Minute*. Just over a year later, in 1914, these activities, together with the PFT, came to an end. As did Gwendolen Bishop.

The cause was not so much the declaration of war as the collapse of the marriage. Certainly the onset of war increased her contempt for Bax, "who I fear is highly appreciative of Shaw's 'Common Sense about the War' as an argument to keep his civilian state even when medically fit." Shaw's essay had appeared in mid-December 1914. In it he argued that both the British and German people had been misled by their respective militarists and suggested that both armies should shoot their officers and go home and gather in the harvests. Bishop's own response to the essay was that

> I feel dazzled and then angry at being dazzled by Shaw's superficial "common sense". Has he reverence for anything but the life of a guinea pig? After all, if the sentimentality he so jeers at is veneer; every veneer is cut from precious woods, and the stuff it covers has no lasting qualities of its own.[75]

Instead she went off to Shoreditch Technical College to learn how to make munitions, and then to turn that experience into poems that reflect on the damage done by the weapons she makes and, above all, the transformative effects of shared work at machines, creating cross-class solidarity and a new sense of womanhood: "Frail hands of women: steadied for all labour; / Gloriously soiled to keep their honour pure."[76]

Underneath all this was a deeper emotional breakdown. She found Bax lacking in affection toward her, yet he collected women. One of those women was Bishop's own close friend Florence Farr. Invited by Bishop, she had visited them in Wiltshire in summer 1912, and Bax clearly became attached, so much so that Farr gave him guardianship of the letters between her and her lovers Yeats and Shaw. Another woman was Bishop's friend the actress Olga Ward, who went on holiday with Bishop in summer 1912 and then replaced her in the household when Bax ejected Bishop in 1913. But if Bax collected women, he didn't necessarily respect them. To Bishop he more or less owed the origins of the artistic career for which he became famous, whereas she, by contrast, felt she had given up her own artistic career to marry him. While on one hand, as she put it, she "slaved" to produce his first plays,[77] on the other, she observed that Bax, in his autobiographical book *Inland Far*, "passes over so many men & especially women who have vitally contributed to his development."[78] Actually, worse than that, it takes an implicit swipe at her when he mocks adherents of Simple Life, Arts and Crafts, and *New Age* ideologies, people who "wore sandals and homespuns."[79]

This swipe had relevance as much for the present as for Bishop's past. When Bax kicked her out of the much loved Wiltshire manor house she developed a new life for herself by buying a property in the quiet rural village of Speen. Although she still visited London, and in particular used the Three Arts Club, in Speen her focus was on self-sufficiency and gardening rather than theatre production. But it also, characteristically, involved, and developed, the community of the village. She became honorary secretary of their new Women's Institute, raised funds for wounded soldiers, campaigned against litter in the countryside, and worked actively in the local Liberal party (with the crowning success of getting rid of the sitting Tory in the 1923 general election).[80] This range of activity somewhat complicates Bax's model of the simple life. Simple rural lives can be as complex to maintain as metropolitan ones. The inappropriateness of his simplistic, and dismissive, generalization suggests the deep difference between their two mentalities. In formal terms they remained married, because, always hoping that he might come to act as a father to their child, she refused to divorce him.[81] He chipped away at and reduced, but still maintained, her allowance. And they led separate lives.

That separation had always potentially been there. While Mrs. Clifford Bax chaired a meeting of the Theosophical Society, Miss Gwendolen Bishop performed to dockers in the East End of London. When the stage activity came to an end, so did Gwendolen Bishop. She surfaced for a brief moment in April 1915, heading up a reading of a verse play by Bertha Louisa Bowhay at the London home of the wealthy Florence Cunard, and then was gone. But this is more than the story of a stage name. Back in 1901 Janet Ashbee knew her friend as Gwen. In 1906–7 Florence Farr and Robert Farquharson knew their friend as Daphne.[82] Her family and alienated husband still knew her as Gwen. In 1915 she was no longer Mrs. Clifford Bax but Daphne Bax. This management of her own naming was arguably driven not just by her career but also by her positioning as a woman in relation to the authoritative men in her life.

From those men she may have gotten a name, but not necessarily fulfillment. With Janet Ashbee she explored the joys of nakedness; with Florence Farr she explored the physical pleasures, indeed ecstasy, of spontaneous dancing. And then in 1908, on her way back from Baghdad, she met a woman who enabled an even deeper exploration: Edith Ellis, the lesbian wife of Havelock Ellis. Edith and Havelock had a loving relationship not predicated on sexual interaction, and they lived in separate places. This was a model for a liberated sort of marriage. And Edith was a model for a particular way of being a woman. Friendship with Edith would lead Bishop into a very different sort of performing.

5

In their personal relationship, she found Edith's temperament and neuroses very difficult. This she confided to Havelock, one of the few men in this narrative, apart perhaps from Pound, for whom she had respect and affection. Her letters to him seem to give her space to reflect on gendered identity: "Oh Havelock, never do you re-incarnate as a tolerably capable woman; for if you do, no one will ever believe you are tired, or try to decide a single point for themselves, but they will bring all their miseries & all their deplorable incapacities & dump them on your breast."[83] She recognized that to cope with her burden of duties she adopted a mask that caused others to find her hard. At the same time she had contempt for incompetent women: "The only excuse for woman is that man created her out of his desire; not God. God must have been busy or else a cynic to allow it."[84]

Out of her reduced allowance she supported Havelock financially. And she did it because, though his work on sexuality may have scandalized England, she thought he was "the most valuable writer we possess."[85] In taking this position, albeit only privately, Bishop was giving psychological as well as material support that encouraged Havelock Ellis to carry on working. Much as she did years before with the production of *Salome* she again set her face against repressive ideas about sexuality. And by these seemingly small and local measures she was one of those who contributed to the much larger shift of ideas about sexuality, which, like a glacier, had so much more happening beneath the surface—and moved about as slowly.

Havelock's opening up of ideas about sexuality in turn had bearing on her admiration for Edith, who "has so nobly frankly pleaded for the 'peculiar people.'"[86] Edith's plea for "peculiar people" was articulated in *New Horizon*, the book that Bishop thought her best. Indeed she planned to give a chapter of it as reading to the new Women's Institute, again in a very local way helping to initiate change. In *New Horizon* Edith writes:

> It is with a different order of "peculiar people" we find the worst tragedy. The true invert, though often not a criminal in any real sense, is an alien amongst normal people. He realises that he is the gipsy, the outcast, the sufferer, and it lies with him whether he can also be one of the redeemers of the race. Society does its best, through its distaste for him, to thwart this greater purpose for which he may possibly exist.[87]

Moving from "inverts" in general, her reflections in the same book on the fate of Oscar Wilde are a vehicle for an attack on both marriage and the heterosexual norm:

> In the near future the average sexual relationship of men to women to-day will be looked upon with as great an aversion as that for which Oscar Wilde was crucified.... We curse and kill the so-called abnormals when they transgress what we are pleased to call the moral law, but what of the normal and self-righteous amongst us, who, within the law of wedlock, indulge to excess or restrain to extinction? Are we not often uncaught criminals under the cloak of our legalities and moralities?[88]

Though Bishop celebrated this plea for "peculiar people," she had actually gone a step further. Her story "Jemil—the Beloved" in *From Gardens* depicts, lyrically, the love of a man and a boy. It is possible that the Arabian setting provided a safe enough exotic frame, but there is no hint of the language of "alien" versus "normal." The story's final image is that of a joyously harmonious nature: "Arm over shoulder Lover and Beloved wandered into the soft gloom of green. Where they had stood a glamour of light fell through the trees, and a little wind rippled the grass in silver smiles."[89] This image and its sentiment encourage us to look back to where we started and perhaps find deeper resonance in that *Salome* production that not only worked with male homosexuals but, crucially, also gave embodiment, for the first time in England, to the most perverse play of the convicted sodomite. This was then followed by a creative relationship with one of the sodomite's old friends, Charles Ricketts, who lived openly with his partner, Charles Shannon. Alongside these there were other, though more distant, links with male homosexuality. Her friend Nanette Dalmas had a composer brother, Philip, who was a member of the Bolton Whitman Fellowship (as was Edward Carpenter) and likely had an affair with one of its other members. And of course her intimate friend Janet Ashbee was married to a homosexual man and included among her close associates Laurence Housman and George Ives, both homosexuals and, in their own ways, sexual campaigners. In light of these contacts Bishop's selection of a text by Ernest Dowson for charity recitals becomes interesting. Dowson had a very specific cultural location. When Rupert Brooke was a schoolboy, under the "tutelage" of the homosexual author St. John Lucas, he was given to read Wilde, Baudelaire, and Dowson.[90]

As to relations between women, we have seen that Bishop herself had significant friendships, which also included the women with whom, not always happily, she went on holiday even while married—a "Mrs. Williams" in Paris in 1903[91] (whom I take to be Ethel Oakley Williams, who was married to the translator Philip Oakley Williams, performed in Walter Crane's masque, and was a friend of both Gerald Bishop and, later, Janet Ashbee); Olga Ward in Sark in August 1912[92] (perhaps to avoid the annual gathering of her husband's male cricketing chums); and a Miss Noel—possibly Barbara Noel, daughter of the socialist priest Conrad and organizer of the Thaxted Players—in Euboea around 1920, whom she shocked when she stripped naked to lie in a mountain stream (if it was indeed Barbara, she would have been only about twenty-three).[93] She also knew the bisexual imagist poet Hilda Doolittle (H. D.), supporting her when she became pregnant by a man other than her husband. Bishop found her a cottage in her own village of Speen and introduced her to her neighbor Havelock Ellis, and indeed to Clifford Bax—though after 1918 and the start of the poet's new relationship with Annie Winifred Ellerman, more famous as the writer Bryher, Doolittle dropped contact.

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Back in 1903 Ashbee wrote of Bishop:

> She has always appeared to me to be in a kind of sexual anaesthesia—& one was never quite sure whether the beautiful creature was a man or a woman, or would take wings & fly to a realm where they neither marry nor are given in marriage. She seems now however to have come to the knowledge of this lack in herself.[94]

She then asked Bishop why she was fond of her: "'Because you are beautiful!['] she said earnestly. . . . I gasped, & was silent."[95] Locked firmly into heterosexual desire, Janet Ashbee could only call it "sexual anaesthesia." We might now describe it as gender indeterminacy, and, perhaps further, that Bishop might best be described as falling into the general category of queer, or at least nonbinary. For the "lack" Ashbee saw in Bishop could also be regarded as an absence of commitment to, or pleasure in, the structure of hetero marriage. This doesn't mean, of course, that she can be identified as lesbian. In the Edwardian period, as all others, it's difficult, indeed false, to specify distinct divisions between hetero and homo—and so too, in terms of lived practices, as in the case of Gerald Bishop and Janet Ashbee, between chastity and sexual activity. This was a period, preeminently, of thinking about, discursively opening up, ideas around gender and sexuality and their practice. Almost immediately after Ashbee imagined she discovered this lack in her, Bishop performed in *Salome* and *Love's Comedy*, with their different sorts of representation of gender and desire. And the following year she performed in Moore's *Aphrodite against Artemis*, as Aphrodite. In this role she championed the heroine Phaedra, finishing the play by apostrophizing her corpse:

> Now with this kiss I draw that beauty back
> Which was not altogether well with thee,
> And thou shalt be untroubled 'mong the shades,
> For extra loveliness, by suitors bold.[96]

The kiss makes Phaedra both more beautiful and more resistant to suitors. Aphrodite then sets fire to the corpse and celebrates the "tidal passion" that roared in Phaedra's veins.[97] It's Moore's writing, but it's the sort of thing he thought Bishop could do, and the sort of thing she was clearly happy doing. Within the space of the performance something very different from lack, and also something very different from normative gender roles, could be performed.

Although there's little evidence of her practices off the stage Bishop's thinking clearly continued to develop well beyond this point, as we have seen in her reading, and enjoyment, of Edith Ellis's work and that of the notorious sexologist Havelock. In 1925, right at the end of her life, she asked him for a book. She had seen and read it at a friend's house and now wanted "to complete my noble line of 'Havelocks.'" She asked: "Don't you think I am the right sort of parent to be allowed to read it? I want it to be there, reading for Undine when she is ready."[98] My guess is that the book was *Little Essays of Love and Virtue*, published in 1922. The Preface says it is directed at "young people," who at their discretion can show it to their elders.[99] The first chapter deals with the negative effects of certain sorts of parenting. Other chapters include "The Objects of Marriage," "Husbands and Wives," "The Love-Rights of Women," and "The Play-Function of Sex." In that last essay he argues that the function of sex extends well beyond procreation, but it's the "Love-Rights" essay that is of huge relevance to any woman negotiating her position within the hetero structure: "the sexual order" of monogamy and the home, says Ellis, "had an unnatural and repressive influence on the erotic aspect of woman's sexual life"; the "marriage order . . . led to the indirect result of banning pleasure in women, or at all events in wives."[100] The reason I have had to guess at the title of the book is because Bishop's letter doesn't name it. She leaves a blank. Why? It's tempting to read this as self-censorship even in the privacy of a letter, but we can't know.

The limits on personal correspondence can be transcended, however, within the frame of performance. We've noted the selection of plays and roles, the various sorts of fictional women that had to be inhabited to be performed. To these we might now add the Boy in Farr's *Masque of Time* and the Page in *Salome*. Ashbee had said of her: "I always think of her more as a beautiful boy than a woman, in spite of her womanliness,"[101] and indeed the Guild of Handicraft wanted her to play Jasper in their *Knight of the Burning Pestle* (which wasn't possible, because Bishop was acting elsewhere). A few years later she herself opted to undertake Pierrot in Dowson's *The Pierrot of the Minute*, a text largely occupied with expressing Pierrot's devotion to the Moon Maiden.[102] This, though, with all the decorum of its rarefied text is somewhat ambivalent, indeed harmless. Less ambivalent was a performance in a very different mode. In "Johannes: A Memory" (Johannes was her name for Edith Ellis), Bishop tells of her being greeted by a sweaty Ellis, because she had "been on a committee," in the hall of the Lyceum Club: "I elaborately groomed her beaded brow, tidied her mane with my finger combs and lifting her face, kissed her on the mouth, with an eye to the several 'starchy' persons present." This was all a calculated performance. "'I believe you're showing off!' she said mischievously. 'I know you are!' I retorted, and we fell to laughing."[103]

The showing off offended starchiness by creating space for public physical intimacy between women. It was both contentious behavior and pleasurable behavior. This was performance based not in fictional dramaturgy but in the deployment of different versions of the self, different faces as it were, to present to the world. Thus in the list of names we've encountered, in Mrs. Bishop, Mrs. Bax, Gwen, Daphne, we see a not very rich middle-class woman managing her self-production, using performance both of others and of self not just to create a defensibly independent career but also to explore, and perhaps inhabit, divergent possibilities for gender and indeed sexuality. At the end, facing terminal ovarian cancer, she wrote again to Ellis: "I have always looked with friendly eyes at death, only fearing pain, & I have practically none; to me it is the final & perhaps most thrilling adventure in a life that has teemed with them."[104]

Notes

1 Simon Shepherd, *The English Theatrical Avant-Garde, 1900–1925* (London: Routledge, 2023).

2 Robert Ross, "*Salomé*: History of the Play—The Drama and the Music," *Morning Post*, 8 December 1910, 4.

3 *The Referee,* 14 May 1905, 2; *Lancashire Evening Post,* 12 May 1905, 2.

4 Laurence Housman to Robert Ross, 3 May 1905, Correspondence of Robert Baldwin Ross, Add. MS 81718, Eccles Bequest, British Library.

5 Charles Ricketts, "Scribbling Diary," 10 May 1905, Diaries of Charles Ricketts, Add. MS 58103, Ricketts and Shannon Papers, British Library.
6 *Letters from Charles Ricketts to "Michael Field," (1903–1913)*, ed. J. G. Paul Delaney (Edinburgh: Tragara Press, 1981), 18.
7 Thomas Sturge Moore to Robert Ross, 31 May 1905, Correspondence of Ross.
8 Cast names in Oscar Wilde, *Salome*, ed. Robert Ross (London: John Lane, 1907).
9 An organization founded in 1914 to press for transparency in government war aims. Most of its members were on the political Left.
10 Michael Davidson, *The World, the Flesh and Myself* ([1962] London: GMP, 1985), 134.
11 John Stokes, *Oscar Wilde: Myths, Miracles, and Imitations* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 10, citing Peter Quennell.
12 I use surnames throughout, unless discussing a married couple or relatives. Of Bishop's three possible names I generally opt for her stage name.
13 Maria Roberts, *Let Them Say: The Life of Frederick Stanley Smith* ([UK]: FeedARead.com Publishing, 2016), n.p.
14 Robert Le Diable, "The Past, the Present and the Future," *Winning Post* (16 November 1918): 5–6.
15 Edra Charlotte Bogle, "The Life and Literary and Artistic Activities of Robert Baldwin Ross, 1869–1918" (Ph.D. diss., University of Southern California, 1969), 202.
16 Robert Ross to Gwendolen Bishop, 6 April 1905, *Salome* file, Oscar Wilde, Mander and Mitchenson Collection, University of Bristol Theatre Collection (hereafter *Salome* file, Wilde). Note that William Tydeman and Steven Price, *Wilde: Salome* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 49, wrongly say that Bishop didn't play a role.
17 Robert Ross to Florence Farr, 14 February [1905], Florence Farr papers, 982/A/1-C/2, Senate House Library, London (hereafter SHL).
18 See letters from Charles Russell to Bishop, April 1905, and letters of thanks to Murby from Herbert Alexander and Arthur Bernhard-Smith, May 1905, in *Salome* file, Wilde.
19 Thomas Sturge Moore to William Pye, 5 December 1905, Thomas Sturge Moore papers, 978/1/5/38, SHL.
20 In *Florence Farr, Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats: Letters*, ed. Clifford Bax (Dublin: Cuala Press, 1941), 33–4.
21 L. H., "Ibsen at Cripplegate," *Daily News,* 29 November 1905, 8.
22 Cast list in Roberts, *Let Them Say*.
23 "Vedette," *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, 8 December 1906, 626.
24 "Success of Handicraft Industries," *West Surrey Times,* 19 August 1905, 5.
25 Ashbee Journal, Papers of Charles Robert Ashbee, King's College Library, Cambridge (hereafter Papers of Ashbee), folio 44.
26 *Archives of the Fabian Society* (Brighton, Sussex, UK: Harvester Microform, 1979).
27 J. B. B. Wellington, "The Professional Photographers' Congress: The Annual Dinner," *British Journal of Photography* 60 (18 April 1913), 299–302, at 301.
28 Laurence Housman to Janet Ashbee, 30 October 1903, Papers of Ashbee.
29 Janet Ashbee, "Rachel," unfinished manuscript, 64, Papers of Ashbee.
30 Ashbee Journal, Papers of Ashbee, folio 82.
31 See Shepherd, *English Theatrical Avant-Garde*, 139–40.
32 Gwendolen Bishop to Janet Ashbee, Papers of Ashbee, folio 311.
33 Fiona MacCarthy, *The Simple Life: C. R. Ashbee in the Cotswolds* (London: Lund Humphries, 1981), 89.
34 Gerald Bishop, *A May-Day Interlude* (Campden, UK: Essex House Press, 1904).
35 Felicity Ashbee, *Janet Ashbee: Love, Marriage, and the Arts and Crafts Movement* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 118, suggests the relationship was ended by Ashbee in summer 1908.
36 Ashbee Journal, Papers of Ashbee, folio 304.
37 Sylvia Legge, *Affectionate Cousins: T. Sturge Moore and Marie Appia* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1980), 193.
38 Gwendolen Bishop to Janet Achurch, 12 July, Janet Achurch and Charles Charrington Correspondence, box 2, folder 29, Beinecke Library, Yale University. As usual Bishop gives no year on her letter but it was written from the address in Cheyne Walk, which she left in 1905.
39 Laurence Housman to Janet Ashbee, 23 November [1902], Papers of Ashbee.
40 Walter Crane, *Beauty's Awakening: A Masque of Winter and of Spring*, Art Workers Guild, London: *The Studio*, summer number (1899): 1–44, at 41.

41 Walter Crane, *An Artist's Reminiscences* (New York: Macmillan, 1907), 454.
42 J. Ashbee, "Rachel," 63.
43 "Fighting the Fashions," *Dundee Evening Post*, 13 May 1901, 6.
44 Robyne Calvert, "'The Artistic Aspect of Dress': The Story of the Healthy and Artistic Dress Union," *Costume* 54.2 (2020): 175–201, at 176.
45 J. Ashbee, "Rachel," 63.
46 Ashbee Journal, "On the Severn—River Camp 1901 August 16th to 25th," Papers of Ashbee, folio 188.
47 Ronald Schuchard, *The Last Minstrels: Yeats and the Revival of the Bardic Arts* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010), 156.
48 "Spontaneous Dancing," *Middlesex & Surrey Express*, 1 June 1904, 2.
49 Ashbee Journal, Papers of Ashbee, folio 189.
50 As quoted, but not verified, in Valerie Large, *The Ring of Immortality: The Life of Gwendolen Bishop* (Valerie Large, 2023), 173–4. Caution is necessary in this citation because the extent of the misreadings, errors, and haphazard referencing in this scrappily put together book make it unreliable as a source. Its potential usefulness lies only in the fact that it is based on a private collection of Gwendolen Bishop's papers, but this is highly compromised in that there is no description of the provenance and properties of these documents, they have not been made available to scholarly scrutiny, and even direct quotations from them appear to contain errors.
51 Clifford Bax to Florence Farr, 2 August [1912], Florence Farr papers, 982/A/1-C/2, SHL.
52 Gwendolen Bishop, "The Deceased Wife's Sister Bill," *Saturday Review*, 24 August 1907, 235.
53 "Chit Chat," *The Stage*, 2 March 1911, 18.
54 *Boro' of West Ham, East Ham and Stratford Express*, 29 January 1910, 8.
55 "The People's Free Theatre," *Westminster Gazette*, 6 February 1911, 8.
56 I have not been able to confirm that they followed recent precedent in casting a woman as Everyman.
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