

Theatres and Friendships: the Spheres and Strategies of  
Elizabeth Robins

Submitted by Leslie Anne Hill to the University of Exeter as a thesis for the degree of  
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## Abstract

Victorian women used strategies that allowed them to not only work as actresses but also as directors, producers, translators, and playwrights, thus transforming theatre at the cusp of the New Drama. Female friendships were particularly integral to these strategies as women employed secretiveness and anonymity, charm and shrewdness, networking and collaborating in small and large groups to meet their creative and professional goals. Through these means of sociability women enlarged their spheres of influence beyond the stage.

Elizabeth Robins is a superb example of these strategies, particularly when theatrical realism was her primary focus. Though she also collaborated well with men, William Archer and Henry James among them, it was Robins's female friends who helped her to establish a London career. This project shows how Robins and her women friends contributed to the New Drama in dynamic, critical, and often-secret ways. Marion Lea and Robins finagled the rights to *Hedda Gabler* in 1891. Lea and Florence Bell helped Robins to translate plays for production and to develop new acting techniques suited to realism. After Lea left England, Robins and Bell joined Grein's Independent Theatre Society to present their anonymously written protest play *Alan's Wife*. These efforts illustrate the adaptive functions of female friendships. Through closer examination of their relationships, particularly the one Robins and Bell called a sisterhood, we see the nurturing functions of female friendships.

This project explains some of the reasons why, despite being famous in their day, these women disappeared from history. It was not just because of male control of the theatre, but was also a product of their own desires to protect themselves. Secrecy had served them well in the 1890s, but their fame faded as even friends forgot them. Yet, since female socialization taught them to be group-focused, these women's stories are highly pertinent to the history of the theatre, an art form that is collaborative by its nature. Through study of their work and their relationships, we can fill some gaps in theatre history, women's history, and nineteenth-century history, adding resonance to their voices that may carry to coming generations.

“The prophet, for all his traditional solemnity, is intellectually a care-free[,] even a light-hearted person by comparison with the historian who is . . . hampered by a yoke of responsibility that most prophets would scorn.”

Elizabeth Robins, *Whither and How* “Note”

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## List of Abbreviations

Elizabeth Robins and her friends frequently used initials to stand for proper names (with and without full stops), and abbreviations to stand for simple words. I also use abbreviations for titles of works, for the archival collections, and for the Independent Theatre Society.

+	and
abt	about
bet	between
<i>Both Sides</i>	<i>Both Sides of the Curtain</i> by Elizabeth Robins
cd	could
ER	Elizabeth Robins
e'en	even
eve	evening
F or FB	Florence Bell
fr	from
Fales	Fales Library, New York University
GBS	George Bernard Shaw
HJ	Henry James
H or WH	William Heinemann
<i>IA</i>	<i>Ibsen and the Actress</i> by Elizabeth Robins
<i>IC</i>	<i>Henry Irving Correspondence</i>
ITS	Independent Theatre Society
mg	morning
Miss F	Constance Fletcher (pen name George Fleming)
<i>ODNB</i>	<i>Oxford Dictionary of National Biography</i>
pd	paid
shd	should
tc	et cetera
<i>TF</i>	<i>Theatre and Friendship</i> by Elizabeth Robins
tho'	though
v	very
w	with
WA	William Archer
wd	would
<i>WH</i>	<i>Whither and How</i> by Elizabeth Robins
wh	which
<i>Works</i>	<i>At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town</i> by Florence Bell
' <i>World</i> '	<i>The Theatrical World of 1893–1897</i> by William Archer
X	Cross (a stage direction i.e. cross the stage)
yr	your

## Introduction: Angels in the Wings?

“One feels, in this terribly hurrying age and roaring place, as if one were testifying in the desert. In London . . . the waves sweep dreadfully over the dead—they drop out and their names are unuttered.”

Henry James, 1881<sup>1</sup>

Though the archival search for women writers continues, we have not been as engaged in finding the many women who wrote for the stage.<sup>2</sup> This amnesia has warped both society’s view of theatre and its view of women. Susan Bennett laments:

We still do not have anything resembling a comprehensive account of women’s dramatic production or any full account of what these women have contributed, in their own historical moments and beyond, to the history of the theatre. This is despite the very real labor of many scholars working in different periods and different geographies on women playwrights and so it seems that the problem may be less one of identification and more one of categorization. (71)

Naming names and finding categories in which to place them is part of the process of recovering theatre women. Yet, neither identification nor categorization puts flesh on their bones. As the Other in theatre history is explored in all its human and geographic forms, I consider that more intimate investigations of the lives and perspectives of theatre women themselves are still needed, utilizing archival documents and life writing. For, as Jacky Bratton explains in *New Readings in Theatre History*, interpretation is a vital reason for collecting such documents (4). At this point in theatre historiography, what Bratton calls a “hybrid” of theoretical approaches is essential. My

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<sup>1</sup> Fred Kaplan, *Henry James: The Imagination of Genius* (New York: Morrow, 1992) 352. These are not my ellipses. Future ellipses are mine unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> As well as Susan Bennett, "Decomposing History (Why Are There So Few Women in Theatre History?)," eds., William B. Worthen and Peter Holland, *Theorizing Practice: Redefining Theatre History* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2003) 71–87, see Shaw and Randolph, *New Woman Writers of the Late Nineteenth Century* (Tavistock: Northcote, 2007) x. See also Katherine Newey, *Women’s Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2003), and Katherine E. Kelly "The Making of Modern Drama," *Modern Drama by Women 1880s–1930s* (London: Routledge, 1996) 1–16.

hybridization includes feminist, Marxist, New Historicist, and psychoanalytic theories in order to analyze plays, to investigate the lives of the female players and playwrights who produced them, and to understand the social contexts in which text, author, and player came together. My approach is also a hybridization of disciplines: theatre history, literary history, and women's history—emphasizing the latter two—as I interpret theatre women's stories as part of women's culture.

Elaine Showalter defines women's culture as “a collective experience within the cultural whole, an experience that binds women writers to each other over time and space” (“Feminist” 197). Yet, without in-depth knowledge of theatre women, how can we bind ourselves to them? From women players, playwrights, translators, and managers, we could learn vital aspects of women's culture—even more so with Elizabeth Robins who sometimes took on all these roles in the Victorian theatre.<sup>3</sup> From such women we discover hidden aspects of the theatre, an art form that is also “a collective experience within the cultural whole.” Showalter has established that a woman writer cannot fully know herself, achieve her own voice, or find her own perspective without knowing her literary foremothers.<sup>4</sup> Yet even “recovered” women artists are not well known or understood. Gerda Lerner asserts in *The Creation of Patriarchy* Vol. I, that

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<sup>3</sup> The Victorian manager usually performed tasks of the modern manager (responsible for theatre operation), director (responsible for performance), and producer (responsible for financing). This allowed one person—usually a man—to have most of the control over who and what audiences saw.

<sup>4</sup> See *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, 2009 ed. (Princeton UP, 1977) 7. Others express this view, including Virginia Woolf in *A Room of One's Own*, first published in 1928. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar's *The Madwoman in the Attic: The Woman Writer and the Nineteenth-Century Literary Imagination* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1979) is also pivotal and was reprinted in 2000. See also *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women, Literature, and Theory* edited by Showalter (New York: Pantheon, 1985), particularly “A Map for Re-reading: Gender and the Interpretation of Literary Texts” by Annette Kolodny, 46–62. Ellen Donkin finds it “disturbing that women today still make up only about 10 percent of the playwriting profession.” See *Getting into the Act: Women Playwrights in London 1776–1829* (London: Routledge, 1995).

In its anthropological sense [the term women's culture is used] to encompass the familial and friendship networks of women, their affective ties, their rituals. . . . Whenever they are confined by patriarchal restraint or segregation into separateness (which always has subordination as its purpose), [women] transform this restraint into complementarity and redefine it. (242)<sup>5</sup>

I reveal the “familial and friendship networks,” the “affective ties,” and the “rituals” that enabled Elizabeth Robins and her female friends to redefine “patriarchal restraint” in the theatre, to advance the New Drama, and to express their own professional and political views, enlarging their spheres of influence beyond the stage. As the title of Robins's memoir *Whither and How* suggests, we are asking questions that some Victorian women have already answered. However, since this memoir went unpublished and many of Robin's details remain secret, I reveal the intimate means Robins and her friends used to shape the London stage at the fin de siècle as a piece of the “comprehensive” picture that Bennett proposes. This case study also answers Jacky Bratton's call to uncover more of women's “networks of kin and influence” in the theatre “across the [Victorian] period and beyond” (*New* 197). However, this story is not about genetic kin, for Robins left her family, none of them actors, behind in America. Her story illustrates the “kin and influence” of common goals and philosophies of the fin de siècle stage (*New* 14–15).<sup>6</sup> Bratton suspects a connection between the Victorian perception of decline in the theatre, when theatres were expanding both in number of houses and numbers of seats, with an increase in the number of women practitioners in it. In order to appreciate the varied picture of Victorian theatre it is necessary to, as Bratton suggests, bring women forward “whose

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<sup>5</sup> Human beings who feel threatened cling to those with whom they find some commonality. This is a natural response that women have utilized so frequently that it seems as if it were a natural part of womanhood and woman's culture. Lerner states, “woman's culture is never a subculture. It would hardly be appropriate to define the culture of half of humanity as a subculture. . . . Women live a duality—as members of the general culture and as partakers of women's culture.” See *The Creation of Patriarchy*, Vol. I (New York: Oxford UP, 1986) 242. See also Gerda Lerner, *The Majority Finds Its Past: Placing Women in History* (New York: Oxford UP, 1979), especially Ch. 11 (“The Majority Finds Its Past”) and Ch. 12 (“The Challenge of Women's History”).

<sup>6</sup> My primary focus is on female friendships, but Robins's male friends and the groups she joined were also helpful and shared many similar aesthetic goals.



stories were not remembered or were inaccurately recorded” (15). Robins’s female friends are examples of the former while Robins is, at best, an example of the latter. By examining these women’s contributions more closely, we recognize them as innovators, not the props they appear to be in the histories of their male cohorts. Telling these forgotten stories enriches Victorian theatre history.

In his 1986 biography, *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign*, Thomas Postlewait decries the absence of theatre critic William Archer from previous histories of the Ibsen movement (11–14). Yet, it should similarly be understood that Marion Lea and Florence Bell made important contributions to the Ibsen campaign, and that Elizabeth Robins was as “ubiquitous” to the movement after 1889 as Archer (13). Postlewait asserts that “Without this denotative register of who, what, where, when and how, the theatre history that we present is nonsense” (xviii). I agree.<sup>7</sup> And because I respect the talent, hard work, and dedication of Lea, Bell, and Robins and admire the camaraderie they shared, I reject Postlewait’s contention that in the Ibsen campaign “Archer was more important than anyone else” (xiii).<sup>8</sup> While any story needs a protagonist, I do not wish to repeat the sins of Great Men histories. So while I look closer than previous historians have done at these women’s personal relationships and strategies in order to learn how they accomplished what they did, I also widen my focus to take in Robins’s other colleagues, including many of the associates of the Independent Theatre Society. Enlarging our perspective enables us to see others who have previously been forgotten—women and men. Through this I show how community and collaboration created the New Drama movement. I illustrate how women were able to add vitally to its success despite the fact that, as Tracy Davis asserts, they were “typically excluded from full and uncontested public

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<sup>7</sup> See also Gay Gibson Cima, *Performing Women: Female Characters, Male Playwrights, and the Modern Stage* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell UP, 1993) 5, 20; and Nina Auerbach, “Before the Curtain,” *Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 4.

<sup>8</sup> McKee presents a similar contention about Shaw. “In 1891 a young Dutch friend and fellow critic, Jacob T. Grein, had produced Ibsen’s *Ghosts* to inaugurate the new Independent Theatre in support of Shaw’s almost solitary campaign for the New Drama.” See “Bernard Shaw’s Beginnings on the London Stage,” *PMLA*, vol. 74, no. 4 (Sept. 1959) 470.

participation” in the theatre (*Economics* 290) in financial, social, and psychological ways (285). Since Victorian women’s socialization particularly encouraged group-focus, paying attention to women’s stories yields a deeper consideration of the collaborative realities of the theatre that are essential both to the art form and to a fuller understanding of its history.

Previous histories that present Robins as selfish and calculating ignore the contrary evidence that shows an artist who felt she had a mission beyond her own career, and a friend who was loyal even when differences arose. I stress (and Robins acknowledged) that her achievements were the sum of synergy. Her strategies for success were often joint strategies: developing new acting methods; writing, translating, and adapting challenging plays; creating communities to produce these works; and taking part in larger communities like the Independent Theatre to help stretch and expand the English drama. Though they worked in commercial theatres too, as they sought to improve the theatre and their lot as artists, Robins, Lea, and Bell often turned to non-commercial companies where everything was to be about art, not about money. Thus they turned the private Victorian drawing room inside out, creating many aspects of modern community theatre at the cusp of a new century.<sup>9</sup>

In her book, *Female Friendships and Communities*, Pauline Nestor considers the social lives of three of the most noted nineteenth-century women novelists: Brontë, Eliot, and Gaskell. My subjects are from the next generation, thus adding to knowledge of Victorian women’s sociability later in the century. Robins and Bell did not achieve lasting fame with their novels, but their spheres were much broader than those of Brontë, Eliot, or Gaskell. Like the Brontë sisters, Robins and Bell were emotionally close. Their friendship sustained them personally and professionally for nearly forty years, despite differences of age, class, nationality, and politics. While their professional collaboration illustrates the creative and adaptive functions of female friendships, the genuine attachment they called a sisterhood illustrates the nurturing functions of female friendships. To see such friendships as mere business associations is to miss the solidarity, the fostering, and the inclusivity of women’s sociability.

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<sup>9</sup> See also Katherine Kelly, “Alan’s Wife: Mother Love and Theatrical Sociability In London of the 1890s,” *Modernism/Modernity* 11.3 (2004) 539–560.

Though she disappeared from theatre history once she left London in 1892, Marion Lea was a gifted actress in her own right. She influenced Robins's professional development in many ways, but initially, and perhaps most profoundly, by taking her to see Janet Achurch's *A Doll's House*. After seeing Achurch's realistic performance, Lea and Robins overhauled their acting practices to explore realism by producing *Hedda Gabler*. As directors they empowered one another and each of their cast members to fully explore their parts and to contribute suggestions to the company for the good of the whole. This kind of collaboration was revolutionary. After its failures on the continent, Lea and Robins gave *Hedda Gabler* its first success (Innes *Henrik* 42–43). Their performances brought them fame as two of the most public Ibsen supporters in England. It is not often acknowledged that Lea was the first English Thea Elvsted or that she cast the play and helped to translate it for the London stage. Robins's memoir *Whither and How* reveals more of Lea's role in the Joint Management,<sup>10</sup> while her letters to Robins provide further clues to their personal lives and professional approaches.

As well as a playwright, Florence Bell was a novelist, a biographer, and a social critic. She is best remembered for exposing the human costs of industrialization in *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town, Middlesbrough*. However, none of her works reveal her personality, her relationships, or her working strategies. Bell asked Robins to burn her letters after she read them, so only a few survive. This, and the fact that she left no autobiography,<sup>11</sup> has resulted in a largely one-sided history of her friendship with Robins. Since theatre histories have mostly ignored her, I showcase Bell's contribution to the New Drama as much as limited resources allow. Knowing

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<sup>10</sup> The typescript of *Whither and How*, hereafter cited as *WH*, is housed in Box 78, Series VII of the Robins Collection at Fales Library, New York University. The pagination of this work starts over at the beginning of each chapter, and some material is repetitious. To avoid confusion, in the parenthetical citations I give the chapter number, then the page number(s).

<sup>11</sup> John introduces the 1985 reprint of *At the Works* with a brief biography of Bell. See "Introduction," *At the Works: A Study of a Manufacturing Town*, 1985 ed. (London: Virago, 1907) ix–xxiv. John also wrote Bell's entry in the *Oxford Dictionary of National Biography* (hereafter *ODNB*). *At the Works* will hereafter be cited as *Works*.

that Robins wanted to tell their story, Bell collaborated posthumously by bequeathing Robins's letters back to her. Robins used these letters and those she and Bell received from mutual friend Henry James to write *Theatre and Friendship*.<sup>12</sup> While I use this book as a resource, much insight into Bell's life is only available through study of her surviving letters. Though few, they remarkably illustrate key details about how Bell saw her work within her sphere via, during, and after the Ibsen campaign. Perhaps Robins could not bring herself to burn them. Bell sent a particularly moving letter, discussed in Chapter 3, from her sister's deathbed. Even in her grief, Bell showed concern not just for Robins, but also for her work.

As an actress Robins traveled widely, making friends wherever she went (Bell *Landmarks* 113). Acting took her across America from the age of nineteen. At the age of twenty-seven, she moved to London where she expanded into managing, directing, translating, and playwriting. Her remarkable ability to collaborate is illustrated in the fact that only two years after her arrival in London, she was actively engaged in the New Drama movement. She wrote in her diary on October 26, 1891:

Marion Lea comes and spends day—we laugh and shout ourselves hoarse as usual—dainty luncheon—[salt beef] after both of us on sofa with rugs and cushions long long talk. She goes after four. Mrs. Hugh Bell comes to talk over play she will write me and shows me scenario. I suggest a 1<sup>st</sup> act with murder done instead of told . . . opera boxes background—I try to get her to let the heroine really kill the other woman instead of being only a victim of circumstantial evidence. [At the] theatre, letter fr. [manager] Wyndham—he insists on America.<sup>13</sup> I write “nay” etc. perhaps I lose that offer. See [Henry] James and he tells me about [Arthur Wing] Pinero's *Times*. Mrs. Bonanza Mackay and party to see [James's play] *The American*. Letters from WA [William Archer] morning 135 and eve. 136[.] Amelie Rives' [novel] *According to St. John* from Wm H[einemann]. Write long long letter to ~~WA~~[.]<sup>14</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> The title *Theatre and Friendship* will be cited hereafter as *TF*.

<sup>13</sup> Quoted text is copied as it appears in the original with minimal changes only where meaning would otherwise be unclear.

<sup>14</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; Folder 18 A, “1891.” Robins destroyed her 1890s diaries. Series I is a collection of letters, notes, and datebooks—not her typical diaries. Robins met Archer in June 1890 but did not work with him until early 1891. By the date of this entry Robins had known him only a few months, but he had sent her 136 letters. See also John 77. Besides the symbol α, Robins also used ~~WA~~ to stand for Archer.

This entry shows Robins's busy life and her independent choices; it also shows her rich social circle. Though she came from an obscure background, through her intelligence, talent, and charm she brought herself into the inner circle of London literati shortly after her arrival in England. Poor and unknown as she was in 1888, how did she bring herself so quickly to success as Hedda Gabler by 1891? Briefly educated as she was, how did she move so easily among the intelligentsia of London who “saw themselves in a changing environment, one in which they were contributing agents of change” (Postlewait *Prophet* xx), both in the theatre and in the wider culture? How did Robins encourage others to take part in the New Drama—even the conservative Florence Bell, with whom she seemingly had little in common? Although they are not now well known, Robins, Lea, and Bell worked for the London theatre alongside men as cohorts and even in front of them as leaders. Yet, because they were women, they could not *seem* to lead. They had to be prudent, resourceful, and sometimes crafty in their negotiations with the men who seemingly held all the power. They were often secretive and resorted to anonymity in their work to protect their privacy and their reputations. Above all they had to be devoted to one another to achieve their common goals.

Robins wrote about her experiences and collected family and personal memorabilia during the course of her ninety years, so her collection at Fales Library, New York University is vast. It includes letters, diaries, playbills, photographs, many unpublished works, and even a thick rope of her hair that she cut in the 1920s. This intriguing collection takes up 100 linear feet of shelf space and could inform historians on many varied subjects. (For example, “The Robins Family Papers” section of the archive could spark research on family dynamics and the treatment of and attitudes toward mental illness in nineteenth-century America.) Robins made important contributions to the theatre and to women’s rights and even explored the Klondike during the gold rush, all of which she was famous for in her time. Yet she has relatively few works written about her. I assert that if we had one tenth of this material from any male artist of similar consequence, it would be endlessly explored through every scholarly avenue. Partly because of her own secrecy, Robins’s efforts have been largely ignored. Her acting techniques have been mostly unexplored. Not only has her play *Alan’s Wife* been misinterpreted, but Robins herself

has been seen as one who only used others. Her means of creating community have been overlooked. Many of the works and the lives of those in Robins's circle are absent from theatre history. These problems cause a loss to theatre history, women's history, women's culture, and nineteenth-century history that this work aims to ameliorate. I interpret Robins's theatre and suffrage careers through the framework of friendship and community. I use her papers to show aspects of women's sociability in the late nineteenth century that are not in the received history to reveal what Robins and her female friends did, how and why they did it, and what it means to our culture.

My work expands on two books about Robins published in the 1990s—one by Joanne E. Gates<sup>15</sup> and another by Angela V. John.<sup>16</sup> These works are invaluable resources on Robins. Yet, as biographies, their scope covers an entire life, while my analyses probe particular issues, works, individuals, and relationships associated with that life. As I explored Robins's treasures, I wondered why Gates and John did not quote more from the richness of the Robins archive to enhance our understanding of her personality and those of the other fascinating individuals who were an integral part of her life and work. Nina Auerbach similarly laments in her review of these books that they are “surprisingly stingy with their quotes. When we do hear Robins' voice, it leaps beyond her story, but to know her, we need more” (“All” 10). I agree, so I provide particularly telling letters, for to know these women we must hear their voices. To simply say that friendships, and particularly female friendships, were vital to women is not as powerful as to feel the emotion in Lea, Robins, and Bell's own words that can bring them, as Robins said of her character Hedda Gabler, “warm to [our] touch” (Robins *Ibsen* 26).

Though I exhibit materials that compellingly reveal Robins's most important relationships, especially her female relationships, some of her relationships were problematic. Her mother was institutionalized when Elizabeth was ten years old, and her father left her and most of her siblings to the care of his mother. Elizabeth was closer to her grandmother Jane Hussey Robins than to any other woman in her youth,

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<sup>15</sup> Unless otherwise noted, references to Gates refer to *Elizabeth Robins, 1862–1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist* (Tuscaloosa: U of Alabama P, 1994).

<sup>16</sup> Unless otherwise noted, references to John refer to *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862–1952* (London: Routledge, 1995).

so I use their correspondence to illuminate Robins's first key female relationship. Their letters also show Robins's attitude toward her early career in America and her feelings about her future husband, George Richmond Parks. This material is from the "Robins Family Papers" section of the archive. Series I of Robins's "General Correspondence" contains letters from 1873 to 1887, including those from Parks. This was another problematic relationship. These letters shed light on a marriage strained by Parks' jealousy, and indicate the emotional instability that led to his suicide in 1887. Her father's abandonment and her husband's death contributed to Robins's difficulty in trusting other men who entered her life after she settled in London in 1888, and undoubtedly encouraged her reliance on female friends. I explore her reflections on remarriage from *Whither and How*, her diary, and the margins of some of her letters.

By looking *into* rather than *at* relationships, I provide a more intimate understanding of Robins and her circle than previous biographers have allowed. For example, while John avoids details of the fight over rights to *Hedda Gabler* because they are "convoluted," I use the archive to closely examine the details of this production in order to reveal these women's personalities and their methods. "General Correspondence" Series II contains letters from 1888 to 1952, including those from Marion Lea. Robins and Lea premiered *Hedda Gabler* in 1891; this fact is sometimes mentioned in theatre histories, but the actual workings of the Joint Management are not to be found there or even in Robins's published autobiographies. For these and other details of her professional life, I select specific letters and extracts from *Whither and How*. Robins and Lea's methods were especially circuitous for *Hedda Gabler*, not only because they feared male prejudice against them as theatre managers, but also because of the acrimony among the male contenders for the play. Female deference in front of the men became defiance when the women were alone, yet they managed to convince each of the men to help them. My approach to this material illustrates Lea and Robins's tremendous commitment to the *Hedda Gabler* collaboration that realized their dream of producing more inspiring stage roles for women. Robins originally intended these details for the final chapter of *Both Sides of the Curtain*, but the draft ran too long. Though she wrote *Whither and How* as a sequel, it was never published. The typescript also expounds on Robins's acting and directing philosophy in much greater detail than either of her published memoirs, *Both Sides of the Curtain* and

*Theatre and Friendship*. I provide detailed analysis of Robins's acting methods exhibited in her prompt copy of *Hedda Gabler* located in Series VIII of the archive.

Materials from Series II and Series V contain many of the secrets of Robins's personal, professional, and political worlds that enabled her success on the theatrical stage from 1888 to 1902, and the political stage from ca. 1906 until her retirement from the Women's Social and Political Union in 1912. I select from Bell and Lea's correspondence with Robins from 1890–1897 (when they were most actively collaborating with Robins on the New Drama) to explore their intimacy and comradeship with her. These letters are essential to explaining how these women worked, both inside and outside the theatre. Series V of the collection contains the correspondence Robins enjoyed with Florence Bell, which commenced in 1891 and continued until Bell's death in 1930. Letters from Robins to Bell fill seven file boxes; Bell's papers fill only three. Fortunately Robins did not always comply with Bell's request to burn her letters. My research on Bell is mainly focused on materials in folders 1 and 2 of Box 8 (Subseries B, Series V), which contain materials from 1891–1904. I use Bell's papers to explore how she compartmentalized her life in order to manage a home, a family, and a career as a writer and philanthropist, and to show how she employed secrecy to maintain control over her work. She shared many secrets with Robins rather than with her family, who saw her writing career as only a hobby.

The most significant literary work for the study of Bell and Robins's collaborative processes is *Alan's Wife*, a play they wrote in 1893 for the Independent Theatre Society. However, there is no original copy of the play to turn to for clues to Robins's acting methods. Nor is there much from Bell on her literary intentions for the play. *Alan's Wife* has been largely interpreted as an expression of eugenics. Therefore, I put this provocative play in context, explaining what I believe were Bell and Robins's intentions for a piece that goes far beyond eugenic theories. The play is also a social protest with rich historical, literary, psychological, and even medical nuances. Through exploration of acting philosophies of the time, I attempt to create a picture of how Robins brought her heroine Jean Creyke to life. I also show how audiences reacted to the performance. Through the only mention of it in Robins's letters, I reveal what the play meant to her. Characteristically for Robins, it was a means of growing closer to Bell. I use *Alan's Wife* and Bell's letters to Robins about the play to showcase Bell's writing process. To further



fill in the social context of the play, I bring forward details of the Independent Theatre itself. Among this group were a handful of women who took the opportunity J. T. Grein offered to explore realism as playwrights. I compare the similar themes of these women's plays that grappled with serious issues like poverty, social injustice, women's roles, and what constitutes sanity in modern society. These plays were performed in London at a time when most audiences preferred light drama and farce. Independent Theatre artists were pioneers of realism whose efforts have been overshadowed. I illuminate them to show another of Robins's collaborative communities that helped her to succeed in the male-dominated theatre.

Auerbach says of John and Gates' books, "When we do hear Robins' voice, it leaps beyond her story." However, this could be said of Robins's memoirs too. Though she wrote three of them and based much of her fiction on her own life, it was in Robins's nature to hide herself. John contends, "[W]e shall never really 'know' Elizabeth" (6). According to Paul John Eakin, author of *How Our Lives Become Stories: Making Selves*, it is not possible to thoroughly know anyone, even ourselves (x). However, we can come closer to understanding Robins and her reasons for hiding behind personae through a psychoanalytical approach to explore why she used memoirs to tell the story of the theatre, rather than the story of herself. Her habit of secrecy partly explains why her career has been largely lost to history, but it also explains why it is imperative to go beyond the surface to more fully understand her personal character and her public endeavors. Such study helps us reflect, as Virginia Woolf suggests, on "the effect of tradition and of the lack of tradition upon the mind of a writer" who writes for the stage, and who happens to be female (Ch. 1). This project digs deep, imparting what Robins and her female friends thought—not just about their now-more-famous associates James, Shaw, and Wilde—but about being artists themselves; not just about Ibsen, but about realism; not just about their friends, but about their friendships, not just about women's roles, but about their own unique contributions to the theatre and the wider world.

Like the Victorian *bildungsroman*, Chapter 1, "Theatres and Friendships: the Progress of Elizabeth Robins," follows Robins's journey, firstly, from a young, barely educated girl orphaned by mental illness and financial loss, to a successful actress in America. It explains her drive and ambition and underscores her ability to make her own advantages. Secondly, the chapter explains why Robins journeyed to Europe and

sought a London career. Thirdly, it shows the social and theatrical progression she took to establish herself there in 1888. It shows how Robins wound her way through a maze of theatre and literary artists who became her first friends and collaborators. The chapter goes on to show how Robins transformed herself a second time, from an unknown to a famous London actress through her collaboration with Marion Lea.

Chapter 2, “Becoming Ibsenites: The Joint Management,” firstly explains Robins and Lea’s early relationship. Secondly, the chapter explains the stratagems they used in negotiating with William Archer, William Heinemann, Edmund Gosse, and Justin Huntley McCarthy for the rights to perform *Hedda Gabler*. This previously unpublished material illustrates how secrecy served Robins well at the beginning of her London career. Thirdly, the chapter discloses how Robins’s view of acting evolved through the process of translation and direction of the stage version with Lea and Archer. Since Robins never had a film career, as some of her stage colleagues later did, this chapter sheds new light on her acting style, using marginalia from one of the prompt copies of the play. Though promptbooks are only an indication of what was intended, not what may have actually transpired on stage, this version shows precisely how Robins, Lea, and Archer bypassed Gosse’s published version in order to prepare their translation for performance. None of the several copies of *Hedda* in the Fales collection is dated, but this one, labeled in Robins’s hand “We play Edmund Gosse’s revised version,” was likely used for the premiere. Its top page has the address of the guesthouse on Rosemount Road in Richmond where she and Lea first blocked their parts. (Robins mentions this sojourn in *Whither and How*.) It also shows the many cross-outs and substitutions in the dialogue that Robins and Archer discussed. When Hedda encourages Lovborg to commit suicide,<sup>17</sup> she asks him to do it “beautifully.” Robins thought audiences would laugh at “beautifully,” since it had become a cliché associated with Oscar Wilde’s discussions of the aesthetic movement. Analysis of the

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<sup>17</sup> See photocopy of promptbook page 51 (my handwritten pagination in lower left of the page) in Appendix 4. After its initial run, Robins produced *Hedda Gabler* in a series of Ibsen plays in May and June 1893. She also performed it in New York in 1898. This accounts for the several copies in Robins’s collection. Gosse’s 1891 version was the first to be published in English and is the one with which I compare Robins’s book, “We play Edmund Gosse’s revised version.” See transcriptions of the pistol scene from these two versions in Appendix 5.

promptbook sheds new light on creative processes of collaboration.

Chapter 3, “The Sisterhood and the Wider Sphere: Robins, Bell, and the Roles of Women” firstly explains the history of the Bell/Robins friendship. Secondly, it uses their relationship to test the interpretations of feminist historian Sharon Marcus from *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* in order to explain the varied aspects of Victorian female friendship prior to the sexual revolution. By using feminist perspectives, the chapter illuminates the nature of the Bell-Robins relationship. Thirdly, the chapter examines relationships each of the women shared with some of the men in their lives, and explores how they each acted and reacted as professional women in male-dominated fields. Fourthly, the chapter shows how Bell and Robins each eventually enlarged their spheres to encompass philanthropic causes. However, they clashed over Robins’s public support of the suffrage movement. This point in their friendship illustrates the personal and social interconnection of two radical movements—the New Drama and early feminism—as Robins’s suffrage work eroded her friendship with Bell. The chapter concludes by explaining how Robins and Bell mended their rift and went on to accomplish wider goals.

Chapter 4, “‘Women’s Place’ in the Theatre: The State of the English Stage and the Lure of the Independent Theatre Society,” firstly illustrates the milieu of the London theatre as Robins found it in the late 1880s to explain some of the problems theatre artists faced. Secondly, the chapter explains how the Independent Theatre (also known as the ITS) gained notoriety from the controversies its radical plays evinced in the press, making its efforts much more influential in the culture than would seem possible for a few mostly matinée performances. Thirdly, the chapter emphasizes how women increased their influence in the New Drama by participating with the Independent Theatre. The chapter places Robins and her ITS associates within the larger repertory movement because they sought to make theatre more accessible and relevant across class and gender and because they believed that commercialism interfered with theatre’s “higher” goals.<sup>18</sup> Because the ITS was a

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<sup>18</sup> See George Rowell and Anthony Jackson, *The Repertory Movement: A History of Regional Theatre in Britain* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP) 1984.

subscription company, members paid for a season of plays sometimes even before the plays were written. This gave playwrights a hearing and offered players, who were also volunteers, more artistic autonomy than they otherwise had in the commercial theatres.<sup>19</sup> This was particularly attractive to women because male managers to a large degree controlled the commercial theatres. Robins and Bell were the first women to produce a play at the Independent Theatre, but they were not the last. Fourthly, the chapter goes on to outline the other plays by Independent Theatre women and shows some of the common themes among them. Lastly, Chapter 4 relates the historical background of the writing of *Alan's Wife* to introduce further analysis of the play in Chapter 5. Robins and Bell's three-scene play maintained the standard set by *Ghosts* in its serious treatment of provocative subject matter.

Despite Robins and Bell's public lives, and also because of them, the lack of a female tradition created a desire for anonymity at various times during their careers, particularly when their work was more provocative. Robins first wrote under the pen name C. E. Raimond believing it would protect her acting career from any controversy from her radical fiction because acting, the more public role, was her livelihood. Bell wrote for years under the name Mrs. Hugh Bell, her legal name. She was anonymous for more controversial works in order to protect her prominent family. Yet she also kept some projects secret from her family. She wanted to enjoy these for herself, away from the stresses of home, family, and community, but she also wanted to have work to share with Robins. One such project was their translation of *The Master Builder* (John 65; Gates 49). They placed Gosse and Archer's names on the work to shield their involvement. In a similar way, Bell and Robins remained anonymous for *Alan's Wife*.<sup>20</sup> It is curious that bourgeois women wrote a play that defies the notion of literature as bourgeois ideology. Robins and Bell thus illustrate the variety of

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<sup>19</sup> Grein used subscriptions to help Robins finance her Ibsen series in May and June 1893. See Grein to E. R. April 12, 1893, Fales Series II; Subseries B; Folder 75, "Grein." Grein raised 500 guineas and procured seven guarantors, including Wilde, Bell, and Home Secretary Herbert Asquith and his future wife, Margot Tennent. See Peter Whitebrook, *William Archer: A Biography* (London: Methuen, 1993) 158–59.

<sup>20</sup> *Alan's Wife* will hereafter be cited as *AW*.

perspectives that existed within the avant-garde. In their cases it was possible to write radical plays and be bourgeois at the same time.<sup>21</sup> It is also curious that Robins and Bell hardly mention *Alan's Wife* in their letters. To help reveal their motives and to bring new perspectives on the play, Chapter 5, "Theatrical Protest: The 'Backdrops' and Meanings of *Alan's Wife*," interprets the play as drama, as literature, and as social criticism using feminist, Marxist, and New Historicist perspectives. Victorian social and cultural contexts must be made clear if modern readers are to more fully appreciate the nuances of a play that is more than a eugenic melodrama. It is a deeply considered exposé with implications that have been largely ignored.

Firstly, the chapter reveals the genesis of the play. Secondly, the chapter investigates some of the realities of poor women and what happened to *real* nineteenth-century English mothers found guilty of infanticide. These analyses illustrate the Victorian disconnect between the bourgeois vision of women and children as the embodiments of a happy family, and the reality that the state contributed to the destruction of poor families. When second-wave feminists rediscovered the play in the twentieth century, it became a means of feminist protest a second time, but it was not seen as a social protest in the larger sense, as I believe Bell and Robins intended. Thirdly, the chapter considers how modern medical knowledge effects our interpretation of Bell and Robins's protagonist, Jean Creyke. Fourthly, the chapter examines how the play's first critics bypassed the eugenic themes that have attracted the attention of more recent critics. Finally, the chapter brings literary comparisons with Eliot's protagonist, Hetty Sorrel, that enable new meanings to immerge from this play that still serves as a potent reminder of the dehumanizing effects of poverty, mental illness, and physical infirmity. *Alan's Wife* remains an indictment against any society that fails to adequately address human needs.

Chapter 6, "The Masks of Elizabeth Robins: Bessie, Clare, C. E. Raimond, Lisa, and Hedda," through a psychoanalytical approach, firstly considers why Robins used so many personae when off the stage and considers how she represented herself to the public in print. Not only did she call herself by many different names

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<sup>21</sup> As Thomas Postlewait points out, the idea of bourgeois radicals is contrary to the received history. See *The Cambridge Introduction to Theatre Historiography* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2009) 80.

throughout her life, friends called Robins by the names of stage and fiction characters. Her two published memoirs *Both Sides of the Curtain* and *Theatre and Friendship* are not “tell-all” books—rare amongst her generation, more common and more marketable in the next. Neither explains the central role Robins played in the New Drama or reveals much about Robins herself. Since the main subject of *Both Sides* is the London theatre as seen through the eyes of a young American actress, it is a *kunstlerroman*, but its many vague subtexts did not register with readers in 1940. Secondly, the chapter discusses how secretiveness that served Robins well in the Victorian age hurt her reputation in the twentieth century when openness was more valued. Thirdly, the chapter considers how her friends seemingly forgot her—the male contingent of the avant-garde with their theatre reminiscences, and even Robins’s friend and publisher Virginia Woolf in her speech that became *A Room of One’s Own*. Society has continued this oversight.<sup>22</sup> According to Joan Templeton in *Ibsen’s Women*, “Indisputably, the woman question [the dispute over what women’s roles in society should be] had prime importance to the originators of modern drama,” yet subsequently the woman question has been “consistently overlooked in discussions of the origins of modern European drama” (324).

As the *Manchester Guardian* noted in 1940 in its review of *Both Sides of the Curtain*,<sup>23</sup> “[Robins] has introduced too many names without saying what they were and where they really stood.” I fill in some of the gaps in Robins’s history by giving biographical details of many of her Independent Theatre associates in Appendix 3, showing some of the professional and personal interconnections among members. This list expands on Kerry Powell’s appendix, “Dramatists of the 1890s,”<sup>24</sup> but focuses

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<sup>22</sup> Katherine Kelly believes that fin de siècle “cosmopolitanism” helped to systematically exclude women from theatre history and relegated them to local art because they supposedly lacked worldly experience. “Most subsequent histories and anthologies of English Modern Drama published through the 1940s and into the 1990s erased the contribution of women playwrights from the history of English dramatic modernism.” See “The Making of Modern Drama,” *Modern Drama by Women 1880s–1930s* (London: Routledge, 1996) 4.

<sup>23</sup> See “The 1890s,” *Manchester Guardian*, Mar 15, 1940, 5.

<sup>24</sup> See Kerry Powell, *Oscar Wilde and the Theatre of the 1890s*, 2009 ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1990).

exclusively on Independent Theatre members, whatever their role in the organization. Shedding light on these artists acknowledges other “Workers in Art” that Robins associated with.<sup>25</sup> Naming names (and in some cases putting faces to those names as I do in Appendices 1 and 2) helps us imagine how they may have looked in their parts and provides a more holistic view of Robins’s social and professional circles.

Lea, Bell, and Robins remain to us largely anonymous—even for their most public efforts. Nicole Loraux asserts, “The glory of a woman [in ancient Greece] was to have no glory” (back cover). Though they were public women in their own unique ways, Lea, Bell, and Robins would have understood this sentiment. Despite the pressure to remain hidden, Victorian women transformed their reality through friendship, collaboration, resourcefulness, and hard work. Jill R. Ehnenn believes that “Women’s literary collaboration operates . . . with a subversive potential that can enact new ways of conceptualizing authorial labor, economies of production, and marketplace” (22). Lea, Bell and Robins exhibited these “subversive” realities both inside and outside the theatre.

In *Hystories: Hysterical Epidemics and Modern Culture*, Elaine Showalter relates, “Today’s feminists need models rather than martyrs” (61). If they were better known, Lea, Bell, and Robins could be three such role models for their loyalty, perseverance, and determination despite social pressure, sexism, and—in Lea and Robins’s cases—poverty. As they helped bring about the New Drama and went on to other altruistic pursuits, Robins and her friends did not wait patiently to come onto the world stage after the first wave of women’s liberation; they helped to make the first wave possible (Heilmann 1–9).

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<sup>25</sup> Robins discusses her status in society as a “Worker in Art” in *Whither and How*. See Chapter 5, p. 9.





Fig. 1 This pose, for Robins's 1890 performance in *Her Own Witness*, reflects Robins's love of secrets. Fales. Used with permission of Independent Age.





Fig. 2 Robins and Lea in their *Hedda Gabler* costumes. The feather boa became the latest fashion. Fales. Used with permission of Independent Age.



Fig. 3 The street side of Robins's first permanent London home, Manchester Square Mansions, where she lived from 1890 to 1900. Photo by Dr. Hannah Lewis-Bill. Used with permission.



Fig. 4. The rear courtyard of Manchester Square Mansions. "In the nineties, three flights up from an iron-gated court[,] one could find in the neighbourhood of Manchester Square, a flat for £50 a year—two tiny bedrooms; two ditto sitting; kitchen and bath, with plenty of light and air . . . in what is the re-named St. Andrews Mansions" (*WH* Ch. 42, p. 2). Photo by Dr. Hannah Lewis-Bill. Used with permission.



Fig. 5 The Olliffe Home in London, 95 Sloane St. Photo: Dr. Hannah Lewis-Bill. Used with permission.



Fig. 6 Florence Olliffe Bell ca.1910 by J. Weston & Son © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 7 Red Barns House was Florence Bell's home as a new bride. Photo from British Listed Buildings web site.  
<<http://www.britishlistedbuildings.co.uk/en-60338-red-barns-house-and-red-barns-hotel-/photos>>

**Chapter 1**  
**Theatres and Friendships: the Progress of Elizabeth Robins**

“Life Upon the Wicked Stage”

Life upon the wicked stage  
 Ain't never what a girl supposes;  
 Stage door Johnnies aren't raging  
 Over you with gems and roses.  
 When you let a feller hold your hand  
 (Which means an extra beer or sandwich)  
 Ev'rybody whispers: "Ain't her life a whirl?"

.....  
 I admit it's fun  
 To smear my face with paint,  
 Causing ev'ryone  
 To think I'm what I ain't,  
 And I like to play a demi-mondy role  
 With soul!  
 Ask the hero does he  
 Like the way I lure  
 When I play a hussy  
 Or a paramour,  
 Yet when once the curtain's down  
 My life is pure,  
 And how I dread it!

Kern and Hammerstein, *Showboat*<sup>1</sup>

Stage life, though often difficult, offered many rewards to women in nineteenth-century America, especially those with an adventurous spirit like Elizabeth Robins. The stage allowed a woman to be seen, but also to see the world; it gave her control over her finances and also her destiny; it offered her the possibility of fame and access to famous people. It provided her freedom of movement and an escape from

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<sup>1</sup> See Jerome Kern, and Oscar Hammerstein II, “Life Upon the Wicked Stage,” *Showboat (Music Sales, 1990)*. *Show Boat*, the 1927 musical, is set in the American South of the 1880s and was inspired by the Edna Ferber novel with the same title. More serious than typical operettas of the time, *Showboat* helped create the musical genre of the next generation. Though the play is not about her, its setting reflects Robins’s connection to the South, where she was born and where she toured extensively in the 1880s. The themes of the song illustrate how Robins’s career was anything but glamorous, but she objected to the assumption that actresses were immoral. Robins wrote of herself: “Never did a girl live a more unostentatious unobtrusive pure life.” See John 28.

domesticity. In Elizabeth Robins's case, the theatre lifestyle offered another escape from conditions she feared—pregnancy and motherhood. Robins was born on August 6, 1862, in Louisville, Kentucky to first cousins Hannah Maria Crow and Charles Ephraim Robins. This lineage haunted Robins's adult life because she believed her elders' warnings that the mental illness on both sides of the family would be her fate too, particularly her mother's postpartum depression, if she were ever to become a mother herself (John 16, 32-33). Her mother gave birth to seven children in a decade and never recovered from the psychosis she suffered after the birth of her youngest child, Raymond, in 1873 (Gates 8). Elizabeth was married briefly to fellow-actor George Richmond Parks, but their careers required frequent separations instead of the settled life he desired. They had no children, though Robins may have had a miscarriage or an abortion during the marriage (John 41).

Robins identified with her Kentucky roots, but spent little time there; her family moved to New York before she was three years old (John 15). When she was ten, a crash on Wall Street and Hannah's illness forced the family to split up (Gates 8; John 16). They were never reunited. Her paternal grandmother, Jane Hussey Robins, reared Elizabeth with three of her surviving four siblings (Vernon; Eunice, called Una; and Raymond) at her "Old Stone House" in Zanesville, Ohio. With its trap door under the stairs, it had been a stop on the Underground Railroad (*WH* Ch. 6, 3-4 "Historical House"). Mother Hannah and brother Saxton were under the care of Dr. James Morrison Bodine, Hannah's brother-in-law and Dean of the Faculty of Medicine at University of Louisville (John 16). Despite Bodine's resources, Hannah languished in various asylums, and even lived for some time in a boardinghouse (Gates 8). Charles squandered what was left of Hannah's fortune on many business schemes (John 15, 20-22). After her breakdown, he launched another career for himself as a gold miner. He tried to induce Elizabeth, his eldest daughter and eldest living child,<sup>2</sup> to follow suit in 1880 by taking her to his claim in Summit, Colorado for the summer before she turned eighteen (John 19-20). She obliged, but since her ambition was to become an actress, the trip only postponed her departure for New York City a year later (23).

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<sup>2</sup> Eugene, Charles's son from his first marriage, died in 1872.



Robins longed to act from her school days (John 18). She excelled at reciting and joined the Amateur Dramatics Club where she managed a short comedy. She also played the flirtatious Arabella in *Who's To Win Him?* at the Schultz Opera House in Zanesville. When she arrived in New York City, she soon met actor-manager James O'Neill who, remarkably, was staying at the same boarding house (26). He first hired Robins as companion to his wife Ella, who had been educated in a convent and did not get on well with rougher-edged actresses. He soon gave Robins her first paid part in 1881 as a nun in *The Two Orphans*; she joined his touring company later that year. She soon took on leading roles with O'Neill (1847–1920), who could proudly say he was the father of Eugene O'Neill,<sup>3</sup> and with Edwin Booth (1833–1893), who was ashamed to say he was the brother of John Wilkes Booth.<sup>4</sup> The Booth brothers—Edwin, John Wilkes, and Junius Jr.,—and their father Junius Brutus Booth were famous Shakespearean actors. After John Wilkes assassinated Abraham Lincoln in 1865, Edwin's career flagged. He retired from the Winter Garden Theatre that he had managed from 1863 until it burned down in 1867. In 1881 he performed in London with Henry Irving, playing alternately the roles of Iago and Othello. Robins saw Booth play Iago in New York City later that year (John 26). Though he built Booth's Theatre in New York in 1869, Booth was not financially successful until he joined Lawrence Barrett to tour America.<sup>5</sup> Arthur W. Bloom reports that Barrett retained only four of the players from the 1886–1887 troupe for his next tour. "Barrett was planning a far more sophisticated troupe" (148). Barrett hired Robins from a group of 2000 applicants

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<sup>3</sup> For more on Robins's experience with O'Neill, see John 25–27.

<sup>4</sup> See James Giblin, *Good Brother, Bad Brother: The Story of Edwin Booth and John Wilkes Booth* (New York: Clarion, 2005). See John 38 and 44–45. See also "Edwin Thomas Booth," Phyllis Hartnoll and Peter Found, eds., *Concise Oxford Companion to the Theatre*, (Oxford: Oxford UP, 1996). Robins's article, "Across America with Junius Brutus Booth" published in 1890 in *The Universal Review*, is available on *The Elizabeth Robins Web*, edited by Joanne Gates.

<sup>5</sup> Arthur W. Bloom estimates that Booth's sixty percent of the 1886 tour profits amounted to \$249,896. See *Edwin Booth: A Biography and Performance History* (Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 2013) 149.

(148-50) for a tour of “the principal States of the Union” (Reid and Compton 179).<sup>6</sup> Robins joined the other 37 actors in 255 performances. Bloom estimates that the entire tour was over 16,000 miles, but Robins’s contract ended when the company reached San Francisco, two months before the company returned to New York. Robins states in *Both Sides of the Curtain* “The year I came to England I travelled thirty thousand miles” (1).<sup>7</sup> The tour played mostly Shakespeare. Robins considered this her apprenticeship, though she was largely self-taught, as were most players of her time (Reid and Compton 179). She was serious about self-improvement. Alone in her room late at night, Robins read philosophy, studied Greek history, taught herself French, reviewed her German, and practiced fainting until she was covered with bruises (John 31). In 1890, fellow-actor Herbert Waring asked Robins to star in a planned production of *Antigone*. She immediately found a tutor and began studying Greek every spare moment (*WH* Ch. 39, 1-3).

#### *Robins’s First Female Friend: Jane Hussey Robins*

Robins remained close to her grandmother, her “touchstone,” and wrote to her often after she left home until her grandmother’s death in the autumn of 1885 (*WH* “Appendix,” 11). She remained an important figure in Robin’s life even after her death. Jane Hussey Robins lamented that her granddaughter was the first woman of their family to have to work for a living, but Elizabeth accepted responsibility as the firstborn of her parents to help support the family (*Both Sides* 52–53).<sup>8</sup> Though Robins’s most

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<sup>6</sup> Reid and Compton report that the tour lasted twelve months. See *The Dramatic Peerage, 1892; Personal Notes and Professional Sketches of the Actors and Actresses of the London Stage* (London: Raithby, 1892) 179. Bloom reports that the tour lasted nine months, beginning in Buffalo in September 1887. After meandering to 71 cities, the tour ended in Brooklyn in May 1888. See Bloom 152. For Robins the tour probably ended in March. She sailed from San Francisco via Panama to Boston arriving in May. She briefly describes the return journey in *Both Sides*, but fictionalized it in the novel *Under the Southern Cross*.

<sup>7</sup> All of Robins’s travel together makes up this figure, including the 16,000-mile tour. From San Francisco to Boston via Panama adds ca. 5,000 miles. From Boston to London adds ca. 3,200 miles. From London to Norway and back adds ca. another 3,400 miles. This makes up ca. 30,000 miles. Robins took a circuitous route, which adds more miles to these estimates.

<sup>8</sup> See also John 5, 103.

pressing desire was to care for her mother, as she could not do this, she sent money home to help with her care. By the age of twenty-one, Elizabeth already sounded world-weary. In a letter to her grandmother dated December 10, [1883], she lamented, “How often matters of health, education—morality even, resolve themselves into a plain question of dollars and cents.”<sup>9</sup> In the same letter she explained her resolve as if heredity and finances had limited her choices: “It was partly because I saw least unhappiness in this course, that I waived opposition and went on the stage.” Though she was not part of upper-class society in America and had to inhabit many “shabby digs” as an actress, Robins preserved a notion of Southern gentility from her mother’s side of the family (John interview). She was well paid, eventually earning \$40 per week, but acting did not provide an opulent life. She toured in dirty railcars, had to buy or make her own costumes,<sup>10</sup> and often played ten performances a week, ten months a year (John 27). She also suffered from vagaries of the stage; employment was never assured. She left O’Neill’s company in early 1883 (28–29). After a brief stint with H. M. Pitt’s company, she joined the Boston Museum in August. The company was so named in order to ease attendees’ consciences; it was believed that going to a museum was more socially acceptable in conservative Boston than attending a theatre.

At the Boston Museum, Robins met fellow-player George Parks who soon began buying her small gifts and asking to call on her at her boarding house (John 31-2). A young woman like Robins could easily be attracted to “Handsome George” (qtd. in Gates 17). He was attentive, and her life on the stage was often lonely. She had few chances to meet other men, as her career limited her social life. Yet she was wary of entanglements. In a letter to Parks (postmarked December 11, 1883) that Robins saved from her ritual burning of his private papers and personal effects, she explained her determination for an acting career instead of marriage. However, she did not mention what her mother referred to as the family “infirmity” (qtd. in John 32).

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<sup>9</sup> Fales, Series III, Subseries A, Box 1, Folder 4. E. R. to J. H. R., [1883].

<sup>10</sup> Companies usually provided costumes to male actors.

Tuesday Evening, 7 p.m.

I have at this moment read your letter + I lay it down with a feeling of helplessness. You are mistaken when you say it is only a question of your love, versus 'a few foolish whims.' A determination like mine, made five years ago, + strengthened by the experience every day had brought me since can hardly be given so light a name. It is because I in the hopelessness of any weighing of the matter that I want to spare us both the pain of an interview. If I seem unjust[,] cruel—unwomanly That is my punishment. Heaven knows how bitterly sorry I am to have given you pain.<sup>11</sup>

When Robins first wrote to her grandmother about this romance, she advised Elizabeth to end it, cautioning her against marriage to anyone. After she received more letters from Elizabeth about Parks, Jane Robins wrote, “I see how it is my dear child, he, the actor, does not wish his wife to be an actress. His jealous temperament would not bear it” (qtd. in John 33). The typical female ideal was marriage and motherhood, but Robins’s father and grandmother discouraged these choices—both because they had higher aspirations for her talents and because they feared for her sanity. Just as Robins’s romance with Parks was heating up in December of 1883, her grandmother sent word that her mother’s mental state had further deteriorated. Her grandmother warned,

Do not, I beseech you, my darling child, rush into matrimony which may plunge you into a sea of difficulty where you may sink to rise no more! Never mind sentiment, feeling, preference, and all that—do not commit yourself—if you think you have encouraged hope, never mind, it is a woman’s privilege to reconsider—to change her mind. (qtd. in Gates 17; John 32)

Despite this advice, Robins found it hard to tell Parks face to face how she felt, so she resorted to expressing herself in letters he chose to ignore. Reticence was a pattern she would repeat with other men in her life. Though she tried for over a year to resist his demands to marry, interlaced as they were with his threats of suicide, she married Parks in secret on January 12, 1885, at the Grace Episcopal Church in Salem, Massachusetts (John 34). (The town is still known for its seventeenth-century executing of witches.) When the manager of their company learned of the marriage four months later, he refused to renew Robins’s contract; she was forced to find work

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<sup>11</sup> Fales Series II, Subseries A, Box 3, Folder 40, “George Parks.”



elsewhere (35). “The adjunct of a family made a woman an awkward employee, and the system was not kind to encumbered persons whether they sought eminence or just a living” (Davis *Actresses* 52-53).

Robins rejoined O’Neill’s Company in 1885 for \$40 a week while Parks went on tour (John 36–7). However, even with two incomes, they struggled to make a living because he also had to support his widowed mother and two siblings (31). Even though Parks acknowledged before their marriage “What a death in life it would be” for her to give up the stage,<sup>12</sup> after only a few months of marriage, he threatened to do something drastic if she did not stop working so she could join him. Inexplicably, he passed up an opportunity for them to work together at Madison Square Gardens in the autumn of 1885 (John 37). To Robins’s dismay, he kept news of this role to himself until after it was filled. It was Parks’ dream to own a business and settle down with his wife, but his depressive moods and heavy drinking made supporting his family on his own impossible (Gates 19-20; John 40). Abandoning her career was ill advised even if she had only acted for the sake of an income. Nevertheless, to please Parks, Robins sent her resignation to O’Neill in the autumn of 1886. Her reunion with her husband in Boston was interrupted in November when she learned that her sister Una had died, probably of malaria, on their father’s farm in Florida, his latest moneymaking scheme (John 37). Una and the boys had joined their father after their grandmother’s death in 1885 (36–38). So again Parks and Robins were separated as she spent Christmas caring for her father and brothers and visiting her sister’s grave. She returned to New York in late spring with her own case of malaria (Gates 20). Meanwhile, Parks also succumbed to illness that forced him to leave work in Cleveland and return to his mother’s home in Medford, Massachusetts, near Boston. Another Boston engagement failed to cheer him. In mid-May 1887, Robins signed on for Booth and Barrett’s cross-country tour to begin in the autumn, but this meant another long separation from her husband, so she chose not to tell him (Gates 21).

Robins’s grandmother was right about Parks’ “jealous temperament.” On May 31, 1887 he sent Robins a suicide note timed to reach her too late and strapped himself to a suit of stage armor before throwing himself into the Charles River (Gates

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<sup>12</sup> Series II, Subseries A, Box 3, Folder 40, July 6, [1884], “George Parks.”

21; John 39). When Parks took his life, Robins blamed herself. Repressing the pain and guilt from this experience, she did not share the reason for her grief with many people (John interview). This trauma solidified her resolve to remain single. Thus widowed at the age of twenty-four, Robins sought escape from familiar surroundings by keeping her engagement with Booth and Barrett. Sleepless and weighed down with grief, she sought solace in work. Afterwards, she boasted that she had seen every state in the union and had given 258 performances at 72 venues (John 45). Once the tour ended in the spring of 1888, she returned to Boston, but familiar surroundings still depressed her. Her friend Sarah Chapman Thorpe Bull (1850–1911) offered another escape, a two-month trip to Norway via England (*Both Sides* 2; John 45–6). Robins accepted the offer in exchange for tutoring Sarah's daughter Olea (born in 1871) on the journey (*Both Sides* 2). Sarah was the widow of the famous Norwegian violinist, Ole Bull, who invested his considerable fortune, made on the concert circuit, in many wide-flung ventures. As well as an ill-fated colony in Pennsylvania founded in 1852, Bull funded the Norwegian Theatre in Bergen in 1850, the first to promote the Norwegian language and the first to hire Ibsen as a dramatist. Sarah, an American, was forty years younger than Ole, who died in 1880. She frequently took Olea to Norway to maintain family ties, staying at their idyllic gingerbread villa on the island of Lysøen (John 46). Despite the family connection with Ibsen, no one mentioned the dramatist to Robins. However, she began learning Norwegian to communicate with her new friends. She thus experienced some of the language, the culture, and the geography of Norway years before she ever read, saw, or acted an Ibsen part. She was unknowingly following the admonition of Ibsen himself: "Anyone who wishes to understand me fully must know Norway. The spectacular but severe landscape . . . and the lonely shut-off life . . . force [Norwegians to] become reflective and serious" (qtd. in Moi 37).

### *In the Land of Shakespeare*

More important for Robins's future career was the fact that the trip was preceded by a weeklong stopover in London. Just before Parks died, she had considered a career in England (John 37). When she arrived at the capital, the famous landmarks and ancient churches enthralled her. During her first weeklong layover she spent much time sightseeing but also sought contacts that might lead to a professional

engagement. By the time of the second London layover on the return from Norway in September 1888, Robins was weighing her options. With her grandmother, sister, and husband dead, her mother in a mental institution, and her father struggling to make a living in swampy Florida, who or what had she to return to? She had been an actress for seven years in America. Having toured extensively, playing the same ingénue parts over and over again, she had exhausted her professional challenges there. She maintained a passion for her craft, but she had lost interest in parts that demanded little more than posing in pretty dresses. She was determined to find more demanding roles. Her success on the American stage gave her courage to try her luck elsewhere. She disliked the low status of actresses in America and hoped that she might improve her lot in Shakespeare's England.<sup>13</sup> London offered an opportunity to remake her life in a place she had fallen in love with. Is there any wonder she found reasons to stay? Nevertheless, her desire to act on the London stage did not mean the London stage wanted her. She had to find work before her meager savings ran out.

Like her Ibsen character Hilda Wangel, Robins knocked at the doors of the theatre with a new way of acting and a new way of thinking about women and their roles in public life. Yet how did the unknown actress accomplish her goal of a new career with no personal or professional connections? How did she produce plays with little financial backing? How did she not only enlarge her own acting prospects, but also offer opportunities to other supernumeraries—actresses as well as many actors who, without her, could not have hoped for a starring role because they were not managers or theatre financiers? Her sociability, charm, beauty, and ambition helped her meet many famous people on the first leg of her journey to Norway. These initial contacts stood her in good stead when she returned to London after her visit with the Bulls. These associates formed a base of security from which she enlarged her circle to include more actors and managers, playwrights and theatre critics who helped her accomplish many of her aspirations for the theatre. Through her remarkable "gift of enmeshing others into her impassioned enterprises" (Bell *Landmarks* 112), Robins succeeded in both commercial and non-commercial theatres from 1888 to 1902. As

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<sup>13</sup> In *Both Sides of the Curtain* Robins often refers to how she fell in love with England, presenting this as the reason for her longing for a London career. See pages 11, 19, 23–24, 27–28, 30–31, 40, 50, and 80, to name several.

the title of her memoir *Theatre and Friendship* suggests, for Robins, sociability and the stage intertwined; both were created through caring and collaborating.

In his biography *Henry James: A Life*, Leon Edel characterizes Robins as self-serving and calculating (406-09); but pleasing others and making friends is important for anyone and is essential for the professional actor. Robins utilized her considerable gifts and her growing number of contacts in order to compete in the theatre for parts—as all actors, male and female, must do. Her training in pleasing audiences on both sides of the curtain enabled her to earn a living and to make a home for herself in a new country. This took courage, but also encouragement from others, as she carried out “the rashest act” of her life by cancelling return passage on the Cunard S.S. *Cephalonia* and an engagement at Augustin Daly’s Theatre in New York for the mere chance of a London career (*Both Sides* 28). Who encouraged this rashest of acts? In *Both Sides*, Robins gives credit to Oscar Wilde (1854–1900), whom she met at Lady Seton’s “At Home” on her first layover in London,<sup>14</sup> for being “the man who, all unconsciously, was to give me England for my home” (9). She even named a chapter “Oscar Wilde to the Rescue” where she quoted her diary description of him: “smooth-shaven, rather fat face, rather weak; the frequent smile showed long, crowded teeth, a rather interesting presence in spite of certain objectionable points.”<sup>15</sup> Wilde spent half an hour discussing his experiences in America, and then encouraged her to settle in London by saying there were always parts for good actresses. However, he could not give her a role nor finance her debut; he was not yet the famous playwright. Holbrook Jackson explained in his 1913 retrospective *The Eighteen Nineties* that

The brilliant Oxford graduate had not yet fulfilled the promise of his youth, of his first book, and of his own witty audacity. He had achieved notoriety without fame, and literary reputation without a sufficient means of livelihood, and so small was his position in letters that, from 1887 to 1889, we find him eking out a living by editing *The Woman's World* for Messrs. Cassell & Co.

His successes during this period were chiefly in the realms of friendship. (73–74)

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<sup>14</sup> An “At Home” was the day of the week designated for invited friends to visit.

<sup>15</sup> These ellipses are Robins’s.

Wilde toured America to promote the Gilbert and Sullivan comic opera *Patience* in 1882, but while there he also promoted his philosophies of art. Powell states, “This revelation of art to everyone, rich and poor, was the essence of the aesthetic yet egalitarian ideology that underlay Wilde’s approximately 150 lecture appearances across America” (*Acting* 28). Wilde’s dandified appearance created more of a stir than his lectures, causing the public to assume that the aesthetic movement was about clothes, not about the real “artistic and social revolution” that Wilde hoped would democratize art (14). When his tour began, though he had written a small volume of poetry, his first play (*Vera*) had yet to find an appreciative audience.<sup>16</sup> Wilde wrote *Salomé* in 1891, but, as Examiner of Plays Piggott had banned it, Wilde could not have offered Robins a part in it. Wilde’s first London stage success was not until February 1892 with George Alexander’s production of *Lady Windermere’s Fan*.<sup>17</sup> Yet, with his eye on society, Wilde was well qualified to enlighten his new friend on the intricacies of London life.

#### “Anglo-American Bonds”

Many of Robins’s first contacts were American expatriates, particularly American players. “If I was not getting myself on the English stage[,] the next best thing in the interval was to cultivate [friendships with] those who were already there” (*Both Sides* 103). To accomplish this, Robins relates in *Both Sides* that she wrote to family members for letters of introduction to players working in London, like Eleanor Calhoun.<sup>18</sup> By the time she returned to London after visiting Norway, Robins

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<sup>16</sup> According to Rupert Hart-Davis, neither of Wilde’s first two plays (*Vera or The Nihilists*, performed in 1880, and *The Duchess of Padua*, performed in 1883) was successful. “There has been much speculation as to when, where, and in what language *Salomé* [Wilde’s third play] was originally written. Wilde had certainly begun work on it by 27 Oct 1891.” See *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Harcourt, 1962) 305.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander produced *Lady Windermere’s Fan* at the St. James’s Theatre in February 1892. By then Alexander and Robins had fallen out because she refused to sign an exclusive contract. He swore he would never work with her again. He relented after she became famous. See John 52.

<sup>18</sup> “The Anglo American Bond” is the title of Ch. 4 of *Both Sides of the Curtain* after the chapters about Wilde and Tree, although the episode with Calhoun occurred prior to her meeting Tree. Calhoun (1857–1957) made her own Anglo-American bond in 1881 when she arrived in London to begin her European

possessed a letter of introduction to Calhoun (1862–1957) from her mother’s cousin Lloyd Tevis (1824–1899), president of Wells-Fargo Express and a millionaire who had made his fortune in California (“Lloyd”). Tevis had financed the education and early career of Calhoun, daughter of one of his employees. Robins reports that

[Tevis] sent [Calhoun] first to London, where she made her debut in the distinguished company of the Bancrofts and won great praise. My cousin sent her afterwards to Paris where she studied under Got, I believe, and certainly with Coquelin [famous French actors]. It should be said that my mother’s cousin . . . had helped me, too on the smaller scale of my own undertakings.<sup>19</sup> But when I thought of what he had done for her, I took heart. She *must* want to give me a hand.<sup>20</sup> (*Both Sides* 5–7)

Calhoun obliged by offering to surrender to Robins the starring role in *The Fair Bigamist*, a new play managed by Sir Mervyn Owen and slated for the Royalty.<sup>21</sup> Robins’s luck seemed to be improving. Yet, just as she left the first rehearsal, Wilde appeared, as if out of a mist, walking down Regent Street (*Both Sides* 14). As soon as she explained her plans, he rattled off objections. Then he read the part.

At first he laughed and then he scarified. He read out things that Miss Calhoun made sound beautiful and behold they were cheap, ludicrous, they made your spine twist with shame. . . . [Then] he talked about Mrs. Langtry—‘a beautiful creature stepping from the drawing-room to the stage . . . a fascinating novelty. But not an experiment to bear repetition—as Mrs. James Brown Potter found to her cost. We like a thing of that sort once. Little interest is felt in imitators of the one successful experiment.’ (16)

Wilde’s reference to Langtry, as Robins recalled it, seems Pygmalion-esque. Langtry

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career after a failed romance with William Randolph Hearst. Hearst’s mother did not approve of Calhoun; she was poor and she was an actress. See David Nasaw, *The Chief: The Life of William Randolph Hearst* (Houghton Mifflin, 2000) 56–66. Calhoun met Prince Eugene Lazarovich Hrebelianovich of Serbia in London and married him in 1903. See George Gilbert Lynch, “Bakersfield’s Princess Nellie” (Bakersfield.com, *The Bakersfield Californian*, May 4, 2007). See also Calhoun, *Pleasures and Palaces: The Memoirs of Princess Lazarovich Hrebelianovich* (New York: Century, 1915). See photograph of Calhoun in Appendix 1.

<sup>19</sup> Tevis sent Robins fifty dollars once she reached London.

<sup>20</sup> Unless otherwise noted, emphases are those of the original author.

<sup>21</sup> According to Holland, Sir Mervyn Owen was actually Sir Randal Roberts (1837–1899).

epitomized the shift in public taste, begun in the 1860s, for seeing upper class stage characters “portrayed by their own caste” instead of by professionals from theatrical families (Davis *Actresses* 77). Essentially, such actresses played themselves in cup-and-saucer dramas and domestic comedies. While Robins hid her feelings about Langtry from Wilde and later tucked them between the lines of *Both Sides*, in October 1892 she described Langtry’s acting to Florence Bell as “indescribably feeble but Mrs. Langtry was radiantly beautiful. How can they say she’s gone off? Of course she didn’t even try to act but one was rather grateful. I loved her beautiful immobility. I am convinced expression in a face (of any varied range) is *ugly*.”<sup>22</sup>

As Gail Marshall reveals in her chapter “Victorian Pygmalions,” immobility was more than a personal acting style or a limit in the actress’s skill; the staging of women like statues “came to form and inform ideological notions of femininity, and specifically the extent to which femininity might be contained by an extension of the viewing practices applied to newly available Classical statues” (8). Langtry’s skill was clearly a matter of opinion, but the other actress Wilde disparaged was the American Mrs. Cora Brown-Potter. The *New York Times* London correspondent reported on March 30, 1887 that Brown-Potter possessed “nothing from first to last which seemed to warrant the lady in adopting the stage as her profession” (“Society’s”) Even so, Brown-Potter went on to have a successful career (Reid and Compton 41). In any case, Wilde should not have compared the socialite Langtry or the amateur Brown-Potter to Robins, who had been a professional actress since 1881. Somehow Robins’s expertise escaped Wilde, and in her effort to please, she failed to set him straight. “It seemed useless to point out that while I obviously *couldn’t* imitate Mrs. Langtry, I didn’t want to. I wanted to act” (*Both Sides* 16). It would not have been useless, but it might have been off-putting to him and embarrassing to her.

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<sup>22</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 1. Unless otherwise noted, letters from Robins to Bell are from Series V; Subseries A. Letters from Bell to Robins are from Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1.

Wilde's prophecy that *The Fair Bigamist* would be a "fiasco" bore out; it soon closed.<sup>23</sup> However, Kerry Powell asserts that though the director was the déclassé Sir Mervyn Owen, the exposure would still have helped Robins's career if she had kept the part. *The Theatre* gave the actress who took it, Rose Murray, a good review: she "acted with some power as Marion" (qtd. in Powell *Women* 153). Though "no acting could have saved" the play, critics often praised Robins's acting in plays they otherwise abhorred.<sup>24</sup> Worse than a lack of good exposure was no exposure at all, and Robins's funds were running low. Because Robins had difficulty speaking freely with men, they understood neither her experience and ambition nor her financial situation. Wilde, for one, assumed that since she was an American touring in Europe, she must have money, certainly the £100 needed to finance a matinée to launch her career. Robins barely had enough to pay for modest accommodations (*Both Sides* 46–47). Though Wilde sat with her in the hall of her boarding house on Duchess Street and even commented on its shabbiness, he did not come to the obvious conclusion (49).

Robins shared her plans to reform the theatre with Wilde on several occasions. He promised to promote their similar philosophies but took his promises no further than conversation (Powell "Verdict" 184).<sup>25</sup> Decades later Robins wrote an appreciation of Wilde but implied disappointment in his lack of following through.<sup>26</sup> Margaret Stetz attributes Wilde's misunderstandings with his female friends to a difference in their notions of friendship.

Women, including professional women such as writers, had been socialized since girlhood to rely upon one another and to value commitment and unswerving loyalty in the behavior of those around them. Indeed, in a misogynistic world, middle- and upper-middle-class

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<sup>23</sup> See Wilde's letter to Robins (September 21 or 22, 1888) in *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Merlin Holland and Rupert Hart-Davis (New York: Henry Holt) 2000, 358.

<sup>24</sup> For example, see the review of *Hedda Gabler* by Clement Scott, "The Playhouses," *The Illustrated London News*, April 25, 1891, 550 and 552.

<sup>25</sup> See also John 71.

<sup>26</sup> Kerry Powell, "Oscar Wilde: An Appreciation": An Unpublished Memoir by Elizabeth Robins, Edited with Commentary by Kerry Powell," *Nineteenth Century Theatre*, (Winter 1993) 101–13.



women depended upon the buttress of one another's unflagging support. When, in Wilde's bi-social experiences, this ideal of reliability came up against his own vision of friendship as spontaneously changeable, it was the women who felt baffled and injured. (534)

Wilde did help Robins find an agent, Harrington Baily, and a solicitor, George Lewis (John 49). He also helped raise subscriptions for her Ibsen series in 1893. As her primary concern in 1888 was employment, he introduced Robins to Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917), manager of the Haymarket who was then starring in *Captain Swift*, in hopes that he would cast her in his next play (*Both Sides* 25).

Robins devoted Chapter 3 of *Both Sides* to Tree. Born to a grain merchant in 1853, Tree had been a professional actor since 1878 and a theatre manager since 1887 when he took over the Comedy (Beerbohm ix). At their first meeting, Tree encouraged Robins to stay in London by promising to hire her. He assumed she wanted to play ingénues, but “the devil prompted” Robins to tell Tree she wanted roles like Charlotte Cushman's Meg Merciless (*Both Sides* 70). “Cushman made up to be utterly unrecognisable. No one who saw it could forget the effect when that incredible hag made a flying leap from the wings to the middle of the stage with a cry that set blood thrilling, nerves twanging.” This expression hit its mark; Tree was

[U]neasy at this prospect. . . . Was he offended by something I had said? What, then, would he have felt if he knew the things I had kept to myself?—so stoically discreet I had been! Never let myself go once, except on the safe ground, as I thought, of the kind of parts I wanted to play. *Not* the Adrienne sort—a part for a schoolgirl. (70)

Robins knew the popular *A Celebrated Case* all-too well, having played several parts in it for O'Neill. She played the lead, Adrienne, for the Boston Museum (John 27, 30; Clapp and Edgett *Plays* 62).

The pretty young woman professing to be one of the famous Edwin Booth's players must have intrigued Wilde and Tree, though the mental image of the professional actress must have jarred with the veiled widow standing before them. Robins possessed prim Southern manners in public but chafed at limitations of prescribed femininity on the stage. She wanted fuller artistic expression in more diverse roles than actor-managers generally offered, but she was faced with having to please them. As with Wilde, Robins did not feel she could be completely honest with Tree. This reticence was partly due to how men treated her. She lamented in *Whither and How* “It's odd that with all my experience[,] my serious tired face, men treat me as

if I were a child" (Ch. 40, 6). In *Both Sides*, Robins reports that when Tree told her of his decision to reject Henry Arthur Jones's play *Judah*, with its "unconventional" woman's part Tree had promised was perfect for Robins, "a chasm opened" (51). "No reader but the one who set the entry down, can have an idea of the shock and jar behind [Tree's] bald statement. 'Quite a disappointment.'" Though she had cancelled her return passage for what was supposed to be her London debut, she did not complain. "I was too much occupied in keeping hold of myself . . . till he should go." She excuses her lack of candor by arguing that Tree would have said it was impossible to star her in this part, since he had not seen her act, but then why had he promised it to her? Robins reports in *Both Sides* that Tree's enemies said he refused the play because the woman's part was better than the lead Jones wrote for him. She states in *Whither and How* that Tree did not realize *Judah* was a "woman's" play until after Jones delivered the last act ("Notes and Fragments"). Tree may have refused it once he realized Robins had no money to contribute. She suspected that "Probably Wilde with every good intention had a hand in putting Tree on the wrong track as to my resources" (*Both Sides* 74). It was wrong to reject *Judah*; E. S. Willard premiered it, and actress Olga Brandon who took the woman's part "took the town" (*Both Sides* 51). Tree did not employ Robins until October 1889, and then only to understudy his wife Helen Maud Holt (John 52).

While waiting for an offer, Robins studied elocution under Philadelphia-born actor Hermann Vezin (1829–1910), "the best-known teacher of acting in England; even established actors would go to him for special coaching" (*Both Sides* 103). The playwright Robert Buchanan was one of Vezin's friends. Buchanan's biographer and sister-in-law Harriett Jay, also a playwright, remembered Vezin as "earnest, scholarly, and sympathetic beyond measure to all young strugglers" (91).<sup>27</sup> Robins explained in *Both Sides* that the most important reason for her becoming one of Vezin's students was that "Managers, . . . though they did not much want Vezin in the Theatre, respected his opinion and were ready, on his recommendation, to give the aspirant a hearing." Despite his expertise, "there was a superstition about Vezin: 'No play ran if

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<sup>27</sup> See web article by Patrick Regan, "Harriett Jay: Biography," *Robert Williams Buchanan 1841–1901*, 2002.

Vezein was in the cast.”<sup>28</sup> This fall from popularity is mysterious. Vezein debuted at Theatre Royal, York in 1850. Gifted at both comedy and drama, his longest run was the 1861 hit *Peep o’ Day* with more than 300 performances (*ODNB*). He played in the single, private performance of Shelley’s banned tragedy *The Cenci* for the Shelley Society in 1886. He went on to play Coranto in *The Amber Heart* with Irving at the Lyceum in May 1888 (*ODNB*). In January 1889, he stood in for the ill Irving as Macbeth with marked success. After nearly forty years on the London stage, he took up teaching and provincial roles in earnest when his career flagged. Appalled by manager bias, Robins invited Vezein to tea at her boarding house, where he delighted her friends with recitations from *Julius Caesar* using Diderot’s technique from *The Paradox of Acting* (*Both Sides* 104). In November 1887, theatre critic William Archer (1856–1924) wrote of Vezein’s reading of *Hamlet*:

The recital was a model of taste and skill. There was no ranting, no mouthing, no grotesque mimicking of the different characters. Mr. Vezein realised the limits of the effect to be aimed at, and the result was that he never missed it. His gestures and attitudes were graceful without a touch of pose; his voice resonant and finely modulated; his English perfect in its purity and refinement; and his sensitive features expressive without grimace. It is a pleasure to see anything done with such easy mastery (*Theatrical ‘World’ of 1897* 318–19).<sup>29</sup>

It is likely that Vezein taught similar techniques to his students, including Robins, who also espoused Diderot’s philosophy that actors should remain detached from the emotions of the characters they portray.

Meanwhile, undeterred by her rejection of *The Fair Bigamist*, Calhoun continued to look for a part for Robins. Besides details of her love affair with William Randolph Hearst, Calhoun enlightened Robins on “the Theatre and the Powers that Be therein” (*Both Sides* 94). Calhoun had made some opportunities of her own in

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<sup>28</sup> George Taylor numbers Vezein among actors who were not from theatrical families but married actresses who “greatly advanced their husband’s careers,” imparting “professional experience they lacked.” This does not fit Vezein, who married Jane Eliza Thomson some thirteen years after establishing his career in England. See *Players and Performances in the Victorian Theatre* (Manchester UP, 2000) 98.

<sup>29</sup> Subsequent references to William Archer’s five-volume collection of reviews, *The Theatrical ‘World’, 1893–1897*, will appear as ‘World’ with the year of publication and the page number in the citation.

1885 by avoiding the typical commercial casting of *As You Like It* (Powell "Verdict" 183-84). Calhoun explains in her memoir *Pleasures and Palaces* that producing the play in the open air of Coombe Wood, rather than in a commercial theatre, enabled her to interpret Celia as Shakespeare intended:

Celia, as Shakespeare wrote her, but as she is not played in the theatre, is, in . . . her devotion to her cousin, an exquisitely defined character. That she is not seen so on the boards is because it often chanced that Rosalind, after the fashion of stage firmaments, would be 'a star, when only one is shining,' and takes Celia's brave words out of her mouth and speaks them herself, thereby wrecking the author's [intentions and] incidentally estranging herself from his conception of Rosalind. (76)

According to Powell, by "moving their production outdoors they moved drama beyond the reach of male actor-managers and the theatres under their control." Their cast included Vezin as Jacques and Arthur Bouchier as Oliver, actors who were, or would become, associates of Robins.

At the time, there were no auditions for aspiring actresses, even an experienced one like Robins. An introduction to a manager was required. Competition was intense as increasing numbers of young women took the stage as a profession. In *Both Sides*, Robins recounted how she "sat in the hansom outside the Royalty Theatre, hot with excitement," while Calhoun went in to see the managers, for "in England, a manager it seemed might as easily be a baronet as wink" (13). Calhoun returned Tevis's generosity again by introducing Robins to the actress-manager Aimee Daniell Beringer,<sup>30</sup> better known as Mrs. Oscar Beringer, wife of the famous musician; and Madge Kendal, a manager in her own right who was also the wife of actor-manager William Kendal and the sister of playwright T. W. Robertson. Beringer and Kendal were busy with a new adaptation by Frances Hodgson Burnett of her book *Little Lord Fauntleroy*. This version was titled *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy* to distinguish it from the many unauthorized versions. The rags-to-riches story was very popular on both sides of the Atlantic. Calhoun, rather than Wilde, came through with the all-important introduction to Beringer, and Beringer came to the rescue with the crucial London debut. Robins played Widow Errol, mother of the "little lord," in January

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<sup>30</sup> Mary Krout reports on Beringer's speech to the Playgoer's Club on the topic "Can Women Write Plays?" See "Women's Clubs," *A Looker On In London* (London: Dodd, 1899) 79–91.

1889, five months after she decided to stay in London (*Both Sides* 95). Beringer hired Robins again in July 1889 to play Martha Bernick in *Pillars of Society*, Robins's first Ibsen role (John 54).<sup>31</sup> Wilde remained a good friend, but as far as work was concerned, Robins's first real helpers were women.

Another of Robins's relations sent her a letter of introduction to the well-known American actress Genevieve Ward (*Both Sides* 105). Robins first met Ward when the veteran actress was playing in New York in 1887 (John 38). They formally renewed their acquaintance at Ward's London home shortly after Robins's arrival. Robins admired Ward's professional reputation and her social graces. Tree had been one of Ward's acting students and called her "Old Ironclad" for her steadfast propriety (*Both Sides* 105). Robins wrote in *Both Sides* that Ward told

More plain truths in an hour than I had yet heard in England. But all without the smallest rancour, smiling and cutting off heads as she cut the American molasses cake. She had heard about me[,] she said nodding in a way to make a body quake till, very unexpectedly, she said she hoped I would stay in England. There were too many Americans here no credit to their country. She would help me. Yes, in any way she could. (110)

Ward kept her word. She offered the part of "the young adventuress in W. H. Vernon's new play *Mammon*" (*Both Sides* 126–27). Remarkably for the time and her circumstances, Robins rejected it because she did not like the part. Undaunted, Ward urged her friend Henry James (1843–1916) to cast this "young compatriot of ours" in the adaptation of his novel *The American* (*WH* Ch. 42, p. 6). In her diary, quoted in *Whither and How*,<sup>32</sup> Robins recorded her first impression of James:

I like this man better I think than any male American I've met abroad. . . . I was very much drawn to [this] . . . rather stout man. . . . [with the] fixed melancholy . . . expression. . . . I felt instantly, I *care* what this man thinks. . . .<sup>33</sup> I was grateful to him for being grave and serious. . . . James's manners are perfect because he doesn't bother about them and yet I believe him capable of *greatest* delicacy. (Ch. 42, p. 6)

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<sup>31</sup> Genevieve Ward (1837–1922) played Lona Hessel.

<sup>32</sup> John states that Ward introduced Robins to James. Gates contends that the Lea sisters introduced them. See John 64, and Gates 43.

<sup>33</sup> These ellipses and the next ones in this quote are Robins's.

The night she met James, Robins was feeling the effects of her poverty.

How little my famous countryman—luxuriously surrounded and lifted throughout life above material cares—would have credited the conditions to which I went ‘home’ from our first meeting. Not all his powers of irony would have saved his sensitive spirit some responsive perturbation had he known how[,] on that same night, the dark came down again, and covered me. (*WH* Chapter 42, p. 8)

She had taken in her young brother Vernon in 1890 so he could attend university in London. This helped her too, as she no longer had to live alone and make her way home from the theatre at night unaccompanied. After Vernon arrived, however, living in the rooms they rented in Culworth Street suddenly seemed risky when she heard the voices of drunken men fighting downstairs late at night (*WH* Ch. 40, 2). She noticed that their landlady wore a badge of dishonor: “In those days outside the theatre you did not see paint on any women’s face who was not a ‘street walker.’” Her suspicions prompted another move, this time to a new flat at Manchester Square Mansions. Unfortunately, it was the middle of winter and the flat was far from ready (*WH* Ch. 42, 1–6). The cold made the wet wallpaper peel, bringing clumps of plaster with it. The pipes froze, so there was no water. The damp made Vernon ill and Elizabeth sat up nights watching over him. Alone in the darkness, she wrote to her dead grandmother in her diary:

I am very lonely tonight—from my new ‘home’ I cry to you who are dead. Lacking living comfort I reach out eager hands for comradeship with dust—dear happy dead, how long before I am with you? Or—if you live, and know my hard condition, give me counsel. Let me protect Vernon from any ill that threatens him. (qtd. in *WH* Ch. 6, p. 11)

Robins commented on this entry in *Whither and How*: “Though it sounds like playacting, the suffering was real and set its stamp. Of course, the darkness lifted and on the other side of it, was Henry James—and the Others.” She soon met friends who helped her feel at home.

*“Henry James and the Others”*

James was on “dining terms” with the Lea sisters from Philadelphia—Anna Lea Merritt, the painter, and her half-sister Marion Lea, the actress (*TF* 30). Mrs. Merritt built a new house at number 50 Tite Street, Chelsea Embankment where she and

Marion entertained many of their expatriate friends.<sup>34</sup> The area was popular with artists; large studios there were still inexpensive, and it was close to the West End.<sup>35</sup> Robins was already friends with the sisters when she and Marion were cast in Buchanan's *The Sixth Commandment*,<sup>36</sup> an adaptation of Dostoyevsky's *Crime and Punishment*. It had a short run under Mrs. Lancaster-Wallis's management at the Shaftesbury in October and November 1890.<sup>37</sup>

As the Buchanan play's houses dwindled, Robins grew anxious for another part just as James was entering the profession as a playwright. Though he was a successful novelist with a substantial inheritance, according to his friend Edmund Gosse (1849–1928), James somehow felt deprived. Gosse believed this was the pang of emptiness in his life rather than real emptiness in his pockets. "In his anxiety [James] turned to the theatre as a market in which to earn a fortune" (qtd. in Kaplan 336). Actor-manager Edward Compton encouraged these hopes when he asked James to adapt his novel *The American* for the stage (335). James was so taken by Robins's performance as the widow Mrs. Linde in *A Doll's House* for a one-time matinée in January 1891 that in February he asked her to play the elderly Mrs. Bread in *The American*. Marion Lea had extolled the advantages to any young actress of

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<sup>34</sup> See "Settlement and Building—Artists and Chelsea: A History of the County of Middlesex: vol. 12, 102–106," *British History Online* (University of London and History of Parliament Trust, 2011). Plots "50 and 52 were bought by Mrs. Anna Lea Merritt and John and Marion Collier. Mrs. Merritt was a widowed American figure painter acquainted with the Colliers, and they asked Marion's brother-in-law Frederick Waller to design a pair of studio-houses in 1881–82. Mrs. Merritt occupied no. 50 which she called The Cottage."

<sup>35</sup> Wilde moved to rooms at number 1 Tite Street in 1880. See Wilde's letters edited by Holland and Hart-Davis, *The Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Holt, 2000), 94 n. Wilde lived at number 16 from 1885–95. See Hart-Davis, *The Letters of Oscar Wilde* (New York: Harcourt, 1962) 52 n.

<sup>36</sup> As a friend of Buchanan, Vezin may have helped Robins get the part of Liza in Buchanan's play.

<sup>37</sup> Marion Lea is first mentioned in Robins's extant diaries of October 1890, the month the Buchanan play opened. See also Gates 40. Herbert Waring, Lewis Waller, Herman de Lange, and Henrietta Cowen were also in the cast. See "Multiple Advertisements and Notices," *Morning Post* (Oct 13, 1890) 4. Robins hired Waring, Waller, and Cowen to act in her Ibsen plays. Herman de Lange, later secretary of the Independent Theatre, directed *Alan's Wife* in 1893.

playing older characters and Robins had repeated this conviction to James (*WH* Ch. 5, p. 10). Robins was embarrassed to reject the part but feared being typecast as the older woman (Ch.10, pp. 3–7). In any case, she could not take on another role. She and Lea were busy with “the Hedda Drama’ . . . as it developed behind the scenes with . . . its plot and counterplots” (Ch. 11, p. 1). To show her breadth as an actress, she invited James to rehearsals. Afterwards, he admitted Ibsen’s ingenuity in his well-known essay “On the Occasion of *Hedda Gabler*” in *The New Review* in June 1891.<sup>38</sup> Robins’s performance “did not lessen his unwilling interest in Ibsen” (*TF* 29) but increased his willing interest in Robins. According to Postlewait, Robins deserves much of the credit for introducing James to Ibsen. Though “of little help in his playwriting, [Ibsen’s realism] pointed the way to the style and technique of the late novels” (*Prophet* 79). Postlewait acknowledges, “Without the direct influence of Elizabeth Robins . . . there is little likelihood that James would have been drawn into the Ibsen campaign. Her performances revealed to him the theatrical power and depth of Ibsen’s realism.” In May 1891, Mrs. Compton, the manager’s wife and the female lead in the provincial run, became pregnant. So James offered the part of Claire Comtesse de Cintré to Robins (*TF* 31; *John* 64). Robins wanted this part—the widow was young.

Robins’s relationship with James soon turned to friendship through their mutual interest in the theatre. However, when they attended plays together, James’s

[A]ll too audible remarks . . . as though he reveled in mercilessness—would send cold shivers down his companion’s spine. She could tell without looking, that the lucky people [sitting nearby] . . . were enjoying the play or not—very certainly [they] were enjoying Mr. James. . . . To remonstrate however discreetly made things worse. From a denunciation so . . . deadly, the critic would fall to a still more scathing pity, in which I would find myself involved.

It was a different matter when the play was French or Italian, and not always, I used to think, because it was actually so much better. . . . [T]he nature as well as the Art of the Latin appealed strongly to Henry James; they found his guard down. He could ‘give’ himself to the foreign actor[,] as I never saw him . . . do in the case of anyone speaking English. (*TF* 129)

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<sup>38</sup> See Henry James “On the Occasion of *Hedda Gabler*,” *Essays in London and Elsewhere* (New York: Harper, 1893): 320–347.



Yet Robins, acting only in English, won James over. He showed his devotion by helping her translate and adapt Echegaray's *Mariana* in late 1895.

Evening after evening he would sit with that sustained patience, discussing, mending, polishing. . . . He would pace the little space between fire and bookcase, one act of the type-script in hand. . . . The hunt for the real[,] right epithet would go on sometimes till I, weakly ready to abandon it, would be brought to my senses by his suddenly dealing himself a resounding smack on the forehead . . . the open palm flung out to hold up 'as it were' the found solution. (176–77)

James remained anonymous for this work (Gates "*Sometimes*" 157).

*"Agreement seemed to be leading somewhere"*

As they met backstage, Robins and Lea discussed their philosophies of acting. For them the stage was more than a living, it was a passion. As well as acting together, they attended plays together, critiquing what they saw to one another (*WH* Ch. 5, pp. 4–5). Robins recorded her opinions in her diary. Lea took Robins to see *A Doll's House*, starring Lea's friend Janet Achurch, in June 1889. Lea and Achurch had studied at Margate Academy, Theatre Royal, established by Sarah Thorne in 1885, one of the first dedicated drama schools in England (John 56).<sup>39</sup> Seeing Achurch play Nora was an awakening for the public in terms of women's rights; it was an inspiration for Robins and Lea in terms of realistic acting (53). Robins wrote:

The Nora of that day must have been one of the earliest exceptions—she was the first I ever saw—to the rule that an actress invariably comes on in new clothes, unless she is playing a beggar. This Nora, with her home-made fur cap . . . [was] almost shabby. . . .

I never knew before or since anybody strike so surely the note of gaiety and homeliness as Janet did in that first scene. . . . The un-stagey effect of the whole play . . . made it, to eyes that first saw it in '89, less like a play than like a personal meeting—with people and issues that seized us and held us, and wouldn't let us go. (*IA* 9–10)

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<sup>39</sup> Sarah Thorne (1836–1899) opened her drama school in 1885. Many pupils became famous, including Harley Granville-Barker, Louis Calvert, Gertrude Kingston, Irene and Violet Vanbrugh, Florence Ward, and Gordon Craig, as well as Lea and Achurch. See "Our History," *Royal, Margate*, the Margate Web.

Such un-theatricality was a revolution. “Looked at historically, it is clear that through Ibsen the conventions of an earlier generation were beginning to lose their credibility” (Williams 172).

Ibsen’s drama is similar to Greek and Shakespearean drama in that “characters are developed in conflict, pitfalls discovered, motives unveiled and soul histories disclosed” all upon one event in the past, “projecting situations, not as manipulations, but as *creations* of character” (Henderson *Evolution* 443). “By opening his plays at the end rather than the beginning of a long, secret-ridden story line, Ibsen requires actors to . . . alter the process of creating character” (Cima *Performing* 21). Ibsen focuses attention on psychological action rather than on spectacle. His simple settings allow more attention for his intellectually demanding plots. In addition, Ibsen’s elimination of the tableau, like a freeze-frame in film, and his rejection of the “lengthy soliloquy, the undisguised confidant and the stage aside” add to the realism of his plays (Henderson *Evolution* 443). By excluding the spotlight, Ibsen promotes the ensemble and maintains the illusion of real domestic situations. These changes necessitated new acting techniques. Lea and Robins determined to be a part of these changes known as the New Drama, but they wanted more. They wanted to escape long runs and typecasting that turned actors into automatons. They wanted parts that stretched their abilities. Though she earned an early comic success as Audrey in *As You Like It*, Lea complained, “The managers all want me to grin and munch a turnip” (*WH* Ch. 2, p. 9). “Endlessly we discussed. You could do that with Marion. She didn’t expect you always to agree—the more exciting when we did, for, agreement seemed to be leading somewhere. There was quickening in the air” (Ch. 5, p. 10).

## Chapter 2 Becoming Ibsenites: The Joint Management

“Oh, the refreshment of [Lea’s] enthralling talk, banging great blows at the theatre as it was—seeing with me a theatre we should worship.”

Elizabeth Robins<sup>1</sup>

Robins reflected in *Whither and How* that her discussions with Lea over the fate of the English stage “were really, though we didn’t know it, private rehearsals for [*Hedda Gabler*]” (*WH* Ch. 2, p. 9). In a theatre they could “worship,” they could choose more intellectual plays from all over the world, and all players—not just actor-managers—could create characters (*TF* 33).

At mid-run in the Buchanan play, Robins and Lea began plans to produce *The Lady from the Sea* with Lea as “the lady” (*WH* Ch. 40, p. 11; Ch. 41, p. 7). However, no actor-manager would produce it because they considered it only a woman’s play (*IA* 16). Then Lea and Robins read in “the Foreign Press: ‘New work by Henrik Ibsen!’” with a woman’s name as the title and two good women’s parts (*WH* Ch. 7, p. 5). It seemed fateful. “Even in the throes of our excitement I remember Marion and I thought the title ‘Hedda Gabler’ unpleasing, worse: mispronounced Gabbler, . . . it invited cheap mockery. But foreign names often did, and anyway Ibsen had called his play by a feminine name—a woman’s play!” Because they could act, Lea and Robins felt they could manage better than those who miscast bad plays (Ch. 5, 9). However, they had yet to acquire performance rights. They went to impresario J. T. Grein to see if he knew anything about the new play, but he had heard nothing (Ch. 7, p. 5). However, he was planning a venture that would become the Independent Theatre. Robins offered to join forces with him to produce Ibsen, but Grein was not ready. Though he did not help the Joint Management, Grein became Robins’s “ally of many years” with other Ibsen projects (Ch. 7, p. 4).

Joanna Townsend contends in “Elizabeth Robins: Hysteria, Politics and Performance” that through *Hedda Gabler* Robins took a “journey along that trajectory towards the ability to articulate her own desire” (103). While Robins’s artistic desires

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<sup>1</sup> *WH* Chapter 2, p. 9.

were fully expressed through management of the play and portrayal of its protagonist, as far as obtaining rights to the play were concerned, Robins's articulation of desire was circumspect and her means of acquisition were anonymous. It can be argued that secretiveness was necessary to bring the piece to performance, but Robins remained guarded about their methods for decades.

### *Secret Diplomacy*

Robins's secretiveness is evident in her 1928 speech for the Royal Society of Arts entitled *Ibsen and the Actress*,<sup>2</sup> later published as a book by Virginia Woolf's Hogarth Press. In it Robins glibly explains how she and Lea obtained acting rights to *Hedda* from Ibsen's English publisher, William Heinemann (1863–1920) by “enlist[ing] the cooperation of the translators,” William Archer and Edmund Gosse (15–16). The reality was neither as simple nor as easy as Robins makes it sound. Indeed, in *Whither and How* she called their efforts “secret diplomacy worthy of a major political crisis” (Ch. 47, p. 4). Rights to the play were disputed from the beginning, with many vying for the prize. While Edmund Gosse was the first to write about Ibsen in England, William Archer's fluency in Norwegian and first-hand knowledge of Scandinavian culture made him England's Ibsen expert (Whitebrook 9). As a young man, Archer read each of Ibsen's plays as soon as he could find a copy and relished them much more than the law books he was supposed to be studying. Restless and depressed as he anticipated a career in the law, he sought out Ibsen in Rome in 1881, where they discussed the plays at length (40–42). From then on Archer was Ibsen's loyal evangelist. Charles Archer related in his biography of his older brother that William “had made himself something of an oracle to the small but growing public which would fain have taken the drama seriously, and he had begun to count as a power in the inner circle . . . of the theatrical world” (165). While Bell and James were at first reluctant Ibsen enthusiasts, Archer had translated all of Ibsen's early plays into English long before anyone had heard of the “old grey wolf of the North.”<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> *Ibsen and the Actress* will hereafter be cited as *IA*.

<sup>3</sup> This is one of Robins's nicknames for Ibsen. See E. R. to F. B. Sat. Nov. 10, 1894 in Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 A; Folder 19 A. “Notes and calendar.”

In November 1889 Archer began editing past translations of Ibsen's prose plays, including eight translations he had done himself, for the five-volume *Ibsen's Prose Dramas* published by Walter Scott (Postlewait *Prophet* 49–50). *Hedda* was to be next, as soon as Archer could get the proofs from Ibsen in exchange for a small fee, as he had done with the earlier plays.<sup>4</sup> According to *The New York Times*, Archer went to Munich to secure both the publishing and the performance rights from Ibsen, but Gosse, Heinemann's reader, got there first. Heinemann wanted to take advantage of the Ibsen controversy to launch his new publishing house, so he felt justified in purchasing the play for the vast sum of £150.<sup>5</sup> According to Robins:

No other publisher wanted or could afford to compete with Mr. Heinemann on the new basis he had created. No possible rival would dream of risking ready cash for rights in a play about which he knew very little + that little far from encouraging. . . . If such rights had ever shown the smallest sign of being a commercial asset, the regular Managers would have seen to the business. (*WH* Ch. 7, pp. 7–8)

However, if *Hedda Gabler* was anything like *Ghosts*, producers could be "certain of one thing only, the Censor's ban" (Ch. 7, p. 8).

Heinemann was most interested in the publishing rights and assumed his investment also secured the acting rights once he had the play read on stage (*WH* Ch. 47, p. 2). Archer contested that Ibsen had not included the acting rights. Archer asserted that he had willingly relinquished his right to publish as a courtesy to Ibsen since Heinemann had offered more money, but only the right to the first publishing from advanced proofs. He asserted that Gosse and Ibsen had agreed that Archer could follow up by publishing his translation soon after (Ch. 43, p. 7; Davis *Critical* 127–28). Ibsen refused to clarify. Archer was offended that instead of asking him to translate the play, Heinemann stipulated that Ibsen's publisher send the proofs directly to Gosse for translation (*Whitebrook* 115). Archer was thus denied his right to continue

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<sup>4</sup> See "London's Week of News," *The New York Times*, Jan. 18, 1891, 1. See also John 56, and Tracy Davis *Critical and Popular Reaction to Ibsen in England: 1872–1906* (Diss., U of Warwick, 1984) 126.

<sup>5</sup> Publishing rights to Ibsen plays were a valuable commodity. Postlewait estimates that by 1892 Walter Scott, for one, had published more than 30,000 copies of Ibsen's plays. See *Prophet of the New Drama: William Archer and the Ibsen Campaign* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1986) 51.

his series and would have to go through Heinemann if he wanted to help direct the play. Despite this publishing debacle, Robins reports in *Whither and How* that the most important issue for Archer (and for the Joint Management) was the acting rights (Ch. 7, p. 7). Archer had translated *A Doll's House* for Achurch and helped her with interpretation. He also helped direct *Pillars of Society* with his own translation. He would not consider using Gosse's translation of *Hedda* for the obvious reason, as Lea pointed out, "It would have to be made speakable" (Ch. 7, p. 8). When Lea and Robins read Gosse's version they "declaimed bits with jeers . . . [and] rolled with irreverent laughter." On January 23, 1891, Archer's frustration erupted with an article on the front page of the *Pall Mall Gazette*, "A Translator-Traitor: Mr. Edmund Gosse and Henrik Ibsen." He compared Gosse's translating skill to that of a "fourth-form school boy." Robins explains:

By dint of the deadly parallel column, the [translations] were set in the eye of the public [with] Mr. Gosse's translation on one side, [and] the actual literal Ibsen on the other. If Archer's rendering was faithful—and no one ever challenged it—the discrepancies between the original and the English of Mr. Gosse were little short of staggering. (*WH* Ch. 7, p. 16)

Though Gosse had published reviews of Ibsen's works since 1872,<sup>6</sup> Archer accused him of doing worse things to the play than Hedda did to Lovborg's manuscript: "She did not deface, stultify and publish it—and then claim copyright. She did a much less cruel thing—she only burned it" (16–17).

Just how bad was Gosse's version, really? The two columns in the *Pall Mall Gazette* were certainly not the whole story. According to Robins, Gosse's translation was so bad she could not at first see herself in the part. "As soon as I began, in this interval, to re-write some of Hedda's speeches I found myself coming close and closer till I had Hedda in my bones" (*WH* Ch. 7, p. 12). Robins had studied Norse since her visit with the Bulls a few years before, but it is unlikely she was fluent. Otherwise, why would she be anxious to engage Archer? How much did Robins, Lea, and Archer change Gosse's version for their premiere? Since they remained secretive about it, even years later, it would seem that they made substantial alterations to the text. Archer was most concerned with accuracy of the translation, which is important.

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<sup>6</sup> See also Miriam Franc, *Ibsen in England* (Boston: Four Seas, 1919).

However, the actresses were most concerned with “speakability,” since they had to say the lines on stage. It would be embarrassing to speak lines like this one of Hedda’s in Act I of Gosse’s version: “Listen, Tesman—is it not up there that there is a place which he haunts—he—Ejlert Lovborg?” (Ibsen *Hedda* trans. Gosse 44).

Lovborg could not be taken seriously if he spoke this line:

Suppose now, Hedda, that a man—about such an hour in the morning as this—after a wild night of carouse, came home to the mother of his child and said: ‘Listen—I have been here and there. In this place and that place. And I have taken your child with me. To this place and that place. I have lost the child. Utterly lost it. The Devil knows into whose hands it has fallen. Who may have had their fingers in it.’ (225)

Heinemann and Gosse had their own ideas as to who should produce the play. Robins and Lea’s fears were realized in early February 1891 when they learned that Gosse had given adaptation rights to Justin Huntly McCarthy who announced plans to star Langtry as Hedda (*WH* Ch. 44, p. 5). Robins considered Langtry an “abominable actress” and feared that her stage personae would distort the play (John 38). Since even Archer considered Langtry for Hedda, Robins remembered thinking, “Nobody cared about acting. What was the use?” After this disappointment, she considered Agostino Gatti’s offer to play at the Adelphi; Buchanan and Sims wanted to write a melodrama especially for her (p. 6). She confided to her diary, “It is such stuff. I’m heart-sick.” She “had arrived, it might seem overnight, at a place where to play some part no longer seemed enough” (Ch. 41, p. 8). Just when she was tempted to give up Ibsen and play melodrama for the rest of her career, the Gatti brothers double crossed her by stipulating that she replace Olga Brandon in the “fading” *English Rose* before they would stage the new piece.<sup>7</sup> At Lea’s urging, Robins declined and kept faith in

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<sup>7</sup> Despite her reaction to the Gatti play, Robins was not against melodrama; she adapted, starred in and directed Echegaray’s *Mariana* in 1897. Indeed she felt that by placing *Mariana* and *Little Eyolf* in a series, she helped gain support for subscription theatre. See Gates “*Sometimes Suppressed and Sometimes Embroidered*”: *The Life and Writing of Elizabeth Robins, 1862–1952*, Ann Arbor, Mich: University Microfilms, 1987, 185. Archer’s one playwriting success was his melodrama *The Green Goddess*. When it was produced in the 1920s, realism had a much stronger presence than it had in the 1890s. Postlewait reminds us that “Most of the time we can find melodramatic elements in realistic drama and realistic elements in melodramatic plays.” See “From Melodrama to Realism: The Suspect History of American Drama,” *Melodrama: The Cultural Emergence of a*

their *Hedda*. On January 27, after reading the *Pall Mall Gazette* article, Robins went to see Archer hoping to find an ally in the quest for the acting rights. She first met Archer in June 1890 when she asked to use his translation of *Ghosts* for a production she planned with Anglo-Norwegian journalist H. L. Braekstad (John 55). This production never came together, but Archer had offered his services as stage manager. “You don’t want a conventional stage-manager, but of course there must be someone to ‘boss the show’” (qtd. in Whitebrook 106). When Robins saw Archer again she was taken aback when “the lion in his own den . . . deluged [her] with . . . the cold water of his doubt” (*WH* Ch. 44, p. 3). Worse still was his

[U]nblushing readiness to consider Mrs. Langtry as player of an Ibsen woman. . . . We . . . could believe anything of him after that. But not even Marion realised the staggering blow his suggestion had been to me. It seemed to shake . . . the Joint Management to its foundation. Since Archer had fallen so far beneath our expectations what worthwhile understanding and support could we depend on? (Ch. 44, pp. 3-4)

On February 3, 1891, with her acting skills and a new “get up,” Lea took her chance to convince Archer to help them translate the play. She recounted the meeting to Robins since Robins was too ill to leave her bed. Lea did not tell Archer they had yet to find a backer or a theatre. Her excitement is palpable:

[Archer] asked point blank what our scheme was. I regretted your absence and . . . told him as much as was necessary and allowed him to draw on his own imagination for more. . . . He wished me to let you know that he would write Ibsen and get his answer as soon as possible, and he also said that he *might on the whole feel it wise to advise Ibsen to give us the first chance in performance [rather than giving it] to such managements as Langtry, Tree, etc.*—This he said after I had laid great stress upon the delight interest and sincerity with which we would turn to our work—contrasting it with the mercenary motives of other managements. He really is very much for us, or so it seemed to me. I can’t but believe we shall win. I was exhaustedly tired yet his lack of enthusiasm did not affect me. I pulled out as one card our being Americans here, with strong American influence—that hit.—Also the ‘new Management’ 2 women—that hit again less hard.

Justin McCarthy’s enterprise roused the fight in him, I thought, but he added he did not think a performance to so limited an audience



could harm us. Finally I said, 'Frankly tell me—if my playing Thea in any way lessens your wish to put Hedda in our hands I will withdraw.' With sincerity[,] 'No, no. I don't see how you could have got such an idea—on the contrary it is owing to your and Miss Robins combining, and both being actresses of capacity which would incline me to favor your plan' or such words.

So that is all right. My get up I think helped.<sup>8</sup>

Their being American “hit” Archer’s hope for an American run. Nevertheless, it is remarkable that he received the two newcomers. Perhaps he thought he could mold them since they were young and new to the London stage. He likely did not expect to be influenced by them, as he was especially by Robins. Despite wanting to help the Ibsen cause, he did not want a legal dispute. Yet he also did not want the tumult over *Ghosts* to die down before he could produce the latest Ibsen play (Whitebrook 114).

Robins wanted a translation as close as possible to Ibsen’s Norwegian, so she was relieved when Archer finally decided to help.

[Archer] is quite turned about. Strongly favours my doing the play, is so much in earnest he advises my doing *anything* almost to placate Heinemann if he remains obdurate even to calling the play Gosse’s on the bills and using practically Archer’s version—this suggestion astounded me!!<sup>9</sup>

This was especially astonishing coming from Archer, the trained lawyer. “Calling the play Gosse’s on the bills and using practically Archer’s version” is exactly what transpired, with the public none the wiser since Archer’s name did not appear (*WH* Ch. 13, p. 12). The version was “practically” Archer’s because Robins and Lea made substantial contributions to the text. A small note in Robins’s hand reads, “On or before Feb 15[,] I am helping W. A. to correct Hedda proof.”<sup>10</sup> Archer asked Lea to join Robins’s efforts to find “any awkwardnesses” in his text (qtd. in Ch. 9, p. 11). As actresses, Robins and Lea were especially attuned to lines that were “unspeakable.”

The joint managers were not without moral support in their mission to save the English stage. Lea's fiancé, Langdon Mitchell, "lightened the atmosphere for us partly

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<sup>8</sup> Fales, Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, “Marion Lea.”

<sup>9</sup> Fales, Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, “Marion Lea.”

<sup>10</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A. “Diaries” 1873–1952.

because he was ready to think, however important, it was all very good fun. He made us laugh more than we would sometimes have had heart for without his whimsical presence" (*WH* Ch. 43, p. 13). Mitchell, who had been courting Lea for some time before the *Hedda* premiere, ran errands and even spied on Gosse at his "At Homes" for the Joint Management (Ch. 7, p. 14).<sup>11</sup> The conspirators needed any help they could get; they were in a hurry. Hacked-up plays often received the notoriety, audiences, and profits before the "real" plays could be produced.<sup>12</sup> Added to the need for speed of production was the stress of the censor, particularly at issue with Ibsen plays. "Translators of Ibsen had to steer a careful course between faithfulness to the original and official acceptability" (Foulkes 2–3).

Heinemann had naturally taken offense at Archer's "Translator-Traitor" article. He returned the volley by accusing Archer of pirating the play in a letter to the editor of the *Pall Mall Gazette* on February 4, 1891.<sup>13</sup> Robins recorded that Archer saw "no harm if you two see Heinemann."<sup>14</sup> She reported to her diary that "Lea + I did so before 20<sup>th</sup>" of February. Archer sent the women as envoys to ask Heinemann for permission to use someone else's version without telling the publisher that he was the "someone else."<sup>15</sup> Making the most of their charms and acting skills, Lea and Robins negotiated in person with Heinemann, Gosse, and McCarthy since "hitches never seemed so serious in any talk face to face" (*WH* Ch. 13, p. 3). However, this meant expensive cab and omnibus rides and, when they could not afford those, long walks to

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<sup>11</sup> Langdon Mitchell was the second son of Philadelphia physician and author Silas Weir Mitchell who created the "rest cure" referred to in Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper." Robins took a similar cure in England in 1904 after continued weakness from the bout with typhoid she contracted in Alaska in 1900. See John 131. Weir Mitchell's papers are housed at University of Pennsylvania.

<sup>12</sup> *The Real Little Lord Fauntleroy* was a test case for copyright. Many versions were produced before Hodgson-Burnett won the stage rights to her own book in 1888. Robins may have known of the case; she appeared in the authorized version in 1889. Mrs. Errol was Robins's first London role. See John 51.

<sup>13</sup> See "Mr. Archer, Mr. Gosse, Mr. Heinemann, and Ibsen," *Pall Mall Gazette* (Feb. 4, 1891): 2.

<sup>14</sup> Fales, Series II; Subseries B; Box 18, Folder 115, "Marion Lea."

<sup>15</sup> Fales, Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, "Marion Lea."

and from the men's offices (Ch. 50, p. 2). When Heinemann disparaged Archer to them, Lea and Robins pretended not to know him well (Ch. 11, pp. 6–7). Heinemann was happy to learn that the women wanted to produce the play (Ch. 44, pp. 4-5; Ch. 47, p. 3). He believed a stage version following quickly on Gosse's published version would help sell more copies of the book.<sup>16</sup> The novelty he had paid so dearly for was being lost by McCarthy's production delays. He was not pleased to hear they wished to make changes, if only "here and there" (Ch. 11 pp. 4–9). Gosse, he guessed, would be furious. It took them some time to convince him to give them an introduction to Gosse. "Outside we hugged ourselves till we remembered we still had the Gosse visit to get through" (Ch. 12, p. 2). When they finally met Gosse with his "round face, small features [and] . . . eyes a little peering through gold spectacles," they were bemused (Ch. 7, p. 14). He was not formidable, only preoccupied, and stunned that ladies were not "repelled" by Hedda (Ch. 48, p. 3).

Though they really only wanted McCarthy's rights so they could perform their translation, Robins and Lea hinted to Gosse that they were willing to produce McCarthy's adaptation. Gosse thought they should join McCarthy's production and sent them on to see him. The women had already asked McCarthy for his rights, but their letter went unanswered. Once they saw him in person, they finally discovered why he had been so evasive. Though he had negotiated with Langtry, she had not accepted, so McCarthy did not write his adaptation (*WH* Ch. 48, p. 11; Ch. 9 p. 2). Nevertheless, Lea and Robins still had to find a reason to bypass his rights. Robins's copy of Lea's letter to McCarthy reveals their secret strategy:

The Cottage, Tite Street  
Chelsea Embankment

Dear Mr. McCarthy

Miss Robins and I called on you on Wednesday under the impression that your stage versions [sic] of Hedda Gabler was an accomplished fact, which we could instantly set to work upon.

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<sup>16</sup> Gosse's "sole authorized English translation" was simultaneously published in America. See Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler: A Drama in Four Acts Translated from the Norwegian by Edmund Gosse* (Boston: Baker, 1891).

Shortly after leaving you we heard from Mr. Edmund Gosse that a revised edition of his translation of the play was not only in preparation but already finished. It therefore seemed wise to Miss R and myself to make arrangements to produce this version personally revised by the original translator.

Our work is so heavy that any saving of time is of great momentousness. You are such an ardent Ibsenite that we hope you will interest yourself in our scheme wherein we hope to do no discredit to a dramatist you so much admire.

Very truly,  
M. [Marion Lea]<sup>17</sup>

Lea failed to mention to McCarthy that the “revised edition” was theirs and that the “original translator” was Archer. McCarthy had unintentionally done them a favor when he told Gosse early on that his text was unsuitable for the stage (Ch. 47, p. 6). This induced Gosse to begin revisions once he heard a similar opinion from Robins and Lea. More importantly for the actresses and their legal position, Gosse gave them permission to make changes to his version and even offered two copies of his proofs (Ch. 12, p. 6).<sup>18</sup> The women did not tell Gosse that their changes were substantial, or that they were in league with Archer. They “reveled in . . . [being] full of guile” (Ch. 11, p. 9). Busy elsewhere, Gosse did not even read their finished draft. By then he was looking forward to seeing the play (Ch. 49, p. 11). Robins did not disclose their machinations in *Ibsen and the Actress*, where she makes it sound as if Archer and Gosse were collaborators on the project (16). However, the eventual compromises of the men, including Archer, suggest that they each wanted *Hedda Gabler* to succeed, or that they took only a benign interest in it in the end. For their own reasons, especially the very public squabble in the press, each could not admit this to the others (Ch. 11, p. 7). As Ibsen enthusiasts, unlike most actor managers, the men had a stake in the women’s project, but it came down to the women, like ambassadors negotiating that “major political crisis” (Ch. 47, p. 4), to make *Hedda* a viable property for the English stage.

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<sup>17</sup> Fales, Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, “Marion Lea.”

<sup>18</sup> See also Joanne E. Gates “Elizabeth Robins and the 1891 Production of *Hedda Gabler*” (*Modern Drama* 28.4, 1985) 616.

*From Translation to Performance*

Archer admitted to Robins that, “a good speakable translation was oftener than not, a work of more than one mind” (*WH* Ch. 9, p. 12). His willingness to entertain changes to his script was very attractive to the actresses who ordinarily would not have been allowed to change their own lines, never mind to negotiate all other lines in a play.<sup>19</sup> Good translation of drama is about making good dialogue while staying true to the author’s intent and meaning. It is not about literally translating from one language to another.<sup>20</sup> Ibsen intended *Hedda Gabler* to reveal secret motivations and hidden emotions. While Edmund Gosse only saw “fragments of sentences without verbs, clauses that come to nothing, adverbial exclamations and cryptic interrogations” (qtd. in Marker and Lone-Marker 163), Robins realized the intricacies of Hedda’s character while grasping the whole of the play. Though they were still learning Norse at the time, the actresses had a unique set of skills—especially that of character creation—to bring to the translation process. Dialogue contributes to both translation and character creation. Herbert Waring, London’s first Torvald in *A Doll’s House* and its first Solness in *The Master Builder*, noted that Ibsen’s “dialogue, which I had previously thought so dull and unimaginative, became the cogent and facile medium for the expression of individual and diverse character. Every word . . . seemed to have a value of its own, and suggest some subtle nuance of feeling” (qtd. in Whitebrook 80). Character motivations come through Ibsen’s dialogue in often-indirect ways as characters attempt to manipulate situations. However, characters are also manipulated by situations, illustrating how an individual can, within hereditary and environmental limits, exercise some elements of free will. Character creation within these limits is the essence of realism. On January 15, 1874, Ibsen explained to Gosse his use of prose in *Emperor and Galilean*. “What I desired to depict were human beings, and therefore I would not let them talk the ‘language of the Gods’” (qtd. in Henderson *Evolution* 438). If the audience is to understand the characters, their lines

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<sup>19</sup> Robins tried rewriting her lines in *The Sixth Commandment*. The manager, Mrs. Lancaster-Wallis, did not renew her contract.

<sup>20</sup> Toril Moi discusses the challenges of translating Ibsen into English in *Henrik Ibsen and the Birth of Modernism: Art, Theatre, Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford UP, 2006) Appendix 2, “Translating Ibsen” 328–333.

must be naturally spoken in unaffected, colloquial language. This is what the Robins/Archer/Lea script accomplishes. Instead of Gosse's unnatural: "Listen, Tesman—is it not up there that there is a place which he haunts—he—Ejlert Lovborg?" (44). The collaborators changed this line to "Tell me, isn't it somewhere in that neighbourhood that he lives—er—, Eilert Lovborg, is living?" After many weeks of work and many changes like this one, Robins and Lea had "the stage version of [their] dreams" (*WH* Ch.13, p. 1).

### *Joint Managing Hedda Gabler*

As they negotiated the acting rights, the joint managers chose their ideal cast—but only on paper. They had no money to engage either players or venue (Robins *IA* 16). Looking back, Robins was surprised at their courage. They had to "accumulate audacity" before they could accumulate capital (*WH* Ch. 41, p. 8). Financing productions was never their primary intention. Without a backer or any ready cash, Lea put up her gold bracelet and Robins offered the "fire-smelted" lump of gold her father had given her as a wedding present as collateral for a £300 loan from one of Lea-Merritt's friends, Mortimer Menpes (Ch. 45, p. 5). With these funds they set to the real work of casting, costuming, and directing the play (Ch. 7, p. 9). Lea wrote: "I've had some money for clothes sent me from home! Into 'Hedda' goes everything!"<sup>21</sup> It may seem counterintuitive that women who struggled financially would advocate non-commercial theatre. However, such projects were possible because they did not have to provide the latest fashions that actor-managers typically required. Ibsen's interior sets were also inexpensive. Combining the freedom of their own management with the enthralling characters of Ibsen was irresistible to Lea and Robins, who valued art more than money.

Finding a venue proved difficult. Even when houses were empty, managers hesitated to confuse the public by having another company play in their house (*WH* Ch. 7, p. 10). Robins and Lea eventually hired the Vaudeville for two weeks of matinées. According to *Whither and How*, Hermann Vezin, Arthur Bouchier, [Charles] Brookfield, Charles Sugden, and Bernard Gould made the first list of contenders for

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<sup>21</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115. "Marion Lea," Feb. 2 [1891].

the three male roles (Ch. 13, pp. 5–7). These players could do more than “decently scrape through”—they were actors Robins and Lea “could hope the best of.” However, as some were already engaged,<sup>22</sup> the final cast involved Scott Buist as Tesman, Charles Sugden as Brack, Arthur Elwood as Lovborg, Henrietta Cowen as Aunt Julia, and Patty Chapman as Bertha (Franc 170).

As they prepared the cast, the managers sought natural speech and movement that enabled Ibsen’s effects to be revealed. “Ibsen was deeply distressed to see the heavily declamatory Hedda created by the popular Munich actress Marie Conrad-Ramlo, in a play whose tight, staccato rhythm indicates the very antithesis of such a style” (Marker and Lone-Marker 163). Robins had learned more natural delivery from American actors like Edwin Booth (Giblin 49). She had also witnessed more natural blocking at the passion play in Oberammergau, Germany. “I celebrated the gain in liberty for the actor to find . . . that you could turn your back and not lose your audience—hold it tighter rather by not being so insistent on doing exactly that” (*WH* Ch. 5, p. 9). They “ignored absolutely the usual . . . risings and crossings unless these were indicated by Ibsen’s sparse stage directions, or by plain implications in his text” (Ch. 14, p. 9). Archer had also been influenced by German acting methods—in his case the Meiningen players who toured London in 1881 (Whitebrook 82). Archer related in his review of the company that for the first time, even in scenes that would have typically been dominated by a monologue, the actors spoke to one another, rather than to the audience as most English actors did (Whitebrook 82-3).<sup>23</sup>

Just as the Oberammergau villagers coalesced, not as stars but as individuals in a community effort, Robins and Lea fostered synergy in their productions. Lea “had complained before that so many actors ‘play the lone hand;’ they consider their business is to make their part—what ever it is—the pivot of the play. Perhaps more than anyone I ever worked with, Marion Lea had the sense of playing with the whole orchestra” (*IA* 35). Robins gives Lea credit for much of the directing.

At rehearsal [Lea] was at her best in helping others to get the last ounce of value out of their parts, as ready as I to let the other fellow try *his* way

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<sup>22</sup> Gould, originally cast as Lovborg, withdrew when his part interfered with a prior commitment in Barrie’s *Richard Savage*. See *WH* Ch. 13, p. 5.

<sup>23</sup> Ibsen saw the Meiningen company in Berlin in 1876 (Innes *Henrik* 13).

and if he could make a good show of proving it best, or even that he tremendously wanted his way—and didn't get in anyone else's way, above all not in Ibsen's—she would uphold him. . . . I see . . . the sharp contrast between her own part (Thea, shy, clinging, tremulous) and the Joint Manageress herself, charming, gay, but unmistakably firm. She could discipline people not generally amenable. . . . [f]ix[ing] her big innocent blue eyes on someone who was a few minutes late and without a word convey that he had failed us all. Not that she hadn't the right word too, on occasion. (*WH* Ch. 15, pp. 1–2)

Robins and Lea noticed that giving actors more autonomy increased their confidence, so necessary with Ibsen's more demanding characters. "We had a sense of infectious eagerness; they were all pulling with us yet freer to express themselves than was common in the Theatre" (Ch. 15, pp. 2–3). Even stage manager George Foss, who Robins knew from the 1891 matinée of *A Doll's House*, and from the 1889 production of *Her Own Witness*, shared their dedication to the ensemble. He hired the Comedy Theatre for rehearsals and borrowed sets from Beerbohm Tree (Ch. 50, pp. 9–10). By night he staged J. M. Barrie's *Richard Savage*; by day he staged *Hedda Gabler*. Robins reveals in *Whither and How*: "The tragedy of Foss's life was his longing to act. Yet I never saw any failure in his good-humoured readiness to help others to do the thing denied him—or to help the enterprise as a whole." Foss wore glasses and an unassuming demeanor but secretly longed to play the tragic Lovborg "with the vine leaves in his hair" (p. 11).

### *Becoming Hedda*

No longer enthralled by the sweetness of *Fauntleroy*, Robins thrived on the deep psychological challenges of a character that still captivates audiences. She and Lea "demolished" Diderot's acting system that Robins had used in her Boston Museum days (*WH* Ch. 5, p. 9). Rather than simply imitate characters, as Diderot advised, they used their experiences and focused their emotions to *become* their characters. Archer had come to similar conclusions in his 1888 book, *Masks or Faces: A Study in the Psychology of Acting*.

Whitebrook insists that, except for changing "beautifully" to "gracefully," "Archer had the last word on everything" (124). Yet Robins reports that Archer did not appear until the later rehearsals (*WH* Ch. 15, p. 3). She explains, "There were differences of course, and the differences were sometimes strongly expressed since we weren't under anyone's heel, not even under W. A.'s though we felt that to please him was an



achievement” (Ch. 15, p. 3). She confessed, “Hedda stirred in me a fierce possessiveness, not only at that time. She was my first great Ibsen part. I had fought for her inch by inch. She was mine” (Ch. 15, p. 11). Weeks before regular rehearsals, she and Lea sequestered themselves at a guesthouse in Richmond to focus on their parts (Ch. 14, p. 8).<sup>24</sup> Before they had even given the script to the stage manager, typically responsible for arranging furniture and blocking the play, Robins and Lea did this themselves. Robins labeled her book “We play Edmund Gosse’s revised version.” This copy is the most “dog-eared, [and] scribbled over [*Hedda*] script” in the Fales collection (Ch. 15, p. 13). It shows how Robins brought Hedda, the “cold-blooded egoist” to life (Robins *IA* 26). “There are pencil strokes at the Hedda speeches and, dashed down on the margin, traces of . . . the mind’s first full impact upon the work of original genius” (*WH* Ch. 15, p. 13). These “pencil strokes” show Robins’s process of *becoming* Hedda. She explains:

I hear Hedda again, in her rare moment of self-revelation: ‘Oh, if you only knew how poor I am.’ . . . *I am her*, throwing her arms passionately around Thea and echoing the contemptuous threat of their school-days in a ‘low, hissing whisper,’ as the pencil directs: ‘I believe I shall scorch your hair off after all.’ . . . After [Thea’s] timid confession has been wormed out of her, and she drops her head with ‘I see nothing but darkness before me’ the pencil exults: ‘Hedda’s heaven opens.’ (*WH* Ch. 15 p. 14)

With the expression “I am her” Robins shows her intention to *become* Hedda, not to simply imitate her. This technique, now called method acting, created London’s first Hedda Gabler.

“Ibsen attributed much of Hedda’s behavior to her pregnancy” (Innes *Sourcebook* 115). Fearing the censor, Archer cut most of the lines that hinted at her condition except Tesman’s to Aunt Julia: “How plump she has grown on the journey” (3).<sup>25</sup> To give clues to the audience, Robins interpreted Hedda as not just bored, but also exhausted. Marginalia in the typescript (and Figure 8 below) show this. On first entering in Act I, Hedda declares to Tesman and Aunt Julia that she slept “tolerably.”

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<sup>24</sup> See also John 58.

<sup>25</sup> See Henrik Ibsen, *Hedda Gabler*, Trans. Elizabeth Robins, Marion Lea, William Archer, and Edmund Gosse, TS, Elizabeth Robins Papers, New York University. Hereafter, this work is referred to as Ibsen et al.

Yet throughout the scene Robins leaned into sofa or chair when sitting. In Act II, after waiting up half the night for Lovborg, Hedda claims, “I have had a very good sleep.” Yet Robins continued to lean on the furniture as if exhausted. It is difficult now to see the need for such subtlety, but Robins had to embody Ibsen’s intention that could be expressed in no other way.



Fig. 8 Robins interprets Hedda’s fatigue. Photo by Aime Dupont from “The Drama,” *The Critic*, April 9, 1898, No. 842, vol. 29: 254. <<http://books.google.com/books?id=FnlFAQAAMAAJ&q=Robins#v=snippet&q=Robins&f=false>>

Robins began “languidly” to show Hedda’s fatigue, but this also helped to lull the audience. As Hedda becomes increasingly agitated, Robins made her movements more violent, using voice modulation and gestures to make Hedda seem increasingly threatening. When Thea tries to leave Hedda’s house at the end of Act II, Hedda retorts: “Nonsense! You shall have tea first, you *little stupid!*” Grabbing Thea by the hands, she pulls her toward the door. Then, Thea’s blonde curls that Hedda was jealous of as a girl become the focus of Hedda’s rage. The promptbook shows that Hedda “draws her breath in thro’ clinched teeth + lifts her hand to Thea’s hair.”<sup>26</sup> This is the last stage movement of Act II. The audience does not see Hedda actually pull

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<sup>26</sup> See copy of page 35 (my handwritten pagination) of Robins’s promptbook in Appendix 4.

Thea's hair, but Robins initiated the threat, thus adding to audience tension. In *Ibsen and the Actress* Robins considers Hedda "pitiable in her hungry loneliness" (26), but when acting the part, she did not soften Hedda's caustic traits in order to soften spectators. Realistic plays were "no longer staged solely for entertainment, [so] the actors needed no longer to ingratiate themselves with the audience" (Williams 172).

Robins's intentions appear again on page 52 of the promptbook, Act III, where Robins blocked Hedda's movements after Lovborg's last departure. Rather than using Ibsen's short line "Now I am burning the child," Robins expands the lines and the movements to act out Hedda's jealous fury.

H holds out her hands wavering a little as L— goes out —stands an instant—utters a broken cry 'Lovb'—grasps curtain looks back at desk where MS. is. + whispers heavily "Thea—Thea!"—again and again as she Xs room takes out MS. with eager vicious hands— catches sight of stove glides to it + drops before it opening door + muttering 'the child the child'—crushes some leaves + throws them in 'how I [\*\*\*]<sup>27</sup> burning yr. child' tc. tc.—

Decades later Bell recalled this scene:

Who that saw it will ever forget what Elizabeth Robins did with the end of the second act? The crouching figure by the fire, Lovborg's book in her terrible maleficent grasp, the firelight flickering on the sinister triumph of hatred in her eyes, as handful by handful she cast the manuscript into the flames, the intensity of her sibilant whisper shuddering through the air—'Your child, Thea! Your child and Eilert Lovborg's . . . <sup>28</sup> now I am burning the child!' (*Landmarks* 110).

This physicality of rage is even more powerful having been juxtaposed with Hedda's earlier physicality of fatigue. Thus, Robins acted out Hedda's "pathological destructiveness" (Innes Sourcebook 117) but also her psychological instability as she secretly loses control.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> My symbol [\*\*\*] stands for a word that is missing. In this case the word is replaced by an ink mark.

<sup>28</sup> These ellipses are Bell's.

<sup>29</sup> Contrast Figures 8 and 9.



Fig. 9 Hedda burns Lovborg's manuscript. Photo: Fales. Used with permission of Independent Age.

Since Ibsen never saw it, it is impossible to guess whether he would have approved of Robins's interpretation of this scene. He told Sofie Reimers when she played Rebecca West in *Rosmersholm*, "Give each mood credible, true to life expression" (qtd. in Innes *Henrik* 31–32). Most critics who saw it complimented Robins's acting whether or not they liked the play. Cecil Howard opined that Robins "as nearly as it was possible, convinced one that such a woman could exist and act as she did" ("Hedda" 85). Her approach had a strong impact that showed rather than told

Hedda's feelings. If Hedda had remained only stoically silent throughout the play, her suicide would have seemed robotic and contrived. On the other hand, such intense emotion is also capable of eliciting audience laughter at the wrong time. Robins's marginalia states that she feared this when Hedda gives Lovborg one of her pistols. Robins explained:

The audience in those days would be far from expecting anything but crude melodrama, or rather farce, from the idea that a woman well-placed in life, well-loved, well-off, not mad—should be tempting the man she loved to find a way out. (*WH* Ch. 15, p. 15)

To prevent possible laughter, Robins introduced the pistol in phases. The prompt copy indicates that she first lifted one of the guns out of the case, hesitated, put it back, and then grabbed it up again before handing it to Lovborg. Though this movement was not in Ibsen's script, Robins made the part her own by encouraging the audience's proper frame of mind during this pivotal scene. Her approach was effective. Cecil Howard commented, "parts of [the play] so border on the ludicrous that only the consummate acting prevents a titter."<sup>30</sup>

Robins showed all of Hedda's humanity, not just her cold calculation and her rage. In a letter of July 8, 1891, Archer recalled to his brother Charles the play's final act where Judge Brack tells Hedda that Lovborg shot himself by accident.

What always fetched me most in [Robins's] performance was a point in which she departed from Ibsen's strict intention. It is where Hedda is sitting by the stove, absorbed in the contemplation of Lovborg's having 'had the will and the courage to turn away from the banquet of life—so early.' Instead of starting, where Brack says he must dispel her pleasant illusion, Miss R. used to speak three speeches: "Illusion?" "What do you mean?" and "Not voluntarily!"—quite absently, looking straight in front of her, and evidently not taking in what Brack was saying. She used to draw deep breaths of relief ('befrielse'), quite intent on her vision of Eilert lying 'I skonhed' [beautifully], and only woken up at her fourth speech: 'Have you concealed something?' Now the old min [Archer's nickname for Ibsen] evidently didn't intend this but it is one of those things I am sure he would be grateful for, it was so beautiful. (qtd. in Innes *Sourcebook* 122)

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<sup>30</sup> See "Hedda Gabler," *Dramatic Notes: A Year Book of the Stage*, vols. 12–13 (London: Hutchison, 1891–92) 85. See copy and transcript of Robin's stage directions for the pistol scene in Appendix 4. Robins and Gosse's versions of this scene are transcribed in Appendix 5.

By revealing Hedda in the middle of her thought process, Robins gave her an immediacy that made her seem like a real person in real situations, as if the audience were watching her through a window. We see through this what Mrs. Patrick Campbell (Beatrice Stella Tanner) described as Robins's ability of "sending thought across the footlights" (*My Life* 85). Another example of this is in the last act (page 52 in the promptbook) when Hedda intends to break up Tesman and Thea as they work over Lovborg's manuscript. Robins's Hedda changes her mind halfway across the room. Whether she is too fatigued or simply not interested, Robins shows how Hedda's behavior is unpredictable.<sup>31</sup> "[Hedda] makes movement up to alcove as if 'I'll soon put a stop to this[']—then a quick thought—'why sh'd I—I don't care'—then the thought of Eilert—turn + go swiftly to arm chair muttering 'No, no' in low-voiced scorn sinks into chair on [the line: 'What a] relief this is [about] Eilert Lovborg.'" Archer pronounced: "Behind every speech we felt the swift intellectual process that gave it birth" (qtd. in Postlewait *Prophet* 77).

Modern viewers would be more likely to laugh in the last scene of the play when Hedda, just after saying she is going to lie down on the sofa behind a curtain in the rear of the stage, instead begins wildly playing on the piano. When Thea and Tesman complain about the noise, she peeks out from behind the curtain and timidly promises, "I will be quiet after this." She keeps this promise to a macabre degree, making only one more noise—the gunshot of her suicide. Hedda's final acting out, also in secret, can seem perplexing. Archer explained his interpretation of Hedda's character to Robins in one of his first notes:

Hedda has the keenest sense of *irony* but no sense of *humour*—which I take to be the *enjoyment of irony*. . . . She knows that this or that is ridiculous; but if it concerns herself it gives her pain; if it concerns others it awakens her scorn; in neither case does she get any pleasure out of it; consequently I would never have her laugh as though she took pleasure in laughing. . . . Hedda sees what a grim joke the world is, and she has not the power of enjoying a joke at her own expense. (qtd. in *WH* Ch. 15, pp. 12–13)

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<sup>31</sup> See Appendix 4.

Robins records one of Archer's final notes before the performance: "If this last scene is played by Brack and Hedda with feverish intensity—if it is kept up by all, it will be tremendous." She reported: "Well, it was, so they told us" (*WH* Ch. 15, p. 17).

### *Responses and Reverberations*

Despite almost impossible odds, Robins and Lea opened *Hedda Gabler* at the newly refurbished Vaudeville on the afternoon of April 20, 1891 (Whitebrook 125). Though it was known for lighter fare, the Vaudeville had premiered Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* a month before. Most audience members would have expected serious themes in any Ibsen play, whatever house it played in. Oscar Wilde asked Robins for tickets to see the play a second time, calling her performance "a real masterpiece of art" (Wilde *Complete Letters* 477). Robins was so absorbed in playing Hedda that during one performance she failed to notice she had ripped her finger open on a nail in the third act. She only knew she had cut herself when the blood poured down. This level of concentration is required on stage, but Robins wrote Bell from Brighton on October 7, 1892:

If I were a nun I shd see visions I suppose. . . . [It] descends upon one with the grasp of such a part. . . . I'm possessed—some mocking half-pathetic demon gets into me + whirls me along without help or hindrance from me. Very curious this—it never so impressed me before[.] I can't help being utterly different even bet. the Acts, I seem to walk on air—. (Letter with *WH* "Notes and Fragments")

Despite this success, James thought Robins lacked ambition after *Hedda* (*TF* 75). Yet she reports in *Theatre and Friendship* that she accepted several roles, including Mary Lonsdale in *A Woman's Revenge*, and Constance in *The Trumpet Call* for the Gatti brothers (31). She replaced Olga Nethersole as Countess Zicka in John Hare's *Diplomacy* with Johnston Forbes-Robertson and Kate Rorke, and starred in *Mrs. Lessingham* as Gladys with Hare at the Garrick.<sup>32</sup> In her diary fragments, Robins exulted: "It looked as if that thin crescent of promise, the hope of September '88 had

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<sup>32</sup> Robins refused Wyndham's contract and, as noted above, "direct negotiations" with Jones broke down when Tree refused *Judah*, but that was in 1888. See *TF* 31–32. Robins does not explain why other "prospects" with Jones that James mentioned in his May 29, 1891 letter did not materialize (see *TF* 32). Neither does she explain what happened with the Vaudeville offer from Mr. Thorne.

come full circle.”<sup>33</sup>

*The Times* reviewer of January 7, 1892, characterized *Hedda* as part of the year’s “negative results of considerable value” (“Theatres in 1891”). He or she called Ibsen enthusiasts a “noisy clique of theatrical busy-bodies [who prefer] enigmatical” rather than popular entertainment. However, this reviewer conceding the “vivid portrayal of [the] two chief female characters” and noted that *Hedda Gabler* was the only one of the Ibsen productions to date (*Rosmersholm*, *The Lady from the Sea*, *Ghosts*, and *A Doll’s House*) to take a place in an evening bill. The reviewer for the *Reynolds’s Newspaper* for Sunday, April 26, 1891 found *Hedda Gabler* a “ghastly story . . . made attractive by the unusual excellence of the acting of everyone concerned in its relation.” Robins’s portrayal of “the hateful, morally insane, serpent-like Hedda Gabler, was intensely realistic, and to this impersonation a great amount of the attractiveness of the production is due” (6). One notice Robins kept as a memento was from *The Echo* for April 24, 1891:

Hedda Gabler is doing an enormous business. Something like £40 was refused at the doors yesterday, and the plucky young Trans-Atlantic manageresses will probably be willing to ask . . . to continue their first joint venture’s success next week. . . . English playwrights complain bitterly that they never get the chance of securing such devotion. But it must be admitted that English dramatists whose meaning is sufficiently deep and complex to repay such industry are rare. (qtd. in *WH* “Notes and Fragments”)

Clement Scott, critic for the *Daily Telegraph*, was no fan of Ibsen. He labeled Robins and Lea “Ibsenites,” to him a term of derision, but he respected their acting.<sup>34</sup> He wrote of Robins, “She has glorified an unwomanly woman. She has made a heroine out of a sublimated sinner. She has fascinated us with a savage” (qtd. in John 61). Although Lea had received her worst review from him, she

Could laugh at Scott’s emotionalism and call him ‘Clementine’. . .  
[because he] ‘cares about acting, really cares. Archer cares only about

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<sup>33</sup> See Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; Folder 18 A. “1891 Diaries.”

<sup>34</sup> For details on other Ibsenites, see Sally Ledger, “Ibsen, the New Woman and the Actress,” eds. Angelique Richardson and Chris Willis, *The New Woman in Fiction and in Fact: Fin-de-Siècle Feminisms* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2001) 79–93. For a thorough study of responses to the Ibsen campaign, see Tracy Davis, *Critical and Popular Reaction to Ibsen in England: 1872–1906* (Diss., U of Warwick, 1984).



plays—no earthly good to actresses. Scott is the best sounding board in England. From his rostrum on the *Daily Telegraph* that man has the power to send the public trooping to a given theatre and keep them severely away from another.’ (qtd. in *WH* Ch. 8, pp. 6–7)<sup>35</sup>

A reviewer for *The Critic* gives another perspective of Robins’s interpretation of Hedda when she took the play to New York in April 1898:

Perhaps the highest praise that can be accorded to Miss Elizabeth Robins for her performance of Hedda is to say that she minimized the extravagance of the character by the artistic discretion with which she played it. Her facial expression is varied and eloquent, her gestures easy, graceful, forcible and appropriate, and her elocution musical, crisp and significant, capable of all the nicer shades of emphasis, especially in sarcasm and innuendo. . . . Her whole performance was brilliantly clever in its naturalness, its elegant cynicism, its calculated coquetry, its variety of resource, its adroit proportion, its easy transitions and definite design. It was in every way a remarkable achievement. (“Hedda Gabler”)

One of Robins’s friends who saw the London production quipped, “Hedda is all of us.” Seeing the play became for many what Susan Torrey Barstow calls a “collectively transformative” experience, particularly for women (394). Robins explained this shared transformation in *Ibsen and the Actress*: “Certainly the particular humiliations and enslavements that threaten women do not threaten men. Such enslavements may seem so unreal to decent men as to appear as melodrama” (30). While Grant Allen saw Hedda as “nothing more nor less than the girl we take down to dinner in London nineteen times out of twenty” (Ibsen “Introduction” 11), few men understood Hedda. Here were actresses portraying middle class female characters with honesty and power, characters that rejected women’s roles in bourgeois Victorian culture in profoundly original ways. Though audiences had surely seen women as frustrated as Hedda in real life, “productions from one end of Europe to the other ended in disaster” (Marker and Lone-Marker 163) while the Lea-Robins production, opening only five weeks after *Ghosts*, was a success. Robins recalled that success “buoyed up our hope that not only followers, but active helpers would gather round the

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<sup>35</sup> Scott suggested Robins to the Gatti brothers for *The English Rose*. She was not impressed with the part and turned it down, but she was impressed with Scott and thanked him in person for his good notices. See *WH* Ch. 8, pp. 7–12.

new Standard. . . . [M]ore and more of the public would be fired up by the still unexplored possibilities of the theatre" (*TF* 34).

Though Lea and Robins's work as translators remained secret, their performance influenced the wider culture for years after. Because of the public quarrel, it was soon revealed that Gosse and Archer had done separate translations of the play. J. M. Barry wrote a one-act parody using lines supposedly from the two different translations. This version, entitled *Ibsen's Ghost or Toole Up-to-date*, was given at Toole's Theatre in May 1891 (Matz 140). Audiences loved the incongruous lines and made the play a hit. The name Hedda Gabler became synonymous with female anger, not just in Robins's but also in the culture's lexicon.<sup>36</sup> Even Hedda's feather boa that Robins wore as part of her costume became a fashion statement (John 58).

### "Workers in Art"

Lea and Robins explained in their April 20, 1891 *Pall Mall Gazette* interview, "Ibsen is so real, so vivid; and then he wins an actor's heart right away by taking drama seriously. . . . But we hope to go on to other things afterwards."<sup>37</sup> After *Hedda*, the joint managers retained their considerable ambitions despite limited finances. They sought varied parts since they wanted to avoid being typecast, even as Ibsenites. Nevertheless Robins particularly became known as Ibsen's "High Priestess" (John 64). Who else but players devoted to the New Drama would risk their careers on Ibsen plays? Yet Robins reported in *Whither and How* that her reverence for acting became more practical. "Though we talked about our art, I no longer called it sacred. I had shied at the word artist—great word so lightly used! We were Workers, we wanted to go on being Workers in Art" (Ch. 5, p. 9). "As to material, apart from revivals of English plays, at the beginning we would modestly draw the best out of the repertoires of every capital in Europe. In time, new first-rate English plays would come our way"

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<sup>36</sup> See "Sweeping Statements by Mostyn T. Piggott," *Penny Illustrated Paper*, June 17, 1911, 790. See also "The New Neurotics," *Isle of Wight Observer* (Ryde, England), Saturday, January 20, 1894, n. pag.

<sup>37</sup> See "The Latest Ibsen Experiment: Two Actress-Manageresses at the Vaudeville," *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 20, 1891: 1–2.

(*TF* 35).<sup>38</sup> They produced Clement Scott's adaptation of Dumas, fils's *Denise* for three matinées at the Criterion in November 1891 (John 240). Henry James advised against it; though the play was to him "a work of art," he thought it "impossible in English. . . . *Denise* is miles over their heads" (39). Lea suggested they adapt James's novel *Roderick Hudson* next and immediately cast herself as Christina Light.

Don't fancy please I think myself enough of a good looking person to play the Poodle's mistress, but *paint* helps and clothes—besides which we'll be photographed and *then* London will say we're tearers! It would be fortunate for me the English have no eye for beauty. (*WH* Ch. 10 p. 2)

James was too busy with *The American* to consider the project. Despite their disappointment, Lea remained hopeful for the future of the Joint Management. She wrote Robins, "I feel that there is such a big future in store for both of us apart from other work we may do. *If we hold together*, I feel so sure that our combined success will assist our separate success that I should most bitterly regret anything's coming in the way of our immediate progress" (*TF* 59). However, much more "combined success" was not to be. Lea was increasingly involved in Mitchell's projects, including *Deborah*, a play he wrote and directed with Lea in the title role in 1892.<sup>39</sup>

On November 8, 1891, Lea wrote to Robins:

Write to 71 Chelsea Gardens SW (if I really am married tomorrow) + it will be forwarded—and now dear Liza I must tell you before I close that I shall always be as much your friend and as entirely as now—that (When I say it I don't know except that you doubt me). My marriage can make no difference, except that I shall have more time more freedom, more independence than ever before + that moreover In loving one person devotedly I believe to all those I care for I shall learn to give a better + more trustworthy + more tender affection—I will not say goodbye dear friend[.]

The Joint Management's last production was Bell's *Karin* (a translation of Alfchild Agrell's play) performed twice in May 1892 at the Vaudeville (John 87). The Mitchells returned to America in July 1892, settling into an old farmhouse in East Bradford

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<sup>38</sup> These ambitions were similar to Grein's, to be discussed in Chapter 3.

<sup>39</sup> The Mitchells offered Robins a part. She declined but read the prologue. See letter of Jan 13, 1892 to Robins. Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, "Marion Lea."

Township, Pennsylvania to await the birth of their first child due on November 9, their first wedding anniversary. Lea wrote Robins on her old Chelsea Gardens stationary:

[Posted Oct. 20, 1892]  
71 Chelsea Gardens S.W. (If only it were!)  
address Reculver [Farm]  
West Chester, Penn

My dear Girl

How + where to begin . . .<sup>40</sup>

I thank heaven daily that I don't realize even yet my separation from London + London Life + the friends I shared it with—I feel as if I had come to the country for a long summer when it's not unusual to give up one's ordinary avocations + that I should, once 'Tiny' [is] in the world—return to London + the theatre + you. Don't tell me it isn't so—I think I should be broken hearted. . . .

Langdon shall send you a line, to tell you of your niece's health as soon as she—reaches home!<sup>41</sup>

In his November 1892 letter to Robins, Mitchell gave news he sent only to her:

The labour was long and dreadful, and to be plain, it came very near to death—there were complications, and Marion was pulled through only by the decision and ability of her Doctor. It was pretty awful—seen for me; —for her I can scarcely tell you what it was like—But that is over. And now she is resting + seeing no one.<sup>42</sup>

Robins's "niece," the baby Robins called "Tiny" hoping it was a girl, according to Langdon "somehow . . . turned out a strong, lusty, fat, red able-bodied Boy."<sup>43</sup> Gates asserts that "Robins could not accept the possibility that sexual fulfillment enhanced artistic capacity" (54). Lea's disappointment at leaving London, her friends, and her career, not to mention her difficult labor, did nothing to encourage such notions. Robins witnessed a more positive example of marital happiness from her association

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<sup>40</sup> These ellipses are Lea's.

<sup>41</sup> Fales, Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, "Marion Lea."

<sup>42</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115. "Marion Lea." This undated letter was received Saturday Nov. 26, 1892.

<sup>43</sup> The Mitchells had three children: Weir, Susanna Valentine, and Helena Mary.

with Florence Bell.

### *A New Friendship*

Though she primarily lived in Yorkshire, Florence Bell involved herself as much as possible in the London theatre scene by attending as often as she could and by writing for it enthusiastically. In only her third surviving letter, dated October 2, [1891] from her home in Red Car, Bell suggested to Robins a play of hers that the joint managers might be interested in producing. “I meant to ask you the other night—but in the excitement of the ‘American’ it went from me!—whether you + Miss Lea wd at some time try ‘A Modern Locusta,’ that play for two women out of ‘Chamber Comedies.’” The Joint Management did not perform this play; however, by the time Lea departed for America in July 1892, Robins’s friendship with Bell was firmly established. Their relationship had less chance of professional rivalry because Bell was not an actress, though Robins later entered Bell’s profession as author and playwright. When Lea left, Robins confided to Bell: “The wrench was quite terrible and I was a bit shaken to see how hard *she* took it. . . . All over again I felt the ghastly eternal inequality between those two” (qtd. in Gates 43).<sup>44</sup> Bell offered the support and friendship Robins needed, so Lea’s leaving was not as difficult for Robins as it was for Lea.

Bell exulted in every aspect of the theatre. As Robins reminisced in *Theatre and Friendship*, “I love the very *smell* of Behind-the-Scenes,’ [Bell] said once, snuffing it up her fine high nose. . . . [T]hat old queer aroma, unknown to pampered players in the antiseptic haunts of today, that exciting, intensely evocative smell . . . of rank-dank, of dust, paint, and escaping gas” [from gas lights] (23–24). What better collaborator could there be for Robins than a linguist like Bell? Bell helped Robins find plays for production and she could translate anything from French or German. She and Robins

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<sup>44</sup> Mitchell enjoyed success with his comedy *The New York Idea*. See *TF* 35. He reported to Robins on October 20, [1889?] that his drama *Becky Sharp* brought in \$11,000 in gross receipts in one week. “How the deuce they have the good taste to like it, I don’t know, but they do!” There are few surviving letters from Lea after her departure from London. She died in 1944. See *Complete Letters of Oscar Wilde*, eds. Holland and Hart-Davis, 476 n.

became proficient enough in Norse and Swedish to translate professionally.<sup>45</sup> Bell related to Robins that translating was the best way to fully understand one's own language. Throughout the 1890s they searched for plays to translate for the English stage, including Ibsen's *The Master Builder*. Since theatrical realism began in France, Germany, and Scandinavia, their skills were particularly pertinent to spreading realism in England. By befriending Robins, who was keen for change, Bell was swept up into the New Drama.

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<sup>45</sup> For details on Robins and Bell's translating projects, see John 57 and 65; Gates 49 and 54–55.

### Chapter 3

#### Sisterhood and the Wider Sphere: Robins, Bell, and the Roles of Women

The conservative, wealthy Bell and the public, American, soon-to-be-suffragette Robins forged a strong bond despite different backgrounds and lifestyles and, especially later, different political views. Their long friendship embraced startling social, political and economic contrasts, as the old century became the new and great change affected Victorian society. “Middle-class women enjoyed leisure time in a new way, and benefitted from places for public intercourse with other women to develop both personal and professional networks” (Shaw and Randolph 30). Like many other middle-class women in the latter part of the century, Robins and Bell used new transportation and communication technologies to maintain friendships and to enlarge their spheres of influence. Their skills at overcoming divergent backgrounds in their friendship later helped them serve wider social causes as they took increasingly active roles in reform and humanitarian movements.

Elaine Showalter argues that because what it meant to be a woman in Victorian society had to be learned, particularly in the upper and middle classes, female friendships were crucial to socialization (*Literature* 12–13). Such associations allowed women to partially modify the apartheid of gender that otherwise controlled their existence. Female friends provided physical security as chaperones and psychological security as advisors and confidantes. Through matchmaking they could provide a husband; through networking they might provide employment. Female friendships diffused tensions in life and within marriages, supporting mental health and social cohesion. These associations constituted what Showalter calls a female “subculture” (*Literature* 12). Because “the entire female sexual life cycle . . . had to be concealed [and] could not be openly discussed or acknowledged,” women “shared [an] increasingly secretive and ritualized physical experience . . . accompanied by elaborate rituals and lore, by external codes of fashion and etiquette, and by intense feelings of female solidarity” (12–13).

Sarah Stickney Ellis’s popular 1842 conduct book *The Daughters of England* describes a woman’s “circle of . . . private friends” like a school where “she learns what constitutes the happiness and the misery of woman” (281). Ellis contends that from her friends a woman

Learns to comprehend the deep mystery of that electric chain of feeling which ever vibrates through the heart of woman, and which man, with all his philosophy, can never understand. . . . Thus, while her sympathy and her tenderness for a chosen few is strengthened by the bond of friendship into which she has entered, though her confidence is still confined to them, a measure of the same sympathy and tenderness is extended to the whole sisterhood of her sex, until, in reality, she becomes what woman ever must be—in her noblest, purest, holiest character—the friend of woman. (281–82)

Ellis compares women who are not true to one another to slaves, marooned sailors, and “inhabitants of a defenceless nation, who would not unite together . . . against a common enemy.” Though it was certainly a limiting view of humanity in many ways, the idea of separate spheres encouraged female solidarity. Gender separation gave women opportunities and reasons to connect to one another as they experienced similar physical and psychological challenges, and as they faced similar societal limitations and prejudices. As well as comfort, there was strength in numbers. Female solidarity was vital as women formed political and philanthropic organizations that attempted to cross class lines. Female solidarity was an important part of the Bell/Robins friendship that also crossed class lines.

As the wife of a wealthy industrialist, Bell possessed the social standing to act as patron in her initial approach to Robins.<sup>1</sup> However, Bell did not take this route to friendship.<sup>1</sup> Rather than treat the actress as merely an entertainer for her other guests,<sup>2</sup> Bell treated her as an equal, and eventually as a member of the family.

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<sup>1</sup> When Robins met her, Bell was known as Mrs. Hugh Bell. She became “Lady” in 1904 when her husband Hugh became second Baronet upon his father’s death. Queen Victoria appointed Hugh the Lord Lieutenant of the North Riding of Yorkshire, which also gave Florence the title of Lady. She became a Dame of the British Empire in 1918 for her Red Cross work (*ODNB*). However, all this was after she met Robins.

<sup>2</sup> Jacky Bratton reveals that “Many actors hated to be ‘lionised’ by society hostesses, and some—Kean is the obvious example—refused to go into the society that they felt only wanted them as playthings, inviting them into their houses but maintaining an invisible class barrier around the performer even as they satisfied their curiosity about him. The situation was, of course, far worse for women.” See *New Readings in Theatre History* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 98.



It is certainly clear that for Robins and Bell, differences strengthened their relationship. Robins reported to Bell on February 2, 1894 that she had tried to mend a rift between Bell and their mutual friend Mrs. Crackanthorpe by telling her, “near as you + I were in most things there were points of ‘difference’ that we accepted + even got an added interest out of.”<sup>3</sup> Each had something to offer the other from their different backgrounds and points of view. How did they achieve this level of equality in their friendship? Sociolinguist Deborah Tannen’s research on communication tendencies reveals that for female friendships to thrive, they must have the elements of mutual equality, self-revelation, and commonality despite difference (*He Said* 9, 12, 26). Tannen found that her female research subjects, in contrast to her male subjects, tended to ignore differences between themselves and their friends and sought opportunities for mutual benefit rather than for competition (12–13). Tannen also found that while male subjects were more likely to speak to others only when there was a problem to be solved, female subjects more often shared the mundane details of their lives (9). Tannen asserts, “The seeds of the conversational styles that we develop as adults are planted when we’re kids playing with other kids of the same sex. Girls create friendships through talking, and they gauge friendships by closeness” (12). “Women often value self-revealing conversations to feel close to others” (26). Tannen’s research does not prove any universal female tendencies (9). Yet it is interesting to see similar patterns in Bell and Robins’s correspondence that helped them stay connected for nearly forty years.

Nineteenth-century sociologist Georg Simmel states, “This world of sociability—the only world in which a democracy of the equally privileged is possible without frictions—is an *artificial* world. It is composed of individuals who have no other desire than to create wholly pure interaction with others which is not dis-balanced by a stress of anything material” (48). Though never financially equal, Bell and Robins were intellectually equal and shared both material and non-material assets that enabled them to balance the “stress” of material difference. While Bell helped Robins financially and opened her home to her, Robins offered an inside view of the theatre that Bell valued. In contrast to sociability, according to Simmel, friendship

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<sup>3</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; “Diaries.” 1873–1952.

[A]ims at an absolute psychological intimacy. Friendship lacks . . . [the] vehemence [of romantic love], but also the frequent un-evenness, of this abandon. It may be, therefore, more apt than love to connect a whole person with another person in its entirety; it may melt reserves more easily than love does—if not as stormily, yet on a larger scale and in a more enduring sequence (325–26).

These aspects of friendship were very apparent in Bell and Robins's relationship, which exhibited a commitment of many resources, but especially of time. In the month of April 1892 alone, Robins thanked Bell for nine letters. If this were their average output, their friendship would have produced well over four thousand letters from Bell alone. Sometimes letters and telegrams crossed several times a day. Their letters take up a good part of the Robins Collection. Yet, because Bell asked Robins to burn each of her letters after she read it, the surviving correspondence is mostly from Robins to Bell. With the exception of Bell's letters, the women seem to have saved everything else: playbills, notes, day books, manuscripts, diaries, photographs—even tiny scraps of paper stuck together with straight pins. Bell and Robins's letters took up a great deal of space in their homes, so they must have been very valuable to them. Their papers are valuable to us in revealing how women's friendships enabled them to create realism for the London stage at a time when women were increasing their roles in public life.

Differences of opinion on the roles of women abounded among different social strata during the Victorian period. While there were prejudices against professional women of any kind, being a public performer was generally considered dishonorable. Both Robins and Bell's fathers discouraged them from performing in public. (As a young woman, Bell had desired a career as a concert pianist.) Yet Katherine Bailey, friend and patron of Mrs. Patrick Campbell in her study of music, felt that being a professional musician was an honorable career for a woman. Bailey was outraged when Campbell chose the stage instead:

When you were the first-rate musician[,] which I have never doubted your becoming, I hoped you might have played with glory at concerts, and over here [Paris], what a joy to have heard you—and your praise. For *that* would have been honest and reputable praise. Whilst gaining which you could have held up your head in any society. Oh, my poor Beatrice, you can form no idea—you have yet to learn—the shame, the humiliation of seeing yourself despised by decent people. (Campbell 45–46)

Jenny Jerome—better known as Lady Randolph Churchill—was an American who, like Bell, grew up in France during Napoleon III's reign. She saw few Americans on the continent in her youth and revealed in her 1908 memoir that

In England, as on the Continent, the American woman was looked upon as a strange and abnormal creature with habits and manners something between a Red Indian and a Gaiety Girl. If she . . . conducted herself as any well-bred woman would, . . . she was usually saluted with the tactful remark, 'I should never have thought *you* were an American,' which was intended as a compliment. As a rule, people looked upon her as a disagreeable and even dangerous person, to be viewed with suspicion, if not avoided altogether. Her dollars were her only recommendation, and each was credited with the possession of them, otherwise what was her *raison d'être*? (60)

### *Enter the Actress*

Davis believes that “Actresses had to overcome the perceptions that they ‘de-classed’ themselves by acting and that they schemed to social climb through the self-advertising vehicle of the stage before the upper classes could sympathize or respect them” (*Actresses* 71). Robins did not consider her ambition or her friendships to be social climbing in the traditional sense, since she often questioned the English social system and did not seek marriage with anyone, either above or below her station in life. Robins, like Bell, held to middle class rules of decorum, but the American class system was different and somewhat more flexible; her success, experience, and intelligence caused Robins to think herself equal to anyone she met, despite her pecuniary circumstances and her gender. Robins had the double disadvantage of being an actress *and* an American—and an impoverished one at that. Yet Bell was eager to make her acquaintance. As gatekeepers of higher society, women like Bell were essential to the eventual social elevation of actresses (Davis *Actresses* 71).

Davis asserts that:

Stigmatization was not just the work of a lunatic puritanical fringe but was also at the heart of orthodox response. . . . Acceptance by a high-born woman is the only signal that society valued sufficiently to suspend its habitual revulsion, suspicion, and unease about the performer.

The significance of *women's* acceptance of the actress cannot be over-stressed.

Cultural norms, particularly those surrounding women's roles, were increasingly called into question. Despite these social changes, Robins and Bell negotiated their

differences because what they shared was more significant to them. They were both well-educated for their times and upbringings; they were ambitious and hard working; each was a self-driven scholar of languages who loved the theatre. Robins wanted above all to enjoy artistic freedom. She shared this vision with Bell. In an undated letter, probably from November 1892, Bell wrote to Robins:

Dearest.

It was delightful to find your beaming, radiantly happy letter when I came down this morning. How blissful those moments of conscious exultation in existence are! 'to be happy—to be joyous—to be alive!' Well, I must say, I was thinking as I read your letter, that I think you are the most enviable person I know, and about the only one I wd change places with—tho you wdn't thank me if I cd effect that change! To be doing the thing you're doing, to be equipped as you are for it, to have the divine spark, and your mental and personal endowments, means that the really best joys of life *must* come to you. Let us for once talk about Art and Ideals—even if they're creatures of our imagination and realise what enthusiasm means in its literal sense a divine possession.

Though they both enjoyed a wide circle of friends of all ages that later included the young Sybil Thorndike (Croall 76–77), each was on the fringe of some part of English society. Even Bell was not in the highest echelon, as her husband worked for a living (Howell 10). Being the daughter of a surgeon, Florence had grown up middle class (John 115). Having been born in France of Irish stock, Florence was not wholly French, Irish, or English. With her French accent and continental upbringing, she understood the difficulties of beginning life again far away from her childhood home. Robins may have had a slight Southern accent that would have made her stand out (John interview). However, because she was an experienced actress used to playing parts, it is difficult to know for sure. Manager Aimee Beringer told Robins, after interviewing her for a role in 1888, "I could not imagine that you would have no accent being fresh from America, and in an English girl a foreign accent would be fatal" (*Both Sides* 130). In the theatre, "working-class accents, rural dialects, and faulty grammar were completely unacceptable on the legitimate stage in all but character business, for the profession vigorously promoted an image of its gentility, refinement, artistry, and exclusivity" (Davis *Actresses* 76). Robins adapted herself well to both theatrical and social settings that valued certain accents, dialects, and grammar. However, though she lived most of her adult life in England, Robins did not take English citizenship (John 1). Like Bell, she was an outsider—a position that could bring a sense of

loneliness but also an ability to observe others more objectively. This vantage point was a boon to writing plays, fiction, and social commentary, as both women did, but was not always helpful to friendship (10, 114). Exclusion was a common experience for Robins and Bell that fueled their ambition and helped them form what they called their sisterhood.

Bell was conservative in her manners and dress. While many of her peers, including Robins, cut their hair and shortened their skirts in the 1920s, she wore her full-length lacy dresses until her death in 1930. She wore full-length gloves both day and evening—even to play the piano (Howell 15). She was very formal in these ways but was not unfriendly. In 1891, she welcomed the American actress to her home. Being far from friends, family, and her beloved stage in London, Bell needed friendship as much as Robins did. Robins had more freedom to mix socially among a cross section of society, providing Bell a wider perspective. On November 10, 1892 Bell wrote:

It is delightful . . . having the constant companionship of a brilliant and sympathetic person whose own life seems to her full of interest and possibilities. . . . Hugh and [the children] and I thought my lines had fallen in pleasant places. And it's no use wanting everything. & repining at fate because I'm not in London—especially as I don't feel a bit far away from it now that I've got *you* to keep me *au courant* and the thought of having you your-self, in my possession is a constant, constant joy to me.<sup>4</sup>

### *False Starts*

Though Robins performed in Bell's matinée, *A Joint Household* in March 1891 at the Steinway Hall, she did not formally meet Bell until May of that year (John 239). In *Theatre and Friendship*, Robins credited Henry James for the introduction.

Certainly among all Mr. James's acquaintances he could have found nobody in 1891 so knowledgeable about the theatre, home and foreign, as Mrs. Hugh Bell. It was the most natural thing in the world for him to write asking her if she had read 'Hedda Gabler.' . . . It was as if [James] could see from the beginning that . . . as Carlyle said of his friend: 'She furnished the English earth and made it homelike to me!' (26–27)

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<sup>4</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1.

Yet, as with many other opportunities Robins was given, she initially refused to meet Bell. After she had seen *Hedda Gabler*, Bell asked Robins for a favor.

I'm occupied by the ladies of Chelsea to make a most indiscreet request to you. It is that you wd. be good enough to recite for them at a charity bazaar at the Café Chantant on Friday next at 4 o'clock—It wouldn't mean much time, about ¼ of an hour—I know how full your time is—but I know also how valuable your help wd. be! My mother, Lady Olliffe, has a stall— + is most anxious to make it all a success—Pray forgive me for asking. . . . I am *enthralled* by your Hedda—it is a great achievement really—I shd. like to go constantly!<sup>5</sup>

The Café Chantant was an open-air café with a performance tradition similar to the music hall and cabaret, although less formal (Banham 150). Despite having received school prizes for recitation and having acted Shakespeare roles in England and America, Robins responded on May 12, 1891: “I frankly don't know anything + I'm afraid the time is too short to learn anything.”<sup>6</sup> Though she wished she could do otherwise for “so good a friend of Hedda's as yourself,” she signed off “with sincere regret.” Robins enjoyed working with others on stage but frequently declined social invitations. Sometimes, as she relates in *Both Sides of the Curtain*, it was because she was exhausted. Sometimes it was because she did not have the cab fare and it would have been impolite to mention it. Bell tried again on May 13, 1891 when she asked Robins to her “At Home” at her mother's house, 95 Sloane Street. Again Robins declined, but mentioned in her letter, “I know many actresses *do* recite with great effect—but many also sing + play the guitar; you must not despise me, please, that I am less gifted.” Nevertheless, she promised, “I am looking forward to seeing you one Friday in June.” Bell's ten-year-old daughter, Molly, reported to her diary that Miss Robins came to dinner on May 20, 1891 (John 87). On June 22, Bell visited Robins at her flat at 28 Manchester Square Mansions.<sup>7</sup> After many attempts, this began the friendship between Robins and Bell.

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<sup>5</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1.

<sup>6</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 1.

<sup>7</sup> See figures 3, 4, and 5.

*Florence Bell's Role: Wife, Mother, Linguist, and Playwright*

Eleven years Robins's senior, Florence Bell was born in Paris. She was the youngest of four children of Sir Joseph Francis Olliffe, physician to the British Embassy, and Laura Cubitt, daughter of Sir William Cubitt, chief engineer of the Crystal Palace ("Bell, Florence" *ODNB*). Florence's upbringing "plunged her into an intellectual and artistic milieu that she would probably not have encountered if she had been brought up in England" (Howell 23). She considered it "a privilege to be born in Paris. To know Paris first, to know it all the time, to grow up in one of the most beautiful parts of it, to take it all for granted, to belong to it, and have it belong to me" (qtd. in Howell 12). Taught to be dutiful and polite, Florence attended the theatre "from a period so early that she was probably the very youngest frequenter the Théâtre Français ever knew" (*TF* 21). When Charles Dickens, a family friend, invited Florence to one of his public readings, this one at the British Embassy in Paris, her parents said she was too young. He responded, "I shan't go either" (Howell 24). Her parents relented; Florence sat on the front row. Since her father forbade a career as a concert pianist, she channeled her energies into reciting for friends, writing plays, and translating and adapting other's works for the London stage (*TF* 22–23).

As a child, Florence spent Easter holidays in England visiting her grandfather Cubitt. She spent summers visiting her great-uncle Thomas Cubitt, the architect who refurbished Osborne Castle for Queen Victoria. In 1869, when Florence was eighteen, her father suddenly died, forcing the family to move into the "imposing, but still dingy" 95 Sloane Street (Howell 28).<sup>8</sup> Just when Florence had reached marriageable age, she had to face life as a stranger in her own country. Marriage was considered the pinnacle of a woman's personal and social life, particularly in middle-class society (Sharon Marcus 71). The gradual evolution of marriage that began in the late seventeenth century mirrored a more democratic, capitalist society that encouraged "equality and individualism, cohesion and competition" (85). After centuries of hierarchical pairings by upper and middle-class fathers in particular, marriage became

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<sup>8</sup> Florence inherited the house in 1900; her mother died in 1898. See Georgina Howell, *Gertrude Bell: Queen of the Desert, Shaper of Nations*, 2008 ed. (New York: Farrar, 2007) 65.

a more companionate relationship; wives had to be won over and perhaps even competed for. Though a woman could refuse a man's offer of marriage, she could not pursue a husband directly. She could show him interest in other ways, including through an intervening friend. Thus female friends had the enormously important role of intermediary between prospective partners (2). Female friendships also served as respites from the marital relationship. These roles elevated women as vital members of society, within their sphere, as they helped to create and to stabilize marriages (26).

A few years after her move to London, Florence met Hugh's sisters Ada and Mary (called Maisie) who introduced her to their brother. However, Florence and Hugh initially resisted attempts at matchmaking (Howell 9–11). At twenty-two, Florence was determined “never to marry an Englishman.” Hugh hesitated to propose knowing that Florence had grown up in the most sophisticated and beautiful city in the world. He had been educated in Paris himself in his youth, though he since worked six days a week running the family ironworks. Though the Bell family was one of the richest in England, the capital was not fluid; it consisted of their massive enterprises in Newcastle and Port Clarence (9). Hugh had not yet come into his inheritance—his father and uncles held the capital—so he could offer only his relatively modest home in Yorkshire, Red Barns (54).<sup>9</sup> Hugh's formidable father, Sir Lowthian Bell, would come down from Newcastle at random intervals to check on Hugh's handling of the Port Clarence works. Thus occupied, Hugh told his family he would never remarry (11). His sisters knew better; he needed a wife, and a mother for his two young children, Gertrude and Maurice. So Maisie invited Florence to family parties when she knew Hugh would be there, and Ada invited her to Red Barns. Ada and Maisie thought Florence fit in well with their family. If she could be convinced to marry Hugh, it would free them, particularly Ada, from the care of Gertrude and Maurice. Ada had lived at Red Barns since the death of Hugh's first wife Mary Shield Bell in 1871. Maisie had joined the aristocracy when she married Edward Lyulph Stanley—fourth Baron Sheffield and fourth Baron Stanley of Alderley—in 1873, but Ada was still single (*ODNB* “Edward Stanley”). As an eligible young woman, Ada longed to return to

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<sup>9</sup> See figure 7.



London life (Howell 10). However, the sisters' matchmaking was not motivated by self-interest only. They wanted to give the gift of a man to their friend (Sharon Marcus 4).

On first seeing Hugh, Florence reconsidered her vow to never marry an Englishman. She described him as "looking beautiful, but very sad . . .<sup>10</sup> with thick curly hair and a beard of bright auburn colour" (qtd. in Howell 11). She had her own philosophies for rearing children when they married on August 10, 1876, after two years of courtship (Howell 12–15). Yet, as a young bride of twenty-four facing the fearless eight-year-old Gertrude, Florence modified some of her ideas of proper feminine behavior. She later wrote of her stepdaughter: "There are a thousand of us who can walk along a level road and get to the end of it successfully, for one who can swim a river or scale a cliff which stands in the way" (qtd. in Howell 26). When she grew up, Gertrude scaled many cliffs and swam many rivers all over the world.

Although the Bells were not religious, Florence was careful about her children's upbringing. She did not allow them to visit homes "where alcohol was consumed, where house parties were the excuse for extramarital activities, where girls were not strictly chaperoned—in other words, homes belonging to the often dissolute aristocracy, circles that might even include that of the Prince of Wales" (Howell 31). Yet Florence was kind and fun-loving. When her three youngest children invited her to a tea party in their playhouse, the garden shed they had christened the "Wigwam," Florence played along. Despite being transported to the festivities in a goat cart, she exhibited her own theatricality by wearing an evening gown and diamonds (22). Another invitation from the Wigwam requested an RSVP. Known for her slight French accent, she responded: "To Monsieur and Mesdames de Viguevamme, Red Barns, Coatham, Redcar. The Marchioness de Sidesplitters will have much pleasure in dining this evening with Mr. Prinketty, Miss Fiddlesticks, and Miss Pizzicato at 7:30."

Bell first wrote plays for her children's amusement. Then, in 1887, when she was thirty-six, she submitted a play to the renowned French actor Coquelin (*TF* 22). She became famous for this play, *L'Indecis* (*Indecision*), performed in London at the Royalty. Success surprised her. "I shall never forget that morning afterwards . . .<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> These ellipses are not mine.

<sup>11</sup> These ellipses are not mine.

when I was so foolish and inexperienced I didn't even look with certainty to there being any notices of it . . . and then coming down and finding the papers one burst of surprise and gratulation—it was good" (22–23). Bell "had seen life in so many of the capitals of Europe and had chosen for her own that remote Yorkshire life of the home" (23). Running a household as large as Bell's provided enough work for many of her peers, even with domestic help, but Bell also worked hard on her writing. She wrote to Robins in 1892: "Sometimes I think . . . [five years] is a long time to be at [writing]—at others I say to myself it isn't really very long when one hears tales of other people's years of hopeless struggle—and I don't think I ever felt hopeless" (22). She was privileged, but since she took all her roles seriously, she had to compartmentalize her life in order to have time to write. She sent the older children to live with extended family when she was pregnant, which helped, but this did not end other demands on her time as the master's wife (Howell 20). For the most part, Florence did not regret her choices. On September 11, [1899] she wrote to Robins:

I've been hearing, via [daughter] Elsa, abt the relations of many young people with their parents. It brings me the feeling that on the whole its much better to 'waste' your time tho' that is not the expression—over your family, than over the world at large. It repays you more I think!<sup>12</sup>

Busy as she was while writing *Alan's Wife*, Bell expressed devotion to Robins and her projects:

Now I do so want to know what you are doing, have been doing and are going to do. . . . I believe I had been thinking of you evry minute. . . . When I said to you the other night . . . that I shd always be so delighted to write, translate, arrange anything you wanted done, to the best of my powers, I hope you didn't think that I meant I wanted to get something to do and rush into the forefront of the fray. . . . No—I meant much more modestly that it is sure to happen to you, as it does to everyone who is doing what you are doing, suddenly to want something translated for you, or hashed up, or something—like the moment in fact when you wanted *Un Caprice* done and that it may be a convenience to you to have your dramatist in ordinary who will do it briskly, (in handwriting and anonymously), and love doing it—for the love of you.<sup>13</sup>

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<sup>12</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries B. Robins wrote on this letter that she was "abroad with Lady Lewis" when she received it. This trip was in 1899.

<sup>13</sup> November 9, [1892]. Fales, Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1, "1892."

Bell frequently expressed her devotion to Robins. “I love you dearly—because I’ve taken yr life into mine—and all it concerns—my blessed friend” (qtd. in John 86). Bell’s motivation was for herself as well as for Robins who provided her with the vicarious excitement of the London stage scene she craved but was too private, too preoccupied with family, and too devoted to her husband’s social position and career to pursue herself. Though they lived very different lifestyles, Robins and Bell shared the life of the professional woman. With domestic help, Bell had some of the freedom of the childless Robins. She and Robins were both good storytellers for the Bell children, but also for larger audiences through their fiction and drama.

Not only did Bell and Robins work together on scripts, Bell helped Robins make her acting more real. Robins’s goal, especially after witnessing the Oberammergau players with their unaffected style, was “to seem to be unselfconscious” (*WH* “Introductory” p. 5). As Robins related in 1930, “Florence Bell was the first to show me how much the actor may learn from the non-professional” (*TF* 24). Bell was shocked when Robins, in her big scene in Bell’s adaptation of *Karen*,<sup>14</sup> cradled a “bundle of rags” in her arms to portray her child (qtd. in *TF* 24–25). Bell protested, “The bundle must have bones.” Bell dragged Robins off to an artist’s supply shop in Regent Street for an “articulated model” that would look, feel, and move like a real baby, without the impossible use of a real infant onstage. When wrapped in shawls, the model looked more realistic. When the shop assistant asked to where he should deliver the parcel, Bell said, “We can’t wait—we’ll take it!” This doll became the baby Robins was to “carry dead out of my husband’s house in the last act. . . . I came to realize how much that scene owed to the fact that the mother’s wild grief was not wasted over a boneless bundle” (*TF* 25). Only realism would do here, not a symbol of a baby. Bell had mothered three children of her own, so to her this was obvious.<sup>15</sup>

As well as a passion for the stage, Bell and Robins shared an inclination for collecting memorabilia. This helped them to reminisce, but it also helped them to maintain power over information. Regardless of the uncertainties and prejudices they

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<sup>14</sup> This title is spelled *Karin* in the correspondence.

<sup>15</sup> Bell’s natural children were Hugh “Hugo” (1878–1926), Florence “Elsa” (1880–1971), and Mary Katherine “Molly” (1882–1966).

faced as women professionals, they could choose whether, when, and with whom to share it. According to Tannen, “Not only is telling secrets evidence of friendship, it creates a friendship” (*You Just* 98). Robins usually burned Bell’s letters according to her instructions. Robins burned letters from her dead husband to commemorate anniversaries. This hoarding-purging pattern reflects the women’s attitudes toward publicity. As an actress, Robins had to face the public and accept a certain amount of publicity in order to build her career. However, she still wanted to control personal information that reached the public. As the wife of a prominent man, Bell had to accept her public roles in the community but did not want to call attention to her private life. She also had a writing career to promote but did not want it to encroach upon her family. She therefore revealed only her professional persona to the public. Bell was so determined to cover her tracks that she ordered Robins’s maid to burn a note of instructions for caring for Robins when she was ill. The maid complied but left her own paper trail by sending Bell a note explaining how she had followed her instructions, even about burning Bell’s note. This shows how meticulous, even obsessive, Bell was about her privacy, even with inconsequential material. It is ironic and revealing of Bell’s nature that she saved only memorabilia related to others, not herself. She saved all of Robins’s letters. She saved all of Gertrude’s letters too, publishing them in 1927 after her stepdaughter’s death (Howell 414). Yet, Bell did not reveal much about herself in her writing. Though she considered writing her profession, she could never allow it to interfere with family obligations. As far as her family—and particularly her husband—was concerned, writing was a hobby. She recognized but did not challenge the dichotomy this created in her life. Her family’s view of her career contributed to her desire to keep her work secret. She could not share the truth of her commitment to writing with them, but she did share this with Robins.

Bell reported to Robins that while planning a holiday she was preoccupied with finishing her “little French book”:

When I foolishly told Hugh the cause of my hesitating, he said ‘Don’t make the mistake of making a burden of a pleasure.’ (meaning the writing) After all you’ve come away for a holiday.’ Yes I thought but the holiday is from the housekeeping[ , ] the works[,] and the all sorts!! Still I see that I mustn’t present this occupation of mine too seriously—Tho it

has its comic side that to-night for instance when I had C-Carr's letter[,]<sup>16</sup> yours saying of Heinemann's possibility, and one fr. Arnold, that I must still keep up the fiction that it must be done in a trifling ladylike manner at odd moments or it will be taking it too seriously!<sup>17</sup>

Though a writing career could be ideal for a woman in a traditional role because it could be fitted into "odd moments" between domestic tasks,

Victorian women were not accustomed to *choosing* a vocation; womanhood was a vocation itself. . . . In pursuing their ambitions, [men] fulfilled social expectations. For women, however, work meant labor for *others*. Work, in the sense of self-development, was in direct conflict with the subordination and repression inherent in the feminine ideal. The self-centeredness implicit in the act of writing made this career an especially threatening one; it required an engagement with feeling and cultivation of ego rather than its negation.<sup>18</sup> (Showalter *Literature* 17–8)

A woman could legitimize a writing career by using it to support herself or her family, as Robins did. Others may have thus excused their work when it might not have been financially indispensable. Bell did not have this excuse; her husband was wealthy.

When faced with wanting to write, to be taken seriously, and to excel while at the same being relegated to "womanly" behaviors, some Victorian women writers

Developed several strategies, both personal and artistic . . . [such as a] persistent self-deprecation . . . sometimes expressed as humility, sometimes as coy assurance-seeking, and sometimes as the purest self-hatred. . . . Vocation—the will to write—nonetheless required a genuine transcendence of female identity. (Showalter *Literature* 17)

It is clear that Bell used self-deprecation as one of her strategies. In this letter, Bell reveals Hugh's attitude toward her writing:

We've been counting (Hugh and I) that if you and I read Ursula at the rate of three pages for three hours a day—you poor thing—we shall get thro it in *six days*. He, Hugh, is definitely not going to read it till its printed and published, if ever, so he confines himself to calculating its length and now I'll say once and for all, and not again, that you're not to think

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<sup>16</sup> Bell likely refers to Joseph Comyns Carr (1849–1916) gallery director, playwright, and theatre manager.

<sup>17</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1. E. R. dated this letter 1895.

<sup>18</sup> See also Peter Cominos, "Innocent Femininity in Unconscious Conflict." *Suffer and Be Still: Women in the Victorian Age*, ed. Martha Vicinus, (Bloomington: Indiana UP, 1974) especially page 161.

that I attach a grotesque and exaggerated importance to the value of this work! But I do want to do it the very, very best I can.<sup>19</sup>

Robins commented in the margin: “See my letter opposing this— + later he *does* read it.” *The Story of Ursula* became a triple-decker novel.

Hugh Bell sacrificed his ambitions to devote himself to the family firm. From his perspective it would not be too much to expect his wife to sacrifice what he saw as a hobby to the family *and* the firm. In a letter to Molly, then grown, Florence wrote,

When your father could have got in [to Parliament] with almost a walkover at Middlesbrough and was frantically anxious to do it and go in for politics, for you know how much he cares and always has cared. That was all his head was in. His father (this is a very private letter!!) was against it and quite without sympathy in it—as always he was, and trade wasn’t good, and we walked up and down the gravel path talking it over and finally decided to give it all up and do nothing but Middlesbrough. You know how he then threw himself into that. But it was . . .<sup>20</sup> a lifelong renunciation and a lifelong regret and we knew it was at the time. And then he felt afterwards what it would have been to him if he had to do it alone—and what a joy it was to care so much and be so close to each other. What a huge difference it makes in the whole aspect of life to be married—that there is some one who cares as much for the thing that happens to one as one does oneself! (qtd. in Howell 20)

Regardless of her profession of closeness to him, there were still things Bell preferred not to tell Hugh. She shared these secrets with Robins.

#### *Bell’s “Little Sister”*

Being separated from her immediate family was not new to Robins; even so, it had a profound effect upon her (John 91). Bell’s friendship became increasingly important to Robins as it gave her an intact family to turn to and return to that she had not experienced since she was a very young child (Gates 46). Robins celebrated her birthdays and Christmases as one of the family. She rested from her frenetic schedule, often for months, at Red Barns and later at Rounton Grange after Hugh inherited the estate from his father in 1907 (*ODNB “Sir (Isaac) Lowthian Bell”*). Robins referred to the Bell family as her own in many of her letters from quite early in the relationship. She was close to the children too, including Gertrude, who was only six

<sup>19</sup> Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1. Letter dated February 12, 1894.

<sup>20</sup> These ellipses are not mine.

years younger than Robins (John 91–2). Florence, the youngest of three sisters,<sup>21</sup> called Robins “min lil søster,” Norwegian for “my little sister.”<sup>22</sup> Robins was the oldest child and only living daughter in her family. So their close relationship replaced some of the sisterly relationships they otherwise lacked. However, Bell’s tone sometimes approached that of a mother figure. She wrote to Robins, “Remember that there is a very happy home here, with a father and mother, and troops of children—who feel that you absolutely belong to them so it’s no good your saying you don’t” (qtd. in John 91). According to John, Bell “never approved of Robins’s calling Hugh by his first name, even after knowing him for over twenty years. Bell corrected Robins’s Americanisms and slips in grammar: ‘Lisa, you must not mix up your shalls and wills, we have discussed that before.’” However, Bell did not always take this tone. Robins brought out the daring and playful aspects of Bell’s personality that she could not always show as Mrs. Hugh Bell (86). While many of their letters expressed frustration, they also expressed exhilaration they felt as playwrights who could “lift [audiences] up out of their seats and set them down hard” (*Both Sides* 70). One way they dealt with frustration was to share gossip. In a letter posted January 31, 1894, Robins reported to Bell that John Hare thought Bertie Crackanthorpe a “very little man with very little stories + a colossal conceit.” She also reported that Hare, manager of the Garrick, had boasted that, “He could make any book or any reputation he made up his mind to.” Bell grew worried in case he did not like her latest book. In her next letter, Robins comforted: “Don’t let my Mr. H[’s] stories for a moment trouble you. He can’t prevent any good book[’s] success[;] he can only advertise + push the things he has already in his own hands— + even here I [don’t] doubt that he overestimates *his* part in the result.”<sup>23</sup> In a letter to Bell attached to one dated January 1894, Robins poked fun at Henry James.

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<sup>21</sup> ODNB “Florence Bell.”

<sup>22</sup> *My Little Sister* is the American title of Robins’s 1913 novel published in England as *Where Are You Going To . . . ?*

<sup>23</sup> Fales Series I; Feb 2, 1894. “Diaries.”

While we were being bored by Grundy's play last night [*An Old Jew*], I turned to H. J. + said 'when I write *my* great play there are three words I'll *not* have in it.'

'*Your* great play?' he said with a start + a look of horror + disgust; then a little reassured by my expression he asked 'what words?'

'Twenty years ago.' I said + he agreed solemnly that they shd be cut in *anybody's* 'great play' + also that fat ladies in caps should *never* have a past.<sup>24</sup>

As well as gossip, Robins shared her professional struggles with Bell. On January 11, 1893 she wrote:

I was struck speechless—*fancy!* T[ree] told H[einemann] he could get Bygmester [*The Master Builder*] done for him even if he didn't do it himself. *Wyndham* wants to do it! + Tree used my confidence to do his best to betray me. He goes to my arch enemy + then after interesting him in this play he'd never seen but for me! he urges Wm. H[einemann] to let W[yndham] have it! I felt as if some one had stabbed me! It is quite clear the actor managers are all leagued together—if Tree cd. serve W. at my expense it seems he wd. not shrink. I am heartsick at the thought of such treachery— + I told him the last time I saw him, 'It was the knowledge that this lb[sen] play was waiting for me in the future that gave me strength to refuse Wyndham's villainous contract. Oh man man! what stuff *is* the human heart *anyhow!*'<sup>25</sup>

Bell sympathized with Robins's feelings for Wyndham in a letter dated September 11, [1899]. "So you saw Wyndham again. By dint of hearing him spoken of as 'my' Grendel, I am beginning to look upon him in that light! Tho he is really too old and too gobbly in the way he talks." With Bell's support, it was easier for Robins to face betrayal. Robins wrote on January 16, 1893: "Ah you are *good* to have for an *ownest* friend; you come in at the right moment always; bringing just the elements one's pining for. I think thro' all this Tree business + thro' other mists + clouds 'never mind there's Florence'— + I catch my breath + press on."

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<sup>24</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 1. E. R to F. B. 1894.

<sup>25</sup> Though she did not trust Tree or Wyndham, some of Robins's men friends were loyal. Heinemann kept his promise to let Robins have *The Master Builder* and Herbert Waring, her friend from *The Sixth Commandment*, found a backer to produce it. Waring also took the part of Solness (Gates "*Sometimes*" 95).



Robins described to Bell her maneuvers to gain a manager for *Mrs. Lessingham*, the play she wrote with Constance Fletcher.<sup>26</sup> Robins gave a draft of the play to Hare, when she was still under contract with him. He took his time reading it. Robins thought this a “good sign” but grew anxious when Tree expressed interest in it.<sup>27</sup>

It was idle to think of *trusting* Tree an inch. Besides . . . while he [Hare] was considering it with such evident good will it might not be submitted to another manager. Miss F. had been so hopeless over Hare so depressed + forlorn I had begun to feel too ‘The Garrick is no good—what next.’ But lo the Garrick is trumps after all! I write Hare a placating letter. I tell him only the feeling that his interest was ebbing + the frantic haste + urgency of another claimant for the play had driven me to the extremity of sending for it. I returned it [to Hare] next unopened—I wired Tree ‘[You] cannot read play.’ . . . Waiting to hear our doom[,] . . . at last . . . we had audience . . . + Hare said ‘*I’ll do this play*. Come directly Caste is out + we’ll talk over the slight alterations.’ . . . Then Miss F + I drove off bet 12 + 1 *shaking with excitement*. . . .

If I’d not been here to hustle Hare with the phantom of another greedy manager the thing wouldn’t have been settled yet.

At the end of this letter Robins urged Bell in her work: “What good running over Ursula 21 pages in a day!!!”

As well as writing letters to Robins, Bell was often literally “Behind the Scenes,”<sup>28</sup> or in the stalls seats watching her friend on stage. Bell was attentive to Robins even when she was mourning her sister Mary Emma Olliffe Lascelles who died in Berlin in April 1897. Bell wrote Robins from Paris after leaving her sister’s deathbed.

Tuesday 4<sup>th</sup> [E. R. dated May 1897]

Dearest:

I’m still in suspense abt. yesterday—<sup>29</sup> for I’ve not seen any English [news]papers yet—if I can get hold of any before post time I’ll add a line to this. And it *is* suspense! for you know how much I have my

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<sup>26</sup> Constance Fletcher, “Miss F,” used the pen name George Fleming.

<sup>27</sup> Fales, Series I; Subseries A. “Diaries.” January 27, 1894. See also Gates “*Sometimes*” 117.

<sup>28</sup> “Behind the Scenes” was the term used for the modern term “backstage.”

<sup>29</sup> The reprise of *John Gabriel Borkman* opened at the Strand on May 3.

little *soster's* success at heart—all the afternoon yesterday I followed you in my thoughts—I sent you a telegram to urge you to keep up the honour of the family!

We arrive on Thursday mg. I [am] sadly afraid I shan't be able to manage any time on Thursday [to attend *Borkman*]—if I find it's possible I'll send a messenger to the theatre—as to Friday, dear friend, I don't know what to say. I don't want to see the public yet[.] *If* there is a handy box [for the matinée] *to which I cd get from behind* so that if I came to see you for a bit in yr dressing room I cd. go into the box for a little. I wd love it but as that isn't an absolute certainty, and you might be able to sell it, is it worth while? Or just as you think best and if I possibly could, I cd turn up there on Friday for a time at any rate. but it depends on [brother-in-law] Frank + [niece] Florence's moves that afternoon. . . .

Dear, I've wanted you frightfully. + if I cd get that letter [lost in the post] I believe it wd have picked me up again—as it is, I realize how people can be so shaken out of their hold on things that nothing seems [sure ?] nothing worth doing—and so . . . all I might have been doing had remained in abeyance. Gertrude has been too overwhelmed herself that one has had to pull her along—. Well, well—I will see you soon[.] I hope[.] in the meantime[.] I *long* to know how all has gone. I long more than I can say.

Yours always  
F.

—Later I can't get a single English paper! bother. I will write to W. A. I can't wait till I get back to England.

Robins was also a loyal friend, and not just to Bell. The most well known example is her surrendering of the lead for Pinero's *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in the spring of 1893 to her friend Stella, "Mrs. Patrick Campbell," whom she had met when they played in *The Trumpet Call*. George Alexander originally approached "Mrs. Pat" for the role of Paula, a woman with a past.<sup>30</sup> The part paid £15 per week at the St. James's Theatre, but Campbell was already engaged at the less prestigious Adelphi for £8 per week as Clarice in *The Black Domino*. Campbell was struggling to support her two children and was still weak from typhoid fever (Campbell 82). The Adelphi managers were dissatisfied with her performance and were going to close the play, but as soon as Alexander showed interest in Campbell, the Gatti brothers refused to

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<sup>30</sup> Before she married Mr. Tanqueray, Miss Paula Ray assumed aliases (Mrs. Jarman and Mrs. Dartry) to hide her identity.

release her (84). Alexander offered the part to Robins but asked her to surrender it when Campbell was released from the Adelphi some weeks later. Though she could have insisted they adhere to the contract, Robins wanted to help Campbell,<sup>31</sup> so she relinquished the part even though she knew it was a singular opportunity.<sup>32</sup> The play, according to Campbell, was “the most successful modern English play of the century” and made Campbell’s career (81). Though some interpreted Robins’s gesture as hiding from success, the reality was more complex. Early in her career Alexander had filed a complaint against her because she wanted to work on other plays when not required at his theatre. He barred her from his future productions (John 52). These bad feelings must have contributed to Robins’s decision. Another consideration was fatigue. She finished *The Master Builder* at the end of March, was acting *Alan’s Wife* for the Independent Theatre in late April, and was planning her Ibsen series in repertory for May. Her father died on April 5, adding grief to this load. Her exhaustion can be heard in her letter to Bell: “Don’t you see, I want to *act* & don’t want to vindicate Pinero and the English Drama & Elizabeth Robins. It’s too much” (qtd. in John 66). Being “Elizabeth Robins” was just another part she had to play.

Far from using fellow players as actor-managers had used her, Robins was extremely generous with roles to friends when the production and her own career might otherwise have been better served. In 1897 she returned Genevieve Ward’s many favors by casting her as Gunhild in *John Gabriel Borkman* (Whitebrook 159). Unfortunately, Ward insisted on playing in the old declamatory style that hampered the ensemble effect. Though Robins left out of *Ibsen and the Actress* any specific mention of this, she must have thought of it when she gave the advice to “Let Ibsen play you, rather than insist on your playing Ibsen” (56). She hoped that having her own company would “counter the profession’s crass commercialism and its subordination of women, [but]. . . she had too much faith in artists’ ability to work as a team and too few associates who could discharge responsibility” (Gates 93). Managing this play left her drained. She wrote to Bell, “I live in the theatre and reach home at night too tired to

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<sup>31</sup> Robins expressed concern for Campbell again in a letter to Bell dated Jan. 31, 1894.

<sup>32</sup> See E. R. to Campbell in *My Life and Some Letters* (New York: Dodd, 1922) 85.

hold a pencil let alone write new stuff" (qtd. in Gates 102). She again put her high ideals into practice for the sake of the English drama but her own survival depended on her writing.

Though she did not mention details in her published memoirs, Robins's 1894 correspondence reveals that she had wanted to cast Marion Lea as Rita in *Little Eyolf*, though the play did not come together until two years later (Gates 79–80). Lea was eager to return from America for the production, but Archer discouraged this "debauch of generosity" as if it would harm Robins to play against Lea's equal talents.<sup>33</sup> In reality, Archer held a grudge against Lea because she was "absolutely imperious to any suggestions of mine." However, Robins would have been better off with Lea as Rita. Her second choice, Janet Achurch, was "'drugging' heavily + was pregnant, at this time besides struggling with financial difficulties."<sup>34</sup> Achurch's initial performances in the play were worthy of her talents, but her behavior and her acting could be erratic (Gates 96–97).<sup>35</sup> When the matinée prompted an evening run financed by the Morocco Bound, Achurch demanded more money. The backers refused. Campbell, who had been playing the Ratwife, offered to take Achurch's part for less. Inexplicably, though Florence Farr had understudied Achurch in case she became too ill to perform, Farr took the part of the Ratwife and Campbell played Rita. With no time to learn the part, Campbell read it on stage with the script dangling by a cord from her waist. This ruined the performance, but the play lingered on for four

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<sup>33</sup> Robins may also have wanted to cast Lea to make up for signing the agreement for rights to *Hedda* without her. She admits in *WH* that this was a "grave insult to the Joint Management." However, she did not remedy this when Lea asked to stage *Hedda* (probably in 1894) in New York. Lea wrote: "Whatever I might do with the play would not[,] according to my belief[,] deflower it for its production by you, the original English interpreter." See Fales, Series II, Subseries B, Box 18, Folder 115, undated. According to the *New York Times* of April 20, 1898, Robins performed the play there only once but gave other Ibsen plays over five weeks. See "Henrik Ibsen's Birthday," 6. However, this was not the play's New York debut. *Hedda* was first given in German at the Amberg Theatre (later called the Irving Place Theatre) in 1891. See "The Drama," *New York Times*, Mar 27, 1898.

<sup>34</sup> Robins wrote this note on the envelope of a letter postmarked November 30, 1896. See Fales Series II; Subseries B.; Box 6.; Folder 3. "Janet Achurch."

<sup>35</sup> See also Whitebrook 185–86.

weeks since audiences wanted to see the famous cast (Whitebrook 189). On December 12, 1896, during this especially trying production, Robins wrote to Bell that she needed to “come and be quiet with you and ‘my family’” (qtd. in Gates 97).

Bell relied on Robins equally as much. She wrote on September 25, [1894]:

I am working *grimly* and when the scene at the beginning of the 2<sup>nd</sup> act is done . . . I shall send it to you. Now don't be too hard on me—look at the thing from my point of view—we're too near to one another for me, I feel, to be able to afford to do this without carrying you along with me. & so I must e'en risk having the 'hard time' you prophesy for me added to in some measure . . . but I must have *you* with it. Tho' I try to think I cd. do without! . . . I can't.

As well as their emotional investment, the Bells helped Robins financially. Hugh sold her £1,000 worth of stock in his company, Bell Brothers, in 1899 (John 92). Though William Heinemann also bought shares, Hugh gave Robins a better price. Busy as he was, Hugh acted as financial advisor to “Lisa,” selling the shares to her personally.<sup>36</sup> “Any further dribbles you can spare will go to increase your stake + carry you towards that annuity at which you scoff!” He sent Robins the details of this transaction on August 31, 1899 on a card edged with black sent from Red Barns. Robins did not always take full advantage of help or advice; it seems Hugh had offered the shares to her in April, 1895 and kept them for “her disposal for which she will pay at her convenience.” She apparently sold most of the shares but retained enough of them to receive £45 per year.<sup>37</sup> This amount was nearly enough to cover the rent of her London flat. In any case, it provided a more consistent income than theatre engagements provided. The extra help from Hugh (not given to Heinemann) was another secret kept by the women.

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<sup>36</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 9; Folder 23. “Hugh Bell.”

<sup>37</sup> Hugh wrote Robins on October 24, 1899: “If you really want to close the account I propose that you should sell 160 of your shares at 14, this will give you a profit of £640. You will then retain 90 shares[,] which will have cost you £995.16.4 in malt and meal, of which, however, £304.00.0 only will have been found in hard cash. The 90 shares will give you £54 a year.”

Robins's acting necessitated public exposure and brought her fame. Though this was the fulfillment of a lifelong dream, she marveled with a bit of jealousy at the freedom Bell enjoyed. Robins did not let Bell complain about how busy she was.

[Undated—probably July 29, 1893]  
Wimbledon  
Sat 10:30

Friend of my heart! How good your dear letter + the blessed news that the eyes are better + that you had that intimate morning with *Ursula*! It made me thrill to read about it. 'whatever comes of it' say you, miserable ingrate!—why *that* came of it, that hour + a half of intense, vivid life + sense of reaching the inner most heart of things—a kind of joy that you know perfectly well most people live all their tedious lives + go to their graves without once tasting— + you'll have *whole mornings* 'in Paradise' always + always.<sup>38</sup>

On Oct. 17, 1931, after this letter was returned to her, Robins scribbled "And upon my soul she had—to the end."

On January 3, 1896, Robins praised Bell for her public speaking.

I'm received of how you looked when you made that little informal address to the Clarence Women. It came over me quite suddenly how well you wd. have done other public tasks if you hadn't had better things to do. Some thing transforms you when you find yourself up before an audience— + its all awfulness I do believe—it usually lays bare all the poverty of our natures—it's a huge pitiless magnifying glass held over our every flaw. I know now in my inmost heart that you would have stood the scrutiny bravely—in the same breath I thank 'whatever Gods there be' that you found a fairer Destiny.<sup>39</sup>

This letter was sent just after Robins had returned from a weeklong rest at Bell's home to improve her health. On February 22, 1896, Robins related, "You are the one woman in the world whose criticism weighs with me. Other women can cheer me, other women can discourage (slightly) or pluck up my spirit but you make me think, make me care, make me see with new-eyes. Judge if I love you for this."

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<sup>38</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 2.

<sup>39</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 5.

*“Sisterhood” and Victorian Sexuality*

Robins and Bell closely fit Showalter’s description of their generation that “included sensation novelists and children’s book writers . . . [who] seemed to cope effortlessly with the double roles of woman and professional, and to enjoy sexual fulfillment as well as literary success” (*Literature* 16). Yet they were meticulous about what they left to later generations, so we know little of Robins and Bell’s sex lives. The intrusion of science into sexuality that began in earnest during the Victorian period has contributed to the generation gap that exists between the Victorians and us. Individuals began to be “endlessly calibrated, their capacities endlessly judged, . . . their normality and pathology eternally measured” (Cocks and Houlbrook 8), though “it wasn’t until the 1960s that the study of sex in history attained any real academic respectability” (5). Contrary to Foucault’s estimation of modern culture (7), Robins and Bell did not pay anyone to listen to their deepest thoughts—they had one another for that—though modern readers may see them as repressed since they did not discuss sex in their letters. Yet modern people may find themselves feeling awkward saying “I love you” to anyone but their immediate families or even their lovers. Robins and Bell did not have this kind of repression. Bell wrote to Robins:

Dearest of my friends

I have alas but little time to write. but I want to send you this line + tell you—why need I? what you are to me. How I care for you and think of you and refer to you—and want you! and how I feel that all the times that we’ve not spent together all this time, have been wasted. Yet I don’t want my infants to think I don’t go after them when you’re here—I want them to be as absolutely content to have you here and adore you. So all is for the best. I wish that this year may do for you and your work + your success all I count on its doing—and I wish more—good for my own dear familiar.<sup>40</sup>

These types of expressions can make modern readers wonder how to define Victorian women’s relationships according to what Sharon Marcus calls a “lesbian continuum” (11). Marcus states that emotional endearments, touching between women, and even kissing on the lips in public were not considered shocking (57), and that openly lesbian

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<sup>40</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries B. Box 8; Folder 1. December 31, [1895].

relationships were often accepted in Victorian society as “female marriages” (20–21, 29–32). According to Joan Perkin,

Such friendships between women were not regarded as being in any way sinister or ‘deviant’ until the 1920s. Parliament attempted to bring lesbianism within the scope of the criminal law for the first time in 1921. . . . By the 1930s the intense female networks and support systems taken for granted by nineteenth-century women were no longer openly possible. (157)

Martha Vicinus reveals, “By the early twentieth century, the concept of one’s true nature concealed by social custom had been subtly altered, so that sexuality replaced natural feeling as the defining core of a person’s identity” (*Intimate* xvii).

Despite their effusive endearments, Sharon Marcus believes that it is “unlikely that the middle-class female majority who wrote adoringly of their friends . . . were actively engaged in sex with women” (19–20). Victorian female friendships often

Reinforced gender roles and consolidated class status, but [they] also provided women with socially permissible opportunities to engage in behavior commonly seen as the monopoly of men: competition, active choice, [and] appreciation of female beauty. . . . As friends, women could comport themselves with one another in ways forbidden with men, without compromising the respectability so prized by the middle class. (26)

Sharon Marcus believes that “Rather than . . . define women’s relationships in terms of an intrinsic ambiguity that blurs the line between friendship and sexual partnership, we need distinctions that allow us to chart how different social bonds overlap without becoming identical” (30). To me this is accomplished through closer examination of individual relationships, such as this one. Marcus asserts in both her book *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, and in an interview with Noah Berlatsky, “Desire Without Identity,” that appreciation of female beauty by women now often occurs around the fashion magazine as it did in the past around the Victorian fashion plate. Marcus notes that though fashion images are (and were) often quite erotic, by associating such attraction with fashion, the heterosexual female can now negate identification with lesbianism. Marcus argues that Victorian women who were interested in homoeroticism had more “latitude” in expressing their desires “in an era when lesbianism was neither avowed as a sexual identity nor stigmatized as a deviant sexuality” (*Between* 113). In the Berlatsky interview and in her book Marcus refers to the wide range of both intimate and visual eroticism available to Victorian



women as the “play of the system” (27). “Some aspects of sexuality at a given moment in time and for a given person may be repressed, but that doesn’t mean that every erotic impulse and interest is necessarily repressed. . . . In Victorian England, women’s interest in other women was not a huge site of repression.”

Demographics reveal that there was a change in sexual mores and an increase in heterosexual restraint early in the nineteenth century. From 1830 to 1880, the gender socialization of women intensified as the doctrine of separate spheres influenced “almost every class, and the previous era’s concerns about female sexual voracity shifted to a view of women as either inherently domestic, maternal, and self-restrained, or susceptible to training in how to be so” (Sharon Marcus 6). Robins came of age in the 1880s when the view of women’s sexuality fell under the profound influences of Darwinian theory, eugenics, and early feminism.

In contrast to Foucault’s idea of a ‘discursive explosion’ around the subject of sexuality, [Hera] Cook suggests instead that there was, in fact, widespread sexual ignorance in European culture until very recently, and very little actual discussion of sex outside discourses of public health and science. (Cocks and Houlbrook 12)

These factors contributed to a decline in the Gross Reproduction Rate that only reversed beginning in the 1930s (H. Cook 26). Hera Cook reveals that

Sexual abstinence as a means of birth control both springs from, and contributes to, a culture of sexual restraint. . . . However, the absence of effective and widely available birth control means that throughout the nineteenth century there is a direct and close relationship between levels of sexual intercourse (controlled by access to marriage) and fertility rates. When the start of the fertility decline is taken back to the initial sharp fall from 1816, it comes into line with the growth of sexual prudery, known as Victorian sexuality. (27)

Marriage and illegitimacy rates also fell. “By the late nineteenth century, women as a group were considerably more prudish, sexually restrained, and sexually ignorant, than men” (30).

While we might expect diaries to divulge deep emotions, including sexual ones, such expressions, according to Sharon Marcus, were probably the first things Victorians would have destroyed or not recorded at all (34). Many Victorians praised restraint in all matters, but especially sexual ones. This might cause us to wonder why they kept diaries only to leave out what we might consider critical details of life. However, diaries were sometimes read aloud to family and friends so they were not

always private repositories. Martha Vicinus asserts in *Intimate Friends: Women Who Loved Women*, “Given the fragmentary nature of the evidence and the danger of exposure, silence becomes as important as the written word” (xxiv). This seems to promote seeing sex everywhere, which is as inaccurate as seeing it nowhere. I agree with Vicinus that we should pay attention to code words for sex that are apparent. However, I also believe we should not assume that all private texts hid some sort of sexual content, especially in Robins’s case. Although she admitted in her diary to sublimating sexuality for the sake of art, her lack of writing about sex in her letters to Bell does not mean that they did not discuss sex in private. Yet even private conversation about such matters may have been too difficult for her and Bell. It is entirely possible, given their personalities, that there never were any “sex talks” between them. And if there were, since they have since been destroyed, it is safest to focus on what we have, rather than to assume details. Her goals encouraged Robins to sublimate her sexuality and she may have been successful in doing so to any number of degrees at various times in her life. All we can do is guess from the little she left us. For, as Foucault asserts, “There is not one but many silences, and they are an integral part of the strategies that underlie and permeate discourses” (27). Cocks warns, “We should be aware of the contradictions inherent in constructing schemes of identity, sexual or otherwise, that do violence to complex forms of individuality, history and culture” (10).

*“No man is my master”*

Robins’s career necessitated working with men, with the result that they often fell in love with her.<sup>41</sup> Having too much male attention wore on her because she was a busy, professional woman who desired to control her own life. Robins wrote several times in the 1890s, “No man is my master!”<sup>42</sup> Pressures to remain single came first

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<sup>41</sup>Claude Marius (1850–1896) who played the chief of police in *The Sixth Commandment*, also professed his love to Robins. See *WH* Ch. 4, p. 7.

<sup>42</sup>Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; File 18 A. The Nov. 5th entry describes dealing with unwanted male attention. See also Postlewait *Prophet* 84.

from her family through limiting access to men, and later through her own self-restraint. Sexual repression was not unusual for a young woman from a middle-class background who came of age when Robins did, but her fear of insanity added to her will to remain celibate. Even so, sexual desires are not easy to resist. Robins admitted as much in her unpublished “Study for a Woman of Thirty” which may originally have been a diary entry or even a letter to Bell that Robins later changed into a character sketch; it is filed among other letters to Bell from 1892.<sup>43</sup> Robins may have changed its original purpose when she decided not to post it. On another occasion she wrote that she was in love with a man but explained that she could not give in. Some “dead ancestress,” or “some Puritan or maybe my own grandmother who reared me” expected her to resist (qtd. in Gates 53). Her experience with George Parks seemed to confirm that when she disobeyed her grandmother’s advice to avoid men, there were tragic results. Like a spy with a secret, she did not name the love interest, though a few love letters from Archer survive (Whitebrook 166–67).

Gates believes that though Robins had many close friends, both men and women, she “found a collaborative literary friendship more important than, and incompatible with, a sexual intimacy” (106). Robins expressed the fear in some of her unpublished fiction that marriage could limit love instead of strengthening it (John 117). In her 1900 story, “A Masterpiece the World Never Saw; or Aphrodite of the West,” Robins shows that sexuality can also limit artistic capacity (Gates 106). Though Robins admitted that she did not share everything, even with her closest friends, a measure of self-disclosure is vital to close friendship. Such disclosure does not necessarily have to include sex or discussion of sex in order for friends to gain, as Sharon Marcus states, “spiritual coalescence and balance” from their friendship (5).

Since their *Hedda Gabler* days when they met at Gatti’s so Archer could give her his prolific notes (*IA* 42), Robins’s closest male friend remained William Archer. The vegetarian restaurant had private dining rooms where women might discretely entertain, reached through a separate women’s entrance (Crawford 118).<sup>44</sup> Their

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<sup>43</sup> See also Gates 53 n. 21.

<sup>44</sup> Though Crawford states that restaurants were “hardly the places in which a male friend or colleague might be entertained,” that is precisely what Robins did.

meetings continued even after *Hedda* closed at the end of May 1891 (Postlewait *Prophet* 76).<sup>45</sup> Robins's August 1891 notebook recalled the search for another play in which Archer seemed indispensable: "The dear man has been cutting and pulling together Tennyson's 'Queen Mary' for the 'joint management.'—he is always doing something for us" (qtd. in Postlewait *Prophet* 83). Despite growing up on different continents, Robins and Archer had much in common. As well as a passionate interest in drama, they shared the perspective of the outsider, and had similar difficult childhoods. Both of their families suffered frequent moves; the quest for a living was a multi-generational struggle. Their fathers had even both tried prospecting for gold in the American West—Thomas Archer in California in 1849 (Whitebrook 5), and Charles Robins in Colorado in 1880 (John 20). Neither had much success. Archer's grandfather, for whom he was named, moved the family to Larvik, Norway in 1825 from Scotland to begin a logging business when William's father Thomas was only three years old. Though the family returned to visit, only two maiden aunts permanently settled in Norway. The rest of the family immigrated to Australia in 1837 to set up sheep stations when their logging business failed (Whitebrook 4–14). Thomas Archer knew that William was averse to hard physical labor, so he sent his son back to England to study law and train for the bar. William did so to please his parents, though he never practiced because he was always more interested in theatre (24–25). As Robins's ideal escape was also the stage, their common interests and backgrounds contributed to their relationship. They both inherited their fathers' restless natures; each traveled extensively into their old age.

Though they had feelings for each other, the reality was that Archer was married. However, he does not seem to have been in love with his wife Frances, nor was he much of a family man (Whitebrook 60; 101–2). They had a son, Tom, but Archer lived apart much of the time, returning to the family home in Cobham occasionally on weekends and holidays (133). Appearing together publically could

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Crawford reports that, as well as restaurants like Gatti's, women's clubs offered women private places to connect with one another. Suffragettes frequented both establishments. See Elizabeth Crawford, *The Women's Suffrage Movement: A Reference Guide 1866–1928*, (U. College, London: 1999).

<sup>45</sup> See also Whitebrook 133.

arouse suspicion, so Robins and Archer had to be discreet. Friendship with Archer was safer for Robins emotionally; she could always run away, having the excuse of his being married if he got too close. She wrote in her notebook on November 5, 1891:

Even WA my strongest anchor to good cheer & wholesome activity is coming to demand too much of me of time and of regard. It wd not be hard for me to love this man not wisely but too well & I must guard my poor life against a curse like that. For soon after I had acknowledged him the one being in the world for me he wd. possess the supremest power to pain me, and unconsciously and inevitably he wd. use his power. Not that he wd. *wish* to, not that he wdn't try to avoid it, but he wd be as helpless as I.<sup>46</sup>

Robins makes it sound as if Archer were single when he was not, so she at least considered a more serious relationship with him, carefully weighing consequences, one of which would have been social ostracism if he had divorced to marry her. She may have feared his managing her life the way he managed their productions. She wrote in *Ibsen and the Actress*, “from the slightest inflection of voice, . . . the smallest gesture or most fleeting expression, up to . . . the capital crime of . . . alteration of the text—nothing escaped . . . [the] ‘Recording Angel’” (13). Archer was not an actor—he had trouble even expressing his own emotions—yet, as a drama critic and Ibsen translator, he felt qualified to judge her performances. She may have wished to avoid the same scrutiny of her private life. As they were also collaborators, their relationship was multifaceted and complex. Regardless of these difficulties, they shared common goals and tastes. Robins wrote of Archer in *Whither and How*, “[He] looked out wide and calm at the Drama on the stage and just as steadily at the drama 'off’” (Ch. 43, pp. 14–15). She likely gained strength from his steadfastness as he gained strength from her determination. They worked so closely on *The Master Builder* that they shared the same promptbook, both writing in the margins (*Postlewait Prophet* 104–5). Postlewait contends that the “campaign for Ibsen was to be their triumph; it was also . . . the cover for their love” (*Prophet* 85). It is undeniable that Robins and Archer shared an emotional intimacy. To what extent they expressed this sexually is open for deliberation, something they hoped to avoid by burning all but a few affectionate lines from Archer to Robins and her small engagement books that indicate frequent

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<sup>46</sup> See John 78; Gates 52–53; Postlewait *Prophet* 84.

meetings. (Archer appears symbolically as  $\alpha$ .) Postlewait acknowledges the possibility that they “carried on a love affair that was only verbal in its passion,” but suspects that they fully consummated their relationship and that Robins may even have borne Archer’s child. This is indicated, he argues, by her delay in producing *Little Eyolf*,<sup>47</sup> and by her lack of stage work in 1895 (*Prophet* 117–23). He accuses Robins of muddling dates in *Theatre and Friendship* in order to cover up her confinement. Angela John refrains from supposition, as “there is no real proof” (79). Secretiveness does not prove anything one way or the other. Discretion was highly valued in middle-class society, and Robins and Archer were extremely private—even by Victorian standards. Their fondness for one another cannot be denied, but Robins’s fear of pregnancy would have made their sexual life together problematic, even if he had been single. The sentiment Robins wrote on the back of a photograph Archer gave her on June 12, 1891 reveals her inner turmoil: “You’ll be sorry, whatever you do” (Whitebrook plate 12). Archibald Henderson’s statement about realism also applies to Robins and Archer: “Passion is as vital in its repression as in its exhibition” (*Evolution* 437). One thing is sure—once she removed her widow’s veil, Robins divested herself of any desires for marriage. As an eighteen-year-old “petulant for freedom and a glimpse of a larger horizon” (qtd. in John 23), Robins sublimated her passions to her art just as she had promised her grandmother she would do in her letter of December 10, 1883. “A Woman must have some idol,’ I said to myself—I will make mine of that art I love best + will worship it all my life.”<sup>48</sup> This was before George Parks wore down her resolve. She would not give in to any other marriage proposals.

Robins’s relationship with Archer continued as they formed the New Century Theatre in 1897. She hoped to create an ensemble company that would avoid the

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<sup>47</sup> On Oct. 26, 1895 Grein asked Robins for rights to *Little Eyolf* for the ITS. She agreed, but production ran into difficulties when Shaw meddled with the casting, hoping to star Achurch as Asta. According to Achurch, Shaw did not ask her before writing Heinemann to explain why Heinemann’s choice for Asta (Rhoda Halkett) was laughable. See Achurch to Robins, Fales Series II; Subseries B, “Achurch.” Heinemann was so angry that he took the play back from the ITS. Rights reverted to Robins, who did not produce the play until 1896. She was writing fiction at the time, which paid better than acting, and had little time for the stage.

<sup>48</sup> Fales Series III; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 4. E. R. to J. H. R.

pitfalls of the commercial theatre: the star system, the long run, and what she considered the crass commercialism of many actor-managers.<sup>49</sup> Robins confessed to Bell that the New Century was a “kind of little theatre for the Minority” offering plays that found “no place on the stage in the ordinary way of theatrical business,” though she and Archer hoped it would lead to a national theatre (qtd. in John 69). It folded after only four productions. Grein’s Independent Theatre came closest to Robins’s ideal, using both professionals and amateurs, producing both men’s and women’s plays, and having a more diverse base of support than the New Century.<sup>50</sup> Their company failed, but their relationship did not. Around 1900 Archer wrote Robins: “Dear one I hold you to my heart & bless you. . . . I love you my own sweet & thank you for all your love” (qtd. in John 84). Yet, when Robins was ill from typhoid she contracted in Alaska in 1900, Archer could not admit to W. T. Stead that he knew her more than casually in order to recommend a doctor (John 84). Archer found a consultant for her but kept this secret. Shaw both confronted and teased him, but Archer would not speak about the relationship. When Archer died in December 1924 from kidney surgery complications, Robins confided to Bell: “William Archer’s death haunts me with a sense of a large part of my own life being swept away” (qtd. in John 85).

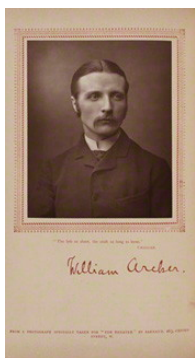


Fig. 10 William Archer by Herbert Rose Barraud, published by Carson and Comerford 1886. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 11 William Heinemann ca. 1895. Photo published in *The Sketch*, Sept. 25, 1895, 479.

As Archer increased his demands on her time with the excuse that his requests were professional, Heinemann increased his demands with the excuse that he could

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<sup>49</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 3 Folder 18 A. 1891. “Diaries.” See also TF 33–6; John 71; Gates 37–38.

<sup>50</sup> For a history of the New Century, see Whitebrook 191–99.

not live without her.<sup>51</sup> She remained professional in obtaining rights to *Hedda Gabler* by keeping her distance, but Heinemann maintained his pursuit of her after *Hedda* closed. He proposed many times and she admitted, “I care for him very much but marry dear God no” (qtd. in John 83). She wrote on February 20, 1892:

He comes in afterwards to read a little Faust out loud, but he somehow neglects “Faust” A pretty hard hour for me + yet there is so much that is good + even noble about this man + his devotion that I am drawn to him, but it’s the same old story will I marry him—No? Then will I go thro’ a civil ceremony + keep it secret fr. all the world + live alone as long as I like. No. Will I at least promise— + so it goes on. With unhappy stories of suffering + sleeplessness all night. . . .<sup>52</sup>

Robins does not make clear if it was she or her suitor who was sleepless. On December 16, 1892, she wrote:

I ask myself is it all wrong? am I an idiot?—repressing + wrestling with the natural healthy hot-blooded woman until she looks like a spiritless old crone? Laying awake at night hour after hour trying to escape from the iron grip of imagination—until morning finds me—weak + almost pulseless—unable to eat—to work to *think* steadfastly!<sup>53</sup>

When she found a gray strand in her mass of chestnut hair she felt conflicted, fearing that unfulfilled sexuality was causing premature aging, but she also feared that if she had a child, she would lose her faculties as her mother had done. It was believed that a man’s depletion of energies was invigorating for him while a woman’s depletion of energies could make her sterile, or even insane (Showalter *Female* 123). If she remained fertile, she could pass on her insanity to her children—daughters particularly. Robins believed in the theory of depletion of energies but did not feel that adding wifehood and motherhood to her already busy life would help her fatigue. Ironically, it was through procreation that Robins’s mother became ill. Robins ensured this would not happen to her.

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<sup>51</sup> Probably in 1891, Heinemann confessed his love in a short story in which he and “Lisa” were the protagonists. See Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; Folder 18 A.

<sup>52</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 A; Folder 19. “1892.” Loose sheet dated Sat. Feb 20, 1892.

<sup>53</sup> Fales, Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 1.



On February 23, 1892, Robins wrote of Marion Lea's exhaustion during rehearsal of Mitchell's play *Deborah*:

My dear Marion would firmly [I] believe be more helped + strengthened if she could pull herself up after yesterday's experience by the hand of some woman she trusted + could lean on. . . . She was in a nervous state bordering on[,] if not actually[,] hysteria[;] her voice was worse + then with strain + altogether she was in such a state that her husband trembled for the fate of *Deborah*.<sup>54</sup>

Robins implies that Mitchell was more concerned for his play than he was for his wife, especially since Robins recommended that a woman friend, not her husband, care for Marion.<sup>55</sup> Robins was also exhausted. "It was good of you to send me that little note. I have passed thro' very arduous times of late + waked up this morning in one of those listless depressed state[s] that is sometimes Nature's revenge for overstrain." In her next letter of February 27, Robins wrote: "Your line about 'achieving one's happiness by very nearly as much conscious effort as one's success' would be sound Philosophy it seems to me—if one could un-think *the necessity* that drives us all like sheep." It was not easy for her to maintain a demanding schedule as it was; she could not possibly have accepted all social and romantic offers she received.

When work was particularly demanding, rather than think of marriage as a way out of financial difficulties, Robins considered it another obstacle. She wrote in 1891:

I believe we come into the world with a fixed capital of courage and of strength. If that reserve is drawn upon too heavily we are bankrupt as I am. Not because I've suffered am I weak to-day but because I've been *overstrained*; and because I see no prospect of rest but Death. Life is merely the waiting for this certain end. I am not sad[;] I am even rather merry but dear God how tired I am!! If I am thankful for any good yet left me it is that this tide of weariness has not yet overflowed my pride nor choked my sensitiveness. I cannot say to Heinemann nor to any other 'my life is valueless to me if you prize it take it.' No—thank fate I am not so dulled and broken-spirited as to sink down to such a marriage.<sup>56</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 1. E. R. to F. B.

<sup>55</sup> It is likely that Lea was pregnant at this time. Letters indicate that she was expecting her first child on November 9, 1892. See Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115. "Marion Lea."

<sup>56</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; Folder 18 A. "Diaries."

Perhaps to console herself in her loneliness, she continued, “Why sh. I complain after all? Few women have lived such brilliant changeul years as I. Few have touched such depths and scaled such heights. . . .” Sometime later in the margin she wrote, “Sink”? may I be forgiven by the ghost of gifted, well-placed, influential, endlessly kind—” Again, sometime later, on the line where she wrote “such a marriage,” Robins wrote, “F. B. + many of my friends said ‘be lifted to security,’ tc. tc.” One friend, Mrs. Wood, wrote from Peterborough: “I can give you no sympathy for being lonely—it is your own fault you will not make up your mind to marry a good man, + have a constant companion to love and cherish you—think of the future a little.”<sup>57</sup> Robins dated this letter October 1892, and retorted in the margin, “Which good man? Maybe that thought it was that hindered the action.” Robins felt that “unmarried and motherless women are seen as threats” (John 117), so she vacillated. Though she later regretted not marrying Heinemann, she was not in love with him. If they had married, she would have had more financial security but less freedom in her choices and less time for her projects. Heinemann gave up asking her to marry but held no grudge. He became her publisher and remained her devoted friend until his sudden death from a heart attack in 1920.



Fig. 12 George Bernard Shaw in 1888. Photo by Sir Emery Walker © National Portrait Gallery, London.

Holbrook Jackson related in 1913 that “most of the distinguished personalities of the Eighteen Nineties challenged somebody or something. George Bernard Shaw challenged everybody and everything” (*Eighteen* 193). When Shaw (1856–1950) considered that Archer was spending too much time with young actresses, he teased,

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<sup>57</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2B; Folder 18 A. “Diaries.” Oct. 1891.

“Marion la blonda today: Elizabeth la bruna tomorrow” (qtd. in Postlewait *Prophet* 81). Then he wrote to Robins suggesting that she write an essay for the *Fortnightly Review* entitled, “How to get at William Archer: by one who has done it” (qtd. in John 81). When Robins did not respond favorably to this, he called her “St. Elizabeth,” a name she retained in Leon Edel’s influential *Henry James: A Life* (406–408). Edel, like Shaw, manipulated words to sway emotions. Edel wrote of Robins:

With her large, liquid eyes and her inner toughness, [she] regarded men as creatures to be manipulated. She could love women; men were to be conquered and ‘used,’ and her secret love affair with the critic William Archer was a kind of collaboration in the theatre as much as a passion. She remained secretive all her life. . . . In America Miss Robins had married an actor named George R. Parkes [sic]. . . . Between them they earned a comfortable income. . . . She spent much of her day sewing her costumes, dressing her hair, studying her roles. . . . Miss Robins seems to have considered sex superfluous in her marriage. . . . Miss Robins was playing the ‘Saint Elizabeth’ who expected men to serve her as her husband had done, by total abdication of the self. . . . From her earliest days she had regarded all her experiences as potential ‘copy.’ . . . She began too late to write her memoirs; the one volume she published barely covers her pre-Ibsen experiences in England. Had James known that Miss Robins dreamed of turning all that happened to her into copy, he probably would have kept a greater distance. (406–8)

What player does not do their hair or study their lines? If they had been well off, Robins would not have had to sew costumes herself. Worse than misspelling the name Parks and making up details,<sup>58</sup> Edel misrepresents relationships. If Edel found a source on Parks and Robins’s sex life, he does not cite it. It was Parks who tried to manipulate his wife by continually threatening to kill himself. Making good his threat was not an “abdication of the self,” but an attempt to punish her. Robins’s relationships with other men—J. T. Grein, John Hare, Herbert Waring, and Harley Granville-Barker, to name a few—were warmly collaborative.<sup>59</sup> It is true that *Both Sides of the Curtain* “barely covers her pre-Ibsen experiences.” However, if Robins had really turned this

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<sup>58</sup> Edel asserts that “Parkes had always kept a suit of stage armor in his hotel room,” but he does not give the source of this information.

<sup>59</sup> Having friendships with men was not unusual for actresses. According to Tracy Davis, “Actresses had always been accepted by male society, as a whole, though their role within it was tightly prescribed.” See *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) 71.

memoir into “copy” by revealing details about famous people she knew, it would have been a better book, at least by a more modern estimation. Edel fails to mention *Theatre and Friendship* because it disproves his assertion that Robins “conquered” and “used” men; in it she does nothing but praise James in warm, mildly playful tones. The accusation of verbatim journaling was a typical accusation thrown at women writers, but mere journaling does not make best-selling novels like those Robins wrote. Edel obviously understood that men also adapt their personal experiences in their writing. He edited James’s short story “Nona Vincent,” whose characters are based on Robins and Bell.<sup>60</sup> Robins feared that James would disapprove of her fiction not because it was autobiographical, but because it might compete in the market with his own. James also had many friends with whom he shared platonic love. Their sexuality, whatever it was, did not interfere with that affection. Edel seems threatened by Robins’s privacy and independence, as if they somehow made her sinister. According to Victoria Coulson, “For Edel, . . . her love of women constitutes a treachery to men in general and to Henry (and Leon) in particular” (78).

Historians and even playwrights have interpreted Robins and Shaw’s relationship, especially an incident that occurred when he appeared at her flat unannounced with the excuse that he wanted an interview about *The Master Builder* (Holroyd 177).<sup>61</sup> He apparently wanted something more than a verbal exchange.<sup>62</sup> Whatever he said so offended that she threw him out. He wrote in his diary, “She got

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<sup>60</sup> See Henry James, *The Complete Tales of Henry James*,. Ed. Leon Edel, Vol. 8 (London: Hart-Davis, 1963).

<sup>61</sup> See Kerry Powell, “New Women, New Plays and Shaw in the 1890s,” *The Cambridge Companion to George Bernard Shaw*, ed. Christopher Innes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1998) 76–100, esp. 95. See also Margot Peters, *Bernard Shaw and the Actresses: A Biography* (New York: Doubleday, 1980) 108–109; Gay Gibson Cima, *Elizabeth Robins: Ibsen Actress Manageress*, Diss. (Cornell: Cornell UP, 1978); Postlewait *Prophet* 106–107; and Gates 62.

<sup>62</sup> Shaw confessed, “Elizabeth was interested in me as an Ibsen specialist; but when my reciprocal interest threatened to develop into something warmer she threatened to shoot me and dropped me for many years.” Qtd. in John 80.

rather alarmed. . . . and swore she would shoot me if I said anything she did not approve of.”<sup>63</sup> He followed their row with a letter on February 29, 1893:

Dear Miss Robins

Will you just look at this rough sketch of the interview you were good enough to give me on Saturday? . . . Never in my life have I had such a professional success. You were clay in the hands of the potter. I have interviewed beautiful women before; but none of them were ever so noble as to threaten to shoot me. It would make any ordinary man’s fortune. And I am going, for your sake, to sacrifice it all—or at least to reserve it for my autobiography.

Now let me give you some advice. 1. Never let an interviewer put you on your guard; it is only his way of putting you off it. 2. Never let him know or see anything that is not for publication. 3. Either barricade the front door or surrender in discretion. 4. Remember that you can be interviewed or not interviewed, as you please; but you cannot be both interviewed and not interviewed at the same time. 5. Remember that the interviewer, in spite of his unfamiliar technique, is a practiced comedian. . . . 9. Get interviewed as often as you can by good interviewers and let them say what they like so long as their copy is entertaining. 10. (& chiefest) Always *interview yourself* if you can.<sup>64</sup>

I could never have convinced you of the impolicy [sic] of your frightful and quite undeserved mistrust of me except by mystifying you as I have done.

To this Shaw attached a mock copy of the interview in which he transformed Robins’s stage pistol into a real revolver. He wrote: “Sensational Headings ad. lib. . . .<sup>65</sup> Lustrous eyes. . . . Ibsen’s Masterpiece . . . . If you do, I will shoot you . . . . The revolver is there. . . . tc, tc, tc” (Shaw *Collected* Vol. I: 380). In his biography of Shaw, Michael Holroyd repeats Shaw’s misrepresentation—calling a stage prop a real weapon—making Robins seem much more menacing than she really was (177).<sup>66</sup>

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<sup>63</sup> See *Bernard Shaw: Collected Letters 1874–1897*, ed. Dan H. Laurence, 1985 ed. Vol. I (New York: Viking, 1965) 379–81.

<sup>64</sup> Shaw followed this advice himself. See T. F. Evans, *George Bernard Shaw: The Critical Heritage*, 1999 ed. (London: Routledge, 1976) 226.

<sup>65</sup> These ellipses are Shaw’s.

<sup>66</sup> Francine Volker’s play *Ibsenites* revisits the production of *Little Eyolf* but converts Robins’s threat with the stage pistol into a backstage scene in which Achurch, in a drugged stupor, really shoots Shaw (Email message to author). Yet

Though her feelings toward him softened in their old age, as a young woman, Robins considered Shaw's behavior insulting. The more she chafed at his teasing, the more he delighted in it.<sup>67</sup> Other women got along better with him by playing along, but Shaw was not one in whom Robins confided her reasons for being aloof, at least not in the 1890s. One of her few personal revelations in *Both Sides* is that being a "lady" was her only shield against men taking liberties (166–68).<sup>68</sup>

Robins pays homage more convincingly to James and Bell in *Theatre and Friendship* than she does to Shaw or even to Wilde in *Both Sides of the Curtain*. James remained very close, as Shaw never was, from the time he gave Robins a role in *The American* until his death in 1916. A mutual friend, Marie Belloc Lowndes, revealed that Robins was the only woman James "cared for sufficiently to wish to marry" (qtd. in John 83). Yet Robins might have used discussions of these friends in her memoirs to shield her most private relationship—the one she had with Archer.

*The Sisterhood Expands: Becoming a Philanthropist; Becoming a Suffragette*

Martha Vicinus explains that

Philanthropy had traditionally been women's particular concern, and its definition during the nineteenth century was broadened to include virtually every major social problem. It is from the narrow base of women's special duties and obligations that women in the nineteenth century came to expand their fields of action and their personal horizons. ("New Trends" x)

Bell extended her sisterhood to the poor women in the community dominated by her husband's factory, visiting them frequently over the course of thirty years. As Hugh Bell's wife, she found manning this "microscope" difficult, "to consider, not in general the lot of thousands, but in detail the lives of some of the individuals who compose

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Robins and Shaw were not always at odds. Sheila Stowell explains that Robins sought his opinion of *Votes for Women!* and took some of his suggestions. See *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (Ann Arbor: U of Michigan, 1992) 15–16.

<sup>67</sup> In *Candida*, Shaw reveals a suspiciously autobiographical method of teasing a young woman when the character Marchbanks attempts repartee with the unwilling Prosperine. Such teasing would not have appealed to Robins.

<sup>68</sup> See also John 83.

those thousands; for it is detail that is really convincing, that brings the vivid flash of realisation and misgiving” (*Works xxxi*). While Bell felt unease at their suffering, did she do enough to help them? Many men were not paid a living wage (78). Workers did not have enough time to eat their meager meals even if a clean, safe place had been provided (29, 98–99). According to *At the Works*,

Besides the fumes and the gasses, every breath of wind at the ironworks carries dust with it, whirling through the air in a wind, dropping through it in a calm, covering the ground, filling the cabins, settling on the clothes of those who are within reach, filling their eyes and their mouths, covering their hands and their faces. (30)

With sparks flying everywhere and molten metal boiling in massive cauldrons round the clock, danger was everywhere. The air was so polluted that day and night were indistinguishable (Howell 11). According to a contemporary visitor to Middlesbrough, “For twenty miles the air smelt of chemicals and ash and soot, as the crowded houses smelt of cabbage, cheese and cat” (qtd. in Howell 11). Since the town existed for the sole purpose of manning the works, “there is nothing to appeal to a sense of art or of beauty” (Bell *Works* 7). Such niceties were not a primary concern to workers who did not earn enough to afford adequate food and clothing. Those who were less careful with money or had more children were in perpetual misery. While some workers and even their wives drank or gambled their way into debt, even the most frugal could become destitute if illness or accident struck (53). With poor nutrition and exposure to extremes of temperature, illness was common. However, compared to some, the unskilled laborers of Bell Brothers were well off. Many others were ready to take the places of any who might find the work too difficult or dangerous.

“Capitalist and employer as Hugh was, he saw no conflict between masters and men—more, he saw them as mutually dependent” (Howell 33). To his credit, Hugh built libraries and assembly rooms for the community and provided schools for the children. Yet, though he was a member of the Liberal party and believed in trade unions as well as sick and unemployment benefits, like so many other industrialists of his time, Hugh Bell did not pay adequate wages to all his workers. An undated letter to Robins suggests that Hugh, in fact, not only sanctioned but also expanded Florence’s visits to workers in order to protect company interests:

It seems—this is private—that the Clarence men don’t seem very well disposed. Hugh & Mr. Kirby—you remember him—were discussing it yesterday, and wondering how really to get hold—to wh. Kirby says ‘I

believe that the person to do it is your wife.' — meaning of course thro the women I suppose—but this makes me feel as if I had a universe on my back. I believe of course that it can be done by going oftener, by doing a hundred things wh I feel at this moment I cd as easily do as write a play in Dutch! However next week we shall be away from it all— then at a distance I can put my head on one side & contemplate it as a picture and say 'how picturesque it is, and how delightful!' bother.<sup>69</sup>

A group of female friends, including at times her stepdaughter Gertrude, helped Florence document workers' lives and living conditions (Wallach 31). Some of Bell's class would have thought this effort foolhardy. Yet Florence felt it was too easy to blame the poor for their predicaments. "It is essential to realize, when one is engaged in any undertaking connected with the working classes, what a very great gulf there is, and must be, between their method of approaching it and those of the well-to-do" (*Works* 120). In her book, Bell illustrates that the wives and mothers of the workers were the crucial element to survival on meager means. If the women of the household were wise and frugal, the family had a good chance of survival (171).

Bell was neither a radical nor a New Woman, yet she wanted to alleviate some of the suffering she witnessed. Though her book seems somewhat clinical, rather than getting bogged down in political solutions that were outside her power, she took a practical approach to helping, first by hosting talks, teas, and magic lantern shows for the workers and their families (Howell 33–6). Though in her book Bell recommended theatres and music halls as better outlets for workers' leisure hours than pubs, they were expensive and were not open on Sundays (*At the Works* 132–36). Recreation was the one thing she could contribute that would help lift workers' spirits and help them keep more of their wages for the necessities of life that too many were wasting on gambling and alcohol (127–128). Florence does not mention her husband or his company by name, but *At the Works* exposes the dreadful conditions in the company town. Nevertheless, Hugh did not forbid her publishing it. She waited until 1907 to do so, when her contribution to the problem of wholesome recreation was finished—the Winter Garden, a hall for concerts, talks, and billiards, that offered simple refreshments (Howell 35–6). Entry and food cost one penny each to cover expenses.

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<sup>69</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1. This letter is likely from 1894.



However, it was not for this that Bell was made DBE in 1918; visiting was women's work expected of her as Hugh Bell's wife. Florence was made DBE for running a Red Cross hospital during WWI (297).

While Bell was building her Winter Garden, Robins was also looking outward. She had come to feel that the English stage was "not enough" ("Notes" *WH*). She had devoted herself to Ibsen's revolutionary drama, but she and her coworkers could not sustain their efforts by themselves; receipts barely covered expenses. On the last page of Ch. 50 of *Whither and How*, Robins relates that she

Stopped the run [of *The Master Builder*] before there were any monetary complications. It is quite certain that every salary was pd. in full + every obligation discharged. People outside the Theatre continued to quote our good houses + good press + a good many people wanted to know[,] demanded[,] why we didn't go on + play . . . more Ibsens. But nobody offered to secure us against loss [Nobody was] prepared to make this practicable for actors who must have their living to consider. Nobody offered to make more Ibsens possible by taking any formal share in the risk. I remember feeling it not v. easy to . . . sustain my share in [these] conversations. One lady . . . came . . . to reason with me. She told me what a great writer Ibsen was. With her carriage waiting, she sat there in my bare, little flat dripping with pearls to tell me my duty towards the stage, to the world[,] couldn't I realize, didn't I care? That's what she had come to say.

Robins does not mention whether she asked this woman for patronage, but if the woman had funded production, Robins could have continued her work. It seemed that intellectual drama should be part of the repertoire of a world power (Guest 282). Actors could not be expected to finance a national concern all by themselves.

Robins retired from acting in 1902, at the age of forty. According to Tracy Davis, "By the end of the century, actresses were chronically over supplied" (*Actresses* 12). Competition for parts made it even more difficult for an aging actress like Robins to find work. Because she had gained a reputation as an Ibsen actress, Robins limited her West End career. She therefore dedicated herself wholly to writing in order to make a living. She notes in *Whither and How* that the stage is one of the best means of education for women "for the early years—and then ceases, I think, to have much more to contribute" ("Introductory" p. 4).

*Elizabeth Robins: Author and Suffragette*

The “self,” as Mary Jean Corbett explains, is not a “stable construct,” but is a continual process of performance (“Performing” 109). Corbett believes that Robins’s “feminist consciousness [was not] constituted in advance (‘offstage,’ or in ‘real life’), but from theatrical performance itself: and not only from the experience of playing Ibsen parts, but also from the difficulties she elsewhere records of getting those parts” (“Performing” 108). However, as we have seen, the offstage experience of gaining *Hedda* was “real life” for Robins. Robins herself states in *Ibsen and the Actress* that if she and Lea “had been thinking politically, concerning ourselves about the emancipation of women, we would not have given the Ibsen plays the particular kind of whole-hearted, enchanted devotion we did give” (31). The artistic freedom of performing Ibsen plays appealed strongly to Robins, but this alone did not make her a feminist. In Robins’s case, feminist consciousness was constituted through both “real life” experiences and through creation of Ibsen characters over many years. Corbett leaves out the rest of Robins’s quote from *Ibsen and the Actress* that explains this:

We were actresses—actresses who wouldn’t for a kingdom be anything else. We got over that; but I am talking about ’89–’91.

Robins further explains why, at that time, acting *was* enough:

How were we to find fault with a state of society that had given us Nora and Hedda and Thea? . . . Marion Lea and I never thought of there being anything difficult to understand in the Ibsen women till people challenged them. Then in sheer self-defense we became controversial. But whether we met abuse or praise, in the end it was all grist to our mill. It was tonic to be attacked. . . . Ibsen had taught us something we were never to unlearn. The lesson had nothing to do with the New Woman; it had everything to do with . . . the art of acting. (31–32)

Because of Ibsen, Robins found fulfillment in acting alone in the early 1890s as she perfected her new techniques appropriate for realism. But why was it “tonic to be attacked”? Because they were finally being taken seriously as *actresses*. By the time she retired from the stage, Robins had offered the public many new perspectives on women and what they could do, onstage and off. Yet she had not yet conceptualized her political self.

Again through friends, Robins’s horizons expanded in another direction—the suffrage movement. This occurred in 1905 when Robins was invited to discuss her

views at a meeting held by the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies (John 142–43). Before this, Robins had not identified herself as a suffragist. At this meeting she became a “convert.” With these issues on her mind, when Gertrude Kingston commissioned a play from her, Robins focused it on suffrage. The play became *Votes for Women!* Robins received an advance of £1,000 in 1907 for the novel version of the play entitled *The Convert* (John 4). This amount is comparable, using the retail price index, to £78,800 in 2008 (*Measuring Worth*). According to the National Archives Currency Converter, £1,000 in 1905 was equivalent to £57,350 in 2005 (“Currency Converter”). Through her writing, not her acting, Robins became both political and financially independent. She was gradually, though at first reluctantly, swept into another high-profile career as a speaker for the suffrage cause.

According to Mary Gay Gibson Cima, Robins's father “came to believe in community work” (6), but Robins took this idea much further and, unlike her father, made it successful. She had helped to create communities to produce plays and brought these skills to the suffrage movement. Shifting from writing fiction and plays with feminist themes to writing suffrage tracts was a natural progression for an independent woman who had made successful careers on both sides of the Atlantic. However, the suffrage movement ran contrary to the Bell family's views. Hugh's father Lowthian Bell was Liberal M.P. for Hartlepool between 1875 and 1880. Hugh also supported the Liberal party, but that did not mean he supported women's suffrage. “Conventional Victorians feared improvement in the lives of women which might strengthen them to stand alone” (Cominos 161). A woman's sphere, according to both Florence and Hugh, was at the local level. Even Gertrude—the fearless explorer of Arabia who went head-to-head with royal authorities and Arab pirates—joined the Anti-Suffrage League in 1908 (Wallach 81–83).<sup>70</sup> It seems inconsistent that the Bells supported the anti-suffrage movement. Yet Florence saw the wives of the Port Clarence workers up close and felt they were unprepared for the responsibilities of the franchise when so many of them were already overwhelmed with daily life. Since many were illiterate, the Bells believed it impossible for these women to be

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<sup>70</sup> Youngest daughter Molly was pro-suffrage, though she deplored violence and did not campaign herself. See “Molly Katharine Trevelyan [née Bell]” in *ODNB*.

responsible voters. They also felt that there were too many other injustices to be dealt with before women's suffrage (Howell 71). Not all men had the vote, so how could all women be given it? This difference of opinion between Robins and the Bells caused tempers to rise, ironically, over the question of violent protest.

Though the Liberal party had promised votes for women, when change was not forthcoming, many suffragists felt betrayed. The women's movement split into two camps: those who were willing to wait peaceably, and those who were not—the latter being dubbed "suffragettes." The Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU) grew increasingly militant, particularly after 1905 when Christabel Pankhurst and Annie Kenney were arrested for obstruction for interrupting a meeting at the Manchester Free Trade Hall (Stowell 9–10). The WSPU swept Robins into the cause just as the struggle was heating up; she gave her first speech in 1906 (Crawford 628). As Robins became more politically active and more public about her views, the Bells grew increasingly fearful that violence might "bring swift retribution and destroy the advances that women had already made" (Howell 71). Tension between the friends intensified in 1912 when Robins published a letter in support of suffragettes breaking shop windows on a large scale. Robins wrote to *The Times* on March 7, 1912:

[W]e are told that because some glass has been broken, any show of understanding, or consideration, towards Militant Suffragists would involve a menace to the foundations of civilisation, [when they are] . . . fighting for a less imperfect civilisation. . . . Does anyone seriously think that the hundreds of imprisonments, the forcible-feeding torture, the death and insanity already to the credit(?) of the policy of repression have had their intended effect? And yet towards this forty-year-old demand, with half the House of Commons on its side and more than half the Cabinet, the Government's only change from an attitude of cynical neglect is to stronger methods of repression. (qtd. in *Way Stations* 289–90)

To Bell, publishing radical political views was outside of Robins's roles—as an actress, as an American, and as a woman. On March 10, 1912, she sent an angry letter to Robins.

The country (not your country, mark) is faced with disorder. . . . [When] utter balance, sanity, patriotism are most needed, *you*, a woman of your fine nobility of outlook, should also go headlong into the excitement and write incendiary letters inciting others—whose country it is—to add to the disorder. (qtd. in John 94)

While the Bells wanted Robins to squelch her activist voice, Emmeline Pankhurst had urged her on back in October 1908:

You could do more for the women's movement if you would let yourself go a little more than you do. You have influence with many people[,] which could be made useful. . . . You have the gift of personal magnetism in a far greater degree than I have by nature. . . . It would be a great comfort to me during these months [in prison] if I knew that you with your great gifts were giving yourself heart and soul to the Cause. If only you could shut out the opinions and doubts of your world and influence them rather than let them influence you. (qtd. in J. Marcus "Transatlantic" 753)

Just as she had approached theatre as a community effort, Robins saw the improvement of women's lives and the extension of their rights as a community responsibility. She believed in equal rights for all women—not just the “exceptional.” She stated in *Way Stations*: “To be able to believe in the value of the Suffrage you must be able to believe in other people. You must neither think too much of yourself, nor too meanly of the rest of the world” (72). Despite her liberal views and the Pankhurst's pleas, Robins initially had reservations about heavy involvement. Her health was weakened from her near-fatal case of typhoid in 1900. She suffered various health problems for many years after that caused her to fear the strain of perpetual speaking engagements. She wanted to devote time to her fiction, which was her only means of support. She wanted to remain friends with the Bells. She also had to be careful, as a foreigner, that her actions did not result in deportation. Despite her fears, the Pankhursts eventually proved irresistible. Robins wrote to her sister-in-law, labor leader Margaret Dreier Robins: “These people have an appalling genius for making you drop everything else and work for them” (qtd. in J. Marcus “Transatlantic” 751).

Robins's involvement in the suffrage movement culminated when, as president of the Actresses' Franchise League, she symbolically resurrected the character of Hedda, portrayed by the actress Princess Bariatinsky on horseback, to lead protesters in the Coronation Suffrage Pageant of 1911. According to Penny Farfan, this was the “largest and most spectacular demonstration of the British suffrage campaign” (“*From Hedda*” 59). At forty-nine—seven years older than Bariatinsky—perhaps Robins felt herself too old and in too dignified a position to take the role of Hedda herself, but she saw to it that the character that epitomized determined womanhood to many women

and that intimidated many men was reborn as a suffragette. It would perhaps have seemed more fitting for the character of Nora to lead the protesters, since she lives after the end of her play, whereas Hedda commits suicide. However, Robins had not played Nora. In order to place herself symbolically at the head of the fray, Robins chose the role she had used to free herself from the confines of the ingénue. Thus, Robins brought Hedda and herself full circle, enclosed within the female quest for freedom on the world stage.

Margaret Dreier Robins, Robins's sister-in-law, feared that Elizabeth was being hypocritical by staying at the Bell family mansion, Rounton Grange,<sup>71</sup> while claiming to be "pulling out of the chief cornerstones of privilege" (qtd. in John 93). Margaret did not realize that Elizabeth's proximity to Bell's anti-suffrage friends enabled her to gather intelligence she sent by telegram to Christabel Pankhurst (J. Marcus "Transatlantic" 748). Bell may have suspected as much, or at least did not want the tension in her home, because she asked Robins to stay away when she was hosting anti-suffrage guests (John 95). Robins knew that the Bells were some of the more liberal of their camp and did not want to lose their friendship. She sent a conciliatory letter to Florence in May 1912:

I do not have to pretend there's no gulf. When you were so ill, when I had you in my heart every hour of the day I did not find myself thinking of any difference—but of long years of a very unusual and beautiful relation[,] of all things you had taught me, of what I owed to you & . . .<sup>72</sup> how very much I loved you. (qtd. in John 95)

Robins served as a committee member of the WSPU for a few months longer, resigning in November after Christabel Pankhurst removed Emmeline and Frederick Pethick-Lawrence from the rolls of the organization (Crawford 486–97).<sup>73</sup>

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<sup>71</sup> Florence and Hugh moved to the family estate in 1905.

<sup>72</sup> These ellipses are not mine.

<sup>73</sup> The Pethick-Lawrences wanted Christabel, exiled in France, to court public sympathy by returning to England to stand trial, as they had done. Christabel refused and advocated even more violent tactics. Her detractors feared such acts would cause serious personal injury or death, turning public opinion against them. See also John 169–70, and Sheila Stowell, *A Stage of Their Own: Feminist Playwrights of the Suffrage Era* (U. of Michigan, 1992) 11.

Though she expressed personal regard for the Pankhursts in her 16-page letter of resignation, Robins disapproved of Christabel's increasingly autocratic leadership.

Despite their political conflicts, Robins and Bell eventually mended their relationship. In 1920, two years after English women over age thirty were given the right to vote, Bell published the essay "Elizabeth Robins: An Appreciation" in the first volume of the feminist periodical *Time and Tide* edited by Lady Rhondda (John 96). In the essay, republished in her book *Landmarks*, Bell acknowledged that Robins was ahead of her time. She undoubtedly referred to Robins's theatrical contributions as well as to her political vision. "The passage of Elizabeth Robins through the world, a flaming torch in her hand, may well bewilder those whose prudent path in life is the beaten track" (*Landmarks* 107). Perhaps she was speaking of herself as being perplexed as Robins seemed to cope with changes in society more readily than she did herself.

Both Bell and Robins expanded their sisterhood by creating a place of rest for workers—Bell's in Yorkshire for her domestic staff, and Robins's in Sussex for workingwomen like herself. Not every woman could have the good fortune to have a friend like Bell to provide a haven for her. As Robins had no children to whom she could leave her fortune and her home, Backsettown, she established the property as a women's rest home. Backsettown is not far from the final home of Virginia Woolf (Glendinning 357). Octavia Wilberforce, a distant cousin of Woolf, became Robins's companion, executor, and occasionally even her physician, a profession that Wilberforce had been able to pursue because Robins helped fund her education.<sup>74</sup> Wilberforce ran Backsettown for Robins and it continued to operate years after Wilberforce's death in 1963.

### *Shaw's Great Artists?*

Throughout their long lives Robins and Bell showed that art could be called to higher causes. Though they shared with Shaw a belief in the New Drama, they did not

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<sup>74</sup> Wilberforce was the last doctor to see Woolf before she committed suicide. See John 235. See also Victoria Glendinning, *Leonard Woolf: A Life*, 2006 ed. (London: Simon, 1997) 361–62 and 367.

always agree with him on the means of achieving its goals, nor did they agree between themselves on the means of social change. Yet it is remarkable how well Robins and Bell fit Shaw's definition of "great artists." He wrote in *The Sanity of Art*:

The claim of art to our respect must stand or fall with the validity of its pretension to cultivate and refine our senses . . . [until they] become highly conscious and critical, . . . protesting vehemently against ugliness, noise, discordant speech, . . . and foul air, and taking keen interest and pleasure in beauty, in music, . . . in the open air, . . . [and in] comfort and decency. Further, art should refine our sense of character and conduct, of justice and sympathy, greatly heightening our self-knowledge, self-control, precision of action, and considerateness, and making us intolerant of baseness, cruelty, injustice and intellectual superficiality or vulgarity. The worthy artist . . . responds to this cultivation of the physical or moral senses. . . . The greatest artist is he who goes a step beyond the demand, and, by supplying works of a higher beauty and a higher interest than have yet been perceived, succeeds . . . in adding this fresh extension of sense to the heritage of the race. (qtd. in Jackson *Bernard Shaw* 142)

Robins and Bell went beyond the demand, fulfilling their own high aspirations for art. Through social work they lifted others to a better reality. They exercised their drive, capacity for competition, ingenuity, and humanity both in the arts and in society,<sup>75</sup> advancing the status and enlarging the roles of women.

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<sup>75</sup> See Sharon Marcus, *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England* (Princeton: Princeton UP, 2007) 56.



## Chapter 4

### 'Women's Place' in the Theatre: The State of the English Stage and the Lure of the Independent Theatre Society

"The actor learns he is nothing by himself."

Elizabeth Robins<sup>1</sup>

"The existing popular drama of the day is quite out of the question for cultivated people accustomed to use their brains."

George Bernard Shaw<sup>2</sup>

What was the London theatre like as an employer for actresses like Robins in the 1890s? What meaningful roles were available to her, particularly after her production of *Hedda Gabler*? She had acted in a few West End productions with little personal satisfaction. While *Hedda Gabler* made a stir, Robins admits "All that interval after Hedda was secretly fitted with waiting for the next Ibsen" (*IA* 32). While she waited, where might she discover another challenge? Where might she and Bell find an outlet for their playwriting talents and their otherwise private political sentiments? What was the state of the English stage in the 1890s and where might Robins and Bell fit in as "Workers in Art"? If women wanted to be part of the New Drama as viewers, actors, or playwrights, where could they go?

Victorian companies offered plays in various settings to suit any pocketbook, taste, or mood (Harrop 197). Touring companies, through better roads and railways, reached even remote towns by the 1890s (194–97). Some portable companies performed within their own structures of canvas and wood, making any open field a possible venue. *Fit up* companies touring the countryside put on plays in whatever building might be available—a barn, a village inn, even the great hall of a stately home. Companies based outside London produced touring shows in the provinces,

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<sup>1</sup> *WH* Introduction, p. 7.

<sup>2</sup> *Plays Pleasant and Unpleasant*, Volume I (New York: Brentano's, 1906) x.

while London companies sometimes toured other major cities.<sup>3</sup> Due to the demand for London productions in the provinces, touring was more lucrative for London-based companies than playing in their own houses (Foulkes 11).

English theatres were continually influenced by the continent, especially France, and by the end of the century, Scandinavia and Germany (Shroyer and Gardemal 654–57). “The nineteenth century had begun in the full flush of the romantic movement, which affected virtually every form of artistic expression by its mood of radical idealism, spontaneity of feeling and faith in the visionary imagination” (Styan 2). According to Katherine Newey, a “break between popular and high culture was institutionalized and embedded in . . . hierarchies of aesthetic value” from the late Romantic period (“Theatre” 119). By the Victorian era many intellectuals felt that English drama was at its lowest, particularly if they distinguished between plays consumed as entertainment, and those consumed as literature (Williams 165). Yet, lighthearted, well-made plays methodized by Eugene Scribe were a successful formula in England (4). Problem plays of Dumas, films were a more moralistic version. T. W. Robertson introduced “cup and saucer” dramas to London with his first success, *Society*, in 1864. With more realistic acting, dialogue, sets, and costumes, Robertson’s pieces remained popular for decades after his death in 1871 (Shroyer and Gardemal 655). Melodramas, with their stock characters, were frequent West End offerings (Styan 3). Farces and comedies were also popular (Postlewait *Prophet* 132). As the century progressed, the theories of Darwin, Comte, and Marx gradually “undermined the intellectual optimism of the early years of the century” (Styan 2). The realism of novelists (particularly Flaubert, Balzac, and Zola) “encouraged the emergence of a different kind of play and a different kind of performance to match it.” Nineteenth-century journalists and authors “often criticized the theatre in order to privilege their

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<sup>3</sup> Robins performed for Queen Victoria at Balmoral Castle in John Hare’s production of Sardou’s *Diplomacy* adapted by Clement Scott in Oct. 1893. The tour included Liverpool, Manchester, Birmingham, Edinburgh, and Glasgow. In her letters to Bell, Robins made no distinction between the public and the command performances. Unlike Mrs. Bancroft, the sight of the aged Queen aroused pity rather than awe in Robins. See, Richard Schoch, *Queen Victoria and the Theatre of Her Age* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004) 77–81. See John 45; Gates 69 and 86.

own genre or, like [Olive] Schreiner, to assert primacy of an art form that, in their view, does not pander to its audience” (Miller vii–viii).

What was known as the London stage amounted to “some twenty playhouses of the first order” in the West End (Orme 55). Actor-managers ran most of these, although a few women, mostly from theatrical families, made their way into management (Davis *Actresses* 51). Even by the 1890s the most radical changes in the drama had escaped the majority of commercial theatres in the West End because the actor-managers who ran them were reluctant to change their repertoires, acting techniques, or directing practices. The rise in the social position of actor managers made their conservatism more likely, especially if that recognition was in the form of a knighthood (Foulkes 2–3).

When Robins arrived in London, one of her first ambitions was to work for Henry Irving, the first actor to be knighted. Irving managed the Lyceum where he was known for Shakespeare productions. Though Robins offered to act for Irving on at least three occasions,<sup>4</sup> she failed to get a part. In *Both Sides* she admitted, “The old idea, that I had brought with me from America, of Irving as the instrument of Fate in England was destined to die hard” (80). Irving’s rebuff must have seemed baffling, especially in 1889 when she had just toured with Edwin Booth, perhaps the greatest American Shakespearean actor of his age and Irving’s co-star in the 1881 Lyceum production of *Othello*. Though she directed Irving’s son H. B. Irving in *Mariana* in 1897, Irving the elder never hired her. She eventually took her revenge by recording in *Both Sides* an incident when Irving bullied one of his actors. She reports this episode indirectly through Lewis Wingfield’s cautionary tale. “A clever young leading man . . . in rehearsing with Irving gave a certain speech with such ability and power that those standing about, actors and onlookers, broke into applause. Irving listened and said dryly: ‘Yes, you gave that very well, Mr. Alexander—we’ll cut out that speech’” (86). Such situations grated on Robins because she sincerely wanted to act, to choose her parts, and to help determine how to play them. Unlike Alexander who, when he

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<sup>4</sup> See Robins, letters to Henry Irving, *Henry Irving Correspondence* for March 1889, January 1899, and June 1899. The *Henry Irving Correspondence* is hereafter cited as *IC*.

obtained his own management, abused his actors as he had been,<sup>5</sup> Robins sought artistic freedoms for all her players—men and women. Wingfield reported that “The only person [Irving] dares not suppress is Ellen Terry.” Yet, even for celebrated actresses like Terry, the “star of Britain’s most brilliant and durable theatrical family” (Auerbach, *Ellen* xv), the self-determination Robins desired was unheard of (Cima *Performing* 38–39). Though Robins and Lea “had come to realize how essential to success some freedom of judgment and action are to the actor” (*TF* 33), commercial managers were not inclined to hire actresses for their independence, no matter how talented they might be. Robins considered that even manageresses who got less glowing notices than their employees might get jealous. Mrs. Lancaster-Wallis failed to renew Robins’s contract when Robins’s reviews were better than her own (*WH* Ch. 5, p. 6).

Though Robins and Lea had hoped the London stage would offer more respect and autonomy than they had experienced on the American stage (John 50), in England too, they had seen

How freedom in the practice of our art, how the bare opportunity to practice it at all, depended, for the actress, on considerations humiliatingly different from those that confronted the actor. The stage career of an actress was inextricably involved in the fact that she was a woman and that those who were masters of the theatre were men. These considerations did not belong to art; they stultified art. (*TF* 33–34)

“Victorian rhetoric . . . worked to gender the theatre as being distinctively, irrevocably, masculine. . . . Furthermore, and crucially, the executive functions of theatre-manager and playwright were carefully defined as requiring supposedly masculine qualities of mind and personality” (Powell *Women* xi).

In many ways the plight of the Victorian actress was similar to that of the English theatre itself. Though they could interpret the full range of human emotions and portray the highest of human aspirations, actresses were sometimes seen as inferior—not just in their morals—but also in their humanity (Davis *Actresses* 77, 81). Some Victorians saw theatre as both immoral and inferior, though it utilized a full range of supposedly higher art forms—poetry, music, dance, painting, architecture,

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<sup>5</sup> See Gates “*Sometimes*” 38.

textiles, and sculpture (Auerbach "Before" 3). From Elizabethan times theatres had been consigned to the outskirts of London. Their proximity to baser forms of entertainment created negative associations in the public mind that persisted even after the reopening of the theatres in 1660. Brothels continued to be tenanted in the theatre district; wealthy men were the market of both industries (Davis *Actresses* 83).<sup>6</sup> Robert Walpole's 1737 bill regulating vagrancy contained two provisions to control the theatres: plays given for money required a license from the Lord Chamberlain; a copy of such plays had to be submitted to the Lord Chamberlain for approval before performance (Milhous 122). According to Jane Moody, this act was "inextricable from a concerted campaign to suppress the unlicensed theatres" (12).<sup>7</sup> The 1843 Theatres Regulation Act extended the jurisdiction of the Lord Chamberlain to all of England's theatres (Fitzpatrick 14).<sup>8</sup>

Since acting did not require formal education and stagecraft was a trade, theatre workers were not respected as artists.<sup>9</sup> Actresses generally experienced more severe social stigmata than their male counterparts because they were women who presented themselves in public for money when women were supposed to be privately domestic. Though the theatre held powerful attractions to both men and women, its social and physical dangers for the actress were "considerations humiliatingly different

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<sup>6</sup> See also Kerry Powell, *Women and Victorian Theatre*, 2006 ed., (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1997) 33.

<sup>7</sup> For a discussion of the history of the legitimate and "illegitimate" theatres and "high" and "low" drama, see Katherine Newey, "Legitimacy" *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (Basingstoke, Hampshire: Palgrave, 2005) 39–65; and "Theatre," *The Cambridge Companion to Victorian Culture*, ed. Francis O'Gorman (New York: Cambridge UP, 2010) 119–34.

<sup>8</sup> The Examiners of Plays during the Victorian era were: "Charles Kemble (1836–40), his son, John Mitchell Kemble (1840–57), W. B. Donne (1857–74), E. F. S. Piggott (1874–95), and George Alexander Redford (1895–1912)." See Richard Schoch, *Victorian Theatrical Burlesques* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003) xxxv.

<sup>9</sup> For gender issues of theatre work, see Davis, "Laborers of the Nineteenth-Century Theater: The Economies of Gender and Industrial Organization," *Journal of British Studies* 33.1 (Jan., 1994) 32–53.

from those that confronted the actor” (*TF* 33).<sup>10</sup> According to Davis, some Victorian managers placed actresses in suggestive poses similar to the latest pornographic pictures in order to entice men in the audience (133). Actresses, none the wiser, would then have to pass the men waiting about the stage door. “As long as female performers were unwitting parties to this ‘invisible’ semiosis, they were subject to social ostracism and treated like sexual anathemas” (xv). Robins frequently fought off unwanted advances from men who presumed she was a prostitute just because she was an actress (*Both Sides* 164). She lamented that actresses were largely recognized for their beauty alone. “Outside very modest limits, acting . . . could easily become a disqualification” to employment (249).

Prejudices against the theatre and its workers were exacerbated by the notion that money somehow tainted true art (Guest 283). Robins initially believed this notion. Around 1891 she wrote:

The Theatre of the Future . . . shd be the meeting of the arts . . . at its best [,] . . . the Forum of the people where ideas can be threshed out with passion but with that passion of Art less mixed with sordid + dangerous . . . ambition. . . . Free from personal gain, the Theatre appeal[s] to the universal mind.<sup>11</sup>

This expression shows Robins’s desire to uplift the theatre through community volunteerism and professional collaboration. Such fervor may seem melodramatic now. As Richard Dietrich explains “Our postmodern perspective makes it all the more difficult to cast ourselves back to the 1890s and feel how burning the issue of realism was to the New Dramatists. . . . It seemed then a life-and-death issue, at least for the drama” (*Modern British* Ch. 1).<sup>12</sup> For Robins, a self-supporting woman alone, the New Drama was a life-and-death issue.

Robins contended that intellectuals—a potential audience—stayed away from theatre because it lacked serious works. If the theatre had equally welcomed serious

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<sup>10</sup> See also Davis *Actresses* xiv; and Kristen Guest, “Culture, Class and Colonialism: The Struggle for an English National Theatre, 1879–1913,” *Journal of Victorian Culture* 11.2 (2006) 283.

<sup>11</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; Folder 18 A. “Diaries” 1891 scrap.

<sup>12</sup> The online version of this book has no page numbers.

as well as light-hearted plays, then perhaps more women would have put their names on their dramas. The imbalance in theatre fare was troubling (Orme 73). Robins desired a more literary approach to drama so that those who desired more intellectual plays could have their needs met, and so that players could extend their range beyond type. The commercial theatre's *raison d'être* was making money, so it had little need for serious plays because, except for Shakespeare, dramas tended to be financially unsuccessful. Though Robins succeeded in making her Ibsen series pay its way, even achieving a small profit, she promised to share any profits equally with her subscribers. This kind of devotion to non-commercial theatre went to the extreme. Instead, her subscribers, many of them her friends, collected these small sums together and presented her with a silver tea service after the series ended (Wilde *Letters* 584 n).

Many New Dramatists considered non-commercialism a token of devotion to art, but theatre cannot exist without patronage. Therefore, they wanted the government to fund a national theatre.<sup>13</sup> Such official recognition would have elevated the social and aesthetic position of both the theatre and the player. Yet a national theatre was not likely when the general public held provincial, even puritanical, views of the theatre reflected in the government's censorship of plays (Freshwater 283). Europeans generally did not hold the level of cynicism toward the theatre that the English did (Styan 23). English theatre "did not reflect the intellectual and scientific advances of the nineteenth century, nor did it address the fundamental problems created by an age of industrialization and urbanization" (Williams 165). Robins and Bell expose the harsh realities of industrialization from a poor widow's perspective in *Alan's Wife*. When even their friend Tree rejected it, it was only natural that Robins and Bell joined Grein's Independent Theatre. "For the London avant-garde, theatrical performance and its variants provided a familiar and flexible form for displaying the very social life they meant to interrogate" (Kelly "Alan's Wife" 540).

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<sup>13</sup> Even the more conservative Henry Irving supported a national theatre. See Irving to George Godwin, *IC* [September] 1878.

*Returning Women to History: A Short Account of the Independent Theatre*

According to Richard Dietrich, the first English playwright to make “the great leap forward into realism was Pinero,<sup>14</sup> gaining in courage from the change in atmosphere brought about by the ground-breaking Ibsen productions of the day” (*Modern*). He ignores Robins who was central to this “change of atmosphere.” She premiered or played in most of the Ibsen productions (*The Pillars of Society*, *A Doll’s House*, *Hedda Gabler*, and *The Master Builder*) by the time Pinero took his “leap” with *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in May 1893. In addition, Robins and Bell produced *Alan’s Wife* the month before Pinero’s play premiered. Women’s efforts in small and large groups both initiated and strengthened the New Drama.

While it is now best known for its London premieres of Ibsen’s *Ghosts* (1891), *The Wild Duck* (1894), and Shaw’s *Widower’s Houses* (1892), the Independent Theatre primed the London public for realism much more than these three plays, however revolutionary, could have accomplished by themselves. Though we may never understand all the factors of its creation, the ITS was partly the product of more inclusive social circles among London intellectuals—friendships and networks that included women. Its founder, J. T. Grein (1862–1935), the son of a Dutch father and a German-Jewish mother, welcomed members from many different backgrounds, believing that “Art knows no boundaries of nationalism nor frontiers of country” (Orme 161). This open, friendly attitude helped the ITS to grow quickly as member friends invited more friends to see their productions and even to take part in them.

Long before Grein immigrated to England, he published radical ideas about the theatre. According to his wife, actress Alice Augusta Greeven who wrote his biography under the pen name Michael Orme, Grein was “already a champion of Ibsen in 1881” (40). He wrote “a preface to the first translation into Dutch of *An Enemy of the People*,

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<sup>14</sup> Shroyer and Gardemal state that: “Naturalism is not a mere extension of realism. . . . It is . . . a quite separate movement that embraces the scientific method . . . [in] the observation of human problems. Its basis in a deterministic doctrine that insists upon the immutability of the laws of heredity and environment strongly suggests that naturalism rules out the possibility of the exercise of free will. [Characters] are not nearly so entrapped and helpless when portrayed by the realists.” See *Types of Drama* (Grenville: Foresman, 1970) 655.



[becoming] a pioneer in Amsterdam, as he was afterwards in London.” Grein enjoyed Amsterdam’s municipal theatre, so he was surprised, upon moving to England in 1885, that there was no similar establishment in London. Only twenty-two years old when he immigrated, He initially found life in London difficult. He could not speak English well and he worked long hours for little pay (Orme 46; Schoonderwoerd 43). A six-month business trip to Paris in 1887 exposed him to the Théâtre Libre (Orme 52). When he returned to London, he gave papers for the Playgoer’s Club with titles like “Are Actors Puppets?” and “A Subsidized Theatre in London” (60). Grein regretting “the lack of original plays, bad adaptations and translations, bad acting, dishonest and incompetent criticism, the censor’s bad influence, etc.” (Schoonderwoerd 63).<sup>15</sup> He lamented, “The drama is not a plaything, but an institution which should be the pride and mirror of the nation” (qtd. in Orme 161). However, the “nation” as a whole could not afford to attend Grein’s theatre due to the cost of its membership. £2.10 for a season, projected to be four or five plays, was out of reach for many. Access to productions was more widely available through the Independent Theatre’s published plays so that even people outside of London could participate in the New Drama. Both supporters and detractors attended ITS plays (Whitebrook 113), but whether or not they attended, there were often-heated debates about the plays in the papers. Thus, the ITS brought new works and new ideas from the continent to the London public, and encouraged more experimenting in the commercial theatres.<sup>16</sup> Orme estimates that at its height the ITS subscription membership numbered no more than 175, but its influence on London theatre was considerable (107).

Though some thought this opening date was unlucky, *Ghosts*, Grein’s first play, was performed on Friday the 13th of March 1891 (Orme 81). Grein did not

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<sup>15</sup> By the 1920s Grein considered the censor “a guardian against licence [excess] instead of an obstruction to liberty” preferring the censor to the police. See *New World of the Theatre, 1923–1924* (London: Hopkinson, 1924) 51.

<sup>16</sup> Grein was not opposed to commercial theatre. In April 1891 he, with his friend C. W. Jarvis, submitted an adaptation of Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* to Irving. See *IC*, Hardy to Irving, May 5, 1891. When Irving declined the play, Grein offered it to Robins. See Grein to Robins, May 6, 1891 Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 13; Folder 76. “J. T. Grein.”

request a license for it because his friend, examiner Piggott, already banned it and told him not to bother (Findlater 82–83). Like The Shelley Society before it that produced *The Cenci* privately in order to skirt the censor, the ITS was a private club. *Ghosts* was slated for the shabby Athenaeum Hall in Tottenham Court Road, but Grein invited members of the Playgoer's Club (he was Honorary Secretary), the press, and “everybody he met who expressed the slightest interest in Ibsen” to attend, so the Athenaeum grew too small for the anticipated crowd (Orme 79).<sup>17</sup> Kate Santley offered her house, the Royalty, for £15 (Whitebrook 112). Detractors in the press urged Piggott to close *Ghosts*, but he admitted this exceeded his mandate (Orme 78), a position he later reversed (Gagnier *Idylls* 103).<sup>18</sup> When almost a thousand people requested seats (the Royalty held 650), Grein allowed attendance at the dress rehearsal as he had seen done in France (Whitebrook 112). *Ghosts* initiated one of “the most violent critical controversies in the history of the theatre” (Williams 167). Over 500 articles were published on *Ghosts* after only two, supposedly private, performances (Kelly “Pandemic” 21).

According to Orme,

For nearly two hundred years . . . the Lord Chamberlain . . . regarded it as a duty to keep the drama in swaddling clothes as far as its serious work was concerned,<sup>19</sup> though lighter fare and the farce of infidelity was another thing. That could go to extreme lengths and as long as the aim was merriment nothing it did could be too suggestive. (73)

Thus, the aim of censorship was more about class segregation and control than it was about homogenizing morality throughout English society. If the working classes could

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<sup>17</sup> See also Schoonderwoerd 74.

<sup>18</sup> After the first production, all other ITS plays were licensed (Freshwater 284). Piggott threatened to close theatres that performed banned plays—even plays sponsored by “private” clubs.

<sup>19</sup> The Lord Chamberlain was released from his duties as censor of plays in 1968. “The Lord Chamberlain's approval once virtually guaranteed a play's immunity from lawsuits. But with that protection gone, playwrights face a bewildering maze of common-law provisions against obscenity, sedition, blasphemy and libel, not to mention a recent law against inciting racial hatred.” See “The London Stage: Exit the Censor,” *Time*, Oct. 11, 1968: n. pag.

be kept happily in their place, enjoying their baser entertainments while the middle classes preserved propriety, then society could be safely maintained.<sup>20</sup> The New Drama was radical in that it countered these traditions. Tracy Davis asserts, “Ibsen’s indiscretion [in writing *Ghosts*] may have been to hold a mirror up to . . . the middle class in images usually reserved for . . . sensation journalists’ exposés of the squalor of the lowest classes” (“Independent” 449). Realism unsettled viewers while it segregated them into pro- or anti-New Drama camps. Orme reports that the convergence of the ITS community with the general public created a maelstrom at the *Ghosts* premiere:

Everybody knew everybody, and the playhouse, between the acts, was a very babel of debate in which enthusiasm and sarcasm, realism and reactionism came into collision in all parts of the house. At one point two champions of the rival factions very nearly resorted to fisticuffs, a disciple of the Independent Theatre having publicly denounced a journalist who had made himself conspicuous by laughing obtrusively and offensively during one of the scenes. (97–98)<sup>21</sup>

Within the pro-New Drama camp, as Kelly asserts, “To read Ibsen and attend his plays was to engage in a kind of public identity construction” (“Pandemic” 26). “It took [Grein] practically ten years to overcome the prejudice created by an undertaking

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<sup>20</sup> Bratton asserts that the establishment of the West End as the theatre district earlier in the century was an expression of class segregation, as the establishment pressured to exclude managers who catered to the working classes. Still, the West End offered a treat to any who journeyed there, being safe, lively, and fashionable. See “Why the West End?” *The Making of the West End Stage: Marriage, Management and the Mapping of Gender in London, 1830–1870* (Cambridge UP, 2011) 18–20.

<sup>21</sup> In 1893 the ITS reprised *Ghosts* to large crowds. The *Era* reviewer reported that the “gangways between the rows of seats were jammed, close as herrings, gasping occupants of ‘standing room only.’ Ladies inclined to embonpoint were squeezed against the bony protuberances of some of the lean and sinewy supporters of theatrical independence. In the doorway and in the passage beyond, rose on tiptoe, eager Ibsenites, whose enjoyment of the “Master’s” dialogue was sadly impaired by the noise of passing omnibuses.” See *Era*, Saturday, Jan 28, 1893, 9. *Morning Post* noted that the audience included “hundreds of feminine auditors . . . following the horrible story with the keenest interest.” See “Independent Theatre Society,” Jan 27, 1893, 5.

which even the enemy eventually had to admit left its mark upon the history of the stage” (Orme 89).

The furor over *Ghosts* was free advertising for Grein’s non-commercial theatre. By early 1892, many English writers were offering their plays. Detractors called Grein a “foreigner,” but as he and his committee read these plays he appealed to intellectuals with more foreign fare (Orme 78). Many other “foreigners” joined his society: the Irish G. B. Shaw and George Moore; the Irish-English, French-born Bell; the German-born, America-reared Santley, the India-born Leighton, the Dutch Teixeira de Mattos, and the American Robins.

As Susan Bennett explains in *Theatre Audiences*, the establishment of a theatre in a certain neighborhood affects its potential audience.

The milieu which surrounds a theatre is always ideologically encoded and the presence of a theatre can be measured as typical or incongruous within it. That relationship further shapes a spectator’s experience. Patronage is clearly an evaluative act. (126)

Due to its modest budget, the Independent Theatre was a vagabond group with no permanent house. Though *Ghosts* had been produced at the Royalty, known for opera bouffes,<sup>22</sup> other plays took shape in halls from the lesser known and rundown to the new and fashionable. Grein frequently faced rejection from managers, even when their houses were empty. This forced mobility encouraged more eclectic audiences, enabling the ITS to spread the New Drama further afield, both socially and geographically, than it would have otherwise. Audiences followed as far east as St. George’s Hall, Langham Place, and as far west as West Theatre, Albert Hall to see more new, perhaps even shocking plays. Because it was cheaper to produce, the matinée performance became the domain of the avant-garde. Since they could attend during the day when their husbands were working, the matinée also became the domain of middle-class women (Barstow 387–88). Independent Theatre plays frequently called attention to realities not normally discussed in polite society, like the sexual double standard. Such plays might provide a haven from the particular strains of womanhood that Martha Vicinus calls the “ideal of femininity[,] . . . tenacious and all-

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<sup>22</sup> See “The Royalty Theatre,” *British History Online*, British Heritage, 2014.

pervasive, in spite of its distance from the objective situations of countless women” (“Introduction “Perfect” x). The ITS thereby opened opportunities for women to think about demanding issues, and to escape, if only for an afternoon, the limitations of propriety. Yet Catherine Hindson contends that “Some spectators may have seen a production at the Gaiety Theatre on one evening, an Independent Theatre production the following afternoon, visited the Haymarket Theatre at the weekend, and considered all to be part of their conception of entertainment and the theatrical” (24).

According to Oscar Wilde, ITS audiences were “sad vegetarians . . . men in Macintoshes and women in knitted shawls of red wool” (qtd. in Whitebrook 154). Audiences of the commercial theatres were much more fashion-conscious. Since theatres had closed the pit and installed more expensive stalls seats in the 1870s, audiences at commercial theatres became part of the event. Socialites donned expensive gowns so they could read about themselves in the papers. This commercial milieu made it imperative that actresses impress the audience, women especially, with their costumes in the latest fashions. To theatre purists like Robins, this circumstance of employment put poorer actress at a disadvantage. Her costumes were never lavish. The straw hat and ruffled blouse she wore for the opening scene of *Hedda Gabler* make Robins look, as Christopher Innes opines, like the “girl next door.”<sup>23</sup> Yet Robins juxtaposed an innocent look with the harder characterization needed for the role.

Robins wrote:

I accepted the fact that to have really satisfactory clothes you must have either money or time to spend. I also knew, taking the world as I found it, that I did not give enough of either of these forms of capital to the subject—never . . . because clothes did not interest me, but because other things interested me more. (*Both Sides* 76)

Though Independent Theatre productions did not pay, the group was more concerned about what an actress could *do* rather than what she could *wear*. The New Drama “demanded more from its actresses than their physical looks, rather requiring . . . their critical and intellectual engagement with texts” (Marshall 135–6). This made the non-commercial New Drama a good fit for Robins.

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<sup>23</sup> See *Henrik Ibsen’s Hedda Gabler: A Sourcebook*, 2005 ed. (London: Routledge, 2003) 59.

Grein stressed that because the Independent Theatre was nonprofit, it did not intend to compete with commercial theatres. “Our only ambition is to come to their aid by bringing out artistic plays and promising artists” (Orme 101). Grein stood behind this philosophy by surrendering rights to plays that actor-managers wanted, including Maeterlinck’s *L’Intruse* produced by Tree at the Haymarket, and Bjornson’s *A Gauntlet* produced by Santley at the Royalty (101, 127).<sup>24</sup> To save money, the ITS used simple domestic backdrops, which disappointed some playgoers who anticipated that high drama would be staged with dramatic sets, not the drab drawing rooms typical of farces (John 59). Grein could not afford to produce plays with large casts, like his adaptation of Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* (Orme 107). Since his staff was unpaid, he had to form and re-form his both his casts and the leadership of his society when members dropped out. Frank Harris, Alice Stopford Green, and Julia Frankau donated funds (Orme 100), but The Independent Theatre was rarely—and even then barely—solvent. Grein was frequently left with the bills; his initial estimate that a season of plays would cost £2,000 was sorely inadequate (71). Still, with more freedom than money, The Independent Theatre was uniquely placed to provide an outlet for radical plays.

#### *Women-authored Plays at the Independent Theatre*

In his preface to *Widower’s Houses*,<sup>25</sup> Grein states that his main goal for the Independent Theatre was:

[T]o attract to the stage all those who, having made a distinct mark in the literary world, are keeping aloof from the . . . playhouse for want of encouragement. . . .

The work of such men is certain to be of some value; and even if in their firstlings the faults should overwhelm the qualities, I hold that one renders a service both to them and to our drama by producing them. . . . [I]n the course of time the Independent Theatre may earn the fame of having so materially strengthened the ranks of native dramatists, that the Independent Theatre Series will become a household word. (vii)

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<sup>24</sup> See also William Archer, ‘*World*’ 1894 372.

<sup>25</sup> See J. T. Grein, “Editor’s Preface to the Independent Theatre Series.” *Widowers’ Houses*, by George Bernard Shaw (London: Henry, 1893) v–vii.

As far as Shaw was concerned, it did. Though it could not promise fame or economic success, the ITS gave women a much better chance at performance than the commercial theatres.

When Robins approached Beerbohm Tree with a play entitled *Befriad*, she did not reveal the identities of its authors because he had told her “women can’t write.”<sup>26</sup> Tree refused the play, so Robins took it to Grein but still kept her and Bell’s identities secret. She made him promise not to ask who wrote it. He assumed it was an “Englishman” (*Alan’s Wife* viii). Robins need not have feared that Grein shared Tree’s prejudice; he knowingly produced other women’s plays after Robins and Bell’s piece. According to Katherine Kelly, the ITS was the first performing organization in the history of modern theatre to offer women playwriting opportunities (*Modern Drama* 5).<sup>27</sup> Grein wrote to Robins on April 12, 1893, as he was looking for a venue for both *Alan’s Wife* and Robins’s Ibsen series, “I am sweet on Terry’s Theatre.”<sup>28</sup> Terry’s theatre designed by Walter Emden for Edward Terry in 1897 was a new, modern theatre with special fire prevention features, including a sprinkler system. Gaslights were only used in case of a power outage.<sup>29</sup> Terry’s was known for its comedies and farces. Anyone expecting similar fare in *Alan’s Wife* would have been disappointed. Yet Grein wrote, “We have our own public . . . quite strong enough to fill the house.”<sup>30</sup> *Alan’s Wife* was the Independent Theatre’s thirteenth play, the first by women, on April 28, 1893 after the light-hearted curtain raiser, *Theory and Practice*, by Arthur Benham. According to Orme, half of the first-night audience responded with

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<sup>26</sup> E. R. to F. B. [Dec?] 1892.

<sup>27</sup> The second was Susan Glaspell and George Cook’s Provincetown Players (Provincetown, Massachusetts) that started in 1915. See Kelly “The Making of Modern Drama,” *Modern Drama by Women 1880s–1930s* (London: Routledge, 1996) 5.

<sup>28</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 13; Folder 76. “Grein.” Grein to E. R. April 12, 1893.

<sup>29</sup> See “Terry’s Theatre,” *Times* [London], Oct. 18, 1887.

<sup>30</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 13; Folder 76, “Grein.” Grein to E. R. April 12, 1893.

hostility (126). When Grein said he did not know the author but would have liked to “shake him by the hand,” one viewer shouted that he would like to “shake him by the throat” (Orme 126). This negative reception prompted Grein to defend both *Alan’s Wife* and the institution that produced it in his preface to the published version.

It is a great shame that in certain newspapers every play produced at the Independent Theatre is howled down and stigmatised as abominable. It is unworthy that men who rule large mouthpieces of public opinion should allow such prejudice, such absolute dishonesty, for the simple reason that the Independent Theatre endeavours to cut new paths. (vii)

A “variety of realisms” existed under the term New Drama (7). The other women’s plays at the Independent Theatre kept up the radical standard: *Leida* by “Josine Holland,” *A Question of Memory* by “Michael Field,” *Thyrza Fleming* by Dorothy Leighton, and *Salvé* by Mrs. Oscar Beringer. All except Bell’s parody, *Jerry-Builder Solness*, were serious plays that share common themes: independence, mental trauma, insanity, child and parent murder, and poverty. The audience must decide the ethics of the dramatic situations presented because the plays do not contain simple solutions. Joanne Gates interprets *Alan’s Wife* as a vehicle for its authors’ desires for “freedom of expression” (65). However this desire for a voice ironically expressed itself through anonymity. Five of the eight women playwrights used pen names or were anonymous when their plays were performed. They hid their identities in order to shock audiences without causing any future difficulties for themselves. “Anonymous publication provided women with effective cover for exploring a variety of conventionally ‘masculine’ social issues” (Easley 1).

*Leida*, translated from the Dutch by Teixeira de Mattos, was produced at the Comedy Theatre on June 2, 1893. “Josine Holland” was the pen name of Josine Adriana Simons-Mees (1863–1946). Orme characterized *Leida* as a “curious and interesting play . . . [that] dealt with the awakening to the facts of life by a young girl whose innocence was more a matter of dangerous ignorance” (127).<sup>31</sup> As in *Alan’s Wife*, a young woman is at the center of a shocking drama. *Leida* is a motherless girl

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<sup>31</sup> For more on Mees see Gabrielle H. Cody and Evert Sprinchorn, *The Columbia Encyclopedia of Modern Drama* (New York: Columbia UP, 2007) 955.



who is seduced by her uncle (“Drama: The Week” 744). She plans to run away with him until she discovers him kissing another girl. At this point her naiveté is stripped away. She determines to run away to fulfill her dream of life on the stage. Archer in *The New Review* admitted that though it was the “least important” production of the season,

Mr. Grein did right to produce the play. It is not the business of the Independent Theatre to supply us with mere masterpieces. It is enough that it should give us object lessons in dramatic art; and from this point of view *Leida* was distinctly interesting and valuable. It was a distinctly interesting character-study. (“Literature” 112)

The Independent Theatre seasoned its serious drama with lighter pieces, usually as curtain raisers. Bell offered a forty-minute parody of *The Master Builder* called *Jerry-builder Solness* under her real name. Solness the builder is afraid of heights and his buildings inevitably fall to pieces (Franc 122).<sup>32</sup> As well as Ibsen’s play, the title mimicked a comedy called *The Jerry Builder* that debuted in Southampton in 1892 (Wearing 214) and went on for a brief run at the Strand (Archer ‘*World*’ 1894 194). Bell’s parody starred James Welch as Solness and Violet Vanbrugh as Hilda Wangel at the St. George’s Hall on July 8, 1893. It was the curtain raiser for the drama *Dante* starring Robins’s acting coach Hermann Vezin in the title role (Orme 128).

Poets Katherine Bradley and Edith Cooper, whose pen name was Michael Field, wrote the next play by women, *A Question of Memory*.<sup>33</sup> It was to be the main production of the evening; however, as Francois Coppées’ one-act verse drama in French, *Le Pater*, also had a scene with gunfire, the poets insisted that their play come first on the program. The only one of their twenty-seven plays, all tragedies, to be produced, it played on October 27, 1893 at the Opera Comique (Sturgeon 115–16). The 1848 Hungarian peasant uprising is the setting for the story of a patriotic schoolmaster, Ferencz Reyni, who is subjected to mental torture when the Austrians

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<sup>32</sup> See also *Morning Post* July 12, 1893, 7.

<sup>33</sup> The authors offered Robins a part, but since she was playing Countess Zicka in *Diplomacy* with Hare’s company, she declined. See “*Sometimes Suppressed and Sometimes Embroidered*”: *The Life and Writing of Elizabeth Robins 1862–1952*, Diss., (U of Massachusetts, 1987) 110–11.

capture him. When he refuses to reveal the location of his comrades, the Austrians summon his mother and sister as hostages to force him to speak. It is his mother who begs him to keep silent. He obeys, but the Austrians drag the women offstage and execute them. This element provides a compelling reversal on the theme of child-murder. When his fiancée, Thekla, is captured and implores him to cooperate in order to save her life, Reyni suddenly suffers amnesia and cannot speak. The Austrians execute her too. This element conveys the theme of psychological trauma and its effect on memory. When Reyni is released and returns to his village, he learns that his friend Stanislaus has betrayed the location of the regiment in order to protect his lover, Elizabeth. The trauma of this betrayal causes Reyni's memory and speech to suddenly return. The violence of this play shocked many in the audience (Orme 136). Like *Alan's Wife*, this work dramatizes mental disorders at a time when the medical community did not have any means to treat them. Reyni's loss of memory is similar to the symptoms of what is now called post-traumatic stress. According to the Mayo Clinic, "memory problems, including not remembering important aspects of the traumatic event" are typical symptoms of this disorder ("Post-traumatic"). "Having trouble concentrating" is another symptom that Reyni experiences in *A Question of Memory*. This symptom is reminiscent of Jean Creyke in *Alan's Wife* who also suffers trauma when she lifts the cloth that shrouds the mangled corpse of her husband. According to Jill Ehnenn, both plays "blur the boundaries between performance and spectator . . . problematize notions of mental health and physical disability, and consider the limits of law and responsibility" (99).

The Independent Theatre produced only three plays in 1895. The most substantial in terms of length and plot was the four-act *Thyrza Fleming* by Ethel Mary Forsyth, Mrs. G. C. Ashton Johnson, whose pen name was Dorothy Leighton. Before she wrote *Thyrza Fleming*, Leighton published a novel, *Disillusion*, about a woman who uses her collaborator's name to hide her authorship of their successful play. According to Orme, Leighton did not reveal her identity as the author of *Thyrza* until

after its debut (143).<sup>34</sup> Seven performances of the play took place from January 4–10, 1895 at Terry's theatre. However, Leighton had taken on the role of managing director of the ITS before her play reached the stage.<sup>35</sup> Advertising for the play named Leighton as the author.<sup>36</sup> Not separating her public and private roles, as Robins and Bell successfully did by remaining anonymous, resulted in the critics and the public knowing who Leighton was before she admitted her authorship. Though amateurish writing was not an accusation thrown only at women playwrights, critics were particularly harsh to Leighton, whom they referred to as Mrs. G. C. Aston Johnson. *The Era* panned the play for having lines that were "unintentionally humorous."<sup>37</sup> *The Morning Post* reviewer asserted that though she was "a lady who has achieved some reputation as a novelist, [she] does not seem likely to shine very brilliantly as a playwright."<sup>38</sup> The "tone and tendency" of the play were not objectionable to this reviewer. Nor was the "'moral' of the piece. It was the "lack of form and finish," rather vague terms, that kept the author from producing a "workmanlike drama." These were typical responses to women playwrights who did not possess "masculine" minds required for playwriting (Powell *Women* 86). The reviewer of *The Pall Mall Gazette* (January 5, 1895) sarcastically opined in "The Theatre" that

Thyrza Fleming is a noble and wonderful woman who, marrying heedlessly and ignorantly, as your heroine is wont, subsequently runs away by herself quite morally for the sake of 'freedom.' For the sake of the plot, her flight is timed after the first birthday of her child, and for the sake of the plot, too, she leaves her little child behind her. It is evident that she is altogether an exceptional woman, and nobly prepared to sacrifice her own private feelings upon the altar of dramatic complications (3).

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<sup>34</sup> See reviews in "The Theatre," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan. 5, 1895, 3; "Terry's Theatre," *Morning Post*, Jan. 5, 1895, 3; and "Thyrza Fleming" *Era*, January 12, 1895, 11.

<sup>35</sup> See "The Independent Theatre, Limited," *Pall Mall Gazette*, October 26, 1894, 8.

<sup>36</sup> See "Thyrza Fleming," *Morning Post* November 22, 1894, 6, and "Theatrical Mems," *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, Jan. 1, 1895: 3.

<sup>37</sup> See "Thyrza Fleming," *Era*, January 12, 1895, 11.

<sup>38</sup> *Morning Post*, January 5, 1895, 3.

These responses reveal why anonymity was a sensible choice for women who wrote radical plays.

After Thyrsa leaves her difficult husband, she is about to commit suicide when she meets a sympathetic man who dissuades her. She befriends this man, Colonel Rivers, who, years later, marries a much-younger woman who turns out to be Thyrsa's daughter. This presents another aspect of the sexual double standard, an issue that Victorians often declined to discuss. Unconventional relationships are something that modern talk shows are made of. So we see the generation gap between the Victorians and ourselves through this play and our reactions to it. Leighton was hampered in her explanation of the nature of the past relationship of Thyrsa to her new son-in-law. The audience must decide: were they lovers or merely platonic friends? Does it matter? Are there any victims when such relationships occur? *The Pall Mall Gazette* reviewer determined that Thyrsa had definitely been the Colonel's mistress prior to his marriage. The reviewer for *The Times* of January 5, 1895 believed otherwise: the "husband had maintained platonic relations of an obscure kind [with Thyrsa]. Husband and wife are then reconciled. There is thus no problem in the play which can be considered worth solving—no story, indeed worth telling."<sup>39</sup> Yet, Sally Ledger considers, "This is one of the most radical of the New Woman plays of the period in its exploration of the possibility of a new kind of relationship between man and woman, based on friendship and trust as well as sexual love" ("New" 56). She believes that *Thyrza Fleming*

Is in many respects the most Ibsenite of all the female-authored New Woman plays of the period: its detailed stage description of a bourgeois milieu; its sequence of intensely personal dialogues between two people in a domestic setting; its close scrutiny of the nature of relationships—including sexual relations—between men and women; and its dissection of the meanings of motherhood—all these closely ally it to the project of Ibsen's middle-period drama. ("New" 57)

Though there is a strong message in this play that it is women who will suffer, in the end Leighton changed the expected outcome (the suicide of the "fallen" woman) by

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<sup>39</sup> "The Independent Theatre," *Times*, January 5, 1895, 6.

feminizing it. Just as a woman, like Thyrza, can change her life by demanding personal freedom, so too can a woman, like Thyrza's daughter, save another woman. Mrs. Linde does this for Nora in *A Doll's House*, but this time it is mother and daughter who are reconciled, making Thyrza's suicide unnecessary. Though at first Thyrza rejects family structures, it is through them that she is saved. This ending was certainly part of the play's radical approach by making women friends instead of rivals for men's attentions, thus affirming multi-generational female solidarity.

Shaw believed in Ibsen's ideas, but criticized women's plays that used them. Despite being a highly charged drama, he complained that *Thyrza Fleming* lacked "feeling" (Powell "New Women" 86). Earlier he had criticized *Alan's Wife* and Achurch's *Mrs. Daintree's Daughter* for having too much feeling. As he often did, Shaw practically rewrote Leighton's play in his article in *The Saturday Review*.<sup>40</sup> Shaw's "belittling women's attempts to become playwrights, denying they had written 'real' plays at all, contributed to the subjection of women in the theatre even while he proclaimed himself their ally in the 'battle between the sexes for control of the London stage'" (Powell "New Women" 87).

*Salvé*, by Aimee Beringer, was given on March 15 at the Opera Comique (Orme 144–45).<sup>41</sup> This "dramatic fragment," according to *The Era* of March 23, 1895, is a tragedy about a desperately poor older couple facing eviction (8). While the wife, Deborah, played by Mrs. Theodore Wright, has gone to beg the landlord for mercy, a heavily bearded stranger comes to the house. The husband, Desmond, played by William Haviland, entertains the man he soon recognizes as their long-lost son Rex, played by Matthew Brodie. Rex has returned from Australia where he made his fortune. The two men agree to surprise Deborah by keeping the son's identity secret. When Deborah returns, the stranger lays his gold on the table and begins to tell the story of his adventures. In despair, the mother suddenly takes up a bread knife and thrusts it into the back of the stranger, not realizing that he is her son. When her husband explains, Deborah completely loses her faculties, suddenly taking her dead

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<sup>40</sup> Reprinted in *Our Theatres in the Nineties*, vol. 1.

<sup>41</sup> The censor refused to license William Heinemann's play *The First Step*, so *Salvé* took its place on the bill.

son in her arms as if he were a baby who is only sleeping. Again we see a form of child-murder, the result of psychological trauma due to poverty, in a woman's play that was meant to shock the audience. Archer lamented in *The Theatrical 'World' of 1895*:

Knowing what was to be the catastrophe, I kept on thinking at every speech, 'Now surely we are going to have some preparation for what is coming!' But no; not a word . . . . The mildest, sweetest, sanest of women suddenly took up the bread-knife at her own table and stuck it into her unoffending guest—and that was all! There is no art in this. (95–96)

In "The Independent Theatre Repents," Shaw acknowledged the talent of Mrs. Theodore Wright as the mother. She "had no difficulty in touching and harrowing the audience to the necessary degree" (71). Though he thought the murder scene "reduced the play to absurdity," he reported, "The audience did not mind the breadknife at all, and made Mrs. Wright an ovation." Nevertheless, Shaw determined that not even the acting could save *Salvé*. The reviewer for *The Era* for March 23, 1895 considered the piece "powerful and well-written, though [an] exceedingly painful little play, and Mrs. Oscar Beringer was called three times before the curtain. The piece had the advantage of being excellently acted" (8). *Salvé* shares some of the same themes with *Alan's Wife*, *A Question of Memory*, and *Thyrza Fleming*, plays that question what constitutes sanity in relation to an individual's survival and society's expectations of behavior. Though being a "sane" woman in society largely means being nurturing, it is the women authors who confront gendering through female characters that reject stereotypes. *Salvé* also shares themes of poverty with *Alan's Wife* and *A Question of Memory*. These plays dramatize real situations that leave the audience with unanswered questions.

#### *The End of the Independent Theatre*

Grein wrote to Robins on October 26, 1895:

I now will tell you something before everyone else knows it, and I ask you to render me a service. To-day, Miss Robins, I have to give up my child—I have to sacrifice it—like *Alan's Wife* sacrificed her baby—My business makes it incumbent upon me to resign my Directorship of the

Independent Theatre, and Mr. Charrington will take my place.<sup>42</sup>

Now my last act as Director was to settle the programme for the next season, which will be wanted with different means to do little and do it well.

Though Grein named Dorothy Leighton and Charles Charrington as the new co-directors, the ITS did not produce any plays in 1896. The Charringtons were gifted actors, but drug abuse made them unreliable. When Charrington booked the Theatre Royal in Brighton for revivals of *A Doll's House* and *Hedda Gabler* in October 1892 with Robins and Archer as co-producers, they were too incapacitated to act, “whimpering and slurring their lines,” and “once or twice [they felt] their way about the stage by the furniture” (Whitebrook 141).<sup>43</sup> When the Independent Theatre flagged, Shaw suggested to R. Golding Bright that it was Robins’s intention to fill the breach “as if [the Independent Theatre] did not exist” by producing *Little Eyolf* and *Mariana*.<sup>44</sup> Since the ITS did not produce any plays, it did not exist that year. The ITS managed reprises of *A Doll's House* (starring Achurch without Charrington), *The Wild Duck*, and *Antony and Cleopatra* in the spring of 1897, but after the production of Brieux’s *Blanchette* on December 8, 1898, the Independent Theatre folded (Orme 147–48).

The ITS produced thirty-two plays in all.<sup>45</sup> Six of these were written or co-written by seven different women, most of whom were English. When Grein

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<sup>42</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 13; Folder 76. “Grein.” See Grein’s announcement in letters to the editor of *Standard*, Oct. 28, 1895, 6, and *The Morning Post*, Oct. 28, 1895, 3.

<sup>43</sup> In her Oct 7, 1892 letter to Bell, sent from Brighton, Robins related that Charrington “had had nerralgia [neuralgia] + had taken an overdose of morphia + was in a deplorable state + [Achurch’s] anxiety about him was pitiful. I quite forgot any sense of irritation I may have been guilty of harbouring” (*WH* “Notes and Fragments,” n pag).

<sup>44</sup> With typical swagger, Shaw claimed credit for suggesting *Mariana* to Robins. See Shaw to Bright, Oct 23, 1896, *Collected Letters*, vol. 1, 684–85. According to Gates, Bell had proposed the play the previous August. See “*Sometimes*” 156.

<sup>45</sup> See “The Theatres,” *Daily News*, May 3, 1897, 9 that slates the performance of *Antony and Cleopatra* for the Princess’s. Archer reports in ‘*World*

announced his retirement in the papers,<sup>46</sup> he reminded the public that the Independent Theatre had “been instrumental in bringing to the front such welcome new playwrights as Mr. George Bernard Shaw, Mr. George Moore, 'Michael Field,' and the author of 'Alan's Wife'" (3). Of the many playwrights he could have named, he mentioned only these six native playwrights, and four of them were co-writing women. At this time Grein still did not know who authored *Alan's Wife*.

### *Breaking into Theatre—Again*

Robins's vision of a community of artists began with the Joint Management:

Actors were coming to realize that 'Ibsen made reputations.' Not Ibsen alone, we were sure. We would gather actors about us who would often be playing bigger parts than our own. We would attract the more intelligent player by a variety of dramatic opportunity that no theatre dependent on the long run could offer. We felt sure we were not the only acting folk who found an intensity of happiness in *working together* at interesting stuff. Others would be glad to take salaries as modest as our own for joy of the new work and the glory of the new aim. (*TF* 34–35)

After the Joint Management ended, the Independent Theatre became part of Robins's vision of a community of artists. This vision continued after the Independent Theatre closed when she formed the New Century Theatre with William Archer, Alfred Sutro and H. W. Massingham in 1896. Angela John calls it “a brave attempt to provide challenging, artistic, non-commercial European drama for the British intelligentsia” (John 69).<sup>47</sup> Because the New Century lasted only two years, the Stage Society was more successful in taking on the ethos and membership of the Independent Theatre, running from 1899 to 1939 (Orme 149). However, it was not successful at including women playwrights (Kelly “Making” 5).<sup>48</sup> Kelly reveals, “Three, or at most four, of the

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1897 that the ITS produced five matinées of the play at the Olympic beginning on May 24 (398). Orme omits this production.

<sup>46</sup> See *Standard*, Oct. 28, 1895, 6, and *The Morning Post*, Oct. 28, 1895, 3.

<sup>47</sup> *John Gabriel Borkman* was the first play produced by the New Century Theatre in May 1897. See Postlewait *Prophet* 128 and John 69.

<sup>48</sup> The ITS was the model for the Vedrenne-Barker management that staged five Shaw plays in one season, 1904–05, at the Royal Court Theatre. See Orme



65 distinct playwrights produced . . . [by the Stage Society] from 1899 to 1914 were women—a meager 4.6 percent.” Instead of including more native women during its 15-year existence, the Stage Society translated and staged the works of 23 continental male playwrights. The golden of age of inclusion of women writers, short and inadequate as it had been, was over.

Robins and Bell waited nearly thirty years to reveal their secret authorship to Grein (Orme 126). They still wait to be consistently acknowledged. Peter Raby, in his essay “Theatre of the 1890s: Breaking Down Barriers,” fails to mention *Alan’s Wife* in his list of influential plays. He asserts that, except for Shaw’s *Widower’s Houses*, “Grein’s program was unsuccessful, and the theatre’s main achievement was in staging Ibsen and in hosting . . . [the] Theatre de L’Oeuvre” (185). He forgets to mention that women, like Robins and Bell, had helped to push the New Drama forward. Omission of such details perpetuates the exclusion of women from theatre history.

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149, and Archer “New Drama,” 12. For details of Shaw’s career with the Stage Society see Tracy Davis, *George Bernard Shaw and the Socialist Theatre* (Westport, CT: Greenwood, 1994).

## Chapter 5

### Silent Protests: The “Backdrops” and Meanings of *Alan’s Wife*

Frequently, the London stage could not escape the accusation that if a play was a comedy it ended in marriage; if it was a tragedy it ended in death. Suicide became a popular way to end a tragedy, particularly if the protagonist was female. In the case of *Alan’s Wife*, the happy marriage of a young working-class couple, Jean and Alan Creyke, is at the beginning. Alan’s death is in the middle (the result of an industrial accident) followed by the birth and ensuing death of their deformed child, also named Alan. The ending is Jean’s incarceration for the murder of the baby. Jean’s refusal to speak in her own defense brings her innocence as well as her sanity into question. Ultimately, her silence results in her execution—a society-sanctioned form of suicide. Jean’s silence, as well as the lack of a court scene, sets the viewer as the interpreter of meaning—at the play’s two performances, and now. So, how did critics first interpret this complex and provocative play? How can we interpret it? The Bell/Robins correspondence reveals little about what the play meant to them, why they wrote it, or how they wished it to be interpreted. David Mayer states that “Because most of the melodramas that have attracted critical scrutiny are at least a century old, we have to . . . recognize and to foreground the sources of stress and anxiety which energize the play” (146). I provide more details of these “stresses and anxieties” that I call “backdrops,” the historical and sociopolitical, legal and medical, as well as theatrical and literary surroundings that contributed to the creation of the work and the reactions to it.<sup>1</sup> These details can inform our interpretations of the play. For modern readers may suffer from a generation gap if they interpret the play as a simple eugenic melodrama because of Jean’s mildly stated attraction to her husband. There is much more to this three-scene play than eugenic ideas in a simple plot.

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<sup>1</sup> While some historians may prefer the word “foreground,” I see the words foreground, background, or backdrops as essentially similar ways of expressing the idea of the milieu or atmosphere that Victorians knew from living within their culture that they likely took for granted, but that we must learn in order to better understand them and their culture. We cannot know everything about them, but we can learn some things that help us experience their works more potently.

As we consider *Alan's Wife*, we are like the original reading audience because we cannot experience it live and collectively as Robins performed it. Unlike *Hedda Gabler*, there are no extant prompt copies with revealing marginalia with which to revisit Robins and Bell's intentions. Therefore, this chapter takes the play as a sociopolitical and literary text. I use the published version that was also the one live audiences saw.<sup>2</sup> Though I use reviews to see how the play was received,<sup>3</sup> a review is only one person's opinion that stands for many other silent viewers. *Alan's Wife* did provoke a good deal of journalistic interest, but not compared to the hundreds that *Ghosts* elicited. It was also less known because the original story was by a previously unknown author, Elin Ameen, who did not have the reputation of Ibsen, and its adapters, Robins and Bell, were anonymous.

According to Josephine McDonagh, child murder is ubiquitous both across the culture and across time as seen in divergent types of literature. "Works of imaginative literature," are especially effective channels for "motifs and preoccupations of the time" (11). By comparing different kinds of texts from different time periods, it is possible to see ways in which the child-murder motif is carried throughout the culture and to see "the interrelationships that exist between divergent kinds of knowledge and forms of expression." I take up this means of looking at infanticide through the novel and the drama in order to better see the "stresses and anxieties" that preoccupied Victorian culture. However, "stresses and anxieties" in literature and drama do not reveal their underlying legal, medical, and sociopolitical origins and results. I bring forward these details in order to inform modern interpretations of *Alan's Wife* with a New Historicist approach. McDonagh believes that the child murder trope opens "the possibility of

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<sup>2</sup> See Florence Bell and Elizabeth Robins, *Alan's Wife: A Dramatic Study in Three Scenes* (London: Henry, 1893).

<sup>3</sup> Reviews discussed are representative: "Terry's Theatre," *The Morning Post* (London, May 1, 1893) 3; "New Plays," *The Graphic* (London, May 6, 1893) 499; "Alan's Wife," *The Theatre: A Monthly Review of Drama, Music and the Fine Arts*, (June 1893) 334–35; "Independent Theatre," *Times* (Monday, May 1, 1893) 4; "'Alan's Wife' at the Independent Theatre," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Apr. 29, 1893, 3; and "Public Amusements: Terry's Theatre," *Lloyd's Weekly Newspaper* (London, April 30, 1893) 7. I also discuss the dispute between Walkley and Archer in *The Speaker*, May 6, 13, 20 and 27<sup>th</sup>. Like many ITS plays, *Alan's Wife* was only given twice (Friday evening, April 28, and Tuesday afternoon, May 2, 1893).

counter histories that question the authority of conventional, progressive accounts” (12). *Alan’s Wife* questions Victorian values, but I believe that it also challenges modern ones too as we compare and contrast ourselves to the Victorians.

Bell saw how the poor were treated in England but, as a politically conservative woman, she was not likely thinking of socialism or Marxism when she wrote *Alan’s Wife*. Robins and Bell obviously experienced how women were treated, but they were not likely thinking of feminism when they wrote the play. Though Robins saw how her mother was treated in the United States, she could not have understood the biochemistry of postpartum depression. The authors probably did not know how the law was applied to real women found guilty of infanticide in England. Yet the play has elements of all of these influences that I wish to return to the discussion as most previous scholars have been preoccupied by the issue of eugenics. The play contains such strong emotive power that it shows Robins and Bell’s outrage as much as it shows their creative autonomy. It can, from a sociopolitical and historical view, be interpreted as a protest play containing the seeds of the women’s future social and political work. I address these elements of the play using Marxist and feminist perspectives as well as general modern medical knowledge.

From a literary perspective, I compare the play to the novel *Adam Bede* by George Eliot to show how the fallen woman found guilty of infanticide evolved through time in the two forms of literature. Hetty Sorrel is the mid-century, passive victim of circumstances who waits to be rescued. Jean Creyke is the end-of-century, dynamic martyr for the cause of the poor and infirm who uses powerlessness as a means to assert power. I then trace how this play took on a different political life in the twentieth century. I conclude by discussing the results of Bell and Robins’s choice to remain anonymous, as it relates to theatre history. But first, I explain how the play came to be in order to show how Robins and Bell used collaboration to create the play and anonymity to assert their voices.

### *Writing Alan’s Wife*

In his introduction to the printed play, Archer reports that in April 1891, shortly before Robins produced *Hedda Gabler*, she found the story *Befriad (Set Free)* by Elin Ameen in the Swedish magazine *Ur Dagens Krönika (Alan’s Wife xi)*. Archer states that after Robins showed the story to him he wrote a scenario and suggested

adaptors. Then, he says, he forgot about it until he “suddenly ‘saw’ it in the form of a play” (xi). Instead of adapting the story with Archer, Robins took it to Bell to write their three-scene play together. Despite his limited part, Archer claimed, “I am in great measure responsible for the existence of the play (ix).” Modern readers may see this as plagiarism on the part of Archer and passivity on the part of Robins and Bell. However, John suspects that Archer was trying to protect the authors by deflecting some negative criticism he anticipated to the written form; there had been negative criticism of the play in performance (89). One detail that supports this view is the fact that Archer rarely acknowledged his work behind the scenes in order to maintain that his criticism was unbiased. Postlewait notes that he was so successful at this ruse that contemporaries and historians alike considered him an outsider to the intricacies of production (*Prophet* xviii, 12). Archer’s intrigues are an example of what Regenia Gagnier calls “the pragmatics of self-representation” (*Subjectivities* 4). “Instead of evaluating the truth of a statement, pragmatism considers what it does. Thus pragmatism seeks to locate the purpose an autobiographical statement serves in the life and circumstances of its author and readers.” Since Archer also liked to hide his involvement in dramaturgy, he understood the authors’ desires to protect their privacy and their writing careers.<sup>4</sup> Bell’s letter to Robins reveals that Archer discussed the play with them as it was written; Bell took Archer’s suggestion for “amplifications,”<sup>5</sup> whatever they were. The women used Archer and anonymity as protections while doing just as they pleased by producing the play. However, secrets confuse the details of the play’s creation.

According to Archer, Robins “read the story in a German translation, and had been impressed by it, though not as a subject for theatrical treatment” (*Alan’s Wife* xi). Yet Robins intended the story for the stage from the beginning (John 89). *Ur Dagens Krönika* was a Swedish, not a German publication. It would have been easier for Robins to read *Befriad* in German; she had studied German from her youth. It was

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<sup>4</sup> As Postlewait explains in *Prophet of the New Drama*, Archer’s choice to remain anonymous similarly caused his contribution to the New Drama to be less understood and acknowledged.

<sup>5</sup> This letter, dated November 9, 1892, is from Series V; Subseries A.

easier still for her to read the scenario in the *Review of Reviews*, edited by her friend W. T. Stead, in the regular feature “The Scandinavian Magazines”:

The heroine—Emma Ohlsson—is a schoolmaster’s daughter, a handsome, well-educated, singularly gifted girl who, despite [more well-off] admirers falls in love with a young labourer and marries him. He [Hans] is the strongest man she has ever seen . . . yet so gentle, so true. . . . [She waits for him] at the gate of their simple cottage [after work]. . . . Up the roadway come four men with a bier, on which lies *something* covered with canvas. A second later, and she knows . . . the ‘something’ is her healthy, spirited young workman—all his life crushed out. . . . She . . . falls in a dead faint to the ground. Seven months later her child is born. She had looked forward to its birth with reviving hope. Of course it is to be a boy—like Hans—and it is to be a workman too, like him. She plans out its life. She sees this boy smile and laugh, and grow big and strong. . . . So the time flits on and the day comes. But alas for the dreams! It is a boy—it is like Hans—it is beautiful. But crippled, miserable, helpless for life! One arm, no legs. . . . Pathetic . . . and terrible, are the unhappy mother’s dreams now of the future. While he is a child he has her arm to protect him. . . . But *after!* . . . If God still lives and sees . . . why, then, does He not take it—release the soul from its maddening prison . . . ? She . . . hears his reproachful cry: ‘Mother! Why did you *let* me live?’ We see her lay the sleeping child in his cradle; we see her gaze upon him with tearful tenderness. . . . *His* boy must be baptised, must meet her Hans in heaven—*she* will never meet him now unless—unless God is merciful, and *this* does not look like it. Then she takes her Bible and, full of the awful solemnity of her self-appointed mission, opens it [and] . . . fetches a bowl of water and—the child. ‘I baptise thee Hans, in the name of the Father, the Son, and the Holy Ghost!’ She sprinkles a few drops over his head. ‘Thou hast no godfather, no godmother, little Hans, and but one gift can I give thee—release from life!’ She kisses him tenderly, breathes softly “Our Father who art in heaven,” lays him gently back in his cradle, takes the pillow and presses it over his face. . . . A few moments, and all is over. . . . Later we see her in the convict cell, pining away her life, with no hope in this world, and—since the priest has told her she must repent and she *cannot*—none in the next. ‘But I released my boy!’<sup>6</sup>

When they could not meet in person, Robins and Bell wrote to one another about their work. They must have saved *Alan’s Wife* for face-to-face talks as there is nothing in their letters about their reasons for writing it. However, the correspondence indicates that, while Robins helped write it and starred in it, Bell was the primary

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<sup>6</sup> See W. T. Stead, ed., “The Scandinavian Magazines,” (*Review of Reviews* Feb. 1891) 194. Also see Katherine Kelly “*Alan’s Wife*: Mother Love and Theatrical Sociability in London of the 1890s” (*Modernism/Modernity* 11.3, 2004) 539–560.

author. On Nov. 9, [1892], the morning after seeing Robins in London, Bell updated her on the status of the adaptation from her home in Redcar.

It's about 9:15 a.m. . . . I've ordered the dinner, I've set my household and my infants going, I've hung a label with 'engaged' on the library door, and now I'm going at Befriad, and won't say another word to you till it's Done.

11.15. Ah ha! It is done! copied, that is to say—for the real doing was accomplished in the train yesterday. I am very very very anxious to know how you like the changes I've made. *I* feel as if the end of the last act were right now. I don't know if you will. in fact I shd feel inclined to make it even shorter than it is, by leaving out the words I have enclosed in square brackets. What do you think? I have made the amplifications Mr. A. suggested in the first act. . . . Now the name. let me implore you to call it *Set Free*. why not? it is simple, it tells nothing, it isn't a name with a purpose, and the last sentence of the play ends w. it. do *do* say you like it.

And I've called the man Hugh Akroyd. . . wh. is a typical Yorkshire name, and seems to me exactly the one we want.<sup>7</sup> I'm quite sure the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> act will want cutting when it comes to the point. but that can always be done. . . . There—so much for our dear Befriad.<sup>8</sup>

On November 11, 1892, Robins responded, “I don't see any objection to 'Set Free' for a title but it doesn't *fire* me. Do *you* not rather like 'A Wreckling' . . . ?” Though Mrs. Holroyd (Jean's mother) refers to the baby as “a poor wreckling,” that title would have focused more attention on the child. The title *Set Free* draws attention to Jean's intentions for her child and for herself, but it still focuses more attention on the baby. The title *Alan's Wife* emphasizes Jean's wifeness rather than her motherhood, but also—by the middle of the play—her widowhood, making it more pathetic that she is left alone. This shifts audience sympathy from the child to Jean. Bell and Robins continued their collaboration over the autumn and early winter of 1892, and finished

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<sup>7</sup> Robins agreed that the name Hugh gave the husband a certain power. However it could have been associated with Hugh Bell, so they changed it to Alan.

<sup>8</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries B; Box 8; Folder 1. See also Gates 66; John 90.

the play at the end of December.<sup>9</sup> Grein formally accepted the play under the title *Set Free* on Dec. 31, 1892.<sup>10</sup> Thus, the final title came quite late in the writing process.

“Like much of the New Drama, [*Alan’s Wife*] fed into the controversy surrounding realism in its relation to art and the presentation of ethical dilemmas” (Gates 65). Such dilemmas in Ibsen’s works are set within the confines of the middle class household. Bell and Robins’s dilemmas are portrayed in a working class cottage. Their heroine, though poor, is not the typical exploited melodrama female. Jean Creyke is well educated for a woman of her class (*AW* 8). Playful, exuberant, and determined to have her own way (8–9), Jean shows how a stereotypically female means of relating—silence—can be a means of self-assertion. Also unlike a typical melodrama heroine, Jean controls her negative emotions, or at least remains detached, depending upon how the viewer interprets her mental state. An intelligent, cerebral heroine in the form of a working-class woman was a radical choice. Newey asserts:

In looking at domestic melodrama we can see how the positioning of the feeling individual of humble circumstances at the centre of the plot offers a politically charged challenge to Aristotelian dramaturgy, which maintained that only high-born heroes could elicit sympathy. To assert that the humbly born could equally be objects of audience sympathy was to challenge the abjection and orientalizing of the poor and the working classes so prevalent in public discourse in the nineteenth century. (“Theatre” 129)

Through her stage roles Robins showed that even “womanly women,” like Mrs. Linde in *A Doll’s House*, want independence and freedom, and they might aspire to respect and honesty in their relationships with men, whether they were friends, fathers, or husbands. Through Hedda Gabler, Robins illustrated that not all women are naturally maternal, domestic, or nurturing. Through Jean Creyke, Robins embodied the reality that mothering instincts do not always preserve life; a loving mother might even take life if that is the only way to end her child’s suffering. Robins admitted in *Both Sides* that when she came to England, even before she discovered Ibsen, she wanted to “shake people out of their smugness” (70). Yet whom did Robin’s intend to

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<sup>9</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries A; Box 1; Folder 1. E. R. to F. B. Dec. 20, 1892.

<sup>10</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Folder 76. Grein to E. R. Dec. 31, 1892.



“shake”? Since she initially took the play to Tree, it seems she preferred to shake up the Haymarket, the home of “comedy of the higher kind” (Pascoe *London* 135). Her next option was the Independent Theatre because, as she said of Grein, “In the early lean days, that indomitable person . . . [had] unblushing hopes of anybody who might bring possible grist to the Independent mill” (*WH* Ch. 7, p. 4). Grein was so moved when Robins read the play to him that he instantly promised, “We shall do that play . . . as soon as we can. It is a beautiful tragedy” (Orme 124). Independent Theatre members were largely middle class frequenters of “legitimate” theatre familiar with happy endings on the stage, but they could expect controversy at Grein’s theatre. *Alan’s Wife*, with its protagonist going off to be executed, was startlingly distinct even from villain-punishing melodramas because Jean is both victim and perpetrator.

#### *Alan’s Wife Through Time: Medical Issues and Eugenics*

Angelique Richardson reveals in *Love and Eugenics in the Late Nineteenth Century* that

Some of the most sustained expressions of eugenic ideas were to be found in fiction and, in particular, in a body of late nineteenth-century fiction by women. . . . However, the story of their role in the development of eugenic ideas remains obscured. . . . [partly] due to a reluctance among literary historians to acknowledge the role played by some middle-class women in the early history of eugenic thought. Acknowledging the intimate relations between eugenics and some strands of early feminism has proved uncomfortable. (Prologue)

Acceptance of eugenic ideas could be considered extremely disgraceful to modern readers. This generation gap is partly due to the relative prosperity and health enjoyed by later generations. It is also to a large degree the result of modern readers’ projecting negative reactions backwards onto the Victorians who could not have foreseen to what ends fascists would take eugenics and social Darwinism. While *Alan’s Wife* has been interpreted as a eugenic play,<sup>11</sup> it is not an emphatic promotion of eugenics and even has anti-eugenic elements. Though Jean expresses appreciation for her husband’s strength, her respect for Alan and her hopes for their

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<sup>11</sup> See Rebecca S. Cameron, “Ibsen and British Women’s Drama,” *Ibsen Studies* 4.1, (2004): 92–102. See also Josephine McDonough, *Child Murder and British Culture, 1720–1900* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2003) 179.

child have little to do with “purifying” the English race. *Alan’s Wife* disproves selective breeding because, though the parents are young and healthy, their child is born deformed. Selective breeding is therefore an unreliable means of “purifying” the race. The element that most closely espouses eugenics is the euthanizing of the baby, but Jean kills her child out of love because she has no way to properly care for him due to her poverty. Robins and Bell used drama to expose the plight of poor women just as they later did with fiction and social commentary.<sup>12</sup> Bell saw the poor of Middlesbrough up close and Robins had experienced poverty herself.<sup>13</sup> Robins witnessed mental illness in her mother, so she could sympathize with a character like Jean Creyke. Also like Jean, Robins lost her husband. The realism of *Alan’s Wife* is effective across time, but the play would have been even more effective in the nineteenth century because of limitations in medicine. Victorians, regardless of class, could face suffering beyond any help of relief except death, so they were likely more understanding than a modern audience would be of Jean’s desire to euthanize her child. Jean’s position is intolerable because she cannot afford help of any kind, being socially, economically, and politically powerless, but even the best Victorian medicine could do little to help baby Alan. *Alan’s Wife* emphasizes how poverty and ignorance separate poor women (Jean and her mother) from higher-class women (including those in the audience) into their own subclass.

Eugenics was largely a middle class movement intended to improve living conditions and to maintain Britain’s position as a world power “through the judicious control of human reproduction, and the numerical increase of the middle class” (3). These were considered positive goals at the time that were within the nurturing spheres of women. However, Jean makes it clear that she is not middleclass and does not wish to associate with upper class people who might think they are her “betters” (*AW* 8). Though there were common themes within all eugenic movements,

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<sup>12</sup> Robins illustrates the plight of the maid of all work in “A Lucky Sixpence.” See *Below the Salt* (London: Heinemann, 1896). Bell discusses society’s harsher demands on poor women in “Women at the Works—and Elsewhere.” See *Landmarks* (London: Earnest, 1929).

<sup>13</sup> Robins explains how her poverty depressed her. See *WH* Ch. 42, p. 8.

Eugenics was deeply inflected by different national concerns, so that while in Germany it centred on issues of mental health and in the United States it was a discourse on race, in Britain it was primarily a discourse on class. It was here part of the debates on class and poverty that intensified with the increasing unrest of the urban poor in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. (A. Richardson *Love Prologue*)

“Eugenics shifted the meaning of marriage from a spiritual union to a reproductive one” (Sharon Marcus 6) since it was believed that selective fertility could ensure national health. The eugenics movement was the embodiment of partner and reproductive choice that relied on women’s thought, knowledge, preference, and autonomy. Its empowerment of women emphasized their reproductive function, necessarily thrusting responsibility for the welfare of the nation upon women who, nonetheless, were not endowed by their society with the rights, education, or knowledge necessary to shoulder such responsibility. Indeed, married women did not have legal rights over their own bodies; marriage made wife and husband “one person under the law. . . . [Even] forced sexual intercourse was legal” (Bourke 421). Marital rape was not criminalized in England until 1991 (“Rape”). Jean is not shy about expressing admiration for her husband, even to her mother, but this does not fit the eugenic model.

Like many viewers who were touched by the play, Archer admired its realism and character-driven plot. Yet he does not mention eugenics in his introduction, beyond an admission of Jean’s “worship of physical strength and beauty, her intolerance of all that is sickly and stunted” (xiv). Nor did A. B. Walkley or J. T. Grein mention eugenics in their reviews. Grein blamed Jean’s shock at seeing Alan’s mangled corpse when she was pregnant as the cause of the baby’s deformity (*Alan’s Wife* vii). In their reviews of May 6, 1893, A. B. Walkley (*The Speaker*) and William Moy Thomas (*The Graphic*) also referred to shock as the possible cause. If shock could cause deformity then that deformity was an accident as senseless as the father’s. However, this intention is not stated in the play. Both the April 29 reviewer for *The Pall Mall Gazette* and the May 1 reviewer for *The Morning Post* noted Jean’s admiration of Alan’s strength, but neither referred to eugenics. In fact, none of the noted reviewers used the word or anything approaching it, though Darwinian ideas

were sufficiently part of the culture. *The Pall Mall Gazette* reviewer repeated the word “lusty” when describing Alan, though Alan does not appear alive on stage.<sup>14</sup> The only thing remotely “lusty” is Jean’s admiration speech in the first scene that modern readers, used to ubiquitous sexual content, would consider very short and quite bland: “I want a husband who is brave and strong, a man who is my master as well as other folks’; who loves the hills and the heather, and loves to feel the strong wind blowing in his face and the blood rushing through his veins! Ah! to be happy—to be alive!”<sup>15</sup> (9). This attitude makes her seem like a New Woman. However, Jean’s espousal of traditional family hierarchy counterbalances this, enabling Jean to be seen as a traditional, loving wife—a non-threatening, non-political female. This would have allowed a nineteenth-century audience some ease in the notion of domesticity that Jean embodies as she tidies the cottage, cooks her husband’s meal, and waits for his return from work.

According to Katherine Kelly,

Jean ingeniously . . . appeal[s] both to middle-class Londoners’ curiosity about the northern, laboring-class other, and simultaneously representing that other in terms familiar to Independent Theatre audiences acquainted with the New Woman character and anticipating her politicized sister in the suffragette (“Alan’s” 545).

Though she is similar to the New Woman in her education and her desire for autonomy, the 1893 audiences of *Alan’s Wife* could not have anticipated the suffragette, especially in her radical militancy.<sup>16</sup> This is another example of ascribing future knowledge to people in the past. Jean married for love but exerts her desire for free will beyond mate selection in her reaction to unchangeable circumstances: when Alan is killed, when she must face poverty alone, and when their son is born handicapped. Despite realities that she cannot change, Jean claims control over

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<sup>14</sup> See “‘Alan’s Wife’ at the Independent Theatre,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, April 29, 1893, 3.

<sup>15</sup> Bell quotes from one of Robins’s letters: “to be happy—to be joyous—to be alive!” See Bell to Robins Nov. 13 [1892?].

<sup>16</sup> See Estelle Sylvia Pankhurst, *The Suffragette: The History of the Suffrage Movement, 1905–1910* (Boston: Woman’s Journal, 1911) especially Chapter 2, “The Beginnings of the Militant Tactics.”

things she can change. Rather than see her child suffer, she shows her love by euthanizing him.<sup>17</sup> Rather than excuse herself to lessen her sentence, she refuses to speak in order to ensure her own death. Through this means of suicide, she seeks to reunite her family in heaven, where she imagines them waiting for her, “straight and fair and happy” (*Alan’s Wife* 48).

In scene i, Jean’s mother, Mrs. Holroyd, laments that Jean did not marry a scholar, like the minister Jaime Warren. Jean responds, “We can’t all marry scholars, mother dear—some of us prefer marrying men instead” (*Alan’s Wife* 7). This line refers to Jean’s father who was the schoolmaster. Jean, despite “knowing as much as any lady” due to “all the book-learning she got from her poor father” does not consider his profession very masculine (3). Despite Warren’s higher social status, shown by his dining with the gentry at “the big house,” Jean is not attracted to him because he is physically weak (8). He could never keep up with her when they raced over the moors together as children. “I like Jaime, and have done ever since we were boy and girl together; but it’s a far cry to think of taking him for my master!” It is noteworthy that Robins wrote in her diary, “No man is my master,” yet she created a strong woman character that desires to be mastered by her husband and also exults in others being mastered by him, but Alan is not rough or unfeeling. When Jean’s mother expresses admiration for Jaime Warren’s “tender heart” for children, Jean responds

I like to watch Alan with a child—the way he looks at it and the way he speaks to it! Do you know, with those strong arms of his he can hold a baby as well as you, mother? He picked up a little mite that was sobbing on the road the other day, and carried it home, and before a minute was over the bairn had left off crying, and nestled itself to sleep on his shoulder. (16)

Jean wants a son to grow up to be like his father in all these ways. Alan’s good traits combined put him on par with the only slightly higher-classed, but weak, parson.

Rebecca Cameron emphasizes Alan’s “Nordic traits,”<sup>18</sup> blue eyes and blond hair; however, these traits do not enable a man to feed his family. The fact that Jean

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<sup>17</sup> See also Fitzsimmons, Linda, and Viv Gardner, “Introduction,” *New Woman Plays* (London: Clays, 1991) vii–xiv.

<sup>18</sup> See Rebecca S. Cameron, “Ibsen and British Women’s Drama,” *Ibsen Studies* 4.1, (2004) 94.

mentions Alan's "honest blue eyes, that make you believe in them" (17), Nordic or not, is a reference to the hard work and character, backed by muscle, that enable survival in an economy that favors capital over manual labor. As part of the working class, Alan has nothing else with which to bargain in the marketplace but the strength and toil of his body. Fortright and loyal, Jean does not speak of Alan as a superior specimen. Her love for him is not overtly eugenic nor are her hopes for her forthcoming child:

At first he'll be nothing but a pink, soft, round, little baby, and we will sit before the fire . . . and he'll lie across my knee, and stretch out his little pink feet to the blaze and all the neighbours will come in and see his sturdy little limbs, and say, 'My word, what a fine boy!' He'll be just such another as his father. Oh, mother, it's too good to be true! (17)

Her expressions are those of any hopeful parent anticipating the good health of her child. While there is little of eugenics or class struggle at this point, there is a note of foreboding in the last line of this speech.

Alan is admired in the village. At the end of scene i, the manager asks him to stay behind to fix a broken saw at the mill. Jean says, "You see, mother, how they turn to Alan before all the rest!" (11). However, though Alan may have been the best for the job, he is not only unable to fix the broken machinery, he is killed by it (18). Superior strength cannot save him. The fact that it is a new saw, rather than an old one, suggests that traditional society that valued craftsmen has been replaced by impersonal industrial capitalism. The new ways are not better than the old ones. "[T]he best workers die first in the contest with machines" (Kelly "Alan's Wife" 545).

The appalling squalor of the poor was cause enough for some to espouse eugenic theories (McDonagh 158). However, in the beginning of the play, the Creykes live in a clean and sunny cottage. The authors therefore saved the opportunity to attack economic and social injustice until after the accident kills Alan. Jean is only a few weeks pregnant when Alan dies. After months without income, she would have to rely on poor relief. Her mother cannot help; she too is a poor widow. Would a real woman in Jean's circumstances not seek marriage with the clergyman or accept if it were offered?<sup>19</sup> The fact that a working class woman chose love over financial stability

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<sup>19</sup> In the Ameen story, there is no minister to advise the protagonist or to offer hope of remarriage. Instead, an older doctor advises Emma.

in the first instance was “strange” enough,<sup>20</sup> but it would have been more so for her to reject it in the second instance. Middle-class women in the audience with social pressure to conform to material expectations could have seen this as not just radical, but foolhardy. Jean does not seek the marriage alternative, either immediately after Alan’s death or after giving birth, because she is suffering from shock, grief, or mental illness, or because she is determined to remain only Alan’s wife. If the authors had created a happy ending, with the minister marrying Jean to rear her child together, that would have sidestepped issues they wanted to put before the public: the plight of the poor and the mentally ill, euthanasia, suicide,<sup>21</sup> and self-determination for women. Bell and Robins combined these themes in *Alan’s Wife* in order to show real characters in real situations and to take audiences beyond their typical experience. They achieved what many women, and even many men, had not dared—to “lift [audiences] up out of their seats and set them down hard” (*Both Sides* 70). This was what Robins hoped for in realism as a playwright and actress, and later as a novelist and suffragette.

Scene ii is set just after Jean has given birth. Other characters demand that Jean accept her child’s birth defects as God’s will. She refuses. To her, his having to “stumble through this terrible world” “hideous and maimed” does not show God’s mercy (32). To comfort Jean, the minister tells her that her child will “grow up to be a scholar and a God-fearing man yet. . . . It’s no ill fate” (32). Jean responds, “He’ll grow up, you think?” Warren says, cheerily, “Aye, why not? He may quite well live to be old.” Instead of being comforted by this, the stage directions indicate that Jean “seizes

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<sup>20</sup> Jean’s mother calls her a “strange girl” for not marrying Jaime Warren whose house is much nicer than Jean’s cottage. See *AW* p. 10.

<sup>21</sup> Robins returned to the theme of self-determination through suicide in her 1898 novel *The Open Question: A Tale of Two Temperaments*. She expresses this through her character Ethan Gano: “From the day that Gano realized that life was voluntary, it became sweet. . . . ‘Even the meanest of mankind are not caught like vermin in a trap. Man’s . . . nobility is that he holds in his hand a key to all the prisons of the earth. He may open the door of escape for himself.’” See *The Open Question: A Tale of Two Temperaments* (New York: Harper, 1899) 217–18. Despite the anguish she suffered when her husband and later her brother Saxton killed themselves, Robins saw those who choose suicide as brave. John believes this attitude enabled Robins to escape guilt. “If [her husband] was in control of his own destiny, she can be exculpated.” (Interview with author).

Warren by the arm” and says, “You don’t think that?” Warren responds that the baby, though “not rightly formed . . . [is] sturdy enough, they say. He may outlive us all, yet!” Jean’s reaction shows her fear that her child will outlive her protection. None of this is stated at this point; it is merely implied by the stage directions. She states this idea later in the scene (35–36).<sup>22</sup>

Though modern philosophers and physicians may struggle with the issue of euthanasia, Jean’s struggle with her decision is short-lived. Since Jaime Warren has convinced her that it is essential that her baby be baptized, Jean conducts this rite herself. Unlike Ameen’s heroine who quotes the Bible, Jean’s words alone evoke the power of this act, but only because she cannot find the place in the Bible to read from. She sprinkles the child with water and simply says, “I baptise thee, Alan!” (*Alan’s Wife* 37). Katherine Kelly observes that Jean’s religion is “vaguely low-church and pointedly unorthodox” (“Alan’s” 558 n. 32). However, any religion where a woman officiated was necessarily low church and unorthodox. Kelly sees Jean as a “woman who will work out her own salvation and that of her innocent baby by trusting her native intelligence and emotional wisdom in an intuitively personal relationship with God. [For Jean] heaven becomes a utopian version of life on earth.” After the sprinkling, the stage directions state that Jean “prays a moment—then stands looking yearningly” at the baby and then gives “a long wailing cry, the eider quilt hugged to her breast as the curtain falls” (37).<sup>23</sup>

The fact that there is no court scene puts more dramatic emphasis on scene iii, the jail scene. As the scene opens, the warder relates to Colonel Stewart that Jean has not spoken since she was taken into custody. Her mother also reports that Jean has remained silent since the night of her child’s death. The Robins/Bell version keeps

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<sup>22</sup> This motivation also appears in the *Review of Reviews* synopsis.

<sup>23</sup> The copy sent to the Lord Chamberlain omits the smothering scene. See Katherine Kelly “Alan’s Wife” 551. Kelly believes Grein colluded with Piggott to get the play a license by removing this scene that Grein replaced for the two performances. See also Richard Findlater, *Banned! A Review of Theatrical Censorship in Britain*, (London: MacGibbon, 1967) 82–83. According to Dominic Shellard, Steve Nicholson, and Miriam Handley, play examiners used any available means to enforce their decisions. See *The Lord Chamberlain Regrets: A History of British Theatre Censorship* (London: British Library, 2004) 48–50.



the viewer at the center of interpretation as the audience likely assumes that Jean admitted to someone that she killed her child; she was alone with the baby when he died. If she had not confessed, no one would have known that she was responsible. When the warder says to Colonel Stewart that he “Can get nothing out of her,” Colonel Stewart at first implies that he is sympathetic to Jean when he says “I can’t help feeling that there must be some extenuating circumstance if we could get at it” (*Alan’s Wife* 38–39). This line gives the audience hope, but when Jean’s mother comes to the jail to see her daughter and asks, “They won’t take her life, will they? There must be a chance for her yet.” Colonel Stewart replies, “I fear not much; a reprieve has been asked for, but—.” It is never stated who asked for the reprieve. There is no mention of legal counsel, judge, or jury. Colonel Stewart’s next lines also seem incongruous: “There seems to be very little here to found an appeal for mercy on” (40). Then he admits, “We know so little of the whole thing.” If they know so little, how can they convict Jean? Then Colonel Stewart asks Mrs. Holroyd, “What could have made her kill the child? Do you think her mind was at all affected at the time?” When given this opportunity to explain that Jean was distracted, “white as a sheet,” and hadn’t “got her strength yet” (28), Mrs. Holroyd seals Jean’s fate by replying,

Her mind! My Jean’s? No, indeed! Why did she kill the little baby? Well, it was a poor wreckling, the lamb, and it well-nigh broke her heart that it wasn’t fine and sturdy like the father, —she wanted a boy like the husband she lost—she never seemed to take to the baby, never from the first, and she never would tew [work] with it as mothers do. (40)

Robins and Bell thus increased the impact of the issue of social injustice by making Jean’s own mother an unknowing accuser.

Colonel Stewart implies that if Jean claimed extenuating circumstances, she could be given a lesser sentence. Mrs. Holroyd asks, “If they spare her life what will become of her? Can I have her back with me to her home again?” (41). The Colonel then responds, “The best will be that her sentence will be commuted to penal servitude for life.” Only after this explanation does Mrs. Holroyd beg of Jean, “Tell his worship how you came to do it. Tell him you hadn’t your wits right; that you didn’t know what you were doing to the little bairn!” (41). Jean does not speak, but her internal line is: “I knew well enough.” Even at this late point Mrs. Holroyd does not understand that there is no hope for Jean’s release. “Oh, my dear, if you could tell him something that would make them let you off—now think, Jean, think, honey! It may be you could tell

them something that would save you.” Jean’s only reaction is to stare blankly into space. Then Colonel Stewart says, “Nothing you can say, of course, will clear you now; but, for the sake of the memory you will leave behind you, can you give no sort of reason, no explanation of the impulse that led to your terrible crime?” If Robins and Bell had Jean confess at this point, that would have taken away the responsibility for finding meaning from the audience. Jean’s refusal to defend herself also increases suspense. She only shakes her head. Then Colonel Stewart says, “No, it is no use, I’m afraid; she hasn’t opened her lips from the beginning.” This scene not only draws attention to the fact that Jean’s mother is taken advantage of by a system she does not understand, it also emphasizes the omissions and inconsistencies of a male-controlled justice system that condemns a woman without clearly understanding her case, her circumstances, or her mental state.

Jean’s long silence gives her last lines more emphasis—her fervent reaction to Colonel Stewart’s accusation that she killed her baby out of cowardice. “I’ve had courage just once in my life—just once in my life I’ve been strong and kind—and it was the night I killed my child!” When Jean turns away to return to her cell, her mother tries to hold her back. Jean retorts, ‘Don’t, mother, don’t! You don’t think I could live after this, do you? I had to do what I did, and they have to take my life for it. I showed him the only true mercy, and that is what the law shows me!” (47–48). Before this speech Jean seems both mentally and physically ill; after this speech she seems rational and conscious of her actions. Yet this quick change of behavior in itself indicates mental instability.

### *The Question of Sanity*

Jean’s being distracted, listless, and inattentive to her baby are symptoms of what is now called postpartum depression, an affliction Robins knew well from her mother’s illness (John 16). Though Jean is not taking advantage of the system for selfish ends by trying to get acquitted, she *is* taking advantage of the system to ensure her own death. Is this intention itself a sign of mental illness? According to the Royal College of Psychiatrists, “There are many different ways [puerperal affective disorders] can start. Women often have symptoms of depression or mania or a mixture of these” (“Postpartum Psychosis”). “Symptoms can change very quickly from hour to hour and from one day to the next.” Warning signs include rapid changes in mood,

sleeplessness, paranoia, and behaviors that are out of character. These symptoms match Victorian descriptions of puerperal mania. Jean exhibits similar symptoms as one minute she refuses interaction with her baby, and the next she is asking questions of her sleeping infant. According to Dr. Hilary Marland at the Centre for the History of Medicine, University of Warwick, “one admittedly high [nineteenth-century] estimate suggested that as many as one-quarter of female confinements were associated with mental disorder of some form, though this presumably included milder conditions.” Current estimates of postpartum depression reveal that up to “85% of women experience some type of mood disturbance” from mild “baby blues” to psychosis (Saju). According to the U.S. National Institutes of Health, postpartum depression “risk factors include past personal or family history of depression, single marital status, poor health functioning, lower SES [socioeconomic status], and alcohol use” (Sheila Marcus). Jean seems happy in the first scene, but we do not know her personal or family history. Nor do we know of any alcohol use, but Jean has the other three risk factors for puerperal affective disorder: single marital status, poor health functioning, and lower socioeconomic status. While Elin Diamond expresses the belief in “Realism’s Hysteria” that Jean “has no nervous symptoms,” when puerperal disorders are closely considered, it cannot be confirmed that Jean is not a victim of this disorder (35). In addition, According to the Mayo Foundation for Medical Education and Research, symptoms of “hopelessness about the future, feeling emotionally numb, and inability to experience positive emotions” are indicative of post-traumatic stress (“Post-Traumatic”). The authors dramatized a psychological trauma similar to this modern diagnosis when Jean lifted the shroud of her dead husband on the stretcher and fainted. This trauma would have been repeated when Jean saw that her child had a similarly deformed body.

William Archer rejected interpreting Jean’s actions as “puerperal mania” and declared, “Nothing, I am sure, could be further from the intention of either Swedish authoress or English author” (xlv).<sup>24</sup> Katherine Kelly too believes that Jean is acting, giving a “realist performance of puerperal insanity” (“Alan’s” 545). Yet if it is so convincing, how is the audience to know whether Jean is acting? Archer asserts,

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<sup>24</sup> Note Archer’s reference to Ameen as “authoress” and the reference to the playwrights as “author.”

“If she were insane, the ethical problem would vanish, and we should have nothing but a study in mental pathology. . . . There is a vast space of intermediate ground between a criminal lunatic and an ideal heroine held up for imitation. . . . Jean Creyke, certainly, is neither lunatic nor heroine” (xlvi–xlvii). Archer urged viewers to consider the “dramatic value,” rather than any ethical issue, as the chief importance of the play:

The situation stands on the highest tragic plane precisely because we can neither freely applaud nor condemn utterly. . . . It seems equally impossible, equally inhuman [for Jean] to act or to refrain. I don’t say that [Jean’s insanity] might not have its interest, but it is not the interest at which the author has aimed. (xlvii–xlviii)

Yet, Jean’s quandary *is* an ethical issue made all the more difficult *because* of the question of her sanity. As there are no easy answers to these issues, Bell and Robins did not offer any—in the text, before the public, or in their surviving letters. The audience must decide whether Jean is sane or not, whether she is right or wrong to have smothered her baby, whether she is moral or a monster, victim or self-determined heroine—or both. Nina Auerbach believes that “Victorian novels about women’s lives, and these are most of the novels we still read, have frozen into predictable ritual: we know what Dorothea will feel when. But women-centered plays are open to almost infinite suggestion” (“Before” 9).

### *Ameen’s Interpretation*

After *Alan’s Wife* was produced, Robins corresponded with the author, Elin Ameen. She did not reveal to Ameen that she and Bell were the adapters. Inclined to secrecy, Robins led Ameen to believe that her “friend” had written it. Ameen wrote to this “friend,” not knowing even the “friend’s” gender. In her May 5, 1893 letter to Robins, Ameen stated her intentions for her heroine, Emma:

I suppose *you* as well as your friend have perfectly understood, that my heroine is no ‘maniac’ with ‘puerperal’ fever, etc., and her act is no ‘infanticide’, but she bereaves her child of a miserable life *only + purely* out of *love* for it, even though she fears she will have to suffer for the deed herself both in this life + in a life hereafter. She *loves* her baby more than herself. . . . This is the psychological [sic] point which must be held clearly up to the reader + the public; it is not because it is a burden *to herself* but because life would be a disaster to it, that she kills it—a proof of the highest maternal love, which so few people seem to be able

to realise + understand. She does *not repent* of her 'crime,' even after she has given herself up to justice, but if the child were given back to her again, maimed as before, she would *not* do the act again.<sup>25</sup>

Oddly, Ameen did not explain why Emma would not do the act again if she were convinced that it was right to kill her baby. Ameen makes it clear, however, that it was her intention that Emma be seen as rational.

### *Critical Reactions*

Despite the play's controversial themes, Robins's performance touched many. For her, this was the power of the New Drama, where new ideas could be "threshed out,"<sup>26</sup> by playwright, player, and audience. Though many intellectuals were hungry for realism, *Alan's Wife* was disturbing. The critic A. B. Walkley was so shaken by the play that he claimed he saw a bloody corpse where there was only an actor under a sheet, and a malformed baby where there was only an empty cradle.<sup>27</sup> Robins's acting so affected him that he hoped Diderot's philosophy was true so that she did not "feel her part." "If my feelings touched—as they did—the point of agony, what must hers have done? Has a woman the right to lay bare the inmost fibres of her being in this

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<sup>25</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 6; Folder 4. "Ameen."

<sup>26</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Box 2 B; Folder 18 A. "Diaries" 1891.

<sup>27</sup> Walkley swore in *The Speaker* of May 6, 1893 "We are shown the stretcher, the mangled corpse, the child." He could not recommend the play as an after-dinner activity; he found it "nauseous." See "Alan's Wife" 512. Archer responded in a letter to the editor that Walkley imagined seeing the corpse smeared with fake gore and that the cradle was empty. See "The Indigestible Drama," *The Speaker*, May 13, 1893, 542–43. In a subsequent article in *The Speaker* of May 20, 1893, Walkley asserted that the actor playing Alan was "streaked with paint to indicate some hideous disfigurement." See "The Drama: Jane Annie" 570. On May 27, Archer again denied that any paint was used and attached corroborative letters from Robins and from Herman de Lange, the stage manager. See "A. B. W. and Alan's Wife," *The Speaker*, May 27, 1893, 603. Archer reprinted excerpts from these articles in his introduction. See *Alan's Wife: A Dramatic Study in Three Scenes* (London: Henry, 1893) 50–53.

way, before a gaping playhouse crowd?"<sup>28</sup> *Alan's Wife* was different from many melodramas because it did not attempt to make issues more palatable to the audience.<sup>29</sup> Shaw called Robins's performance "heartrending" ("L'Oeuvre" 75).

Most critics admired the work of the players, especially Robins, but many did not like the play. Typical was the opinion of the critic for *The Morning Post* for May 1, 1893: "It is hardly possible to commend the choice of subject. The theatre would indeed be a melancholy place of resort if only such terrible tragedies and 'studies' of life as these became the ordinary dramatic fare." This expresses the common opinion among critics that the public went to the theatre only to be entertained, a view reiterated in "The Theatre" in *The Pall Mall Gazette* for January 18, 1895. "There are so many of us who do not go to theatres to see just ordinary human beings, who detest great moral discoveries, and who are fairly complacent in their treatment of their domestic partners." He or she determined that comedic characters "are so much more entertaining." While William Moy Thomas in *The Graphic* admitted that horror is "well within the lawful domain of the tragic dramatist," *Alan's Wife* "exhibits neither skill in the manipulation of his gruesome materials nor [a] sense of the limits which divide a pathetic presentment of human afflictions from a coarse and pitiless accumulation of distressing details."<sup>30</sup> He accused the author of "sensationalism," but expressed the belief that "many a loving mother driven to frenzy by the hopelessness of the struggle with privation has taken her child's life; but this has generally been by plunging into the cold river with her infant clasped tightly to her breast." This scenario is more melodramatic than *Alan's Wife*. Thomas seems to forget that Jean *does* sacrifice herself, but she does it by means of the gallows.

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<sup>28</sup> *The Speaker*, May 6, 1893, 512. Robins's father reacted similarly to her depiction of human suffering; he did not approve of her career. See John 19.

<sup>29</sup> Mayer discusses the enduring uses and nature of melodrama. See "Encountering Melodrama," *Cambridge Companion to Victorian and Edwardian Theatre* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2004) 147.

<sup>30</sup> See W. Moy Thomas, "New Plays." *Graphic*, May 6, 1893.

The critic for *The Theatre: A Monthly Review of Drama, Music and the Fine Arts* for June 1893 called the play “terrible in directness and power” but expressed two opposing opinions about its artistic merit (334–335). Though only a one-act,

Judged by the usual tests it must be pronounced a play—a very remarkable play. It lives, it moves, emphatically it has its being. Nothing is extenuate; nor is aught set down in malice. From the opening to the close remorselessly it makes for its logical conclusion—its climax of appalling tragedy. Nevertheless, although it satisfies these requirements of art, it must be set outside the boundaries of art, as too pitiless, too painful a reflection of the facts of life. (334–35)

Nevertheless, this reviewer considered Robins’s performance to be the best of her career. “For haunting naturalness this remarkable actress has long been celebrated; but nothing she has done can be compared with her heartrending Jean.”

According to the London correspondent for the *Birmingham Daily Post*: “Apart from the motive, there is little that is remarkable in the play. The situations are somewhat clumsily arranged, and the dialogue is feeble; while there is one scene, in which the mother baptises her child before smothering it, which would hardly be tolerated in any ordinary theatre.”<sup>31</sup> Despite this negative opinion, he reported, “On the whole, the reception of the piece was favourable, if not very enthusiastic.” The reviewer for *The Era* for May 6 considered Jean to be

[S]imply a monster, with whom we can feel no sympathy whatever. . . . The scene of the murder is nevertheless awesome. Miss Elizabeth Robins rose to a fine height of tragic expression in the child murder scene, and thrilled her audience by the intensity and poignancy of her acting; and, in the last division of the piece, her stony indifference and dumb show were deeply impressive.<sup>32</sup>

Similarly, the reviewer for *The Times* of May 1, 1893 reported that Robins played her part “with great intensity and created a profound impression upon the house.” This viewer interpreted the play as “a study in puerperal mania [that is] dramatically effective after a fashion.” She or he determined, however, that it is too pessimistic to be “regarded as entertaining or even instructive.”<sup>33</sup> These opinions essentially admit

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<sup>31</sup> “London Correspondence,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, April 29, 1893, 7.

<sup>32</sup> “Independent Theatre: ‘Alan’s Wife,’” *Era*, May 6, 1893: 8.

<sup>33</sup> “The Independent Theatre,” *Times*, May 1, 1893. 4.

that the play succeeded in its goal; it is a serious play full of serious themes. If audiences appreciated it, it was largely due to its effective acting.

Though it “was either mercilessly condemned or highly praised,” Grein felt that *Alan’s Wife* was second only to *A Woman of No Importance* as “the most exciting event in the theatrical world in April” (*Alan’s Wife* vi). This was easy for Grein to assert because he believed in serious, intellectual drama. *Alan’s Wife* was more serious and thought-provoking than other West End offerings at the time: *The Babble Shop*, a parody of Henry Arthur Jones’s *The Bauble Shop*; the melodramas *The Black Domino*, *Uncle John*, and *The Silver Shell*; and the “old fashioned but pleasant and entertaining comedy” *Clever Alice* (Archer ‘World’ 1893 90–104).<sup>34</sup> Grein saw *Alan’s Wife* in the same vein as *Ghosts* in its “directness, its exquisite writing, its soul-stirring power” (*Alan’s Wife* viii).

#### *Social Protest and Legal “Backdrops”*

In the *Review of Reviews* scenario and in Ameen’s sketch the baby is born with no legs and only one arm. In the play the extent of the child’s condition is not mentioned, so it does not make it clear whether or not the baby might later be capable of the scholarly life that Minister Warren hopes; nor can it be assumed that the boy would be capable of fathering a child and passing on his infirmity if he grew to adulthood. However, it is vital to understand that while this ambiguity opens up interpretation, Robins and Bell’s version made all these potentialities problematic due to his mother’s poverty. Jean does not have the necessary resources to educate or to care for an invalid child. In her class there are few alternatives to manual labor. If baby Alan remains unable to work, or even to care for himself, he cannot fulfill his role in society. Thus, Jean’s reaction to her baby’s condition—killing him—is what makes the play eugenic. Though Jean does not state Marxist ideals and the authors were certainly not Marxists, the play can be interpreted as an exposé of the tragic results of industrial capitalism.

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<sup>34</sup> Janet Achurch played Alice, supported by Charles Charrington, Gertrude Kingston, and Mrs. Theodore Wright.



Ameen wrote Robins's "friend" on June 11, 1895, "As to the third act, I am not sure *mine* is the 'best'; yours was only impossible according to *Swedish* laws; we do not 'hang' women for child's murder—my Emma would only have had from 1–3 years imprisonment."<sup>35</sup> While Jean's lack of legal counsel is unsettling, it would not be as difficult to accept if her sentence were more lenient. This begs the question: was Jean's fate indicative of the English legal system of the time?

Due to high infant mortality among the poor, there was a widely held suspicion that poor parents, particularly single mothers, were killing their infants (Higginbotham 324). Illegitimate children had a death rate at least double that of legitimate children (321). According to coroner reports, more than 80 percent of all murder victims in Wales and England in the mid 1860s were children. Authorities feared that many more infanticides were committed than were coming to light. While the time of *Alan's Wife* is "the present day," 1893, earlier in the century, "in the context of the high infant mortality rate, the periodic discovery of a baby's body in the street or river was shrugged off as a grim inevitability" (Rose 35).<sup>36</sup> This attitude gradually changed

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<sup>35</sup> Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 6; Folder 4. Ameen stressed to Robins that she could have explained this if the adapter had asked. As she lived in Sweden, she did not know her play was being adapted until after reviews appeared. She repeatedly asked for compensation from Robins after the two performances. As there was no copyright agreement between England and Sweden, Ameen had no legal recourse. Before the performance, Robins and Bell discussed paying "some fare monetary acknowledgement to her if it ever came to a question of profit." See Series V; Subseries B, 1893, E. R. to F. B., undated, from Wimbledon. *Alan's Wife* was not accepted for an evening bill, so there were no profits to share. However, the authors acknowledged Ameen in the book version. Ameen retaliated by adapting the play without Bell or Robins's consent, changing the title to *En Moder*, and setting it in Sweden. See Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 6; Folder 4, June 11 and 23, 1895, Ameen to Robins.

<sup>36</sup> In Medieval England infanticide was seen as a sin punishable by penance in the ecclesiastical courts. In 1624 infanticide became a capital crime. If an unmarried woman concealed her pregnancy and could not produce a living baby, this was evidence enough to convict for murder. Courts grew more lenient with mothers convicted of killing their infants; the 1624 statute was repealed in 1803. See Jennifer Thorn, "Introduction: Stories of Child-Murder, Stories of Print," *Writing British Infanticide: Child-Murder, Gender and Print, 1722–1859* (Cranbury, New Jersey: U of Delaware P, 2010) especially 27–28 and 36. See also Rosemary Gould, "The History of an Unnatural Act: Infanticide and Adam Bede," (*Victorian Literature and Culture* 25.2, 1997) 265.

around mid-century. Registration of infant deaths was not compulsory until 1874 (22). Registration of live births began in 1837 (Haskey 159), but registration of infants did not feed them. A poor widow like Jean Creyke would have to rely on the local poor union for her maintenance. The Poor Law of 1834 that codified and institutionalized poor relief gradually limited aid outside the workhouse, called Outdoor Relief, which allowed a recipient to remain at home.<sup>37</sup> The restriction of Outdoor Relief was an effort to cut rates by forcing the poor to go to the workhouse rather than receive alms in their homes, despite the fact that Outdoor Relief was cheaper per capita than the workhouse (MacKinnon 608). Though public assistance was not consistent across the nation, the numbers of those applying for relief went down because the workhouse was so abhorred. Many would rather starve or commit suicide than go there (Roberts 97–99).<sup>38</sup> More abhorrent for many was the fact that the bodies of those who died in the workhouse and were left unclaimed for burial by friends or relations were quickly sold to anatomists to be dissected for medical purposes (R. Richardson xvi; 102). The 1832 Anatomy Act ended dissection for murderers, so it seemed that being a pauper was a worse crime (207). The negative impact of these acts remained potent into the twentieth century (MacKinnon xvi).<sup>39</sup>

The workhouse was meant to be less attractive than the conditions of the lowest-paid laborer outside the workhouse in order to discourage skivers, but it would have been more accurate to state that the workhouse should be less attractive than the conditions of the poorest *workingwoman* outside the workhouse (Thane 30). Infanticide must therefore be seen in the context of the difficult lives of poor women who could not compete in the economy with men (33). When they could get jobs, women were given only the lowest-paying ones: domestic service (one quarter of workingwomen), factory labor, needlework, or agricultural labor (Rose 15). In 1906

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<sup>37</sup> For more details on the Poor Law, see Marjie Bloy, “The Peel Web,” *Web of English History*.

<sup>38</sup> See a contemporary discussion of this issue in “The Poor-law Amendment Act,” *The Lancet*, ed., Thomas Wakley, April 10 ed. Vol. 2. (London: Churchill, 1841) 97–101. See Mary MacKinnon, “English Poor Law Policy and the Crusade Against Outrelief” (*The Journal of Economic History* 47.3, 1987) 603–4.

<sup>39</sup> See also Paul Carter, “Our Ancestors and the Fear of the Victorian Workhouse,” Audio blog post, *National Archives Media Player*, National Archives.

“the average wage for women in industry was about 11 shillings to 13 shillings and 6 pence a week. Research showed, however, that a single woman supporting herself alone needed 15 to 17 shillings a week to keep herself at a tolerable subsistence level” (16). Jean could not be expected to support a handicapped child on such wages. As her case illustrates, the woman question was much more than a question of a woman’s rightful place; the suffrage movement was much more than a question of the right to vote. These issues were about the right to survive.

Legislation in 1846 and 1848 provided that widows with legitimate dependents were an exception to the prohibition of Outdoor Relief (Thane 36). Jean would therefore be considered “deserving poor” and would have been allowed to remain in her home. However, even in the 1890s the assistance such widows received was not generous or consistent and was certainly not enough for a mother to afford appropriate help for a handicapped child. Even “deserving poor” “had no right upheld by legislation to a weekly ‘outdoor’ welfare benefit. . . . Almost nowhere was the amount of relief sufficient for barest subsistence; mothers had always to find means of supplementing it” (Thane 41). Children often did the supplementing by working, or stealing. An illegitimate infant could grow up to support itself and might thereby recover from social stigmata. A severely handicapped child might never support itself. Because an illegitimate baby, even if born healthy, “should never have been conceived in the first place,” the state would excuse the mother for killing it to prevent its becoming a burden on the system (Gould 272). If a healthy baby could be dispatched in this way, just because he or she was illegitimate, how much more lenient would the state be to a mother who killed a deformed child?

Despite the ending of *Alan’s Wife*, the English system was even more lenient than the Swedish system with mothers convicted of killing their babies.<sup>40</sup> Research

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<sup>40</sup> There were critics of the English system, and not just in England. *The New York Times* London correspondent remarked: “The outrageous inequality of judicial sentences in England has frequently been commented upon, but it seems impossible to reform them. This week a female baby farmer, who had deliberately starved two little children to skin and bones, so that they would have died in a day or two if they had not been discovered, was sent to prison for a year, while a poor man convicted of collecting 63 cents [sic], a public subscription for a fire company of which he had ceased to be a member, was sentenced to eighteen months.” See “London’s Week of News,” Jan. 18, 1891, 1.

reveals that “all murder cases tried in the Central Criminal Court during twelve sample years between 1839 and 1906 produced forty-two trials of mothers accused of murdering illegitimate children under five years old as well as ninety other cases involving crimes related to the deaths of illegitimate infants” (Higginbotham 324). Of these, “few women were convicted of infanticide, and those who were found guilty routinely received pardons. After 1849, no woman was hanged for the murder of her own infant under one year old, legitimate or illegitimate” (323).

### *Connections to the Novel*

England’s recourse for “fallen” women was not execution or transportation, as seen in novels and plays, but starvation and disease. The redemption of poor women in literature served as a cover for the institutionalized euthanasia that was literally being conducted by the state. Feeding workhouse inmates poor diets was a long, drawn-out way of ensuring malnutrition, and disease (Roberts 103). In reality then, the state was practicing eugenics. The Poor Laws “had the veiled purpose of ridding the state of ‘paupers,’ especially unmarried women and their children” (Gould 269). “Victorian emphasis on infanticide . . . emphasized the actions of the individual mother and slighted the role of poverty, lack of extensive childcare, low wages for women, and poor social services” (Higginbotham 337). These conditions affected poor legitimate children as much as poor illegitimate ones but affected handicapped children even more severely. Higginbotham asserts that

Medical practitioners, and particularly medical coroners, may well have had a stake in emphasizing infanticide as a widespread problem. . . . Between the 1860s and ‘90s, fewer than two hundred murders of children under age seven were reported each year in England and Wales. While these represented a high proportion of all murders, they could not account for a significant proportion of the 30,000 to 40,000 illegitimate infants born each year during this period. (324)

Coroners did not seem to take into account the fact that many children found dead might have died of natural causes (Higginbotham 323–24).

The recurrence of the theme of the “fallen” woman in literature

Suggests that English society was using the fictional expulsion of the fallen woman from her community as a kind of ritual purging and sacrifice. These novels reassured the readership that the dangerous ‘vice’ which threatened their stability had a way of taking care of itself

. . . even as they also transformed the impulse to punish into an impulse to save. (Gould 270)<sup>41</sup>

Bell could see the realities of poverty; legislation had little effect on the individuals she visited. Bell and Robins succeed in “shaking people out of their smugness” by having their heroine come to a tragic end instead of a comforting denouement as in Eliot’s *Adam Bede*. Since Jean’s hero, her husband Alan, is dead, he cannot save her like Hetty Sorrel’s lover, Arthur Donnithorne, by riding up to the gallows at the last minute with a pardon. Adding to the shock of Jean’s eminent death is the fact that she does not want to be saved by anyone. Jean’s perplexity as a character is heightened still more by the fact that her fall is not the result of promiscuity, or even of ignorance. Though Jean joins the ranks of “fallen women” by first exiling herself in jail, then by sacrificing herself to the gallows, she is both sinner and martyr. However, she further differs from the typical melodramatic heroine by taking charge of her destiny and that of her child. While Ameen believed that Emma’s action would result in her eternal punishment, Robins and Bell place the power of redemption within their protagonist’s reach. Thus, they create a righteous martyr for the cause of the poor. Adrienne Rich believes that “The scapegoat is different from the martyr; she cannot teach resistance or revolt” (qtd. in Logan 97 n). Unlike Hetty Sorrel, Jean actively kills her child rather than merely neglecting it (114–15). Unlike Hetty Sorrel, who also refuses to speak, Jean’s silence stems from self-determination rather than from shame, ignorance, or selfish pride. Hetty, according to this definition, cannot be a martyr because she is immobilized by fear and pride (Gould 267). Jean is cerebral, logical, and in control in sacrificing herself, making the power of the state conform to her will. These authorial choices were radical ones.

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<sup>41</sup> Josephine McDonagh makes a similar point. “Even the rhetoric that speaks for the amelioration of infant life is paradoxically entwined with the rhetoric of child sacrifice” Even “campaigners for legislation for the protection of infant life at the end of the nineteenth century . . . were keen to make distinctions between the relative values of infant lives on proto eugenic grounds.” See *Child Murder and British Culture: 1720–1900*, Cambridge (Cambridge UP 2003), 9.

*Audience Interpretation and Acting: "Limitations of Language"*

Mayer sees melodrama as a flexible and receptive "process" through which to "confront issues and mediate social values" as well as a means to be entertained (145–63). If it is possible to be entertained by serious drama, as I believe it is, *Alan's Wife* shares these characteristics with melodrama. However, through the silence of its protagonist, rather than verbal expression, *Alan's Wife* was a further step in the evolution of realism, particularly in its expression of a character's internal mind. In this it is similar to the novels of Henry James. Colin Matthew states,

In his longer fictions, James is the most notable of all late-Victorian novelists in his attempts to show . . . the mind's dialogue with itself as well as the narrator's dialogue with the motivations of the characters. . . . James resists a neat conclusion, leaving the reader with unresolved questions. His deliberate refusal to pin down meaning is related to the second important phenomenon which places the perceiver at the center of cultural interpretation: the growing acknowledgement and exploration of the limitations of language.<sup>42</sup> (*Nineteenth* 252)

This description could easily be applied to *Alan's Wife*, especially to the smothering scene. Unlike novelists, however, playwrights and players cannot rely on description or narration. Creating an appropriate response in the audience is not always an easy task, even when there are spoken lines. Yet to more fully express Jean's inner being, the play withholds utterance. Since Jean is alone on stage and uses only internal dialogue, the scene depends entirely upon the actress. To be effective, the actress must convince the audience that Jean knows no other way to help her child. Though it is Jean's silence that makes her so compelling, without the actress's skill, Jean can be seen as either cold and heartless, or exaggerated and unrestrained. Robins's new acting style—controlling emotionalism and using silence effectively—was essential to convincing the audience that to Jean, killing her infant is a loving, merciful act. We cannot now determine how Robins played this scene. However, to maximize the

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<sup>42</sup> Robins, Bell, and James were especially close in the 1890s. They wrote frequently and met as often as they could. James named Robins's flat "Morocco" for its steep seventy-four-step ascent where they enjoyed long conversations about their work. After they read *The Master Builder*, they called the flat "The Castle in the Air." See *TF* 121.

realist effect, she would have had to avoid being what she referred to as “stagey” (Robins *IA* 10).

As Robins’s contemporary and Irving’s assistant Percy Fitzgerald observed,

To express the mind in the face. . . . [has an] electrical influence . . . on the beholders. . . . Facial expression is the expression of things that *cannot be spoken*—it is a new language, where language fails. The contention of great passions can be efficiently expressed only by the face; you may of course, describe them in words, but that does not *exhibit* them (22–24).

Facial expression would be the primary means for an actress to exhibit Jean’s internal mind.

Gesture, regulated and studied, is nearly as potent a medium of expression as the voice itself; in many cases it is more subtle, swift, and comprehensive. There is a language in gesture, with innumerable shades of meaning. . . . There is one method of great force . . . which is used to enrich the dramatic expression. It is, indeed, quite a common form on the French boards, but almost unknown to us. This is the anticipation of the utterance by the gesture.” (Fitzgerald 50–51)

Refined gestures would be another, though less subtle, way to express Jean’s thoughts. Though Jean’s silence can be attributed to her having no advocate as a poor woman locked up by male jailers,<sup>43</sup> her refusal to speak is more nuanced than this. Silence speaks for her, both because she cannot explain herself completely with words and because keeping silent is the surest way to ensure her own death.

#### *Writing and “Real Life” in Yorkshire and London*

Bell often saw men who were injured at the mill become unable to work, but as only the wife of the mill owner, she could not provide a safe workplace, or compensate workers for an injury. In a letter to Robins from August 23 [E.R. dates 1895], some two years after the production of *Alan’s Wife*, Bell related the grim existence of a young woman remarkably similar to Jean Creyke in age and circumstances. This woman lived in “wretched” conditions, not a cozy cottage, and had

Four children under 8 running abt, a husband just recovering from an accident[;] she herself expecting her 6<sup>th</sup> child—she has lost one—‘at any

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<sup>43</sup> See Catherine Wiley, “Staging Infanticide: The Refusal of Representation in Elizabeth Robins’s ‘Alan’s Wife’” (*Theatre Journal* 42.4) 1990, 432–46.

time now.' She said. She told me with many details, how horribly bad she was on these occasions and each time worse than the last. She doesn't have anaesthetics, of course. And I felt that an amazing thing it was to be able to stand there (and a not particularly heroic person I shd judge!) waiting for this horrible thing that ever was invented. And under those conditions, with those surroundings.<sup>44</sup>

Bell did not mention in this letter whether she helped this woman who lived in Warrenby, a small village very near Bell's home in Redcar but approximately thirty miles from Middlesbrough. Because of this distance, it is highly unlikely that the husband was a Bell employee; commuting from Warrenby would not be feasible. However, the distance from Warrenby to Red Barns need not have precluded Bell from helping. She may have visited this family many times over the years. Existing letters from this period do not give further details. Assuming she did not also believe in some sort of social Darwinism, Bell would have had many opportunities to be generous to the poor. Indeed, seeing so many in need may have been overwhelming to her.

Bell sympathized with workers and their families, but in *At the Works* she remains somewhat detached, perhaps to avoid accusations of sensationalism, but also because of confidentiality (Bell 172). Most men in the town worked at the mill but could barely make a living, and only by difficult and dangerous physical labor. The women had no access to employment beyond taking in washing or lodgers (48–50). Bell reported in *At the Works* that "The spectre of illness and disability is always confronting the working-man; the possibility of being from one day to the other plunged into actual want is always confronting his family"(47). Bell was not a radical organizer of industrial workers. The sources of recreation that she provided could only indirectly impact workers' incomes and only if they chose to use them instead of spending money on drink and gambling. She believed that if they could be persuaded to use her entertainments instead, workers and their wives had a chance of a happier life even on meager means. Hugh Bell was forward thinking for his time in that he was not opposed to unions, but he did not provide all workers a living wage. His wife could not openly protest in the 1890s, so she used *Alan's Wife* to expose the dire circumstances she saw through drama. Though she felt the sting of recognition in

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<sup>44</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries B; Box 8, Folder 1.



some of the wealthy characters in Robins's early fiction (John 114–16), Bell wanted her identity as co-author of a play with similar messages to remain secret, even from her family. In contrast, by 1907, Bell directly reported poverty and social injustice in *At the Works*. Despite the implications to Bell Brothers, she revealed that

Out of 900 houses carefully investigated, 125, in round numbers, were found to be absolutely poor. The people living in them never have enough to spend on food to keep themselves sufficiently nourished, enough to spend on clothes to be able to protect their bodies adequately, enough to spend on their houses, to acquire a moderate degree of comfort. One hundred and seventy-five more were so near the poverty-line that they are constantly passing over it. That is, the life of a third of these workers . . . is an unending struggle . . . to keep abreast of the most ordinary, the simplest, the essential needs. (51)

Despite their protest in *Alan's Wife*, both Bell and Robins revealed some rather unsympathetic attitudes about those they considered their social inferiors. Bell admonished Robins to maintain a professional distance from her servants and to speak to them only about their work. Robins frequently ignored this advice, recording conversations with her maids that she considered “just too precious to lose” (John 117–18). Robins could not help laughing at their improper grammar and ignorance about life. However, in her fiction about the working poor and in her efforts to help her servants personally, Robins was sympathetic. In her first published work of fiction, *A Lucky Sixpence*, Robins showed some of the hardships and humiliations of workingwomen. The main character, Hester, is a maid who is seduced by the master of the house. When she becomes pregnant, she is forced to lie about the identity of her lover in order to save his marriage. When she is dismissed, she heads out into the night alone, knowing she will soon have to spend her only treasure, the lucky coin her master had given her as a gift.

Robins never lost the sense that she was middle class, but her career as an actress was particularly precarious. Seeing the lifestyles of her wealthy friends, Robins was inclined to sympathize with the poor. This class crossing caused some of her upper-class friends, including Bell, to feel betrayed (John 114). Bell did not like stories that defied separation of the classes, finding some of the details “entirely revolting”

(116).<sup>45</sup> Nevertheless, Robins maintained close ties with many of her servants even after they left her employ. The longest of these relationships was with Karolina Gardner, Robins's German-born cook of the 1890s, with whom she maintained contact into the 1930s.<sup>46</sup> Through Heinemann, Robins arranged a loan so Gardner could buy a bakery in Bermondsey. Robins's Danish housekeeper Laura Alkjaersig continued her education, translated Robins's suffrage writing into Danish, and became the principal of a Danish labor college.

### *Secrecy Continued: The Later Life of Alan's Wife*

Robins had supplied the public with shocking women characters on the stage and in fiction, but when it came to admitting authorship of *Alan's Wife*, even her gender-neutral pen name, C. E. Raimond, was not secret enough. With her name on the play, a playwright is in some ways more exposed than even the actress on stage because it is her words that all characters speak. By remaining hidden, Bell and Robins were able to produce the play that would have been too damaging to them at the time if the truth were known. As they both had careers to consider, it is not surprising that Bell and Robins did not wish their names to appear. Henry James had urged Bell to acknowledge previous work, but in the case of *Alan's Wife* she and Robins did not reveal themselves even to him because the play was far too controversial. While she felt anonymity was necessary, Robins also relished the thought that secrets fooled readers. "Two short novels and the short stories of that time [1894] were published [by Heinemann] under a pseudonym, [and were] taken without exception to conceal the identity of a man" (*TF* 150). This strategy appealed to Robins's acting inclinations as writing anonymously was "still . . . playing a part." She confessed:

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<sup>45</sup> According to Sue Thomas, Archibald Grove, founding editor of the *New Review*, had a similar reaction to "A Lucky Sixpence." He convinced Robins to soften the story, but it still "caused a large drop in the circulation" from which the publication never recovered. See "Elizabeth Robins and the 'New Review'" *Victorian Periodicals Review*, 28.1 (1995) 63.

<sup>46</sup> Gardner's life story may have inspired Robins's "The Portman Memoirs." See John 118.

I used to hear people speculating, attaching now this, now that established name to my inventions. About one of those little books of mine [*A Lucky Sixpence*] there was plenty of disagreement. When people at dinner parties praised it, I picked flaws. When they damned it, I defended, with an air successfully impersonal. It was immense fun.<sup>47</sup>

She did not mention *Alan's Wife* in this context, though she did reveal its origins in *Theatre and Friendship*. Robins turned again to anonymity with her book *Ancilla's Share: An Indictment of Sex Antagonism* because of its feminist themes. She made the connection between female-ness (*ancilla* means maidservant in Latin) and the ancillary role of women in the culture.

Though it caused a stir at the time, *Alan's Wife* went no further as a dramatic production in England.<sup>48</sup> However, Grein wrote the preface (v–viii) and Archer wrote the introduction (ix–lii) to the ITS version published in 1893. In a letter to Bell, Robins wrote,

I wonder what you'll think of ~~WA~~ preface you must tell me *just* what you think. He writes with some agitation about Grein's putting his fingers in the pie + it certainly is a little intrusive. ~~WA~~ says if you object to Grein he shall be eliminated[.] I almost suspect *Grein* won't be your main objection. *I'm* quite willing to [let] the little man's voice be heard, he'll be awfully cut up if Archer drops on him + there's really no harm in his little speech.<sup>49</sup>

Robins implies that Archer's "fingers in the pie" were more intrusive than Grein's; Archer's introduction is almost as long as the play itself. Though the playwrights did

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<sup>47</sup> As well as Heinemann, head editor of the *New Review*, others knew of Robins's authorship of *A Lucky Sixpence*, including Clement Scott and Edmund Gosse. See Gates 71. Gosse denied that Heinemann had told him anything about the story. See Series II; Subseries B; Box 13; Folder 72. "Nellie Gosse." The *Daily Chronicle* revealed Robins's identity in the winter of 1898, just after the second printing of *The Open Question*. See *The Bookman: A Journal of Literature and Life*, 8: 6 Feb 1899, 520. See also John 118, and Gates 109.

<sup>48</sup> Ameen's play, *Un Moder*, was translated into French and published in *Le Figaro*. See Ameen's May 23, 1893 letter in Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 6; Folder 4. In an undated letter, Ameen wrote that *Un Moder* played in Paris, The Hague, and Amsterdam but "proved a complete failure." She did not confirm Robins's authorship of *Alan's Wife* until 1901 and apparently never learned Bell's involvement.

<sup>49</sup> Fales Series V; Subseries B, August 13, 1893.

not follow his scenario, Archer dictated the meaning of the play to its readers when Robins and Bell had been purposely vague. Though they disliked his intrusion, Robins suggested to Bell that they take the good with the bad and accept the introduction because, since the play struck a nerve with critics, Archer's reputation could help sell the book. Besides, Archer was hurt when Robins expressed her reservations, even though he asked what she thought. Archer was a demanding critic and could be a demanding friend (John 89–90). Robins wanted to spare his feelings. The reading public could decide for itself. This is another example of how women hid from notoriety in ways that could be considered unfortunate, even cowardly, but that would be a modern perspective of the tradition of anonymity for women writers.

Considering Archer's commitment to *Alan's Wife* and his closeness to its authors, it is remarkable that, according to Kerry Powell, "Even . . . in *The Old Drama and the New* (1923), [Archer] omits any notice of women playwrights—although he knew several personally" (*Women* 77). Archer may have been jealous that Robins had not asked him to do the adaptation, though he was the first one to whom she showed the synopsis of *Befriad*. He was perhaps jealous of the extra time Robins spent with Bell during this period when Robins and Archer had grown especially close, but that was decades before his 1923 book. After *Alan's Wife*, Archer worked with both women on other plays they each authored (John 84–85).<sup>50</sup> He failed to mention any of these plays. Though Grein attributed the play to an "Englishman" in his preface, neither of the women corrected him until "some thirty years later" (Orme 126). In 1929, Bell publically acknowledged her authorship on the first page of her book *Landmarks* in a list of her other works. Though Archer knew from the beginning, he denied their existence as playwrights when even the reticent Bell considered anonymity no longer necessary.

Although Leonard and Virginia Woolf published some of Robins's later works,<sup>51</sup> they seemingly did not make the connection between their own failure to promote

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<sup>50</sup> Archer knew about Robins's authorship of *Mrs. Lessingham*, and about her famous play *Votes for Women!* He wrote plays with her himself, including *Benvenuto Cellini*. See John 84–85.

<sup>51</sup> For more on Virginia Woolf's friendship with Robins, see Hermione Lee, *Virginia Woolf* (London: Vintage, 1997).

women playwrights to the next generation and the eventual loss of women playwrights to history. By the time they wanted to admit authorship, Bell and Robins had not only dropped out of cultural memory, their friends had seemingly forgotten them. *Alan's Wife* was overlooked for several generations.

*Alan's Wife* was more acceptable in some ways in the 1890s than it is today. As Angelique Richardson noted, eugenic ideas among nineteenth-century women writers made some later literary historians "uncomfortable" (*Love Prologue*). Nineteenth-century women writers who sought freedom for themselves but produced literature that could be considered racist, classist, and euthanasic seem hypocritical. Modern readers may have a similar reaction to *Alan's Wife* that Robins had to her first reading of *Ghosts*—she threw it across the room. Such a reaction in modern readers may be exacerbated by the assumption that Victorian women were all of a type: the "perfect Victorian lady," wife and mother (Vicinus *Suffer x*). *Alan's Wife* can seem even more shocking because we have not fully dealt with our own versions of eugenic realities in the forms of reproductive technologies. Genetic engineering, embryo profiling with in vitro fertilization, and other technologies for infertile couples have resulted in eugenic ideas being revisited by modern scientists, social critics, and philosophers, as well as would-be parents.<sup>52</sup>

Despite the generation gap, second-wave feminists revived interest in Robins (John 1) since she put her name on *Votes for Women!*, along with its novel version *The Convert* to back the suffrage cause. These works were republished in the 1980s. *Alan's Wife* was also rediscovered through association with Robins the suffragette rather than Robins the actress-playwright. Thus, Robins's realism became influential in feminine protest a second time. Newey relates that women playwrights were able to "produce works which can be read by the twenty-first-century feminist historian against the grain of Victorian ideologies of class, race, and gender" (*Women's* 3). *Alan's Wife* has received more notice since its first production than its authors would probably ever have anticipated (John interview). Without this attention from more recent feminists,

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<sup>52</sup> See Aviad E. Raz, "Eugenic Utopias/Distopias, Reprogenetics, and Community Genetics," (*Sociology of Health and Illness* 31.4 2009) 602–19.

*Alan's Wife* would have remained hidden, like so many other women's plays, behind a curtain of forgetfulness.

### *Robins's Reminiscences*

It is indicative of Robins's devotion to Bell that she looked back on *Alan's Wife* with particular fondness, not because of its challenging themes, its acting opportunities, or the fact that it was produced by the Independent Theatre, but simply because it was a project she shared with Bell. Robins reminisced in scribbled notes written after her letters were returned that 1891 was the year she and Bell saw each other most. In an 1892 letter to Bell, Robins contrasted this collaboration to the one she had with Constance Fletcher ("Miss F") on *Mrs. Lessingham*:

Ah dear one this Garrick play—if it brings me every other blessing will never bring the good days of companionship + joy in working with a familiar spirit that *Alan's Wife* did. I am an ingrate to confess it but I felt sore longings + [incompleteness?] in the situation after I left the Theatre with Miss F. last night. Dear I love you. Lisa.<sup>53</sup>

It is clear that for Robins the most rewarding part of creating a play was how it strengthened relationships.

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<sup>53</sup> Fales Series I; Subseries A; Folder 19 A, "Diaries," Nov [11?] 1892. Robins helped Fleming to write *Lessingham* and negotiated its production under John Hare, but their collaboration broke down when Fleming reneged on letting Robins take the play to America.

## Chapter 6

### Disappearing Act: The Masks of Elizabeth Robins

“She had intended to tell the truth—but hardly perhaps the whole truth. The life [that] was before her—which it was necessary that she should lead—seemed to her to be so difficult! She could not clearly see her way to be pure and good and feminine, and at the same time wise.”

Anthony Trollope, *The Duke's Children*<sup>1</sup>

“The discourse from the past is always layered with meanings, interfusions of revealed and hidden messages that often contradict one another.”

Thomas Postlewait<sup>2</sup>

“[Woman's] supposed inability to keep a secret is with many an unchallenged article of faith. Yet no secret has ever been better kept than the woman's. . . . [Woman's] instinct for the mask is abundantly justified.”

Elizabeth Robins<sup>3</sup>

Elizabeth Robin's life story could read like the plot of a Gothic novel: the insanity of her mother, the decay of her once-prosperous family, and what she considered the curses of inbreeding, including an inclination to suicide. These were not literary devices but real tragedies in the life of a sensitive, gifted woman who had internalized her father's belief in Darwinian theories of inheritance and her grandmother's fear of hereditary insanity. Science might explain these tragedies to her

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<sup>1</sup> See *The Duke's Children* (1880 ed. *Project Gutenberg*). This line describes Lady Mable Grex from Ch. 10 “Why Not Like Romeo, If I Feel Like Romeo?”

<sup>2</sup> See, Postlewait *Prophet* xix.

<sup>3</sup> See Robins, “Women's Secret,” *Way Stations*, ed. Joanne E. Gates (*Elizabeth Robins Web*) 3 and 7. Helene Cixous similarly wrote, “Woman has never *her* turn to speak—this being all the more serious and unpardonable in that writing is precisely the very possibility of change, the space that can serve as a springboard for subversive thought, the precursory movement of a transformation of social and cultural structures” (879). See “The Laugh of the Medusa,” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen, *Viewpoint* Summer 1.4 (1976) 5–93.

but could not prevent the mental anguish she suffered from them. Unlike many actresses of later generations, Robins chose not to publicly vent her grief in her memoirs. After her brother Saxton killed himself in 1900, she confided to her diary that her family suffered “madness & suicide by wh. we were menaced, bound, dogged from generation to generation” (qtd. in John 129).

Thomas Postlewait discusses typical perspectives taken by Victorian performers in their autobiographies:

When we consider how childhood regularly gets represented in nineteenth-century poetry and fiction, it is hardly surprising that many performers writing during and just after this period evoke childhood in either Wordsworthian (Lillah McCarthy, Lillie Langtry, Johnston Forbes-Robertson) or Dickensian (Constance Collier, Elsa Lanchester) mode. Some, such as Ellen Terry, give us both modes. (“Autobiography” 257)

Robins gives us neither mode. Why? Like the victim of psychological trauma who cannot remember past details, the omission of her childhood and youth from her narrative indicates that this part of her life was too painful. In *Whither and How*, Robins reveals how, years after her husband’s death, she experienced a flashback when she lost her wedding ring while acting in *The Sixth Commandment* with Lea and M. Marius (Claude Marius Duplany).<sup>4</sup>

In spite the rag round my finger to conceal it, [the ring] slipped off in the last act. I hold it tight in my palm but feel it was an omen; recollection unnerves me. I cannot conceal my agitation. They make enquiries. (What is the matter?) I fly downstairs to escape questioning. Break down later when dear old Marius comes gently and begs me to tell him what has distressed me. He sees the ringless finger and understands. I try to hide it. He draws my hand from under Lisa’s ragged cloak. “I saw it come off,” he says. I lose grip of myself. Seem to see the past all in one swift instant. The first, ‘With this ring I thee wed;’ the day in the buttercup field. And the last! The last! I suppose I am weak and unstrung. Marius is very gentle and respectful. ‘Don’t tell anyone,’ I say ‘don’t tell anyone what was the matter!’ ‘On my honour as a man.’ No one would understand—no one in the world.’ (Ch. 4, p. 8)

Some of her fiction contains autobiographical elements, especially *The Open Question*. However, fiction does not require direct soul bearing or the revelation of

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<sup>4</sup> Marius played the part of the chief of police. See “Shaftesbury Theatre,” *The Morning Post*, Oct. 9, 1890.



private details like the flashback. Also indicative of severe emotional pain was her rejection of romantic love. In *Whither and How*, she quoted a diary entry of Oct. 20, [1890]:

Sometimes in a moment, without effort, without warning, we stand revealed to ourselves. . . . Tonight my eyes were opened. . . . I saw how I had missed, or rather had and lost the most blessed thing in life, Devotion. I saw that I[,] whose strongest need and greatest capacity is for loving, am somehow forbidden to enjoy my birthright. . . . If any come near to offer me the fairest of gifts in human keeping, something in me cries out: Not again! Not for *you!* . . . I saw how I have thrown away one gift after another, laughed and jested away true affection, and if the mood were hotter, flown from it as if it were a pestilence. (qtd. in Ch. 2, p. 5).

After her husband's violent suicide, she could not risk romantic attachment.

Robins first used the "rest cure" in 1900 to help recover from typhoid that left her weak and exhausted (John 130–31). This treatment—complete rest and a fatty diet—could do nothing for grief or depression and might even make them worse. Neither did she use psychoanalysis to help her deal with traumas she experienced (John "Psychoanalysis"). According to Victoria Glendinning, patients of Robins's rest home at Backsettown were not encouraged to use "the 'talking cure': mulling over their miseries was definitely not encouraged" (357). So how did Robins vent her grief? Surely acting was an outlet, but as time removed her from the freshness of her pain, she might have felt release by sharing her story with the public as a triumphant expression of not only profession success, but also psychological health. She did not choose this means of writing her memoirs. Valerie Fehlbauer remarks in her study of novelist Ella Hepworth Dixon (1855–1932) that while nineteenth-century men frequently shed light on their inner selves as well as their work in their life writing, nineteenth-century women more frequently kept "their private selves hidden" (7). It seems ironic that the gender traditionally associated with vocalizing and emoting would be the one to hide themselves in their autobiographies.

Memoirs of this period frequently took the form of the bildungsroman. Robins not only used this genre to shape her past in *Both Sides*, she used it as a means to shield herself from view. In August 1891 she wrote in her diary:

If I write when I am too old to act, my best capital next to sympathetic observation and an unaffected style would be a diary of my own life . . . .<sup>5</sup> I will try to write the real happenings within and without—excusing myself to myself for lack of complete frankness by calling my silences self reverence, a dignified reserve, a 19<sup>th</sup> century shrinking from the nude. And yet since I take the trouble (and very great trouble it is) for my own future guidance let me leave as little dark as I can with decency reveal. As I write I feel sure I'll forget 'decency' and all self-consciousness in its narrow sense as soon as I am interested in what I'm putting down. (qtd. in Gates 255)

It is noteworthy that Robins characterized the “shrinking from the nude” as nineteenth-century, recognizing how reticence was typical of her times. Yet it seems that even by the twentieth century Robins did not forget “decency.” Though Virginia Woolf urged her to write *Both Sides of the Curtain* in 1928 and even offered the title (Gates 253), as that title suggests, Robins wrote as much to conceal as to reveal herself. Mary Jean Corbett remarks, “Self representation becomes its writer’s last performance . . . to protect herself against the deformations of publicity and celebrity, the final mask that will survive her, [is] a mask that can shield the private individual from public view” (“Literary Domesticity” 255). Corbett asserts that Robins’s creation of “self” in *Both Sides of the Curtain* was “not so as to maintain a feminized decorum about private life” (“Performing” 120). Yet Robins *did* keep to prescribed notions of femininity in her private life and she is circumspect in all of her published memoirs in order to protect that private life. This indicates at least some degree of anxiety about her past. Despite bemoaning the long history of women writers’ “inarticulateness in the past,” Robins too could be accused of “inarticulateness” (“Women’s Secret” 3). For example, she neglects to directly address her marriage and only refers to it by mentioning her mourning clothes in *Both Sides of the Curtain*. Instead of sharing personal details or reflections, Robins wrote about herself as if she were a fictional character in one of her stories, and not even a very well-defined one at that. Yet her tendency to hide behind masks was not something Robins began in her old age. She took on many personae throughout her life and held to social reserve for self-protection.

Robins’s desire to reveal the essence of characters on the stage but to reveal little of herself makes using her version of events problematic. “If I see any one trying

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<sup>5</sup> These ellipses are not mine.

to ferret me out, my greatest delight is to baffle and elude my pursuer and leave him contentedly following a false scent. . . . I have partly deliberately and partly unconsciously ‘cooked my accounts’” (qtd. in John 10).<sup>6</sup> Hiding the important details of her story unfortunately also hid her significance to theatre history. Revisiting her words and works can add a valuable dimension to theatre history. Though it is not one draft to consult, through the sum of her repository of papers, we see a more complete picture of a woman who made tremendous contributions in every sphere she entered.

Having a painful past fed another reason for Robins’s reserve: her early training for the stage that demanded emotional control. In *Whither and How*, Robins explains:

Among the things demanded as a matter of course are: punctuality; obedience; co-operation (the actor learns he is nothing by himself); power to bear public failure and keep a smiling face; instant, soldier-like answer to call or cue; power to override physical anguish, hopeless grief—and in the face of a broken life do the work of the hour—not once or twice in a lifetime, but in common practice. (“Introductory,” p. 7)

She was speaking from experience. After her husband’s death, she could not stop to grieve but had to perform night after night to support herself. It is noteworthy that it was not her heart that was broken, but her life. Putting together her broken life necessitated pushing through “physical anguish” and “hopeless grief.” In *Whither and How*, she makes it clear that suppressing feelings enabled her to act. Similarly, acting was a coping mechanism for living through difficult times, for instance, when she was about to be made redundant after the run of *The Sixth Commandment*.

Those last days at the Shaftesbury, remind me of one of the many useful things, psychologically considered, about life in the theatre. You cannot be consistently gloomy behind the scenes. And while you affect equanimity, even cheerfulness, you are rewarded by being inwardly less cast down.” (Ch. 4, p. 7)

She repressed her feelings as a coping mechanism.

Despite acting out of both psychological and financial necessity, not just artistic drive, Robins explains in *Whither and How* that her acting had been seen as attention-seeking. In a vague explanation of past events, Robins implies that she had to justify her need to act because of her family’s disapproval.

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<sup>6</sup> These ellipses are not mine.

The stage was the resort of vanity—of the particular variety known as exhibitionism. . . . The stage-aspiring young man, more (for obvious reasons) the young woman, was held to be so satisfied with herself that she felt the need of figuring on a wider field. It is true, of course, that the would-be actress wants the wider field. But she wants it for exhibiting something different from herself. . . .

People who do not outgrow the passion to try what it is like to be someone else, are so far from being vanity-smitten, they are those of all the world least satisfied with themselves as they are. It is huge discontent, not with the world, with *oneself*, that culminates in refusal to sit down for life with such a person. (“Introductory” pp. 1–3)

Though Robins must have intended the readers of this statement to sympathize with her as the subject of this self-doubt, even self-loathing, this admission is not personal. She distances herself by putting it in the third person. Self-doubt extends even to her body. She compares the performer’s body to an instrument played well only through practice (“Introductory,” p. 5). When a player cannot even cross the stage

Without betraying some unsuspected mannerisms—can’t do anything on *that* ‘play ground’ that isn’t awkward, or ludicrous or at least dull, pitifully unworthy of this glaring publicity we have been rash enough to invite. . . .

The body has to learn a fundamental precision that wears grace like an outer garment. Yet the body of the artist can never be quite content with itself, because never quite sure it may not be sublimely bettered. (pp. 5–6)

There is no “I” in these expressions. She may possess her body like an object, but Robins does not inhabit it. For her, grace is not innate or organic, but outside her nature, put on like a costume. The stage is “a great magnifying glass held over our defects” (p. 4). “When the actor has studied and slaved to teach himself ease, that is to seem to be unselfconscious, the hard-won step in mastering the more mechanical part of his business [has been accomplished]” (p. 5). Realism was part of this seeking after the natural, particularly as Ibsen’s situations were outwardly commonplace.

Because Robins suffered self-doubt, it is easy to see why self-improvement was so much a part of her ambition, in acting and in life, despite, and even because of, her personal hardships and family tragedies. Instead of pondering over problems she could not change, like her heroine Jean Creyke, Robins focused on what she could change. Since her family could not afford to finance her further education, Robins sought the theatre as “the nearest approach to the ideal University. . . . If to educate is

to draw out, stimulate and enlarge the natural powers, then all blindly, I did the best possible for myself when I insisted on finding my way to the stage” (*WH* p. 3). Her work ethic and self-mastery are admirable in many ways. Not only did they enable her to pour her emotions into her acting, they empowered her to compensate for her wrecked past by making a meaningful present. However, controlling one’s emotions can also become self-repressive; it inhibited Robins’s personal life, and even hid her contribution to the stage. This is especially unfortunate since her emotions and her contribution could have been openly discussed in her memoirs. Rather than self-aggrandizing in *Both Sides*, Robins is guilty of making herself disappear.

### *Remaking Identity Through Naming*

Robins frequently changed her identity by acting but also by changing her name. When she was young, her family called her Bessie. When she joined James O’Neill’s company in 1882, she took the stage name Clara and then Claire Raimond to protect her reputation (John 26). By January 1883, Robins was acting for the Pitt Company and felt confident enough to take back her given name Elizabeth (Gates 14). When her first fiction was published in London a few years later, she returned to a version of the name Claire Raimond by using the gender-neutral pen name C. E. Raimond, a combination of her father Charles Ephraim Robins’s initials and her favorite brother Raymond’s given name (John 106).<sup>7</sup> She was delighted when people assumed C. E. Raimond was a man (108). Robins had “the ‘strong pulse of Ambition’ that drives a woman to become a professional writer,” an ambition that causes a “‘secret, inward wound’ whose bleeding necessitates complicated defenses, disguises, evasions” (Gilbert and Gubar 317).<sup>8</sup>

Robins’s pen name helped her recreate herself on the page as she had done on the stage—through disguise. Even in their letters, friends addressed Robins by the

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<sup>7</sup> Robins’s first short story, “A Lucky Sixpence” (1893), and her first novel, *George Mandeville’s Husband* (1894), were published under her pen name. For a list of Robins’s other major works, see John Appendix 2.

<sup>8</sup> For discussion of how women’s gendering affects their psyches in other ways, see Elaine Showalter, *The Female Malady: Women, Madness, and English Culture, 1830–1980* (New York: Pantheon, 1985).

name of fictional or dramatic characters. Robins gained the nickname “Lisa” or “Liza” in the autumn of 1890 when Marion Lea began calling her after her character in *The Sixth Commandment* (WH Ch. 41, p. 6). This nickname persisted after the play closed with Robins signing herself as Lisa in many of her letters. With a similarly playful naming, “W. T. Stead, moralist and religious crusader, who had never entered the theatre until Robins persuaded him to do so at the age of fifty-five, could write to her in the guise of Hedda: ‘Oh, Hedda Hedda Darling don’t you know how I rejoice in your success how I glory in your triumph’” (qtd. in John 76). In 1891, Bell addressed Robins by the name of the heroine of Bell’s latest play *Stella*. Letters to “Stella” are filed with others from Bell “to Various People,” rather than with letters from Bell to Robins in the Fales Library.<sup>9</sup>

Mary Jean Corbett contends that “By contrast with Elizabeth Robins’s view of stage performance, ‘where your business is not to be your real self,’ the poststructuralist discourse on identity seems to contend there is no ‘real self’ not to be” (“Performing” 109). Again, there seems to be a gap that separates us from the Victorian perspective. Paul John Eakin believes, “We can never expect to witness the emergent sense of self as an observable event precisely because it is an ongoing process. . . . We never catch ourselves in the act of becoming selves; there is always a gap or rupture that divides us from the knowledge that we seek” (Introduction x). Yet Robins also acknowledged doubt about any solidness in the self with the statement: “No one knows anything more than what seems” (qtd. in John 104). This is true of any human expression. Jane Austen’s narrator in *Emma* similarly explains: “Seldom, very seldom, does complete truth belong to any human disclosure; seldom can it happen that something is not a little disguised or a little mistaken” (*Complete* 1035).

Robins did reveal much to her closest friends. And her habit of saving letters, and drafts of her memoirs gives those who seek them more details of her life and work. So was her attempt to “baffle and elude” really necessary? Gilbert and Gubar assert that the development of self is more complex for women, and that this is reflected in female characters in fiction.

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<sup>9</sup> See Series V; Subseries C; Box 11; Folder 1. December 24, 1891.

Because the relationship between personal identity and social role is so problematic for women, the emerging self can only survive with a sustained double vision. . . . It is possible for a kind of dialectic of self-consciousness to emerge. While this aspect of female consciousness has driven many women to schizophrenia. . . . maturity implies . . . the continual possibility, indeed the necessity, of self-division, duplicity and double talk. (163)<sup>10</sup>

Similar to fictional women, Robins's strategies of pleasing people, using aliases, and remaining silent were "defenses, disguises, evasions" that enabled her to not just survive, but to succeed. She was better at speaking up for others, as she did as a suffragette.

In *Whither and How*, Robins admits that she remembered things differently and remembered different things than the young woman who wrote them down in her diary. As anyone might in their later years, she admits to feeling as if she is two completely different "selves" (*WH* "Introductory 1").<sup>11</sup> "All that I go to find is my lost self—or, to be as honest as possible—I go to find such fragments as I shall be willing to declare" ("Introductory" 1). This response is typical of what Ira Bruce Nadel sees in the Victorian "natural desire but social resistance to personalizing experience" ("Apologize" 189). Even in a modern diary, a person may not record inner emotions or secrets. As Janet Bottoms observes in her essay on the diary of Alice James, "If the first instinct of the diarist is towards freedom of expression, the second instinct is to retreat, for no sooner does pen touch paper than the writer becomes also a reader, and a complex of inhibitions and an inculcated self-consciousness come into play" ("Sisterhood" 110).

Few people want others intruding into their lives as they are living them, so a degree of self-protection is to be expected. However, in his essay "Apologize or Confess! The Dilemma of Victorian Autobiography," Nadel explains that

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<sup>10</sup> See also Vivian Gardner, "By Herself: The Actress and Autobiography, 1755–1939" *Cambridge Companion to the Actress*, ed. Maggie B. Gale and John Stokes (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 2007) 173–192.

<sup>11</sup> Joanne E. Gates comments on this in "*Sometimes*," 6.

Victorian unease with confession as an autobiographical form led to its expropriation as a device for the novel. This, in turn, elevated the apology as the fundamental convention of autobiographical expression but the preponderance of objective, descriptive and limiting autobiographies that appeared created a conflict over form resolved only through the emergence of the mask as an autobiographical strategy late in the century. (189)

*Both Sides of the Curtain* illustrates the tension between the desire for privacy and the desire to confess. Only a mask bridges the gap between these two opposing compulsions, as Nadel explains, because Victorians tended to fear self-aggrandizement (190). Through the apology as opposed to the confession, the Victorian autobiographer focused on deeds rather than feelings, thereby protecting the “inner self.” If the tension between “reticence and admission” was heavy in the culture among male writers, it was heavier still among female writers who carried the further burden of female invisibility thrust upon them by their culture. In the case of *Both Sides*, Robins’s mask is the ingénue.

#### *Robins’s Bildungsroman*

According to Sharon Marcus, the female bildungsroman frequently “deploys amity to help female protagonists acquire the autonomy that makes them equal to their husbands” (91). Since Robins was a widow, a fact she emphasized frequently though indirectly in *Both Sides* by referencing her mourning outfit, the actor-managers who tried to limit and control her opportunities played the “husband-role” in her book. This explains the need to mention them regardless of their limited part in her success as compared with the part played by her female friends. The men block her path as she tries to find her true self, but more importantly, her true art. *Both Sides* then is even more a *kunsteroman*, an artist’s search that took Robins not just symbolically, but literally outward, first across America, then to England—her journey maturing her along the way. Robins hoarded her memorabilia in “an infatuation with the past, reverence toward documents, absorption with history and bias toward induction” (Nadel 193–94). Because of her “bias toward induction,” Robins created a naïve persona in *Both Sides* that was nothing like the pioneer presented in *Whither and How*. According to John, Robins used her diary to “work through and legitimise her actions and contradictions” (102). Yet if she had truly “worked through” them, Robins



might have been able to more openly express her “actions and contradictions” to future generations. Robins was able, as Mrs. Pankhurst advised, to “let [herself] go a little more” for the women’s movement, but when it came to her autobiographer-self, she was much more circumspect.

In 1913 Robins explained why restraint was necessary for women writers:

In print, even more than elsewhere (unless she is reckless), she must wear the aspect that shall have the best chance of pleasing her brothers. Her publishers are not women. Even the professional readers and advisers of publishers are men. The critics in the world outside, men . . . . So conscious is she it is *his* game she is trying her hand at, that she is prone to borrow his very name to set upon her title-page. She does so, not only that she may get courage from it to talk deep and go a-swashbuckling now and then, but for the purpose of reassuring the man. Here is something quite in your line, she implies; for lo! my name is ‘George.’ (“Women’s Secret” 6–7)<sup>12</sup>

Though publishing is no longer strictly a male domain, women writers, such as J. K. Rowling, still use their initials or pen names, particularly early in their careers. Gilbert and Gubar similarly explain the appeal of the male pseudonym: “By pretending to be a man, [a woman writer] can see herself as the crucial and powerful Other sees her. More, by impersonating a man she can gain male power, not only to punish her own forbidden fantasies but also to act them out” (316-17). Having another woman writer to talk to certainly helped Robins and Bell feel more empowered in “talking deep,” but, anonymity, even more than a pseudonym, helped them “go a-swashbuckling now and then,” for anonymity allowed them to safely write incendiary literature and to produce radical plays.

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<sup>12</sup> In *George Mandeville’s Husband*, a writer, Lois Wilbraham, uses a male pseudonym (George Mandeville). She also assumes a male role in her family. Some critics thought the book was anti-New Woman (John 109). John sees it as a role reversal showing how men take themselves too seriously. Showalter considers it anti-George Eliot. See *Sexual Anarchy, Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle*, especially Ch. 4 “Queen George,” 60–61. Showalter also explores how the shadow of Eliot fell over the next generation of women novelists, including Robins, in *A Literature of Their Own: British Women Novelists from Brontë to Lessing*, 2009 ed. (Princeton, NJ: Princeton UP, 1977) 88–91. Rather than write like men, as Robins advised, Helene Cixous expresses the idea that women can free themselves, personally and politically, by writing like women. See “The Laugh of the Medusa” trans. Keith Cohen and Paula Cohen (*Viewpoint* Summer 1.4 1976, 8) 5–93.

*Ibsen and the Conspirators Revisited*

By the time Robins wrote *Ibsen and the Actress* in 1928 at the age of sixty-six, many of her closest collaborators had died—losing their chance to tell their version of the Ibsen campaign. Robins continued to protect herself and her friends—both dead and living. *Ibsen and the Actress* contains telling examples of this as Robins explains the struggle for rights to *Hedda Gabler*. She neglects details about her work with Archer in order to avoid mentioning their close relationship:

They [Gosse and Archer] allowed us to collaborate in a somewhat more speakable version for stage use. I don't mean for a moment that we had anybody's consent to the least alteration of Ibsen's meaning, but we were allowed to alter Ibsen's English dress. We found in this latitude a very inspiring kind of freedom. (17)

Robins, Lea, and Archer were direct collaborators, not Gosse. Ibsen did not write the play with “English dress”; the play is set in Norway. Even after forty years, Robins denies details. This indicates that she was uncomfortable admitting that she, Lea, and Archer had finagled the rights to the play from its legal owners. The joint managers' motives may, to them, have been artistically noble; they aimed to be as true to Ibsen as anyone could get. However, their version was initially unauthorized. Robins deflects these concerns by mentioning the typical domain of the Victorian actress—dress and appearance—as if anyone in 1928 cared about 1891 legalities. Farther down the page she reveals what she was really excited about:

I have somewhere several sets of page proofs of *Hedda Gabler* as they left the hands of the translators; one set scored over in Marion Lea's handwriting, one with mine, and our final agreed recommendations. These Mr. Archer fully criticized, sometimes denounced and utterly declined; but the final result was, I think, a very speakable, very playable version, no less faithful—I have always held more faithful—to Ibsen. (17)

Here Robins reveals her enigmatic personality. She enjoyed being mysterious, hinting at rather than stating, the facts. It did not take several sets of proofs to make a recommendation for costumes. Further on she admits, “In setting down my notes I have not aspired to be historical. I have tried quite simply to fix a personal impression” (15).

Lea and Robins avoided public squabbles over *Hedda Gabler* at the time but must have realized later that their efforts to protect themselves early in their careers

kept them hidden from history. Yet, even in 1928, four years after Archer's death, Robins still did not wish to admit their schemes. Her relationship with him was tender enough to warrant protection from prying eyes—even those of historians. Yet Robins could have easily burned all her papers if she did not wish to be known at all. She had Bell's example of this means of ensuring privacy. To a large degree she did not follow it. Instead, she revealed her involvement in the Ibsen campaign through a kind of doublespeak—at once denying and affirming the facts—what John refers to as “staging” her own life.

At the age of 78, when she wrote *Theatre and Friendship*, Robins wanted to share more details of her friendships, but still hesitated to disclose all of their stratagems. By the time she wrote *Both Sides of the Curtain* at the age of 86, she was ready to share more aspects of her life, but still did not admit that she had done some devious things in the name of art. Because of this silence, she was unable to claim her part in the evolution of the theatre—particularly the influential role she played in the Ibsen campaign. Even though she was a very different woman from the twenty-six-year old eager to escape a painful past, she did not share her history. Revelations might have proved cathartic. Publishing *Whither and How* might have proved historic. The bildungsroman genre separated Robins from her reading audience in the twentieth century and in the twenty-first, making Robins appear like an archetype instead of the pioneer she was.

The reviewer for the *Manchester Guardian* pronounced on March 15, 1940 that Robins “too lavishly chronicles rather small beer.” For modern readers especially “the discourse of ‘inner’ experience—fantasies, feelings, desires, dreams, and so forth—and the related construction of an ‘inner self,’ as distinct from the public persona, are central functions of the autobiographical process and arguably its unique domain” (Buckton 85). Even Heinemann had warned, “There’s no money in a shadow” (qtd. in John 107). As Jane Marcus asserts, “the young actress is lost in a welter of names and places, and the central, heroic figure that emerges is Beerbohm Tree” (*Elizabeth Robins* 5). Tree, as we have seen, was not Robins’s hero. Interestingly, Robins did not reveal that his real motivation for helping her—or not helping her—was to make her his mistress (John interview). Though this would have been a provocative detail in 1940, Robins “shrank from the nude” and left it out. Details do not have to be intensely personal to be interesting. She does include a passage about how, when her role in

the Buchanan play was ending, she decided to splurge by buying a roasted potato to eat behind the scenes. When she thought of its cost, the potato stuck in her throat. These kinds of details make a good story. However, though neither her father nor her husband had proved able to support her, either financially or emotionally, she does not explain how she was able to afford to take in her younger brother or why she was determined to do so. Secrets shared make a good story.

### *Shaw's Contribution*

When Robins finished *Both Sides of the Curtain* she wrote to Shaw to ask him to recommend it. The introduction of the book is made up of this correspondence. Instead, Shaw responded in his typical facetious style: "I am not sure that you will not have to tell more about yourself, unless you think it better to leave the reader guessing, which I rather incline to advise, just giving the reader that old portrait you showed me to start with" (vi–vii).<sup>13</sup> Shaw referred to a photograph of Robins taken when she was about twenty that became a cigarette card. In her return letter, also published in the introduction, Robins replied that her intention was to show how "the creature [Bessie at age twenty] little by little learned and grew" from the Victorian version of sex appeal, the ingénue. This photograph was originally meant to attract male admirers—but more importantly for Robins—stage roles. Robins asked Shaw to "Think of the chasm between that early picture and the Hedda photographs."<sup>14</sup> Robins saw the contrast between the two characterizations as a positive progression, despite the fact that Hedda was repellent to many men, including many actor-managers and their not-proffered stage roles. That the same woman embodied these two opposite images within a decade is remarkable—for illustrating the tremendous changes occurring in society, for showing Robins's versatile acting, and for revealing her multi-faceted personality. Though Robins included the ingénue photograph in her book, she

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<sup>13</sup> See Figure 13.

<sup>14</sup> See Figure 9, the studio photograph of Robins as Hedda. Stage lighting was inadequate for the cameras of the time to capture live performance. Exceptions are extremely rare. Therefore, actors had photographs taken in the studio, dressed in character. See Christopher Innes, *A Sourcebook on Naturalist Theatre* (London: Routledge, 2000) 3.

did not include any Hedda photographs; perhaps she felt they were still vivid in Shaw's mind, though the next generation would not have this knowledge. However, the difficulty with her using the ingénue as the protagonist for her memoir is that she begins *Both Sides* with the "creature" at twenty-seven, as she saw England for the first time, not at twenty. She was no longer an ingénue in 1940, but neither was she one in 1889 when she first took up Hedda or in 1888 when she landed in England. Despite protestations to Shaw, Robins was mistaken in patronizing her "pin-up girl" personae. Though she presents herself as naïve in *Both Sides*, she was only unknowing of her future—like anyone else. She did not know when she landed that she would be "rescued" from bad parts by Ibsen, but that did not make her naïve (*Both Sides* 209, vii). Even at twenty the demure costume and shy smile hide the fact that as a young woman alone she had been strong and self-assertive as she procured a livelihood in America. Years after the cigarette card photograph was taken, she had buried a husband and had crossed an ocean to recreate herself. Calling herself a "creature" in 1940 was more a mask than a pleasant or even a teasing self-deprecation.

Robins was naturally inclined to taking on parts, a tendency that did not stop at the stage door. As Angela John relates, her "intense concern about whatever subject was currently absorbing her, invited charges of self-centeredness and a suspicion that she willfully used people for her own advantage" (10). However, these same accusations could rest at the feet of any actor-manager, even more so, because they wielded so much power. Anyone accomplishing the things Robins did, with so few financial resources had to find creative, sometimes circuitous strategies to succeed.

Instead of praise for the book, Shaw wrote:

I cannot judge this: you must try it on somebody under thirty. You see, I start with an interest—a ready-made interest—that the readers of today do not possess. First, a rather special interest in YOU. Second, third, fourth, fifth, etc. an interest (not special) in all the people you mention, based on incidents that you do not mention. . . .<sup>15</sup> "Oh! This mania for secrecy will undo you" (*Both Sides* v, vii)

It would have been kinder for Shaw to simply recommend the book, but that was not his typical reaction, nor was it the style of *his* public personae, the critic GBS. Shaw

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<sup>15</sup> I "mention" details of some of Robins's associates in Appendices 2 and 3.

offered advice, often unsolicited, to many of his friends and even their spouses, like Archer's wife, Frances, who did not persevere with her two hundred and fifty page novel after Shaw gave his opinion of it (Whitebrook 91). We may never know what became of that manuscript, but in the case of *Both Sides*, Shaw's point was valid. Instead of making the book more personal, Robins published Shaw's letter in her introduction along with a strident response: "This isn't the letter you first thought of writing me. It's a subterfuge. Why don't you tell me what you were most clearly thinking about, or cursing about, when you first read those pages?" (*Both Sides* vii). How can we explain this level of anger with someone Robins represents as her friend? Perhaps she hoped that the harshness of this statement would induce Shaw to make some confession of his own, but he did not. Perhaps she still felt vulnerable to Shaw's teasing. Perhaps no one could have encouraged her to be more frank, but Shaw was definitely not the one to do it. In 1891 she had no reason to endure his obnoxious behavior. He was poor, ill-clad, and very much without influence (Whitebrook 1). He had been jealous of Robins's early success, her time with Archer, and her access to Ibsen's works, some even before publication. Robins and Archer were part of a circle that did not include Shaw (138). As she consulted old diaries and letters for her memoir, Robins reread her old thoughts on Shaw and made comments to herself in the margins. One comment she did not publish referred to her disgust at the way Shaw repaid his lover Florence Farr after she produced his "Arms + the Man wh. no manager + no other producer wd. look at—Shaw on the 1<sup>st</sup> night in the Theatre lobby after the play was over laughed at some harsh criticism of F. F.'s acting + said 'The unfortunate Miss Farr.'"<sup>16</sup> Though Shaw came to womankind's aid philosophically and took their issues more seriously than many men of his age, he could be condescending and cruel to real women in his life.

Though there was a thawing of relations between him and Robins, due partly to the passing of time and to the passing of so many of their other friends, one reason that Robins did not vent her full anger about Shaw in *Both Sides* was because the memoir only takes her story up to 1890, before she had met Shaw. The more

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<sup>16</sup> This statement is un-dated and appears on the reverse of a piece of Bell's stationary imprinted with her name and her title DBE, which she received in 1918. Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 18; Folder 115, "Marion Lea."

important reason was that Robins was not using her book to expose the faults of others but to rescue her reputation as a pioneer in the theatre. Unfortunately, though Robins was famous first, according to Mary Gay Gibson Cima, “One of the ways Shaw eventually defended himself was to rationalize her talent away, in print” (*Elizabeth* 175). Since Shaw would not recommend the book, Robins included the cigarette card as her frontispiece, as Shaw had suggested in jest, and swore that it was “by way of revenge on you for failing me” (vii). Shaw had humiliated her in the past, but this time he told her the truth. The fact that she uses their curt exchanges in her introduction reveals that the real purpose of her including them was to mention *him*; after all, many in 1940 would recognize the Academy Award winner of the hit screenplay *Pygmalion* (S. Peters 3). Establishing a link with Shaw was essential if she were to reverse the effects of her own secretiveness that had hidden her from history. Being famous in 1940, Shaw was a much more attractive friend for Robins to associate herself with than the threadbare bachelor of the 1890s. Though he had nothing to do with her success then, without him in 1940, who would understand just how important she was? She used stories about Oscar Wilde and Beerbohm Tree in her memoir too, giving them more credit than they really deserved, but she could not receive any letters from them. They had already died—Wilde in 1900 and Tree in 1917. The other friends who had joined in her exploits: Lea, Grein, Archer, and Bell, were also dead. Robins still felt an obligation to protect them—she could not have done all she did without them (*TF* 24–27, 33–35).<sup>17</sup> Even her neighbor, friend, and sometime publisher Virginia Woolf preceded her in death.

It is unfortunate for posterity that Virginia Woolf implied in *A Room of One's Own* that there were no women playwrights, for she knew many. Though Robins had been a friend of Virginia's mother, Julia Duckworth Stephen, Robins met Virginia in 1928,<sup>18</sup> the same year Virginia gave speeches at Newnham and Girton that became *A*

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<sup>17</sup> As we have seen, *Hedda Gabler* would not have been possible without Lea and her contact with their financial backer Menpes. As well as scripts and translations, Bell provided props and set pieces, including the cradle for *Alan's Wife*. Grein helped Robins with her Ibsen series of plays. Archer was Robins's continual collaborator until she retired from the stage.

<sup>18</sup> See John 232.

*Room of One's Own*. Though Virginia had read many Victorian women's diaries, she reported to her young audience, "all has vanished" (qtd. in Sharon Marcus 33). Certainly this makes the point that women's works have been forgotten, though many are still in the archives. Did Woolf's listeners then understand this? Do we now? Sharon Marcus laments, "Even today few consult this corpus" of life writing.<sup>19</sup> Virginia revealed a clue to her intentions in Chapter 1 of *A Room of One's Own*: "When a subject is highly controversial . . . one cannot hope to tell the truth. One can only show how one came to hold whatever opinion one does hold." Virginia Woolf had more than a passing interest in Robins's story. She found it "fascinating," but had difficulty with Robins's "scale of one year to 500 pages" (qtd. in John 232). If only Woolf could have edited Robins's sightseeing so that the *Whither and How* material could have been a chapter of *Both Sides*, then Robins might have regained her place in history.

Robins, like Shaw, had the drive to remain in the public eye. She had succeeded many times in recreating herself, but she did not make a final leap back into public consciousness. "The creature . . . learned and grew," but she failed to show her full height (*Both Sides* vii). Instead of Hogarth, Heinemann's company published *Both Sides*; the publishing house retained its almost reverential attitude toward Robins many years after the death of its founder in 1920 (John interview). Though Virginia Woolf did not mention to her young audiences at Newnham and Girton that women she knew *did* write plays, ironically it is to Hogarth Press that we owe the publishing of *Ibsen and the Actress*; *Portrait of a Lady or The English Spirit Old and New*; and the posthumous *Raymond and I*. When Robins's executor, Octavia Wilberforce, died, the administration of the Backsettoun trust fell to Leonard Woolf (John 4). It is thanks to him that Robins's collection found a home at New York University.

### *The Larger Picture*

Though she certainly intended for particular individuals to stand out in her memoir, Robins claimed in the final paragraph of her introduction that "I did not expect in a long record, bristling with names, to make them individually interesting. Many of

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<sup>19</sup> Marcus refers to women's life writing, but I would expand this to include all of women's writing, whatever the genre and whatever the century of its genesis.



them must of necessity be like figures in a stage crowd, not meant to stand out, and if they did stand out, spoiling the picture” (viii). This is another example of Gagnier’s “pragmatics of self-representation” (*Subjectivities* 4). Robins uses “pragmatic truth” for “specific ends rather than conformity to the facts per se” because she had to maintain a “divided self.” Even as a wealthy old woman, Robins maintained this division between the public actress in front of the curtain and the private woman behind it. Even if Robins could not explain her psychological journey out, she could have explained her professional achievements and fleshed out the collaborators who were so vital to her success. No longer the latest fad, Robins and her friends remain as forgotten as any other non-*canonized* artists. Leslie A. Fiedler believes that

All literature which survives its historical moment is rooted in archetypes[;] it prepares for change by expressing the otherwise unconfessed dark side of our ambivalence: chiefly our hatred and fear of the Other. That Other is, though customarily defined in terms of race, gender, generation, or class, a projection of all that is irredeemably alien in the depths of our own psyches. (“Canon” 63)

Thus, to survive beyond one’s historical moment is a two-part struggle: to express the universal, *and* the personal. Robins’s ingénue persona that she hoped would be archetypal, and therefore timeless, could not survive its historical moment without the necessary second part—her inner self.

As a writer Robins declared that she did not want “white light turned on *me* for the benefit of others’ amusement or pity anymore than I could stand naked in the marketplace” (*Both Sides* 262). Yet being a writer, especially an autobiographer, *is* like standing naked in the marketplace if that writer publishes under her own name, openly and truthfully reveals herself, and tries to sell these expressions to the public. Yet, by revealing only what she wanted people to see, Robins felt more in control, an understandable desire considering how much of her youthful experience had been out of her control. As a young woman Robins had felt vulnerable to strange men in the street, but as a professional woman she was brave and resourceful. Just because a woman feels weak in one part of her life does not mean she cannot be brave in another part. Robins shook off her fear when it was something she wanted for others. However, expressions of the inner self are obviously individual, rather than collective. As Jacky Bratton asserts, “Rather than a sense of individual autonomy, a sense of identification, interdependence and community is key in the development of women’s

identity and therefore also central in their stories of themselves” (*New* 101–02).

“Interdependence and community” are also essential to the stories of the theatre, an art form that creates and recreates collective experience. Therefore communal stories, like Robins’s, better reflect the inner life of *the theatre*. Since Robins brought other personalities into *Whither and How*, Archer and Lea in particular, this memoir is more pertinent to theatre history than her published memoirs and is more vital to theatre history than it would have been if Robins had focused solely on herself.

*Whither and How* sits on the shelf alongside a great deal more of Robins’s unpublished work. There is much to be learned from her: about the fin de siècle theatre, about the New Drama, and about friendships that created them. Robins and her friends *are* individually interesting and their stories should stand out. Far from spoiling them, they color the pictures of women’s history and women’s culture and fill in the picture of theatre history.





ELIZABETH ROBINS

aged about 20, as heroine in the New York production of  
James Albery's *Forgiven*

The only photograph of mine to achieve the distinction of being a cigarette card. Bernard Shaw caught sight of it on my writing table at Palace Gate among a heap of papers and other things discarded. I heard his chuckle as he seized on the absurdity. "Here," he said, with some gibe I have unfortunately forgotten, "here is your frontispiece."

Fig. 13 Robins used this photograph as her frontispiece for *Both Sides of the Curtain*. Shaw wrote to Robins: "I am not sure that you will not have to tell more about yourself, unless you think it better to leave the reader guessing, which I rather incline to advise, just giving the reader that old portrait you showed me to start with" (vi-vii). Used with permission of Independent Age.

**Appendix 1**  
**“Workers in Art”: Some of Robins’s First “Helpers”**

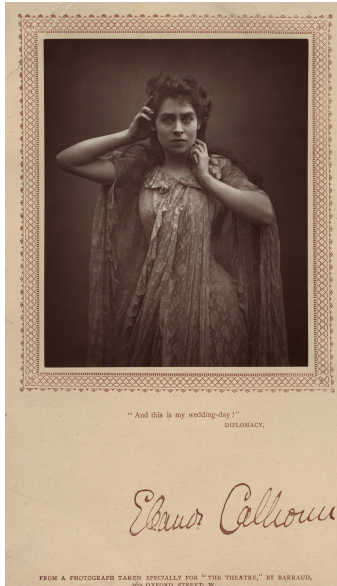


Fig. 14 Eleanor Calhoun in *Diplomacy*. Photo by Herbert Rose Barraud. Published by David Bogue, 1885. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Photo by Mrs. Oscar Beringer Kate Praguel

Fig. 15 Mrs. Oscar Beringer gave Robins her London debut in 1889. Photo from “A Bookman’s Gossip,” *The Bystander*, Vol. 7, July 5, 1905, p. 39, Google Books.

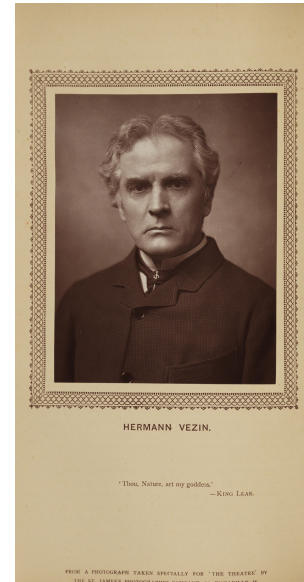


Fig. 16 Hermann Vezin (1829–1910). Photo by St. James’s Photographic Co. Published by David Bogue, 1883. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 17 Genevieve Ward, (1837–1922). Photo by unknown photographer, ca. 1879. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 18 Madge Kendal (1848–1935). Photo by Alexander Bassano, 1882. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 19 Henry James (1843–1916). Photo by Elliott and Fry, 1884. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



## Appendix 2

### “Workers in Art”: Some of Robins’s Cast Members



Fig. 20 Scott Buist played Tesman in the 1891 *Hedda Gabler*. Photo by C. W. Faulkner, London. <https://www.flickr.com/photos/42399206@N03/4762061862/>



Fig. 21 Charles Sugden played Judge Brack in the 1891 production of *Hedda Gabler*. Photo by Bassano Ltd., 1913. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

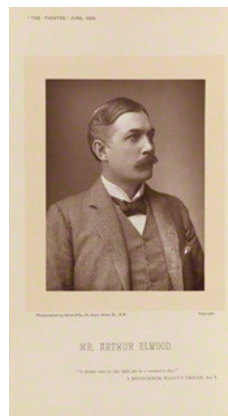


Fig. 22 Arthur Elwood was London’s first Lovborg. Photo by Alfred Ellis, published by Eglington & Co., 1893 © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 23 Mrs. E. H. Brooke played Jean’s mother in *Alan’s Wife*. 1929 photo by Arnold Genthe. Library of Congress, Washington, DC.



Fig. 24 James Welch (1865–1917) played Jaime Warren in *Alan’s Wife*. Photo published by Beagles & Co., ca. 1900. © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 25 Lewis Waller (1860–1915), London’s second Lovborg and its first Oswald in *Ghosts*, played the warder in *Alan’s Wife*. 1900s photo by Alexander Percy Guttenberg, © National Portrait Gallery, London.



Fig. 26 Annie Saker (1882–1932) had a walk-on part in *Alan’s Wife*. 1914 photo by Bassano Ltd. © National Portrait Gallery, London.

### **Appendix 3** **Associates of the Independent Theatre Society (ITS)**

Like Robins, members of the ITS experienced the “immense advantage to plays and players of having little parts in the hands of important people—one week to play lead, the next[,] the least in the cast” (*Whither and How* Ch. 5, p. 9).

#### **Original Leadership:**

J. T. Grein, President and Founder; Frank Lindo, Business Manager;  
Charles Hoppe, Acting Manager

#### **Committee Members after *Ghosts*:**

J. T. Grein; Frank Harris; Julia Frankau; George Moore; Cecil Raleigh;  
C. W. Jarvis, Secretary (later replaced by Herman de Lange)

#### **Management of the ITS as a Limited Company:**

J. T. Grein, Honorary President; Dorothy Leighton, Acting President

#### **Other Associates:**

(\*Playwrights, adapters and/or translators who offered plays to the ITS,  
produced or not.)

**\*Abingdon, William L.** (1860–1918) Born at Northampton, the “popular Adelphi villain” debuted in Ireland in 1879 (Reid and Compton 3). Returning to England, he played Captain Macdonald in the long-running *The English Rose* at the Adelphi, where he perfected his “scoundrelism.” For the ITS, he played the lover Laurent in the ménage à trois *Térèse Raquin* at the Royalty in 1891 (Orme 99), and Hjalmar in *The Wild Duck*, also at the Royalty, in 1894 (141).<sup>20</sup> Abingdon played in John Gray and André Raffalovich’s play *The Blackmailers* in 1894 (“Prince”). Abingdon supported John Hare in the title role of *An Old Jew* with Mrs. Theodore Wright, Herman De Lange, and Kate Rorke at the Garrick in 1894 (W. Archer ‘*World*’ 1994 21).

**Achurch, Janet** (1863–1916) [née Sharp] Achurch trained at Theatre Royal Margate under Sarah Thorne in 1881 (*ODNB*). In 1883 she debuted at the Olympic Theatre in London and toured the provinces in a number of plays, including *Lady Audley’s Secret* in which she played the title role (Adams 7). She impressed George Bernard Shaw,

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<sup>20</sup> See also “Independent Theatre,” *Times*, Oct 10, 1891: 6.

who later championed her career, when she played in *The New Magdalen* in 1884 (ODNB). At twenty-three she took the management of the Novelty where she debuted the part of Nora in *A Doll's House*. She revived this role for the ITS in 1897 with Courtney Thorpe playing Torvald (Orme 147). She played Rita Allmers in Robins's *Little Eyolf* at the Avenue with Courtney Thorpe as Alfred Allmers ('*World*' 1896 394). In 1897 she debuted the title role of Shaw's *Candida* at Her Majesty's Theatre, Aberdeen (ODNB). Shaw wrote the play with her in mind. Achurch wrote *Mrs. Daintree's Daughter*, which Powell points out shares many aspects of the later-written *Mrs. Warren's Profession* ("New Women" 85). *Mrs. Daintree's Daughter* was not produced until 1903; Achurch played Leila Daintree (ODNB).

\***Archer, William** (1856–1924) Theatre critic and journalist, Archer was born in Perth, Scotland, the eldest son of nine children (ODNB). He began his journalism career in 1875 at the *Edinburgh Evening News* while attending Edinburgh University where he studied literature, moral and natural philosophy, and mathematics. He eventually wrote theatre criticism for the *London Figaro*, *The World*, *The Tribune*, *The Nation*, and *The Star*, as well as articles on other subjects for other papers. Despite this work, he struggled to make a living. He wrote over 175 pieces about Ibsen's plays, and was a tireless advocate for a national theatre. He translated *Ghosts* and *A Visit* for ITS productions (Whitebrook 111; Orme 103). Financial success came late in life when he wrote *The Green Goddess*, which opened in New York in 1921 (Whitebrook 367).

**Armstrong, G.** Armstrong played Flor in the Independent Theatre production of *The Wild Duck* in May 1894 for three performances at the Royalty ('*World*' of 1894 383).

**Ashton, Florence** Ashton played Ellen, the maid, in the 1897 ITS revival of *A Doll's House* for six nights at the Globe Theatre ('*World*' 1897 395).

\***Aveling, Edward Bibbins** (1849–1898) Aveling, who took a Doctor of Science in 1876 and helped form the Socialist League in 1884, was a regular contributor to the *Dramatic Review* under the pen name Alec Nelson from April 1885 (ODNB). In 1889 he began writing plays for the Shaftesbury Theatre. He read *Ghosts* to The Playgoer's Club which helped to increase interest in the ITS's first performance (Orme 79).

Aveling offered his play *Judith Shakespeare* to the ITS in 1891. It was not performed there, but at the Royalty in 1894 (Orme 94; Powell Oscar 145). On May 5, 1895, he offered this play to Henry Irving as repayment for his debts (*Irving Correspondence*).



**Ayers, Mrs. Arthur** Mrs. Ayers played Vaussard in *The Heirs of Roubardin* in 1894 at the Opera Comique ('*World*' 1894 375).

**Barnett, Orlando** In 1891 Barnett co-managed and starred with Hermann Vezi in Vezi's comedy *Mrs. M.P.* with George Foss (*Era* "Theatrical Gossip" November 7, 1891, 10). He also played in *A Breach of Promise*, the curtain raiser for *Mrs. M.P.* According to *The Morning Post* for July 12, 1893, Barnett "gave touches of the grotesque" to his role in Bell's *Jerry-BUILDER Solness*.<sup>21</sup> He also appeared in *The Black Cat* for the ITS on December 8, 1893 (Adams 165). He was the first Nichola in *Arms and the Man* in 1894 ("*World*" of 1894 381). Barnett continued acting into the 1920s, including the part of Finch McComas in *You Never Can Tell* ("You Never Can Tell" 16).

**\*Barraclough, Sidney** (1869–1930) Actor and vocalist from Yorkshire, Barraclough received a three-year scholarship in music to New College, Oxford (Reid and Compton 14). He debuted at the Drury Lane Theatre in 1886 as a member of the chorus of *Frivoli*. He played mostly light comedy parts before taking the role of Duke Ferdinand of Calabria in *The Duchess of Malfi* for the ITS ("Duchess"). Oscar Wilde so admired Barraclough in this part that he wanted him to play Gerald Arbuthnot in *A Woman of No Importance* (*Letters* 540). Tree gave the role to Fred Terry.

**\*Barton, Dora** (1884–1966) Barton was a child actor when she played the daughter, Undine, in *The Black Cat* for the ITS with Lily Hall Caine, Neville Doone, and Orlando Barnett on December 8, 1893 (Orme 137; Adams 165).

**Beauchamp, John** Beauchamp played Sir Charles Fairfax in Dr. Dabb's London matinée performance of *Her Own Witness* with Elizabeth Robins and Winifred Fraser in 1889 ("Her Own Witness"). In October 1893, he received good reviews for his part as the Austrian general in the ITS production of *A Question of Memory* ("Independent Theatre" *The Standard* Oct 28, 1893).

**Beaugarde, Alice** Beaugarde took the part of Jones in *Thyrza Fleming* in 1895.<sup>22</sup> Bernard Gould, Winifred Fraser, and Esther Palliser were also in the cast.

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<sup>21</sup> See "Independent Theatre Society," *The Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7. See also Franc 122.

<sup>22</sup> See "Thyrza Fleming," *Era*, Jan 12, 1895: 11.

\***Bell, Florence** (née Olliffe) (1851–1930) Bell published more than forty works, including *Between the Posts*, a one-act comedy that enjoyed 119 performances at the Comedy in 1893 (Powell Oscar 146). As well as *Alan's Wife*, Bell wrote *Jerry-Builder Solness*, one of few comedies produced by the ITS (Orme 128). Both plays used the talents of James Welch. Sybil Thorndike produced Bell's *The Showroom* and *Angela (Who Was Who* "Hugh Bell"). Bell's social criticism includes *The Minor Moralist*. She published her stepdaughter Gertrude Bell's letters in 1927. She was made DBE in 1918 for commanding a hospital for wounded soldiers in WWI (ODNB).

\***Benham, Arthur** (1872–1895) Benham wrote *Theory and Practice*, given as the curtain raiser for *Alan's Wife*, at Terry's Theatre on April 28, and May 2, 1893 (Schoonderwoerd 115; Orme 125–26). A promising playwright, Benham died at age twenty-three. His sister, actress Estelle Burney, co-wrote *The Awakening* and *The County* with him in 1892 (Adams 145). She nursed him during his final illness (Powell Oscar 146).

\***Beringer, Mrs. Oscar** (1856–1936) [née Aimee Danielle] Born in Philadelphia the child of Edward Lynch Daniell of the 44th Regiment (King's Own), Beringer was a playwright, director, and novelist who became a manager in 1888 with her play *Tares (Who Was Who)*. She married Oscar Beringer, director of the Philharmonic Society, in 1873; they had two sons and three daughters. She launched her daughters Esmé and Vera as child stars in the 1888 production of *Little Lord Fauntleroy* (Adams 148). The girls followed this success with other roles in their mother's productions. Vera played Olaf in Mrs. Beringer's *The Pillars of Society* with Elizabeth Robins as Martha Bernick (Gates 32). Mrs. Beringer wrote *That Girl* with Henry Hamilton, produced in 1890 (Powell Oscar 146). In 1891 she wrote *Katherine Kavanagh* with Clotilde Graves (150). Mrs. Beringer wrote *Salvé* for the ITS for a double-bill with *A Man's Love* in 1895 (Orme 145).<sup>23</sup> Her most famous play, the one-act *A Bit of Old Chelsea*, was given in 1897 as a curtain raiser for Buchanan's *Sweet Nancy* at the Court Theatre (Powell Oscar 146; "Mrs. Oscar"; "World" 1897 383). John Martin-Harvey played in both productions.

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<sup>23</sup> See also "Independent Theatre Society," *Era*, Mar. 23, 1895: 8.

**Berton, Paul M.** Berton acted in *Le Pater* in French for the ITS on October 27, 1893. ("Independent Theatre" *The Times* Oct. 28, 1893). In 1897 he played the waiter in *The Liars*, a comedy in four acts by Henry Arthur Jones (*'World'* 1897 414). He adapted Marie Corelli's novel *The Sorrow's of Satan* with Herbert Woodgate for a two-month run at the Shaftesbury theatre from January 9, 1897 (379–80). This play starred Lewis Waller as Prince Lucio Rimanez and John Beauchamp as The Earl of Elton.

**Besant, Walter** (1836–1901) The fifth child of ten, Walter Besant was born in Portsea to William Besant and his wife Sarah Ediss (*Who Was Who*; *ODNB*). He excelled at school and entered King's College, London in 1854, but left there in favor of Christ's College, Cambridge in 1855. He became known for his serialized novels, especially *The Golden Butterfly* (1876) and *All Sorts and Conditions of Men* (1882). Besant was a speaker for reform on behalf of sweatshop workers, the poor, the London Hospital, free public libraries, and the Salvation Army. He founded the Women's Central Bureau of Work in 1897, which helped middle-class women find employment. He took up the cause of copyright reform by organizing the Society of Authors in 1883. He wrote *The Death of Count Godfrey* with W. H. Pollock for the ITS, but it was not given (Schoonderwoerd 125).

\***Bond, Acton** (1862–1941) Bond starred as Renyi in *A Question of Memory* for the ITS in October 1893 at the Opéra Comique (Orme 133). He played in Irving's *Henry VIII* in January 1892 with ITS players William Haviland and John Martin-Harvey (Wearing 101–02). He played Prospero in *The Tempest* and Valentine in *The Two Gentlemen of Verona* at the Court Theatre in London in 1904 (Adams 624).

**Bonney, William** *The Era* for Jan. 12, 1895 reported that Bonney "was good in the part" of Bertie Earnshaw in Dorothy Leighton's *Thyrza Fleming* ("Thyrza Fleming").<sup>24</sup> He was assistant stage manager under Herman de Lange for the musical *His Last Chance* starring Sydney Herbert Basing, Kate Santley, and Lizzie St. Quinten in 1891 (Wearing 87).

\***Bourchier, Arthur** (1863–1927) Educated at Eton and Oxford, Bouchier was president and founder of the Oxford dramatics club, Philothespians, that became the

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<sup>24</sup> *The Morning Post* called this "excellent work." See "Terry's Theatre" Jan. 5, 1895: 3.

Oxford University Dramatic Society in 1884 (*Who's Who*; *ODNB*). He joined Lillie Langtry's company in 1889, debuting in Wolverhampton in September of that year as Jacques in *As You Like It*. He spent much of the 1892 season in New York with Augustin Daly's company but played in *A Visit* for the ITS in March 1892 (*ODNB*; Orme 105). Bouchier married the actress Violet Vanbrugh in 1894. She became his leading lady in many productions; they divorced in 1917. In early 1900, Bouchier jointly managed the Criterion with Charles Wyndham, and then took management of the Garrick from 1900–06. His most famous success, with 223 performances, was *The Chili Widow* in which he starred as Sir Reginald Delamare, debuting in 1895 (Powell Oscar 146). He adapted this play with Alfred Sutro. He took over the lease of the Strand theatre in 1919 (*Who Was Who*).

**Boyne, Leonard** (1853–1920) Boyne began his acting career in 1869 at the Theatre Royal in Liverpool, then played between ten to twelve parts a week in the provinces (Reid and Compton 32). His London debut was as John Fern in *Progress* at the St. James's Theatre in 1874. He toured with his own company for a year, returning to London in 1880. He often played the hero in many West End productions, including *The English Rose* at the Adelphi with Olga Brandon in 1889. He played the hero in the debut run of *The Trumpet Call* with Elizabeth Robins in 1891. He appeared in *A Man's Love* for the ITS in 1889 at the Opera Comique with Gertrude Kingston and Mary Rorke (Orme 61).

\***Bradley, Katharine Harris** (1846–1914) Playwright and poet, Bradley took over the care of her niece Edith Emma Cooper, when her mother became an invalid (*ODNB*). Cooper and Bradley first collaborated on literary efforts in 1881, publishing *Bellerophon* under the names Arran and Isla Leigh. They published verse drama, including *Fair Rosamund* in 1884, under the pseudonym Michael Field. Their play *A Question of Memory* was produced in 1893 by the ITS (Orme 134–36).

\***Brandon, Olga** (1865–1906) Born in Australia of Russian parents, Brandon made her acting debut in New York at the Madison Square Theatre in 1884 (Reid and Compton 34). She worked for the Kendals at the Court Theatre before playing the female lead, Ethel Kingston, in *The English Rose* at the Adelphi in 1889. She played Vashti Dethic in Henry Arthur Jones's 1890 premiere of *Judah*, under the management of E. S. Willard (*Both Sides* 51). (Beerbohm Tree had promised Robins this part until he refused to produce what he considered only a "woman's play.")

Brandon appeared in *A Visit* for the ITS in 1892 (Orme 105). In 1894, she played in John Gray and André Raffalovich's *The Blackmailers* with W. L. Abingdon and Mrs. Theodore Wright ("Prince" 8).

**Brodie, Matthew** According to *The Era*, Brodie gave a "capital portrayal" as the son, Rex Ogilvie, in the ITS production of *Salvé* ("Independent"). This play appeared with *A Man's Love* at the Opera Comique (Orme 144–45).

**Brooke, Mrs. E. H.** (1835?–1915) E. H. Brooke, an actor, left his wife a widow in 1884 (Parker 1176). According to Mrs. Brooke's obituary in the *New York Times* of December 21, 1915, Mrs. Brooke began her career in 1864 in comedies ("Mrs. E. H. Brooke"). She was "long associated with Toole and Irving." In December 1880 she was in *School for Scandal* with Hermann Vezin at Sadler's Wells (Parker 1106). She played Anna with Rose Norreys as Nora, Frank Rodney as Helmer, W. L. Abingdon as Rank, and Charles Fulton as Krogstadt in *A Doll's House*, a single matinée, in June 1891 at the Criterion (Wearing 72; Adams 409). In May 1893 for the ITS, Brooke played Mrs. Holroyd, Jean Creyke's mother in *Alan's Wife*, "with characteristic humour and quaintness." ("Independent Theatre: 'Alan's Wife'" *Era*). In 1907 she played the nurse in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Waldorf Theatre (now the Novello) in London ("Mrs. E. H. Brooke"; Lloyd "Novello").

**Bucklaw, Alfred** A veteran actor, Bucklaw made his debut in the 1870s and worked consistently until 1912 (*Who's Who in the Theatre* 107). He appeared in *Pink Dominos* under Charles Windham's management in 1878. He toured the provinces and the United States with the Kendals in the 1880s and toured Australia in 1889, 1890 and 1903. He played opposite Olga Nethersole in *The Transgressor* in 1894. In September 1901, he appeared with other ITS alums Vane Featherston and Charles Fulton in Cecil Raleigh's *The Great Millionaire* (Adams 606). Bucklaw played the disloyal husband Arthur Denham in the ITS production of *The Black Cat* with Miss Hall Caine and Dora Barton at the Opera Comique on the evening of December 8, 1893 (Adams 165).

**Buist, Scott** Buist played George Tesman in Robins and Lea's production of *Hedda Gabler*, and Mortensgaard in Robins's 1893 production of *Rosmersholm* (Wearing 168). He played Henry Beauclerc in *Diplomacy* in 1893 with Robins, Mrs. Edmund Phelps, Olga Nethersole, and Kate Rorke at the Garrick (Wearing 205). He also appeared with Robins in *Mrs. Lessingham* in 1894 with Johnston Forbes-Robertson,

John Hare, and Kate Rorke. For the Independent Theatre, he played in the premiere of *The Wild Duck* with Winifred Fraser, Charles Fulton, James Welch, and Lawrence Irving (Orme 15–16).

**Burney, Estelle** Estelle Burney made her debut at the Avenue Theatre in June 1891 (Adams 232). Powell reveals that she co-authored *The County* (1892) and *The Awakening* (1892) with her brother Arthur Benham (*Oscar Wilde* 146–47). She also wrote *An Idyll of the Closing Century* (1896), *Settled out of Court* (1897), and *The Ordeal of the Honeymoon* (1899) (Adams 232). Burney played Bertha for part of the long run of *The Trumpet Call* (Wearing 82). (Robins played Constance.) For the ITS, Burney acted in her brother's one-act *Theory and Practice*, the curtain raiser for *Alan's Wife* (Wearing 163).

**Buss, Harry** (1874–?) Buss began as a child actor (Wearing 488). According to *The Era* for Jan. 12, 1895, he “capitally enacted” the part of henpecked Bobby Falkland to Agnes Hill's Theophila Falkland in *Thyrza Fleming* with Winifred Fraser and Bernard Gould (239).

\***Calvert, Louis** (1859–1923) The third son of actor Charles Calvert, Louis was educated in Manchester and in Germany (*ODNB*). He and his four brothers took up acting despite their father's discouragement. Calvert earned a reputation for his Shakespearean roles. He directed many of the plays of the Manchester branch of the ITS plays under Charles Hughes. One of these was *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon*, given in June 1893 (Schoonderwoerd 113; Orme 128). Calvert staged an Elizabethan-style production of *Richard III* in February 1895 for the Manchester ITS, showing his interest in the Saxe-Meiningen style of acting (*ODNB*). Calvert went on to appear in Shaw's *John Bull's Other Island* (Nov. 1904) and *Major Barbara* (Nov. 1905) for the Vedrenne-Barker management at the Court Theatre. He moved to New York in 1909 to manage the New Theatre. Though this lasted only two years, Calvert spent the rest of his life in America, teaching acting and elocution. He died at his home in New York City in 1923.

**Calvert, Mrs. Charles** *The Standard* for Oct. 28, 1893 lamented that Mrs. Calvert played Elizabeth in *A Question of Memory* in the old declamatory style (“Independent Theatre” 3).

\***Carson, S. Murray** (1865–1917) According to *Who Was Who*, Carson made his stage debut in 1882. He played “Bosolo” in *The Duchess of Malfi* for the ITS (“Staging”). With Louis Parker he produced *Gudgeons* (Carson played Silas Hooper);

*The Blue Boar; Spell-bound Garden; Rosemary; Change Alley; The Jest; and The Fly on the Wheel* (Scott 378). He used the pen name Thornton Clark (Adams 618). He produced Shaw's *A Man of Destiny* around 1900 (Orme 192–93).

\***Charrington, Charles** (1854–1926) [birth name Martin] Charrington met Janet Achurch in 1885 when they were acting in Frank Benson's company (*ODNB* "Achurch"). They began living together early in 1886 while she was still married to Fitzwilliam St Aubyn Miller (1865–1929), also an actor. In December 1888 her husband petitioned for divorce, which was granted in 1889. Charrington married Achurch that June. Later that year the pair premiered Ibsen's *A Doll's House*. Charrington played Dr. Rank to Achurch's Nora. They took this play on tour to Australia where their daughter Nora was born. They extended the tour to New Zealand, Tasmania, India, and Egypt. In Egypt Achurch almost died giving birth to a stillborn child. Charrington and Achurch returned to England in 1892. They took over management of the ITS with Dorothy Leighton after Grein retired from the Society in 1895 (Orme 147). In 1897 the ITS revived two earlier Ibsen plays; Charrington took the part of Relling in *The Wild Duck*, and Dr. Rank in *A Doll's House* (Orme 147).

**Chester, Elsie** Chester played Mrs. Compass in the single matinée of Amy Steinberg's *My Mother* with Yorke Stephens and Vane Featherston in 1890 (Wearing 19). According to *The Morning Post* for Nov. 13, 1891, Elsie and her sister Lucie managed a benefit performance of Hermann Vezin's *Cousin Jack* at the Opera Comique with Vezin in the starring role. In 1893 Chester acted "with earnestness and strength" as Socialist Ellen Sands in *The Strike at Arlingford* for the ITS.<sup>25</sup> Robins cast her as Mrs. Solness in *The Master Builder* when it moved to the evening bill at the Vaudeville in 1893 (Wearing 156).<sup>26</sup> Chester joined Tree's company as Mrs. Bagot in *Trilby*, opening at the Knickerbocker Theatre in New York on Dec. 14, 1896 (Clapp and Edgett *Plays* 279). Chester appeared with Murray Carson and Bessie Hatton in Shaw's *The Devil's Disciple* at the Princess of Wales's Theatre, Kensington, in 1899 (Adams 396). Her daughter, Dorothy Holmes-Gore, was also an actress (Parker 407).

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<sup>25</sup> See "'The Strike at Arlingford' at the Opera Comique," *Pall Mall Gazette*, Feb. 22, 1893: 2.

<sup>26</sup> See also "Vaudeville Theatre," *The Morning Post*, Mar. 7, 1893: 5.

\***Churchill, M. L.** Churchill translated Brieux's *Blanchette* with help from Grein (Orme 147). The play concerns an educated peasant girl who cannot escape her past. In the revised "happy" ending, she returns to marry the man she once scorned (W. Archer *Study* 53).

**Conyngham, Martha** Conyngham, an American actress, played the title role in *Leida*, a young innocent, with "plenty of intelligence and dramatic instinct" (*'World'* 1893, 153).

\***Cooper, Edith Emma** (1862–1913) With her aunt, Katherine Harris Bradley, Cooper published poetry and drama under the name "Michael Field" (*ODNB*). Their tragedy, *A Question of Memory*, was performed by the ITS in 1894 (Orme 132–36).

**Cove, Louise** Cove played the Chambermaid in the ITS production of *Thyrza Fleming* in January 1895 with Esther Pallier as Thyrza, Bernard Gould as Rivers, and Winfred Fraser as Pamela (*Wearing* 239).<sup>27</sup>

**Cowen, Henrietta** Cowen took the part of Aunt Julia in Robins and Lea's production of *Hedda Gabler* in 1891 (Adams 348). She played Lucy Price in Estelle Burney's *The County* in 1892 (232). For the ITS, she played the spinster in *Leida* (*'World'* 1893 153).

**Cox, Harding** An amateur, Cox played Chapuzot in *The Heirs of Roubourdin*, and Old Ekdal in the reprise of *The Wild Duck* in 1894 for the ITS (*'World'* 1894 375, 383).

**Creswick, Mrs. Charles.** According to *The Morning Post* Mrs. Creswick was "earnest and effective" as Gemma, Dante's wife, in the ITS drama *Dante* by Edward Righton and G. H. R. Dabbs in July 1893.<sup>28</sup> In 1894 Mrs. Creswick took the part of Mrs. Sorby in the premiere of *The Wild Duck* for the ITS. The cast included: George Warde, Charles Fulton, Winifred Fraser, W. L. Abingdon, Lawrence Irving, Gilbert Trent, and Mrs. Herbert Waring (*'World'* 1894 383).

\***Crackanthorpe, Hubert Montague** (1870–1896) Hubert Crackanthorpe was the son of writer Mrs. Blanche Alethea Holt Montague Crackanthorpe (1846–1928) (Powell *Oscar* 149; *ODNB*). He wrote short stories as well as plays and offered the ITS a one-

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<sup>27</sup> "Thyrza Fleming," *Era* Jan. 12, 1895: 11.

<sup>28</sup> See "Independent Theatre Society," *The Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7.



act, but it was not performed due to financial difficulties (Orme 142-43).<sup>29</sup> In 1896 he began an affair with Sissie Welch, wife of actor James Welch, which ended Crackanthrope's marriage and possibly contributed to his mysterious death (*ODNB*).

**\*Dabbs, George Henry Roque, M.D.** Born in Southsea, Dabbs received medical training at the Royal Naval School and at King's College Hospital, London (*Who Was Who*). He edited *My Journal* and wrote many novels and plays, including *Dante*, written for the ITS (Orme 128),<sup>30</sup> and *Punchinello*, written for Robins (John 239).

**Dark, Sydney** (1874–1947) Educated at the Royal Academy of Music, Dark began as a singer before briefly appearing on the stage (*Who Was Who*). He played Petterson in the ITS debut of *The Wild Duck* at the Royalty in May 1894 (*'World' 1894* 383). Taking up journalism, he wrote the column "Green Room Gossip" for *The Daily Mail* in 1899, moving to *The Daily Express* in 1902. He edited *Church Times* from 1924–1941 (*Who Was Who*).

**Dene, Miss Lena** Dene played Eugénie in *The Heirs of Roubourdin* for the ITS in 1894 (Wearing 201). She took the part of Lucy in T. W. Robertson's *School* with H. B. Irving as Beaufoy, and Winifred Fraser as Clara in 1891 for 90 performances at the Garrick (85).

**\*de Silva, Nina** (1868–1949) [née Angelita Helena Margarita de Silva, married name Lady Martin-Harvey]. De Silva appeared with her husband, John Martin-Harvey, and Louis Calvert in *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon* for the ITS in 1893 (Orme 128). She was a member of the Lyceum company for many years, first under Irving, then under her husband's management, playing Katharine in *The Taming of the Shrew*, and Ophelia in *Hamlet* among other roles (Parker 221).<sup>31</sup>

**Doone, Neville** Actor and dramatist, Doone "gave a capital sketch of Mansfeldt," an Austrian soldier, in the ITS production of *A Question of Memory* in 1893.<sup>32</sup> He

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<sup>29</sup> See "Theatrical Mems," *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, Nov. 3, 1894: 8; Schoonderwoerd 126.

<sup>30</sup> See "Independent Theatre Society," *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7.

<sup>31</sup> See also *IC*, John Martin-Harvey to Bram Stoker, Oct. 3, 1899, note.

<sup>32</sup> See "Independent Theatre," *Standard* Oct. 28, 1893: 3.

appeared in *The Black Cat* for the ITS on the evening of December 8, 1893 with Lily Hall Caine, Dora Barton, Gladys Homfrey, Alfred Bucklaw, and Orlando Barnett (Adams 165). Doone's own plays include *Summer Clouds*, *Two Suicides*, *My Awful Luck*, *The Lass that Loved a Sailor* (libretto), *Breaking It Off*, and *Snowdrop*—all written in the 1890s (Adams 414).

**Duval, Paul** Duval played in *Le Pater* for the ITS in October 1893 with Anna Zetterberg.<sup>33</sup>

**Evelyn, Maud** Maud Evelyn played the part of Bob in the ITS revival of *A Doll's House* in 1897 (W. Archer 'World' 1897 395).

**\*Farr, Florence Beatrice** (1860–1917) Actress-manager, mystic, and feminist author, Farr studied acting with J. L. Toole in 1882 (ODNB). She married actor Edward Emery (1861–1938) in 1884, but he left for America in 1888; they divorced in 1895. Farr acted in the English premiere of Ibsen's *Rosmersholm* in 1891. She played Blanche in Shaw's *Widower's Houses* for the ITS in December 1892 (Schoonderwoord 115). In 1894 she produced a season of plays at the Avenue Theatre in London, financed by Annie Horniman, including Shaw's first hit *Arms and the Man*, and Yeats's *The Land of Heart's Desire* (ODNB). She helped establish the Irish Literary Theatre in 1899, which became the Abbey Theatre, Dublin in 1904. In 1905 she produced Wilde's *Salomé*. According to Virginia Crosswhite Hyde, Farr was "a strong influence upon the great authors she knew, but as a collaborator with Yeats, [she was] an original voice in her own right, and a versatile, dedicated social critic and spiritual seeker" (ODNB).

**\*Flem[m]ing, Herbert** According to *The Era* of March 23, 1895, Flemming played "exceedingly well" as Frank Upworth, the unfaithful husband who falls in love with his wife's sister in *A Man's Love*. Winifred Fraser played Emily, his wife, while Mary H. Keegan played Georgie, his sister-in-law.

**Featherston, Miss Vane** [a.k.a. Miss Vane] Featherston premiered at the Olympic as a child actor in bit parts (Reid and Compton 84). She played at other West End theatres where she was known for her comedic roles. In *Caste*, she played various parts on tour. In 1894, she played in the five-act *The Fatal Card* by C. Haddon Chambers and B. C. Stephenson at the Adelphi (Adams 496). The cast included

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<sup>33</sup> "Independent Theatre" *Times* Oct. 28, 1893: 6.

Murray Carson and W. L. Abingdon. Miss Vane joined Charles Fulton in the cast of the popular three-act drama *Black-Ey'd Susan* by Douglass Jerrold in 1896 (167). She played Mrs. Linde in *A Doll's House* for the ITS revival at the Globe in May 1897 (*'World'* 1897 395).

**Fletcher, Herbert** Fletcher played Balle in *The Wild Duck* in 1894 (*'World'* 1894 383).

**Forrester, Mabel** Forrester played in *Le Pater* in French in October 1893 with Charlotte Morland, Ivan Watson, Anna Zetterberg, Paul Duval, and Paul Berton.<sup>34</sup>

According to *The London Gazette* for December 3, 1895, Forrester (née Zoe Elie Auguste Robert) died sometime in September 1895 ("In the matter"). She had won a claim at court against Charles Hoppe, who was also a player in the ITS, but she died before she could collect.

\***Frankau, Julia** (1859–1916) Frankau was born in Dublin the sixth of eight children of Hyman Davis and his wife Isabella. She married Arthur Frankau, a merchant, in 1883; they had five children. Her first novel, *Dr. Phillips*, was published under the pseudonym Frank Danby in 1887. It was considered shocking and was very popular as were several of her other novels that, according to Elizabeth Eccleshare, invited readers "into the milieus of the aristocracy and the upper middle classes" (*ODNB*). Frankau adapted her novel *The Babe in Bohemia* for the ITS, but it was not performed (Orme 107). After her husband's death in 1904, Frankau established a salon frequented by male literati of London, including Somerset Maugham; Max Beerbohm; George Moore; and Henry Irving, her sister Eliza's lover (*ODNB*).

\***Fraser, Winifred** (1868–1951) [Married name Foss, née Agnes Catherine Mary Day] Fraser was born in London and educated in Hampstead (*ODNB*). She first appeared in amateur theatre in London in 1888 and in the West End in 1889. She showed an early talent when she played double roles as both Little Nell and the Marchioness in *The Old Curiosity Shop: Or Little Nell* at the Athenaeum Hall in Shepherd's Bush in April 1889 ("Old Curiosity" 8). According to *The Era* for November 9, 1889, Fraser was "delightfully fresh and natural" as Alice Fairfax in *Her Own Witness* at the Criterion ("Her Own"). Elizabeth Robins, Ben Greet, and John Beauchamp, also in the cast, dramatized the story of a sleepwalker, played by Robins, who is accused of infidelity

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<sup>34</sup> See "Independent Theatre," *Times*, Oct. 28, 1893: 6.

when she is discovered leaving her old lover's bedroom in the middle of the night. Fraser's first Independent Theatre role was as Blanche in *Widower's Houses* in 1892 (Orme 15–16). She followed this with the ITS premiere of *The Wild Duck* in 1894, playing Hedvig, with much success (Orme 141; *ODNB*). She was also praised for her performance of Pamela Rivers in the Independent Theatre's *Thyrza Fleming* in 1895 (Orme 143–44). Also in 1895, she played in de Vos's *A Man's Love* for the ITS (145). She reprised the role of Hedvig in the 1897 ITS production of *The Wild Duck* (Frank 104). In April 1892 Fraser married actor-manager George R. Foss (1859–1938) with whom she had a daughter, Iris Fraser Foss (1893–1973) (*ODNB*). The couple divorced some years later. In 1900 she joined Mrs. Patrick Campbell's company at the Royalty performing in *The Fantasticks*, a romantic comedy by "George Fleming" (Adams 489). Fraser toured the United States in 1910 and settled there, acting on Broadway into her later years. She died in Sussex in 1951 (*ODNB*).

\***Fulton, Charles J.** (1857–1938) [birth name Foss] Son of Edward Foss and brother of George R. Foss, Charles was originally intended for the law. He debuted at the Princess's Theatre in December 1883 under Wilson Barrett's management (Parker 314). In 1890 he appeared as Duke Senior in *As You Like It* at the St. James's Theatre under Lillie Langtry's management with Arthur Bouchier as Jacques, Charles Sugden as Touchstone, Matthew Brodie as Silvius, Marion Lea as Audrey, and Lillie Langtry as Rosalind (Wearing 8). In September 1895, he played in *The Swordsman's Daughter*, Clement Scott and Brandon Thomas's adaption of a French melodrama, with Vane Featherston, Mrs. E. H. Brooke, and W. L. Abingdon at the Adelphi.<sup>35</sup> He played in premieres of historically significant plays such as *Widower's Houses* (Trench); *The Wild Duck* (Gregers Werle) and *A Doll's House* (Nils Krogstad) (Orme 16; 141; Adams 409). For the ITS, he took the part of Baron Steinbach in the otherwise disappointing *The Strike at Arlingford*. Though a weak play, according to the February 22, 1893 review in *The Standard*, Fulton "did justice to the dialogue" (3). He played the lead in *The Great Millionaire*, a five-act drama, at Drury Lane in 1901, supported by A. Bucklaw and V. Featherston (Adams 606). Fulton joined the cast of

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<sup>35</sup> "Adelphi" *Times*, Sept. 2, 1895. See also "Adelphi Theatre." *Standard*, Sept. 2, 1895: 3.

*The Cardinal* by Louis Parker at the St. James's in 1903 with E. S. Willard and Herbert Waring (625). He took the lead as Booth Voysey in Harley Granville Barker's *The Voysey Inheritance* at the Court Theatre in 1906 and again at the Kingsway in 1912 (Parker 314–15).

**Goodh[e]art, Charles** Goodheart played Dr. Morgue in *The Heirs of Roubourdin* in 1894 for the ITS with James Welch, Harding Cox, C. M. Hallard, Lena Dene, Douglas Gordon, and F. Norreys Connell ('*World*' 1894 375). He also played the Lieutenant in Shaw's *A Man of Destiny* in 1901 with Herman de Lange (Orme 193).

**Gordon, Douglas** Gordon played Le Doux in *The Heirs of Roubourdin* in 1894 ('*World*' 1894 375).

\***Gray, John Henry** (1866–1934) Gray was born in London where he befriended writers and artists, including Oscar Wilde (*ODNB*). In 1888 he began contributing to some of his friends' publications. He translated Theodore de Banville's *Le Baiser* into rhymed couplets for the ITS (Orme 100, *ODNB*). Gray and Raffalovich, another ITS playwright and Gray's lover, collaborated on *The Blackmailers*, performed at the Prince of Wales's Theatre at a matinée on June 7, 1894. The authors did not approve of the staging of their play, calling it "slipshod."<sup>36</sup>

**Green, Alice Stopford** (1847–1929) Alice Sophia Amelia Stopford was born in Kells, Ireland the seventh of nine children (*ODNB*). She and her three sisters were educated at home until the family moved to Dublin where Alice attended physics lectures at the college of science. When her father died the family moved to Chester, England where Alice enjoyed a lively social life. Her particular friend and cousin Stopford Brook introduced Alice to journalist John Richard Green whom she married in 1877. Due to his ill health, she assisted with his projects, including *The Conquest of England*, which she completed after his death. She became a historian in her own right, beginning with a short biography of Henry II. She moved to 14 Kensington Square where she was a well-known hostess to intellectuals and artists, including Elizabeth Robins. Mrs. Green rented a house in Wimbledon so Robins could rest after performances out of the heat

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<sup>36</sup> Raffalovich, André, and John Gray, "The Blackmailers," Letter to Editor. *Times [London]*. 9 June 1894: 14.

of the city in July 1893.<sup>37</sup> She served on Robins's Ibsen Series committee, also in 1893, acting as treasurer.<sup>38</sup> After 1900, Mrs. Green became increasingly involved in Irish politics. She was a constitutionalist who supported dominion status for Ireland. In 1922 she was given a senate seat in the Irish Free State. Her home in Dublin became the gathering place for intellectuals, artists, and politicians until her death in May 1929.

\***Greeven, Alice Augusta** (1874–1944) [pen name Michael Orme] Greeven was an actress and journalist who married J. T. Grein in July 1904 (Schoonderwoerd 159 n. 5). She adapted plays including: *Wedding Bells* (1911), *La Pompadour* (1911), *Those Who Sit in Judgment* (1915), and *The Woman on the Window-Sill* (1917) (Parker 627).

\***Grein, Jacob Thomas** (1862–1935) ["Jack," "J. T."] Grein was born in Amsterdam, the eldest son of merchant Jacob Herman Grein and his wife Frances (*ODNB*). He attended a commercial college in Bremen before settling in England in 1885. He was a self-made drama critic from 1882, writing at first for Dutch, and then London papers (Orme 44-6). Made a Knight of The Leopold II Order in Belgium and a Knight First Class of the Norwegian Order of St. Olaf (*Who Was Who*), Grein is best known for forming the Independent Theatre in 1891 (*ODNB*). He wrote and adapted plays, including *A Man's Love* (1889), and *Spring Leaves* (1891) with C. W. Jarvis (Powell Oscar 150). He wrote three more plays in 1892: *Reparation*, *Make-Beliefs*, and *The Compromising Coat*. Grein co-edited *The Free Lance* after the death of its founder, Clement Scott (Orme 164–65). According to Orme, Grein's 1903 private production of Wilde's *Salomé* "did not flutter the dovescots to any appreciable extent" (197). He died at his London home of a heart attack in June 1935.

\***Hall Caine, Lily** (1869–1914) [Elizabeth Ann Caine, Mrs. G. D. Day] Hall Caine began her career singing ballads ("Miss Lily"). Her first acting part was for the ITS, playing Regina in the reprise of *Ghosts*. Also for the ITS she played Cariola in *The Duchess of Malfi*, Thekla in *A Question of Memory*, and Mrs. Constance Denham in *The Black Cat* (Adams 239).<sup>39</sup> Archer opined that Miss Hall Caine played the latter, "a

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<sup>37</sup> Fales E. R. to F. B. July 1893.

<sup>38</sup> See Fales Series II; Subseries B; Box 6; Folder 1 A. 1888–1913.

<sup>39</sup> See also Orme 137, and 'World' 1893 255, 287.

very difficult part,” with “tact and skill.” She reprised the part of Regina in *Ghosts* in 1893 with Mrs. Theodore Wright playing Mrs. Alving. The sister of novelist Thomas Henry Hall Caine, Lily played in some of his stage adaptations, including *The Prodigal*, her final stage role, in 1906 (Rusche). She was the author of “My Remembrances of Christina Rossetti (“Miss Lily Hall Caine”).

**Hallard, Mr. C. M.** (1865–1942) Hallard played Lord Deepmere in Edward Compton’s London production of James’s *The American* with Robins in 1891 (“Our Play-Box”). He played Dominique in *The Heirs of Rabourdin* in 1894 for the ITS with James Welch and Harding Cox (*World’ 1894* 375). In 1908, he played the part of Lovewell in David Garrick and George Colman’s comedy, *The Clandestine Marriage* (Adams 295). According to Andy Walker’s web article “Being Winston,” Hallard also played Churchill in “the first big screen depiction . . . in 1935’s Royal Cavalcade . . . a full five years before the man himself entered Downing Street as Hitler’s forces rolled across western Europe.”

**Hardy, Miss Mabel** Hardy played a passerby in *Alan’s Wife*.<sup>40</sup>

**Hardy, Thomas** (1840–1928) Orme mentions that Hardy encouraged Grein in his plans for the ITS (78). Grein and Jarvis wrote an adaptation of Hardy’s *The Woodlanders* for the ITS, but sets would have been too costly. They tried to sell the adaptation to Irving, but he declined.<sup>41</sup> Hardy collaborated with J. W. Comyns Carr on an adaptation of *Far From the Madding Crowd* in the 1880s (Wilson 96).

**Harris, Frank** (1856?–1931) [née James Thomas Harris] Born to a poor family in Galway, Harris immigrated to America in 1871 where he studied law and passed the Kansas bar in 1875 (*ODNB*). Returning to England, he became of the *Fortnightly Review* in 1886, hiring George Bernard Shaw and Max Beerbohm as drama critics. He lost this post after eight years, being notorious for womanizing, blackmail, and advocating anarchy. He served on an early ITS committee with Grein, Julia Frankau, George Moore, Cecil Raleigh, and C. W. Jarvis Orme 91).

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<sup>40</sup> *Era*, May 6, 1893: 8.

<sup>41</sup> See Irving letter to Thomas Hardy of April 28, 1891, and Hardy’s reply of May 5, 1891 in *IC*.

**Haviland, William Alexander Irwin** (1856–1917) On March 15, 1895, Haviland played Desmond Ogilvie in *Salvé* “naturally and effectively.”<sup>42</sup> Mrs. Theodore Wright and Matthew Brodie were also in the cast (Orme 145). Haviland acted at the Lyceum from 1882–1895.<sup>43</sup>

\***Heinemann, William Henry** (1863–1920) Born on a family farm in Surbiton, Surrey, Heinemann was the eldest of six children of German-born Louis Heinemann and his Lancashire-born wife Jane Lavino, both Jewish by race but Anglican by faith (*ODNB*). Having studied in Dresden, William was fluent in German, and also in French. Though he aspired to a musical career, he decided he lacked the ability. He settled on a career in publishing after his apprenticeship to Nicolas Trübner in 1879. He began his own firm in 1890 with Hall Caine's novel *The Bondman*, which enjoyed popular success. He hired Edmund Gosse as a reader, editor, and author and published works by James McNeill Whistler, H.G. Wells, Henry James, George Moore, Sarah Grand (née Frances McFall), and Elizabeth Robins. Heinemann offered his play *The First Step* to the ITS, but it was not performed due to censorship (Orme 144). He also wrote *Summer Moths*, a play in four acts, in 1898 and *War*, a play in three acts, in 1901 (*ODNB*). Heinemann served as president of the Publishers' Association of Great Britain and Ireland from 1909–1911 and on the executive committee of the International Congress of Publishers from 1896–1913. Powell reveals that Heinemann was “influential in renewing the practice of printing plays in book form (his editions of Pinero were one of the landmarks of the period)” (*Oscar* 151).

\***Herberte-Basing, Sydney** (?–1898) Herbert-Basing debuted in Liverpool in 1876 in the chorus of *Madame Argot* and sang in several Gilbert and Sullivan operettas (Reid and Compton 105–06). He appeared in *The Sixth Commandment* at the Shaftesbury in October 1890 with Robins and Lea under Mrs. Lancaster-Wallis. He took up his own management at the Alexandra Palace and later at the Princess's. He received “high marks” as Camille, the husband in *Térèse Raquin*, for the ITS (Orme 99). He wrote *Gringoire* in 1890 with actress-playwright Elizabeth Besale (Adams 151).

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<sup>42</sup> *Era*, “Independent Theatre Society,” Mar 23, 1895: 8.

<sup>43</sup> See Haviland and Harvey letter to Henry Irving, *IC*.



**Herapath, Mervyn** (1865?–1923) A sculptor and actor, Herapath played Colonel Stewart in the ITS production of *Alan's Wife* (Wearing 163).<sup>44</sup>

**Hill, Agnes J.** Hill received a good review in *The Morning Post* for her part of New Woman Theophila Falkland in *Thyrza Fleming* (Wearing 239).<sup>45</sup>

**Homfrey, Gladys** Homfrey had a long and distinguished career in the theatre. She debuted in April 1883 as Juliana in *The Honeymoon* at the Gaiety (Parker 407). In 1884 she acted with Edward Terry in *The Chancery* as Mrs. Marmaduke Jackson. She toured with Walter Bentley in 1886 in Shakespeare's *Othello* (Emilia), *Hamlet* (Gertrude), and *Macbeth* (Lady Macbeth). She appeared in the ITS production of *The Black Cat* with Miss Hall Caine, Neville Doone, and Dora Barton at the Opera Comique in December 1893 (Adams 165). In 1902 she played the part of Madame Hetteima in Clyde Fitch's previously banned play *Sappho* at the Adelphi under the management of Olga Nethersole (Parker 407, 610). In 1912 she took her Countess Kokozeff to New York with *Our Miss Gibbs* (407).

**Hoppe, Charles** Original acting-manager of the ITS, Hoppe was involved in an action brought against him by actress Mabel Forrester, [née Zoe Elie Auguste Robert], one of the ITS players (Orme 75; "In the Matter"). Though successful against Hoppe, Robert died in September 1895.

\***Howard, Sydney** Howard played Jacob Engstrand in *Ghosts* with great effect (Orme 77; 84).<sup>46</sup>

**Hughes, Charles** Hughes managed the Manchester branch of the ITS (Orme 147). According to Schoonderwoerd, Grein tried to establish branches of the ITS in other cities too (113). Manchester was the only place where his efforts materialized in the form of at least two plays performed in 1893: *The Strike at Arlingford*, given in Manchester by most of the London cast, and *A Blot on the 'Scutcheon* given in London by the Manchester cast and directed by Louis Calvert.

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<sup>44</sup> See "Mervyn Herapath," *Mapping the Practice and Profession of Sculpture in Britain and Ireland 1851–1951*, University of Glasgow History of Art, and Hathi, 2011.

<sup>45</sup> See also "Terry's Theatre," *Morning Post*, Jan. 5, 1895: 3.

<sup>46</sup> See also "Ghosts," *Era*, Mar. 21, 1891: 10.

**Mr. G. Humphrey** Humphrey played Ragnar Brovik in *Jerry-Builder Solness*, Bell's parody of *The Master Builder*, on July 10, 1893 at St. George's Hall (Franc 122).

**\*Irving, Laurence Sydney Brodribb** (1871–1914) The son of Henry Irving and his wife Florence O'Callaghan, Laurence was educated at Marlborough College and at College Rollin, Paris (*Who Was Who*). He spent three years studying in Russia. He first acted in Benson's Shakespeare Company in 1893, and played in Toole's Company from 1894–96. For the ITS, he played in both casts of *The Wild Duck*, as Dr. Relling in 1894 and as Hjalmar Ekdal in 1897 (Orme 16; 141).<sup>47</sup> He joined his father's company from 1900–04 and Tree's company for the 1912 season. He later managed the Globe and toured with his own company. He wrote several plays including *Dante* (from the French play by Sardou and Moreau) and *Typhoon* (*Who Was Who*; Adams 376). He was returning from an American tour of *Typhoon* when his ship, the SS Empress of Ireland, was struck by a collier and sunk in the St. Lawrence River.<sup>48</sup> He and his wife, actress Mabel Hackney, drowned.

**James, Henry** (1843–1916) New York-born, James was a prolific and successful author from an early age (*ODNB*). Many of his novels were serialized, including *The American* that first appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly* in 1876. He adapted this novel for actor-manager Edward Compton who offered a £250 advance for the adaptation (Whitebrook 117). James gave the part of Claire de Cintré to Elizabeth Robins in 1891 when they became abiding friends (*TF* 31). Though James did not take an active role in the ITS, Orme mentions that he was one of the "notables" in attendance at *Térèse Raquin* (97). James became a naturalized British subject in 1915 (*ODNB*).

**\*Jarvis, Charles W.** As well as editing *The Weekly Comedy* with Grein, Jarvis adapted works for the stage with him, including *Spring Leaves*, *A Man's Love*, and *The Woodlanders* (Orme 61, 107). He served as secretary of the ITS after *Ghosts* (91). He translated Maeterlinck's *L'Intruse* for the ITS but surrendered it to Tree (100).

**Jocelyn, Mary** Jocelyn played Charlotte in the ITS production of *The Heirs of Rabourdin* (*'World'* 1894 375). She acted the part of Whisker in *Adoption* in 1890 at Toole's Theatre (Wearing 21). Jocelyn played in the premiere of *The Henrietta*, a four-

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<sup>47</sup> See also *'World'* 1894 138, 383; 1897 396–97.

<sup>48</sup> "Great Shipping Disaster," *Times*, May 30, 1914: 8.

act comedy by Bronson Howard, with Yorke Stephens, Lewis Waller, W. H. Vernon, Florence West, and Marion Lea in 1891 at the Avenue (*Dramatic Notes* 248).

\***Johnson, Laura** To Orme the American actress Laura Johnson was “found lacking” when she played the lead in *Térèse Raquin* (99). Yet *The Times* reviewer considered her an “actress of much promise.”<sup>49</sup> The reviewer for the *Daily News* complimented her “remarkable force, concentration, and depth of passion” in this role.<sup>50</sup> A friend of Hermann Vezin, Johnson played the Spirit of Beatrice to his lead in the ITS version of *Dante*, given at St. George’s Hall on July 10, 1893 (Adams 376).<sup>51</sup> Johnson appeared in the 1896 production of *The Pilgrim’s Progress* with Vera and Esmé Beringer, W. L. Abingdon, and Courtenay Thorpe (*World* 1896 357) She also played Wallaroo in *The Duchess of Coolgardie* (362, 388). The five-act melodrama premiered at Drury Lane on September 19, 1896 (Adams 431). Vezin played The Warden of Coolgardie.

**Jones, Henry Arthur** (1851–1929) Jones was reared in Buckinghamshire where he trained as a draper (*ODNB*). After moving to London in 1869, he attended the theatre frequently and studied popular dramas in order to become a dramatist himself. His first London production was the comedy *A Clerical Error*, performed at the Court Theatre in 1879. His first success was the melodrama *The Silver King*, commissioned by Wilson Barrett, who later employed Jones as house dramatist. Jones and H. Herman wrote *Breaking a Butterfly*, the first English adaptation of Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, performed at the Prince's Theatre in March 1884. Jones first copied the style of popular plays but later championed more serious drama in lectures and articles beginning in 1884. These were published as *The Renaissance of the English Drama* in 1895. Jones confronted the sex double standard in *The Case of Rebellious Susan*, premiered at the Criterion in October 1894. He advocated a national theatre, discussed the drama as literature, and addressed the limitations of the actor-manager system in *The Foundations of a National Drama*, published in 1913 (*ODNB*).

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<sup>49</sup> See “The Independent Theatre,” *Times*, Oct 10, 1891, 6.

<sup>50</sup> See “The Drama,” *Daily News*, Oct 10, 1891, 6.

<sup>51</sup> See “Independent Theatre Society,” *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7. See also Vezin to Irving Sept. 15, 1897, *IC*.

\***Keegan, Mary H.** For the ITS, Keegan gave a “graceful and refined” performance as Georgie in the Grein-Jarvis adaptation of *A Man’s Love*.<sup>52</sup> The ménage à trois featured Winifred Fraser as Emily and Herbert Flemming as Frank Upworth (Orme 145). In October 1893, Keegan played Fina, Reyni’s sister, “with spirit” in *A Question of Memory*.<sup>53</sup> On December 8, 1893, she played in the ITS production of *The Black Cat* with Lily Hall Caine, Neville Doone, and Gladys Homfrey (Adams 165). According to Archer, “Miss Mary Keegan lent just the right sort of charm to Blanche Tremaine,” the “other women” of the play (*World* 1893 287). Keegan played Dona Luisa in Robins’s production of *Mariana* in 1897 with H. B. Irving as Daniel De Montoya, Herman Vezin as Don Felipe, James Welch as Don Castuo, John Martin-Harvey as Arturo and Robins as Mariana (*World* 1897 385).

\***Kenward, Edith** Kenward, who played the part of Regina in *Ghosts* in March 1891, made a success in Australia before appearing in London with the ITS (Orme 77).<sup>54</sup> “Fleet Street therefore delighted in calling [her] ‘Kangaroo Kenward’” (84).

**Kingsley, Alice** According to *The Morning Post*,<sup>55</sup> Kingsley played a young mother too enamored of her baby to attend a ball in the ITS production of *The Cradle* at St. George’s Hall in July 1893. Thomas Kingston played her husband. On the same evening Kingsley was “pleasant” as Kaia in Bell’s *Jerry-Builder Solness*.<sup>56</sup>

\***Kingston, Gertrude** (1862?–1937) [Married name Silver; née Gertrude Angela Konstam or Kohnstamm] Born in Islington, Kingston began her acting career in Sarah Thorne’s Company after studying painting in Berlin and Paris (Reid and Compton 126–127; *ODNB*). She first starred in an amateur production of Gilbert’s *Broken Hearts* when she was fifteen. She joined the Haymarket Company in 1888. In 1889 she played Rachel Denison in *Tares*. On October 1, 1892, she opened in Arthur Benham’s three-act comedy *The Awakening* at the Garrick with Estelle Burney, Vane

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<sup>52</sup> See “Independent Theatre Society,” *Era*, Mar. 23, 1895: 8.

<sup>53</sup> “Independent Theatre” *Standard*, Oct. 28, 1893: 3.

<sup>54</sup> Also see “Ghosts,” *Era*, Mar. 21, 1891: 10.

<sup>55</sup> See “Independent Theatre Society,” *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7.

<sup>56</sup> See Franc 122. See also “Independent Theatre Society,” *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893, 7.

Featherston, Herbert Waring, and Arthur Elwood (Adams 94). She appeared in another play with the same title by C. Haddon Chambers at the St. James's Theatre in London on February 6, 1901, this time with George Alexander, H. B. Irving, Miss Granville, Julie Opp, and Faye Davis. After her marriage to George Silver in 1889, she determined to maintain her stage career because her husband's military pay was not sufficient to support them (*ODNB*). (She was left a widow in 1899). She acted in *The Minister's Call* (with Arthur Elwood and William Bonney) and in *A Man's Love* (with Leonard Boyne and Mary Rorke) for the ITS (Orme 61; 104; "Stage Notes" 214). As well as being a gifted comedienne and tragedienne, she co-wrote *A Matchmaker* with Clotilde Graves, which equated marriage with prostitution (*ODNB*). She also produced *The Woodbarrow*. She took the part of Helen in *The Trojan Women* at Shaw's suggestion. She took over management of the Adelphi in 1910, inaugurating new lighting techniques. Shaw wrote *Great Catherine* for her in 1913. She was a committed speaker for suffrage and wrote articles on a wide range of subjects.

**Kingston, Thomas** Kingston acted as the young father in *The Cradle* with Alice Kingsley as his wife.<sup>57</sup> The piece was translated from the Flemish by Teixeira de Mattos for the ITS. It preceded *Dante* and *Jerry-Builder Solness* on the program.

**\*De Lange, Herman** De Lange directed most ITS productions but came to difficulties with *A Question of Memory* when the playwrights (Bradley and Cooper) and the male lead (Acton Bond) mutinied (Schoonderwoerd 120, 133). De Lange also had an acting career. Among other plays, he appeared in the 1897 musical farce *Lost, Stolen or Strayed*, afterwards called *A Day in Paris*, at the Duke of York's Theatre in 1897 (*'World'* 1897 120).

**Legassick, Charles** Legassick played Graaberg in *The Wild Duck* in 1894 (*'World'* 1894 383). Also in the cast were: Harding Cox, Charles Fulton, George Warde, W. L. Abingdon, Mrs. Herbert Waring, Winifred Fraser, Mrs. Charles Creswick, Laurence Irving, Gilbert Trent, Sydney Dark, Herbert Fletcher, G. Armstrong, and Herbert Maule.

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<sup>57</sup> See "Independent Theatre Society," *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893, 7.

**\*Leighton, Dorothy** Dorothy Leighton was the pen name of Ethel Mary Forsyth (Mrs. G. C. Ashton Johnson) (*ODNB* “Sir Douglas Forsyth.”) She was the eldest of three daughters of Sir Thomas Douglas Forsyth and his wife Mary Alice Plumer (Orme 143). She was born in the city of Jammu, India where her father was a government official (Forsyth 280). She edited her father’s memoir, *Autobiography and Reminiscences of Sir Douglas Forsyth*, published in 1887. She wrote the novel *As a Man is Able*, published by Heinemann in 1893 (Halkett 150). Leighton became co-director of the Independent Theatre with Grein after the 1894 season when it became a limited company (Orme 143). Leighton asked her friend Esther Palliser, concert vocalist, to star as Thyrza Fleming with Bernard Gould (Colonel Rivers), William Bonney (Bertie Earnshaw), and Winifred Frazer (Pamela Rivers) (Wearing 239).<sup>58</sup> The *Birmingham Daily Post* for Feb. 4, 1895 revealed that rights to the play had been sold in Sweden, Norway, and Denmark.<sup>59</sup>

**Lindo, Frank** Some-time business manager of the ITS,<sup>60</sup> Lindo played “Oswald” in *Ghosts* “with power but was accused of rolling his eyes too much” (Orme 84).

**Lupton, Miss Jay** Lupton appeared with Arthur Bouchier, Laurence Irving, Violet Vanbrugh, and Gigia Filippi in the 1898 production of George Bancroft’s *Teresa* at the Metropole (“Theatrical and Musical” 3). According to *The Era* of Dec. 29, 1894, Lupton was slated to appear in a minor role in *Thyrza Fleming* for the ITS in 1895 (“Theatrical Gossip” 10). However, Archer does not list her in his “Synopsis of Playbills.” According to him, “Miss Paption” played the part of Martin. Lupton also played Mary in *A Man’s Love* for the ITS (Wearing 245).<sup>61</sup> In 1896 she played an Anglican Sister in Jones’s five-act *Michael and His Lost Angel* at the Lyceum with Johnston Forbes-Robertson, who played Michael Feversham; Marion Terry, who played Audrie Lesden; and Mrs. E. H. Brooke, who played Fanny Clover (*World* 1896 362).

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<sup>58</sup> Leighton explains that Palliser was not leaving her musical career for the stage; she took the part because Leighton felt it needed an “unusual combination of gifts.” See letter to the editor, “Thyrza Fleming,” *Morning Post*, Nov. 22, 1894: 6.

<sup>59</sup> See “Theatrical Items,” *Birmingham Daily Post*, Feb 4, 1895: 3.

<sup>60</sup> See Schoonderwoerd 128.

<sup>61</sup> See also “Independent Theatre Society,” *Era*, Mar. 23, 1895: 8.

**\*Martin-Harvey, Sir John** (1863–1944) An actor and theatre manager, Martin-Harvey was born in Essex, the eldest son of naval architect John Harvey and his wife Margaret Goyder (*ODNB*; *Who Was Who*). His father expected him to take up the family business but instead was persuaded to pay for acting lessons for his son under John Ryder. Martin-Harvey made his acting debut on September 24, 1881 at the Old Court Theatre and was soon engaged by Charles Wyndham. He worked for many years under Henry Irving's management at the Lyceum as a supernumerary. He played for the ITS in *A Blot on the Scutcheon* in 1893 with his wife Nina de Silva (Orme 128). After leaving the Lyceum in 1896, Martin-Harvey played Osric in *Hamlet* under Forbes-Robertson's management. In February 1897 he played Arturo in *Mariana*, under Robins and Archer's management (*'World'* 1897 65). Robins cast him as Erhart Borkman in *John Gabriel Borkman* in March 1897 at the Strand with ITS colleagues W. H. Vernon, James Welch and Dora Barton (121–23). He played in the comedy *Belle Belair* with John Beauchamp and Irene Vanbrugh, also in 1897 (142). Martin-Harvey premiered *Pelléas* with Mrs. Patrick Campbell as Mélisande in the first London production of Maeterlinck's drama (*ODNB*). In February 1899, he and his wife took over management of the Lyceum. Their production of *The Only Way*, an adaptation of *A Tale of Two Cities*, had more than five thousand performances over forty years. Martin-Harvey was knighted in 1921.

**Maule, Herbert** Maule played Kaspersen in *The Wild Duck* (*'World'* 1894 383). The cast included George Warde, Harding Cox, Charles Fulton, W. L. Abingdon, Mrs. Herbert Waring, Winifred Fraser, Mrs. Charles Creswick, Laurence Irving, Gilbert Trent, Charles Legassick, Sydney Dark, Herbert Fletcher, and G. Armstrong.

**Meredith, George** (1828–1909) Novelist and poet, Meredith was born in Portsmouth, Hampshire, the only child of Augustus Meredith and Jane Eliza Meredith (*ODNB*). He was educated in Germany, returning to England in 1844. He began publishing his work, initially poetry, in *Fraser's Magazine* in 1849. He briefly took authorship of the *Belles Lettres* section of *The Westminster Review* from 1857. His marriage to Mary Ellen Nicolls (1821–1861) ended when she left him and their young son. He worked through his emotional pain through writing. Though he wrote several novels and volumes of poetry, Meredith is best known for his 1885 novel *Diana of the Crossways*. He served as president of the Society of Authors in 1892. George Moore wanted a play from him for the ITS, but Meredith did not comply (Schoonderwoerd 98).

\***Milton, Maude** Milton gave a “poignant performance of the discarded mistress” in *The Gold Fish*, at the Opera Comique on July 8, 1892 (Orme 106). According to Adams’s *A Dictionary of the Drama*, Milton appeared in *Love’s Messenger*, a blank verse one-act play by Alfred C. Calmour, in 1884 with Kate Rorke and Lesley Bell (362). Milton played the part of Lady Constance Howard.

**Morland, Charlotte** Morland played in the ITS production of *Le Pater*, performed in French in October 1893.<sup>62</sup>

\***Moore, George Augustus** (1852–1933) The novelist, journalist, and playwright was born in County Mayo, Ireland, the eldest son of George Henry Moore and Mary Blake (*ODNB*). He longed for a career in art but settled on writing, becoming an admirer of Zola when they met in Paris. He published his first realistic novel, *A Modern Lover*, in 1883. As a journalist, he crusaded against censorship, especially that of circulating libraries that refused to stock his work. He criticized melodrama in favor of the realism that first emerged on the continent. As one of the founders of the ITS, Moore hoped to bring unusual plays to the stage (Schoonderwoerd 97–8). Though he wrote *The Strike at Arlingford* for the ITS in 1893 (Orme 91, 110), he is best known for his 1894 novel *Esther Waters* that sympathetically treats the life of a servant girl (*ODNB*). He collaborated with William Butler Yeats on the Irish Literary Theatre as playwright and stage director from 1899–1900.

**Mulder, Jan** Musician and composer, Mulder served as Musical Director for the ITS and also for a time served as Grein’s deputy (Schoonderwoerd 128).

\***Outram, Leonard** Outram enjoyed success as Pastor Manders in *Ghosts*.<sup>63</sup> According to *The Times* for May 12, 1891, he played in *The Lady from the Sea* with Edith Kenward (“Terry’s” 12). William Davenport Adams reports that Outram adapted Soumet’s *Le Gladiateur* for the stage, first performing it at the Avenue in 1891 under the title *The Fiat of the Gods* (512). In 1896 Outram and Gordon’s play *True Blue* was given at the Olympic (Parker 1120). Outram “was good as old Werle” for the reprise of *The Wild Duck* in 1897 with James Welch as old Ekdal, Kate Phillips as Gina, Ffolliott Paget as Mrs. Sorby, and Winifred Fraser as Hedvig (*World* 1897 143, 396).

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<sup>62</sup> See “Independent Theatre,” *Times* Oct. 28, 1893: 6.

<sup>63</sup> See “Ghosts,” *Era*, Mar. 21, 1891: 10.



**Paget, Miss Ffolliott** Miss Paget was born in Margate, Kent and studied under Mrs. Dallas Glyn, a “celebrated Shakespearean reader” (Austin 20). She appeared first in a comedy at the Theatre Royal, Portsmouth and went on to play both serious and comedic roles. She joined Wyndham’s company at the Criterion and on tour (Wearing 15). Among other roles, she played Mrs. Jobstock in *Trying It On* in 1890. She later appeared with Augustin Daly’s company in New York (Austin 20). According to Archer, Paget was “excellent” as Mrs. Sorby in the ITS reprise of *The Wild Duck* (*World 1897* 143).

**Palliser, Esther** (1872–?) Palliser appeared in musicals, including *The Gondoliers* at the Savoy. She opened the new Royal English Opera House, built at the end of Shaftesbury Avenue, with *Ivanhoe* in 1891 (Reid and Compton 165). It is now called the Palace Theatre (Lloyd “Palace Theatre”). Palliser starred in the ITS production of *Thyrza Fleming* in 1895 (Wearing 239).<sup>64</sup> Upon seeing this performance on January 9, Archer concluded that Palliser “showed some ability. . . but was hampered by nervousness and inexperience” (*World 1895* 14).

**Papton, Miss** Papton played Martin in *Thyrza Fleming* for the ITS (Wearing 239).

**Partridge, John Bernard**, a.k.a. Bernard Gould (1861–1945) The youngest son of Professor Richard Partridge, John Bernard Partridge acted briefly under his stage name with Henry Irving and Johnston Forbes-Robertson (*ODNB*). Though the reviewer for *The Pall Mall Gazette* found *The Strike at Arlingford* less than revolutionary, Gould, who played the protagonist John Reid, gave a memorable performance.<sup>65</sup> He also distinguished himself as Colonel Rivers in *Thyrza Fleming* in 1895 by giving, according to *The Pall Mall Gazette*, “consistency to an absolutely inconsistent character.”<sup>66</sup> According to *The Standard* for February 22, 1893, though Gould “evidently devoted great care” to his part, the play was not well received (3). Also in 1893, Gould took the title role in *Brand* with Elizabeth Robins playing Agnes at

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<sup>64</sup> “Thyrza Fleming,” *Era*, Jan. 12, 1895: 11.

<sup>65</sup> “*The Strike at Arlingford* at the Opera Comique,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Feb. 22, 1893: 2.

<sup>66</sup> “The Theatre: *Thyrza Fleming* at Terry’s.” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Jan. 5, 1895: 3.

the Opera Comique (Adams 199). He worked with Grein and Robins again on her Ibsen series at the same house in 1893 (Orme 3). Shaw had Gould in mind for his third play, *Mrs. Warren's Profession*. Though Shaw intended the play for the ITS, Grein found it too offensive (Orme 117–118; Shaw 412). Shaw cast Gould in the role of Sergius Saranoff in *Arms and the Man* in 1894 (ODNB). Gould became an illustrator for *Punch* in 1891 on the recommendation of George Du Maurier, becoming principal cartoonist in 1910 (ODNB). He first produced mostly theatrical cartoons but in 1899 he turned to political caricatures. He was knighted in 1925.

**\*Paull, Harry Major** [H. M.] (1854–1934) Paull worked for HM Office of Works from 1871 to 1903 (*Who Was Who*). He wrote plays in his spare time and articles for *Nineteenth Century*, *The Fortnightly Review*, and other journals. He wrote *At a Health Resort* for the ITS in 1893, a “discussion of the moral values in men and women” (Orme 127). He also wrote *The Gentleman Whip* and *Hal the Highwayman* in 1894 (Powell Oscar 155).

**\*Percival, T. Wigney** Percival played the part of the landlord Sartorius in Shaw's *Widower's Houses* with Florence Farr as his daughter Blanche (Orme 115).<sup>67</sup>

**Phelps, Mrs. Edmund** [Miss Henrietta Hudspeth] (?–1907) Daughter of John Hudspeth, actor-manager, and wife of Edmund Phelps, actor, (1838–1870) Henrietta debuted at the Lyceum in 1859.<sup>68</sup> She appeared with Kate Rorke in the comedy *Brighton* in 1884 at the Criterion under Charles Wyndham's management (Parker 1208; Adams 206). She played Mrs. Bouncer in *Box and Cox* at the Haymarket in 1889 (Adams 195), and took the part of Lady Grey in the musical comedy *A Gaiety Girl* in 1893 at the Prince of Wales's (558). For the ITS Mrs. Phelps was “decidedly comic” as Mrs. Solness in *Jerry-builder Solness*.<sup>69</sup> She also took the part of Mrs. Ridley in *Alan's Wife* (Franc 122; *Alan's Wife* liii).

**Phillips, Kate** [Mrs. Harry Blenkinsopp-Coulson, husband's stage name H. B.

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<sup>67</sup> See also “The Independent Theatre,” *Times*, Dec. 10, 1892: 5, and “Widower's Houses,” *Era*, Dec. 17, 1892: 8.

<sup>68</sup> See also Charles Eyre Pascoe, *The Dramatic List: A Record of the Performances of Living Actors and Actresses of the British Stage*. 2nd ed. London: Bogue, 1880, 190.

<sup>69</sup> See “Independent Theatre Society,” *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7.

Conway] Phillips began as an amateur, debuting at the Lyceum as a page in *Chilperic* (Reid and Compton 169-70). She toured the provinces before joining Irving's company. She played Gina in the ITS revival of *The Wild Duck* ('World 1897' 397).

**Pinero, Arthur Wing** (1855–1934) Born in Islington, the second of three children of a London solicitor of Jewish-Portuguese ancestry, Pinero's education was limited by family finances (*ODNB*). Nonetheless, he excelled at elocution at Birkbeck Scientific and Literary Institution from 1870–74. He continued as a professional actor at the Theatre Royal, Edinburgh under R. H. Wyndham's management. After several years at the Lyceum with Irving, Pinero wrote his first "problem play," *The Profligate*, in 1889. He followed this with the even more successful *The Second Mrs. Tanqueray* in 1893. Pinero's other plays include: *The Notorious Mrs. Ebbsmith* (1895), *The Benefit of the Doubt* (1895), *The Thunderbolt* (1908), *Mid-Channel* (1909), *Iris* (1901), and *Letty* (1903). *His House in Order* (1906) had 430 performances and netted over £78,000. Orme mentions that Pinero was one of the eminent members of the ITS, but he did not provide the ITS any plays (91).

**Poel, William** (1852–1934) Actor, director, and author, Poel was born in Westminster (*ODNB*). He joined Charles Matthew's acting company in Bristol in 1876 and also took many roles in touring companies. By 1881 he managed the Royal Victoria Hall (later the Old Vic). He was instrumental in founding the Shakespeare Reading Society in 1875, with Henry Irving serving as first president. He taught for the Society from 1887–1897, developing his own style of delivering Shakespeare lines based on his theory of "tuned tones." This led to the Elizabethan Stage Society that gave Shakespeare plays in period costume with minimal sets. As well as what he considered appropriate delivery, Poel wanted more historically accurate staging and music for productions and wanted to rebuild the Globe theatre. He actively campaigned against the censor and the long run. He directed *The Duchess of Malfi* for the ITS with Mary Rorke, Bassett Roe, and Murray Carson (Orme 108). Henry Irving lent the costumes because he thought they were doing Shakespeare ("Staging").

**Pollock, Walter Herries** (1850–1926) Barrister and author, Pollock was the second son of Sir William Frederick Pollock, 2nd Bt., and Juliet Creed (*Who Was Who*). Educated at Eton and trained for the bar, Pollock preferred journalism. He edited *The Saturday Review* from 1883–1894 and wrote non-fiction, including *Jane Austen, Her Contemporaries and Herself* and *Impressions of Henry Irving*. His plays include *The*

*Ballad-Monger* (adapted with Walter Besant from de Banville's *Gringoire*), and *An Interlude* (written with Mrs. W. K. Clifford) (Powell Oscar 156). The former was performed at the Haymarket with Tree playing Gringoire in September 1887 (Adams 103). The latter debuted in 1893 with Janet Achurch playing the lead at Terry's Theatre (7). With Besant, Pollock offered *The Death of Count Godfrey* to the ITS, but it was not performed there (Schoonderwoerd 125; Orme 107). Pollock's novel "*The Picture's Secret* (1883), like other period stories with magic pictures or mirrors, inspired *The Picture of Dorian Gray*" (Powell Oscar 8–9).

\***Raffalovich, André** (1864–1934) Raffalovich was the third child of Hermann Raffalovich, a wealthy banker, and his wife, Marie (ODNB). His family emigrated from Odessa, Ukraine to Paris just before André's birth. In 1882, his parents sent him to London to enter university. Instead, he cultivated friendships among the literati. As well as poetry, he published two novels, *A Willing Exile* (1890) and *Self Seekers* (1897). His play, *Roses of Shadow*, was performed by the ITS as the curtain raiser for the reprise of *Ghosts* in January 1893 at the Athenaeum Hall (Orme 120). This one-act went on for a second performance at the West Theatre, Albert Hall in April 1894 with *Black Sheep*, another play by Raffalovich, and *Sour Grapes*, a "masque" by his lover John Gray ("West Theatre;" ODNB).

**Raleigh, Cecil Rowlands** [birth name Abraham Cecil Francis Fothergill Rowlands] (1856–1914) Having no training, Raleigh went on the stage shortly after his father's death. He helped to manage the Royalty under Kate Lawler and then under Kate Santley (*Who Was Who*). He was drama critic for *Vanity Fair* and *The Sporting Times*. He served the Playgoers' Club, first as president then as vice-president, and was a member of the Actors' Association. He collaborated on three plays with Claude Carton, seven with George Sims, and several with A. Harris and Henry Hamilton (Powell Oscar 156). Though he wrote many plays by himself and promised one for the ITS, none of his plays were performed there (Schoonderwoerd 119). Instead, he served as stage manager for the ITS premier of *Ghosts* in 1891 with Archer's assistance (Orme 85; Postlewait *Prophet* 62). Raleigh acted as secretary of the School of Dramatic Art, which operated from 1882 to 1895 (*Who Was Who*).<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>70</sup> See *Irving Correspondence* under "School of Dramatic Art," Feb. 1882.

**Rayner, Ethel** Rayner played Einar in the ITS's six-night revival of *A Doll's House* at the Globe Theatre in 1897 ('*World*' 1897 395).

**Revelle, [Arthur] Hamilton** Revelle took the part of Severin Campion, the young lover, in the ITS production of *Roses of Shadow* by Raffalovich. This play was the curtain raiser for the second production of *Ghosts* given by the ITS at the Athenaeum Hall (*Morning Post* Jan. 27, 1893, 5). Revelle played the part of Andrew Sharpus in *Alone in the World* in 1892 at the Royalty, managed by Sidney Herbert-Basing (Wearing 115). In 1893 he appeared in Tree's production of *Hypatia* for 104 performances. The large cast included Lewis Waller, Annie Saker, Olga Brandon, and James Welch (Wearing 151). Also in 1893, Revelle took the part of Stanislaus in the ITS production of *A Question of Memory* with Acton Bond, John Beauchamp, Mary Keegan, and Mrs. Theodore Wright (Wearing 189).

**\*Righton (Thomas) Edward Corrie Burns** (1838–1899) Son of artist Thomas Righton, Edward studied acting under John Corrie, his uncle (*Who Was Who*). He debuted in 1853, in *The Stranger* at Sadler's Wells and became known for his comic roles (Reid and Compton 173–74). He wrote *Dante* for the ITS with George Dabbs (Orme 128).<sup>71</sup> He joined the Conway-Farren Comedy Company in 1887. In 1889, he played Mr. Bargas in *The Weaker Sex* at the Court Theatre (Reid and Compton 174).

**O'Riordan, Conal Holmes O'Connell** (1874–1948) [a.k.a. F. Norreys Connell] O'Riordan planned an army career but sustained a back injury when he fell from a horse at the age of sixteen, so he was rejected for the service (*Who Was Who*). In 1891, at the age of seventeen, he moved to London to take up the stage under the name Norreys Connell. In 1893, he played the part of Engstrand in the reprise of *Ghosts* with Lewis Waller as Oswald (Orme 120–21). In 1909 he became the director of the Abbey Theatre, Dublin (*Who Was Who*). He played Isaac in *The Heirs of Rabourdin* in 1894 for the ITS ('*World*' 1894 375). He appeared in and directed the Independent Theatre's last play, *Blanchette*, in 1897 (Wearing 201; Orme 148). With Oscar Asche he wrote the play *Count Hannibal* in 1910 (Parker 25).

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<sup>71</sup> See also "Independent Theatre Society," *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7.

**Robertson, W. J.** Robertson “appeared with a measure of success as the hero,” Dr. Harry Trench, in *Widower’s Houses* in 1892.<sup>72</sup>

\***Robins, Elizabeth** (1862–1952) Robins produced six of Ibsen’s plays: *Hedda Gabler*, *The Master Builder*, *A Doll’s House*, *Rosmersholm*, *Little Eyolf*, and *John Gabriel Borkman* with the help of friends, including: Marion Lea, Janet Achurch, Charles Charrington, William Archer, Herbert Waring, J. T. Grein, Florence Bell, William Heinemann, Alice Stopford Green, and George Foss (John 240-42). She also produced the fourth act of *Brand* and organized the copyright reading of *When We Dead Awaken*. She played in *The Pillars of Society* as well, under Mrs. Oscar Beringer. In total, she played in fifty plays in England, most of them in London. After retiring from the stage, she made her fortune as a novelist. *The Magnetic North*, her most famous work, was a chronicle of the Klondike based on her brother Raymond’s journals (Gates 131). She served as first president of the Women Writer’s Suffrage League. Her play, *Votes for Women!*, was given at the Court theatre in 1907 (John 153; Parker 1126).

**Rock, Charles** (1866–1919) On February 22, 1893, Mr. Rock played the reporter in *The Strike at Arlingford* at the Opera Comique (*Standard* “Independent Theatre” 3). In 1897 he played Ptolemy in *The Wizard of the Nile; or The Egyptian Beauty*, a musical by Harry B. Smith and Victor Herbert at the Shaftesbury (‘World’ 1897 409). He played in *Romeo and Juliet* at the Court Theatre in February 1904 with Thyrsa Norman and Charles Lander (Parker 1102). Rock died on July 12, 1919 at the age of 53 (1211).

**Roe, Bassett** Roe began his acting career in the provinces (Reid and Compton 180–81). He debuted in London at the Grand Theatre in March 1886 as Richmond, Duke of Gloucester, in *Jane Shore*. He joined Grace Hawthorne’s company from 1886–1888 before joining Miss Ellen Wallis’ company. In the autumn of 1890, he appeared in *The English Rose*, playing Sir Philip Kingston. He acted in *Theory and Practice* with Estelle Burney for the ITS in 1893 (Orme 126). He also appeared as “a good-humoured libertine” in *Leida* for the ITS with Martha Conyngham and Henrietta Cowen (‘World’ 1893 153).

\***Rorke, Mary** (Mrs. Frank St. Aubyn) From a theatrical family (sister Kate Rorke,

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<sup>72</sup> See “Royalty Theatre,” *Morning Post*, Dec. 10, 1892: 3.

mother Miss Whithall), Mary Rorke enjoyed a long and distinguished career. In her youth she joined Charles Kelly's stock company in Croydon (Reid and Compton 181). After working for some time in Liverpool, she returned to London under the management of John Hare at the Court and then under Charles Wyndham at the Criterion. She toured America with Wyndham from 1882–83 (Parker 693). After her return, she joined the Adelphi Company. In 1888 she appeared in *Little Lord Fauntleroy* at the Prince of Wales's and was replaced in the part of Mrs. Errol by Elizabeth Robins (Parker 694; John 238). In 1890 she starred as Bridget O'Mara in Sims and Buchanan's *The English Rose* at the Adelphi replacing Jessie Millward (Reid and Compton 182; Parker 1043). She starred in *The Duchess of Malfi* (Parker 694) and in *A Man's Love* for the ITS (Orme 61).

**Royd, Mrs. Lois** Royd played Fiquet in *The Heirs of Roubardin* in 1894 with James Welch, Harding Cox, C. M. Hallard, Lena Dene, and Mrs. Arthur Ayers ('*World*' 1894 375).

**Rutland, Charles** Rutland played Meyerhof in *A Question of Memory* (Wearing 189).

**Saker, Annie** (1882–1932) Daughter of players Maria O'Beirne Saker and Edward Saker and granddaughter of actor William Saker, Annie made her debut at the Haymarket in 1893 (Parker 1012, 708). She played many ingénue roles for Charles Wyndham before appearing as a waitress in Edward Rose's four-act romantic drama *Under the Red Robe* adapted from Weyman's novel with the same title (Clapp and Edgett *Plays* 285-86). This was performed at the Haymarket in 1896 starring Herbert Waring and Bernard Gould. She played lead roles in the provinces in *Pink Dominos*, *Mary's Secret*, and *The Great Divorce Case* under Emma Hutchinson's management (Parker 708). For the ITS, Saker was a passerby in *Alan's Wife* (*Alan's Wife* liii).

**Santley, Kate** (1837–1923) Santley had an international upbringing, being born in Germany and reared in the United States (Pascoe *Dramatic* 1<sup>st</sup> ed. 277). She left her home in South Carolina when the Civil War broke out in 1861. After a brief career in music, she debuted in Edinburgh where she played Jessica opposite Charles Kean's Shylock. Her London career commenced with the parody *The Stranger* at the Queen's Theatre. After an American tour, she returned to London in 1872 to perform at the Alhambra in *Le Roi Carotte*. She managed the Royalty from 1877 to 1878. After acting in the provinces, she again managed the Royalty. Grein approached her with plans to produce *Ghosts* in early 1891. She hosted four more ITS "At Homes": *Therese Rauquin*

in October 1891; *The Kiss*, *The Minister's Call*, and *A Visit* (a triple bill) in March 1892; *Widower's Houses* in December 1892; and *The Wild Duck* in May 1894 (Schoonderwoerd 114-16).

**Scott, Alice** Scott played Nora's daughter Emmie in the ITS revival of *A Doll's House* for six performances at the Globe in May 1897 with Janet Achurch and Courtenay Thorpe ('*World 1897*' 395).

**\*Shaw, George Bernard** (1856–1950) Born in Dublin, Shaw followed his mother to London in 1876. He was unemployed when he met William Archer at the British Library reading room (*Who Was Who*; Whitebrook 1). Archer found Shaw his first job as a music critic (Holroyd 135). The friends eagerly awaited the ITS, which gave Shaw his first opportunity to staging a play (Orme 112; *ODNB*). He won the Nobel Prize for Literature in 1925.

**Shepherd, George** Shepherd played the waiter in *Thyrza Fleming* (Wearing 239).

**Shillingford, Osmond** Shillingford played the part of Jenks in *Thyrza Fleming* (Wearing 239). He wrote the comedy *Court Scandal*, with actor-playwright Aubrey Boucicault, performed at the Court theatre on January 24, 1899 (Parker 1037).

**Skarratt, C. S.** Skarratt played Jensen in *The Wild Duck* at the Royalty in May 1894 ('*World*' 1894 383).

**\*Spence, Edward Fordham** (1860–1932) Son of author James Spence and his wife Mary Laserre, Edward worked as a solicitor until his retirement in 1928 (*Who Was Who*). As well as several novels, he wrote drama criticism for *The Scotsman* and *The Sketch*, and in the book *Our Stage and Its Critics*. He promised to write an original one-act comedy for the ITS, but no plays by him were performed there.<sup>73</sup>

**Stuart, Mary** Stuart played Anna (the children's nurse) in the ITS revival of *A Doll's House* in May 1897 for six nights at the Globe ('*World*' 1897 395).

**\*Symonds, Arthur** (1865–1945) Writer, poet, and critic, Symonds was born in Wales (Powell Oscar 159). He adapted Frank Harris' novel *A Modern Idyll* into the one-act play *The Minister's Call*, produced by the ITS at the Royalty on March 4, 1892 (Orme 100). This was the first English play produced by the Society (107). Gertrude Kingston

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<sup>73</sup> See "Theatrical Mems.," *Bristol Mercury and Daily Post*, Nov. 3, 1894: 8. See also Orme 107.



starred and Herman de Lange directed (103-04).

**\*Teixeira de Mattos, Alexander Louis** (1865–1921) Born in Amsterdam, Teixeira de Mattos settled in London in 1874 (*Who Was Who*). He wrote many books, including *The Recollections of Alexis de Tocqueville*, and translated works from Dutch, French, German, and Danish. He was given the Chevalier of the Order of Leopold II in 1920. He served as head of Intelligence Section, War Trade Intelligence Department, from 1915 to 1918 and was secretary of the department from 1918 to 1919. A close friend of Grein, he translated *Leida*, *The Cradle*, *Térèse Raquin*, *The Gold Fish*, and *The Heirs of Raboudin* for the ITS (Orme 95-6, 105, 127, 139; Powell Oscar 154).

**\*Thorpe, Courtenay** [Courtney] Thorpe played Alfred Allmers in *Little Eyolf* at the Avenue Theatre under Robins and Archer in November 1896 (Postlewait *Prophet* 96; John 241). The cast included Robins as Asta Allmers, Janet Achurch as Rita Allmers, and Mrs. Patrick Campbell as the Rat-Wife. It was, according to Shaw, “the strongest Ibsen cast yet seen in London” (Shaw *Collected Letters* 684). Thorpe played Helmer in the six-night ITS revival of *A Doll’s House* in May 1897 (Orme 147).<sup>74</sup> He starred as Marchbanks in Shaw’s 1897 production of *Candida* with Janet Achurch as Candida, Charles Charrington as Morell, and Edith Craig as Prosperine (Adams 247).

**\*Todhunter, John** (1839–1816) Todhunter was born in Dublin where he began his medical training at Trinity College (*Who Was Who*). After further training on the continent, he returned to Ireland to become assistant physician at Cork Street Fever Hospital in Dublin (*ODNB*). After the death of his wife in 1871 and his son in 1874, Todhunter moved to London and began writing poetry and plays, including *The Black Cat*, performed by the ITS in 1893 (Orme 136). Though his poem “Aghadoe” was widely anthologized, Todhunter’s stage plays were his most lasting literary contribution, including *Comedy of Sighs* and *The Poison Flower* (Powell Oscar 159).

**Trent, Gilbert** Trent took the part of Mr. Flutter in the three-act farce *Cerise and Co.* by Mrs. Musgrave at the Prince of Wales’s Theatre in 1890 (Howard 172). He played Molvik in *The Wild Duck* in 1894 for the ITS (*World’ 1894* 383).

**Vanbrugh, Violet** (1867–1942) [née Violet Augusta Mary Barnes] Older sister of actress Irene, Violet Vanbrugh was born in Exeter to the Reverend Reginald Henry

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<sup>74</sup> See also *World’ 1897* 395.

Barnes (d. 1889), prebendary of Exeter Cathedral, and his wife Frances Mary Emily Nation (*ODNB*; Parker 822). Reverend Barnes gave his eldest daughter £50 and paid for the services of a nurse to help launch her acting career. After only three months, on the recommendation of Ellen Terry, Vanbrugh débuted in *The Don* at Toole's Theatre and then acted Shakespeare's Ophelia with Sarah Thorne. She toured America for two years with the Kendals from 1889.<sup>75</sup> In 1891 she acted the parts of both Thea and Hedda in Toole's parody of *Hedda Gabler*, *Ibsen's Ghost or Toole Up-to-date* ('*World*' 1891 873).<sup>76</sup> In 1892, she appeared as Ann Boleyn in Irving's *King Henry VIII* (*ODNB*). She played Hilda Wangel in *Jerry-builder Solness* for the ITS in 1893 with James Welch as Solness (Orme 128).<sup>77</sup> Her best-known roles were Queen Katherine in *King Henry VIII* and Mistress Ford in *The Merry Wives of Windsor* (*ODNB*). She married Arthur Bouchier in 1894 and played opposite him in many productions, including *Lady Macbeth to his Macbeth*. They divorced in 1917. Their daughter Prudence was also an actress.

\***Veziñ, Herman(n)** (1829–1910) Born in Philadelphia, Veziñ earned an M.A. from the University of Pennsylvania (Reid and Compton 225). Though he trained for the bar, he was determined to act and sailed to England in 1850 (Baker Table 2). After six months he debuted in a bit part at the Theatre Royal, York and later appeared at the Princess's in London under the Kean's management (Reid and Compton 225). He toured the United States from 1857 to 1859 (*ODNB*). He returned to England and in 1861 triumphed as Harry Kavanagh in Falconer's *Peep o' Day* for over three hundred performances. He appeared at the Princess's Theatre with his wife, Jane Thompson, whom he married in 1863. In 1886, he played Count Francesco Cenci for the Shelley Society in a private performance at the Grand Theatre. (The censor had banned the play for its themes of incest and patricide.) When his career flagged, he spent his time touring the provinces and teaching elocution. He starred in *Dante* by G. H. R. Dabbs

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<sup>75</sup> See also Reid and Compton 221.

<sup>76</sup> See also Davis, ed., *The Broadview Anthology of Nineteenth-century Performance* (Peterborough, Ontario: Broadview, 2012) 565.

<sup>77</sup> See also Franc 122.

and Edward Righton for the ITS in 1893 (Orme 128).<sup>78</sup> In 1897, he played in *Olivia*, an adaptation of *The Vicar of Wakefield*, with Ellen Terry. Robins also cast him in *Mariana* that year. In 1900 he played Fergus Crampton in Shaw's *You Never Can Tell*. His final role was as Rowley in *The School for Scandal* with Tree at His Majesty's Theatre in 1909. Illness kept him from finishing the run. He died in June 1910. Vezin wrote two farces *Cousin Jack* and *Mrs. M.P.* (Powell Oscar 159).

**\*Vyner, James D** Vyner's *The Debutante* was "the slightest of curtain-raisers" for the ITS production of *The Black Cat* on December 8, 1893, at the Opera Comique (Orme 137). According to Schoonderwoerd, this was Vyner's only staged play (128 n. 2).

**Waller, E. G.** According to *The Era* for May 6, 1893, E. G. Waller played the First Warder in *Alan's Wife* for the ITS.<sup>79</sup>

**Waller, Lewis** (1860–1915) Eldest son of a civil engineer and intended for similar pursuits, Waller was educated at King's College School, and in Germany (Baker 88; *Who Was Who*). He debuted at Toole's Theatre in March 1883, the same year he married actress Florence West. He played in Hare's production of *The Profligate* with Olga Nethersole, Johnston Forbes-Robertson, and Kate Rorke in 1889 (John 52). (Robins understudied for Nethersole, but did not play). He appeared with Robins and Lea in *The Sixth Commandment*. Lea detested his habit of crying on stage, whether his role called for it or not (*Whither* Ch. 1, p. 9). For the ITS, Waller played the Chief Warder in *Alan's Wife*.<sup>80</sup> According to *The Morning Post* of Jan. 27, 1893, he played the part of Oswald in the reprise of *Ghosts* "with great force" ("Independent Theatre Society"). For Robins's Ibsen Series, he played Lovborg in *Hedda Gabler* and Rosmer in *Rosmersholm* in May 1893. (C. Archer 198; 'World' 1893 148–49). Waller managed the Globe, and the Lyric, took a season at the Haymarket, and co-managed the Shaftesbury (*Who Was Who*).

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<sup>78</sup> See "Independent Theatre Society," *Morning Post*, July 12, 1893: 7.

<sup>79</sup> See also Wearing 163.

<sup>80</sup> "Independent Theatre: Alan's Wife," *Era*, May 6, 1893: 8.

**Warde, George** Warde played Werle in *The Wild Duck* in May 1894 at the Royalty (*World* 1894 383). He played John Heron in *Thyrza Fleming* at Terry's in 1895 (Wearing 239).

**Waring, Florence (Mrs. Herbert Waring)** (?–1929) [née Florence Victorine Rous] The eldest daughter of George Rous, Florence married her actor husband in 1883 (*Who Was Who* “Herbert Waring”). She played Gina Ekdal in *The Wild Duck* for three performances at the Royalty in May 1894 (*World* 1894 383). Her husband premiered the role of Helmer in *A Doll's House* in London in 1889 and Solness in *The Master Builder* in 1893.

**Watson, Mr. Ivan** Watson acted in the ITS production of *Le Pater* in French in 1893.<sup>81</sup>

**\*Welch, James** (1865–1917) The youngest son of John Robert Welch, an accountant, James Welch was born and educated in Liverpool (*Who Was Who*). His first parts were under Wilson Barrett at the Globe, beginning in December 1887, after which he played in most of the London theatres. He debuted the part of Lickcheese in Shaw's *Widower's Houses* to great success in 1892 (Orme 114-15).<sup>82</sup> In 1893, as well as playing the pastor Jaime Warren in *Alan's Wife*, Welch appeared in *Jerry-builder Solness* (Orme 128; Franc 122). In June 1893 he played Horstad opposite Beerbohm Tree as Dr. Stockmann in *The Enemy of the People* (Adams 460). He starred as Rabourdin in *The Heirs of Rabourdin* for the ITS in February 1894 at the Opera Comique (*World* 1894 375). He premiered the role of Major Paul Petkoff in *Arms and the Man* in April 1894 with Alma Murray, Florence Farr, Charles Calvert, Yorke Stephens, and Bernard Gould (Adams 76; *World* 1894 381). Robins cast him as Don Castulo in *Mariana* at the Court in February 1894 (384), and as Foldal in *John Gabriel Borkman* at the Strand in May 1897 (*World* 1897 393–94; Whitebrook 194). The cast of *Borkman* included Mr. W. H. Vernon as Borkman, Genevieve Ward as Gunhild Borkman, Martin-Harvey as Erhart Borkman, Robins as Ella Rentheim, and Dora Barton as Frida Foldal. Also in May 1897 Welch played in *Solomon's Twins* for a matinée performance at the Vaudeville, and in the ITS's *The Wild Duck* for five matinées at the Globe (*World* 1897 395). His great success was *When Knights Were*

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<sup>81</sup> See “Independent Theatre,” *Times*, Oct. 28, 1893: 6.

<sup>82</sup> See “Widower's Houses” *Era*, Dec. 17, 1892: 8.

*Bold* (“Mr. James Welch”). He produced *You Never Can Tell* with Yorke Stephens at the Strand in May 1900 and managed the one-act *Judged by Appearances* in 1902 at the Comedy (Parker 759, 286). He was married to Sissie Welch.

**West, Florence** West starred as Lady Anne in the ITS production of *The Strike at Arlingford* with Bernard Gould. She also appeared in *Roses of Shadow*, the curtain raiser for the ITS reprise of *Ghosts*, in January 1893. She starred as Blanche Darien with Hamilton Revelle as Severin Campion, two lovers who succumb to traditional marriage (*The Morning Post*, Jan. 27, 1893: 5). West was married to Lewis Waller (Orme 121–122).<sup>83</sup>

**\*Whitaker, Arthur** Whitaker played Cokane “with a fine, quiet humour” in Shaw’s *Widower’s Houses* with Florence Farr and James Welch (Orme 115).<sup>84</sup>

**Wilde, Oscar** (1854–1900) Wilde did not offer any plays to the ITS but supported it with subscriptions and attendance at the plays (Orme 97).

**\*Wright, Mrs. Theodore** Though Edward Aveling and Eleanor Marx feared that an amateur would ruin the part, Mrs. Wright received good reviews for her ITS debut, Mrs. Alving, in *Ghosts* (Orme 83-4).<sup>85</sup> (She repeated the role in January 1893.) Critics praised her Madame Raquin in *Térèse Raquin* (Orme 98-99). She played Deborah Ogilvie in the “excellently acted” *Salvé*,<sup>86</sup> and gave “the best acting of the evening” as the mother in *A Question of Memory*.<sup>87</sup> Wright appeared in the final ITS play, *Blanchette*, produced by Conal O’Riordan in 1898 (Orme 148). She was cast in John Gray and André Raffalovich’s *The Blackmailers* in June 1894 with W. L. Abingdon and Olga Brandon (“Prince”).

**Mr. Wyes** According to *The Morning Post* of July 12, 1893, Wyes was “droll” as Dr. Brovik in the ITS parody *Jerry-builder Solness* with James Welch, Mr. G. Humphrey, Mrs. Edmund Phelps, and Violet Vanbrugh (Franc 122).

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<sup>83</sup> See also “Independent Theatre,” *Standard*, Feb. 22, 1893: 3.

<sup>84</sup> See “‘Widower’s Houses’ at the Royalty,” *Pall Mall Gazette*, Dec. 10, 1892: 3.

<sup>85</sup> “Ghosts,” *Era*, Mar. 21, 1891: 10.

<sup>86</sup> *Era*, “Independent,” Mar. 23, 1895: 8.

<sup>87</sup> *Times*, “Independent Theatre Society” Oct. 28, 1893: 6.

**Zangwill, Israel** (1864–926) Zangwill was a Zionist journalist, author, and lecturer who studied languages and philosophy at London University, receiving his degree in 1884 (*ODNB*). His novels include *Children of the Ghetto* (1892) and *Ghetto Tragedies* (1893). He married novelist Edith Ayrton in 1903. Though he eventually wrote twenty plays (*ODNB*) and promised one to the ITS (Orme 76), none of his plays were given there. He wrote a one-act parody of Ibsen entitled *Threepenny Bits* given for charity on May 6, 1895 at the Garrick, starring Violet Vanbrugh and Arthur Bouchier (Franc 123). A friend of Grein, Zangwill served as president of the Playgoers' Club and president of the Jewish Drama League (*Who Was Who*). Zangwill was a friend of Estelle Burney whose life story informed some of his fiction (Rochelson 86).

**Zetterberg, Anna** Educated at the Royal Theatre in Stockholm,<sup>88</sup> Zetterberg appeared in *Le Pater* at the ITS on October 27, 1893 (*'World'* 1893 255-56).<sup>89</sup> *The Times* reviewer noted that she was “a Swedish amateur, whose [French] enunciation was not of the clearest.”

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<sup>88</sup> See Ristori to Irving, *IC*, Jan. 10, 1897. Adelaide Ristori, Countess del Gillo, asked Irving to give Zetterberg a part. Sir Augustus Harris had promised to finance her debut but died in 1896, before he could help her. Zetterberg had continued to study acting after the death of her patron.

<sup>89</sup> See also "Independent Theatre" *Times* Oct. 28, 1893: 6.

## Appendix 4

**Transcript and photocopies of pages  
from Robins's promptbook of *Hedda Gabler*.**

Robins's pagination is inconsistent, so the pagination below refers to my handwritten page numbers (lower left corner) of Robins, Lea, and Archer's version. Two asterisks [\*\*] stand for an indecipherable word. Robins's promptbook does not give the character's names, so I have placed these in brackets. Robins's additions appear in blue type.

Page 35:

[TESMAN]

\_\_\_\_\_ Mrs. Elvsted home, eh?

[HEDDA]

Oh, we'll manage that somehow.

[LOVBORG]

(10 or thereabouts)\_\_\_\_\_ will that do?

[HEDDA]

Admirably.

[TESMAN]

\_\_\_\_\_ so early, Hedda.

[HEDDA]

Oh, you can stay as long—as long as ever you like.

[MRS. ELVSTED]

\_\_\_\_\_ end of it all.

[HEDDA]

At ten o'clock ~~he will be here~~ (*Eilert Lovborg will be here*). I see him already. With vine leaves in his hair. Flushed and fearless. ~~And then he will have gained control over himself~~ (*he'll come [X] back be master of himself*). He'll be a free man for all this days.

[MRS. ELVSTED]

\_\_\_\_\_ might only be.

[HEDDA]

It will be. (*Rises and approaches her*) (*low uttered*) You may doubt him as long (*much*) as you please. I believe in him.

[MRS. ELVSTED]

\_\_\_\_\_ hidden motive, Hedda.

[HEDDA]  
 (*Maybe*) I'd like,<sup>90</sup> for once in my life, to shape a human destiny.

[MRS. ELVSTED]  
 \_\_\_\_\_ you done that?

I never have.

[MRS. ELVSTED]  
 \_\_\_\_\_ Not your husband's?

[HEDDA]  
 [\*\*] you think that's worth the trouble? Oh, if you could only know how poor I am. And fate has made you so rich. (X) ~~(Throws her arms passionately round her)~~ I think I will burn your hair off after all. (*Holds her with R \*\*\* voice*) **[This sentence is scribbled].**

[MRS. ELVSTED]  
 Let me go! Let me go! I am afraid of you, Hedda.

[BERTHA]  
 \_\_\_\_\_ [tea] is ready, ma'am.

[HEDDA]  
 Very well. We are coming.

[MRS. ELVSTED]  
 \_\_\_\_\_ without waiting.

[HEDDA]  
 Nonsense! You shall have tea first, you *little stupid!* (*grasps Thea's hands*) And then comes ten o'clock—and Ejert Lovborg, with vine leaves in his hair.

(*Drags MRS. E. almost by force to the doorway*) (+ *draws her breath in thro' clinched teeth. + lifts her hand to Thea's hair.*)

[END OF SECOND ACT]

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<sup>90</sup> E. R. doubled underscored "I'd."



Page 52, end of Act III:

After Hedda has said goodbye to Lovborg for the last time, Robins used this stage direction:

H holds out her hands wavering a little as L— goes out —stands an instant—utters a broken ‘cry ‘Lovb’—grasps curtain looks back a desk where MS. is. + whispers heavily “Thea—Thea!” —again and again as she Xs room[.] takes out MS. with eager vicious hands— catches sight of stove glides to it + drops before it opening door + muttering ‘the child the child’—crushes some leaves + throws them in ‘how I [\*\*\*] burning yr. child’ tc. tc.<sup>91</sup>—

Page 59:

In the last scene of the final act, Tesman and Thea plan to edit Lovborg’s manuscript for publication. Robins wrote this note:

[Hedda] makes movement up to alcove as if [‘]I’ll soon put a stop to this[‘]—then a quick thought—‘why sh’d I—I don’t care’—then the thought of Eilert—turn + go swiftly to arm chair muttering ‘No, no’ in low-voiced scorn sinks into chair on [line what a] ‘relief this is [about] Eilert Lovborg.’

Page 51

See transcription of this photocopy in Appendix 5 that compares Robins’s and Gosse’s versions.

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<sup>91</sup> Bell remembered the line as “Now I am burning your child.”

Oh, we'll manage that somehow. Mrs Elvsted home, eh?  
Admirably. 10 on furniture will that do?

Oh, you can stay as long - as long as ever you like. so early, Hedda.

At ten o'clock vine leaves in his hair. I see him already. With He'll be a free man  
He'll be a free man He'll be a free man He'll be a free man

It will be. (Rises and approaches her) might only be, you may doubt him as  
long as you please. I believe in him.

Waste Id like, for once in my life, to shape a human destiny.  
never you done that?

Not your husband's?  
You think that's worth the trouble? Oh, if you could only know how poor I am. And fate has made you so rich. (Throws her arms passionately round her) I think I will burn your hair off, after all. hotter is ready, ma'am.

Very well. We are coming.

Without waiting And And  
Nonsense! You shall have tea first, you little stupid. And And  
then comes ten o'clock - and Ejlert Lovborg, with vine leaves in his hair. (Drags MRS E. almost by force to the doorway)

drawn her hair in their drawn her hair in their drawn her hair in their  
drawn her hair in their drawn her hair in their drawn her hair in their

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\* wakes nervous up to alarm as if  
He soon put a stop to all this - then a quick  
thought - "why not?" - "I don't care" - then the  
thought of Albert - "how to go tonight, to wear  
cloak and carrying the box in hand in a new  
suits with cloaks in "relief that is Albert's Army."





**Appendix 5**  
**Comparing the Pistol Scenes: Gosse's and Robins's Versions**

Gosse's version appears first, in black type. Hedda's lines in Robins's version are in red with her additions in blue, italicized in parentheses. My comments are bolded in brackets. Two asterisks stand for an indecipherable word. Three asterisks stand for a missing word.

LOVBORG

Thea said that what I had done was the same to her as murdering a child.

\_\_\_\_\_ her like child murder.

HEDDA

Yes, that's what she said.

Yes, *so she said*. [**E. R.'s emphasis**]. (*angry contempt*)

LOVBORG

But, to kill one's child—that is not the worst thing you can do to it.

\_\_\_\_\_ a father can do to it.

HEDDA

*That not the worst?* [**sic**]

Not the worst!

LOVBORG

No. That is the worst which I wished to shield Thea from hearing about.

\_\_\_\_\_ (*wanted to shield Thea*) from hearing

the worst!

HEDDA

And what then is this worst?

Then what is this worst (*drops in chair head in hands elbows on knees*).

LOVBORG

Suppose now, Hedda, that a man—about such an hour in the morning as this—after a wild night of [**End page 225**] carouse, came home to the mother of his child and said: Listen—I have been here and there. In this place and that place. And I have taken your child with me. To this place and that place. I have lost the child. Utterly lost it. The Devil knows into whose hands it has fallen. Who may have had their fingers in it.

\_\_\_\_\_ (*who may have*) it in their clutches!"

HEDDA

Ah! But, after all—this was nothing more than a book—  
*(Rises draws hand across eyes to clear off the spell of L's words.)*  
*(But) Well* —but after all—this was only a book—

LOVBORG

The pure soul of Thea was in that book.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *(Thea's pure soul)* was in that book.

HEDDA

Yes, I understand that.  
*[Ah,] Yes, I understand. (bet. shut teeth she sees now how hopeless 'tis to try to loosen Thea's influence.)*

LOVBORG

And therefore you understand also that between  
 her and me there is no future henceforward.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *(for her and me together—)* no future is

possible.

HEDDA

And which way will you go? **[End Gosse's p. 226]**  
 What will you do then? *(doggedly)*

LOVBORG

No way. Merely see how I can make an end  
 altogether. The sooner the better.  
 \_\_\_\_\_ *(make an end of it all)* the sooner the

better!

HEDDA

*(A step nearer)* Ejlert Lovborg—now listen to me. Could you not contrive—that it  
 should be done beautifully.  
*(What! yes! yes whispered)* *(A step nearer)* Ejlert Lovborg—listen to me—~~couldn't~~  
 you see that you do this *gracefully* *(brilliantly boldly bold brilliant brilliant*  
*beautifully)*—make a ~~fine~~ *bold* *(fine)* end of it all?

LOVBORG

Beautifully? *(Smiles)* With vine leaves in my hair,  
 as you used to fancy—  
 \_\_\_\_\_ in the old days.

HEDDA

Oh, no! The vine leaf—I don't think anything more about that! But beautifully, all  
 the same! Just for once—Good-by! You must go now. And don't come here any  
 more.

~~Oh,~~ no! *(No no)* No! I don't believe in the vine leaves any longer. Let it be *gracefully*  
*(beautifully)* nevertheless—**[In the margin:]** (If you do this let there be **[\*\*]** beauty

in it.) ~~for once, in a way.~~ (+ *now*) Goodbye! You must go now. And don't come here any more (*let me see you again.*)

LOVBORG

Good-by, Mrs. Tesman. And give a message to George Tesman from me. (He is going)

**[End Gosse's p. 227]**

\_\_\_\_\_ me to George Tesman.

HEDDA

No, wait! You shall take with you a keepsake from me.

(She goes to the writing table and opens the drawer and pistol case. Comes back to LOVBORG with one of the pistols.)

No, wait! (*You must take with you a memento of from me.*) (She goes to the writing table and opens the drawer and pistol-case. Comes

**[End of p. 51, my pagination; E.R.'s p. 47].**

(Little afraid of laughter at giving of pistol. Accustom audience to sight of it—lift it [\*\*] :X: see opposite page.<sup>92</sup>

**[My page 53]:**

back to LOVBORG with one of the pistols)

LOVBORG

(Looking at her) This? Is *this* the keepsake?

\_\_\_\_\_ is this a memento?

HEDDA

(Nods slowly) Do you recollect it? It was aimed at you once.

(Nods slowly) Do you recognise it? It was aimed at you once.

LOVBORG

You should have used it then.

\_\_\_\_\_ you should have used it then.

HEDDA

Look here! *You* use it now.

Take it and do *you* use it now.

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<sup>92</sup> In "Note" marked with the symbol :X:, Robins gave herself stage directions intended to avoid audience laughter when Hedda gives Lovborg the pistol: "in their right half take it fr. case. look at L— lay it down— go to him a step then turn rapidly + take up pistol—this gradual leading up may bridge a possible dangerous episode."



LOVBORG  
(Puts the pistol into his breast pocket) Thanks!

[End Gosse p. 228]

\_\_\_\_\_ Thanks.

HEDDA

And do it beautifully, Ejlert Lovborg. Only promise me that!  
And a *fine (brilliant) fine (brave)* end, Ejlert Lovborg. Promise me that!

LOVBORG  
Good-by, Hedda Gabler.  
\_\_\_\_\_ Good-bye, Hedda Gabler!

(He goes out through the hall door. She then goes to the writing table and takes out the packet with the manuscript, peeps into the envelope, pulls one or two of the leaves half out, and glances at them. She then takes the whole of it and sits down in the arm-chair by the stove. She holds the packet in her lap. After a pause, she opens the door of the stove, and then the packet also.)

HEDDA

(Throws one of the sheets into the fire and whispers to herself) Now I am burning your child, Thea! You with your curly hair! (Throws several sheets into the fire) Your child and Ejlert Lovborg's child. (Throws the rest in) Now I am burning—am burning the child.

(Listens awhile at the door. She then goes to the writing table and takes out the packet with the manuscript, peeps into the wrapper pulls one or two of the leaves half out and glances at them. She then takes the whole of it and sits down in the armchair by the stove. She holds the packet in her lap. After a pause she opens the door of the stove and then the packet also) (Throws one of the sheets into the fire, and whispers to herself) Now I am burning your child, Thea! You, with your wavy (yellow) hair! (Throws several sheets into the fire) Your child and Ejlert Lovborg's (Throws the rest in) Now I am burning—burning your child!  
[Hedda's line above is crossed out with two lines. These lines are replaced by:]

H. holds out her hands wavering a little as L- goes out —stands an instant—utters a broken “cry “Lovb”— grasps curtains looks back a desk where MS. is. + whispers heavily “Thea—Thea!” —again and again as she Xs room takes out MS. with eager vicious hands catches sight of stove glides to it + drops before it opening door + muttering “the child the child”—crushes some leaves + throws them in “now I [\*\*\*] burning yr. child” tc. tc.

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