Articles

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Fashioning fairy fellows

Fashioning fairy fellows: Androgynous performativity in the Savoy Shakespeare Productions 1912–14

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Abstract

For a few seasons in London theatres before the outbreak of the First World War, modernizations of historical costume embodied androgyny in both Sergei Diaghilev’s Ballets Russes and Harley Granville Barker’s Savoy Shakespeare Productions. In *Twelfth Night* of 1912 and *A Midsummer Night’s Dream* of 1914, cross-dressing, folkloric and magical characterization through costume performed a gender fluidity at the heart of both scenarios.

In *Prefaces to Shakespeare* (1927–46), Barker positions Oberon's intersex hybridity as 'travesty'. The Savoy Productions reimagined the androgyny of the fairy characters supplanting the feminization and infantilization favoured in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century productions with the casting and costuming of Dennis Neilson Terry as Oberon and Donald Calthrop as Puck. Neglected archival evidence of Norman Wilkinson's drawings orginally bequested to the Courtauld Institute and now in the V & A London reveal how his historical and 'Post-Impressionist' costume designs enrich understandings of these productions glimpsed in publicity photographs and reviews. These traces capture how the embodied interpretation of Barker's players performed a folkloric androgyny through gesture, movement and costume. Cross-dressing in modernized Elizabethan 'menswear' in *Twelfth Night* and the exotic golden and sylvan 'fairies' of *The Dream* reveal how costume amplified the performance of complexly fluid and androgynous gender on the Edwardian stage.

Keywords: androgyny, costume design, Edwardian London, fairy, travesty, Norman Wilkinson

The Stagecraft of Menswear

> The advent of brighter colourings in the matter of men's wear has brought forward the query does the stage set the fashion in men's clothes? For it is usually only 'behind the footlights' that extreme colours are worn by man. […] The actor is a good agent for the dissemination of the new ideas in dress.
>
> (Anon 1913a: 9)

An article entitled 'Clothes and the man: Are actors responsible for men's fashions? – The half-on glove' on the 'Notes and notions of the moment' page recognized the complex interplay between menswear and theatrical costuming. Alongside helpful hints about how to purchase the right size of boot and the 'Tie question', the article enquired 'Are men vain or only very neat?'. The observation of a succession of men 'staring hard into a shop window' which upon approach was discerned to be a display of hand glasses which afford confirmation that 'one's collar was immaculate and tie neat' suggested yes. Closing reflections on the 'Vogue for the half-on

glove' declared: 'No one who values his appearance, no one who wishes to appear even moderately well dressed, would dream of wearing his gloves full on and buttoned'. The knuckle and the palm must be 'uncovered. This practically applies to both sexes'. (Anon 1913a: 9)

These sartorial practices prompted 'a young exquisite […] [to] ask the manager of a well-known glover's shop if he could not make gloves permanently turned up – like trousers'. (Anon 1913a: 9) This anonymous editorial in the back pages of a regional newspaper captured how debates about the performance of self in the early twentieth century resonated in what men wore onstage and off. Observations about 'extreme colours', a morally inflected tension between masculine 'vanity' and 'neatness', how a glove revealed and hid flesh, indicated how clothing performed gender complexly. Fluid identities implicit in phrases such as 'a young exquisite' were not just a preoccupation or practice of 'theatricals'. Nonetheless, a night at the theatre offered an education on such matters. The 'Dramatic Jotting' article on the same page named the Savoy Shakespeare Productions as one of the 'London pioneers […] [who] are training a great public in the art of theatre' (*Manchester Courier* 1913a: 9). Theatrical costume design reverberated with contemporary debates about masculinity and the performativity of what men wear. Gender fluidity, a central theme of many of plays by Shakespeare and his contemporaries, is amplified through the particularities of stagecraft (Barker [1912; 1914, 1924] 1993; Shapiro 1996; Parker 2020). The performances and designs of the Savoy Productions of 1912–14 directed by Harley Granville Barker (1877–1946) deployed 'extreme' colour and embodied stagecraft to express an androgyny at the heart of Shakespeare's plays.[1]

Narratives of role reversal and disguise embodied through voice, movement and costume are core leitmotifs of both *Twelfth Night* and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* omnipresent in the surviving primary evidence of the Savoy Productions. Scholars have diligently mapped the relationships of players and stage design through the prompt books for these two productions held in the University of Michigan Library. Barker's 'Prefaces', purchasable as pamphlets at the theatre in 1912 and 1914 and re-edited in the 1920s, articulated vital insights into the rationale and practices of the Savoy performances ([1912, 1914, 1924] 1993). The costumes and stage decoration created by Norman Wilkinson (1882–1934) were well illustrated in an ample press coverage that recognized their importance for the dramaturgy. The cross-dressing costumes for Viola-Cesario and Sebastian in *Twelfth*

Night survive in the Victoria and Albert Museum London. A rarely discussed bequest of Wilkinson's sketches to The Courtauld Institute (now in the V & A London) included drawings of the innovative apron stage specially constructed at the Savoy, backcloths, Titania's bower and all the costumes for the three productions. Focusing more closely on this physical evidence amplifies how the costume, movement and settings of the Savoy Shakespeare embodied a spectrum of Edwardian cultures of androgyny.

The historiography of Savoy Shakespeare scholarship is dominated by the work of literary and theatrical historians, mostly without illustrations. Barker's agency is the main focus (Greif 1980; Kelly 1965; Kennedy 1985; McCullough 2007; Morgan 1961; Purdom 1955). The Savoy Productions are positioned either as landmarks within an historical overview of productions or as modernist single production case studies (Barbour 1975; Griffiths 1996: 1–80). A more sustained consideration of how the sensoriality of costuming and stage decoration embodied cultures of androgyny at the turn of the century is the objective of this study. Its method is the interpretive juxtaposition of surviving garments, sketches and poster-programmes with their representation through theatrical photographs and in press reviews of 1912–14. Emulating the contextualization of narratives within contemporary plays and politics demonstrated by the textual methods of Jackson and Carlson, this visual analysis also hopes to compare how the colours and textiles of the Savoy production design resonated with a spectrum of contemporary visual cultures of the androgyne in the 1890s–1910s (Jackson 2004; Carlson 2006).

Scholars' spotlighting of Barker misrepresents his own deep commitment to the collectivity of theatrical creation: 'The text of a play is a score awaiting performance, and the performance and its preparation are almost from the beginning, a work of collaboration […] if [the producer] only knows how to give orders, he has mistaken his vocation' (Barker 1993:6). Wilkinson's designs and performances of the actors who created Viola and the

principal fairies, Lillah McCarthy (1875–1960), Dennis Neilsen-Terry (1895–1932) and Donald Calthrop (1888–1940) warrant more attention. They embodied the verse, costumes and decoration which expressed a distinctive gender fluidity at the heart of the Savoy Productions's interpretation of Shakespeare. The allure of claiming modernity for the productions has oversimplified the inferences of invocations of 'Post-Impressionist' decoration in the reviews. Wilkinson's stagecraft synthesized multiple temporalities inspired by a 'total work of art' aesthetics where archaic Greece, 'Orientalist' fantasy, Elizabethan and folkloric rhetoric intersected. The fashioning of Viola-Cesario-Sebastian and the Fairy Court at the Savoy flowed from the aesthetics of illustrated books and plays created by Wilkinson and Walford Graham-Robertson (1866–1948). The Savoy costuming, stage decoration and actors' movement within them imagined an alternative world of heightened sensuality recognized to be located in youthfulness and the androgyne rather than the polarities of sexual desire amidst the gathering clouds of the First World War.

Prologue: The players

Whilst Barker's career is so well documented as to require no rehearsal here, the Savoy designers and actors as yet have only secured cameo appearances in the scholarship. Lillah McCarthy's reputation has been primarily focused upon her starring roles and marriage to Granville Barker (1906–18). Historical strong female roles as well as the 'new woman' characters such as Ann Whitefield in *Man and Superman* of George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) at the Royal Court made her reputation. Her multiple professional identities as manager of the Savoy Theatre in 1912, producer-manager of the Kingsway Theatre in 1919, entrepreneur-founder of Lillah McCarthy Productions Ltd., film acting, Royal Institution Lecturer in 1932, as well as her activism as a Suffragette, have been underplayed in favour of celebrating the conjugal alliance with Barker (Carpenter 2023; Kennedy 2011; McCarthy 1933: 30).

Dennis Neilsen-Terry, who played Oberon in 1914, made his debut aged 10 in the production of *Much Ado about Nothing* for the Jubilee of his great aunt, Ellen Terry (1847–1928). A reluctance about his dynastic inheritance might be inferred from his early-stage name Derrick Dennis. In an obituary, Neilson-Terry was dismissed 'never a really *great* actor' but he was 'a most attractive man to meet – good looking, with a graceful turn of the head and all the family charm' (Anon 1932: 7, original emphasis). His Rosencrantz in *Hamlet* for the actor-manager for F. R. Benson (1858–1939) at Stratford prompted admonitions to be 'careful of mannerisms […] and put more feeling and less prettiness into his acting' (Anon 1912: 7). Neilsen-Terry's performance of Julian Ross in a new problem play *The Big Game* by Sydney W Carroll (1877–1958) consolidated his association with the persona of an 'overwrought neurotic […] artist' (Anon 1913b: 4) which 'did not spare us the effeminate and sneaking side of the youth' (*Anon* 1913: 8). Productions and films with his wife Miss Mary Glynne (1895–1954), with whom he had two daughters, were dismissed as commercial 'trashy "shocker[s]"', but *Fear* was 'his best thing, his picture of a man with nerves shot to pieces being a splendid piece of nervous acting' (Anon 1932: 7). Caroll admired Neilson-Terry's interpretation of a Japanese samurai, Dr Tokeramo, in the inter-racial melodrama *Typhoon* (1909) by Melchior Lengyel (1880–1974). It demonstrated the actor's skill in being other to himself: 'He conquers the difficulty of his height, of his features, of his movement, of his speech' achieving 'a quiet, deliberate and intense Orientalism' (Anon 1932: 13). Grandson of Dion Boucicault (1820–90), Donald Calthrop (1888–1940) also descended from theatrical dynasty. As with many character actors, he is harder to trace beyond his roles in 1920s and 1930s films directed by Alfred Hitchcock, Michael Powell and Anthony Asquith. Calthrop was admired as: 'a visual performer, who, with his body language, could easily define a role' (Slide and Macfarlane 2017: 115).

One posthumous exhibition was held at the National Gallery of Canada in 1936, but there are no monographic studies of Wilkinson 'of Four Oaks'. His obituary in *The Times* celebrated Wilkinson's 1914 Savoy 'gold-clad fairies in *The Dream* sharply distinguishing them from the mortals' before outlining his designs for commercial theatres with Charles Frohman (1856–1915) at the Duke of York's Theatre, the Kingsway, the Lyric as well as the learned Phoenix Society and Stage Society for which he 'gave his services'. Wilkinson was 'distinguished by poetical imagination and a gracefully rococo taste in decoration […] An effect of his which will always remain in memory was the belvedere mound in […] *The Dream*' (Anon 1934: 19). William Bridges Adams (1889–1965), director of the Shakespeare Memorial Festival Company 1919–34, was cited at length using evocative epithets 'child-like enthusiasm', 'vigorous and delicate' 'whimsical, witty, and lovable', 'fanciful', 'something of an Elizabethan […] his taste was catholic, embracing everything, old or new. […] Modernity had no terrors for him' (Anon. 1934: 19), 'vague in conversation […] his work was exact and precise. His mind was virile and his imagination sunlit'. (Anon. 1934: 19) Wilkinson's silvery variation of his 1914 *Dream* costumes and decorations created for the 1932 inauguration of the Shakespeare Memorial Theatre Stratford (for which Wilkinson was a governor and executive committee member) was a 'riotous epithalamium' (*The Times* 1934: 19). Wilkinson was curator of the art of the theatre section in the British pavilion for the 1925 Decorative art Exhibition in Paris and a skilled harpsichordist. A letter to Armfield *The Times* from Arthur Hamilton Lee, 1st Viscount of Fareham (1868–1947) made public Wilkinson's bequest of his 'substantial fortune' (£77,493 1s. 8d worth £3,926,001 in 2017 or 54,572 days wages of a 1935 skilled tradesman *DNB*; National Archives) to the Courtauld Institute, then a young institution establishing art history in Britain, which included the donation of his sketches for both the 1912 *Twelfth Night* and 1914 *The Dream* (23 February 1934).

Maxwell Ashby Armfield (1881–1972) wrote the entry on Wilkinson for the *Dictionary of National Biography*, evocative of their intimacy: '[Wilkinson] never fully recovered from the effects of the brutalities of the [First World War] upon his sensitive and essentially pacifist nature' (Armfield [1949] 2007, n.pag.). As young men they had studied together at the 'enlightened' Birmingham School of Art where an interdisciplinary syllabus and staff promulgated craft skill and social ideals. Joseph Southall (1861–1945), Quaker, socialist, pacifist, international exhibitor, and in a companionate marriage with a cousin, would also seem to have been an influence through Armfield. Wilkinson's aesthetics embraced the decorative modalities grounded in simplicity of form, saturated colour tonalities and historical media such as tempera championed in Birmingham. In 1904, Nicholson shared a studio in Paris with Armfield and the Scottish war artist, Keith Henderson (1883–1982). Armfield's painting *Norman Wilkinson – Art maker* (1904, Private collection, whereabouts unknown) portrayed a slender, dark-haired youth wearing an artist's smock over a neat collar and tie, his eyes downcast absorbed in the Kelmscott Chaucer held open delicately to the frontispiece (Bowe 1988: 28). All around him are the inspirations discernible in his theatre decoration and costumes: Islamic ornament, cascading roses, pigment and mixing palettes, a tempera painting and a sculpture of medieval knights in doublet and hose or chain mail on horseback, an Arts and Crafts textile. Brockington's account of Armfield's wife, Annie Constance Smedley Armfield (1876–1941), also a Birmingham student, intimated a companionate androgyny which was also perhaps resonant for the unmarried, childless Wilkinson: '[their] unconventional partnership: her handicap, and [Armfield's] sexual orientation towards men, precluded full marital relations, and thus children. Yet their intense working relationship, and romantic friendship, led to fertile collaboration in literature and theatre' (Brockington 2007: n.pag.)). Wilkinson and Henderson collaborated on an illustrated edition of *The Romaunt of the Rose* (1908) for which Wilkinson's ten plates prefigure the

bright, floral shimmering androgyny deployed for the 1914 costumes and settings for the Fairy Court. (Chaucer [1230] 1911)

Wilkinson’s figuration and technique was often aligned to gender fluidity in the reception of his art. Reviews of The Birmingham Art Exhibition held at the Fine Art Society characterized Wilkinson’s generation of ‘newer Pre-Raphaelites of the Midland city’ as ‘worship[ing] […] not […] the healthier, more vigorous, more truly poetic art of the Brotherhood, but […] the more avowedly ornamental, but also more fastidious and less deeply rooted, art of Burne-Jones, their fellow townsman’. (Anon. 1907: 11) Wilkinson ‘of Four Oaks’, an epithet adopted to differentiate himself from the military painter, was singled out for: ‘very discreetly combin[ing] an element of the ornamental or decorative with […] a pensive charm and even pathos of its own […] loving care and satisfaction […] transfigures the face of the homely young maker of images’ (Anon 1907: 11). Wilkinson’s illustrations for *Virginibus Puerisque*, the ethical and satirical 1870s articles on youth and marriage by Robert Louis Stevenson (1850–94), also attracted coded phrases such as ‘peculiar mannerisms’. Wilkinson is equated with his ‘quiet demure studies of single flowers – none of them of the flamboyant or expressive kind […] not less pathetic or less refined than in his figure drawings’ (Anon 1910: 14). This rhetoric of gender ambiguities is ubiquitous in reviews of Wilkinson’s art: ‘incredibly affected’, ‘intense self-consciousness, this exaggeration of purely exterior defects and mannerisms’ (Anon 1909: 14) and informed his decorations for the Savoy Productions.

Walford Graham Robertson (1866–1948) who designed the 1914 poster for the Savoy *Dream* also was praised as a ‘poet-draughtsman’ alongside the critique of Wilkinson (Anon 1909: 14). This more sympathetic response to his illustrations of his own play, *Pinkie and the Fairies*, in the same exhibition is intriguing. Graham-Robertson’s vigorously ‘Decadent’ androgyny projected in painted and photographed images attracted less censure than

Wilkinson's quiet, nervous ambiguities (Figure 1). In his portrait by John Singer Sargent (1856–1925) exhibited at the Royal Academy in 1894 Tate London, Graham-Robertson is the quintessential dandy. The svelte, androgynous figure *is* the black Chesterfield overcoat, only his pale face, direct gaze and expressive hands-on hip and jade-topped cane have substance. The only colour note is accorded to his 11-year-old St Jean de Luz poodle 'Mouton' festooned with a bow in the symbolic Decadent 'queer' hue of *The Yellow Book* covers of Aubrey Beardsley (1872–98) (Evangelista 2023:196–203). In his memoir *Time Was* (1931), Graham Robertson captured his immersion in the homosocial and androgynous networks of artists and actors around Oscar Wilde in the 1890s as well as his friendship with Edward Burne-Jones (1833–98). Graham-Robertson's more flamboyantly Decadent poster and associations with gender fluidity, stage decoration, children's music and book illustration practices may have inflected the reception of Wilkinson's Savoy costumes and decorations.

Figure 1: John Singer Sargent (1856–1925), *W Graham Robertson*, 1894. Oil on canvas. 230.5 cm × 118.7 cm. Tate.

A portrait oil painting showing a young man in a long black coat in an interior with his dog at his feet.

Twelfth Night: Colour, decoration and the boy actress

A review in the *Evening Standard and St James's Gazette*, positioned Wilkinson's decorations for *Twelfth Night* as an 'incongruous […] pictorial treatment of the play':

> The pink pavilions, the Lowther Arcade trees, the new German art curtains, nebulously suggesting anything – or nothing – all these are mere affectations, […] silly modernities. […] Elizabethan figures moving amongst these 'precious' faddinesses are misrelated as Greek gods at a penny bazaar. The acting for the most, was full blooded and rubicund. The setting entirely, was anaemic and perfunctory […] associated with an Arts and Crafts exhibition at South Kensington.
>
> (Boyle 1912, n.pag.)

Boyle connected Wilkinson's notorious abstract trees to 'the Lowther Arcade' in London, famed for toy shops. *London Town*, a children's book by Felix Leigh, included the poem 'The Lowther Arcade' (1883: 52–53). Thomas Crane (1843–1903), older brother of the more renowned Walter (1845–1915), and their cousin Ellen Houghton (1853–1922) collaborated on the illustrations, his ornament and her figures. Their design for 'Lowther Arcade' imagined this children's paradise with a border of toys facing a full-page view of the Arcade (Figure 2). In the centre of Crane's lower border, a pair of conical trees with concentric rings in pea green might have been a source for Wilkinson. Bustling with elegant families, the plate: illustrating the Arcade shows toy stalls with signs above: 'Toyman', 'Arcadia' and 'Noah's Ark'. Invocations of Noah's Ark, toys and confectionary echoed across the Savoy reviews (*Referee* 1912; *Globe* 1912) appearing twice in one article: 'Imagine two green yews cut in stiff spirals, like glorification of the trees of a Noah's Ark […] [an] eccentric and ugly picture' and Wilkinson's backcloth though deemed beautiful, was nonetheless 'emblazoned with Noah's Ark landscapes'. The Olivia's garden set was 'needlessly eccentric […] might have been designed by a confectioner […] neither beautiful nor Shakespearean, but merely eccentric' (EAB 1912: n.pag). Childishness, sugary sweetness and eccentricity encoded a nexus of identities through which the costume of the Boy Actress part of Viola-Cesario performed gender fluidity.

Figure 2: Thomas Crane (1843–1903) and Ellen Houghton (1853–1922) illustration for 'The Lowther Arcade' in Felix Leigh *London Town* 1883 London, Belfast, New York: M. Ward & Co. Work on paper: 22 cm × 22 cm. Library of Congress, Washington DC.

A colour book illustration showing a shopping arcade in Victorian London with children and families looking at toy seller stalls.

Wilkinson's use of colour, often deemed too discordantly vibrant for the stage decoration, was often praised as an enhancement in his costumes. H de S in the *Star*

championed Wilkinson's 'extraordinary ingenuity and a fine feeling for effects of colour' and 'the quality and skill of [Wilkinson's] work […] an enormous help to the success of the production', (H de S 1912 n.pag.) but accuses him of 'one mistake': 'the pale magenta-pink of the cupola in Olivia's house […] a hideous colour and spoiled a beautiful scene' (H de S 1912 n.pag.). JT in the *Evening News* also celebrated the decorator's individual originality: 'a piece of theatre at once genuinely popular and selectively artistic. […] There seemed to be cries of "Author" at the fall of the curtain' (JT 1912: n.pag). However, an intensely individual decorator risked the audience's incomprehension which might have wider implications.

> The perception of colour harmonies is notably a matter both of training and of instinct. We all see timid harmonies; your artist always busy with these matters, sees beauty where the less trained eye sees crudity. But it were wise […] to temper the tones for the untutored eye. Otherwise what was meant to be subordinate becomes unduly distracting, a cause of scandal to the weak, a weapon in the hands of the ungodly.
>
> (JT 1912: n.pag)

'Extreme' colour symbolized political and gendered identities in the 1900s. As Carlson has persuasively argued, pink, green and white were the colours of the Actress Franchise League, modulating the symbolism of purple evoking loyalty, green, hope and white, purity for the Women's Social and Political Union (2006: 134; Duncan 2016: 211–17). Suffragette dress and banners deployed colour as 'an essential tactic of the street pageants and public demonstrations that were the movement's most visible means of declaring support' (Kaplan and Stowell 1994: 169). JT's counsel to 'temper the tones' lest one fall prey to the weaponization of colourfulness by the 'ungodly' also resonated with 1890s 'queering' of colour (Evangelista 2023:196–203). In *Time Was*, Graham-Robertson recalled the famous episode of Wilde's provocation to wear green carnations at the first night of *Lady Windermere's Fan* in 1892: '[people] will look around the house and see every here and there more and more little specks of mystic green. "This must be some secret symbol" they will

say. “What on earth can it mean?”’ (Robertson 1931:135). At the curtain, Wilde addressed the audience in a ‘burlesque speech […] congratulating the audience upon their performance’, by tacit implication, of homosocial aestheticism (Graham-Robertson 1931: 136).

Despite the contrasting tones of the *Daily News & Leader* and the *Evening News* reviews, both recognized how colour enhanced costume. ‘This background was bad for the players, if effective for the costumes’ (EAB 1912: n.pag), whereas JT recognized how colours accentuate the actor’s performance:

> If the playgoer will cease wondering and merely surrender himself to the contemplation of what is before him he will see that he is being shown beautifully apparelled players standing out duly prominent – the player’s the thing – in skilfully arranged patterns and groupings against a softly lighted neutral ground that gives rich colours their values.
>
> (JT 1912: n.pag)

The costume design worn by Viola as Cesario amplified the distinctive travesty of the ‘Boy Actress’ role: ‘Viola must be mannish. Is she not disguised as a boy?’ (McCarthy 1933: 160). Lillah McCarthy found interpretation of the part challenging: ‘I must play the man – that is the youth that Viola pretends to be. […] Viola is a big strain played as a leading man, which the producer insists upon’ (McCarthy 1933: 161). Letters of praise from intimates included Charles Ricketts (1866–1931) who admired the androgyny conveyed by a ‘marked cleanliness of movement which places [McCarthy’s performance] many miles from the sentimentality and self-consciousness with which it is usually rendered’ (McCarthy 1933: 162). Wilkinson’s costume, theatrical portrait photographs of McCarthy and contemporary press reviews demonstrate how Viola-Cesario and Sebastian were embodied at the Savoy in 1912.

The *Twelfth Night* programme listed three makers who executed Wilkinson’s designs in 1912: Mrs Owen and Mr Savage and Dorothy Carlton Smyth, seemingly a misspelling of

Dorothy Carleton Smyth (1880–1933), Glasgow School of Art student (1895–1905), then teacher from 1914, serving as Principal of Commercial Art before her nomination to director a month before at her untimely death in 1933. F. R. Benson had hired her as costume designer for his touring Shakespeare Productions 1904–14. The firm of R & G Manning Pike painted the stencilled decorative patterns of the costumes; Clarkson supplied the wigs and Gamba the shoes (V & A 2004). The expense witnessed in the company's ledgers are striking; the total production costs of *Twelfth Night* amounted to £1190.5s.12d (about £93,048 at 2017 prices). Wilkinson's costumes constituted over half of that budget costing £619.7s.1d (about £48,416 at 2017 prices). The textiles for Viola's costumes included eight yards of black silk costing £1.11s.4d and 12 yards of green silk costing 18s.00d and required exquisite, skilled tailoring and specialist dyes (to dye six pieces of braid was a further 13s.6d). The total cost of Viola's costumes was £35.10.7d (equivalent to 107 days wages for a skilled tradesman in 1910 and over £2,777 in 2017) (V & A 2008; National Archives Currency Converter).

The commitment to close material analysis of garments championed by dress historians also grounds research into historical costume meaningfully (Mida and Kim 2018). Close scrutiny of the Viola-Cesario doublet and breeches in the V & A revealed the meticulous construction and execution of Wilkinson's costumes. Elaborate patterning was achieved by application of green wool braid by invisible hand stitching to sustain alignment whilst encompassing the curvature of the actor's body. (Later repairs in black thread to the second line of braid at the base of the doublet demonstrated how distracting visible stitching would have been to the overall effect of the braid work.) Between the vertical bands, diagonal slashes into the black silk revealed a full underlay of the garment executed in emerald green silk. Double rows of spherical buttons, seemingly in an early form of plastic, embellished the central vertical join of the doublet, but were purely decorative. The doublet and breeches were closed and conjoined by hidden metal hooks and eyes. The whole structure of the

garment was lined with off-white cotton and reinforced with internal boning. Elasticated hems in the breeches presumably facilitated swift costume changes and ease of active movement as in the duelling scene. The replaceable false white collar and cuffs mitigated against soilage by make up or perspiration incurred by the 1.4 kg of weight the doublet and breeches imposed (before adding the over coat and boots).

The buttonless, narrow white silk damask over coat held in the V & A appeared to be altered from the original illustrated in many surviving publicity photographs of Lilah McCarthy in costume. A black and white portrait photograph by Malcolm Arbuthnot (1874–1967) dated November 1912 held in the National Portrait Gallery London captured McCarthy's as Cesario lounging upon a Windsor chair with one hand raising a velvet hat with white ostrich feather in greeting and the other clutching the hilt of a rapier. Arbuthnot favoured pictorial lighting and its use in this portrait heightened the impact of the white brocade over coat, bringing the floral Elizabethan motif into greater relief. Half sleeved and full to the knee, the elegant silhouette of the photographed over coat drew attention to the skirt evocative of both Elizabethan doublets and Suffragette suit fashion worn in 'sex problem' plays of Shaw and Barker (Kaplan and Stowell 1994) (Figure 3). The colour cover of *Play Pictorial* featuring McCarthy as Cesario with Olivia's garden set behind demonstrated how the touches of pink on the hat, the coat collar under the doublet false collar, and the glove, as well as the green slashes of the underlaid sleeve and the tongue of the knee high boots caught the eye and connected the actor to the colour notes of the set decoration behind (1912). The white of the over coat embedded the performer in the innovatively stark whiteness and extended apron of 'Barkerized' stage. However, the organic patterning of the damascene brocade of the main fabric of the coat disrupted this synthesis, echoing the patterned surfaces of the furnishings behind instead. McCarthy's three-quarter

stance connected the triangularity of the coat from collar to skirt and the conical stylized trees.

Figure 3: Cover illustration from *Twelfth Night Play Pictorial* No. 126, 15 November 1912. Author's Collection.

A colour-printed cover for a theatre magazine showing a woman dressed in male Renaissance costume in front of a pink, white and green stylized garden set.

Wilkinson's costume was recognized for amplifying the distinctiveness of McCarthy's interpretation of Viola-Cesario. Its 'boyishness' was greatly admired:

> very fine – the most boyish boy I have seen in the part. Missing just a little of the tenderness of the character […] gave it every other attribute in her white satin surcoat over her green doublet and hose she looked splendid.
>
> (Boyle 1912: n.pag)

> The costumes were very beautiful, notably those of Viola and Sebastian. Green doublet and breeches. With a surcoat of white brocade. […] McCarthy's Viola […] really was a convincing boy, and even in the duelling scene […] she never played down with the usual womanish stupidities.
>
> (JT 1912: n.pag)

Wilkinson's mirroring of the doublet and breeches for the twins enhanced the synergy between them (Figures 4A and B) *The Play Pictorial* included two illustrations with Cesario and Sebastian side by side underlining the reciprocity of the roles and their costuming. Positioning the *Twelfth Night* parts on a spectrum of manliness was another commonplace. Orsino was praised for being 'without any of the sickly sentimentality […] here for once was a manly Orsino' (Boyle 1912: n.pag). Neilson-Terry was 'a pleasing Sebastian', whereas McCarthy was 'a disappointing Viola' (H de S 1912: n.pag); '[McCarthy] never pretended to remember unseasonably that she was a woman […] a gallant boy. […] Dennis Neilson-Terry made a chivalrous figure as Sebastian and acted in a fine and manly fashion' (Anon 1912:

12). Two contrastingly positive and negative reviews both emphasized how McCarthy and Neilson-Terry expressed gender fluidity in their performances and costumes:

Figure 4A and B: Illustrations of Ceasario, Sebastian and Olivia in *Twelfth Night Play Pictorial* No. 126 15 November 1912 Author's Collection.

Two black-and-white illustrations from a theatre magazine showing a woman and man both dressed in male Renaissance costume.

> Miss Lilah McCarthy acquitted herself with a suggestion of the girl under the doublet and hose, very charming to witness. [Her] performance as the masquerading girl making love for the man who she loves to the woman he thinks he loves was as delightful a reading of Viola as we have had for some years. It was such a frank and 'manly' reading […] gave to the character a meaning and a power too often lacking […]. There were good qualities to in the Sebastian of Mr Neilson Terry who looked more like the girl than his twin sister Viola.
>
> (*People* 1912: n.pag)

> the Sebastian of Mr Dennis Neilson-Terry began sententiously, but after the dual scene he seemed to gain his freedom and was a striking contrast to the travestied Viola of Miss McCarthy […] [who] always makes the impression on me of one who strives too hard to do her best that in that ambitious warfare she forgets that tactics are the strategy of a campaign and to husband force is the main canon of economics.
>
> (Anon 1912d: n.pag.)

The power which captured a 'frank and manly' Viola for some was an unwomanly bellicosity of theatrical practice for others. The gendering of the fairies in *The Dream* would favour androgynous alterity over this tussling gendering in cross dressed performance.

Golden fairy folk and 'Fellow Feeling'

The Gentlewoman was puzzled by the 1914 Savoy fairies:

> Their combined flavour of the Orient and of the Futurists' movement produced invisible question marks all over the house […] even the least psychic among the audience became acutely conscious of telepathic waves […]: Why these Golden Fairies? ···Why this Indian Element?

(Momus 1914: xvi)

Female acting of the fairy parts, such as Oberon by Mme Lucia Elizabeth Vestris (1797–1856) and Ellen Terry (1848–1928) as Puck in the 1850s had connected these roles in the popular imagination with a prettified fairydom set to the dulcet tones of the 1826 *Dream* composed by Felix Mendelsohn (1809–47) (Reiff 2019). Realist stagings reached an apogee in the live rabbits at Her/His Majesty's Theatre in 1900 of the actor-manager Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917). Lillah McCarthy recalled with some grievance how when she wore a blond wig to play the part of Helena in the 1914 *Dream*, suddenly she was showered with amorous offerings of bouquets and bracelets as never before when a brunette (McCarthy 1933: 174). However, she felt golden tresses took on a different affect in the 'beauty' of the gilding of the 'elves' (Gold-leaf make up cost a shilling a time and the fairy parts stayed golden between the matinee and evening performances.) The 'genuine inspiration' of Wilkinson's gilded flesh and 'clothes of gold and silver' of the fairies 'made them seem beings of another order, of a separate creation, remote from humanity' (McCarthy 1933: 175–76). The return to Boy Actresses for Oberon and Puck did not simply realign them with masculinity; the golden uniformity of the Fairy Court suggested a different species incompatible with human genders. 'The Boy Actress' in Barker's *Prefaces* relished the 'make believe' of cross-gendered performance. Shakespeare made no demands upon his boy actresses that might expose them to 'unseemliness or ridicule':

> Feminine charm – of which the modern stage makes such capital – was a medium denied [Shakespeare]. So his men and women encounter upon a plane where their relation is made rarer and intenser by poetry, or enfranchised in a humour which surpasses more primitive love-making. […] He asks instead for self-forgetful clarity of perception, and for sensitive, spirited, athletic beauty of speech and conduct, which will leave prettiness and its lures at a loss, and the crudities of more Circean appeal looking very crude indeed.
>
> (Barker [1914] 1993: 18–19)

The Savoy Golden Fairies avoided the risks of cross-dressing, and only Cobweb's quartet were children, instead Shakespeare's Boy Actresses were transformed into another form of life.

'Playing with colour was a way of both revealing and concealing' (Evangelista 2023: 202). Graham-Robertson's poster for the 1914 dream used colour to symbolize the androgyny of the 'Boy Actress' (Figure 5). A shock of scarlet emblazoned with yellow patterns with manic eyes, Puck gambols, raising one arm to show a pansy, the mystic flower, whilst another hand summons a yellow-scarlet spherical flame from which emanated a blue serpentine form. This blue mass blended into blue outlines defining androgynous faces crowding together. Some peered out towards us at the bottom of the image, some above had closed eyes. In the very far left top corner, the most prominent figure in the fairy throng with a more elaborate headdress suggested an androgynous Oberon. Reaching across the blue swirls towards the pansy, Oberon, with eyes also closed and a finger to lips, intimated touch as well as a gesture of silencing. The 'extreme colour' and movement of the blue serpent form might be a quotation of synaesthetic tendrils in the cover design for *In the Key of Blue* by John Addington Symonds (1840–93) created by the gay partnership of Ricketts and Charles Shannon (1863–1937). The 'Orientalizing' gilded burlap masks and bejewelled chiffon costumes of Oberon and the Fairy Court alongside the contrasting English folkloric scarlet of Puck prompted a cavalcade of praise and some confusion in the ample press coverage. The *Illustrated London News* devoted a rare colour supplement to the costumes (*Illustrated London News* 1914b: n.pag.), but its review castigated them as 'neither pretty not poetical; they seem the invention of calculated eccentricity' (*Illustrated London News*: 1914a: 252). The colours and movement of these enigmatic Fairy Folk suggested an alternative form of life whose gendering and ethnicity delighted, fascinated and perplexed their audiences.

Figure 5: Walford Graham Robertson (1866–1948) poster for *A Midsummer Night's Dream* at the Savoy Theatre. 1914 colour lithograph: 29.4 cm × 7 cm. Theatre Museum, London.

A colour poster principally in orange and blue on off-white article showing a fairy leaping in air surrounded by a blue serpentine shape and a crowd of fairy figures in leafy costumes.

Wilkinson devoted three times as many drawings to the Faires, with only one sketch each for the Athenians and Mechanicals. Titania's Bower, an evanescent confection of green gauze, pink and yellow silk flowers and bluebell cloche electric fairy lights was developed through dozens of drawings culminating in his most elaborate design an exquisite colour sketch in tracing article over a gouache drawing of the woodland backcloth (Figure 6). In Wilkinson's drawings, Oberon's hands emulated the Buddhist gesture of calling the earth to witness; the graceful flow of his diaphanous costumes billowed and swayed. Inscriptions on a drawing of Oberon's main costume noted his necklace was made of pearls and each material (gold, crystals, tinsel, braid or brocade in either ground or bright hue) to use for the sleeves, leggings and transparent cords with suspended glass beads creating a transparent skirt. Individual sketches design each pattern and three-dimensional profile of Oberon's diamante jewels, his curvaceous leafed sceptre, the pattern of gold-backed crystals on Oberon's cloak.

Figure 6: Norman Wilkinson of Four Oaks Sketch of Oberon costume 1914. Pencil and gouache on paper. 36 cm × 28 cm. Formerly Prints and Drawings collection of the Courtauld Gallery accessioned to V & A London in 2017.

A colour sketch for a costume for the fairy king Oberon in a black-and-white and gold cape and doublet.

Barker advocated a certain strangeness of timbre and aspect:

> The fairies cannot sound too beautiful. How should they look? […] They must not be too startling. But one wishes people weren't so easily startled. I won't have them dowdy. […] Norman Wilkinson and I – he to do and I to carp) have done our best.
>
> (Barker [1914] 1993: 36)

Shakespeare has Oberon and Titania 'come from the farthest steppe of India', but 'Puck is English folklore'. *The Atheneum* assessment of 'the fairies and superhumans' found that

whereas Neilson-Terry gave 'an ideally graceful and majestic Oberon', Calthrop's Puck's 'antics suggested more distinctly than any other figure indoor life – the life of a comfortable bourgeois interior from which like a naughty boy he has run away without his hat' (1914: 239–40). *Punch* scoffed 'Neilsen-Terry as Oberon was a curiously effeminate figure for those who recalled the manly bearing of his mother in the part' (1914: 138). Barker argued that Oberon manifested an empathetic alterity aloof from the heteronormative human passions of the Athenian lovers:

> Is Oberon's fairy disposition so strange to us after all? […] the callousness of Demetrius shocks him! […] All very fairylike and outlandish! …There is […] a touch of travesty about Oberon. But the word implies something too clumsy for his fairyhood. It is rather that he is in everything'.
>
> (Barker [1914] 1993: 63–64)

This alterity of the masked fairies transfigured them into disturbing objects: 'they are golden bronze statues. […] Frankly they are Decadent […] these heavy weird beings as from the netherworld – creations of a nightmare' (HAS 1914: 6). One 'Elfin' beard 'would make a handsome drawing room fire screen or design for an electrolier'; 'the fairies, especially Oberon, Titania and their attendants, looked like brass figures for fender or other ornaments' (Anon 1914a: 4). However, movement was essential to their character at the Savoy.

Barker's 'Orientalizing Shakespeare's Fairies' into 'Cambodian idols' with the 'posture of Nijinsky in *Le Dieu Bleu*' was expressed by movement and colour: '[the fairies]chase one another through the wood in single file or lie prone on a low green mound […] play hide and seek round the columns of Theseus palace'. (Anon 1914:8) The article's two subheadings highlighted Puck and Oberon through colour: 'A Patch of Scarlet' and 'The Golden Oberon'. Calthrop's 'mischievous boy' was an 'uncanny' Puck; Oberon stole the limelight:

> Neilsen-Terry is a figure of slim, noble and Giorgionesque beauty. His movements are grace itself. […] This Oberon for the first time dominates not only the scene, but the whole play, informs it with graciousness and majesty (fairy majesty, golden majesty) and exquisite rhythmic beauty.
>
> (Anon 1914b: 8)

The *Times* not only recognized Wilkinson's agency, but also its origins in his Birmingham book illustration as the final fairy left the stage: 'the last patch of gold to fade from the sight, and to leave on the mind the strange, new impression of the play as golden, a 'golden book of spirit and sense' Who is the magician who created these fairies? Is it Mr Barker or Mr Norman Wilkinson?' (Anon 1914b: 8). The creative ensemble at the Savoy fashioned an alterity for the Savoy fairy folk which embodied the prelapsarian 'fellow feeling' eloquently evoked by Laurence Housman (1865–1959) when golden fairies brutalized by war in 1917 sought solace in colour, nature and childish sensoriality:

> It is not out of the accentuation of sex-differences, and their segregation into absolute male and absolute female, that understanding and sympathy and fellow-feeling have arisen in social life, and sensitiveness and creativeness in art; but rather a gradual approximation and drawing the one into the other of what were once two extremes […] to arrive at the full degree of fellow feeling […] there must be interplay of a more subtle kind than we have hitherto been able to see our way to […] we must to some extent be as little children.
>
> (Housman 1917: 14–15)

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1. *The Winter's Tale*, the first of the three Savoy Shakespeare productions, opened on 21 September 1912 for six weeks with costumes by Albert Rutherson (née Rothenstein) (1881–1953) and stage decoration by Norman Wilkinson. *Twelfth Night* opened on 15 November 1912 with over 135 performances and *A Midsummer Night's Dream* opened on 6 February 1914.

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