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The Omega Workshops and the Modern Artistic Interior on the British Stage, 1914–1918, with special reference to *The Wynmartens* (1914)

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Ben Angwin is a Ph.D. candidate. His thesis-presents new research on The Omega Workshops and its engagements with modern British theatre, its complex relationships with female patrons, and its little-known ambitious transatlantic ventures. In Fall 2018 he co-curated the exhibition *Mantelpiece Modernism: The Omega Workshops, Bloomsbury, and Gordine* at Dorich House Museum, London.

ABSTRACT

This essay examines a modern artistic interior created by The Omega Workshops Ltd. (1913–1919), an artist-led coterie that focused on a particular type of “modern” artistic interior decoration, and the design of the individual items necessary to it, for the little-known play *The Wynmartens*, written by Richard Henry Powell (1884–1915) and opened on the British stage in May 1914. Newly “discovered” photographs are analyzed to reveal how The Omega Workshops helped stage an interior which brought the first “advanced” and Post-Impressionist-inspired interior to British theatregoers. The Omega’s motivations for diversifying and taking up such a project are considered, as is the capacity of the dramatic stage as a potentially lucrative platform for modern artists and interior designers. It concludes by considering the possible reasons for the disappearance of this project from histories of The Omega Workshops.

KEYWORDS: *modernism, interiors, theatre, The Omega Workshops, Bloomsbury Group*

Studies which explore the application and integration of modern art and aesthetics into early twentieth century metropolitan life have tended to marginalize popular dramatic theater. This essay considers the role played by one of the most “advanced” interior decorating companies of the day, The Omega Workshops, in relation to a comedic drama presented on the British stage in 1914.

Historians of art and design have considered painters' engagement with the stage as both autonomous practitioners as well as part of collaborative ensembles. For example, recent scholars have viewed modern artists' stage-oriented practices for the avant-garde dance troupe the *Ballet Russes* less as heterogeneous adjuncts to canonically-favored oil on canvas painting than as correlative to it and of considerable merit in and of their own right. By embracing the multiplicity of surfaces and media presented by artist-theatre collaborations, together with theatre paraphernalia, such as back-drops, costumes, props, and scenery, recent contributions to scholarship have helped re-evaluate the ways we think about platforms and domains typically associated with painterly modernism.

This article both draws upon and adds to current debates about the connections between leading artists and popular theater. It focuses on The Omega Workshops, an artist-led avant-gardist interior design firm run by a coterie of like-minded modern artists and makers, and how its radical ideas about domestic design reform and experiments in interior aesthetics were circulated among audiences outside of the more conventional "progressive" art and design marketing domains such as galleries and exhibition halls [Figures 1 and 2], and on The Omega Workshops' showroom at 33 Fitzroy Square [Figures 3 and 4]. On a practical level, the Omega's interior decorations could easily be transferred to the theatrical stage since there exists little difference between the fictional interiors of its showroom, an exhibition stand, and a theatre stage.

This essay presents new evidence linking The Omega Workshops with popular theater and goes on to examine the first known British stage set in a "progressive" Post-Impressionist manner for a play titled *The Wymartens*, a farce that opened in London in 1914. While articulating the Omega's contributions, this

essay also considers the factors behind this project as well as the capacity of the dramatic stage as a potentially lucrative, albeit unconventional, platform for modern artist decorators, both financially and creatively. It places the Omega's contributions within the context of popular comedic plays and the audiences who saw them during the early decades of the twentieth century and, after considering audience reception to *The Wymartens*, suggests reasons for the play's disappearance from histories of The Omega Workshops.

The Omega Workshops

The Omega Workshops (1913–19) was a radical interior design firm established and led by painter and art critic Roger Fry, and included painters Vanessa Bell and Duncan Grant as its directors and among its leading artist members. Through its decorative projects, The Omega Workshops sought to agitate modern interior design by applying principles which Fry and his counterparts recognized in recent developments in modern painting, movements they believed had strong decorative qualities. The Omega Workshops' aesthetic was ever-changing due to its intermixing of painterly styles brought to the Workshops by its artist members whose designs responded to Continental modernism, bringing to them elements from Post-Impressionism, Fauvism, and Cubism. The Omega advocated an experimental approach to design, encouraging its artists to be bold and expressive in their treatment of color, surface, and form. For Fry, the modern movement represented an opportunity to reconnect the practices of art and design, a relationship which he believed was mutually beneficial. In a fundraising letter for The Omega Workshops, Fry declared:

I am intending to start a workshop for decorative and applied art. I find that

there are many young artists whose painting shows strong decorative feeling, who will be glad to use their talents on applied art both as a means of livelihood and as an advantage to their work as painters and sculptors. (Fry to George Bernard Shaw, dated December 11, 1912, reprinted in Reed, 1996: 196)

British artist members included Dora Carrington, Winifred Gill, Nina Hamnett, Paul Nash, as well as soon-to-be-Vorticists Percy Wyndham Lewis, Frederick Etchells, and Cuthbert Hamilton, three artists who departed The Omega Workshops in late 1913 over concerns of aesthetics. International artist members included two French avant-gardists, painter Henri Doucet and sculptor Henri Gaudier-Brzeska, who contributed progressive designs before their deaths on the Western Front in 1915. Other international artist members included Spanish-Russian Dolores Courtney, Chilean Alvaro Guevara, Norwegian Roald Kristian, and South African Edward Wolfe. The Omega Workshops also employed several female assistants who helped execute artists' designs.

One of the aims of The Omega Workshops was to support struggling artists by paying them thirty shillings (£170 in current terms) for three and a half days per week, leaving remaining days devoted to their own autonomous art practices. The Omega Workshops produced a wide range of wares to decorate and furnish interiors as well as garments. Items included printed and woven textiles, painted silks, knotted rugs, painted as well as hand-thrown ceramics, painted lamp bases and silk shades, painted screens, designs for stained glass, painted as well as marquetry furniture, mosaics, and painted murals. Among its clothing and accessories were dresses, tunics, pajamas, waistcoats, painted artificial flowers, silk fans, parasols, and beaded jewelry. All designs were produced anonymously under the Ω symbol.

Art, design, and the stage

Many painters (and sculptors) who operated between the *fin de siècle* and the first half of the twentieth century tried their hand at progressive theatre design. This diversification was a result of developing ideas and practices surrounding modern stagecraft as a more widely respected art form. What is more, the stage afforded modern artists an opportunity to develop their artistic repertoires while also helping to affirm their professional legitimacy among industries previously averse to the merits of modern painting. The work these artists undertook, however, was mainly for ballet or opera, and, while considerable attention has been paid to such examples, remarkably little has been paid to collaborations which saw artists engage with popular dramatic theatre.¹

The relationship between modern artists, particularly painters, and the theatrical stage is a well-trodden field. Pablo Picasso, Henri Matisse, and André Derain were among the avant-gardists in France, and Léon Bakst, Natalia Goncharova, Wassily Kandinsky, and Mikhail Larionov in Russia, who all designed works for the stage.² Among their modern British counterparts were Duncan Grant and Vanessa Bell, both important members of The Omega Workshops.³ The artist Charles Ricketts, another of Grant and Bell's contemporaries, established himself as one of Britain's foremost artist designers for the dramatic stage, working on productions such as Oscar Wilde's *Salome* (1906), Laurence Binyon's *Attila* (1907), George Bernard Shaw's *The Dark Lady* (1910), and Arnold Bennett's *Judith* (1916), among others.

Omega and British theatre: *Too Much Money* (1918)

Given the links between progressive artists and the theater, it is unsurprising that a company as closely associated with modern art as The Omega Workshops

forged connections to the theater. Existing literature on the Omega cites only one instance, however, of the firm furnishing a play on the British stage—a little-known comedy farce, *Too Much Money* (1918), written by the British Jewish playwright and humorist Israel Zangwill (1864–1926) and performed at the Ambassadors Theatre, London, in April 1918. Unfortunately, the extent of the firm’s involvement is little understood beyond a limited number of existing photographs and letters. The subject was first explored in any depth by Judith Collins in her comprehensive study of The Omega Workshops, although she offers limited analysis of the play nor does she question the commercial and creative capacity of the British stage for modern artist groups such as the Omega.⁴ As we shall see, there is more to learn from a closer reading.

At the heart of the play’s narrative, Zangwill satirizes wealthy, high-society hostesses who acted as patrons and agents in the international modern arts trade, many of whom patronized The Omega Workshops. As the title suggests, the female lead, Mrs. Annabel Broadley, played by then-celebrity actress Lillah McCarthy, suffers from having an abundance of wealth at her disposal, a condition to which her husband responds by feigning his own bankruptcy in an attempt to curb his wife’s purchasing habits and morally educate her in the benefits of a more impecunious lifestyle and one of less challenging aesthetic taste. While this narrative certainly suggests cause for comedy, beneath its surface exists suggestions of a relationship between aesthetics and morality, responsible spending, and women in business.

Too Much Money was featured in a small number of photographs and illustrations circulated among the press. One such photograph was published in *The Sketch* and depicts several items produced by The Omega Workshops [Figure 5] including a painted chair and a two-seater bench (both bought by the Omega as

undecorated blanks and embellished with artist decoration), and two cushions made using *Maud*, an Omega printed textile designed in a cubist-style by Vanessa Bell in 1913. To the right is a glimpse of a patterned curtain, a painted side table holding a hand-painted vase containing a selection of artificial flowers produced by the Omega. In the background stands an artist's easel holding a cubist-style painting, and a series of linear designs have been painted onto the walls. McCarthy's dress, too, resembles designs produced by The Omega Workshops.⁵

Correspondence further reveals the extent of the Omega's involvement. In January 1918 Fry wrote to his daughter, Pamela:

Lillah Macarthy [*sic*], the actress was so enchanted with my design for her dress that she wanted us to do it, but it has already been given to someone else [unidentified]. However, I think my design is going to be carried out. Like all actresses she is very *difficile*, so I'm not sorry not to be responsible. Oh, she is stupid and vain. Don't be an actress, please (Roger Fry to Pamela Fry, January 18, 1918. Sutton 1972, 424)

Fry's letter included an ink sketch titled "design of a cushion for the theatre" which he annotated "dark grey figures on yellow and green" perhaps suggesting a color scheme for the staged interior although it is not known precisely which colors were used among the items presented on stage.⁶ Furthermore, the Omega textile *Maud* used in this staged interior was available in four colorways.

In February, in another letter to Pamela, Fry confirmed that The Omega Workshops had not manufactured McCarthy's dress, sharing his disappointment that the dress had been "made all horribly more florid and flaunting than my design"⁷ It is probable that Zangwill and the play's production team had decided to have Fry's designs translated by a professional tailor or couturier, one well-practiced at meeting the high standards of manufacture which the dramatic stage and its celebrity actresses demanded from its suppliers.

The same letter also reveals greater involvement for The Omega Workshops.

Fry wrote:

The play was dress-rehearsed on Wednesday. It took all day long and I actually sat it out 'cause I wanted to see the effect of my scenery and furniture re-arranged in the last act. Everyone thinks the scene a huge success ... My mantelpiece looks stunning. It's really only a farce, the play, but quite amusing so that I should think it may have a run (Sutton 1972, 425)

Such letters reveal more deeply The Omega Workshops' involvement in *Too Much Money*, producing dress designs and a range of scenery, furniture, and a mantelpiece. It is also likely that the mantelpiece was decorated with Omega Workshops lampstands and ceramics; a common practice for the firm's artist members. What is more, Zangwill's published stage directions for Mrs. Broadley's Mayfair drawing-room (Act One) suggest greater involvement for The Omega Workshops than existing photographs and correspondence reveal. Zangwill's instructions are worth quoting in full:

The walls are frescoed with a flamboyant futurist pattern; a brilliant lamp hanging from the ceiling makes a colour harmony with a gaily cushioned divan on the floor to the right; and a screen of strange hues and symbols at the back. The furniture is precious but minute, and dotted about in space-harmonies. It includes a writing-desk by the left wall, a central tea-table and an uncomfortable settee towards the left centre. There is a window with freakish curtains in the wall ... On an easel at the left centre is a large, plain framed, highly coloured chaos (Zangwill, 1924: 1)

All the above-mentioned items were produced and circulated by The Omega Workshops throughout its six-year operation, therefore it is highly probable they supplied a complete artistic interior in this instance. Richard Shone makes two claims about The Omega Workshops' contributions. Firstly, that Fry was assisted by painter Edward Wolfe in delivery of the commission, and secondly, an Omega Workshops screen painted by Vanessa Bell in 1913 featured among the loans.⁸ Titled *Bathers in a Landscape* (Victoria and Albert Museum, London), the screen

consists of four panels painted in gouache on paper mounted on canvas, and depicts four Post-Impressionist female nudes sat among stylized tents in the open air.

However, without additional evidence we can only speculate as to the extent of the Omega's involvement.

What is also worth highlighting from Zangwill's instructions is the language used to describe items of progressive aesthetics: "flamboyant," "brilliant," "gaily," "strange," "uncomfortable," "freakish," and "highly coloured chaos." Such pejorative terminology suggests The Omega Workshops' inclusion was principally as a target for ridicule rather than reverence, something which is echoed on the dustjacket of the published play which declared Zangwill's farce included "some good satire on the *fads* of the day" [emphasis added],⁹ and also by reviewers of the play who discussed the Omega's contributions with mixed opinions. One reviewer for the *Observer* singled out The Omega Workshops for praise, announcing, "the gem of the thing is for the eye—in Mr. Roger Fry's 'Omega' drawing-room and within it ... Miss Lillah McCarthy's clothes."¹⁰ However, the criticism which appeared in *Punch* hit on the play's and, indeed, the Omega's overall weaknesses and, thus, likely reasons for the episode's near disappearance from histories of The Omega Workshops. The *Punch* reviewer questioned:

Was it that the decoration of the Mayfair drawing-room by the Omega Workshop might have been (and should have been) worse? (And, oh! MR. ROGER FRY, anyway, what a flippant betrayal of a cause reputedly so sacred to you!). (*Punch* 1918, 253)

This criticism raises two important points. Firstly, that The Omega Workshops' contribution wasn't nearly radical enough, suggesting that by 1918 its aesthetic was considered much less challenging than it had been previously. And, secondly, that critics were unable to understand why Fry, as figurehead for the company and the

modern art movement in Britain, would participate in an act of self-mockery. It is necessary to speculate on Fry's willingness to self-ridicule in such a public display. An essential mechanism in comedy and farce is the act of mockery. The Oxford English Dictionary defines farce as "a comic dramatic work using buffoonery and horseplay and typically including crude characterization and ludicrously improbable situations," mechanisms which rely heavily on the use of exaggerated visual aids for which the Omega's contributions were essential.¹¹ By 1918 Fry was well aware of the Workshops' position as a popular target for ridicule among the British public. Could The Omega Workshops not participate in its own mockery—especially in a farce whose narrative centered on the activities of wealthy female art patrons? Furthermore, Fry may have been willing to join Zangwill in his mockery of Annabel Broadley who, for the most part, accurately represented the once-reliable patron of The Omega Workshops whose support had begun to wane by 1918. Informal and lackadaisical approaches to patronage continually plagued The Omega Workshops, and Zangwill's play sought to ridicule a culture of fashion-led modern art buying and interior design exercised by "faddist" wealthy women.

Fundamentally, though, with limited information available, *Too Much Money* sits uneasily among histories of The Omega Workshops. It has been presented by scholars as Collins and Shone as "a new kind of commission" for the firm,¹² a venture which the Omega had apparently not participated in before. However, discoveries such as *The Wymartens* (1914) challenge these assumptions and force a reconsideration of The Omega Workshops' engagement with the British stage. It is worth noting that besides *Too Much Money* there was also Grant's work for an avant-garde French stage production. In 1914, the same year as *The Wymartens* opened, Grant created set and costume designs for the French dramatist Jacques

Copeau's (1879–1949) reworking of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (*La Nuit Des Rois*) at the Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Paris. Although not officially an Omega Workshops' commission (no interior furnishings or decorations were included), Grant did incorporate a number of Omega textiles into his costumes.¹³ Such commissions fall outside a study into the Omega's collaborations with British popular theatre, and thus the limitations of this article, although it is likely that Fry, who admired Copeau's work, sought to secure a collaborative project at a later date.

***The Wynmartens* (1914)**

Written by Richard Henry Powell (1884–1915),¹⁴ *The Wynmartens* was a comedy farce that ran for a total of twenty-six performances at the Playhouse theatre in London's West End between May 6 and 30, 1914, less than one year after The Omega Workshops' launch.¹⁵ It was produced by and starred Marie Tempest (1864–1942), a leading soprano and actor, famous for her roles in late-Victorian and Edwardian light opera, and musical and dramatic comedies. Known as the "Queen of her profession"¹⁶ Tempest was one of the first women celebrity stage performers to demand couturier clothing for some of her roles. Tempest's biographer, Hector Bolitho, states she "shook an old tradition in the theatre by going to a dressmaker instead of to a theatrical costumier for her clothes" and, throughout her life, Tempest exercised an enthusiasm for interior decoration, becoming familiar with the most à la mode decorations of the *fin de siècle* and early twentieth century, which she put into practice inside her many homes across London.¹⁷ Little is known about *The Wynmartens*. It was not published and no copy of the script has come to light as yet.¹⁸ We can, however, glean something about it from newspaper reviews, magazine features, and an existing playbill. We know it is not a historical play as the

playbill declares the time to be “THE PRESENT”.¹⁹ Writing in *The Athenaeum*, one reviewer noted that “it is based on the antagonism of the Dowager Countess of Wymarten to her widowed daughter-in-law Eleanor [Lady Wymarten] ... [who], worried by scandal and misunderstanding, determines to give the Dowager something to make a fuss about.”²⁰ Another reviewer went as far as describing Eleanor as a “common person with a mania for extravagant dress, a slangy creature with apparently no great intelligence.”²¹ The arrival of a former romantic interest, William Carington, provides Eleanor with an opportunity to give the Dowager “something to make a fuss about” and the pace of the farce seems to have rapidly increased thereafter.²²

Underpinning the play are a series of gender, age, and class-oriented themes, from societal expectations of widows, social mobility, and marrying into wealth, to the difficulties associated with attempting to be accepted by members of a “higher” class. As a dramatic art, farce offered playwrights safe vehicles for dealing with such issues at a time when class differences and “knowing one’s place” were deeply entrenched. As a genre, farce uses highly exaggerated scenarios and dialogue, highly choreographed movement, and clichéd characterization for comedic effect. What is more, the inclusion of believable interiors on stage performed a vital role in a play’s overall effect. Much of the comedy in *The Wymartens* emerges from the tensions between a snobbish, older, upper-class woman and a young, *nouveau-riche* woman whose friends and tastes do not accord to those of her elders. Eleanor, now a wealthy young widow, delights in trying to annoy her mother-in-law who believes that Eleanor married for money and thoroughly disapproves of the young woman’s lack of social graces and good taste—a point amplified by her reconnection with Carington,

whose London flat is decorated in a modern artistic interior produced by The Omega Workshops.

Popularity of “society dramas”

It is difficult to assess the composition of the audiences attending *The Wynmartens* but factors such the host theater, genre, topic, actors, playwright, and manager all played a part.²³ Broadly speaking, London’s Victorian and Edwardian theatres and their audiences were geographically defined. In the East End of the city, where the so-called lower classes lived, a range of lively performances were presented in music halls while “the middle classes were sitting in the red-plush stalls of the West End theatres watching ‘society dramas.’”²⁴ The latter were so called because they “depicted the lives of lords, ladies, duchesses and earls, and [were] invariably set in the drawing room of a London mansion or country house.”²⁵ They also became a popular film genre in the following decades.

It is also likely that a significant proportion of *The Wynmartens*’ audience was composed of young women. During the Edwardian period more young working women in the big cities began visiting the theater, as their spending power increased. In 1908, Italian journalist Mario Borsa voiced his disdain at the rising number of young women theatregoers in Britain and the social liberties exercised by what he referred to as “shop-girls, milliners, dressmakers, typists, stenographers, cashiers of large and small houses of business, telegraph and telephone girls, and the thousands of other girls whose place in the social scale is hard to guess or to define.”²⁶ According to Borsa, these young women spent “all their money on gadding about, on sixpenny novels, on magazines, *and above all, on the theatre*” [emphasis added].²⁷

Farces such as *The Wymartens* purposefully synthesized the exaggerated comedic mechanics typical of plays performed in the East End with the rigid society dramas of London's West End. This was in part, as Nina Auerbach explains, a response to Edwardian theatergoers having "evolved grandly into the cultivated—for which we may read wealthy and fashionable—classes."²⁸ This change is reflected in *The Wymartens'* playbill which lists a range of seating and services offered by the Playhouse theater. Together with the design of the play, especially the interiors, costumes, and sets, they served to heighten the experience of theatergoing and lure more people to the productions. Opera glasses could be hired, there were multiple extensively-stocked refreshment bars, no charge was made for cloak rooms, and there was a program of live music during the intervals between acts. Seating ranged from luxury private boxes at four guineas, stalls at 10/6d, fauteuils and balcony stalls at 7/6d, balcony at 5/-, upper boxes at 2/6d, and gallery seating at 1/-.²⁹ Such breadth in ticketing suggests the Playhouse attracted a diverse mix of theatergoers while excluding what might be regarded as disreputable elements.

The Wymartens sets

Costumes and sets were crucial components in the allure of society dramas, and *The Wymartens* was no exception. To illustrate, I have discovered a series of photographs which depict the stage sets and performances throughout the play's four acts, and provide an essential source in understanding the contributions of The Omega Workshops.³⁰

The four acts are listed in the playbill as taking place in *The Drawing-room of Eleanor's House, 306, Belgrave Square* (One and Three), *Room of a flat in Jermyn Street lent to Carington* (Two), and *Office of Messrs. Wilberforce, Saker & Co.*

(Four). Eleanor's wealth is made evident through an abundance of expensive fashionable clothing worn throughout the acts. The playbill states, "Miss Marie Tempest's dresses and hats by Madam Hayward, 67 & 68 New Bond Street," an estimable court dressmaker whose garments accompanied Tempest on her American tours. Additionally, "The dresses worn by Miss Thomas and Miss Cavanagh by Miss Francis, 78 Duke Street, Grosvenor Square" and "Hats by Maisons Hayward and Lewis."³¹ Photographs of the fictional Belgravia interior typify those of the *nouveau-riche* during the 1910s with its restrained but costly use of furnishings and materials [Figure 6]. One can see furniture and soft furnishings executed in expensive velvets and silks, including a large buttoned settee and a pair of tassel cushions, an elegant Japanned bergère-backed chair, a pair of floor-length heavily draped curtains, a pair of smaller net curtains for privacy, and an array of plants and flowers are displayed throughout the drawing-room. These types of furnishings were ever-present among Britain's Edwardian social elite, the newly wealthy and fashionable class, many of whom resided in the Belgravia district of London for which Belgrave Square was the architectural centerpiece. As mentioned previously, it was also essential for theatres to present accurate interior representations on stage for the dramatic mechanics of a play to achieve their desired effect. And, in maintaining such accuracies, the set for Eleanor's Belgravia drawing-room, described by one reviewer as "exquisite,"³² was furnished by Druce & Company of Baker Street in the Marylebone area of London's West End,³³ a firm that displayed and sold "fine furniture from skilled makers throughout the globe."³⁴

The play's final act, set in the Office of Messrs. Wilberforce, Saker & Co., presents an altogether different style than Eleanor's drawing-room [Figure 7]. Immediately appearing less domestic, the dominating materials are wood and

leather. Heavy, Jacobean-style dark wooden paneling surrounds the room. Leaded windows with wooden shutters replace softer velvet and net curtains. The furniture is sparse and masculine. An imposing square-form desk topped in leather dominates the room and sits atop an oriental rug. Throughout the room stand smaller items of dark-wood furniture including a bookcase. A pair of side tables and chairs continue the style which mimic earlier English furniture by craftsmen such as Chippendale and Hepplewhite.

The Wynmartens and The Omega Workshops

The Omega Workshops furnished the set for Act Two, described in the playbill as a “Room of a flat in Jermyn Street lent to Carington.”³⁵ The location of Jermyn Street during the 1910s was, as it remains today, a wealthy district within London’s St. James’s area, with close proximity to both Parliament and Buckingham Palace. We are informed that Carington, Eleanor’s love interest, was staying in the flat lent to him for an unknown period although we are informed that he is back in England from India on business. It is assumed that Carington did not choose the decorations or furnishings, as he was only a temporary resident. Unfortunately, what is not known are the occupations or social statuses of either Carington or the flat’s owner. We are also not told the gender of the owner who, it must be said, could quite easily have been male or female as The Omega Workshops decorated several London residences irrespective of a client’s gender. Despite such narrative absences, it is likely that the play’s script offered sufficient references to the social statuses of both Carington and the flat’s owner so that audiences of 1914 could recognize and associate the “progressive” interior aesthetics with them. It is also possible that Powell would have incorporated something about the Omega’s aesthetically

“advanced” interior into his script and the set instructions so that it could be a point of discussion and mockery between characters.

The appearance of The Omega Workshops’ interior was considered so avant-garde that in trying to describe it to readers *The Observer’s* reviewer settled upon “Futurist”—a term that was frequently applied to the work of The Omega Workshops—only to immediately add in parentheses “as we suppose it will be miscalled.”³⁶ This suggests that at least one theater journalist working for a respectable newspaper grasped that, while readers would have some inkling of what Futurism was, the set itself was in a different yet still overtly modern aesthetic.

So, what did it look like? What was the overall aesthetic? The above-mentioned playbill and black-and-white photographs of the sets not only confirm the Omega’s contributions to Act Two, but also provide more information than hitherto available about this project [Figures 8 and 9 reveal the extent of the commission].

Many of the items produced and sold by The Omega Workshops went into the homes and apartments for members of London’s social and cultural elite. This uniquely urban aspect of the Omega’s interiors requires further interrogation, but in the case of the fictional apartment presented here, in early 1914, The Omega Workshops were the most sought-after company for anybody wanting the most up-to-date fashionable interior scheme for a central London apartment and, what is more, it was also the only viable commercial outfit able to take on such a theatrical commission and provide a modern artistic interior of a so-called “Futurist” aesthetic.

Photographs [Figures 8 and 9] reveal that The Omega Workshops provided no less than thirty-one items for the set of Act Two, from soft and hard furnishings to an array of decorative accessories to help achieve the modern artistic interior. Soft furnishings included three hand-knotted rugs in designs attributed to painters

Vanessa Bell, Frederick Etchells, and Roger Fry; extensive applications of the Omega textile *Margery*, which included two pairs of full-length curtains, three cushion pads for two spindle-back chairs, and a matching footstool as well as an armchair cover; a bell-pull made using another Omega textile, *Mechtilde*; and five silk cushions painted in abstract designs. The Omega furniture consisted of an inlaid marquetry desk with a cubist decoration designed by painter Duncan Grant in 1913 (manufactured by J. J. Kallenborn, London), a wooden stool and embroidered seat cushion with an abstract circular design, and a painted folding card table. Lighting was also supplied with two electric lampstands painted in abstract designs. These Omega-painted lampstands and another larger floor lamp (not produced by The Omega Workshops) have silk shades painted in abstract designs. In addition, the Omega supplied decorative ceramics and artworks including two vases painted in abstract designs, an undecorated hand-thrown ceramic bowl, a painted cubist-inspired abstract design adorns the mantelpiece, and three framed drawings by an unknown artist hang on the walls. A small number of furnishings not provided by the Omega are also visible. These include a pocket shrine positioned at the center of the mantelpiece, the chairs and foot stool re-fashioned using Omega textiles, and a wooden oriental floor lamp mimicking a piece of bamboo—probably all stock items owned by the theatre.

Most of The Omega Workshop's contributions to *The Wynmartens* are items made of printed and hand-painted fabrics. It is not known what were the colors of the painted silks or which colorways of *Margery* or *Mechtilde* were used, although we know that they came in two- and six-color variations, respectively. Similarly, the colors of the painted lampstands are not known, but similar extant examples suggest

bold and expressive color application [Figure 10]. A design for Bell's rug (The Courtauld Gallery, London), strikingly similar to the one included here, reveals hues of teal, grey and yellow. The colors of the interior walls, floor, and door are not known.

Although the fabrics on stage were only seen from a distance, the Omega's most expensive printed linen, *Margery*, was used for the curtains, seat covers, and cushions at 4/- a yard; the selection made sense within the diegesis of the play. What is more, many of the above-mentioned items were used to illustrate *The Omega Workshops Descriptive Catalog* published, according to Judith Collins, not until Autumn 1914,³⁷ several months after the opening of *The Wynmartens*. This sales catalog included black-and-white photographs of Bell, Etchells, and Fry's rugs, depicted within a real interior at the Cadena Café in affluent Bayswater, London (1914) and on an exhibition stand at the Salon of the Allied Artists' Association, Holland Park Hall, London (1914) [Figure 11]. Also included are photographs of *Margery* and *Mechtilde* fabrics, an identical marquetry desk adorned with similar hand-thrown ceramics [Figure 12], and a sketch illustration of a painted lampstand [Figure 13]. Although the catalog was not published until later in 1914, the similarities between those items included on the set of *The Wynmartens* with those chosen to illustrate the catalog cannot be coincidental and, much like the purpose of the catalog, the wares presented on stage ranged from relatively low-priced items (such as cushions in printed linen) to more expensive items whose manufacture had to be outsourced (marquetry furniture and rugs), offering theatregoers a broad selection of what goods The Omega Workshops produced. In including an example of hand-thrown pottery, a process which Fry, Bell, and Grant had only recently begun to

explore in early 1914, further suggests they were consciously promoting their newest products through this arrangement with the theater.³⁸

Was the Omega's artistic interior as effective as it could have been? The overall effect of its interior lacks the impact of a complete and holistic artistic interior seen at The Omega Workshops' showroom and on its exhibition stands [Figures 1, 2, and 3]. Soft furnishings and interior accessories, which are relatively simple to transport and install, dominate the items selected for the stage. No labor-intensive media such as painted murals are present. Had the Omega's contributions included modern paintings and sculptures by its artist members it would have helped harmonize what was a haphazard and disparate arrangement of modern decorative objects. The reasons for this are likely to fall with the play's producers who wanted to avoid shocking audiences and retain control over the Omega's contributions, selecting enough items to present a radical artistic interior but, ultimately, diluting The Omega Workshops' overall aesthetic range seen at its showroom. In 1914 few or no playwrights or theatre producers would have afforded The Omega Workshops complete freedom to create a pure, unadulterated artistic interior on the British dramatic stage.

Fry and the Theater Arts

Fry's relationship with the theatre was complex and remains an underexplored facet of his criticism. He favored stage design drawing upon modern progressive approaches to painting and aesthetics and in 1911 he penned an article which praised the theatrical designs of Gordon Craig, a key figure in the New Stagecraft movement. In it Fry opened with a scathing attack on the current state of theatre in

general: “The malign influence of the theatre on drama has long been apparent,” continuing, “Yet clearly as we perceive that the theatrical is the enemy of the dramatic, we have not yet found a way out for our tragic actors, *still less for our scenery*” (emphasis added).³⁹ This sheds light on why he might have agreed to collaborate on *The Wymartens*.

According to Fry, popular comedy “is upon the plane of ordinary life, since its emotional pitch is low,” and “needs no setting but what common-sense and a certain decency of taste supply” because it was able to achieve “due effect by a more or less exact imitation of the actual scenes of modern life.”⁴⁰ Thus, although Fry belittled popular theater, he understood that part of its success lay in having interiors and props that were believable within the diegesis of the particular play involved. One can speculate that Fry might have been pleased about the Omega’s wares being used in *The Wymartens* since they were being used in an appropriate setting. No matter what Fry’s reasons for agreeing to collaborate, he was soon disillusioned. Shortly before the play opened, he told Grant, who was then away in Paris working on designs for Jacques Copeau: “I wish you’d come back ... these theatrical people are damnable. I’ve developed a theory in Desmond’s [MacCarthy] Theatrical Supplement to the New Age [*sic*; *New Statesman*] which is to do away with our job in the theatre, and I’m sure you’ll agree with it.”⁴¹ Fry’s letter reveals a desire to disassociate The Omega Workshops, or at the least its leading artist members, from the theatre and is one possible reason for the four-year gap between *The Wymartens* and *Too Much Money*. Fry’s theory for the *New Statesman*, to which he refers in his letter to Grant, was published in June 1914, the month following *The Wymartens*’ short run. Titled “Stage Setting,” Fry declared in typically candid manner:

I never have succeeded in acquiring the taste for the theatre. My fondness for the drama takes me there, but always with hesitating steps and a fear of the peculiarly devastating disillusionment which the stage can and sometimes does contrive. My attitude to the stage, then, is mainly negative. (Fry 1914, 2)

Fry denounced the ornamentation of theatre interiors and the over-staging of theatrical sets which he believed spoilt the illusion of scenery and interiors. Instead, Fry's article celebrated the reductive approach to stage setting which was more suggestive and abstract than overtly realist, aspects for which he singled out Gordon Craig and Jacques Copeau as forerunners in this modern movement. And, in wanting to disassociate himself, Grant, and The Omega Workshops, Fry avoided mentioning any of them in his article and their recent forays into dramatic theatre design. Furthermore, in that Fry was so dismissive of "the theatre" and considered theater people "damnable," would suggest his indifference to any theatrical project, while the lack of references to *The Wynmartens* in the surviving diaries and correspondence of the Omega's artist members and associates suggests that none of them attended a performance of the play during its short run (May 6–30). By contrast, during that period Fry, Grant, Vanessa Bell, and her husband, Clive, visited France for a cycling vacation and to visit artist studios in Paris.

Fry, Bell, and Grant may have further neglected to publicize The Omega Workshops' association with the production of *The Wynmartens* (before, during, and after the event) simply because they were preoccupied with four other major projects: the London home of Lady Jean Hamilton (1861–1941) at 1 Hyde Park Gardens, a painted mural and mosaic for Fry's Guildford home (*Durbins*), and two major exhibitions that opened in May and June 1914.⁴² In May, Fry, Bell, and Grant each contributed work to *Twentieth Century Art*, an exhibition at London's Whitechapel Art Gallery, but it was The Omega Workshops which took center stage,

contributing a staggering seventy-nine items which demanded considerable effort to design and either create at the Workshops or have produced elsewhere.⁴³ In June, and with some overlaps in dates, The Omega Workshops also presented an extensive selection of its wares at the Salon of the Allied Artists' Association, Holland Park Hall, London [Figure 2].

So why did The Omega Workshops proceed with *The Wymartens* project? Most fledgling firms need publicity, and it needed to affirm its professionalism among an increasingly competitive market for modern interiors. This was especially the case after Wyndham Lewis, former Omega member and self-declared enemy, launched his own modern artistic decorating firm, The Rebel Art Centre, at 38 Great Ormond Street, London, in March 1914.⁴⁴ This act of brazen hostility can only have been viewed by the Omega coterie as a major competitive threat in the struggle to secure the patronage of London's Society hostesses, and the theatrical commission can be read, in part at least, as a response to Lewis's initiative at a time when The Omega Workshops sought to appear a leading professional enterprise, as opposed to a group of dabbling artistic enthusiasts. The Omega Workshops demonstrated further professionalism by registering its printed linens in July 1914.

The Benefits of Collaborating with the Dramatic Stage

The possible benefits offered to modern artists, designers, and progressive interior decoration firms through collaborations with stage productions were multifarious. For a newly-launched commercial outfit such as The Omega Workshops, they offered wider audiences for its products. But the degree to which, firstly, theatergoers took note of who supplied the goods on stage, and, secondly, followed that up with purchases is difficult to estimate. Nonetheless, *The*

Wynmartens offered an opportunity to increase the Omega's exposure and circulate its goods before a more diverse audience than the small group of friends and potential clients within its orbit in 1914. The fact remains, however, that in 1914, even among London theatregoers, most were skeptical about the merits of modern art and modern interior design.

The Omega Workshops did receive some publicity for its contributions to *The Wynmartens*. *The Observer* reviewer told readers that the "'Futurist' studio carried out by The Omega Workshops was perfectly delightful to look at" and, for those who attended a performance, the playbill carried a notice announcing "Furniture by Omega, Ltd., Fitzroy Square."⁴⁵ However, most reviews did not mention the interiors. We might speculate that, had *The Wynmartens* been more successful, then the venture might well have gained the Omega more commissions and historians might well have paid it more attention. Even if on-stage promotion had helped reposition the Omega away from the market confines of private patronage, without knowing the contractual details of the commission or whether there was a response in the market following the play's run, we are unable to determine how financially lucrative such a project was for The Omega Workshops.

Other benefits include increased circulation of Omega products should the play be sent on tour: "when the London market is exhausted, send the star(s) to other markets in Britain or abroad."⁴⁶ More publicity might have come the way of The Omega Workshops had *The Wynmartens* toured nationally but it only had one showing outside London, a matinée at the King's Theatre in Southsea, Portsmouth. *The Wynmartens* was selected as part of Tempest's North American farewell tour: "She will be seen in a repertoire [*sic*] of her greatest successes, including her new comedy in four acts by Richard Henry Powell entitled 'The Wynmartens' which she is

now doing at the Playhouse in London.”⁴⁷ The reference to *The Wymartens* as one of Tempest’s “greatest successes” suggests that for those involved in its production there must have been optimism for both the play and its forthcoming North American tour, which included several major cities and a run on Broadway (Shubert, 1913).⁴⁸ A North American tour offered the fledgling British company exposure among a potentially lucrative market for modern artistic products and painterly progressive interior decorating services in the wake of the commercial success of the now famous Armory Show held in New York in 1913. Also known as *The International Exhibition of Modern Art*, the latter was a major marker in the early acceptance in the United States of avant-garde art (including Cubism, Futurism, Fauvism, and Post-Impressionism). Within this context, the Omega’s products might well have attracted the attention of those in the United States who were interested in avant-garde artistic interior decoration, both on and off stage.

Ultimately, *The Wymartens* was not included in Tempest’s North American tour and The Omega Workshops had no circulation of its wares on a Broadway stage. Indifferent reception by British critics and theatergoers alike was almost certainly the reason as, Tracy C. Davis argues, “only by having a London success could a subsequent tour be viable.”⁴⁹

Reception of The Wymartens: A Focus on Fashion

The Wymartens received widespread attention from newspapers and lifestyle presses which were mostly encouraging, although several reviewers found the narrative confusing and Tempest’s talents wasted.⁵⁰ *The Wymartens* was also the subject of illustrated features and caricatures, which suggests its bold, visual stimuli on the stage, i.e. the fashionable clothing, accessories, interiors, and props,

had quite an impact⁵¹ [Figure 14]. The play received a full-page feature in *The Graphic* (London),⁵² which included five photographs produced by well-known stage and theatre photographers Foulsham and Banfield, Ltd.⁵³ Only one review mentioned The Omega Workshops while others briefly mentioned the interiors; one described the Belgrave interior as “charmingly furnished.”⁵⁴ Among review literature, a play’s costumes and dresses tended to get more attention than sets, and thus the Omega’s near absence from the reviews is not surprising. Indeed, playwright George Bernard Shaw, who was also an important patron and shareholder of The Omega Workshops, observed that “the [theatre] manager was ultimately uninterested in whether a play was good or bad so long as it was ‘nice,’ ‘nice plays’ with nice dresses, nice drawing-rooms and nice people are indispensable commentary which reveals the need for plays to please and entertain audiences over anything else.”⁵⁵

Indeed, theater managers and producers understood that, for many women, seeing fashionable dress on stage was a major feature of their theatergoing experience and, in the early twentieth century, a mutually beneficial relationship was actively supported between the theatrical stage and the press, especially the fashion-led lifestyle presses.⁵⁶ By 1914, theatre reviews often focused on the dresses and accessories worn by actresses, and the two that featured *The Wynmartens* were no exception. “A Woman Correspondent” for the *Manchester Guardian* reviewed exclusively the dresses, accessories, and coats worn by Tempest, and *Tatler* did likewise.⁵⁷

Conclusion

The modern artistic interiors of The Omega Workshops were easily transferred to the dramatic stage both in 1914 and again in 1918. What is surprising,

however, is the joint failure of The Omega Workshops and the producers of both *The Wynmartens* and *Too Much Money* to utilize this rich opportunity to its commercial and creative benefit. In asking why The Omega Workshops sought new territories to express its creative output, one recognizes a concerted attempt to consolidate markets for modernist painting and modern artistic interiors, and to expand the professional experience among its artist workforce. Besides this, the Omega could have appealed to new patrons and possible future theatrical commissions. Since the turn of the century, theatre audiences had developed, becoming larger, more mobile, increasingly middle class, and female dominated. Realistically, though, did the Omega believe it could use the theatre to expand its patronage? Probably not. Instead it relied on its ability to charm high-society women and secure their patronage through private means.

In the case of *The Wynmartens*, The Omega Workshops were at the mercy of the theatre which restricted its modern, painterly approach to interior design and decoration. Instead, the Omega was represented by a haphazard arrangement of individual decorative pieces, and within boundaries where they could not outrage British theatregoers. Ironically, had the Omega been allowed total creative autonomy over its staged interior, perhaps the reviews of the play and, in turn, of the Omega's interior, would have been better. More accurately, however, *The Wynmartens* awarded The Omega Workshops the honor of being London's leading designers and makers of ultra-fashionable, modern artistic interiors. In this respect the Omega failed to truly embrace the opportunity presented before it. Ultimately, The Omega Workshops did not, and was unable to, assert itself among an industry it little understood and cared for even less. Regardless of the failures of the Omega's venture into the theatrical world in 1914, it does indicate that shortly after its launch in July 1913, this relatively

small-scale enterprise started by a few like-minded artistic friends had attracted the attention of at least one London theater professional who recognized the theatrical potential of its approach to interior design. Moreover, examples such as *The Wynmartens* also reveal that Fry (irrespective of his open disdain for the theatre) recognized some merit in allowing the Omega's wares to be included on Britain's dramatic stage. It also expands the known theatrical practices of The Omega Workshops, some four years earlier than previously believed and thus further challenging how the Omega's involvement with *Too Much Money* is understood.

What both *The Wynmartens* and *Too Much Money* offer is evidence that throughout its six-year operation The Omega Workshops failed to convince theatre producers and audiences of its ability to sustain and validate its position as a leading producer of ultra-modern artistic interiors, both on and off the stage. Had the plays been successful, both projects promised to bring greater public exposure to The Omega Workshops and potentially increased revenue and commissions. In analyzing new discoveries such as *The Wynmartens*, and consequently revisiting underexplored examples such as *Too Much Money*, we can develop a more nuanced interpretation of both theatrical projects and, ultimately, a more refined contextual understanding of The Omega Workshops' moment, a fuller understanding of the firm's public collaborations with British dramatic theatre, and a rethinking of its artistic ambitions.

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FIGURE DESCRIPTIONS

1) The Omega Workshops' Post-Impressionist Room at the Ideal Home Exhibition, London, 1913. © British Library Board (News75. *Illustrated London News*, October 25, 1913: 21–22).

2) Postcard depicting a lounge furnished by The Omega Workshops at the Salon of the Allied Artists' Association, Holland Park Hall, London, 1914. © Ben Angwin Collection.

3) Showroom at The Omega Workshops, 33 Fitzroy Square, 1913. © The Charleston Trust.

4) "A Futurist Bedroom." © British Library Board (ZC.9.d.560. *Bystander*, December 31, 1913: 748).

5) Lillah McCarthy as 'Mrs. Annabel Broadley' in *Too Much Money*. © British Library Board (HIU.LD52. *The Sketch*, April 17, 1918: 50).

6) Photograph of *The Wynmartens* (Act One) by Foulsham and Banfield, Ltd. (Marie Tempest Photograph Albums, 1912–14). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

7) Photograph of *The Wynmartens* (Act Four) by Foulsham and Banfield, Ltd. (Marie Tempest Photograph Albums, 1912–14). © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

8 and 9) Photographs of *The Wynmartens* (Act Two) by Foulsham and Banfield, Ltd. Marie Tempest Photograph Albums, 1912–14. © Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

10) Lampstands designed and decorated by The Omega Workshops, 1913–19. © Victoria and Albert Museum.

11) *The Omega Workshops Descriptive Catalogue*, 1914: 15. David Herbert Collection.

12) Omega Workshops display. *The Omega Workshops Descriptive Catalogue*, 1914: 10. David Herbert Collection.

13) Sketch illustration of a painted lampstand with shade. *The Omega Workshops Descriptive Catalogue*, 1914: 14. David Herbert Collection.

14) Caricatures of *The Wynmartens* by Tony Sarg. © British Library Board (HIU.LD52. *The Sketch*, May 20, 1914: 203).

¹ Recent literature includes Juliet Bellow, *Modernism on Stage: The Ballet Russes and the Parisian avant-garde* (Farnham: Ashgate, 2013); and Jane Prichard and Geoffrey Marsh, eds., *Diaghilev and the Golden Age of the Ballet Russes, 1909–1929* (London: V&A Publications, 2013); and Robert Bell, ed., *Ballet Russes: The Art of Costume* (Canberra: The National Gallery of Australia, 2010). Notable earlier examples include Charles Spencer, *Léon Bakst and the Ballets Russes* (London: Academy Editions, 1973); and Douglas Cooper, *Picasso: Theatre* (London: Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1968).

² Picasso, Matisse, Derain, Bakst, Gonchorova, Kandinsky, and Larionov all produced designs for scenery and costumes for Serge Diaghilev, impresario of the illustrious *Ballet Russes*.

³ Duncan Grant produced designs for stages and costumes for French dramatist Jacques Copeau's modernist reworking of Shakespeare's *Twelfth Night* (*La Nuit Des Rois*, Théâtre du Vieux-Colombier, Paris, 1914); Vanessa Bell and Grant collaborated with Copeau on his rendition of Maurice Maeterlinck's *Pelléas et Mélisande* (New York, 1919).

⁴ For Collins' discussion on *Too Much Money* see Judith Collins, *The Omega Workshops* (London: Secker & Warburg; Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1983), 157–159.

⁵ For a refreshing discussion on The Omega Workshops' clothing see Elizabeth M. Sheehan, "Dressmaking at the Omega: Experiments in Art and Fashion", in *Beyond Bloomsbury: Designs of The Omega Workshops 1913–19*, ed. Alexandra Gerstein, (London: The Courtauld Gallery in association with Fontanka, 2009), 50–59. Sheehan's essay does not include a discussion on Fry's dress designs for Lillah McCarthy.

⁶ Denys Sutton, *Letters of Roger Fry*, Vols. 1 & 2 (London: Chatto & Windus, 1972), 424.

⁷ Roger Fry to Pamela Fry, February 16, 1918 in Sutton, *Letters of Roger Fry*, 425.

⁸ Richard Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits* (London: Phaidon, 1976, revised edition 1996), 173; Richard Shone, *The Art of Bloomsbury* (London: Tate Publishing, 1999), 145. The screen was subsequently owned by Roger Fry and presumably loaned from his personal collection for inclusion in *Too Much Money*. Shone does not give references for either of his claims.

⁹ Israel Zangwill, *Too Much Money* (New York: Macmillan, 1925), dustjacket.

¹⁰ "At The Play: 'Too Much Money,'" *The Observer*, April 14, 1918: 5. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.kingston.ac.uk/docview/480673100?accountid=14557> (accessed September 4, 2019).

¹¹ *Lexico.com*, s.v. "Farce." <https://www.lexico.com/en/definition/farce> (accessed June 18, 2019).

¹² Shone, *Bloomsbury Portraits*, 173.

¹³ For discussions on Grant's Copeau commissions see Denys Sutton, "Jacques Copeau and Duncan Grant," *Apollo* 1, no. 66 (August 1967), 139–41; for a renewed approach see Claudette Joannis "Textiles for the Theatre: Duncan Grant and the European Theatrical Revival, 1912–22," in Gerstein, *Beyond Bloomsbury*, 43–49.

¹⁴ Richard Henry Powell was editor of the sporting department for *The Times* (London) before which he had gained experience in theatrical management. He wrote three plays, *The White Dove*, *The Wynmartens*, and *The King's Counterfeit*. He was killed on or after May 9, 1915 at the battle of Aubers Ridge, Rue du Bois, Richebourg l'Avou. See Andrew Renshaw, *Wisden on the Great War: The Lives of Cricket's Fallen, 1914–1918* (London: John Wisden and Co; Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014), 171–172.

¹⁵ Lionel Carson, ed. *The Stage Year Book* (London: Carson & Comerford, 1915), 125.

¹⁶ Hector Bolitho, *Marie Tempest* [her biography], (London: Cobden-Sanderson, 1936), 283.

¹⁷ *Ibid.* 89–90.

¹⁸ The author has corresponded with surviving relatives of Richard Henry Powell who knew nothing of his activities with British theatre.

¹⁹ *The Wynmartens* Playbill (London: Miles & Co. Ltd. Wardour Street, 1914), 2.

²⁰ “Dramatic Gossip: ‘The Wynmartens,’” *The Athenaeum*, May 16, 1914, 699.

²¹ E.F.S. “Monocle”, “To Kiss or Not to Kiss: The Countess of Wynmarten who played with smoke,” *The Sketch*, May 20, 1914, 202.

²² “Dramatic Gossip,” *Athenaeum*, 699.

²³ The Playhouse was a recent addition to London’s stage repertoire and included an array of contemporary redesigns including, perhaps surprisingly, a reduced seating capacity. Formerly known as the Royal Avenue theatre, during the late nineteenth century it had been associated with a self-conscious move away from hosting music-hall-themed comedies, comic-operas, and farces, and, instead, towards more high-cultured dramatic plays. By the 1910s the Playhouse was firmly recognised as a leading West End venue for both established and emerging talent in dramatic theatre.

²⁴ Julie Holledge, *Innocent Flowers: Women in the Edwardian Theatre* (London: Virago Press, 1981), 5. While such binaries remain true for Victorian and Edwardian dramatic theatre, by 1914 London’s theatrical spectrum had altered significantly due to growing social and industrial developments the city was experiencing.

²⁵ *Ibid.*

²⁶ Mario Borsa, *The English Stage of To-Day* (New York: J. Lane, 1908), 5.

²⁷ *Ibid.*

²⁸ Nina Auerbach, “Before the Curtain,” in *Victorian and Edwardian Theatre*, ed. Kerry Powell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 5.

²⁹ *The Wynmartens Playbill*, 3.

³⁰ Marie Tempest Photograph Albums, 1912–1914. Theatre and Performance Archive, Victoria and Albert Museum, London

³¹ *The Wynmartens Playbill*, 2.

³² “At the Play: ‘The Wynmartens,’” *The Observer*, May 10, 1914, 9. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.kingston.ac.uk/docview/480782141?accountid=14557> (accessed May 4, 2016).

³³ *The Wynmartens Playbill*, 2.

³⁴ “Druce & Co, Upholsterers and Cabinet Makers, Baker Street, London,” *London Fine Antiques*. <https://www.londonfine.co.uk/pages/druce-co-upholsterers-and-cabinet-makers-baker-street-london> (accessed March 12, 2019).

³⁵ *The Wynmartens Playbill*, 2.

³⁶ “At the Play: ‘The Wynmartens,’” 9.

³⁷ Collins, *The Omega Workshops*, 74.

³⁸ The first half of 1914 signalled the Omega’s most intense period in ceramics production and decoration, experimenting with metallic lustres and overpaints. For a discussion on the Omega’s brief foray into lustre decoration see Ben Angwin and David Herbert, “From Ancient to Modern: The Omega Workshops’ experiment in lustre, c.1914,” in *Mantelpiece Modernism: The Omega Workshops, Bloomsbury, and Gordine* (London: Kingston University, 2018), 12–23.

³⁹ Roger Fry, “Mr Gordon Craig’s Stage Designs,” *The Nation*, September 16, 1911, 871, reprinted in *A Roger Fry Reader*, ed. Christopher Reed, (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996), 287–289.

⁴⁰ *Ibid.*

⁴¹ Letter from Roger Fry to Duncan Grant, March 6, 1914, reprinted in Sutton, *Letters of Roger Fry*, 379.

⁴² Lady Jean Hamilton’s commission included two stained glass windows, mosaics for the floors and entrance steps, painted murals as well as a range of furniture, lamps, textiles, carpets, and other hard and soft furnishings. A painted wall mural and a mosaic (incomplete) at *Durbins* was executed by Fry, Bell, and Grant on April 21 and 22, 1914.

⁴³ The catalog lists exhibits 36 to 115 as being by The Omega Workshops. All are listed as being loaned by the Omega except for a single cushion (lent by ‘G. A. Ramsay, Esq.’). The exhibition ran between May 8 and June 20, 1914. According to the catalog Fry and Bell showed five works each and Grant showed seven. It was encouraged that Omega members would exhibit their own independent

artworks within the same exhibitions, alongside the anonymous and collectively produced wares of The Omega Workshops.

⁴⁴ The Rebel Art Centre was launched with the financial backing of English painter, Kate Lechmere (1887–1976). Its first commission was for wealthy Society hostess Lady Drogheda at her home, 40 Wilton Crescent, London. The firm exhibited next to The Omega Workshops' lounge in an applied arts gallery at the Salon of the Allied Artists' Association, Holland Park Hall, June–July, 1914.

⁴⁵ “At the Play,” 9; *The Wynmartens* Playbill, 3.

⁴⁶ Tracy C. Davis, *The Economics of the British Stage: 1800-1914* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 335.

⁴⁷ Maitland Davies, “News of the Theatres, Music, Drama and the Picture Plays,” *Arizona Republican*, May 31, 1914, 4, *Chronicling America: Historic American Newspapers*, Library of Congress. <https://chroniclingamerica.loc.gov/lccn/sn84020558/1914-05-31/ed-1/seq-16/> accessed November 16, 2016.

⁴⁸ Letter from Lee Shubert to Mr. H. Graham Browne, dated March 13, 1913. Shubert Foundation, New York, USA. I am indebted to Sylvia Wang, archivist at the Shubert Foundation Archive, for sharing with me copies of Shubert and Graham Browne's correspondence.

⁴⁹ Davis, *Economics of the British Stage*, 335.

⁵⁰ Among the national presses: *The Times*, *Illustrated Sporting and Dramatic News*, and *Manchester Guardian*; among the lifestyle magazines: *Punch*, or the *London Charivari*, *Tatler*, *Sketch*, *Academy*, *Athenaeum*. Such widespread coverage demonstrates how central the theatre was to British metropolitan life at the beginning of the twentieth century.

⁵¹ Caricatures include *The Sketch*, May 20, 1914: 203 and *Punch*, or the *London Charivari*, May 13, 1914: 376.

⁵² “The Art of Spiting One's Mother-in-Law: ‘The Wynmartens’ at The Playhouse.” 1914. *The Graphic*, June 6, 1914, 1027.

⁵³ Copies of these press photographs are included in the Marie Tempest Photograph Albums, 1912–14 (Victoria and Albert Museum, London).

⁵⁴ “The Theatre: ‘The Wynmartens.’” *The Academy*, Issue 2193, May 16, 1914, 269. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.kingston.ac.uk/docview/9408888?accountid=14557> (accessed June 28, 2016).

⁵⁵ George Bernard Shaw, *The Bodley Bernard Shaw: Collected Plays with their Prefaces*, ed. D. H. Laurence, Vol. 2, (London: Bodley Head, 1970), 21, quoted in Ian Clarke, *Edwardian Drama* (London: Faber and Faber, 1989), 5.

⁵⁶ London was not alone in this respect and, in many ways, it responded to industry developments in Paris. For an excellent discussion on the relationship between Parisian theatre and fashion see Nancy Troy, *Couture Culture: A Study in Modern Art and Fashion* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: MIT Press, 2003).

⁵⁷ “A Woman Correspondent,” “Miss Marie Tempest's Dresses in ‘The Wynmartens,’” *The Manchester Guardian*, May 11, 1914, 3. <https://search-proquest-com.ezproxy.kingston.ac.uk/docview/475801551?accountid=14557> (accessed November 16, 2016); and M. E. Brooke, “The Highway of Fashion,” *Tatler*, May 20, 1914, xxi. <https://www.britishnewspaperarchive.co.uk/viewer/BL/0001852/19140520/089/0079> (accessed November 16, 2016).