

The Collected Letters of Ellen Terry

Editor: **Katharine Cockin**, University of Hull

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Ellen Terry (1888)

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Dame Ellen Terry (1847–1928) was one of the first modern stars of the British stage. She toured America and Australia and was adored by the public, and has become an icon of Victorian womanhood. A transitional figure, Terry straddled both the Victorian and the modern world. But the controversies of Terry's private life were numerous: elopement, cohabitation, single-motherhood, multiple marriages – two with significant age differences – yet she maintained the reputation of a thoroughly feminine woman of the age.

Terry's correspondence was both exuberant and extensive. Despite falling victim to selective destruction, the remaining letters provide a fascinating insight into the dynamics of the Victorian theatre, as well as the difficulties of life for a woman maintaining a successful public persona whilst raising two illegitimate children. The collection brings together material from across the world, and includes letters to many famous addressees – Bram Stoker and George Bernard Shaw among them – as well as many lesser- or unknown recipients who often get the best of Terry's playful prose.

The collection will be of value to those with an interest in Victorian theatre, women's suffrage, and *fin de siècle* literature.

- This collection of around 3000 letters has not previously been published
- The letters are sourced from fifteen different archives worldwide
- The letters are transcribed verbatim, retaining all the idiosyncracies of Terry's style and the immediacy of her prose
- Gives an insight into the context of nineteenth-century theatre
- Correspondents include many famous figures of the day, including writers, aristocrats, and artists
- Contains indices of addressees, theatrical associates, theatres and plays

Addressees:

Janet Achurch (1863–1916),
performer

Acton Bond (1861–1941), author

Bertha Bramley, friend

Austin Brereton, author

Audrey Campbell, friend

Mrs Casella, friend

Olive Chaplin (née Terry), niece

Pauline Chase (Mrs
Drummond), performer

James Henry Chute (1808/10–
1878), actor and theatre
manager

Stephen Coleridge (1854–1936),
barrister

John Paul Cooper (1869–1933),
artist

Edith Craig (1869–1947),
theatre director and costumier

Edward Gordon Craig (1872–
1966), artist and theatre
designer

Augustin Daly (1838–1899),
author, director and theatre
manager

Rev Charles Dodgson [aka
Lewis Carroll] (1832–1898),
author

Herbert Duke, friend

Edith Evans (1888–1976),
performer

Joe Evans, friend

W E Gladstone (1809–1898),
politician

H A Gwynne (1865–1950),
journalist

Mary-Anne Hall, friend and
artist

John Hare (1844–1921), actor
manager

Sir John Martin-Harvey
(1863–1944), performer and
theatre manager

Lady Jeune, friend

Boyd N Joll, MD

Henry Arthur Jones (1851–
1929), dramatist

Lady Elizabeth Lewis (1845–
1931), friend

Sir George Lewis (1833–1911),
lawyer

Dr Alexander Mackenzie, friend

Mrs Elizabeth Malleson (1828–
1916), friend

Mabel Malleson, companion to
Edith Craig

Cyril Maude (1862–1951),
performer

Mortimer Menpes (1855–1938),
artist

Lady Monckton, friend

Major Herbert Neve, Kent
neighbour

Elsa Queen Palmer (1850–
1894), friend

Bernard Partridge (1861–1945),
artist

Arthur Wing Pinero (1855–
1934), dramatist

Lady Margaret Pirrie (died
1935), friend

Lady Georgina Pollock (died
1935), friend

Charles Reade (1814–1884),
author and dramatist

Rev Compton Reade, friend

Ada Rehan (née Crehan)
(1869–1916), performer

(Walford) Graham Robertson
(1866–1948), artist

Elizabeth Robins (1862–1952),
performer and author

Elizabeth Rumball (née
Bocking), companion

Clement Scott (1841–1904),
drama critic

Sir Albert Seymour, friend

George Bernard Shaw (1856–
1950), author

Christopher St John (1871–
1960), author

Bram Stoker (1847–1912),
author

Florence Stoker (née Balcombe)
(1859–1935), friend

Tom Taylor (1817–1880),
dramatist

William Terriss (1847–1897),
performer

George Terry, brother

Kate Terry (1844–1924), sister

Marion Terry (1853–1930),
sister

G F Watts (1817–1904), artist,
and Terry's first husband

Ben Webster (1864–1947),
performer

Dame May Whitty (Webster)
(1865–1948), performer

Ernest George Harcourt
Williams (1880–1957),
performer and producer

William Winter (1836–1917),
drama critic

Collected Letters of Ellen Terry

To Mary-Anne [Hall]¹ Friday 22 6 [June] [18]66

Friday 22-6-66
24 Caversham Road

Dearest Mary-Anne

I hear from Mr Taylor² you were “in front” on Wednesday. I looked or you when my sister was speaking the address but could’nt see you³ – before that time, I looked for no body. I was so very very nervous, & oh so really unwell – on the stage I laughed as you know, but when I reached

[p. 2] My dressing-room I positively cried, with pain in my side – I am however very much better now –

I think people were most kind to me that evening (in your part of the building I mean -) Of course it was only what my sister Kate had a right to expect, being an acknowledged favourite with the Public but I was quite an amateur =

Dear dear chick -

[p. 3] When shall I come (to sit for the portrait) to your studio? I am most anxious for you to do it – a truthful, un-varnished portrait – if you will do it please let me know when I shall come – I wish you did’nt live so far away.

With very best love dear

Believe me always affectionately

Yours/ Nelly Watts =

Did you see Mrs Dalrymple⁴ in a Private Box?

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1. Mary-Anne Hall was an artist and a close friend of Ellen Terry at this time. See Tom Prideaux, *Love or Nothing: The Life and Times of Ellen Terry*, 1976; New York: Limelight Editions, 1987 p. 58.
 2. Tom Taylor (1817-1880), educated at Trinity College, Cambridge University and trained as a barrister, was a prolific dramatist and editor of *Punch* magazine. He was committed to popular theatre and adapted many plays, including dramatizations from the works of Charles Dickens. Several of his plays were produced at the Lyceum Theatre.
 3. ET refers to her sister, Kate Terry’s benefit performance in which ET participated and reports on her disappointing performance. Kate Terry Lewis (1844-1924), appeared on stage at age 8 as Prince Arthur in *King John* with Charles Kean. She left Kean in 1859 to join the Bristol stock company. Her notable performances were as Ophelia opposite Charles Fechter as Hamlet in 1861 and in various plays by Tom Taylor (see above). Retired in 1867 on marriage to Arthur Lewis, she briefly returned to stage in 1898 in *The Master* by G. Stuart Ogilvie. Her daughter Kate was the mother of John Gielgud.
 4. Mrs Dalrymple (Lady Sophia) formerly Pattle (1829-1911) was one of the seven daughters of James Pattle of the East India Company. Three of her other sisters, Mrs Prinsep, Lady Somers and Mrs Julia Margaret Cameron, photographer were known as ‘Beauty, Dash and Talent’.

This letter comes from the V&A archive and shows Terry’s characteristic use of dashes, equals signs and stray apostrophes.

Sources have been drawn from the following collections:

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