

## INTRODUCTION: ELLEN TERRY AND HER CIRCLE – FORMAL INTRODUCTIONS AND INFORMAL ENCOUNTERS

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Ellen Terry (1847–1928) is familiar to many in the mind's eye, even when her name or specific achievements remain on the tip of the tongue. As the object of the admiring gaze of artists and photographers – G. F. Watts, John Singer Sargent and Julia Margaret Cameron – she materializes before us typically in solo form rather than in the midst of a group. Like many of her peers on the stage, she was widely reproduced in photographic portraits, marketing her image far and wide and feeding the appetite of hungry fans. Consequently, the value of her visual image was appreciated by the commercial world. She has been particularly known for her own supporting role in relation to powerful and famous men, the principal achievements of her working life associating her with Henry Irving.<sup>1</sup> It was a long-lasting bond. According to Lynn Voskuil, the 'power of personality' characterized both Irving and Terry, known for personalities which were respectively 'magnetic' and 'mesmeric' and 'charming' and 'effusive'.<sup>2</sup> Voskuil claims for Irving and Terry a significant influence on theatre practice:

The ascendancy of these two performers contributed to an important shift in the concept of natural acting at the end of the nineteenth century, a shift that rewarded the performance of one's own personality more than the effective impersonation of character.<sup>3</sup>

In the 1890s Terry attracted the adoration of Oscar Wilde and found an intimate correspondent in a young George Bernard Shaw.<sup>4</sup> At once idolized and cajoled, Terry found her epistolary role in the Shaw–Terry correspondence as subordinated to that great man. She was well versed in the silvery feminine role, designed to reflect and magnify the male, and described so memorably by Virginia Woolf: 'Women have served all these centuries as looking-glasses possessing the magic and delicious power of reflecting the figure of man at twice its

natural size.<sup>5</sup> Could Woolf have had Terry in mind? The lectures which made up *A Room of One's Own* were delivered in the year of Terry's death. Any diminutive or trembling male may have drawn strength from Terry's benevolent aura, enhancing himself (in his own imagination) to twice the natural size. Woolf saw this aspect of Terry in appropriately modernist terms in her essay 'Ellen Terry', published in the year of Woolf's death. Faced with a Manly Man in the era of the Womanly Woman, Terry would be irresistibly drawn to him but would also be tempted to refract his image, sometimes hinting at the comic side of any assumed grandiosity. As one of those young women who found herself on the other side of Lewis Carroll's lens, she gave an insight in later years for many others into that world which might lie on the other side of the mirror.

Other dimensions of Terry have become more visible in recent years. These have begun to place her in a more material and complex social setting, typically one which is gendered. Nina Auerbach has seen her as a multi-faceted player in – but perhaps also ahead of – her time.<sup>6</sup> It was a part in which she was ultimately sustained by a community of supportive women, both from her immediate family, those in her employ and others drawn devotedly to her side.

Terry was one of a number of stage stars in a period when their celebrity was aligned with the rise of the theatre as a profession and its increasing attraction as a pastime of the middle classes. Mary Luckhurst and Jane Moody explain in their study of theatrical celebrity that

Much of the scholarship done by theatre historians in this area has been concerned with fame (the nature of the exceptional life) rather than with celebrity (a concept which focuses attention on the interplay between individuals and institutions, markets and media).<sup>7</sup>

Terry has a significant role in the rise of the theatre as a profession in Britain. Irving was the first actor to be knighted in 1895, while Terry received an honorary degree in 1922 and became a Dame in 1925. The movement of the cultural capital embodied by actors was apparent in the formation and reconfiguration of a social circle and its events, as well as the booking of tours at home and abroad. The transatlantic tours of British stars appear to have exploited what Leigh Woods has called the Americans' sense of cultural deficiency in this period.<sup>8</sup> How did the influence of celebrity work behind the scenes? The increasing popularity of the theatre as a pastime of the wealthy middle classes found the audience demographic including such employment groups as politicians, lawyers, artists and writers. Terry numbered some of the most influential lawyers and politicians of the day among her fans. Gladstone watched her from the wings. She was a regular correspondent with the family of Sir George Lewis,<sup>9</sup> steely adversary in the divorce cases of the elite. Systems of patronage operated both formally and informally. Commercial advertising thrived in the available spaces of many play

programmes bought by theatregoers and treasured as souvenirs. Securing work on the stage for actors was a fraught affair, making any sign of ill-health a threat to future casting. Terry never forgot the rigours of the world for those looking on from the margins, so when she achieved the means of exerting her influence on behalf of others, she frequently did so. The extension of a helping hand to others was for her a reflex, such that she maintained her charitable acts when she could least afford it herself. Any reader of her letters today occasionally feels an urge to reproduce the pantomime warning, 'behind you!' Her discreet financial support of one unidentified woman in difficulty led to personal losses which she was lucky to recoup by means of a serendipitously timed benefit performance.<sup>10</sup> The precise mechanisms at work in the informal networks of public and powerful contacts operating in the theatre are not always clear. Any available evidence tends to emerge from private correspondence; the new guide to her own archive and publication of her letters will provide a rich source of material for future research.

The essays in this collection begin to ask questions about Terry's spheres of influence, placing her at the centre of what became an influential circle or network. She is placed at the centre, not with a view to limiting this to biographical concerns, although the life and the work are inevitably imbricated for Terry, but to explore actual and potential relationships she had with those in her circle by attending to the discursive interplay of influence. Thus Moody and Luckhurst refer to Michael Quinn's approach to celebrity: 'his insistence that celebrity is the discourse through which the dynamics of acting are revealed. It is only by investigating these transactions between individuals, audiences and institutions, he suggests, that performance can be fully understood.'<sup>11</sup> Further work is welcomed on how Terry influenced the next generation, handing on a particular attitude towards theatre work, an appreciation of the theatre as a social force and, more ephemerally, the physical characteristics of her performance style. Fans and intimates wrote of their memories of her performances, leaving their various impressions of her voice, her demeanour, a gesture; an emphasis here rather than there. The significance of Terry's performances was widely valued and debated. As for other celebrated performers, Terry acquired a mythical status during her lifetime which has endured in recent times. The recording and sharing of the memory of having seen Terry perform itself acquired cultural significance which influenced others. Rebecca West wrote about an encounter in a hotel with someone who recalled Terry. West regarded Terry as unique in that her words survived, even in some ways reviving her for later generations: 'She continually made remarks that, recollected, bring back the very essence of her.'<sup>12</sup> Laura Marcus has demonstrated how Virginia Woolf's interest in Terry (explored most obviously in *Freshwater*) also featured in a draft of 'A Scene from the Past' in the idea that memories may be transferred from one person

to another.<sup>13</sup> It may well be that the influence exerted by these shared memories served a social function, associating Terry with a bygone age so that her citation became a short form for Englishness and Empire. Lisa Kazmier's analysis of the response to Terry's death includes the proposition that 'Ellen Terry symbolized the endurance of British values and institutions.'<sup>14</sup> For theatre practitioners she embodied the respect which the theatre could command. There were examples of an attempt to recreate or revive Terry's performance style, through the delivery of Terry's Shakespeare lectures by Florence Locke. In 1933 she performed at the Shakespeare Memorial Library at Stratford on the occasion of the presentation to Lady Flower of artefacts relating to Irving and Terry.<sup>15</sup> An annual memorial Shakespeare performance was held from 1929 at the Barn Theatre in the grounds of Terry's house to mark her death. The configuration of time, place and production produced an act of remembrance and an opportunity for those who survived her to pass on any specific theatrical knowledge as such. But the gathering of family, colleagues and those who knew her, together with a younger generation of aspiring and established thespians, such as John Gielgud, Robert Donat and Sybil Thorndike, also provided a suitable environment for what would now be known as networking.

As one of several children born to acting parents, Terry naturally associated the theatre with her own family from the earliest age. The idea of a theatrical dynasty, of nurturing and inheriting knowledge and skill, rendered family relations influential. In 1937 when the Eugenics Society made an educational film about heredity, they included members of Terry's family: Edith Craig, Val Gielgud and Hazel Terry.<sup>16</sup> Michael Holroyd's recent book, *A Strange Eventful History* (2008), puts Terry in her own and closely associated family settings. Actors have seemed to form a separate group, even creating a closed community. Perhaps to some extent this familial discourse provided a perspective from which child actors were regarded differently from those in other fields of employment. With this familial discourse in mind, it is likely that assistance was associated with gender; for Terry, the protective impulse was exerted along with a self-sacrifice bound together with absolute commitment to theatre work and devotion to the maternal. This maternal modality afforded her the leeway to express herself to others in an emotional and intimate way,<sup>17</sup> which tended to be accepted in the context of theatrical flamboyance but it sometimes cloaked a more complex gradation of emotional and sexual feelings. Terry seemed to love everyone. She was generous and giving in an apparently indiscriminate manner. While this love was framed within a maternal discourse it was extremely powerful and productive for her, both literally and aesthetically. The other side of the mirror may have revealed a desperate pursuit of attention, in a displacement of tremendously powerful feelings which never found a lasting realization in any of

her relationships with men. A sense of if-only hung over the premature death of Godwin and the oppressive control of Irving by his wife.

Influence may be exerted in both subtle and more explicit ways. Perhaps the more intriguing aspects of influence relate to the ephemeral, unrecorded and unofficial nature of its deployment. Influence is felt; it operates in a subjective realm. But its effects may be powerful and, in more interventionist forms, it becomes registered as nepotism or patronage. Organizations, theatrical or otherwise, publicly declare their official patrons; they acknowledge their work under the auspices of a particular organization. An endorsement appears with the citation of a name, the supply of funding and the carrying of adverts in theatre programmes. The theatre has long been supported by such 'angels', in mutually beneficial arrangements. Influence may be registered simply by means of physical presence. Patronage may be signalled by means of attendance at a play; being seen and recorded in theatre reviews; lending one's name to something; sending flowers; a letter of appreciation; a fan letter; a gift. Such activities are much in evidence in Terry's career and most visible, perhaps, on the occasion of her stage jubilee in 1906, covered extensively in the illustrated press.

Terry is one of the most memorable performers on the British stage in the nineteenth century. She inspired some of the greatest artists of her day and her portraits have located her in popular memory. The celebrity of Terry in the world of the nineteenth-century theatre may to some extent have obscured some of the more contradictory and apparently modern aspects of her approach to her work and her life. The archival repositories on Terry are numerous and widespread. This physical obstacle, together with the fact of her prolific epistolary output and the hitherto uncatalogued state of her own archive, has rendered many questions frustratingly unanswered. This collection of essays tackles some of these challenges and explores the spheres of influence of Terry. These thirteen essays, from established experts and new researchers drawn from an international field, reassess some of the performances and cultural significance of Terry, her daughter Edith Craig (1869–1947) and her son Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), as well as Bram Stoker, Lewis Carroll and some less familiar figures such as Velona Pilcher and Clotilde Graves.

This collection of essays marks the beginnings of a new era in research on Terry and her family. The contributors include international experts on Terry: her biographer Nina Auerbach and Sir Michael Holroyd, whose group biography of Terry, Irving and their family was published in 2008. In the same year, the AHRC-funded project was completed, resulting in the online catalogue of the National Trust's vast collection of papers of Terry and Edith Craig: [www.ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk](http://www.ellenterryarchive.hull.ac.uk). This database was officially launched on Saturday, 6 June 2009 at the University of Hull at the Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Conference. Most of the essays collected here have developed from papers delivered at that

conference, which was sponsored by the Society for Theatre Research and the University of Hull. This archive of over 20,000 documents is now searchable by means of the online catalogue. Several chapters of this book, especially Chapters 11 and 12 and this introduction, provide some insights into the richness of this archive. This chapter provides an introduction to Terry's career on the British stage, examining the relationships she established at work and at home in relation to the influence she exerted, which had far-reaching effects. It outlines some of the promising new research questions which are beginning to emerge.

### Part I: Ellen Terry's Influences on Others

Nina Auerbach, author of the influential biography of Terry, introduces Part I with an essay on 'Ellen Terry's Lost Lives'. This reflects on the Terry we have not known. Edward Gordon Craig claimed that no one other than he and his father could know her. Auerbach's essay invites us to consider the blank spaces which Terry left behind, and those with which she played and cultivated.

A sense of loss attaches to Terry in many ways. She experienced loss in her relationships – lost husbands and lovers – and experienced more material losses which severely affected her later years. Terry lost money and lost control in various ways. The lives she could have had are worth thinking about. Their potential was limited by unexpected and sometimes unfortunate circumstances. The pursuit of lost or imagined letters, those which we imagine may provide the keys to her most intimate stories, has captivated many. Her success and fame, to some extent, have concealed the difficulties she faced.

Bram Stoker, Irving's business manager at the Lyceum Theatre, receives new consideration here from Catherine Wynne in Chapter 2. This chapter traces a relationship with melodrama and the Gothic and examines the influence of Stoker's fiction on the work of the Lyceum Theatre. Terry is named in *Dracula* as the reference point in a quoted extract from a newspaper report of the 'bloofer lady'.<sup>18</sup> Edith Craig's involvement in the stage reading (for copyright purposes) of Stoker's dramatization of *Dracula* and the association of Irving with *Dracula* demand further consideration of Terry and her circle as an influence on Stoker's work and the parts they played in the nineteenth-century Gothic. Terry's autobiography has many Gothic episodes; a cast of strong, brooding men, fantastical children, large country houses; her life story, drawn from a range of sources, features elopement, the threatened kidnap of children; adventures abroad; train travel in wild weather; misery, tenacity and belated revelation.

For Terry and Irving, highly visible players on the Victorian stage, gender was very much their business. But in their circle, gender was often troubled as well as a source of mirth. Stoker was the vampire figure, on the fringes of the theatre. He was also the object of banter. Terry joked with Florence Stoker, referring

to him in familial and feminized terms as 'Bram-mama'.<sup>19</sup> For Pamela Colman Smith, he was 'the Bramy Joker'.<sup>20</sup> There was some humorous potential in *Faust* and the abject figure bestowed on Terry. In this circle it would be known that Terry hated playing the part of Margaret. Is she infantilized or does she perform this role in a knowing way? Wynne argues persuasively that Terry's portrayal of female suffering should be situated in the context of melodrama and the Gothic.

Veronica Franklin Gould demonstrates in Chapter 3 that, although together for a short time, Terry and the artist G. F. Watts transformed each other and their mutual influence continued for long after they had parted. Gould's analyses of Watts's artwork identify details of Terry's expression and deportment which caught the painter's imagination. Terry was clearly a painterly performer. In his art, Watts appeared to achieve a satisfactory union in the physical and spiritual realms which he failed to realize with Terry during their marriage.

Terry appeared to draw some amusement from the roles she could adopt, interacting in a self-conscious way with Stoker and Irving, with whom she may have been triangulated in their homosocial relationship.<sup>21</sup> Humour is also apparent in *The Mistress of the Robes*, as Jenny Bloodworth demonstrates in Chapter 4. Terry's long career brought her into contact with many writers and theatre practitioners. One little-known but illuminating example is Clotilde Graves, author of this play. Bloodworth explores Terry's involvement with Graves in 1903 in *The Mistress of the Robes*, which brings into sharp focus the increasingly difficult relationship Terry had with age and performance. Since Terry, as an older woman, was obliged to carry on working, the suitability of roles and their scarcity became a pressing concern. Terry solicited work, exerting her influence on others, including J. M. Barrie. To what extent did the expectations of her performance as a youthful beauty become a burden for Terry in her later years? Perhaps she continued to be drawn to such roles in order to work through her acceptance of increasing age. Her letters demonstrate her awareness of the bodily signs of ageing and her sense of dismay at its relentless progress. However, Terry's association with Shakespeare provided opportunities to be lifted out of time – an eternal Portia or Beatrice – whereas other women, whose acting roles tended to be in naturalist drama, may have found themselves time-bound to a greater extent. Terry placed great store by the power of imagination in acting, as Voskuil demonstrates: 'She downplayed the role of personality in the acting process in favour of an emphasis on craft, hard work, and the actor's own imaginative interpretation of the character and situation'.<sup>22</sup> Thus Terry's approach to the performance of a much younger character would have little to do with her belief in the power of her own physical properties and everything to do with the power of her imagination to create the character.

Terry had performed in Shakespeare for the Lyceum Company in Britain and abroad but in the period from 1910 she toured with her lectures on Shake-

speare's women, producing a new range of associations. In Chapter 5 Katherine Kelly explores what these lectures promised for the women's suffrage movement as a model of public speaking. The power of Terry's voice and the impression she left on others are all explored here in light of Kelly's new research on the manuscripts of the Shakespeare lectures held in the National Trust's Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Archive. How Terry regarded the women of Shakespeare and how they were treated in the lectures are fascinating questions.<sup>23</sup> Given the process of their production, the answers may not necessarily be identical. The extent to which Terry endorsed women's suffrage activism is questioned by the agitation which it produced in her and is evident in some of her correspondence.<sup>24</sup> This episode in Terry's career draws attention to the potential conflicts arising from the different perceptions the performer and author may have had of each other's roles in this period. Terry and her 'ghost', Christopher St John, were in dispute over the production of the lectures.<sup>25</sup> Although Terry laid the ghosts of past quarrels to rest, annotating the papers with instructions for destruction ('1921 Disagreement with Chris – long ago – why not burn? these papers? E.T?'),<sup>26</sup> these were ignored and the correspondence was carefully preserved. Terry's words were highly prized commodities. In times of cash drought she found that her own words were thin on the ground. However, repetition is not always a good thing. She and her ghost had found themselves a whisker away from self-plagiarism in 1907 in their dealings with *McClure's Magazine*.

Terry enjoyed the public image of commanding speaker, as Kelly demonstrates. How did Terry reconcile this expectation of being someone in command of her own voice when it was often on the run? Her experience of losing her voice is revealed in some of her private correspondence.<sup>27</sup> This disjuncture between public image and private reality appeared to agitate her and provided a source of anxiety which would be likely to ensure that the symptoms recurred. She also experienced difficulties in remembering her lines, a phenomenon which became associated with Terry's performances later in life. The loss of memory features in Virginia Woolf's essay on Terry while, curiously, the strength of her public speaking does not.

## Part II: Family Influences

With Chapter 6, 'Edward Gordon Craig – Prophet or Charlatan?', Sir Michael Holroyd introduces the second part of the collection. He explores the characters of Edward Gordon Craig – his personality as well as the role he played – in his family and intimate relationships and in his interactions in the world of work. Gordon Craig's influence has extended to world theatre and to the new medium of film. Addressing the harsh judgements and great expectations placed upon Gordon Craig by others, this essay engages with the extremes of Craig's project,

his brutal impact on others and the crises which befell him. He created prolific personae as fearless avatars while he became increasingly fixed in solitude and silence.

Terry expected to exert influence over her children and her correspondence with them is predicated on this assumption. The absence of her children's father is to some extent the unstated element in these interactions and possibly sometimes prompted Terry to overzealous guidance. Terry's expectations of the role of the mother as distinct from the father would have been influenced by her own family experience, and demonstrated by her own parents as well as by her sister Kate and her husband. Terry's children had the experience of various father figures but had only distant, probably troubling, first-hand memories of their biological father. Both children were born just the other side of the mid-nineteenth century (in 1869 and 1872), when ideas about fathers and fatherhood dominated concerns about the family and its function in the social fabric. As Valerie Sanders explains,

'Fathering' is not the same as being a father in that a childless man can assume paternal responsibilities for children who are not his own, while a biological father remains a father even if he ignores his offspring, and plays no part in raising them.<sup>28</sup>

Terry may have tried to make some sense of her own unconventional family relationships. She was an avid reader of Dickens, whose fictional father characters varied but ideally assumed a strong and powerful role, while the families he depicted tended to be other than ideal. Sanders concludes: 'Ultimately Dickens's experience of fatherhood permeated his entire writing life. All his novels are about families, most of them fragmented by a parent's absence, or distorted by the father's heavy-handed presence.'<sup>29</sup> Edith Craig and Edward Gordon Craig had two step-fathers, Charles (Kelly) Wardell and James Carew. The latter married Terry in 1907 and was younger than both of his step-children. Close father figures included Henry Irving, Bram Stoker and Stephen Coleridge. Edward Gordon Craig's experience of his biological father was largely mediated at a distance through print.

The influence of father on son was exerted through more than the passing on of a name. J. Michael Walton's chapter considers the significance of Edward Gordon Craig's reprinting of many of his father's articles in *The Mask* (1908–29), beginning with a son's dream about his father. To what extent was this an act of revival, for Gordon Craig, a communing with the lost father rather than driven by an intellectual and aesthetic interest in the articles themselves? They present themselves as curiously displaced alongside *The Mask's* other items. Terry seems rarely to mention Godwin, but in one touching letter to her son she gives him information about his father's career with a view to making him proud of his father.<sup>30</sup>

In Chapter 8, Professor Richard Foulkes examines the influence which Lewis Carroll exerted on Terry in order to advance the career of Menella Quin. He situates this in the context of Carroll's befriending of young women with theatrical leanings. Terry's function as role model and mentor is evident from her private correspondence. She went to great lengths to support others and provide practical advice.

Edith Craig's place in theatre history should be more firmly fixed than it is.<sup>31</sup> Training alongside her mother at the Lyceum Theatre and on tour in the United Kingdom and United States, Craig learnt her skills as costumier and performer before finding her vocation as a director. Supported and inspired by the women's suffrage movement, she produced many plays associated with this and other political movements, including socialism and even vegetarianism. Her principal achievement was the founding of the Pioneer Players theatre society in 1911. This was London's forgotten art theatre.<sup>32</sup> A complex figure, Edith Craig has been overshadowed by her mother and her brother and also likely to have been marginalized in this period as a woman, a feminist and a lesbian. She received international acclaim for her productions in the interwar period. Her productions of Claudel were groundbreaking and align her, as Roberta Gandolfi shows in Chapter 9, with many innovative productions in Europe. Gandolfi analyses the productions, focusing especially on the interpretation of the physical aspects of performance, demonstrating the significance of Craig's production of Claudel's plays with the Pioneer Players at this time and their context in international theatre history. The association with Claudel, Catholicism and the female abject also situates Edith Craig's work in a lesbian aesthetic context.<sup>33</sup> In the era of the 'invert', it is hard to avoid a lesbian reading of Djuna Barnes in a nun's habit or of the female martyr figure as a role model for agency. Gandolfi's illuminating research on prompt books and reviews provides a fascinating analysis of the pace of Edith Craig's production of the last scene of *The Hostage*, with its suggestion of cruelty, excess and possibly deviance. It seems that in this production of Claudel's play, dramatic form and performance style, drawn from the developing expressionism in international art theatre, lent itself to the dramatization of a dissident female subjectivity. This provided some continuity with the Pioneer Players' earlier work.

Terry's influence extended unexpectedly to the art theatres of London in the interwar period. Terry danced into the life of Velona Pilcher very briefly in 1925 before she danced out of life itself. In Chapter 10, Charlotte Purkis examines how Pilcher's involvement with Edith Craig and her circle provided her with a supportive network in her activities in theatre. Edith Craig went to great lengths to ensure that her mother was remembered. In Chapter 11, 'Ellen Terry: Preserving the Relics and Creating the Brand', I outline the history of the National Trust's archive of more than 20,000 papers belonging to Terry and Edith Craig

at Smallhythe Place, Tenterden, Kent. This is one of the UK's most significant theatre archives, and is the result of active collection of 'Ellen Terry's relics' by her daughter after Terry's death and Terry's own selection of material for preservation during her lifetime. Some examples of Terry's marginalia demonstrate her conscious decision to record her opinions for posterity. She cultivated her own image in the press, responded imaginatively to her fans and, indeed, created the Ellen Terry brand at a time in her life when she was in financial difficulty. This essay provides new insights into the details of Terry's financial demise as they have become apparent from the newly catalogued archive. The AHRC Ellen Terry and Edith Craig Database project 2006–8 resulted in the online guide to this major archive. The final chapter in this volume highlights some of the significant features of the project, the development and design of the database and its web interface, as well as an enhanced descriptive summary of the archive.

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