

The Collected Letters of Ellen Terry

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The Pickering Masters

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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	John Hare (1844–1921), actor manager	Ada Rehan (née Crehan) (1869–1916), performer
Acton Bond (1861–1941), author	Sir John Martin-Harvey (1863–1944), performer and theatre manager	(Walford) Graham Robertson (1866–1948), artist
Bertha Bramley, friend	Lady Jeune, friend	Elizabeth Robins (1862–1952), performer and author
Austin Brereton, author	Boyd N Joll, MD	Elizabeth Rumball (née Bocking), companion
Audrey Campbell, friend	Henry Arthur Jones (1851–1929), dramatist	Clement Scott (1841–1904), drama critic
Mrs Casella, friend	Lady Elizabeth Lewis (1845–1931), friend	Sir Albert Seymour, friend
Olive Chaplin (née Terry), niece	Sir George Lewis (1833–1911), lawyer	George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), author
Pauline Chase (Mrs Drummond), performer	Dr Alexander Mackenzie, friend	Christopher St John (1871–1960), author
James Henry Chute (1808/10–1878), actor and theatre manager	Mrs Elizabeth Malleson (1828–1916), friend	Bram Stoker (1847–1912), author
Stephen Coleridge (1854–1936), barrister	Mabel Malleson, companion to Edith Craig	Florence Stoker (née Balcombe) (1859–1935), friend
John Paul Cooper (1869–1933), artist	Cyril Maude (1862–1951), performer	Tom Taylor (1817–1880), dramatist
Edith Craig (1869–1947), theatre director and costumier	Mortimer Menpes (1855–1938), artist	William Terriss (1847–1897), performer
Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966), artist and theatre designer	Lady Monckton, friend	George Terry, brother
Augustin Daly (1838–1899), author, director and theatre manager	Major Herbert Neve, Kent neighbour	Kate Terry (1844–1924), sister
Rev Charles Dodgson [aka Lewis Carroll] (1832–1898), author	Elsa Queen Palmer (1850–1894), friend	Marion Terry (1853–1930), sister
Herbert Duke, friend	Bernard Partridge (1861–1945), artist	G F Watts (1817–1904), artist, and Terry's first husband
Edith Evans (1888–1976), performer	Arthur Wing Pinero (1855–1934), dramatist	Ben Webster (1864–1947), performer
Joe Evans, friend	Lady Margaret Pirrie (died 1935), friend	Dame May Whitty (Webster) (1865–1948), performer
W E Gladstone (1809–1898), politician	Lady Georgina Pollock (died 1935), friend	Ernest George Harcourt Williams (1880–1957), performer and producer
H A Gwynne (1865–1950), journalist	Charles Reade (1814–1884), author and dramatist	William Winter (1836–1917), drama critic
Mary-Anne Hall, friend and artist	Rev Compton Reade, friend	

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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