

# Staging a Female Identity

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Representations of the Female Actor in Ellen Terry's  
*The Story of My Life* and Henry James's *The Tragic  
Muse*

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## Sammendrag

Denne oppgaven tar for seg hvordan skuespilleren Ellen Terry skapte en kvinnelig identitet i sitt arbeid, og analyserer hennes selvbiografi *The Story of My Life* (1908) komparativt med *The Tragic Muse* (1890), en roman av Henry James. Ved å lese teaterkritikk og analysere hvordan Ellen Terry bruker de samme språklige virkemidlene som kritikerne sine for å gjenskape et bilde av seg selv som naturlig kvinnelig i selvbiografien kommer hennes egen konstruksjon av sin identitet frem. Terry sin selvstendighet i presentasjonen av seg selv på scenen blir tilsynelatende undergravd av mannlige fortolkere som gjenskriver det de ser til et større publikum. En av disse er Henry James, som bruker *The Tragic Muse* til å fremstille sin versjon av en kvinnelig skuespiller. Sammenligningen mellom Ellen Terry sin skrevne konstruksjon av sin identitet som kvinne heller enn skuespiller, og James sin figur Miriam Rooth som blir skrevet for å fungere utelukkende som skuespiller, viderefører uenigheten mellom de to forfatterne om hvordan en skuespiller bør skape sin rolle. De uklare skillelinjene mellom skuespiller, rolle, forfatter, figur, kunstner og modell blir gjenskapet i de forskjellige mediene Terry representerer seg selv, og blir representert, gjennom.



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## Chapter 1: Introducing Construction of Identity on the Stage

This thesis investigates the various enactments of Ellen Terry's female identity. Who was she primarily, woman or actor? Why was this question so important to her audience? How was she able to construct herself as much as the role she was to play when performing on the stage? How does what her critics saw correspond to how she constructs herself in her autobiography? Is her own, and her reviewers', written creation of her identity discernible in visual representation of her? How do the different media of painting, photography, writing and acting onstage compare in their presentation of Ellen Terry's public persona? By positing these central questions against parts of Henry James's theatre criticism to understand his view of Ellen Terry as well as the British stage in general, I also examine James's understanding of how identity influences acting. How does James stage his female actor in his novel *The Tragic Muse* (1890)? Is his portrayal of a female actor similar to how Terry constructs herself? If not, why are they so divergent?

Beginning to answer some of these questions requires me to detail elements of both authors' lives, and to explain the different reasons behind Henry James's involvement with the theatrical world of London. Relocating permanently to England in 1877 he arrived during a time when the theatres were becoming respectable and were deemed suitable entertainment for the middle and upper classes. During Ellen Terry's life as a professional actor from 1856 onwards, the theatres were becoming more reputable. This change was in no small degree due to the efforts of the theatre-managers who became more prominent during this time, and George Rowell details the "return of polite Society to the playhouse" as "a gradual process, stretching over a quarter of a century" (92) in his book *The Victorian Theatre*. This process was "encouraged by each manager in his own way" (ibid) and was headed by the Keans during their management of The Princess's Theatre during the 1850s. The Bancrofts, a

manager-couple where the wife, the previous actor Marie Wilton, had bought a theatre and gone in for management on her own before getting married to Squire Bancroft, are also interesting as their managerial relationship was built upon the work of the woman. Mrs Bancroft's decision to make her theatre suitable for women, and to focus on certain, drawing-room types of plays, was soon followed by other notable managers of the day who made changes in inventory and repertory to suit an audience of finer taste. Rowell mentions Gilbert at the Savoy Theatre, Wyndham at the Criterion, Hare at the Court and finally, Irving at the Lyceum Theatre (93). Henry Irving, who was to be the first actor to have the honour of being knighted in 1895 for his outstanding contributions to the English stage and the cultural life of the nation, was the actor-manager of the Lyceum Theatre for more than twenty years, from 1878 to 1899, where he was celebrated along with his leading lady Ellen Terry.

Conversely, James found the repertory to be dated and more concerned with teaching behaviour and good morals to the audience than representing true art and human life. He disliked the ornamental style and considered the productions he saw in London to be lacking in artistic quality. He was an eager critic who was greatly involved in the artistic life in London and with much expertise and experience from Paris, but he also struggled with what he perceived as the poor taste of the British public, the poor quality of acting, and the theatre's commercial focus on profits rather than on artistic value. In the column "The London Theatres", which appeared in *The Galaxy* in May of 1877, he wrote that "he would be wise who should be able to indicate the ideal, artistic and intellectual, of the English drama of today" (*The Scenic Art*, 94) and stated that "the theatre in England is a social luxury" (100) rather than, as in Paris, "an artistic necessity" (ibid). In the article he blames this on what he calls the typical English nature, and laments the fact that the public is "intellectually much less appreciative" (101) than a Parisian audience. This early critique of the London theatres

marked the start of his highly dedicated involvement with the stage in England and its limitations and shortcomings, which was to last for decades.

The two books I have chosen are dissimilar in more than their approach to the art of acting. Ellen Terry's *The Story of My Life* (1908) is an autobiography, written towards the end of a long career as a successful actor. Terry was born into a theatrical family and was trained for the stage from early on. She never received formal education in other areas, but remained active within the theatre for most of her life. She had help in the writing of her autobiography by Christopher St. John, her daughter's partner. St. John, who lived with Terry and her daughter Edith Craig at Smallhythe, was a translator and a writer, and St. John assisted Terry in gathering materials and in the process of writing. *The Story of My Life* is, as an autobiography necessarily must be, a construction of Terry's identity. This written formation of Terry's self must be read in light of her experience of performing a public persona in the theatre, and how her treatment of roles and performance upon the stage is reflected in the book.

*The Tragic Muse*, on the other hand, is a novel by an author who was experienced in portraying human nature in literature. The book was published during a time of change in James's authorship, as his interest in the theatre resulted in his decision to give up writing novels and dedicate his time to being a playwright. *The Tragic Muse* is James's most theatrical novel, both in terms of style of writing and in its subject matter. In comparing how James constructs his figure of a woman actor in his novel to Terry's construction of her own female identity displayed on the stage and in her autobiography, I am examining James's reaction to, and dialogue with, the actor's performance of self. This thesis links the two works together based on how the key issue of constructing an actor's female identity is handled by James and Terry. I read the character of the actor in both books as a part of the process of the authors' engagement with the English stage, though the two authors construct their figures

according to widely separate ideals and different motives. Paul de Man's words in his examination of autobiographies in the article "Autobiography as De-facement" become relevant here, as he states that an autobiography is "not a genre or a mode, but a figure of reading or of understanding that occurs, to some degree, in all texts" (921). Paul de Man argues for understanding autobiographies not as true products of lived life, but rather as producing that life in their portraiture of it. Terry's autobiography is as much a fictional construction as James's novel. In de Man's reading "any book with a readable title-page is, to some extent, autobiographical" (922) in its negotiation between author and reader and the alignment between them as the reader experiences the narrative. My reasoning behind comparing the figures of Miriam Rooth and Ellen Terry in the two books is the claim that they both realise the authors' attempts to justify their own approach to acting. Analysing them in relation to each other and the environment they were written in sheds light on the different perceptions of identity in acting, and is helpful in understanding the contrasts they offer.

When discussing women who worked as actors in the late nineteenth century there are some terms that must be clarified. First and foremost is my usage of the terms female actor or woman actor rather than the term 'actress'. The primary reason for this is the history of the word and the connotations that are still attached to it. Many female actors working today prefer not to be called 'actresses' and the *Oxford English Dictionary* states that though "actress remains in general use, actor is increasingly preferred for performers of both sexes as a gender-neutral term" under definitions of the term 'actress' (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'actress'). Gilli Bush-Baily illuminates some of the views of women who were actors in her essay on the first British female actors in *The Cambridge Companion to the Actress*:

From the moment the first British professional actress appeared on the London stage in 1661 she became an object of fascination. She was both admired and derided, desired and vilified. The very public sphere in which her craft was practiced quickly

lead to parallels with prostitution in a patriarchal society employing the binaries of private/public, virgin/whore as constructs of femininity (15).

Bush-Baily here points to the public and the visual nature of performing as an actor and to a prevalent view during the last part of the nineteenth century; that women belonged in the domestic sphere. In this socially constructed binary women who displayed themselves in front of crowds for payment were fascinating in their ability to cross these categories and to embody both sides, the domestic as well as the public. Furthermore, the parallels with prostitution that Bush-Baily talks about become evident also when looking at the history of the word 'actress' in the *Oxford English Dictionary*. The *OED*'s definition of the word 'actress' states that it can be "1. A woman who performs an action; a female doer or actor" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'actress'). The first sources with this usage of the word are shown from as far back as 1586, and up to as recent a point as 1923. This meaning of the word, however, is stated to be rare and not in common usage. 'Actress' can also be either "2 a. A woman who acts a part on stage or (in later use) in a film, on television, etc.; a female dramatic performer. Occas. in figurative context. Also in extended use: a woman skilled in dissimulation", or "2 b. as the actress said to the bishop (also as the bishop said to the actress): a catchphrase mischievously implying a sexual innuendo in a preceding innocent remark" (*Oxford English Dictionary*, 'actress'). The final definition, 2 b, was noted for the first time in English as recently as in 1930, and is still used for its sexual implications.

According to the *OED* the word 'actress' being used to denote "a female actor or doer" has occurred in writing since 1586, and that was clearly the original meaning of the word when it first came into existence. However, 'actress' soon came to stand also for a "woman who acts a part on stage", the first written account of this usage of the word being in 1608, before it was even legal for women to act in England. Definition 2 b. illustrates the reasoning behind the decision not to use the term 'actress' in this thesis, but to write female performer,

or actor, instead. Usage of the word in “a catchphrase mischievously implying a sexual innuendo in a preceding innocent remark” shows how the connotations from the early dichotomies between prostitution and domesticity that Bush-Baily writes of have lingered. As this thesis is concerned with examining how Terry succeeded in becoming respectable through her acting, using such a loaded term is both unnecessary and inhibiting to my discussion.

Another debateable concept I engage with is the notion of femaleness and the construction of a female identity. In using this terminology I am aware that to most readers it implies a sense of biological determinism, gender essentialism and certain physical traits according to modern feminist theories. Toril Moi writes in “Feminist, Female, Feminine” that among “many feminists it has long been established usage to make ‘feminine’ (and ‘masculine’) represent social constructs (patterns of sexuality and behaviour imposed by cultural and social norms), and to reserve ‘female’ and ‘male’ for purely biological aspects of sexual difference” (108). However, this separation between gender and sex, and the terminology used to denote this, is a product of modern theoretical practice. Although I am writing in a period which must acknowledge these theories, I am writing of a period in which they were not used, and the writings I have chosen for analysis do not relate to the feminist criticism of today. The texts in my thesis were written decades before academic feminism as it is understood now became a topic, and the terms that are used in these texts had a different meaning for those who read them around the turn from the nineteenth century to the twentieth than they do for readers in the twenty-first century with a newer theoretical background. For example, the next chapter will examine Henry James’s discussion of Ellen Terry in the article titled “The London Theatres” published in *Scribner’s Monthly* in 1880, where he stated that the “feminine side, in all the London theatres, is regrettably weak” (*The Scenic Art*, 142). When reading this it must be highlighted that in his writing James was not referring to

‘feminine’ as a social and cultural construct, but used the expression as a natural reference to women.

This causes some confusion with regards to terminology. I do not wish to use the word ‘feminine’ as it would be unnecessarily complicating. There would then be two different usages of the same term in this thesis; the ‘feminine’, meaning simply womanly, that Henry James and Ellen Terry engaged with during the end of the nineteenth century, and the ‘feminine’ that now has widely different connotations and readings, carrying with it a set of theoretical expectations and definitions. When writing of the work that Ellen Terry was doing throughout her stage career and in her autobiography, applying the word ‘feminine’ to her identity construction is wrong in my reading of it. I argue that Terry performs her identity in relation to what the late Victorians understood to be typical of women, and in correspondence with how, during this period, gender was inextricably tied to sex. In applying the word ‘feminine’ to the construction of a public self that Terry does, I feel I limit my own understanding of the complexity of the process, which involved more than portraying certain characteristics which are mistakenly assumed to belong only to women. Rather, Terry’s public persona is built upon her being a woman in an all-encompassing sense, and this serves several functions in Victorian society; such as confirming her respectability, confirming the respectability of the theatre and positioning her within the middle class, as the requirements and views of women varied within the different classes. When analysing writing produced in a time and society as divided by class as by gender, this distinction is also important. Terry’s performance of self is equally directed towards establishing herself as belonging to the middle class as it is towards being a woman, since being a middle class woman was extremely far from being a working class one. Using ‘feminine’, a term often politicized by feminists in relation to all women regardless of class or of specific periods of time, was therefore not right for this thesis.

In an attempt to choose a more neutral word, and to avoid the theoretical baggage that comes with applying ‘feminine’ when I am not making use of feminist criticism in this thesis, I have settled for the term female. While this is not at all ideal, and the word female carries its own unintended connotations, it turned out to be the least difficult term to use. The more unifying concept of womanhood, while perhaps more neutral and appropriate for what I am trying to discuss, is long and heavy, and not always applicable when I am attempting to describe an active process of constructing identity. Femaleness and female identity, though by no means uncomplicated or completely representative, remain the terms I find most suitable for my purpose. The definition of the word female as it is used now, and according to recent feminist discourse, is summed up by Toril Moi as purely a biological indicator of sexual difference from males (108). I am aware that in using female it would seem that I am closing my eyes to the last few decades of important feminist research and critical writing. It could be argued that it is a poorer choice than ‘feminine’, but as neither of the terms carried the same implication to the late Victorians as they do today, and as neither fully covers what I am trying to show in this thesis; namely how Terry constructs her identity as a typical English middle class woman of the period, I have opted for femaleness. The reasoning behind this choice is that while it does come with some theoretical implications that I do not aim for it is not a word used in the texts I am analysing and I will therefore be able to use the word for my own specific reasons without having to adapt to how it is used in the earlier material. In using ‘female’ I am not ignoring recent feminist work, but attempting to adapt the word for my purposes. This thesis recognises, but will not engage with, feminist theories as it is more concerned with reading the texts within their own context.

In illustrating my reasoning behind using female identity and femaleness, and showing how these terms are used in this thesis to denote a construction of a publically displayed identity relating to late Victorian society’s understanding of women, social class and acting, I



also set the scene for explaining another point of departure from feminist theory. Judith Butler's *Gender Trouble* (1990) has made a great impact on a variety of feminist fields, perhaps most importantly on queer theory and postmodern feminism. Her writing on performance of gender, which she calls performativity, could have been used as an analytical tool on both James's and Terry's writing on acting and their portrayals of the female actor. Doing so would have made this a completely different thesis, however, as I do not read these texts as expressions of how gender was performed as the equivalent of sex, and do not intend to dismantle or rely heavily on these categories. Butler writes of gender performativity as a universal phenomenon when stating that:

acts, gestures, and desire produce the effect of an internal core or substance, but produce this *on the surface* of the body, though the play of signifying absences that suggest, but never reveal, the organizing principle of identity as a cause. Such acts, gestures, enactments, generally constructed, are *performative* in the sense that the essence or identity that they otherwise purport to express are *fabrications* manufactured and sustained through corporeal signs and other discursive means (185-186).

While Butler's mission is to prove that society will always force us into performing gender as our identity by stating that the "gendered body is performative" (186), I am using my thesis to show something more specific. This thesis investigates how Henry James and Ellen Terry construct the notion of a female actor's identity in their works, and how this relates to English theatre during the late nineteenth century. In doing this I am examining how construction of identity takes place specifically through acting of roles, and the authors' affiliation to different theatrical traditions. While I could have attempted to use Butler's theoretical work on how gender is performed as identity to support my arguments, doing so would have hindered rather than helped me, as I am not looking at how acts of performativity create the idea of gender

and “without those acts, there would be no gender at all” (Butler, 190). This thesis looks at professional acting only, the performance that takes place on a stage before an audience, and the particular procedure of constructing a self for display through acting. Performance, acting and identity construction in relation to precisely the late nineteenth century British society will inherently diverge from Butler’s notions of performativity, gendered acts and gendered identity. They are two different and unrelated processes to me, and forcing them together into an attempt at cohesion would weaken my argument rather than strengthen it. My preference for reading *The Story of My Life* and *The Tragic Muse* on their own terms and within the particular period and society that produced them has lead me to contextualise my analysis of the two works instead of making use of more recent theories.

Highlighting the fact that *The Tragic Muse* is perhaps Henry James’s most neglected novel is a part of this contextualisation. Though James’s authorship has received a vast amount of critical attention and most of his work has been read and interpreted in a wide variety of theories and methods, *The Tragic Muse* is rarely written of, and largely forgotten. The novel met with mostly negative reviews when it was first published in 1890 (Gard 193-221). Many articles in newspapers expressed disinterest, and an unsigned review published in the *Graphic* in August of 1890 named the novel “the very dreariest production which has issued even from the pen of Mr. Henry James” (Gard, 200). The critical neglect and general lack of interest in *The Tragic Muse* has persisted, and today the novel is still fairly unknown and little read. Due to the subject of the book, which engages with the debate of art versus the world, the novel tends to be used mostly by writers who see Henry James as an author in relation to the Aesthetic movement, such as in *Professions of Taste* by Jonathan Freedman, who ties James to British aestheticism and a commodity culture. Leon Edel, James’s biographer, has also done much work on what he terms James’s theatrical phase, and in this he has brought forth the importance of *The Tragic Muse* as a factor contributing to James’s

decision to write plays. Edel argues for understanding the later phase of James's authorship as a product of his experiences with the London theatres and his failure to achieve success as a playwright. In 1895 the premiere of his play *Guy Domville* turned out to be a failure on James's part, and the audience hissed him off the stage after the performance. His inability to conquer the London theatres affected James deeply, as he had desired to commit to "the art of representation" (Edel, 221) on the stage rather than in novel form. *The Tragic Muse* marks the beginning of this project, and shows ample evidence of James's contradictory emotions regarding acting and the theatrical world.

Although Ellen Terry's work in her autobiography is interesting I am especially concerned with how her performance as an author reflects the work she did as an actor on the stage. Is it possible to completely separate the two functions that Terry has in this thesis; that of an actor and that of an author? This question brings up other issues in need of clarification. Terry plays several parts within this thesis, and she is described in the written material that I use, in addition to describing herself in her autobiography, as acting several parts during her stage career. For simplicity's sake I have decided to use the terms 'role' or 'part' to denote a written construction in a play, acted on a stage before spectators. When discussing literary constructions within a book I will use either the word 'figure' or 'character'. The term 'character' will not be used in any other sense in this thesis, due to the imprecision of the word. 'Character' can, after all, be used in a sense that means constructions in a book, parts in a play and someone's personality or identity. When discussing Terry's identity construction as a woman I make use of the term 'public persona' as a synonym for 'constructed identity', and reserve all usage of the word 'character' to denote only figures in books.

Ellen Terry, and her autobiography, was chosen for this thesis for several reasons. Firstly, because she was a famous performer of Shakespearean roles precisely during the period that James wrote *The Tragic Muse* and most of his critical essays on London's theatres.

James and Terry were contemporaries in England's theatrical world during the latter half of the nineteenth century, and they were committed to many of the same cultural debates. The two knew each other, but were not particularly fond of each other, as James in his writings frequently mentioned his preference for his close friend, the actor Fanny Kemble, over Terry, whom he often criticised. Secondly, Terry was a good choice for my analysis due to the fact that she had gone to the extra length of writing her own autobiography. This in itself turned out to be an intriguing fact, which lead me further into a realm of unanswerable questions. Why did Ellen Terry feel the need to write an autobiography when numerous other female actors who were as famous and important during the same period of time did not feel that it was necessary? Was it due to the changing times for women with the rising suffragette movement, the changing times of the theatre, or unrelated to these factors? Why choose, and whose choice was it, to name the autobiography the story of her life? The title seemingly confirms the fictional nature of Terry's construction of self, and the autobiography as a continuation of her performance. Who chose the title? While these questions are impossible to answer, it is helpful to keep them in mind when reading Terry's text.

## Chapter 2: Theatrical Performance of Female Identity

This first chapter of analysis will develop the notion of identity construction in acting by investigating the female actor Ellen Terry's life and career. Here I will analyse how Terry constructed a public identity when performing on the stage as a means to remain socially acceptable, and this will be seen in relation to a debate in the theatrical world which centred on the importance of sensibility, or lack thereof, in acting. This discussion, to which many critics contributed, can be tied to, but was not solely a result of, Walter Pollock's 1883 translation of the French philosopher Denis Diderot's work *The Paradox of Acting*. I enter this debate from the point of Ellen Terry and Henry Irving's performances at the Lyceum, and will use Diderot's concepts of Nature and Art in relation to how Terry stated that she conceived of, and acted, roles. The analysis of Terry's construction of a female identity must also be tied to the reactions of her reviewers. Particularly relevant are two of the preeminent theatre critics, Henry James and George Bernard Shaw, and their perceptions of drama, art, and what Terry performed upon the stage.

During the late nineteenth century, as a result of the increasingly respectable standing of the theatre, the profession of acting became more popular both for women and for men of the middle classes. The famous actor Mrs Kendal stated in 1885 that "the most remarkable change that has come over the condition of the Drama is the fact that there is at last a recognized social position for the professional player" (Jackson, 131). When considering the great numbers of young middle class people who flocked to the theatres hoping to achieve success and fame, she expressed concern of the stage being "over-stocked" (ibid). This rising respectability and popularity of the stage was to a great extent aided by the patronage of nobility and royalty, which confirmed the London theatres as suitable entertainment. The Lyceum, which was frequented by heads of state, as well as royalty, was a cultural and artistic

pinnacle, and Rowell writes in *Queen Victoria Goes to the Theatre* that “Irving in particular was regularly supported by the royal couple, even before he became manager as well as star of the Lyceum” (96). Russell Jackson writes in *Victorian Theatre* that the “receptions given by Irving at the Beefsteak Club and on the stage of the Lyceum were part of a general acceptance of successful actors and actresses in society as guests rather than entertainers” (80). Terry herself writes in her autobiography of dinners and social events at the Beefsteak Room as a sort of national institution, attended by foreign as well as English artists, politicians, heads of state and nobility (369). The Lyceum’s repertory was Shakespeare along with well-known poets and playwrights of the day. The costumes and sets were of extremely elaborate design, but the theatre was popular first and foremost due to the attraction of the personalities of its two lead players; Terry and Irving.

Recruiting Ellen Terry as his stage partner was “one of Irving’s shrewdest moves, and one that did much to ensure the continuing success of the Lyceum” writes Irving’s biographer Jeffrey Richards (37). Ellen Terry was loved by her audience and widely held to be a model of womanliness and charm. During the relevant timespan, that between the 1870s and the early 1900s, negative stereotyping of female actors was still common, regardless of the elevated status of the grander theatres. Victorian middle class morality was strict and while the view of the profession of acting was changing with the middle classes taking to the stage, the notion of female actors as indecent was a recurring stereotype often featured in caricatures. It is therefore worth noting the importance of Ellen Terry’s private life, which certainly was not spotless, and to question why she was seen as embodying the positive traits of women in her time. As a young actor of sixteen she married the celebrated painter George Frederic Watts, who was almost thrice her age, but they separated less than a year later. After this she returned to the stage, only to leave it again a few years later to live with the architect Edward Godwin, with whom she had two children while still being legally married to Watts.

She would marry again twice during her career, both times to fellow actors, but would never again leave her profession, which enabled her to provide for herself and her children.

However, despite privately living her life in a manner which to the public would confirm all their negative associations of the female actor, her contemporaries saw her as “a force of womanly charm and radiant beauty” (Stoker, 207).

Terry kept her personal life very private, working to gloss over unsuitable parts of her story and performing a public persona as her private identity in a manner which would confirm her as a genuinely domestic woman, and thus someone respectable. Theatrical reviews of Ellen Terry acting on the stage are almost unanimous in their praise. Three words are used especially often by those who wrote about her, and those are ‘charming’, ‘youthful’ and ‘natural’. A *Times* article on March 25<sup>th</sup> in 1863 wrote of Terry’s early acting of the role Gertrude in the originally French play *The Little Treasure* that there was “nothing conventional or affected in her performance” and that “the young girl of buoyant spirits, kindly heart, impulsive emotions” was presented “in her natural shape, free and uncontrolled” (Pascoe, 334). An examination of collected theatrical reviews of Ellen Terry reveals the repeated usage of similar vocabulary. An article in *The Daily Telegraph* published March 2<sup>nd</sup> 1874 praises Terry’s acting of the role Philippa in Charles Reade’s play *The Wandering Heir*, saying that “the undiminished brightness and buoyancy of her style” brought out “how much she retains of girlish modesty and simplicity” (ibid). Of her portrayal of Clara Douglas in *Money* an article on June 5<sup>th</sup> in 1875 in *Athenaeum* said that “Miss Terry has the rare gift of identifying herself with the personage she presents” (Pascoe, 335). Many reviewers limited the attraction of her acting entirely to her believable representation of youth and beauty, as when William Archer wrote of her Rosamund in *Becket* that her performance was “graceful, tender and altogether charming” (53) in *The Theatrical ‘World’ for 1893*. Terry enhanced these traits in her performances, thus assuring her spectators that she was merely displaying

herself. It was Terry's personality that induced the business manager of the Lyceum and personal assistant to Henry Irving, Bram Stoker, to write that in her "womanhood is paramount. She has to the full in her nature whatever quality it is that corresponds to what we call "virility" in a man" (202). Giving the impression that she was a modest woman rather than a driven and ambitious actor was possible if she was seen by her audience as only being herself on the stage. Showing herself as a true woman was therefore the first step in constructing a public persona which would remove her from the negative associations of indecency in the acting profession.

Terry achieved cohesive unification between performances on the stage and what her audience saw as her private self by acting in a certain style and for a specific reason. The American critic William Winter wrote of Terry in 1888 when elaborating upon the role of Portia in *The Merchant of Venice* and how that particular role's ideal could not "be made actual by a commonplace person", that "Ellen Terry had only to be herself in order to make it real" (219). The naturalness she was continually praised for served to underline the impression that she was in fact not acting at all, but to a great extent representing herself to her spectators. The audiences' view of the parts Terry played as versions of her own personality was furthered by Terry herself.

Utilising the roles she played by making the traits of the roles into her own was made possible due to the Victorian preoccupation with what Stuart Sillars calls "excising the role" (188-191) from the whole of the play in his book *Shakespeare, Time and the Victorians*. This excision, removing the roles from their context within the written play and writing about them as if they were real, illustrating them on their own and in imagined scenarios not actually described in the plays, was common. Especially Shakespearean roles were extensively used outside of the plays they originated in and were popularly used to teach moral values. Sillars writes about the trend of excising the roles that the "movement is seen most directly in the



exploration of what is essentially a Victorian invention, the phenomenon of Shakespeare's heroines" (188). Both Mary Cowden Clarke's *The Girlhood of Shakespeare's Heroines* from 1851, where the author details the childhood of the Shakespearean roles in an attempt to clarify and explain their actions later on, and Mrs Jameson's *The Characteristics of Women: Moral, Poetical and Historical*, first published in 1832, are telling examples of this phenomenon. In *Characteristics of Women*, which later changed its title to *Shakespeare's Heroines*, Anna Jameson has divided Shakespeare's female roles into the groupings of: Characters of Intellect, Characters of Passion and Imagination, Characters of the Affections and the Historical Characters. The book offers analysis of the different characters, as well as illustrations making them well known and firmly established figures carrying traits and characteristics outside of the bounds of the written play. The increasing interest in the roles in Shakespeare's plays as independent figures assigned individual meaning ensured the book continuous reprints throughout the nineteenth century.

In the introductory dialogue in *Characteristics of Women* the two characters Alda and Medon are talking about women when Alda makes the statement that captures the essence of the book and of the Victorian obsession with the classification and excision of Shakespearean roles: "We hear Shakespeare's men and women discussed, praised and dispraised, liked, disliked, as real human beings; and in forming our opinions of them, we are influenced by our own characters, habits of thought, prejudices, feelings, impulses, just as we are influenced with regard to our acquaintances and associates (13-14). This articulation, by one figure in a book on other figures in plays, makes clear the strength of the Victorian focus on the relevance of Shakespeare's characters outside the limits of the plays they were written in. Terry used Mrs Jameson's book in her work on preparing roles and she also made use of the book's concept of the role having an independent spirit in her work. In Terry's autobiography there is much evidence of the influence of the concept of the Shakespearean roles as

independent figures with important qualities relevant for society. By writing of the roles she played as real, stating that they had an effect upon her and that they became as part of her, she contributed to the Victorian view of the female Shakespearean roles as morally significant in addition to using the familiar traits and accepted characteristics of the role to construct her public identity when acting.

The role of Ophelia is a suitable example of how Terry adopted the traits of the excised role. *Hamlet* was the first play she was to appear in as Irving's new leading lady at the Lyceum, and Terry details her conception of Ophelia in 1877, writing that she felt "Ophelia only *pervades* the scenes in which she is concerned until the mad scene" (164). She talks of how she had "been told that Ophelia has "nothing to do" at first", and how, when Terry herself took on the part, she became Ophelia and "found so much to do! Little bits of business which, slight in themselves contributed to a definite result" (164). Terry thus makes the role of Ophelia her own, using her portrayal of the role to make visible her constructed identity. She underlines the connection between herself and Ophelia by writing more of how she attempted to understand the part by visiting "the madhouse to study wits astray" (165). Once there, however, she found "no beauty, no nature, no pity" (ibid) in any of the residents and she therefore became convinced that her own feeling in the part was what would give it life. She states that "the actor must imagine first and observe afterwards" and insists further that the "idea must come first" (ibid). By insisting that her acting of the role is based primarily upon her own imagination and instincts she is able to use her portrayal of Ophelia as a portrayal of Ellen Terry, and the traits she was praised for representing so well in the part becomes praise of the traits the spectators believe to belong to the private Terry.

Ellen Terry's early enactment of Ophelia was generally acknowledged to be a great success. *Punch* wrote on the 11<sup>th</sup> of January 1879 that it "was as consummate, as its conception was subtle and complete. It was an ideally beautiful presentment jarring in no

point of look, movement or speech with the ideal called up by Shakespeare's exquisite creation" (10). Terry was especially credited for putting "entirely fresh significance" (ibid) into the part of Ophelia by the author of the article, who also eagerly added that if anything more "exquisitely wrought out has been seen on the English stage in this generation, it has not been within *Punch's* memory" (ibid). The audience perceived that when they fell for Ophelia on the stage they were falling for Terry herself, who was merely in the guise of Ophelia. The spectators could believe that what they really saw was Terry, and that Ellen Terry was so alike the role of Ophelia that she was simply being herself. In other words, she successfully acted that she was not acting. *The Saturday Review* confirms this view of Terry's acting. On May 24<sup>th</sup> in 1879 an article stated that "Miss Terry's performance begins by striking a note of nature, and is natural and complete throughout" (Pascoe, 338).

The press and the public applauded the Terry-as-Ophelia that was considered to embody innocence, purity and girlishness, while to a large extent disregarding the less attractive fact that Ophelia goes mad in the play, and sings crude songs before drowning herself. Terry's acting enabled them to overlook this without much notice, as indeed her constructed public persona enabled that same press and public to overlook her private life without taking note of its irregularities. By performing the role specifically with embellishment only on the prettier aspects of Ophelia, by so believably acting them to perfection with all focus on her innocence and youth, Terry was able to step delicately over the aspects of the role that were not appealing. This accomplishment was something the enthusiastic writer in *Punch* found especially agreeable, saying that with more practice "her mad scenes will, no doubt, be as pathetically if not as passionately beautiful as her scene of heart-break" (10), underscoring Terry's ability to convincingly give life to beauty. In publicly promoting her acting to be built completely upon her own emotions she also transferred these

processes onto her own private life off the stage. This made her portrayal of roles believable and enabled her to confirm to her audience that she was indeed just playing herself.

When reading critics' reviews of her, it is clear that Terry achieved an effect of cohesion between herself and the role, and that most of her critics fell for the charm of her female identity as it appeared to them on the stage. William Winter writes that when Terry "embodied *Portia* the observer saw a woman of fine mind as well as of enchanting beauty; an imperial woman, yet one essentially feminine, possessing a deep heart and a passionate temperament" (219), and in fact *Portia* from *The Merchant of Venice* was one of the roles which Terry was to make her greatest impact in. "There is no reason to suppose that we shall ever again see *Portia* so truly and entirely incarnated as she was by that great actress" (221-222), Winter states, showing his perception of *Portia* as a piece of Terry herself. The amount of success Terry experienced for her version of the part can perhaps best be expressed in her own words: "never until I appeared as *Portia* at the Prince of Wales's had I experienced that awe-struck feeling which comes, I suppose, to no actress more than once in a lifetime – the feeling of the conqueror" (Terry, 116). The role of *Portia* was associated with Terry herself and with her identity in the part, and imbued with the constructed persona of Ellen Terry. Her success as *Portia*, as with many other roles, relied on her display of self.

Ellen Terry had good reason to promote herself as wholly an emotional actor, one who identified with the role she played. Her and Irving's success at the Lyceum Theatre was to a great extent due to their magnetic personalities and how these shone through in their acting. Therefore Irving's position in an ongoing debate is worth considering, as he attempted to remove the Lyceum from Diderot's notion of the fallacy of sensibility. In 1883 Walter Pollock's translation of *The Paradox of Acting* became available in England and rekindled the debate of whether or not the actor should truly feel the emotion he or she was expressing for the audience, or whether the greater effect came from the ability to mimic emotion without

actually feeling it. Diderot argued for the latter when discussing what makes an actor an actor of genius, while Irving in his preface to the edition of the English translation argued for the former. Irving also addresses Diderot's usage of the concepts of Nature and Art, and shows how the relation between them differs according to the two theatrical traditions of England and France. Nature entails the elements of the human nature, sensibility, reliance on the senses and display of uncontrolled emotions, which Diderot thought of as unsuitable when writing for the classical French stage and of French comedy. Art, on the other hand, is based upon the purely artificial and intellectual and is therefore better than Nature. Irving, in his preface, reconciles the two concepts, which to Diderot needed to be separated. It is also worth noting that the title of Diderot's work neatly brings out the difficulty of discussing these issues. The paradox involves that an actor is, at least to an extent, always dissimulating, always pretending. That is the nature of his or her profession. Acting is not being natural; it is being something else but making it seem natural to the audience. The illusion, both sides of the debate agree, needs to be present, but they disagree on how it is to be represented, and in how they prefer to see the actor doing it.

Irving and Terry's performances were fundamentally different from Diderot's ideal of "penetration and no sensibility" (7) and they both profited by the audiences' understanding of them as acting from their nature. Operating within a completely different stage tradition than the one Diderot wrote of, they each show the impossibility of forcing the French theatrical tradition upon the English stages of Shakespeare. Terry and Irving both worked within conditions that were incomparable to the French theatre Diderot wrote of, and so both rejected his approach to acting. Terry can be read as disagreeing with Diderot's principles in her autobiography, while Irving dealt with the matter directly, writing a dissenting preface to the new publication of Diderot's work.

In his preface Irving argues for why Diderot is wrong and makes his and Terry's position stronger. Affirming that "the actor who combines the electric force of a strong personality with a mastery of the resources of his art, must have a greater power over his audiences than the passionless actor who gives a most artistic simulation of the emotions he never experiences" (xvii) Irving justifies and confirms the value of his own style of acting. Though both Terry and Irving had years of rigorous training and work on formal technique in acting behind them, their fame rested on the appeal of their personalities and how they used their personal qualities when playing a role. Their audiences were loyal to their distinctive and highly recognisable style when performing. Additionally, they wished to dismiss Diderot's thoughts of actors as "cold; proud" and "self-interested" (63), and the implication of manipulation which Diderot suggested actors used. In Irving's defence of the actors who rely on sensibility rather than external imitation of emotion he states that actors did, and should, truly feel the emotions they were portraying. Irving directly contradicts Diderot's constructions of Art and Nature as completely separate and irreconcilable; Art being artificial and therefore free of all sensibility, while Nature was flawed because it resided within the emotional mind of the actor. In his preface Irving shows that Nature influences Art and that rather than impede, it can be both creative and helpful for the actor who has the skill to utilise these emotions. In bringing the two concepts together Irving is also positioning himself as specifically within a British theatrical tradition.

Irving engages publicly in the debate of the paradox Diderot posed; that the less the actors themselves feel the more effective they are in moving the audience to tears or laughter. Irving proposes a solution by providing several examples that show how the opposite is true. The more the actor is able to draw upon his or her own emotions and experiences, the more it benefits the performance and becomes more credible. Both Irving and Terry use the issue of

crying on the stage as an example of how genuine feeling is beneficial to acting. Irving concludes his preface with the words:

It is often said that actors should not shed tears, that real tears are bad art. This is not so. If tears be produced at the actor's will and under his control, they are true art; and happy is the actor who numbers them amongst his gifts. The exaltation of sensibility in art may be difficult to define, but it is none the less real to all who have felt its power (xix-xx).

The tears, though real, should still be under the actor's control. The importance of technique is always present, and the actor is, after all, always acting. To Irving, however, this does not mean that genuine emotion lessened the value of the performance; rather it is the other way around. Art is not elevated above Nature, instead Nature offers a means to attain Art. Irving argues for experiencing true emotions and utilising them, relying on instincts and personal nature. Terry goes further than this in her autobiography, where she paints herself and Henry Irving as emotionalists to such a degree that they usually suffered when partaking in the feelings of the role they played. Their acting was rewarding and painful, for, as she writes when describing Irving, "the actor who impersonates, feels, and lives such anguish or passion or tempestuous grief, does for the moment in imagination nearly die" (220).

Terry is able to show how Diderot's statement that the actor gives all emotion over to the audience and is able to stir the audience without feeling anything other than the physical exertion is incorrect when related to the two leading actors at the Lyceum Theatre. In this way she ensures that viewers of her are still seeing what she does upon the stage as truth; she is not dissimulating, she is hardly even acting; the role is her. Terry claims that her acute emotional sensibility in parts caused a flow of tears that became "a hindrance to me. I have had to *work* to restrain them" (Terry, 151). She is here not only using the opportunity to confirm to the

public the validity of her constructed female identity that she purported in her acting, but doing it by orienting herself in relation to an on-going debate taking place in the theatrical world and in which many contemporary critics and artists were partaking. Terry is able to get around the inherent paradox of all acting, which is that the actor is never what the audience perceives, by appearing to not act. In the way that she attempts to stage her presentation and performance of self the paradox becomes superfluous; it is not relevant to her spectators when what the audience see in the theatre is what they firmly believe to be the truth also outside the theatre. Making her spectators believe in the naturalness of her performance was the key to hiding her private life from the public's view.

The debate of sensibility in acting, or of whether Art was unattainable by means of Nature, engaged many in London with artistic interests, one of whom was the theatre critic William Archer. Archer published the book *Masks or Faces: A Study in the Psychology of Acting* in 1888, which was an attempt to resolve the debate and invalidate Diderot's paradox. A great admirer of the Lyceum and Ellen Terry, Archer was one of the critics who tended to praise Terry extravagantly for her charm, beauty and natural grace on the stage. His writing in the book shows his preference for the emotional approach to roles and how this influenced his perception of Ellen Terry.

In his study Archer interviewed several men and women actors and used their answers to argue for sensibility. Summing up the disagreement between the two factions he writes that the "emotionalist position is that both actor and audience should yield themselves up to the illusion to a certain extent; the anti-emotionalist position is that the actor will more easily and certainly beget illusion in the audience if he remains entirely free from it himself" (26) and then continues to demonstrate to the reader the value of an emotional conception of the role. To do this he uses, among others, Ellen Terry and her style of performance as an example. In his example he chooses to recount her role as Ellaline in the sentimental play *The Amber*



*Heart* written by Alfred Calmour, a play which Irving bought for Terry though there were no parts for him in it (Terry, 258-259). William Archer's warm feelings for Terry's presentation of femaleness on the stage and the influence his view of her has on his argument can be seen in the following quotation:

No one who was near the stage on the first night of *The Amber Heart* can doubt the reality of Miss Ellen Terry's tears. In the second act they literally streamed down her cheeks, while her own frame was shaken with weeping. Her emotion was not, of course, uncontrollable, but for the moment it was uncontrolled; and I may add that the effect upon the audience was instant and intense (65).

Archer here contributes to the discussion of the pertinent question of tears, and whether they produce more of an effect when they are genuinely felt or not. His admiration for Terry and his wish to believe that the femaleness she so beautifully portrayed on the stage was merely transferring into public her manner of being in private shows how effective her construction of self was. Archer stresses the issue of the reality of Terry's tears, and in this he confirms the importance of crying. He sees crying as a preeminently female trait that achieves an "instant and intense" effect from those who observe. Terry looks beautiful when she cries on the stage, and with her body shaking, weak and fragile, this ensures her femaleness in his eyes. At the same time Archer is saying that her emotion was uncontrolled, which establishes how he perceives Terry's performance: she is letting her emotions run free rather than acting. This also corresponds with the Victorian middle class stereotypes of women as extremely sensitive and vulnerable.

Terry's acting relied on the attraction her looks created, as well as her ability to appear natural. That is why she puts so much focus on the importance of imagination in her autobiography (53). George Bernard Shaw, who was a friend of William Archer and like him

an admirer of Ellen Terry, offers evidence in his letters to her and in his preface to the collection of their correspondence of her particular gift of appearing to show her private self when acting. Though Shaw was a proponent of modern realism in the theatre, and Terry worked within the more traditional plays, he nevertheless felt that she was unique among the older school of actors. However, Shaw was radically different from the theatre critics who tended to applaud Terry.

Shaw, who was an admirer of Henrik Ibsen and supported the emancipation of women, wrote that unless “Woman repudiates her womanliness, her duty to her husband, her children, to society, to the law, and to everyone but herself, she cannot emancipate herself” (*Shaw and Ibsen*, 130). In his writings on Ibsen he supported the women’s cause, and he juxtaposed the absurdity of the idea that every woman was suited to lead domestic lives to the idea of every man being equally suited to lead a military life (129). The fact that Shaw, a central socialist thinker in Britain, found Ellen Terry to be the most terrific female actor he had seen, appears contradictory, as Terry’s success rested upon her continual portrayal of traditional Victorian virtues for women. Writing provocatively in his reviews and articles, Shaw challenged the old fashioned way of writing plays which did not deal seriously with social problems and inequality, stating that with “the single exception of Homer, there is no eminent writer, not even Sir Walter Scott, whom I can despise so entirely as I despise Shakespear [sic] when I measure my mind against his” (*Shaw on Shakespeare*, 50). His derogatory attitude towards the Shakespearean theatre, did not, however, extend to Ellen Terry’s acting. Blaming Irving for his management at the Lyceum as the reason for her continual appearances in what he considered outdated plays, Shaw was outraged with the limited repertoire confining Terry’s abilities. Writing on the Lyceum’s production of *King Arthur* in 1895 where Terry played Guinevere, he stated that as “to Miss Ellen Terry, it was the old story, a born actress of real woman’s parts condemned to figure as a mere artist’s model in costume plays which, from the

woman's point of view, are foolish flatteries written by gentlemen for gentlemen" (*Our Theatre*, 17). Throughout the years of his correspondence with Terry he struggled to convince her to act in plays where she would be able to portray a "real woman's part", as in Ibsen, or one of his own plays.

The reason for Shaw's appreciation of Terry's work was grounded in her ability to charm her beholders with her portrayal of every role as a piece of herself. Shaw, who became an intimate friend of Terry through correspondence, allowed himself to believe in the illusion she created in her performance, and in the female identity that she constructed also through the writing of letters. Archer's statement regarding what he termed the emotionalist position again seems pertinent here, that both actor and audience should "yield themselves up to the illusion" (26) in order to experience the desired effect, which could only be achieved by taking the acting to be reality for the duration of the performance. Shaw did this when watching Terry and he continued yielding to her illusion of inherent femaleness throughout their years of correspondence. In his preface to their published letters he writes that he "hardly ever saw her, except across the footlights" (St. John, xxxiv), confirming his desire to remain a spectator to her performance of self, to see her in roles enacting possible selves in costume, make-up and skilled lighting. In the letters between them it appears that this preference was mutual, Shaw writing to Terry on 25<sup>th</sup> of September 1896: "Very well, you shan't meet me in the flesh if you'd rather not. There is something deeply touching in that" (76). Terry worried that if they were to meet in person without the stage or the written word between them as a mediator, the attraction they felt would fade. Their mutual understanding of taking each other as they wished to be seen ensured the longevity and, paradoxically, the intimacy of their relationship on paper. They did meet eventually, after Shaw had written the play *Captain Brassbound's Conversion* for Ellen Terry, in which she was to star and Shaw attended rehearsals backstage, but essentially they preferred to interact through the written word.

As a consequence of this relationship Shaw spends time in his preface on eradicating any remaining notions that his reader might have of the irregularities in Ellen Terry's private life. Though he advocated women's right to break the old fashioned moral and social bonds of the late Victorian period, he vigorously defended Terry from any charges of having lived in a manner which would have been offensive in her lifetime. The strength of her emotional appeal to him lasted even after her death, and Shaw recognised her desire to preserve her constructed female identity in people's memory of her. He strictly warns the reader of their collected letters "not to judge it according to the code of manners which regulate polite letter writing in cathedral country towns" (vii). He also wished to explain "how Ellen Terry could be a woman of very exceptional virtue without having the smallest respect for the law. She did not care enough about it to have even a prejudice against it" (xiv). To Shaw Terry was a modern woman and he admired how her profession and how she acted allowed her to be outside of the social laws. His desire to have Terry use her gift of complete identification with the parts she played, and her ability to make the audience see both the role and herself as one part of a whole, to bring about social change comes across often in their letters. Where many other critics admired Terry for how her adaptation of the role served to make the theatre and her acting decidedly acceptable for the middle classes, Shaw wanted to put her particular talent to use.

At this point I will bring in Henry James, precisely because of his dissenting voice when it comes to Terry's performances. James differs from the previously mentioned critics in his skepticism towards Terry's acting, and in his refusal to see the value of such a performance of self. Whereas Shaw saw, and distinctly appreciated, Terry's cleverness and skill in her construction of self through being natural in roles, James saw Terry's work upon the stage as far from artistic and far from skillful. When James came to London and first saw Ellen Terry, she was still working for John Hare, though she would soon go to the Lyceum

and Henry Irving, and James took an attitude of distinct reserve against her. In 1877 he wrote of Tom Taylor's play *New Men and Old Acres* at the Court Theatre in the column "The London Theatres" for *The Galaxy* that Terry was "intelligent and vivacious, and she is indeed, in a certain measure, interesting. With great frankness and spontaneity, she is at the same time singularly delicate and lady-like, and it seems almost impertinent to criticize her harshly" (*The Scenic Art*, 109). He was forced to admit the attraction of Terry's looks and her great popularity as he recognised her ability to draw the interest of the public. He also became aware of how strongly her admirers tended to react when she was criticised, and admitted his reluctance to do so. Still, he believed that her success was mostly due to the shallowness of the English who valued a pretty face more than acting talent. He continued the article mentioned above by saying that Terry had "the defect that she is simply *not* an actress" (*The Scenic Art*, 110), eager to make his readers see that he was not taken with her charm. Additionally, it was important for him to imply in his comments that he was the one who was able to remain objective regarding her, implying that applauding her would make him no better than the rest of the uncritical public.

James's work as a writer and critic continued throughout the years following his relocation to England, and in 1880 he wrote another "The London Theatres" article for *Scribner's Monthly* where he stated the following when talking in general about his perception of Ellen Terry:

Miss Terry is supposed to represent the maximum of feminine effort on the English stage. The feminine side, in all the London theatres, is regrettably weak, and Miss Terry is easily distinguished. It is difficult to speak of her fairly, for if a large part of the public are wrong about her, they are altogether wrong, and one hesitates to bring such sweeping charges (*The Scenic Art*, 142).

In all his writing James is concerned with making his own critical position clear. He finds it important to focus on the fact that far from being impressed with Terry's acting, he is struck by what he considers the superficiality of her treatment of the parts she played. His desire to justify his own critical opinion in the matter is nevertheless slightly modified by his recognition of the great sway she held over most of her spectators. In the article he is fully aware of the core of her popularity and not afraid to point it out: "The difficulty is that Miss Terry has charm – remarkable charm; and this beguiles people into thinking her an accomplished actress" (ibid). For James, interestingly, it is the exact same qualities that attracted so many to Terry's performances he does not like. Where most critics found Terry's charm the aspect of her acting that they most appreciated, James voiced the notion that it could be merely a technique used to cover what he terms her defects, and then especially the rather inhibiting defect that she was not a very good actor.

Why was Henry James the one who did not feel 'beguiled' by Terry, but instead seemed to have a distinct disinclination towards her as an actor? The first and most obvious answer which comes across is that his opinion was influenced by the years he had spent travelling Europe and living in Paris. He wrote of Terry in the aforementioned 1877 article from *The Galaxy* that she had "the face of a clever young Englishwoman, with a hundred merits, but not of a dramatic artist" (*The Scenic Art*, 110). In his statement of how having the "face of a clever young Englishwoman" is in no way comparable to having the visage "of a dramatic artist" James aims to be the more cosmopolitan of the London theatrical critics. He was not only of the opinion that the stage in London was inferior to that of the Comédie-Française, but that the acting technique was better in France than in England. James's writing indicates that he preferred the measured approach of intelligence rather than sensibility. Aligning himself with the traditional French model of acting James soon became very skeptical, not just of Ellen Terry's sentimental performances, but also of the English stage in general.

Henry Irving's writing on acting is relevant for this discussion, as he effectively demonstrates the contrasts between the stage-manner and theatrical customs in France and England. In the preface to the English translation to Diderot's work Irving asserts that when Diderot "lays great stress upon the divorce between Nature and the Stage" this was due to him "thinking of the stage of Racine, and not of the Stage of Shakespeare" (xvii). In James's as in Irving's eyes, there was a clear separation between the stage in France, with greater focus on formal art, and the English, which relied more on the attraction and the appeal of nature and with the concept of nature; sensibility. From the time he had spent in Paris James had learned to value the traditional and more formal French rules of acting and declamation that Irving criticised as outdated and foreign to the English stage of the 1880s. Irving also criticised the French critics for wanting to confirm Diderot's theory of how "the creations of Racine were out of this sphere of human emotion. They were grand ideal types, which could not express themselves in simple language; they required an artificial declamation, in which anything like a natural tone would have been a sacrilege" (ibid). This French formal ideal was widely dissimilar from Ellen Terry's technique of appealing to her audiences. As James came to London strongly influenced by the French cultural heritage, it did not take him long to posit his own position directly opposed to the critical mainstream that tended to unanimously fall in love with Terry's performances.

James was, as an American, a foreigner in the British Isles, one who simultaneously belonged to two English speaking nations but with many years in other European countries behind him. As an immigrant with strong preferences for the Continental style of acting, James stood out in London's theatrical and critical environment. James found Terry not only to be a shallow type of actor relying too much on her good looks, he also disagreed with her style of acting as he did not think highly of the emotional conception of roles that she used to promote her public persona. "To our own English vision Miss Terry has too much nature, and

we should like a little more art” (*The Scenic Art*, 142) he wrote in his *Scribner’s Monthly* 1880 essay on London’s theatres where he details his general impression of Terry.

Additionally, James frequently mentions that he finds Terry to be “amateurish”. From his first notice of her in his 1877 *The Galaxy* article up to his review of the Lyceum’s production of *Faust* in 1887, when he wrote that her role Margaret had a “strange amateurishness of form (for the work of an actress who has had Miss Terry’s years of practice)” (233), he consistently finds her unchanging and immature in her portrayal of roles. For more than ten years James disliked the technique Terry used, seeing her demonstrations of innocence and girlishness as unprofessional.

Where other critics applauded Terry’s ability to seemingly act her own private self, James saw an actor performing the unremarkable feat of reproducing her own nature on the stage, regardless of which role she appeared in. In “The London Theatres” from 1880 when discussing her portrayal of Portia, which was considered to be one of her best parts, he writes in *Scribner’s Monthly* that she does not have the elocution he would like to hear from an accomplished actor, and therefore her speeches as Portia “savours, to put it harshly, of the school-girlish” (*The Scenic Art*, 143). It is her performance of Portia, also, that induces him to say that her “comprehension of a character is sometimes weak” (*ibid*). Failing to appreciate the visible display of an inherent female identity in the actor as a final demonstration of her respectability as most other critics had done, he instead stated in *The Galaxy* in 1877 that the English “people are too highly moral to be histrionic” (100). Much of his criticism shows evidence of his opinion that English society was as much to blame for Terry’s popularity in necessitating her type of acting in order to gain success, as she herself was when acting in the artless and natural style. His reviews also sharply criticise the quality and relevance of the plays that were staged in London around this decade.



James's article "Henry Irving as Louis XI: *Olivia* at the Court Theatre" was published June 13<sup>th</sup> in 1878 in the *Nation*. In it he sharply attacks "the actual state of the English stage" (*The Scenic Art*, 114), which he claims can be best demonstrated by the success of the play *Olivia*, a success that "could only be accounted for by an extraordinary apathy of taste on the part of the public" (ibid). *Olivia* was one of Terry's popular roles, and her portrayal of innocence and youth in the play had greatly helped increase her status. James wrote of the play, however, that the "goody-goody, namby-pamby element in *Olivia* is its most striking feature, and, combined with the extreme thinness of its interest, it really makes a thoughtful spectator revert longingly to those skilful productions of the French theatre" (ibid). James disliked the plays that were produced in London. Most of them were, in his opinion, bad translations of French plays that lost much of their cultural value. The contemporary plays written by British playwrights were not deemed to be any better, as James found them conventional and petty. To James, the standard of the theatre had declined along with the English theatrical tradition.

Despite his critique, James's negative view of the English theatrical world would slowly change during his life. His failed attempt to conquer the stages of London did to an extent modify his extremely critical attitude towards the English theatres, and, as a consequence, towards the performances of Ellen Terry. He had always understood that her value as an actor lay in the picturesque beauty she brought to the stage. As time passed and James's life continued to be lived in London, his experiences caused him to become more attuned towards the appeal Terry's performances offered. This can also be related to James's adjustment to English society in general, as well as the process of his maturing fiction. In 1896, when he saw the Lyceum production of Shakespeare's *Cymbeline*, he allowed himself to be taken in by Terry's illusion, and wrote of her Imogen that "no part that she has played of late years is so much of the exact fit of her particular gifts" (*The Scenic Art*, 283) in the article "Mr. Irving's

Production of *Cymbeline*” in *Harper’s Weekly*. This fit of the part to the actor enabled James to overcome his previous dislike of Terry’s obfuscation between herself and the role she played. Additionally James was able to watch Terry with the same look that her devoted audience had always used; that of appreciating the beauty and the skill in displaying traits of femaleness as her own when acting a role.

Her performance is naturally poetic, has delightful breadth and tenderness, delightful grace and youth. Youth above all – Miss Terry has never, without effort, been so young and so fresh. Short-skirted and free, crowned with roses by Mr. Alma-Tadema’s hand, and dressed in the unmistakable “note” of one of that painter’s learned visions, she is exactly the heroine demanded by an old-time story for a circle – not too critical – round the fire (*The Scenic Art*, 283).

Here it must also be noted that despite the marked change this shows of James’s perception of Terry’s performance in this particular case, it offers perhaps even more evidence of the new development within the areas of stage lighting and make-up taking place towards the turn of the century. James himself points out that it is the work of the painter Lawrence Alma-Tadema that creates much of the impression of youth and sweetness Terry conveys. He also attempts to reserve himself from becoming too enthusiastic in his acclaim of the performance, the circle around the fire must not be too critical, that would break the illusion. James, then, has grasped, if not given himself over to, the emotional appeal of Terry’s acting. If the spectators are willing to accept the visual and the beautiful as the essence of what they are watching then they can enjoy Ellen Terry staging a version of herself.

When discussing Henry James and his approach to the theatre, cultural life and art, a factor to note is his admiration for the poet and cultural critic Matthew Arnold, whose writings had a great impact on the social debates in Britain. Arnold was the first to use the

expression Philistine, now commonly used to describe artless and materialistic people, and James utilised this term in his own work. James found in Arnold and his critical writings on English culture a source of inspiration. In Arnold's influential work *Culture and Anarchy* the author outlines a situation that James fundamentally agreed with and explored in his own writing. Matthew Arnold writes of culture as perfection and art, of sweetness as beauty and of light as intelligence. Arnold highlights culture as a necessary implementation in England: "The pursuit of perfection, then, is the pursuit of sweetness and light. He who works for sweetness works in the end for light also; he who works for light works in the end for sweetness also" (52). The argument of culture and art as the most vital remedy for society is taken further by Arnold in stating the following:

It does not try to teach down to the level of inferior classes; it does not try to win them for this or that sect of its own, with ready-made judgments and watchwords. It seeks to do away with classes; to make all live in an atmosphere of sweetness and light, and use ideas, as it uses them itself, freely, – to be nourished and not bound by them (52).

James's writing shows how he agreed with Arnold's preoccupation with the need for an ideal of culture as key to a better England. It is therefore necessary to understand James as a critic in light of his affiliation with Arnold's writing of culture as the path to perfection. As James was of the opinion that sweetness, the notion of beauty, was always connected to light as intelligence in the cultural life, it becomes possible to relate this to his early perceptions of Ellen Terry as an actor. He valued her beauty but found it to be far from enough to be a reforming element of England's culture without the all-important light of intelligence present in her acting. James, after all, believed that intelligence in the conception of roles in plays lay in freedom from sensibility.

The issue of England's cultural and artistic spirit is given free rein in James's most theatrical book, his 1890 novel *The Tragic Muse*, where he continually questions the identity of the female actor and critiques English theatre. In the novel he introduces the politicians of London as Philistines, and creates a range of literary figures to represent the varying degrees of Philistinism and art in order to detail the conflict between them. In his preface to the New York Edition of the novel, which was published in 1908, James wrote that a satiric treatment of the English cultural life was "the only adequate or effective treatment, I had again and again felt, for most of the distinctively social aspects of London: the general artlessly histrionized air of things" (3). In *The Tragic Muse*, which will be analysed in detail in the next chapter, James provides for his readers his own construction of a female actor's identity, and debates this construction textually. The novel, which offers what James calls a "free plunge of the speculative fork into the contemporary social salad" (9), describes a female actor rising towards fame, and who achieves artistic success. The title character of *The Tragic Muse* thus offers an interpretation of James's relation to women actors as well as to the English theatrical world.

Henry James chose to name his tragic muse Miriam Rooth, and to make her a young Jewish girl who wanders across Europe with her mother. In some respects the character Miriam Rooth resembles the French tragic female actor Rachel Felix, whom James had never seen yet admired based upon what he had heard of her performances. The figure of Miriam Rooth specifies this link by saying that she would like "to be the English Rachel" (James, 141) and the comparison is extended by Miriam's desire to breathe new life into classical tragedy and make the English stage a site of art of the highest order.

In many respects Miriam Rooth functions to display James's belief in the application of intellect to artistic talent. I have already thoroughly demonstrated how Ellen Terry constructed her female identity in her acting of roles, and how much success this performance achieved on

the English stage, as well as why James's reaction towards her was negative. In James's construction of the identity of an actor, the figure of Miriam has a histrionic nature to such "perfection that she was always acting; that her existence was a series of parts assumed for the moment, each changed for the next, before the perpetual mirror of some curiosity or admiration or wonder" (James, 126). The presentation of Miriam and the difficult case of her identity and how it is portrayed in a sense ridicules the notion of truthful personality in representation, as the idea of truth in her identity is as untrustworthy off the stage as on. Miriam is continually portrayed by James as a direct opposite to how Terry performed.

James's ideal of an intelligently conveyed idea in declamation comes across in *The Tragic Muse* in the scene where the theatre enthusiast Sherringham, who admires the French theatre, comes upon Miriam Rooth, the young woman he is helping become an actor. She is described while reciting from the third act of Shakespeare's *King John*. The passage is so telling in its detailing of the female actor's performance that I will quote it at length:

Miriam flushed a little, but he immediately discovered that she had no personal emotion in seeing him again; the cold passion of art had perched on her banner and she listened to herself with an ear as vigilant as if she had been a Paganini drawing a fiddle-bow. This effect deepened as she went on, rising and rising to the great occasion, moving with extraordinary ease and in the largest clearest style at the dizzy height of her idea. That she had an idea was visible enough, and that the whole thing was very different from all Sherringham had hitherto heard her attempt. It belonged quite to another class of effort; she seemed now like the finished statue lifted from the ground to its pedestal. It was as if the sun of her talent had risen above the hills and she knew that she was moving, that she would always move, in its guiding light. This conviction was the one artless thing that glimmered like a young joy through the tragic mask of Constance, and Sherringham's heart beat faster as he caught it in her face. It

only made her appear more intelligent: and yet there had been a time when he had thought her stupid! (214).

Miriam is in this instance raised above the rest of the people present in the room by her art. The fact that she is seen by Sherringham here, the man who falls in love with her because of her acting talent, is important when noting the strength of the admiration she induces. She appears to him cold and distant, she has “no personal emotion in seeing him again”, and she contains the paradox of cold passion. Miriam is, in this passage, compared to Nicolò Paganini, the Italian virtuoso violinist and composer, which brings out several aspects of James’s idea of the art of acting. To James, acting, similarly to other arts be it literature or music, operates with “the perfect presence of mind, unconfused, unhurried by emotion, that any artistic performance requires and that all, whatever the instrument, require in exactly the same degree” (216). By alluding to Miriam being a Paganini drawing a bow when performing James is also continuing his association with other great European artists who were undisputedly the best at what they did and who were technically as well as personally gifted. Matthew Arnold’s idea of necessary elevation also come into how Miriam’s acting is represented in this scene, as Arnold’s writing of how culture must be used to help society raise itself up is reflected in how Miriam is “rising and rising to the great occasion”. Additionally, the idea of intelligent art is seen in how Miriam’s conception of the role takes place at “the height of her idea”, marking the intellectual conception and acting of a role as the highest form her art can achieve as well as a method of elevating her audience along with her. Miriam is described as a “finished statue”, or in other words, a completed work of art. The symbolism in the terms “the sun of her talent” and her talent’s “guiding light” is very closely associated with Arnold’s wording in his descriptions of how intelligence is light and can refine society through art.

By only allowing the reader access to Miriam through the focalization of other characters in the book James achieves a histrionic nature that goes beyond descriptions in his textually constructed figure. As this is one of the central points to be explored in the following chapter, I will not take it further here, but mention it in order to be able to focus on a central point of comparison between the actor Ellen Terry and Henry James's character in *The Tragic Muse* Miriam Rooth: the extent to which they are both seen and narrated by men. In the following chapter this will be remedied in Ellen Terry's case, as I will examine her own writing in her autobiography. It is a point to be made, though, that in this chapter we see Terry almost exclusively interpreted by other men surrounding her, applying their own preconceived notions of acting and identity to her performance. That is what constitutes acting, performing on a stage before spectators who pay to be able to experience an illusion of reality in a play.

Further analysis of the figure Miriam Rooth and James's identity construction of the female actor in *The Tragic Muse* will resume shortly. I find it relevant to mention here due to the great extent a female actor is always constructed by her viewers, something James highlights in his novel, and Terry plays on in her performances on the stage, in her autobiography and as a model. Both Terry and the character Miriam Rooth become what the readers make them out to be when seeing them through the eyes of male critics, and in this way of understanding their performance the readers of this thesis are positioned in the same situation that Terry's audience and the readers of *The Tragic Muse* are. In this chapter I have presented numerous interpretations and views of Terry as an actor and as a woman, from her admirers and critics, such as William Winter, Bernard Shaw, William Archer and Henry James, who all wrote extensively about her to the general public. Russell Jackson shows in his book *Victorian Theatre* how "journalism publicizing the theatre to its audiences became more personal in tone" during the 1880s and 1890s due to new magazines which "published

interviews with actors and actresses of a domestic and personal turn absent in most earlier journalism” (81). Terry’s construction of her female identity through her onstage performance must then be related also to the changing situation of the press, which more and more offered a written interpretation of her to the reading public. Thus the matter of how her critics and reviewers saw her became an extremely important factor to be considered in her identity construction. Working during the time when the actor’s career became largely “mediated by a popular press avid for personalities” (Jackson, 81) in England, the importance of how she was seen by men who were to rewrite their impressions is given new vitality. The theatrical audience of the 1880s and 90s experienced Terry also through these writings, and were influenced by them, so the complexity in relation to how and what of Terry the public saw and recognised arose from the connections between actor working on the stage, spectators in the theatre, critics and readers of magazines and newspapers. The rewriting of the female actor’s identity is a central factor that shaped perceptions and reactions, and so the following chapter is dedicated precisely to this.



### Chapter 3: Textual Construction of Female Identity: *The Tragic Muse* and *The Story of My Life*

This chapter examines how the female identity of the actor is textually constructed in Henry James's *The Tragic Muse* and Ellen Terry's autobiography *The Story of My Life*. Through close readings of passages from both books and looking at how the texts are used to portray the two female performers I argue that they each perform a version of a female actor's identity according to their authors' different conceptions and motivations regarding the art of acting. Ellen Terry's technique of demonstrating her femaleness within the writing of her autobiography is a means of continuing the construction of the public persona she was celebrated for on the stage. This will be developed along with how *The Tragic Muse* stages the figure of Miriam Rooth and how her fictional female identity is built through layers within the text by Henry James. Great attention to how the narrative functions, and who is doing the construction of the figures of female actors is required, as both autobiography and novel represent their figure of a woman actor in a similar manner as the actor on a stage.

Ellen Terry's title, *The Story of My Life*, makes for an interesting point of departure, as it indicates something beyond the fact that an autobiography by definition always will be a narrative of a person's life. The word 'story' has a stronger fictional element to it and a more homely feel than for example 'account' or 'narrative'. This confirms Terry's book as an extension of herself; a part of her much reputed femaleness is responsible for sharing her story, as if among friends. Further it is not merely a story, but 'the' story, with the definite article, of Ellen Terry's life. It thus becomes the decisive authority on what is written about her, not only because she presents it, but because the title tells the readers so. Even though Ellen Terry would appear to be the most suited to set down her own life's story, the fact that she is in control of her own legacy and that she is forced to consider her own reputation as well as that of others, does require an alert and suspicious reader. Additionally, any reader

needs to be constantly aware that the autobiography is a product by a professional performer whose life consisted of acting and representing herself as various roles for an audience. The decision to name it the story of her life, rather than of her career or the story of her work is also noteworthy considering the great gaps and omissions of the events and people she does not wish to be associated with, as will be more fully explored later on. The title contains much of the complexities of Ellen Terry's written construction of her own female identity; her constructed narrator within the text aims to address the reader on close terms as a confidante, while simultaneously forcing its own authority to the forefront, demanding what is stated to be accepted as fact.

Gail Marshall writes of Ellen Terry in her book *Actresses on the Victorian Stage*, that "Ellen Terry's story forms a narrative thread throughout this book, and makes clear the ways in which the Pygmalion and Galatea myth operated both practically and metaphorically to shape and define women's theatrical lives" (6). Marshall's book is concerned with demonstrating how female actors in the Victorian period were subjected to the Galatea-trope, to embody the myth of the statue of Galatea who was given life by male desire. These actors could therefore not work independently from the enforced statue imagery making them merely objects animated by the male gaze when performing on the stage. In Ovid's story it is Pygmalion who has power over Galatea and the statue is given life solely because of his desire. To Marshall, who has transferred this process to Victorian theatres, Terry is a victim of this practice. I disagree, and will continue to show that Ellen Terry utilised the gaze of her beholders and was consciously performing the female identity that would work to her advantage.

Her autobiography offers valuable insight into how she constructed herself as a woman and female performer, and close study confirms her skilful attempts to position her reader as

she had positioned her audience, so that she would remain always in control while appearing to be completely natural before them.

How dangerous it is to write things that may not be understood! What I have written I have written merely to indicate the qualities in Henry Irving's nature, which were unintelligible to me, perhaps because I have always been more woman than artist. He always put the theatre first. He lived in it, he died in it. He had none of what I call my *bourgeois* qualities – the love of being in love, the love of a home, the dislike of solitude. I have always thought it hard to find my inferiors. He was sure of his high place. He was far simpler than I in some ways. He would talk, for instance, in such an ingenuous way to painters and musicians that I blushed for him. But I know now that my blush was far more unworthy than his freedom from all pretentiousness in matters of art. *He never pretended* (Terry, 160).

This passage is written by Ellen Terry, the author. In her autobiography Terry is the first person narrator and main character, the protagonist of the story. The quotation is narrated by a textually constructed Ellen Terry-narrator, who guides the readers through the book, and is concerned with constructing her own identity as a character, which is Ellen Terry, a figure in the text. These levels are difficult to distinguish, as the author is the first person narrator and the main character in the book. The first person narrative tends to blur the distinctions between the character itself and the author who operates through the narrator to construct this character. The narrative voice of Ellen Terry, the voice which details events and thoughts to the reader in every recollection of a memory and in elaborate anecdotes, is prominent throughout the book. This narrative voice induces the readers to feel as if they are communicating at an intimate level. Even the letters and comments from others that are quoted in the autobiography are all chosen for their content which confirms what the narrator is communicating.

Terry begins by taking precautions, taking care to protect what she writes from any misunderstandings, and this is the explicit reason she has for recording the passage in writing. Her sense of urgency in this is highlighted by the exclamation mark at the end of the first sentence, indicating the strength of the narrating Terry's desire that what she writes will not be taken the wrong way by anyone, as well as giving the reader the sense that she is confiding intimate details. She goes on to explain the difference between herself, as Ellen Terry, and her construction of Henry Irving as one of artistic nature in relation to their genders, and she almost excuses herself for her writing in her claims of her lack of artistry. This is done by claiming that she had "always been more woman than artist", so certain of Irving's qualities were "unintelligible" to her, as he was not only a man, but an artist. Henry Irving, Terry says, "put the theatre first", not just occasionally or most of the time, but "always", like the constructed Terry character was "always" more woman than anything else. This heavy contrasting between the two continues in the next short sentence where Terry further underlines his strong connection to the theatre and this also serves to put her figure of Ellen Terry in a different light than that of Henry Irving.

She goes on to talk of her own "bourgeois qualities", which is an interesting word to use. To Terry bourgeois means middle class and respectable, and it is italicised for emphasis and effect. Terry wishes to mark her constructed self distinctly as middle class, and the use of the French word is an intriguing choice. It indicates a textual method of placing her Terry figure within the appropriate level of society and confirms her claim of being "always more woman than artist", as bourgeois entails owning and controlling means of production or one's own business, and not living off one's skill as an actor. The fact that the narrator here calls her Terry-figure bourgeois, then, confirms the Terry who is being constructed by the narrative as a domestically oriented and materialistic woman, not an artist. The narrator goes on to elaborate, to detail Terry's "love of being in love", a quality testifying more to her womanly

side than her bourgeois one, as well as her “love of a home”, which serves to underline both of these sides. Longing for a home can hint at a love brought forth from years of touring, travelling and moving in relation to the acting career. Additionally, loving the home is clearly a statement made to show how womanly Terry is, in suggesting that she would prefer to remain in the domestic sphere. Likewise “the dislike of solitude” also appears as a professional habit, learned from always working in close relation with others daily and from a young age while in addition showing that she truly is a woman according to the Victorian stereotypes; she feels better when surrounded by people and dislikes being alone. The Terry-figure, then, longs for domestic stability and not for public success. Taken together with “the love of being in love” all of these three statements confirm how Terry-as-author wants to be seen; as bourgeois and womanly, not as an extremely driven and professional actor. What the narrating Terry states also serves to highlight the implied difference between the figures of Ellen Terry and Henry Irving. That he has no love of being in love is implied, as well as the fact that he has no love of a home, as the theatre is the only home he cares for. That he does not dislike solitude is the final opposition between them, making the picture of the woman Ellen Terry contrast even more with that of a dedicated artist. In her construction of self as a woman, then, Terry also constructs Irving as essentially a man. By doing so she ensures that when Irving functions as her diametric opposite it further confirms her position as a woman.

The following short sentence with its eloquent phrasing of the Terry figure’s humble attitude to others is directly opposed to the Irving character’s certainty of his own high place, resulting in the claim that he was “far simpler than I in some ways” as he never had to struggle with her insecurities. This humility on her own behalf is expressed throughout the book, and is one of the most frequently employed methods Terry-as-narrator uses to show an essence of femaleness to the reader. Terry’s construction of the character Ellen Terry is based upon continually talking herself down, and in this way making the figure out to be less than

what her long career would indicate. With this Terry validates what her reputation depended on; her humble nature and her display of her own private person.

In order to bring this quality further into focus, her description of how Irving talked to painters and musicians who were to participate in the plays he staged uses the word “ingenuous” as an effective contrast. According to the *Oxford English Dictionary* the word is defined as: “4. a. Honourably straightforward; open, frank, candid. (The current sense.)” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘ingenuous’) with relevant examples of the word ‘ingenuous’ with that meaning from a text published in 1855. So when discussing matters of art in his own production Irving was unreserved, free from restraint and dissimulation as a dedicated manager should be, despite the fact that neither painting or musical composition were the areas of his expertise. There also are many accounts from contemporaries and biographers who go into detail on Irving’s complete control over every aspect of his productions at the Lyceum. One is Bram Stoker’s detailing of his continued demands of Arthur Sullivan, who was composing the music for *Macbeth*, to rewrite his score until it sounded exactly like what Irving preferred, and also how this extreme attention to detail and control of every element made him feared, loved and inspired great loyalty from each member of the theatrical group (Stoker, 112). According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, however, there is another, obsolete form of the word ‘ingenuous’, namely “2. a. Noble in nature, character, or disposition; generous, high-minded. (Of persons, or their dispositions, actions, etc.) Obs. or arch” (*Oxford English Dictionary*, ‘ingenuous’) which is not recorded after 1788. It does not seem entirely coincidental that Terry should choose just this word for describing Irving’s decisive dealings with other artists, as the passage is dedicated to praising him while also contrasting her approach with his.

The narrator informs the reader that Irving is “high-minded”. Ellen Terry, on the contrary, is not. She “blushed for him” when hearing him speak in such an unrestrained

manner. The blush once again confirms the Terry figure as humble and insecure regarding others. Additionally her blush shows her womanliness, as a reaction by blushing was typically associated with young and innocent women. Terry further encourages this by positioning herself artistically and intellectually beneath Irving, making herself distinctly out as his opposite while stressing her own innocence. The excerpt ends with Terry's gained wisdom that her blush "was far more unworthy than his freedom from all pretentiousness in matters of art" and his freedom from all pretentiousness is made more explicitly clear to the readers by the narrator in the last sentence, the only one to be entirely italicised, stating that he "never pretended". Despite being an actor and pretending for a living, the narrator claims he personally would not pretend, he as a person was free from all pretentiousness. The language is tellingly decisive at this point, where the narrating Terry's eagerness to construct Irving overrides her construction of self as a docile woman, thus enforcing the contrast between them to the advantage of both.

In the passage above Terry paints Irving as a strong and artistic man and herself as a soft and lovable woman by balancing their different traits against each other. Thus she and Irving both contrast and complement each other as persons, and as man and woman. This disparity between their characteristics is not coincidental or a result of her construction of self within the autobiography alone. The embodiment of femaleness in opposition to, and in submission to, male artistic genius was something Ellen Terry had performed on stage for almost twenty-five years with Irving as her partner at the Lyceum Theatre, to great success. But despite performing the same feature as she did at the theatre; actively creating herself as a woman, not an actor, who comes across as young, warm and spontaneous in her autobiography, the language itself gives her away at times. In her statement of how she has a "love of being in love" the author is also consciously and professionally working to continue building her identity on stage in addition to confirming the truth of her femaleness to her readers. By

declaring herself an artless woman in the writing, not a conscious artist, she ensures that her naturalness continues to be understood as a product of her female identity. In her autobiography she makes the character Ellen Terry out to be someone who cannot hide, nor disguise, her “love of being in love”, as this female trait of strong affection is a part of her nature. Terry is deliberately bringing her on-stage qualities into her construction of self in the autobiography, just as she managed to always convey the impression that she displayed aspects of her private self when she was acting.

The apparent anxiety in the beginning of the quotation that what she narrates might be read the wrong way can also be interpreted as a strong wish that others should read her text as it was intended by her to be read. It is a rhetorical device used to ensure that readers will follow the direction the seemingly feeble Terry wishes them to. The Terry-narrator gives the impression of placing herself at the reader’s mercy, and says it is “dangerous” to write these things when they might be misunderstood. This language, in addition to creating an intimacy between her and the reader, is a technique to hide her own strength in using the autobiography to further promote her public persona. She portrays herself as very like the woman she thinks is reading in an attempt to shape how she would be perceived, to close the gap between her and her readers. Or, in the words of Gail Marshall who writes of *The Story of My Life* as Terry’s one autonomous achievement, the “act of writing, previously the privilege of her critics”, was what enabled Ellen Terry as an author to “position her audience, characterising them in the role of the beloved, to be charmed and wooed by her text, and subsequently, to have their reactions influenced, if not determined, by the decisions that she as a writer is making” (176). In this Marshall displays a level of ignorance of the power Terry’s work on constructing a public persona on the stage gave her, and of how the autobiography was the last in a long line of situations where Terry was in control of the image she perpetuated. The deliberate blurring of the lines separating author and actor, stage and book show how Terry



consciously constructed herself artistically rather than being shaped by dominant forces around her.

While Ellen Terry's work in her autobiography is a construction of self, where the text is an attempt to solidify her lifelong performance of a female identity, the construction of Henry James's character Miriam Rooth in the novel *The Tragic Muse* (1890) is a textual expression of ambiguous attitudes towards the theatre and professional actors. In James's novel this element of fluidity and ambiguity in the character Miriam Rooth is attained by various textual methods, perhaps the most important being James's choice of nearly exclusively presenting Miriam through the focalisation of another figure within the book. Specifically she is almost always presented to the reader through the two protagonists Peter Sherringham, a theatre-enthusiast who falls in love with her, and Nick Dormer, a politician turned painter who does her portrait. While I have previously analysed an autobiography where the author constructs herself as first person narrator and protagonist, I am dealing here with a male author who constructs a third person narrator and this unknown narrator details various characters who through their focalisations construct their versions the figure of the female actor. Whereas Ellen Terry's autobiography blurs the distinction between author, narrator and the constructed character Ellen Terry in the text, James makes use of these different levels of construction for exactly the opposite purpose; to make the figure Miriam Rooth inaccessible to the reader. Though the distinction between author, narrator and characters in the text are easier to separate in the analysis of *The Tragic Muse* than in *The Story of My Life*, the interplay between them is of equal significance to why and how the identity of the woman actor is textually constructed and how this affects the reading experience.

I understand James's 1890 novel *The Tragic Muse* to be the author's attempt to explore his doubts of the English theatres. Unlike the first person Terry-narrator who tells of events to

the readers in *The Story of My Life*, the third person narrator in *The Tragic Muse* is unknown to the reader. It is this narrator, which I assume to be male, who guides the reader through the book, where most of the story is told from the point of view of various characters. The following quotation concerns itself with the figure Miriam Rooth as she is seen by Peter Sherringham, the character whose love interest in her is the shaping force of the greater part of the novel. The narrator's descriptions of Sherringham's perception of Miriam are always striking as well as complicated. The following passage is focalised through Sherringham, and details his conflicted emotions when watching Miriam perform:

Miriam had never been more present to him than at this hour; but she was inextricably transmuted – present essentially as the romantic heroine she represented. His state of mind was of the strangest, and he was conscious of its strangeness; just as he was conscious, in his person, of a cessation of resistance which identified itself absurdly with liberation. He felt weak at the same time that he felt excited, and he felt excited at the same time that he knew that his face was blank. He saw things as a shining confusion, and yet somehow something monstrously definite kept surging out of them. Miriam was a beautiful, actual, fictive, impossible young woman, of a past age and undiscoverable country, who spoke in blank verse and overflowed with metaphor, who was exalted and heroic beyond all human convenience, and who yet was irresistibly real and related to one's own affairs (James, 425).

The religious tone of admiration in the language used is striking when reading this passage. Miriam is described in very elevated terms, like a biblical figure or a saviour, through terminology as “present”, “shining” and “exalted”. Not only does she speak “in blank verse”, which gives her authority, but she is “beyond all human convenience”, which adds to the impression of her as a divine creature and posits her as a work of art, a finished creation, to

the reader. The narrator here illuminates how it is the conflicted emotions of the character Sherringham that shape his notion of who Miriam Rooth is.

Within the first sentence there is a richness of contradictions and complexities when it comes to Sherringham's perception of Miriam, as well as ample demonstration of how the figure of Miriam is built on how other characters in the narrative experience her performances. In the passage the reader learns that to Sherringham she was more present than ever, yet "inextricably transmuted", so changed or transformed that it would be utterly impossible to disentangle her from her act of representation. It is not really Miriam that is present to him, it is "the romantic heroine" she is acting. Throughout the narrative James makes it clear that this contradiction is the crux of the attraction she offers to the figure of Sherringham, and the fact that she is described as being somewhat removed from him, present only as the essence of her role, adds to this. In this particular sentence Sherringham voices the complication that lies at the heart of the construction of the figure Miriam Rooth. She is "inextricably transmuted" to Sherringham, he sees her only as the representation she performs. This textual situation is reminiscent of how a real actor would work on the stage, present to the audience only in a transformed state, as the representation of the role which is performed in the play. This again is reinforced by James by allowing the readers of the novel to see only a representation of a character through different focalisations. The readers of the novel find themselves in the same position as the figure of Sherringham does within the narrative, wishing futilely for a revelation of what lies behind the continual performance of identity in Miriam Rooth.

The latter half of the paragraph is a series of contradictions. Sherringham's emotions are described as being simultaneously "weak" and "excited", inner turmoil is contrasted with his blank face, hinting at a calm exterior and attempts of self-control. That he "knew that his face was blank" could also be interpreted to mean that he is somehow momentarily paralysed,

unable to move or express himself regardless of will, because the force of what he is watching renders him incapable. The blankness of his face is contrasted with that of Miriam's, which is filled with expressions. In this sense she is the conveyer of significance and importance, he her designated spectator. Further on his "confusion" is described with the word "shining", a word with positive imagery tied to it. The "confusion" he experiences is bright and filled with light, whereas the definitive that he perceives is "monstrously definite", it is frightening, unsettling and unnatural. Here as well she appears to be in power while he is rendered powerless. Her monstrosity in his eyes derives from the same acting talent that is so attractive to him, and his paradoxical feelings make him view her as an embodiment of opposites that is nevertheless impossibly absolute. Sherringham's impression gives the reader someone both "actual" and "fictive", literally an "impossible young woman".

By having his narrator posit the two characters Peter Sherringham and Miriam Rooth in this relation to each other James is able to shift the traditional power relations between them to a certain extent. Though Miriam is focalised through Sherringham and he has the power to define her, she is portrayed as influencing him and as the one with capacity to determine his direction in the plot. Not only is she the one who repeatedly refuses his proposals of marriage, but she renders him incapable of movement. Her continuous acting renders her impossible for Sherringham to grasp, despite his frequent attempts. The figure of Miriam Rooth has no voice of her own when it comes to focalisation of her own story in the narrative, yet to the reader she, rather than Peter Sherringham, is the stronger force.

The strength of the narrative voice is also important to mention in relation to *The Story of My Life* where the narrator is performing a similar feature. Ellen Terry, as author, is eager to construct a figure through herself as narrator that appears powerless in relation to artistic choices and how readers perceive her. This Terry posits Irving as the one who has power in the relationship, attempting to confirm that the narrative of the autobiography functions in the

same way as the author's real life. But *The Story of My Life* is a construction by Terry, and in the book it is the character of Ellen Terry who is portrayed to provide the reader with a specific view of her as a woman. Thus it is the Terry figure and how she is meant to be received that determines how stories are recounted and how other characters are positioned in relation to her. While seemingly being subordinated to the figure of Irving in the narrative, the character Terry is the one that influences readers' perception in her favour. Therefore, my reading of Terry's work contradicts that of Gail Marshall's. According to Marshall the Galatea aesthetic was forced onto Terry during the whole of her career, but essential to how the myth operated is the fact that one man must function as Pygmalion. Irving was the manager of the Lyceum Theatre, and dictated the behaviour and routine of all of his employees, not just Terry. There is also the issue of Terry's own cleverness in using him for her construction of a public persona, which severely undermines the idea of Ellen Terry as helplessly trapped within a statuary Galatea aesthetic.

I find, additionally, that the Terry protagonist in *The Story of My Life* is created to a great extent through the roles she played. I demonstrated in the previous chapter how Terry constructed a public persona that she performed as herself through how she acted roles on the stage and in her autobiography much of the work she did in the theatre is transferred into writing. Similarly, in *The Tragic Muse* the character of the woman actor also functions as in theatrical performance. James, through the narrator, gives the readers the above description of Sherringham's experience, a character who is infatuated with the novel's female actor, in order to display the contradictory construction of Miriam Rooth. To Sherringham, the oppositional elements that constitute her identity are what frighten him while they simultaneously entice him. Likewise, James struggled with reconciling his aversion to the English stage with his attraction toward drama as art. In constructing a character that so confounds those who behold her, James transfers the difficulty of illusory and performed

identity from the drama of his day into the text. What is actual and what is fictive is continually questioned in the figure Miriam Rooth, who is described in terms that are almost transcendent while still being “irresistibly real and related to one’s own affairs”. The image of her identity as “an undiscoverable country” graphically establishes her as essentially sovereign unto herself and therefore unknowable to the figure of Sherringham as well as to the readers who must rely on the narrator’s descriptions of Sherringham’s perceptions.

Not only the figure of Miriam Rooth, but also the structure of the plot in *The Tragic Muse* is composed to explore James’s doubts regarding the English theatre. The reader follows the parallel stories of Nick Dormer and Peter Sherringham in their struggles to come to terms with their artistic conscience, and through these two characters the reader is introduced to both Gabriel Nash, an aesthete who is a self-proclaimed crusader on the side of art, and Miriam Rooth. Miriam is thematically important as the title character of the book, she is the Tragic Muse, but she is also important structurally, as a link between the two separate stories unfolding in the narrative. Each of these four figures represent some aspect of Henry James’s own doubts and beliefs regarding theatrical life, as well as being a part of the greater debate of art versus the world. The character Gabriel Nash in the narrative pointedly comments on the severe limitations imposed on a playwright by asking what could be done “with a character, with an idea, with a feeling, between dinner and the suburban trains? You can give a gross, rough sketch of them, but how little you touch them, how bald you leave them! What crudity compared to what the novelist does” (James, 55). James displays Nash as having a negative attitude towards the theatre in the beginning of the novel, but shows the reader how the character moderates his opinion as the narrative progresses and Miriam Rooth steps forth as a successful actor. The scepticism expressed directly by the figure Gabriel Nash regarding the contemporary English theatre reflects what was to be James’s own later conclusion after his attempt at writing plays did not work, that a play was inferior to a novel

as a means of expressing something valuable about society and people. James's biographer Leon Edel wrote that James "was to speak of the stage as a straitjacket for any self-respecting man of letters" (219) during his later years.

The oppositional nature of James's belief in the theatre, his high opinion of dedication to art and a genuine appreciation of the art of acting, as well as his dismay over the poor standards of the London theatres, are highlighted in his construction of the figure Peter Sherringham. Sherringham professes himself infatuated with the Parisian theatres, and an ardent theatre critic, yet views the theatre only as a pastime he can fill his evenings with and not a serious endeavour to be equated with his own diplomatic career. As a contrast to Sherringham's part of the narrative we then have the figure Nick Dormer, who chooses to be true to his artistic nature and paint portraits rather than devote his life to the career in politics his family and fiancée expect of him, the mundane Philistine option which Gabriel Nash calls "choosing a life of shams" (James, 261).

*The Tragic Muse* also constructs James's problems with the theatrical world on different levels, starting at the dual form the narrative takes. In the novel we follow two main stories rather than one, and the book is structured to underline dichotomies. The first part takes place in Paris, the second in England. Paris is equated with the artistic spirit, England with Philistines. The contrastive division continues in the general thematic treatment of art and representation as intelligent truth against the mundane work in politics as false. The art of acting is further debated within its own bounds, as essentially paradoxical and entailing an element of impossibility, which shapes the contradictions in the constitution of all the central figures. This dispute continues down to the level of James's deliberately ambiguous choices of opposing words in a single description. The figure Miriam Rooth is key in this project, because, as William Storm states, she stands "as the central subject, and indeed the focal point" (74) in the exchange that takes place between forms as the novel not only "presents a

sustained argument over the assets and shortcomings of the stage, it carries on a more embracing debate concerning its own methods of representation” (ibid), and Miriam is the figure who is represented through various means as the embodiment of the stage. Her identity as a woman actor is constructed in the text to explore the act of performing, and acting’s effect on the audience.

The narrative in *The Tragic Muse* is neatly divided into two separate but intertwining plots where the reader intermittently follows Nick Dormer and Peter Sherringham. Due to his near obsession with her, Miriam is most often focalised from Sherringham’s perspective, and his long, intense observations provide the reader with a contentious view of her. The narrator organises the two parallel stories of the protagonists Sherringham and Dormer, who are cousins, largely around their interaction with Miriam Rooth. She remains the novel’s most central character while never relating events from her own perspective in the narrative. Or, as John Landau puts it in his book *“A Thing Divided”: Representation in the Late Novels of Henry James*, the “most noteworthy aspect of the structure of *The Tragic Muse* is that we never get close to Miriam Rooth, the actress who *is* the tragic muse. We hear dialogue in which Miriam speaks, but we do not have access to her consciousness, and we only see her through the characters in the novel” (46). She is a structural centre-point in the narrative as Peter’s love interest and Nick’s model, and the narrator organises her appearances to always have a great impact on not only the plot, as when Julia Dallow walks in on Nick painting Miriam in his studio and breaks off their engagement, but also on the other characters’ perception of her and their changing attitudes to the novels’ main concern; art and representation. While the figure of Miriam cannot tell her own story directly to the readers, she is the incitation for most of the actions of those around her and most of the other characters react to her. James thus awards Miriam power not only within the plot and the action that takes place in the novel or in the language used when other characters view her,



but also at the structural and thematic level. As a successful and dedicated actor she embodies the theatre and art of acting, and as Nick's model for a portrait she becomes the figure of the Tragic Muse on canvas, thus linking the art of acting with that of painting in the narrative.

While James's construction of his figure of a female actor certifies how the actor has power over her beholders, Terry structures her autobiography to appear less influential when it comes to how she is perceived. In her autobiography she does not quote many reviews, but reproduces numerous private letters from various distinguished people, such as Ada Rehan, Tom Taylor, Eleonora Duse, Lewis Carroll, Mary Anderson and Edward Burne-Jones. The contents and passages of these letters enable the reader to believe that when Terry was on the stage she performed only herself. As Edward Burne-Jones wrote to her about *The Dead Heart*: "Exalted and splendid it was – and you were you – YOU – and so all was well" (Terry, 321). These letters confirm the desired view of Terry in the text and allow her to emphasise her fame and convince her readers of her womanly charm by the use of privately written materials rather than only public reviews and magazine articles. The convergence of public and private conceptions of Terry underlines the wholeness in her presentation of her female identity. This use of others' written view of her in her own autobiography also serves to make the book function even more as Terry-on-the-stage. James achieves this on-the-stage effect with his figure Miriam by only allowing the reader to see her through the other characters. Terry in her way does something similar when allowing others' views and perceptions of her take up space in her own autobiography. This is also one of Terry's techniques to posit herself as passive and lacking influence, not only in what is written but in how the text is structured and put together.

Edward Gordon Craig, the son of Ellen Terry and Edward Godwin, published the biography *Ellen Terry and Her Secret Self* in 1931, a few years after her death. This external source of Terry's life, a biography written by someone very close to her, challenges the claims

of truth Terry makes in her own text. In the emotional biography, which appears to be written more to contradict the image painted of her in the published letters between her and Bernard Shaw than for any other reason, Terry's son Craig tells of a completely different Ellen Terry than the person his mother showed to the public. He claims that the "merely lovable creature of the legend could not have achieved so much as she did: how, then, is this "legend" so firmly associated with her name?" (144). He was far from happy with the way the public had come to know Ellen Terry, and blamed her audiences for being both simple and blind to her many sides. He states in the book that it was the public who wanted to cast Terry in the role of a sweet naïve girl, and it was the theatre-goers and theatre-critics alike that were responsible for her interpretation of Lady Macbeth as a soft woman in 1888, rather than Terry herself. He writes that one had:

First to consider the material Ellen Terry had to work with – her temperament. It is too easy to say of my mother, Ellen Terry (here we can link them together), that she was willful, because it is what many have said of her; but I would rather not write of her at all than make her out to be a mild person, or that "touching", "pathetic", "frail" being of the legend – "the lovable Ellen Terry". Of course she was that too, but that was not all. No mild, yielding, and too reasonable, actress ever counts (143-144).

Craig contrasts Ellen Terry the actor with the other Ellen Terry who is his mother. When he mentions how the two, who to him are widely disparate, can be linked together in a discussion of her temperament he disputes the public's image of her. He states that the unity and wholeness of self that appeared to shine through in her performances, that what was visible on the stage was her private person, was far from true. Terry was in many ways a completely different woman from the one that the public saw. Craig claims that it was her audiences that simply saw her as they wanted to see her, Terry did not construct herself to meet their preferences. Craig protests against seeing Terry as a mild and lovable person, stating that both

privately and publicly she was much stronger and more determined. This last point is validated by the trajectory of Terry's career. Luck and well trained skills can never replace strength of ambition when it comes to the high level of fame Ellen Terry reached and held for half a century. Despite being a very successful actor for most of her life she continually maintained that she had got to where she was by being modest and caring more for family and love than her profession. "Never at any time in my life have I been ambitious, but at the Haymarket I was not even passionately anxious to do my best with every part that came in my way – a quality which with me has been a good substitute for ambition" (Terry 61). Not only direct statements like this, but also various hints through the language and in the way she recounts stories, confirms her lack of ambition. The autobiography is filled with Ellen Terry's female qualities, which are made to shine clearly through in her interpretation and preparation for roles she is to play, how she performs them on the stage, how she is in private, and how her friends and close ones experienced her. Reading it is a confirmation of how Terry throughout her career had specifically acted that she did not act. Craig's biography is revealing in its outright denial of certain of Terry's statements regarding herself in private, but it is also revealingly concerned with constructing Terry from his own point of view. Craig's biography of his mother is one other version of Terry, a version that disputes and disagrees with her construction of self as well as the theatrical spectators' view of her.

In addition to Ellen Terry's primary motive of constructing the figure of Terry, the autobiography can be said to have been structured to cover omissions of known facts from her life. One example of her omissions is Edward Godwin, the father of her two children, with whom she eloped and lived for six years out of wedlock. Godwin is mentioned in relation to other aspects of her life, she tells of how he designed and made dresses for her as a young girl and how he was hired to design the set of the Bancrofts's production of *The Merchant of Venice* where she played Portia to her first truly magnificent reception, but in relation to what

she calls her “six year vacation” it would seem there was no man involved at all, despite her admission of giving birth to two children. This was a part of her private life she did not share with the public. Michael Holroyd highlights the distress of the family at her action and Ellen Terry’s expulsion from their companionship, following not only her decision to live with a different man than the one she was still legally married to, but also the discovery of a drowned girl in the river, whom they mistook to be her (55-57). Of these episodes very little is said by Terry, she merely mentions having gone away. Her reasons to not inform her parents and the reason for their disappointment, she states, was that they had wanted her to stay on the stage and not give up acting. This is one example of how the multiple stories of her life intertwine, suggesting while denying access to the more multifaceted full picture underneath Terry’s own words. Regarding her many omissions and slips Ellen Terry defends herself with this comment.

And I have to answer that I have lived very little in the world. After all, the life of an actress belongs to the theatre as the life of a soldier belongs to the army, the life of a politician to the State, and the life of a woman of fashion to society. Certainly I have had many friends outside the theatre, but I have had very little time to see them. I have had many homes, but very little time to live in them! (343).

Thus, her desire to structure the book around the untold holes in her life’s story makes her finally contradict her own prior statements, and the previous smoothness of her construction of self is cracked. Her love of a home, of being in love, of living in the world, and not in the theatre is no longer discernible. She does not portray herself as a bourgeois woman in this particular passage. Instead she writes of her life as that of “an actress” not merely a woman. Due to her profession her life, and so also the story of it, belonged “to the theatre”, exactly like in other demanding professions. While this certainly is an excuse as to why she did not find it pertinent to include many events from her personal life off the stage, it also clashes

with her frequent previous statements that she is “more woman than artist” (160) and much of the work she does in the book to ensure the reader that she is just like any other woman. This creates an unintended multiplicity of stories and angles within Ellen Terry’s own definite story of herself which challenges the more simplistic view of Ellen Terry as a woman actor who achieved fame only due to her natural charm and grace.

The figure of Terry in *The Story of My Life* can then be said to have become a more complex construction due to the narrative’s structure and the author’s motivations. The same is true of the figure of Miriam in *The Tragic Muse*. Miriam Rooth is constructed as a character that is seen as always representing various versions of her own identity, and she as a character is represented exclusively through other figures in the novel, the narrator and Henry James’s writing. In the previous chapter I discussed the aptly titled book by William Archer; *Masks or Faces*. This title illustrates the duality of person that acting is concerned with, the difference between the actor, the real face, and the mask that is worn above the face to obscure it, the role that is portrayed by the actor. In the case of Ellen Terry’s acting she worked to make her spectators see her mask as her true face, or a truthful reflection of her own face. James’s character Miriam Rooth in *The Tragic Muse*, however, is remarkable for her ability to play with the notions of masks and to use the masking of self to entice her beholders.

Sometimes he thought she looked better on the stage than she did off it, and sometimes he thought the exact contrary. The former of these convictions had held his mind in the morning, and it was now punctually followed by the other. As soon as she stepped on the boards a great and special alteration usually took place in her – she was in focus and in her frame; yet there were hours too in which she wore her stage face in the world. She took up either mask as it suited her humour. Today Sherringham was seeing each in its order, and he thought each the best (James, 382).

When beholding Miriam there is an uncertainty as to what her actual face is; she is described as always wearing some sort of mask, whether it is on or off the stage. In this quotation James alludes to how his female actor, to her beholders, is wearing a mask as much off the stage as on it, that the person that is seen off the stage is as constructed as the person “on the boards”. He thereby writes a woman actor who also, by using different methods of manipulating the concept of masking than Terry, acts at being her private self, acts that she is not acting. James also shows how the inherent fascination in masking and uncertainty is attractive to the spectator. James reveals to readers by various contrivances how his creation of an actor is great at what she does due to her ability to always mask herself, never allowing her face to be seen.

In the words of William Storm; “the “impossible” nature of Miriam’s depiction” makes the figure able to become “a reflection of James’s difficulties in successfully representing the theatre through the narrative technique of the novel” (74). Miriam is the only character who is never once described as being alone during the book. She is continually the object of spectatorship in the novel, she is viewed by Peter Sherringham who is her suitor, Nick Dormer who is her painter, she is described by the narrator and the readers do not get the opportunity to discover for themselves who she is independently from how she is seen by other characters. In the novel she is to the reader what a professional actor is to the audience while on the stage. This textual method of presenting her only through the eyes of others and never directly to the reader serves to underline how the novel constructs her as an actor, through masks, not just thematically but also in how Miriam Rooth as a character is written and how she functions in the text. She is always in front of an audience, always seen by someone, and she is only what those who see her make her out to be, in a textual reflection of the profession of an actor. On a stage as well as in literature identity is the representation which is open to interpretation; it is what the audience observes and make of their

observations. In *The Tragic Muse* everyone, including the reader, becomes a spectator and thus an interpreter of Miriam Rooth. These aspects of the figure Miriam's identity construction is similar to how the author Ellen Terry used the narrative of *The Story of My Life* to be able to perform in the book as she performed on the stage. By making the narrative into her version of a play, and the Terry character into the role she is to act, the author Ellen Terry performs the same achievement of identification in the book as she did upon the stage.

This is why the light-hearted tone and youthful candour which is always implicit in the Terry's text is important. That was after all what she had become famous for; her ability to be a young, innocent girl, her charm, her grace unhampered by age. Outside of Shakespeare she had always been most popular in moral plays like *Olivia*, *The Amber Heart*, *The Wandering Heir* and *Nance Oldfield*; plays dealing with the treachery of or loss of innocence in a young, beautiful girl, roles giving full reign to all of her emotional power of pathos. Her natural gifts and training were all aimed at portraying these kinds of roles, and her ability to appear young, sweet and innocent throughout her life seemed completely effortless and perfectly natural. In most of what is written about Ellen Terry this is seen as an inevitable by-product of being a woman like her. She could not suppress or change herself when going on the stage, she adapted the roles to her own personality. "Although she was soundly skilled in the technique of her profession she never needed to perform any remarkable feat of personation: the spectators would have resented it: they did not want Ellen Terry to be Olivia Primrose: they wanted Olivia Primrose to be Ellen Terry" (St John, xvi) said her admirer Shaw in his preface to their correspondence. Edward Gordon Craig also writes of this in his biography of his mother, where he says that "Ellen Terry met almost everyone, and everyone certainly had a good chance of meeting her, for they had but to go the Lyceum Theatre, and there she was – now Ellen Ophelia, now Nelly Oldfield or Nell Beatrice. She played but one part – herself; and when not herself, she couldn't play it" (10). This 'homeliness' in Terry's acting, the

impression that you were watching the private Ellen Terry performing likely versions of herself was consistent throughout her career, even unto old age when she tried, and failed, to act in more modern plays. Likewise, Terry's autobiography gives the reader the same impression; that they are watching her act on the stage, and that this acting is what gives the emotional response and the feeling that she is familiarly herself.

That she was only able to perform the one sort of sweet young woman that came naturally to her and conduct herself in one manner only would create the impression that she was not a very good or versatile actor, but evidence can be found that there was a great deal of skill and finely rehearsed, complicated technique behind her acting. Michael Holroyd mentions in his biography of the Terry and Irving dynasties that Ellen Terry at a young age developed a technique of walking that involved pushing her leg back a little before setting her foot down (13). Terry herself talks of managing the art of a graceful glide across the stage floor in the very beginning of her autobiography, when she was being trained for theatre life before she was ten.

One of the most wearisome, yet essential details of my education is connected with my first long dress. It introduces, too, Mr. Oscar Byrn, the dancing master and director of crowds at the Princess's. One of his lessons was in the art of walking with a flannel blanket pinned on in front and trailing six inches on the floor. My success in carrying out this maneuver with dignity won high praise from Mr. Byrn. The other children used to kick at the blanket and progress in jumps like young kangaroos, but somehow I never had any difficulty in moving gracefully (Terry, 37).

Terry was famed for her 'floating', many reviewers wrote of her graceful manner of walking, which seemed to be not walking at all, but drifting, as if her feet did not touch the ground. This, as well as her swift movements, was her nature. It was not acting, it was Ellen Terry.



Yet everything she did was carefully studied and planned, and had been rehearsed since she was very young. The seemingly irrepressible femaleness everyone associated with her personality both on the stage and off it was in fact a construction and a carefully executed display of specific characteristics, which she then would go on to use in her autobiography.

In *The Tragic Muse* there is one scene where Miriam is not focalised through another character, which would seemingly offer the readers a less mediated view of Miriam. This takes place when Sherringham takes her to the Comédie-Française to see a play in which the famous and beautiful female performer Mademoiselle Voisin acts, and arranges for them both to meet her and visit her dressing room during the interval. In the particular instant when they meet the actor the focalisation of the narrative shifts from Sherringham to Miriam, detailing Miriam's impressions of what she is certain will be her future career. These three pages, in which the narrator details events from Miriam's perspective, are not, however, written to grant the reader a fuller understanding of the character. Rather the narrator tells only of her emotions of admiration for Mademoiselle Voisin and the profession she works in, which "seemed royal" (James, 232) to Miriam, and "immediately made the art of the comedian the most distinguished thing in the world" (ibid). The focus is strictly on Miriam's ambition and desire for a theatrical life, and tells the reader nothing that he or she has not already gathered from Miriam's extensive dialogues. Furthermore, as soon as Sherringham leaves the room, the narrator retracts too and the scene shifts. The narrative cannot follow or develop the figure of Miriam alone; it must always remain based on her interaction with the main characters.

Another of James's employed methods of "representing the theatre through the narrative technique of the novel" (Storm, 74) is his extensive use of dialogue. Large sections of *The Tragic Muse* consist of only dialogue and short descriptions of what the characters do and their tone of voice. In these parts the novel resembles a play in its complete disregard of going into the interior processes of the characters. These processes can only be guessed at by

the reader from what is spoken and direct detailing of their movements and tone. This, in addition to the division of the narrative and the plot into sub-sections where the reader follows parallel stories with different protagonists and a wide array of characters, is perhaps where his style differs most from his work in the more known novels such as *The Portrait of a Lady* (1881), *The Wings of the Dove* (1902), *The Ambassadors* (1903) or *The Golden Bowl* (1904). Rather than a focused psychological investigation, *The Tragic Muse* remains a panoramic view of the world of the stage and issues of representation. The influence of his theatrical years and the interest in theatre had upon the development in his authorship is especially highlighted by his biographer Leon Edel, who points several times to the importance representation on the stage had for Henry James, and how the theatrical years from 1890 to 1895 changed him (*The Treacherous Years*, 77).

Though *The Tragic Muse* is far from a mixture of the novel form and a play, the novel does contain elements where the shape and look of the text is similar to that of a play, and how the text reads confirm this sense. Important and emotional scenes consist almost exclusively of long and dense dialogue, and it is the scenes where Peter Sherringham attempts to convince Miriam to leave the stage and settle for becoming his wife that are the most extreme in absence of a narrator and not detailing a figure's thoughts or feelings. Many other interactions between other characters are heavily based on dialogue, but are also rich in descriptions by the narrator and in long strings of thought by the focalising character. When only Miriam and Peter converse, however, the text subtly changes and becomes more and more reliant on what they say, sometimes even short notes as to how they are moving or their tone of voice are also entirely omitted. The text itself hints of the effect Miriam has on Peter, she traps him inside the mechanism of a play, on a stage where she is the one in control and where he does not understand the rules or grasp that it is she who is in power. The content of their dialogue lets the reader know the very same thing, frequently their conversations take the

same turn throughout the book; Peter begging Miriam to leave the stage to become his wife, Miriam answering that if he truly loved her he would not mind being married to her on her own terms. Peter is forced to show how little he respects her and her profession in the end, stating that the “cases are not equal. You’d make of me the husband of an actress. I should make of you the wife of an ambassador” (434), finally revealing himself a Philistine choosing material politics over the art of acting. This earns him nothing but scorn from Miriam, who informs him that he is dishonest, ungrateful and false (ibid). “It was the theatre brought you here – if it hadn’t been for the theatre I never would have looked at you. It was in the name of the theatre you first made love to me; it’s to the theatre you owe every advantage” (ibid). Throughout the novel these strained disagreements between the two characters are intensified, not only by the escalating discomfort experienced by Sherringham as he falls deeper in love with Miriam’s illusion as a female actor and realises she is determined to remain in her profession regardless of his wishes, but also in how the text increasingly lengthens the dialogue scenes between them when they are arguing. Miriam’s spoken words regarding the power of the theatre and the actor over those who behold and allow themselves to be enamoured by the illusion are also made evident in the structure and shape of the text. Parts of Henry James’s *The Tragic Muse* therefore become the equivalent of the figure Miriam’s theatre for the reader.

Both *The Tragic Muse* and *The Story of My Life* are books that blur the line between woman, actor, performance on the stage and reading text, in an extension of the actor’s concealment of the line separating actor from the role to be played. Both books make their readers implicit spectators, and both books use varying techniques and different angles to illumine the fluid line between construction of self and the construction of role. This can be exemplified by looking at Ellen Terry from a different perspective than that which she herself perpetuates, that of her son Edward. In the following passage he talks of his time as an actor

at the Lyceum, and of his ritual with his mother in the dressing room right before they were going on stage:

Always rather nervous before the piece began, she talked little at such times – but generally wanted to have a look at me... so I stood there and looked at myself in her tall glass, and she looked at me. There's a lot of looking in the looking-glass goes on in a theatre – a tremendous lot. One doesn't come into another fellow's dressing-room and sit down and look at him – one comes in, and at once looks in the looking-glass. There one is sure to find his reflection – and the reflection is very much more to us than the solid thing itself. So we stand and talk to each other's reflection – and go on looking at ourselves (Craig, 106-107).

In this passage they are in full costume and make up, communicating only through the mirror, to each other's reflections of the role they are to play. Thus mother and son are not relating to each other as family members, nor as fellow actors. They are talking to each other's masks. Craig implies that it is a theatrical custom to for the actors to relate to each other as their on-stage representation. They use the mirrors' reflection to look at the other person who is already once removed from their perception by costume and make up, and to look at themselves. As the reflection of themselves in costume means more to them than “the solid thing itself”, this shows the extreme importance of the visual, the illusion, for their sense of relating to their own identity. The paradoxical situation of being oneself and at the same time being something else; a role, is here highlighted by the use of the visual effects in makeup and costume, they are embodying the difference between self and role and can view a reflection of the process in the mirror.

James engages with the same paradox in a similar manner in *The Tragic Muse*. I examined earlier how Peter Sherringham falls for the spell of Miriam's performance on the

stage, feeling that she is “inextricably transmuted – present essentially as the romantic heroine she represented” (425), unable to discern between the actor playing the part, and the part itself or what, is a mask and what is not. It becomes highly challenging to discern where the mask ends and the true face of the actor underneath it begins. After Miriam’s performance Sherringham invites her to meet him alone in a private house, and she arrives directly after exiting the stage, in full costume and make up. In the following long scene filled with dramatic dialogue then, Miriam is also literally “present essentially as the romantic heroine she represented” (ibid). In both these instances neither the onlookers, Craig and Sherringham, or the reader of the text, see clearly the person, the actor, but rather a blurred line of what is represented. Textual attempts to solidify the identity construction in acting then continues the ambiguity regarding the English theatres experienced by Henry James. I will continue to explore the visual impact of masking and identity in acting in the following chapter.

## Chapter 4: Visual Representation of Constructed Identities

This final chapter will delve into the visual presentation of the constructed identity of the female actor. I will analyse a small selection of photographs and a painting, which are all related to Ellen Terry's performances on the stage, in an attempt to understand how the complexities of role and actor are reflected in visual representation. Henry James's treatment of the representation of a woman actor's identity on canvas in his book *The Tragic Muse*, and the dynamics at play between the artist and the actor who is also a model will be investigated. Additionally, James's concern with fidelity in representation and the malleable personality necessary in an inspirational model will be explored further in his short-story "The Real Thing". This chapter offers the final angle from which I will explore the display of the female actor's identity; visual representation. In the case of Ellen Terry I have already examined acting reviews and acting style upon the stage and then her textual construction of her own identity in her autobiography. With regards to Henry James this final chapter offers a fuller understanding of how he constructs the figure Miriam Rooth as an actor through the process of painting. The images of Ellen Terry can be read as a visual narrative, inherently connected to the narrative her critics wrote of her and the narrative she herself writes in her autobiography. The painting in James's novel is in itself solely a written narrative, but the visual implications in the text, which serve the same function of reflection as the pictures of Terry, allow the narrative to accomplish a similar effect.

It is necessary to start with the specifically visual perception of female actors during the latter half of the nineteenth century. The Victorian theatres were famously preoccupied with presenting plays, especially Shakespearean ones, in an appealing and pictorial manner. Plays in theatres came to rely heavily on a picturesque presentation of the productions. Elaborate sets and costumes were carefully made to be as historically accurate and detailed as possible

and the stage design made to resemble paintings. In *Theatre in the Victorian Age* Michael Booth elaborates on what he calls the “pictorialisation of the production”, saying that the actor’s job in all this was essentially to pictorialize “passions in order to make them accessible and understandable to the audience; such pictorialisation was also a visual way of treating text and character” (120). Especially regarding actors, then, understanding the fixation on the visual aspect of their performance is necessary when researching their work and reception. To act was often to participate and position oneself in one pictorial scene resembling a painting after the other.

The Lyceum Theatre has already been shown as explicitly focused on the visual aspect of their productions through the comments of the critics and reviewers and the writing of Ellen Terry. Henry Irving’s management was founded upon and profited from the contemporary concentration on the visual and the pictorial, and famous painters and architects of the day were hired to work on the design for the sets. Ellen Terry worked to construct a public identity through performance on a stage pre-eminently concerned with visual appearance and a stage that was engaged in a debate with painting. Her impact on and relation with the artistic community of her day through her acting is evident in her autobiography, where she quotes letters from, among others, the famous painter Edward Burne-Jones, who had contributed to the play *King Arthur*, which she had acted in. She speaks of him as “one of my kindest friends” (358), and the letters she quotes from him are filled with praise for her. Terry states that Burne-Jones was one of the Lyceum’s “most ardent admirers, and was prejudiced in my favour because my acting appealed to his *eye*. Still, the drama is for the eye as well as for the ear and the mind” (318).

Another contemporary aesthete who professed his admiration of Ellen Terry through his art is Oscar Wilde. Gene Bell-Villada writes of Wilde in *Art for Art’s Sake & Literary Life* that he was a “chief spokesman for pure art among the British” (85), and Wilde shows

evidence of appreciating the purity of Terry's visual appeal on the stage. Terry tells of the sonnets Wilde wrote for her (190-192) in a display of modesty, quoting the sonnets and expressing her gratitude. The sonnets are all to Ellen Terry in a role, but their wording is praise of Terry's display of female traits more than for acting well. Of Terry as Henrietta Maria in the Lyceum's production of *Charles I* Wilde writes: "O, hair of gold! O, crimson lips! O, face / Made for the luring and the love of man! / With thee I do forget the toil and stress" (Terry, 191). Wilde adamantly praises her for her beauty in these roles, and for resembling a picture in her performance. Of her portrayal of Portia, which has been discussed as one of her most successful roles, Wilde continues his acclaim of Terry's appearance rather than her skill in acting. He writes a sonnet to applaud her looks when on the stage, which is what he finds most attractive. "For in that gorgeous dress of beaten gold / Which is more golden than the golden sun / No woman Veronese looked upon / Was half so fair as thou whom I behold" (Terry, 192). Ellen Terry, who recognised the value of being picturesque and the sometimes blinding effect it could have on her audiences, actively engaged with the art of painting through her performances. When Burne-Jones and Wilde celebrated her appearance they saw what they wanted to see in Terry's acting; a role enabling Terry to pictorialize passions.

Ellen Terry was married at sixteen to the much older painter George Frederick Watts. Though their marriage was short and they separated about a year after their wedding, their relationship reveals to what a great extent Terry's looks enabled her beholders to view her as an idealised woman and how easily Terry adapted to that part. In his portraits of her, most famous perhaps is *Choosing*, Watts's view of Terry as a suitable model due to her beauty and innocence comes across. Their relationship appeared more like that of a master and his inspirational muse rather than that between a husband and a wife. Terry also strengthens this view of her and Watts when she writes in *The Story of My Life* of how she loved posing for



her new husband. Stating that “I was happy, because my face was the type which the great artist who had married me loved to paint” (66) she again deliberately positions herself personally and artistically beneath the man she is working with, here Watts rather than Irving, to illustrate her own passivity in how she was viewed and depicted. Her first artistic relationship then did set some precedents for how Terry learned to portray herself as passive, beautiful and girlish to her own benefit. Experiencing early on how, as an aesthetic object, but a subject in art, a model could be granted a measure of power over her beholders and the image they produced of her, Terry was able to use her body, face and gestures to pictorialize her femaleness when she acted.

The idea of Terry as an aesthetic object struggling to become a subject is further examined by Gail Marshall in her theory of a specific Galatea aesthetic. Marshall argues in *Actresses on the Victorian Stage* that Terry was trapped in an aesthetic tradition which relied on setting women on pedestals, both metaphorically and by actually tasking the female actors with playing only decorous roles, which frequently were those with reference to classical statues. Marshall’s reading of Terry’s life is laid out to demonstrate how she explicitly rejected “both the dimensions of Galatea’s role, and the terms of the living statue aesthetic” (38). This rejection, however, could not be seen when Terry worked on the stage, as Marshall admits, and therefore her argument falters. By reading Terry’s autobiography as evidence of Terry’s “growing dissatisfaction with the stage by the end of the nineteenth century” (ibid) Marshall attempts to show how Terry did not wish to conform to the visual standards she was forced to perform under. Her theory of both the Galatea aesthetic in the theatres and of Terry’s active refusal to be an actor who was only visually appealing are, however, quite contrary to my own interpretations of Terry’s work. While Marshall’s writing can be illuminating in showing the extreme focus on visual appeal in the Victorian theatres, I disagree with the assertion that the sculptural myth was a “vital part of the spectacular

Victorian stage, one which has its own distinctive cultural connotations and history, and its own specifically gendered ramifications which are not wholly absorbed by the pictorial aesthetic” (5). I focus rather on this pictorial aesthetic, which Terry consciously related to. Whereas Marshall describes Terry’s relationship with Watts as her first Pygmalion relationship in a life as Galatea, I will show Terry’s agency in determining how she was perceived, also by male painters and other artists. My reading of Ellen Terry’s work has shown her to be very aware of her influence upon her spectators and, contrary to Marshall’s notion of her as trapped and wishing to escape, to use her performances to display her public self as she wished to be perceived. Her reliance upon other’s perceptions also comes across in pictures of her, and I will use a selection of photographs and one oil sketch to exemplify the strong visual element in her identity construction.

The first three pictures of Terry that I am using for my analysis are photographs. A photograph is, as Stuart Sillars points out in *Shakespeare, Time and The Victorians*, usually assumed to be an accurate visual description of a moment that has happened (152). It is therefore tempting to treat photographs of Ellen Terry as indisputable evidence of what she looked like when performing. However, a photograph “always constructs as much as it records” (ibid) and Sillars shows in his book how Victorian photography, with its presumptions of truth and innate temporal complexities, was another instance of adding to the connection between verbal and visual narratives. Photographs, which come with so many assumptions of truth and accuracy, are by their nature often unreliable documentation of the past, and must be interpreted carefully.

In the first two pictures below it is certainly possible to examine what Terry’s face looked like, and to an extent what her costumes looked like and how they were made, but the photographs are illusive in that they do not show what Terry’s audience saw when beholding her on the stage. The first two, which depict Terry in a role, are taken in a studio and not in

the theatre. Though she is in costume she is not surrounded by the elaborate production and other actors, as she was when seen by her contemporary spectators. Further, the photographs are not of known and recognisable instances in the plays, they are focused solely on Terry in her role, positing her in an isolation that is far more complete in the pictures than it would have been for spectators who saw her act the role at the Lyceum surrounded by stage properties and other effects. The photographs also, for obvious technical reasons, deny the viewer a sense of Terry's movement on the stage. Both movement and diction are important components of any performance and in Terry's case she often talks of the positive effect her handling of pace had and how her quick movement was greatly to her benefit (107).

While the photograph by nature denies the viewer knowledge of how Ellen Terry looked when acting a role, it still shows us Terry posing for the camera lens, and the pictures can be informative when searching for evidence of how Terry obfuscated the line between herself and the role to promote her public persona. When examining the photographs it is also necessary to ask the question of who is looking, and who is the artist responsible for capturing the actor? In the first two photographs of Ellen Terry the photographer is an anonymous person who worked in a studio in London. Additionally, it is impossible to know who was in charge of staging the pose she holds; it could be Terry, but it could also be the unknown photographer. If it was the photographer, he or she would have been influenced by how Terry had used the role and how she had looked when acting on the stage. Thus, even if she had not arranged the pose for herself, the photographer would have tried to capture in the picture what he or she saw of Terry when acting, making the photograph a visual demonstration of how he or she perceived Terry in the role. When viewing a photograph the beholders are to an extent viewing Terry through the photographer's eyes.

When identifying the complexity inherent in photography and other forms of visual representation of the actor embodying a part in a play Sillars asks the question: "What of the

identities of the figures that it presented, caught between private personhood and public role, in the liminal identity of the subject-as-actor-as-character” (20). The first two photographs of Ellen Terry are interesting in that they show us Terry, the private person and the public actor, but also a fictional role. The photographs are not only of Terry, but of Terry in a part; Terry as Lady Macbeth and Terry as Ophelia. Thus these photographs demonstrate in the naming of what we see, the dual nature of acting. The actor is, in addition to the profession as actor, his or her own person. The role he or she is acting is a written construction that does not exist outside of the fictional bounds of a play, but is given cultural vitality through people’s reading and usage. In the process of performance the role is given life, and the line of separation between the two becomes difficult to discern. Ellen Terry’s acting, which I demonstrated to be based on blurring the line between herself and the role so that she could display traits and mannerisms she constructed as her public persona, makes it a question of whether the titles of the two first photographs should not be ‘Ophelia as Ellen Terry’ and ‘Lady Macbeth as Ellen Terry’. This brings out my argument, which is that on the stage, in the autobiography and in the photographs the role in question was used to promote Ellen Terry, not the other way around. Sargent’s perception of Terry disputes this interpretation, which is what make his paintings of her in the role of Lady Macbeth so interesting, and why his view of Terry, as a painter, will be examined later.

The photographs chosen for this chapter were selected because they are especially suitable for demonstrating the point that I am making. There are, of course, many other photographs of Terry in various roles where her poses and facial expression are different from these. Having looked through a large amount of photographs of Ellen Terry in parts, I can, however, say that the first two photographs shown here are typical of how they were staged. They are valid examples of what several other pictures of Terry in a part looked like, in other roles as well as the two chosen here. There are numerous interesting photographs of Terry in

the role of Lady Macbeth that portray her differently, and discussing and comparing more of those would have required a separate chapter. As this role was among her most controversial it should be mentioned that the examples I use here are a few among many representations, and that the photograph chosen for this thesis is different from many others.

The role of Ophelia, which I discussed in my second chapter, is a telling example when beginning to establish a visual narrative of Terry's performance of her female identity. I demonstrated how Ophelia was considered a role which was so fully explored that *Punch* mentioned that many considered it impossible to put much fresh significance into it. Ophelia was considered the epitome of pathetic emotion, innocence and beauty. Mrs Jameson, in her analysis of the figure in *Characteristics of Women*, compares her to "the snowflake dissolved in air before it has caught a stain of earth" (151) when describing her purity. A common subject for depiction to painters, poets and other forms of writing and illustration, the popularity of Ophelia made the role one that Victorian audiences were familiar with. In Terry's portrayal of Ophelia, however, she is not doing anything new or giving an untraditional interpretation of the role. Rather she is constructing herself through the well-known associations to Ophelia, and this portrayal was applauded. Terry was praised, not for changing the conception of the role of Ophelia, but for making the role become a recognisable version of Ellen Terry on the stage. The following image can be used to demonstrate some of these differences.



Ellen Terry as Ophelia from the Lyceum Theatre's production of *Hamlet*, Window & Grove, London, 1878, 9 x 5,8 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

The photograph could be said to be of Ellen Terry in role. But it could also be said to be of Ellen Terry in a costume or of the role Ophelia being played by Ellen Terry in the production of *Hamlet* at the Lyceum in 1878. The problem of which side of the difficult 'as' to assign the

most meaning when it comes to the acting of a role is here made explicit through the naming of the photograph; it is Ellen Terry as Ophelia. The duality of the seemingly simple image we see, and the duality that is always present to a theatrical spectator, is highlighted because while the person the viewer is looking at is Terry, she is not supposed to be Terry. We are also looking at Ophelia, or more accurately, the assumed Ophelia of Terry.

In the picture Terry is standing sideways and looking towards the right side of the frame, showing her profile. Her gaze is directed upwards and her hands are clasped at her chest in a position of quiet reflection, perhaps prayer. Her face and posture gives the picture an air of melancholy that to the viewer of the picture, who knows Ophelia's fate, hints of sadness and of tragedy. The stillness in the picture also brings forth the impression that she is waiting, perhaps for Hamlet, perhaps for her impending doom. The white dress symbolises her innocence and purity and even the background in the picture is light in colour. The colour choice and posture is also relevant because of what the viewers of the picture knows will happen to Ophelia; she will go mad and drown. These aspects of the picture represent the figure Ophelia, but many elements also show how Terry used the role to promote her constructed female identity. The beauty of her melancholy confirms what Terry says of her own strength in playing pathos and pathetic emotion, and the appeal it had on her audience (164-165). The posture, position of the hands and her facial expression all contribute to the view many critics had of Terry; as innocent, fragile and young.

These aspects of the picture, the softness and the display of youth and innocence are not conspicuous when Terry is being photographed as Ophelia. After all, Anna Jameson is inspired to state that it "is the helplessness of Ophelia, arising merely from her innocence, and pictured without any indication of weakness, which melts us with such profound pity" (153) when elaborating on the role. Rather those aspects show how artfully the construction of Terry's public identity is being done when in that particular role. It becomes difficult to

separate the two, what in the image is meant to represent Ophelia and what element is purely Ellen Terry herself? A definite answer is impossible to provide, the line between the two is too unclear.

The picture therefore encompasses its own visual narrative, which the beholder can attempt to read. The viewer of the photograph experiences how Terry managed to give the impression that her own nature was inseparable from the part she played when attempting to discern which elements are composed to display the role of Ophelia and which are Terry's own construction of self. In the following example, however, Terry is portraying Lady Macbeth, a role that was considered cold, hard and manly in her ambition. Her manner as Ophelia in the first photograph becomes even more interesting when seen in relation to the picture of her as the widely different figure of Lady Macbeth. With its speech of wishing to be unsexed, the role was considered manly, cruel and hard: "Come, you spirits / That tend on mortal thoughts, unsex me here, / and fill me, from the crown to the toe, top full / Of direst cruelty" (1.5.40-43, *The Arden Shakespeare*). It is difficult to imagine the speaker of these lines being soft and gentle, yet that was how many perceived the Lady Macbeth that Terry brought to the Lyceum's stage.





Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth from the Lyceum Theatre's production of *Macbeth*, Window & Grove, London, December 1888, 8,7 x 5,7 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum, London.

In this picture, which was taken ten years after the first one, we see Terry remarkably unchanged in posture and facial expression. Arms still kept close to her body, her left hand clasping at her throat and collarbone in a melancholic gesture. Similarly to the picture as

Ophelia she shows only the profile of her face and has her eyes fastened on something outside the scope of the camera lens. In the role of Lady Macbeth her gaze is downcast, she is looking down almost submissively and her expression is both worried and sad. The quiet air, the beauty and the sense of female forbearing and endurance is the same as in the photograph of Terry as Ophelia.

In the latter picture, however, it is Terry's unique conception of the role and her attempt to change it into something she could use to portray a female identity through that is visible to the beholder. Lady Macbeth has traditionally been understood as a figure driven by ambition and not impeded much by compassion or tenderness. To return to *Characteristics of Women* and the book's strategy of personifying the female roles in Shakespeare's plays, Anna Jameson uses Lady Macbeth to warn of the moral dangers of the "very rapture of ambition" (370). The tragedian Sarah Siddons had developed these elements of the role to the greatest extent in her acting, when she in the late eighteenth century was revered for having set the standard of interpretation and performance of Lady Macbeth. For Terry, taking on this role which a previous female actor had adapted and determined the perception of proved difficult. Her experience and talent was concentrated on performing the traits of charm, innocence and sweetness, and the role of Lady Macbeth was quite inconsistent with the portrayal of femaleness Terry usually gave on the stage. Additionally, Terry worked by promoting her constructed identity through the role she acted, which would prove difficult in a role that was not only viewed as hard-hearted and ambitious in a decidedly manly manner, but that was also firmly associated in the mind of theatre-goers with a previous and very different female actor.

The solution for Terry became to approach the role from her own position. Her conception of the role, which she claims was based on Sarah Siddons's own thoughts regarding how Lady Macbeth should be played, was built on making the figure most like the public identity she constructed for herself. In this way she would be believable, be performing

a display of herself, and her loyal audience who cherished her style of acting would still feel satisfied. Terry chose to see Lady Macbeth as first and foremost a loving wife, devoted and strong in her desire for her husband's success. She played the role with emphasis on the softer aspects, attempting to bring the characteristics of Lady Macbeth as close as possible to those she promoted as her own. This performance was validated by Jameson's writing on what could vindicate the figure of Lady Macbeth; her behaviour with her husband, her bravery and her irrefutable link "with her sex and with humanity" (363). An additional justification for Terry is Jameson's footnote on how Siddons, who was the undisputed authority on performance of Lady Macbeth, had always thought that Lady Macbeth had "been a small, fair, blue-eyed woman" (362) but never, due to her strong features, tall and impressive stature and penetrating gaze, been able to act out her gentler, more womanly sides.

In the photograph above Terry's pathos and tenderness is most prominent in a striking contrast to the traditional view of Lady Macbeth. She is no longer merely utilising the commonly accepted traits of the Shakespearean role as a reflection of her private self, she is assigning new meaning to a well-established perception of a role. This novel way of acting Lady Macbeth, so fundamentally different from the previous portrayals, was met with much derision and much acclaim from a divided public. Of the criticism following the opening night Ellen Terry wrote to her daughter that "I shall not budge an inch in the reading of it, for that I know is right. Oh, it's fun, but it's precious hard work for I by no means make her a 'gentle, lovable woman' as some of 'em say. That's all pickles. She was nothing of the sort, although she was *not* a fiend, and *did* love her husband" (Terry, 318). In this defence of her manner of playing the role she gives the impression that she did not find Lady Macbeth merely a "gentle, lovable woman" and that she did not act the role solely with emphasis on these elements. Rather she gives the impression of acting out every characteristic and emotion associated with

the role, in this way making her portrayal of Lady Macbeth a more truthful representation of how the figure was meant to be understood by Shakespeare.

Terry cannot, however, dispute that she went against the commonly accepted classification of the role as that of a cruel villain and modified the acting of the role so that it would fit her range and style upon the stage. She attempted to ground her interpretation of the part in the authority in Anna Jameson's very popular work on Shakespeare's female roles so that her portrayal of Lady Macbeth would not be attributed to limited capacity or lack of ability to act something that was not suitably sweet and womanly. Her audiences' unwillingness to accept another version of Ellen Terry on the stage, an Ellen Terry not acting her own femaleness through the role, can be seen in the following quotation from her autobiography.

I flattered myself that I was able to assume a certain roughness and solidity of the peasantry in "The Good Hope", but although I stumbled about heavily in large sabots, I was told by the critics that I walked like a fairy and was far too graceful for a Dutch fisherwoman! It is a case of "Give a dog a bad name and hang him" – the bad name in my case being a "womanly woman"! What this means I scarcely apprehend, but fancy it is intended to signify (in an actress) something sweet, pretty, soft, appealing, gentle and *underdone*. Is it possible that I convey that impression when I try to assume the character of a washerwoman or a fisherwoman? If so I am a very bad actress! (339-240).

Terry vehemently declares herself to be a bad actor if she is not able to achieve the effect she aims for, yet she still admits not being able to convey any other impression than that of the "womanly woman" who is described by the long line of adjectives; "sweet, pretty, soft, appealing, gentle". This extract and her treatment of Lady Macbeth are examples of her

recognition of the fact that her constructed public persona was not compatible with the acting of roles that were not girlish. Her effort to resolve this conflict between her desire to validate the female identity she performed as her own on the stage and the role's demands of a completely different set of traits being portrayed led her to change the characteristics of the role to become more suitable for her to play. For this reason the above photograph of Ellen Terry in the role of Lady Macbeth is far more an example of how Terry made the role a part of herself, how Terry's acting involved almost appropriating the role for her own needs.

The photograph of Terry as Lady Macbeth, the way the pose is staged, the position of Terry's hand and the direction of her face and gaze, offer the viewer a visual demonstration entailing the same elements that were detailed above. When looking at the photograph alone, out of context, there are almost no clues indicating that Terry is in the role of Lady Macbeth. Which role she is in can be deduced by examining the costume, and more importantly her long hair, as the long red plaits are famously represented in John Singer Sargent's portrait, but otherwise the photograph is remarkable in its lack of similarity to what is commonly associated with the role. The photograph shows the traits of softness and distress that most critics commented on in Terry's performance, and it combines key elements of both Terry the actor and Lady Macbeth the role. In doing so it performs Terry's constructed female identity in the same manner as her acting on the stage and her writing in her autobiography. By extending the reading of the image itself, and seeing it in relation to the previous one where she poses as Ophelia, a larger visual narrative of how she constructed her public persona by recognisably showing the audience herself through the role also becomes discernible. This point can be further explored by examining the picture of Terry at seventeen taken by Julia Margaret Cameron.



Ellen Terry at Freshwater, Isle of Wight, by Julia Margaret Cameron, February 1864, 13,7 x 9,6 cm. Victoria and Albert Museum.

This photograph was taken by Julia Margaret Cameron when Ellen Terry was seventeen years old and married to Watts, during one of their visits to Freshwater. Here, Terry is leaning against the bathroom wall in her nightgown, showing only half of her face in profile and

looking down (Holroyd, 40). Her expression is thoughtful, melancholic and calm. The picture gives the impression of having captured a private moment of contemplation, the intimate mood making the viewer feel close to Terry. Simultaneously, the struggle to interpret her expression, which is distant and unreachable, in addition to Terry's downcast eyes, makes the picture feel removed from the viewer. In this instance the photographer is known and the onlooker is aware that this picture of Ellen Terry is seen through the lens of Julia Margaret Cameron. The photograph is of the young Terry, in private, that Cameron saw and reproduced in her picture.

The connections between Terry's own strength in portraying herself when being a model and how Cameron as an experienced photographer captured her image, the play between artist and the model who poses for the image, appears in the unique identity of the picture. Though it does not depict a unification of Terry and a role she was famous for portraying, it is no less complicated when staging her as Ellen Terry, merely a girl, not an actor. To the viewer of this image, Terry's self is equally ambiguous as when she is in a role. She is acting her identity in this photograph as well and is posed in a very specific manner. The intricacy of what the onlooker sees becomes more pertinent with the awareness that the photograph was taken by Cameron, who in Terry's words "was the pioneer in artistic photography as we know it today" (67).

Terry's seemingly natural female identity becomes more complex when comparing this photograph to the one of Terry as Lady Macbeth. The similarity between Cameron's picture of Ellen Terry at Freshwater, taken twenty-four years earlier, and the previous example in the photograph of her as Lady Macbeth is striking. They are alike, not just in expression, angle of the head and direction of the gaze, but also in the position of her hand. In the first picture of her as Ophelia, she also has her hands clasped at her chest and her necklace, drawing the onlooker's gaze to her slender wrists and neck. The likeness between Ellen Terry at

Freshwater and Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth is unexpected both due to the long period of time which passed between the taking of the two photographs and because in this last one we are looking at a picture of the young girl Ellen Terry while in the previous one we see the grown and experienced actor Ellen Terry in the role of Lady Macbeth. Their similarities offer a visual confirmation, so to speak, of the constructed female identity Terry demonstrated to her audience. The consistency of this visual narrative is reminiscent of how consistently Terry's public persona was utilised by her, resulting in the perceived completion or rather the wholeness of her identity that those around her saw when she acted roles. She retained and reused the same elements of youth and girliness in her display of self throughout her career, which induced many critics to praise her performances and Henry James to deem them superficial and amateurish.

In my second chapter I demonstrated how Henry James aligned himself with the ideals of Matthew Arnold, and therefore disagreed with the emotionalists who promoted sensibility, especially with regards to Terry's work. His conception of acting and representation differed from what Terry promoted with regards to the theatre and his portrayal of visual representation in his novel serve a similar function. In his treatment of artistic matters in *The Tragic Muse* he shows his preference for the measured, intellectual approach to roles in acting and adapts this approach into a visual frame of reference by looking at representation of identity from the angle of portrait painting. The painting of the Tragic Muse portrait is an important turning point in the book, and it also offers an interesting juncture between the novel's two artists, the painter Nick Dormer and the female actor Miriam Rooth.

In 1890, when Henry James's novel was published, the image of the Tragic Muse was already firmly linked with that of a spectacular female performer in the minds of British theatre-goers. Most notably this link is expressed in the famous painting by Sir Joshua Reynolds entitled *Mrs Siddons as the Tragic Muse* from 1784. Through the title of his book as



well as his figure Miriam Rooth James invokes association to Sarah Siddons, the great British tragic woman actor of the eighteenth century. By implicitly showing his readers that Miriam Rooth is of the same capacity and looks as the legendary Tragic Muse Sarah Siddons, James not only confirms the talent of his figure but also positions Miriam within the traditions of the London stage. However, in the second chapter I stated that James also alludes to another female actor in his portrayal of Miriam; namely the great French tragic actor Rachel Félix. Félix, a woman actor who made a great cultural impression and who also was considered the nation's greatest tragic actor, was, like Siddons, represented on canvas by famous painters and especially known for her portrayal of one specific role. Where Siddons was considered to have made Lady Macbeth come truly alive, Rachel Félix dominated the role of Phèdre in the play with the same name by Racine. James's character Miriam Rooth is then positioned to represent elements of both these women actors. The figure Miriam speaks both French and English in addition to other European languages in the novel. She is a wanderer of the continent, and Jewish, like Rachel Félix. In *The Tragic Muse* she must decide whether she will go on the stage in France, the stage of Racine and Molière, or upon the English stage, the stage of Shakespeare. After deciding which tradition she wishes to enter into she is painted as the Tragic Muse.

Miriam Rooth is made to evoke the image of Mrs Siddons from the very first time the two protagonists Peter Sherringham and Nick Dormer see her act. The description of her face and looks gives the impression that she was similar in appearance and in effect to the dark colouring, bold nose and intense gaze of Sarah Siddons.

But still the girl hesitated, and for an instant she appeared to make a vain, convulsive effort. In this effort she frowned portentously, her low forehead overhung her eyes; the eyes themselves, in shadow, stared, splendid and cold, and her hands clinched themselves at her sides. She looked austere and terrible, and during this moment she

was an incarnation, the vividness of which drew from Sherringham a stifled cry. '*Elle est bien belle – ah ca!*' murmured the old actress; and in the pause which still preceded the issue of sound from the girl's lips Peter turned to his kinsman and said in a low tone: 'You must paint her just like that.' 'Like that?' 'As the Tragic Muse' (James, 90-91).

It is the look and the effect produced by Miriam's "vain, convulsive effort" that makes Peter voice the notion that Miriam should be painted by Nick Dormer as the Tragic Muse for the first time. From early on it is made clear that Miriam has all the physical and natural attributes necessary to become a tragic actor, it is the all-important formal training that remains. James has deliberately placed Miriam Rooth alongside the women actors of previous generations, Sarah Siddons and Rachel Félix and distanced her from the actors and styles of the late nineteenth century associated with, among others, Ellen Terry. In doing so Miriam becomes the timeless and classical female performer in his book, embodying the notion of how the actor can transcend national, stylistic and temporal boundaries.

The physical aspect is one of the many points of contrast between Ellen Terry and James's figure Miriam Rooth if they were to be compared. James's construction of Miriam is almost a direct opposite of how he saw Terry. Miriam is described as dark, ruthless in her ambition and as completely obliterating herself into the act of representing someone else. Terry was considered light, filled with womanly charm and always used her acting to be perceived as her natural self. Miriam, in James's novel, resembles the Lady Macbeth of Sarah Siddons rather than Terry's version of the role, and Miriam is also trained in formal technical acting by a retired French female actor who represents the earlier and by implication better, French stage. Terry's construction of self was seen as temporally and nationally bound by Henry James, to him she was too tied to the specificities of the British stage. Miriam, as a contrast, is constructed as timeless and cosmopolitan, working within several theatrical

traditions and periods. There is, however, one essential point where James has positioned his figure Miriam Rooth as similar to Ellen Terry; namely in how suited they are to be represented visually. James often mentions Terry's appealing looks as her most redeeming quality when on the stage. Stating as early as 1877 in his *The Galaxy* article "The London Theatres", one of the first times he saw Terry perform, that "Miss Terry is picturesque; she looks like a preRaphaelitish drawing in a magazine – the portrait of the crop-haired heroine in the illustration to the serial novel" (*The Scenic Art*, 109) when elaborating on the company at the Court theatre, he illustrates how great an effect she has on the eye. Miriam, in *The Tragic Muse*, is also unanimously considered extremely suited to be depicted, but for a different reason. James considered Ellen Terry to be more suited to be a painter's model than an actor because her visual allure was what he found most rewarding in her performances. She was not a good actor in his eyes, but she was "picturesque" and pleasing to look at. James's figure Miriam, on the other hand, is a satisfactory model for painting not only because she is beautiful but because she is a talented actor with the ability to become anything and anyone the painter might wish to represent on his canvas. Miriam is the timeless tragic muse of artistic inspiration, while Terry, as James wrote in the 1879 article "The London Theatres" published in the *Nation*, "belongs properly to a period which takes a strong interest in aesthetic furniture, archaeological attire, and blue china. Miss Ellen Terry is "aesthetic"; not only her garments but her features themselves bear the stamp of new enthusiasm" (*The Scenic Art*, 122). To James, Terry was more a product of the English's focus on beauty and art for its own sake, than beauty and art with an intelligent purpose and function. Her looks and her manner, which were unmistakably English, tied her specifically to the time and place she worked in. While this exact trait was the reason for Terry's fame, it was also what James felt limited her ability to transcend these fixed boundaries that determined who she was and what kept her from being able to rise the way Miriam rises in *The Tragic Muse*. Thus it becomes

clear that while James viewed Terry as a subject worthy of depiction, her suitability as a model was purely due to how she looked and how her features belonged “properly to a period” where the focus was only on the aesthetic. That James continually positions Miriam as a contrast to how he saw Terry will be demonstrated by examining the function of Miriam’s portrait in his novel.

In her sitting for the painting as the Tragic Muse, Miriam, and the process of representing her in painting, becomes increasingly complex within the narrative. As stated earlier, there are several ambiguities present when looking at a picture and even the seemingly simple and straightforward photographs of Ellen Terry turned out to lead the viewer to unanswerable question of what is truly represented. In the novel Miriam is posing, but not only as herself, she is posing as herself as the Tragic Muse. Furthermore, Miriam’s nature is in itself already a representation of something. In the previous chapter I demonstrated how the figure of Miriam is constructed in the text to function as the actor does upon the stage. It becomes perceptible, then, that in a picture of Miriam Rooth in *The Tragic Muse* many of the same problems regarding the identity of the actor become relevant as when looking at the pictures of Ellen Terry. In neither of the two cases are the viewers granted access to the private self of the female actor. Their private person is impossible for readers and the potential spectators to reach. The photographs of Ellen Terry give a visual demonstration of how she worked when constructing a public persona that she skilfully displayed as her private self, and the descriptions from the different focalisations and the narrator give the readers an impression of what Miriam looks like in the Tragic Muse portrait. In both cases the viewer or reader, sees what the artist, be it the author, the painter, or the photographer, want them to see. The identity of the subject in the pictures is mediated through the artist who depicts.

In the case of Miriam Rooth in James’s novel, the process of representing the actor is only rendered accessible through reading descriptions rather than viewing a finished result.

The portrait is described to the reader, but in the book it not the finished result that is important, it is rather the process of painting it, and what that process reveals about the sitter. The narrative portrays Nick Dormer as feeling that he can paint Miriam “day after day, without any agitating blur of vision; in fact, the more he saw of her the clearer grew the atmosphere through which she blazed, the more her richness became one with that of the flowering picture”(455). Nick is described as experiencing a connection with Miriam who is posing as the Tragic Muse, she is acting, he is painting, and they are both involved in the act of representation. The importance of the model and the effect skillful presentation of self has on the painting is brought out. If Miriam is flowering, then the picture must be flowering too, as Dormer’s job is to capture the essence of Miriam Rooth posing as the Tragic Muse. James gives his artist in the book, Nick Dormer, the impression that the relationship he and Miriam share when on each their separate sides of the canvas, both contributing to the picture as artists, is special, almost sacred, and that there “are reciprocities and special sympathies in such relations” (455). In *The Tragic Muse* James awards power to the model that is to be represented, power over how she is perceived by the painter. The reciprocal relationship between painter and muse ensures that inspiration and art comes from both of their creative outputs, not a singular, one-way direction of passive sitting and active interpretation.

This view of the process of painting is also evident to a certain extent in Terry’s writing of her short marriage with George Frederick Watts. As a young girl she had been taken off the stage by him and offered instead a life as his wife and model. In her autobiography she writes that “I remember sitting to him in armour for hours and never realizing that it was heavy until I fainted” (66) when telling of how she loved to spend days in his studio being an inspiration for him. This statement is first and foremost another example of how Terry constructed her female identity through the autobiography, the fact that she fainted confirming her as fragile, womanly and dedicated. It would be a mistake, however, to take this quotation as evidence

only of Terry's passivity and subordination in the artistic relationship to Watts, as she perhaps wished it to be taken, and as Gail Marshall reads it when claiming that Watts functioned as Terry's first Pygmalion. That Terry says she was sitting to Watts for hours in armour, "never realizing that it was heavy" can also imply that she herself was so mentally involved in the process, straining and using her skills as a trained actor to represent an idea to the painter, that she was completely unaware of the passing of time or what was going on around her. In this reading Terry is still actively constructing her identity by representing a version of herself, but in a studio before a canvas rather than on a stage before an audience.

The power that the inspirational muse and model holds over the representation of identity is given a fresh interpretation by Henry James in his short story "The Real Thing" from 1892. Here we meet an illustrator who is struck by the fact that two of his recent models, a lady and a gentleman called Mr and Mrs Monarch, are unsuitable for drawing illustrations of for a book, as they are both too real to be much good as sitters. Of Mrs Monarch the artist is forced to conclude that "she herself had no sense of variety" (12) and that she obliterates any attempts of the artist to create something malleable to use for showing various effects. The problem lies in Mrs Monarch being too much the real thing, something which makes her particularly unfit for representing anything else. There are once again striking similarities between James's portrayal of identity on canvas and identity on the stage. "She was always a lady certainly, and into the bargain was always the same lady. She was the real thing, but always the same thing" (ibid). In "The Real Thing" it is a too stable and clearly expressed identity which blocks the process of representation. Mr and Mrs Monarch are unable to assume different traits or personalities, they are undeniably a lady and a gentleman, and do not attempt, or wish, to be anything else. The comparison with the successful actor Miriam Rooth in *The Tragic Muse* could not be more contrastive. In the book Sherringham tells Miriam early on why she is so fascinating to him. "You are always playing something; there

are no intervals. It's the absence of intervals, of a *fond* or a background, that I don't comprehend. You're an embroidery without a canvas" (James, 138) he states, and this turns out to be exactly the reason for Miriam's success upon the stage; the utter malleability that comes with having no personal identity independent from the act of representing others. This quality is also why Miriam is a perfect model, and the painting of her as the Tragic Muse becomes a tribute to the female performer who fluently performs even herself. Mrs Monarch, who in her inability to represent something other than herself as a lady forces the illustrator in the story into "trying to invent types that approached her own, instead of making her own transform itself" (12), becomes representative of James perceptions of Terry.

As to the Tragic Muse painting in *The Tragic Muse* the reader is allowed to view it as they view most of Miriam Rooth; through the eyes of Peter Sherringham. This scene in the book is filled with revealing points about the figures involved in it. Henry James has put Peter in Nick's studio where he is alone with Nick's younger sister Bidy. Bidy, while not a protagonist in the novel, is the only character besides Peter Sherringham and Nick Dormer to focalise a few parts of the narrative. Bidy's perspective and thoughts are therefore known to the readers, who are aware that she is in love with Peter. The narrative positioning Bidy Dormer as the one who shows Peter Sherringham the painting then becomes worth noting, as she is described as holding it in front of herself. This action creates a visual image for the readers; of Bidy lifting the painting of the woman Peter desires to cover her own body. While her head and shoulders are showing at the edges of the canvas the painting is in front of her, the play on angles creating the effect of merging her own body with that of the picture of Miriam to the reader who is partaking in Sherringham's experience of events:

She wouldn't let him take it; she bade him stand off and allow her to place it in the right position. In this position she carefully presented it, supporting it, at the proper angle, from behind and showing her head and shoulders above it. From the moment

his eyes rested on the picture Sherringham accepted this service without protest. Unfinished, simplified and in some portions merely suggested, it was strong, brilliant and vivid and had already the look of life and the air of an original thing. Sherringham was startled, he was strangely affected – he had no idea Nick moved with that stride. Miriam was represented in three-quarters, seated, almost down to her feet. She leaned forward, with one of her legs crossed over the other, her arms extended and foreshortened, her hands locked together round her knee. Her beautiful head was bent a little, broodingly, and her splendid face seemed to look down at life. She had a grand appearance of being raised aloft, with a wide regard, from a height of intelligence, for the great field of the artist, all the figures and passions he may represent. Peter wondered where his kinsman had learned to paint like that. He almost gasped at the composition of the thing, at the drawing of the moulded arms. Biddy Dormer abstained from looking round the corner of the canvas as she held it; she watched, in Peter's eyes, for *his* impression of it (303).

The whole scene becomes a series of reflective representations. There is the representation of the actor Miriam Rooth, which on the canvas is as “strong, brilliant and vivid” as she, “the original thing”, is. Her identity as a Tragic Muse has been captured in the visual presentation of her. Yet what the readers see in the text is Sherringham's reaction and emotional response to a painting of the woman he loves. Sherringham is looking at Miriam from the angle and perception that Nick Dormer had of her when working on the representation. We as readers therefore see Miriam in the Tragic Muse painting through how the artist, Nick Dormer, has understood her performance of identity when painting her, and then through the focalisation of the protagonist Peter Sherringham when he looks upon Dormer's painting. Additionally, there is the figure of Biddy, who is holding the painting in front of her body and not looking at it, but for a reflection of what it means to Peter in his eyes. The painting and the scene



unfolding around it becomes a mirror image reflecting the different characters and their function within the narrative. The multiple viewers of the female actor's identity represented on canvas, and the multiple layers they, and we readers, are viewing through, as well as the various media of representation, are neatly gathered in one scene of looking at a painting.

The regal majesty the picture affords to its subject is vividly described and easily imaginable to readers. The narrative depicts Miriam Rooth as placed above being merely an actor in the painting, she represents an ideal, and does it so well that she is "raised aloft" seeming to look down at the world. Her position, as the Tragic Muse, elevates her above the mundane; she is at the "height of intelligence" and invokes the association of a deity or a queen. In these descriptions the regal nature of Sarah Siddons in Reynolds's painting is recalled, where Mrs Siddons is sitting in a throne-like chair. Miriam's position as aloft and seeming to "look down at life" also shows that in the narrative the painting reproduces the features of Miriam that have been observed by Sherringham when he sees her acting. The painting, then, has captured Miriam with such fidelity that Sherringham describes it in the exact same terms as he uses to denote how he perceives Miriam when she is acting before him. The religious tone and choice of words hinting at an element of worship are as present as in other examples of Sherringham's focalisations of Miriam, confirming the link between representation on canvas and on the stage. Miriam is described as elevated to a height due to her intelligence in the picture, which shows how her method of acting and of attracting Sherringham through her masking of self, has been captured in the painting of her. The painting thus functions in the narrative as one of her masks, or her stage presence; it is one way of representing self.

The painter's ability to uniquely represent what he or she sees when the female actor is performing, the importance of who it is that is looking at her, are vital in the following painting of Ellen Terry in the role of Lady Macbeth. The picture is based on a sketch John

Singer Sargent did while watching her in the Lyceum's production of *Macbeth* in 1889 (Ormond and Kilmurray, 189). The original sketch is now in the Ellen Terry Memorial Museum in Smallhythe, Kent, but for her stage jubilee in 1906 Sargent reproduced the picture in oil.



John Singer Sargent, *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, 1906 after a sketch done in 1889, National Portrait Gallery, London, 85,1 x 72,4 cm, oil on canvas.

In this picture we see Sargent's perception of Terry as Lady Macbeth, which is quite different from the photograph of the same subject that I examined above. This complicates the layering that Terry is viewed through, by offering a completely different perspective of her in the role. This painting offers another artist's view of Terry's work, and it shows how the painter's conception and understanding of the actor determines the finished result on canvas. Sargent's model was Terry as Lady Macbeth, and Sargent has represented what he saw on the Lyceum's stage. From the image it seems that Sargent did not perceive Terry in that role as the majority of reviewers and audiences did. His paintings indicate that rather than adapt the role to suit herself Terry adapted herself to the role.

In the example above this is reflected in every aspect of the painting, the colouring, staging and Terry's face and body. The darkness of the picture is a deliberate choice, making the mood feel intimidating. Unlike the promotional photographs of Ellen Terry in a role the lack of colour is an effect which serves a purpose, the different hues of iron grey serving to underline the iron hard lines in Terry's face and the determination in her walk. The painting is also able to give the viewer the impression of interacting with the Lady Macbeth of the play, as Terry is not depicted on her own, but surrounded by ghost-like retainers who are bowing down to her. Sargent's picture takes the viewer into the action of the play, by showing a moment that took place on the Lyceum's stage, act 1, scene 6, where Lady Macbeth exits the castle to greet Duncan (Ormond and Kilmurray, 189). Though Ellen Terry's facial features can be recognised, it is Lady Macbeth that is represented in the dark scenery and the viewer gets the feeling of engaging with the role within the action of the play, the onlooker of the picture standing where Duncan would have stood on the stage. This painting therefore gives its viewer a far greater feeling of interaction through its representation than the photographs did. The painting's sense of immediacy and involvement is pointed out also by Sillars in his analysis (270).

Sargent's painting demonstrates the point James makes in his novel of noting who is looking, and who is capturing the representation. In the above portrait of Terry as Lady Macbeth the onlooker of the picture feels involved in the plot of the play, the image promoting a sense of hurried movement and engagement with the role. Terry looks far more determined and strong than soft and womanly. In his paintings of Terry as Lady Macbeth Sargent brings forth a completely different interpretation of her in the role, focusing on the traditional aspects of ambition and hardness in Lady Macbeth. In his most famous portrait of her, which hangs at the Tate Gallery in London and is also entitled *Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth*, we see the tall and stately Terry holding up a golden crown representing Lady Macbeth's ambition. The more famous painting of Terry with the crown, unlike the painting chosen here, vividly uses the colours red and green to illuminate the contrast between her dress and hair, and depicts Terry alone, without any stage properties or other effects from the production. The image of Terry holding a crown in front of her head recalls Lady Macbeth's speech that was quoted earlier, where she utters a wish to be filled with dire cruelty from the crown of her head to her feet (Shakespeare, 113). The closeness of how both paintings work visually along with the imagery of determination and ambition in Shakespeare's text is worth noting. It indicates that to Sargent the performance was one where Terry became Lady Macbeth to the extent that her constructed female identity disappeared from the stage. The effect Terry had on her audience by making them feel that they could see Ellen Terry through every part that she played is not visible. Sargent, in his picture, did not see Terry's performance on the stage as a confirmation of her female identity, and his paintings confirm Terry's wording in the letter to her daughter; that she did not make Lady Macbeth into a gentle and loveable woman as many of her critics stated.

The regal air Sargent brings to the portraits of Terry in that role position them as closer in nature to the Tragic Muse painting of Sarah Siddons, and tells us perhaps something of how

Sargent experienced Ellen Terry as truly acting the Lady Macbeth of Siddons. The portraits he painted of her could also imply something else entirely; that Sargent considered Terry herself to be more like the role of Lady Macbeth than the public persona she purported as her identity. Sargent, when he paints Terry in that role, appears to paint the Lady Macbeth of Shakespeare's writing rather than Terry's portrayal of the part. His symbolism remains very close to the text in the play, and the crown of ambition as well as the hardness of manner is directly contradictory to Terry's construction of self. In chapter 3 Terry's continuous confirmation of her own humility and lack of ambition was questioned by her son Craig. In this chapter it is challenged by Sargent's view of her in the role of Lady Macbeth.

Regardless of which interpretation is chosen for why Sargent painted Terry as Lady Macbeth to bring out the traits usually associated with the role and not with Terry, the importance of the artist's gaze, the interactions between the actor performing and posing, and the painter observing and representing, are demonstrated. Sargent's paintings produce a completely different visual narrative than the photographs did. Reading the above painting that is Sargent's interpretation therefore illustrates that the relationship between master and muse is dynamic and multifaceted. Representation becomes a dual effort that flows both ways. James's idea regarding the complexity of how the model performs an identity before the canvas is equal to that of how actors perform identity for a role on the stage. The painter's perception of this construction and the reproduction of it can be seen in Sargent's paintings of Terry as Lady Macbeth. The play between actor and role, and the fusion of the two in the mind of the audience is captured in all of the pictures of Ellen Terry as well as in Henry James's portrayal of the Tragic Muse portrait.

## Conclusion

This thesis has explored Ellen Terry's construction of a female identity presented through various forms of writing and visual illustrations. Terry continually constructs herself as a woman using her onstage techniques to portray her identity in both her autobiography and in visual images. Comparing Terry's construction of her own female identity as author, actor and model to Henry James's portrayal of a female actor in his novel, I demonstrated the blurred lines between the different performances; textual, theatrical and visual. The autonomy both authors award to the female actor in their texts is mediated by the focus on the interpreters who behold the performance and present their interpretation to a wider audience. This thesis was one more rewriting of Terry's portrayal of self into a different form than her original performance.

A theatrical performance exists only in the moment it takes place. Any attempt to preserve it will alter the performance into something related yet invariably distinctive. Each enactment of a play is unique, as is each remembrance. Though there are many recollections and reviews of the plays Ellen Terry acted in, her onstage performance of her female identity can now only be accessed through writing, pictures, and a few audio recordings. None of these provide the experience of watching Ellen Terry act before her audience. This thesis looked at how Terry was portrayed in the various media nevertheless, to see how her performance of self was interpreted and reproduced by other artists and viewers.

James's *The Tragic Muse* constructed another female identity through a different textual portrayal. His narrative of a female actor also joined aspects of performance on the stage, on canvas and the male viewer's presentation of his own interpretation. A theme of comparison between the two works is that they both showed the difficulty of discussing the truth or original intent in construction of self and the impossibility of separating the

performance of identity from those who view and interpret it. These themes were only explored as far as they are taken in the two primary texts of this thesis; *The Tragic Muse* and *The Story of My Life*. Further examination of more of James's critical writing and a different selection of his literature might have yielded deeper insight to other aspects of how he, as a male critic, responded to acting. This investigation could be taken further in the future by comparing his attitude toward art from the early stages of his authorship and through his later phases by including *Roderick Hudson* (1875) and *The Ambassadors* (1903) into the works analysed. Looking at James's essay "The Art of Fiction" (1884) and making use of his letters and writings on visual art would also be one way of building on this thesis.

In addition, juxtaposing Terry's autobiography with those of some of her contemporaries, Lady Helena Faucit Martin or perhaps Dame Madge Kendal, could elaborate some of the issues that have been raised here; such as the identification with and excision of Shakespearean roles or how the female actor is able to construct her identity similarly as on the stage through the writing of an autobiography. By focusing further work upon several female actors and their autobiographies it would be possible to attempt to answer the question why only certain Victorian women actors chose to write an autobiography at all, and why others did not feel that such a step was necessary. Another possible road to take when building on the work done here is an expansion on the genre of autobiography, and specifically the autobiographies by women in nineteenth century Britain, to see how they construct themselves as women of the period.

There are many inclusions I wished to make that have been left out due to spatial concerns. I would have liked to include Oscar Wilde's *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) for Wilde's ideas on identity in visual representation, and his depiction of the female actor Sibyl Vane. George du Maurier's popular novel *Trilby* (1894) would also have made an excellent addition to the themes discussed, and both authors make relevant and interesting comparisons

to Henry James and Ellen Terry. This thesis could have been done differently by approaching the material through feminist criticism of theatre or looking at the changing theory of acting technique by using Constantin Stanislavski, but I chose to read the texts mainly on their own terms, and my approach resulted in this particular finished product.

The notion of a fluent identity being shaped and represented by acting is wide open to interpretation, and an expansion upon this study could preferably include a greater focus on the play of mirrors and masks that take place in the material presented here. The female actor's construction of identity on the stage, its representation in literature and in visual portrayals, is a relevant subject for an array of different fields, and could be utilised by cultural historians, art historians and various literary theorists alike. This thesis will close with the words of Henry James, detailing Miriam's success as Juliet upon the stages of London in the final pages of his book. Allowing Miriam to triumph in one of Shakespeare's most famous female roles and expressing the elation in the actor's artful illusion, this passage captures many of the elements that have been expanded on. "Miriam's Juliet was an exquisite image of young passion and young despair, expressed in the truest divinest music that had ever poured from tragic lips. The great childish audience, gaping at her points, expanded there before her like a lap to catch flowers" (486).



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