Section 2

Personalities in Costume

2.1 Costume Centre Stage: Re-membering Ellen Terry (1847–1928)

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Resurrecting the Dead

There is something uncanny about a costume on display: though inanimate, it is a garment which insists on the absent body. Indeed, the mannequin and its 'shroud' are consciously employed to resurrect the absent or deceased performer(s) who once inhabited it. To suggest that curators are engaged in resurrecting the dead, risks conjuring up images of body snatching, séances and melodrama. Whilst this evokes an atmosphere of dramatic spectacle appropriate to a discussion of theatre costume in the late nineteenth century, the spirits under consideration in this chapter have no malicious intent. To summon these benevolent spirits, costumes, rather than Ouija boards are required: these are, after all, garments which carry 'magic' in their fibres.

Sybil Thorndike felt a particular reverence for costumes worn by her fellow actress Ellen Terry declaring that:

> Ellen's stage clothes became such a part of her that some magic seemed to belong to them. I know her daughter Edith Craig never liked them being cleaned, she said it spoilt them and the magic went out of them.[1]

Thorndike's description of the 'magic' which was an intrinsic part of Terry's costumes resonates with what Susan Pearce has described as 'the power of the "actual object"' (Pearce 1994: 25). Stage costumes, unlike many examples of historic dress derive this perceived power directly from the close connection they develop with their original wearer(s). This connection transforms them from a simple garment into a carrier of their 'identity' with the ability to take on the role of the 'effigy' perpetuating the 'memory' of the lost production and literally, 're-membering', the absent performer (Roach 1996: 36).

This chapter illuminates the important function that stage costumes can have in what Marvin Carlson termed 'ghosting' (Carlson 2003). Having established the role of costumes as 'carriers of identity' and 'memory' this chapter considers why and how performers might deliberately reference their own past roles by re-creating or alluding to costumes which reference a previous performance or a specific aspect of their celebrity. Through the close analysis of specific examples from the

wardrobe of celebrated Victorian actress Dame Ellen Terry (1847–1928), it will highlight the degree to which costumes are haunted by 'ghosts' of 'performers' and 'performances' both during the lifetime of their original wearer(s) and after their death.

'Haunted by the Absent Body' (Hodgdon 2006: 143)

Recalling a visit to the Royal Shakespeare Company Collection (hereafter RSC Collection), Barbara Hodgdon offered an evocative description of '[…] the thrill of touching a costume's fabric, feeling its weight and drape in one's hand' (Hodgdon 2006: 140). Hodgdon's observations capture the excitement of direct engagement with surviving costumes. It is only by examining a costume at first hand that one can fully appreciate and document material evidence of the body or bodies, which once inhabited it. These traces of past performers and performances are significant, because whilst certain costumes are preserved, the majority are re-used, re-cycled and ultimately discarded. The costumes which do survive often do so because of their association with the celebrated performers who once wore them. In such cases, the original wearer shapes not only the physical form of the costume but also its historical identity. These are garments which are 'indelibly imprinted' with both the physical and spiritual 'ghosts' of their wearers (Hodgdon 2006: 141).

It is arguably the perceived presence of these 'ghosts' which enable costumes to take on what Hodgdon terms a 'talismanic function', offering a tangible connection between performers past and present. Terry's respect for the 'memories' carried by costumes is apparent in the large collection of costumes and related ephemera she assembled in the collection now housed at her former home, Smallhythe Place in Kent. There were also occasions on which relics of past performers provided inspiration for her own performances. For instance, when taking on the role of Lady Macbeth in 1888, Terry kept a pair of shoes, reputedly worn by Sarah Siddons in the same part, in her dressing room at the Lyceum Theatre.[2]

For Terry, these precious shoes were 'not to wear, but to keep with [her].'[3] When performers move beyond looking and touching to wearing surviving costumes however, this 'talismanic function' is intensified. Indeed, Thorndike's description of her experience when wearing Terry's 'Beetlewing Dress' (co-incidentally also from *Macbeth)* suggests that actors can become temporary 'hosts' of the 'ghosts' preserved within certain costumes:

> The moment I put on Ellen's dress, something happened, not a tremor, not a quake, I waltzed through the play on air. When it came to the banquet scene, the fine American star lost himself, his nerve went. But the beetlewing dress came to the rescue. I wasn't a very hefty girl in those days but something pushed me from behind and I took hold of that huge man and I hurled him across the stage, whispering his words in his ear […] that was Ellen Terry's dress, she pushed me on. That's what Ellen did to her dresses.[4]

Evidence that this 'ghosting' is an established part of theatrical practice can be found in Hodgdon's analysis of the fate of a 'rat coloured cardigan with pockets' within the RSC Collection. The 'power' attributed to this 'everyday sort of garment' stemmed from its connection with actress Peggy Ashcroft

(1907–91) who wore it when playing the Countess of Rossillion in the 1982 Royal Shakespeare Company production of *All's Well that Ends Well* (her last Shakespearean role). Returned to the theatre's wardrobe after the final performance, by 1999 the cardigan had a name, 'The Peggy' and was part of 'material memory system' in which performers resurrected and wore the garment, simultaneously referencing the previous wearers and productions and adding to its history (Hodgdon 2006: 160–1).[5]

Simon Sladen (2017) has drawn attention to the important role that deliberate 'ghosting' plays within contemporary pantomime. Through an examination of pantomime dame Chris Hayward's tribute to star performer and female impersonator Danny La Rue (1927–2009), Sladen highlighted the part that costume can play in what he describes as the 'hosting' process. As he demonstrated, this was a performance in which both Hayward's body and his 'borrowed' costume worked to 're-member' the lost performer, resulting in a performance 'ghosted' by the memories of La Rue's former triumphs which took full advantage of the 'halo' effect this produces.

Terry's recognition of the 'meanings' and 'memories' costumes carry for both the performer and the audience will be made apparent in the case studies which follow. Before considering how Terry sought to exploit the power of 'ghosting' however, it is first necessary to establish why the actresses felt she needed the protection afforded by the 'halo effect' (Carlson 2003: 58–9).

'They Love Me, you Know, Not for What I Am, but for What They Imagine I Am'[6]

The second child of two strolling players, both Ellen Terry and her elder sibling Kate were trained for the stage from an early age. Terry made her first stage appearance aged eight, performing the role of Mamillius in *The Winter's Tale* opposite the actor/manager Charles Kean (1811–68) as Leontes. She remained with the Keans' company at the Princess Theatre, London until the Keans departed for America in 1860. Having completed this useful apprenticeship, Terry began a more nomadic existence, moving in pursuit of new engagements and between 1860 and 1863 she performed in London, toured 'the provinces' and worked with a stock company in Bristol.[7]

Between 1864 and 1874, Terry's career was then punctuated by what she termed two 'vacations' from the stage (Terry 1908: 76). The first, to marry the painter George Frederick Watts (1817–1904) in 1864. The second, between 1868 and 1874, when distressed by the failure of her first marriage and the pressure to re-kindle her stage career, Terry eloped with the architect and designer, Edward Godwin (1833–86). As Terry acknowledged, both men had a lasting impact on her approach to dress and design, training her to make careful judgements 'about colours, clothing and lighting' (Terry 1908: 150). Both relationships provided an opportunity to learn not only from the work of Watts and Godwin, but also to gather ideas from the other artists they both brought her into contact with.

Terry spent six years living with Godwin. They never married, but did have two children together: Edith Craig (1869–1947) and Edward Gordon Craig (1872–1966).[8] In 1874 however, financial necessity coupled with the gradual collapse of her relationship with Godwin compelled Terry to return to the stage. Over the next four years she gradually re-built her professional career and by 1878 had become established as a 'general favourite' with 'aesthetic credentials, and a following alert to

decorative elegance' (Meisel 1983: 403). This success brought Terry to the attention of Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905) who invited her to become the leading lady of the Lyceum Company (Terry 1908: 147).

This invitation marked the commencement of a partnership which endured over twenty years and established both Irving and Terry at the pinnacle of their profession. The seven tours of America which the Lyceum Company undertook between 1883 and 1902 brought them international celebrity and by the late 1880s, Terry was one of the most popular and celebrated actresses of her generation and amongst the 'best paid women in England' (Powell 1997: 7).

From 1889 onwards however, tensions began to develop between the two performers. The success of Terry's partnership with Irving was founded upon her ability to perform the role and 'roles' of a 'leading lady'. This made it impossible for her career to follow the traditional path from leading lady towards 'heavy business' in secondary and more mature female roles (graduating in Shakespeare's *Othello* from Desdemona to Emilia and in *Hamlet* from Ophelia to Gertrude) (Davis 1991: 22). Instead Terry, now approaching her fifties, remained confined to 'young parts' (Terry 1908: 313). There were fleeting moments of brilliance with Terry's performance as Imogen in *Cymbeline* in 1896 'accounted one of her greatest triumphs' and the fifty-year-old actress was described as 'radiant' and 'full of girlish spirits' (A.B. Walkley quoted in Richards 2005: 44). Yet in Terry's view, this production represented her 'only inspired performance of these later years' and sustaining the illusion of 'eternal youth' was becoming an increasingly oppressive burden for the actress (Terry 1908: 316).[9]

By 1902, she was conscious that 'the Lyceum reign was dying' and understood the pragmatic motivation that prompted Irving to revive 'his biggest "money-maker"' *Faust*. She was nevertheless determined that 'it was [now] impossible that [she] could play Margaret' (Terry 1908: 313):

> There are some young parts that the actress can still play when she is no longer young: Beatrice, Portia, and many others come to mind. But I think that when the character is that of a young girl the betrayal of whose innocence is the main theme of the play, no amount of skill on the part of the actress can make up for the loss of youth. (Terry 1908: 313)

Gail Marshall attaches specific importance to the emphasis reviewers placed on Terry's 'eternal youth'. She argues that when faced with the pressure to continue performing young roles, the 'only way in which [Terry] might remain on stage was through the turning back of the theatrical and social clock, which the illusion of an ever-youthful Terry enabled' (Marshall 2009: 157). Building on this point, Marshall suggests that:

> [Terry's] perpetual charm is precisely that, a perpetuation of her audiences' initial enamoured response. That stasis begins to explain why it is not only possible, but necessary, for Terry to play the parts of much younger characters, or to reprise some of her earlier successes in later life: it […] reminds her audiences of why they have adored her, and enables them to keep on loving her, and watching her play. (Marshall 2009: 155)

Marshall's observations resonate with Carlson's descriptions of the extent to which an audience's 'reception of each new performance is conditioned by inevitable memories of this actor playing

similar roles in the past' (Carlson 2003: 58). Engaging with Joseph Roach, Carlson observes that the 'power of performance' is such that the "theatrical body" (unlike the physical body) cannot be 'invalidated by age or decrepitude' (Carlson 2003: 58).

I extend Carlson's idea, arguing that the garments in which this 'theatrical body' is clothed have the potential to play an integral part in evoking 'the ghost or ghosts of previous roles' (Carlson 2003: 11). Focusing specifically on two connected pairs of costumes from Terry's wardrobe, I argue that the actress consciously sought to harness the 'memories' carried by these garments, ensuring that her later performances would be 'haunted' and 'protected' by the 'ghosts' of her youthful successes.

'A Dream of Beauty': Tragic Heroines

From the commencement of her professional partnership with Irving, Terry played an active role in the design and creation of her costume and was granted an unusually high level of control over this process (Isaac 2018). Between 1878 and 1887, the primary designer of Terry's costumes was Patience Harris (1857–1901). As the surviving costumes and images attest, Harris generally created elaborate gowns, made from stiff and heavy silk damasks and silk velvets.[10] From *c.*1882 onwards however, Terry also engaged Alice Comyns-Carr (1850–1927) to assist with the design of her costumes. A known advocate and wearer of Aesthetic dress, Comyns-Carr's taste in dress and approach to costume design were in much closer accord with the flowing, lightweight dresses that Terry favoured for her personal wardrobe.[11] Comyns-Carr worked alongside Harris for nearly five years, but the collaboration was not a success and Harris 'had but little use for the simple designs [she] suggested' (Comyns-Carr 1926: 79).

In her *Reminiscences*, Comyns-Carr attributes Terry's decision to dismiss Harris to a disagreement over the design of her costumes for the 1887 production of *The Amber Heart*. Admiring a 'simple, unstarched muslin frock' Comyns-Carr was wearing, Terry determined that it was 'just the thing' she wanted for the role of Ellaline and demanded to be told how the designer had achieved the 'crinkly effect'. Undeterred by Comyns-Carr's confession that she 'twisted the stuff up into a ball and boiled it in a potato steamer to get the crinkles', she commanded Comyns-Carr to explain the process to Harris, declaring: 'I don't care whether Pattie likes it or not … if a potato steamer is necessary to make a frock look like that, then I am going to have a lot of my dresses "steamed"' (Comyns-Carr 1926: 79) A few days later, Harris left Terry's service and Comyns-Carr was invited 'to undertake the designing of all her stage clothes' (Comyns-Carr 1926: 79).

The Amber Heart (1887)

The Amber Heart by Alfred Calmour (fl.1887–1900) was the first production for which Comyns-Carr had sole responsibility for the design of Terry's costumes. It was an important milestone in the careers of both women, as this was also the moment that Terry made her first appearance on the Lyceum stage without Irving.

Irving took advantage of the opportunity the initial matinee production offered to watch Terry's whole performance from the auditorium. Though he had been sceptical about the play, he was so impressed by her performance that he bought the rights and wrote to Terry, declaring: 'I wish I could tell you of the dream of beauty that you realized' (Terry 1908: 249–50). The production, which achieved success in both Britain and America, remained in the company repertoire until Terry's departure in 1902 (Terry 1908).

The role of Ellaline, (a beautiful woman whose heart is broken when she puts aside the amulet which has previously granted her immunity from the pain of love) fitted securely within Terry's established repertoire of tragic heroines.[12] Terry's 'fantastic, graceful, Ellaline' certainly appealed to critics who felt that 'the one actress of our time [had] secured perhaps the surest acting triumph of her long career'[13]

A key element of the production, for both actress and costume designer were the costumes in which Terry performed the role. Only one costume from the production is captured in the surviving black and white photographs (Figure 2.1.1). These images show Terry wearing a floor length, softly

Figure 2.1.1 *Window and Grove, Photograph of Ellen Terry as Ellaline in* The Amber Heart*, first staged at the Lyceum Theatre, London in 1887. Museum Number S.133:407-2007. © Victoria & Albert Museum, London.*

pleated tunic with a round neck and wide, hanging sleeves. The gown fits loosely to the figure, extending into a slight train at the rear and is largely plain, the only decoration focused in a narrow band at the neckline. A costume which strongly resembles the dress depicted in surviving photographs and believed to have been worn in *The Amber Heart* is preserved in the collection at Smallhythe Place.[14] When examining this costume alongside surviving photographs of Terry however, strong similarities between this garment and a gown worn by the actress in the 1893 production of *Becket* became apparent (Figure 2.1.2).

The surviving dress is made from very fine translucent silk through which the inner tunic, made from a pale yellow silk and fitting slightly closer to the body than the loose outer dress is visible. Decoration, including using metallic braid, spangles and circular cut-glass discs has been added at the 'V' shaped neckline, around the cuffs of the wide-hanging sleeves and at the hem. Much of the stitching has been carried out by hand and whilst the construction of the garment is based around a comparatively simple T-shape, weights added at the centre front bodice and at the interior hem of the inner tunic have been used to control the garment's fall.

No direct match could be identified between images from either the 1887 production of *The Amber Heart* or *Becket* in 1893. The colour palette fits with the amber tones suggested by the former, yet the decoration at the neckline, sleeve cuffs and hem fits more closely with the design of Terry's costume in *Becket* than that worn for *The Amber Heart* where only the neckline was embellished. However, the cut glass discs used to decorate the centre front neckline of the extant costume are not visible in surviving photographs of either production.

Given the fragility of the surviving costume (which is torn in several places) together with Terry's reputation for dashing on to the stage with moments to spare – damaging her costumes in the process – it is almost certain that the actress would have required replacement costumes during the fifteen years that *The Amber Heart* was staged (Comyns–Carr 1926: 209–10). It is very likely therefore that this surviving costume is a re-make of Terry's original dress from the play. Rather than create a direct replacement however, this new costume has evolved to incorporate the decorative elements seen on the gown used for *Becket*. It is therefore a costume which carries the 'ghosts' of both productions.

Whichever production the surviving dress was worn for, the strong similarities between the style of the gown that Terry wore in both 1887 and 1893 reveal that this was a costume she deemed successful enough to return to and re-work six years after it was originally devised. The question that remains to be answered however, is why Terry selected to revive this specific costume for the 1893 production of *Becket*.

Becket (1893)

In 1887, Terry was arguably at the peak of her career: yet to play Lady Macbeth and only just turned forty, she still felt youthful enough to take on 'young parts' like Rosalind.[15] Six years later however, her confidence in her ability to sustain the eternal youth required to take on roles such as 'Fair Rosamund' in *Becket* was faltering.

Figure 2.1.2 *Photographer Unknown. Photograph of Ellen Terry as Fair Rosamund in* Becket, *first staged at the Lyceum Theatre, London in 1893. NT 1122480 © Smallhythe Place, National Trust.*

The play's original text had been provided by Sir Alfred, Lord Tennyson (1809–92); and with his approval, Irving made significant alterations to the script, changing the order and re-working characters and speeches to create a drama which would suit the talents of the Lyceum Company and its lead performers (Richards 2006: 342). Rosamund, mistress of the king, rival of Queen Eleanor and protected by Becket, was technically a fallen woman but a character whom, as Jeffrey Richards suggests 'the play is keen to show redeemed' (Richards 2006: 346). Her presence provides a useful counter to the Queen and gave Irving as Becket the chance to display compassion, but it was a role which offered little scope for Terry's talents and left her frustrated, unable to escape her enduring characterization as a 'charming actress'.[16]

The 1893 production of *Becket* proved a triumph for Irving, but not for Terry, whose part was felt by one critic to have 'been dragged in by the hair' (Melville 1987: 145). Terry shared their misgivings, confessing to W.G. Robertson that she did not know what to do with the role: 'She is not there. She does not exist. I don't think that Tennyson ever knew very much about women, and now he is old and has forgotten the little that he knew. She is not a woman at all' (Robertson 1931: 153).

Given the doubts that Terry had about her role, her decision to seek the protection offered by the 'halo effect' becomes more understandable. As Carlson has observed 'any physical element' of a past production can carry 'certain memories of their previous usage even in a quite different play' (Carlson 2003: 119). The 'reception advantages' Carlson attributes to this 'recycling', specifically the 'powerful accumulation of meaning and emotion' built up in 'the audience's mind' offers further insight into the rationale behind Terry's choices of costume (Carlson 2003: 129). Although Terry was not wearing an exact replica of the earlier costume, the resemblance to the dress she wore in *The Amber Heart* would have been immediately apparent, enabling her to re-capture and revive memories of this past success, both within her own mind and that of her audience (Carlson 2003: 58–9).

From 'Macbethshire' to Camelot: Warrior Queens

Reflecting on her time with the Lyceum company, Terry observed: 'My mental division of the years at the Lyceum is *before* "Macbeth" and *after*' (Terry 1908: 191). This statement suggests that the 1888 production of *Macbeth* marked, in Terry's mind at least the pinnacle of her achievements with the company. This mindset offers important insights into the instances of visual references to earlier roles that are identifiable in Terry's costumes during her last decade with the company. Direct evidence of the specific importance that Terry attached to her performance in *Macbeth* can be found in her decision to resurrect the costume for her appearance in *King Arthur* seven years later.

It was a close examination of the surviving garments, rather than any striking similarities visible in production photographs, which brought to light the relationship between a costume worn by Terry as Guinevere in 1895 (Figure 2.1.4) and the 'Beetlewing Dress' now synonymous with the 1888 production of *Macbeth* (Figure 2.1.3).[17] A direct comparison of these costumes revealed parallels in their fit, construction and external appearance which are much harder to identify in two- dimensional sepia photographs and sketches.[18]

Figure 2.1.3 *Photograph Unknown. Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth in* Macbeth, *first staged at the Lyceum Theatre, London in 1888. NT 1122483. © Smallhythe Place, National Trust.*

Figure 2.1.4 *Window & Grove, Photograph of Ellen Terry as Guinevere in* King Arthur, *first staged at the Lyceum Theatre, London in 1895. S.133:495-2007. © Victoria & Albert Museum.*

Terry admired not only the visual effect, but also the fit of the iridescent green and silver/blue gown covered with beetle-wing cases she wore as Lady Macbeth. The external gown which fits closely to the body from shoulder to hip is supported on an internal knitted silk jersey bodice. This knitted structure helps to sculpt the body of the wearer and the addition of a hanging weight at the centre front hem controls the fall of the bodice, making it possible to create a costume that did not rely upon internal boning or a stiff corset to achieve the desired silhouette. It was a design ideally suited to an actress who did not like to wear corsets on or off the stage and, as Terry enthusiastically informed an interviewer in 1888, made it easy for her to move gracefully on the stage (Terry 1911: 88).[19]

Whilst this internal bodice was not directly replicated in Terry's costume for *King Arthur,* the flattering dropped waistline and hanging belt detail at the waist – a design which lengthened Terry's torso and defined her waist and hips – does appear in both garments. Similarities can also be traced between the colour palettes of the two dresses. Both costumes are based around varying tones of

green with the *Macbeth* costume tending towards the bluer end of the spectrum, whilst *King Arthur* is more yellow. The most striking parallel however, lies in the crocheted structure used for the bodices and skirts of both gowns. As both Comyns-Carr and Terry would have been aware, the strands of metal thread running through this crochet work meant that both dresses looked magnificent in the ethereal glow of the Lyceum Theatre's gaslights. Whilst great importance was attached to creating costumes which were visually appealing and suited Terry's maturing body, the garments she wore in both productions were also carefully designed to anticipate and manipulate the 'public reception' of her performance.

Macbeth (1888)

The announcement, in 1888 that Terry was to play Lady Macbeth had provoked immediate controversy. Terry's costumes therefore had a particularly important part to play in placating critics who declared that she was 'too good, too gentle, too feminine for the part' ('Macbeth at the Lyceum', 1888). They also needed to appease others who argued that, to 'suppose that Lady Macbeth was other than diabolical and fiendish is impossible; and these are qualities to represent which is beyond the wide scope of Miss Terry's genius, great as it unquestionably is' ('The Real Macbeth', 1888).

The actress' personal papers and published writings testify to her conviction that Lady Macbeth was 'A woman (all over a woman)' who 'was *not* a fiend, and *did* love her husband.'[20] Despite the criticism provoked by her interpretation, Terry resolved 'not [to] budge an inch in the reading of it, for that I know is right'. She was therefore prepared to 'what is vulgarly called "sweat at it," each night' in order to counter any critics who claimed she wanted to 'make [Lady Macbeth] a "gentle, lovable woman"' for 'She was nothing of the sort' (Terry 1908: 307).

Portraying Lady Macbeth as a woman whose actions were motivated by passionate love for her husband, enabled Terry to emphasize and exploit the feminine qualities within the character. This 'new Lady Macbeth', was an 'exquisite creature' who was both 'passionate […] sensuous and finely strung'. Her 'femininity' was a source of strength, rather than weakness: a device she employed to manipulate her male counterparts and satisfy her craving for absolute power ('Macbeth at the Lyceum', 1888).

Terry's costumes were designed to help communicate and support her portrayal of Lady Macbeth and the spectacular 'Beetlewing' dress in which she made her first appearance provided an immediate statement of her reading of the character. The crochet ground of this costume sought to reproduce the effect of 'chain mail', an impression heightened by the serpentine gleam of the blue green beetle-wing cases and strands of metal 'tinsel' which covered its surface (Comyns–Carr 1926: 211–12). Encasing Terry within this 'armour' enabled her to convey Lady Macbeth's majesty and power and yet retain sufficient femininity and beauty to placate even the harshest of critics. As one reviewer concluded:

> Is this Lady Macbeth? Who shall decide? That it is not the Lady Macbeth of Mrs. Siddons we know. It is scarcely a Lady Macbeth we realise. It is perhaps, one of which we have dreamed. […] This is Miss Terry's Lady Macbeth. ('Lyceum Theatre', 1888)

In spite of the criticism that Terry's Lady Macbeth received, the production remained a popular part of the Lyceum Company canon until her departure in 1902. Its popularity was certainly boosted by the visual impact of her costumes. Contemporary reviews remarked upon 'the marvellous costumes designed by Mrs. Comyns-Carr' and declared Terry's performance to be 'a continual feast to the eye' (*Pall Mall Gazette*, 1888: 4). The 'beauty' and 'picturesque' qualities of the scenery and costumes led some reviewers to soften their criticism of Terry's performance, leading one critic to argue:

> difficult to deal with is the Lady Macbeth of Miss Ellen Terry. That it is convincing few will maintain. It is, however, divinely beautiful. The woman who, in a quaint and indescribably beautiful costume, read by the light of the fire the letter of her husband […] might have stood in the Court at Camelot, and gained the wondering homage and obeisance of Sir Galahad, as well as Sir Lancelot (*Morning Post,* 1888).

King Arthur (1895)

Audiences would have to wait another seven years before Camelot came to the Lyceum Theatre. Clement Scott's analysis of *King Arthur* (eventually staged in 1895) makes apparent the excitement surrounding the play and the long-standing desire for a Lyceum production that addressed the Arthurian legends. 'At last' he declared, 'Ellen Terry is to be the Queen Guinevere we have pictured in our imaginations these countless years' (Scott 1897: 373).

The high expectations of both critics and audiences heightened the pressure on Irving and Terry, who were expected to deliver a spectacular production and mesmerizing performances. For the script, Irving relied upon the husband of Terry's costume designer, Joseph Comyns-Carr (1849–1916) (an established writer and connoisseur of the arts). Comyns-Carr's blank- verse drama, though not charming all critics was deemed 'very effective and interesting' and made respectful allusions to the Arthurian traditions established by both Thomas Malory (*c.*1415–71) and Tennyson (Scott 1897: 374).

The production's chief attraction however, was the involvement of an artist from amongst the 'aristocracy of English art': Edward Burne- Jones (1833–97) (Shaw 1895: 93–5). Extolled by George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950) as 'the greatest among English decorative painters,' Burne-Jones had agreed to design both the scenery and the costumes 'stipulating only that he should not be required to superintend the carrying out of his designs in detail' (Comyns–Carr 1926: 205). The spectacle of the resulting production drew together figures from across the arts and cemented the Lyceum Theatre's status as 'a Temple of Art [and] a theatre of Beauty' (Meisel 1983: 402).

The production did not achieve universal praise however and whilst acknowledging the splendour of the picture that Irving had presented, Shaw dismissed the production as a 'picture-opera' and criticized many elements of the direction, script and acting. His chief frustration lay in the limited scope that both text and narrative provided for the performers – Terry in particular (Shaw 1895: 93–5):

> As to Miss Ellen Terry, it was the old story, a born actress of real women's parts condemned to figure as a mere artist's model in costume plays […] It is pathetic to see Miss Terry snatching at some

> fleeting touch of nature in her part, and playing it not only to perfection, but often with a parting caress […] What a theatre for a woman of genius to be attached to! (Shaw 1895: 94)

Shaw's remarks highlight many of the constraints – not least in terms of the roles she was offered and Irving's 'pictorial' approach to design – that were an inescapable part of Terry's position at the Lyceum. Although Guinevere offered a brief escape from the role of a young and innocent heroine, Terry was still called upon to perform a part praised for being 'very loveable in its true womanliness' (Archer quoted in Richards 2006: 29). Contemporary reviews re-inforce Terry's imprisonment within this 'womanly' role. William Archer for instance, observed that 'Miss Ellen Terry is an ideal Guinevere to the eye […] and her performance is altogether charming' (Archer quoted in Richards 2006: 29). Whilst another reviewer praised Terry's embodiment of the 'true nature' of 'the representative woman – a nature that rests not upon mind but upon emotions' (quoted in Richards 2006: 27).

Whilst Terry regretted the frequency with which she was obliged to play 'second-fiddle' parts she was conscious that 'for one thing [she] did not like doing at the Lyceum, there would probably be a hundred things [she] should dislike doing in another theatre' (Terry 1908: 164) (St. John 1932: 96).[21] Nevertheless, she remained determined to demonstrate that there was 'there [was] something more in [her] acting than *charm*' (Terry with St. John 1932: 13).

Resurrecting 'Lady Macbeth'

Although Burne-Jones had been commissioned to design the scenery and the costumes for *King Arthur*, it was Alice Comyns-Carr who was entrusted with transforming the 'coloured sketches' he produced into workable designs for Terry's costumes (Comyns–Carr 1926: 206). Comyns-Carr was given a relatively 'free hand' by the artist who, recognizing the value of her experience approved the substitutions the designer made with regard to the colour and fabric selected for the actress' costumes (Comyns–Carr 1926: 206). As was the case with *Macbeth* in 1888, Ada Nettleship (1856–1932) was asked to create the garments Comyns-Carr had designed. Terry was therefore collaborating with two women who understood her stage wardrobe and its history and together they could create costumes carrying the required 'ghosts'.[22]

Returning to a costume associated with the ruthless and powerful figure of Lady Macbeth – and a role in which she had actively rebelled against her 'womanly' persona –provided Terry with a means through which to resurrect the 'memories' and 'spirits' associated with this previous performance. This strategy – reliant on visual effect – was also particularly well suited to a production in which she was required to provide 'a beautiful living picture'.[23]

The dresses that Terry wore in *King Arthur* were 'far more elaborate than those [Comyns-Carr] had previously designed for her' (Comyns–Carr 1926: 206). Indeed, over £150 (equivalent to £18,750 GBP today) was spent on one dress, 'twilled by [Nettleship's] girls entirely of gold thread' for the actress to wear as Guinevere (*New Zealand Herald* 1900: 2). The immense sums invested in the creation of Terry's costumes were soon justified however, not least by the significant part they played in securing positive responses to her performance. Reviewers were entranced by the 'marvellous

witchery' of Terry's first appearance as 'the very Guinevere of fact or legend' (quoted in Richards 2006: 27). Critics remarked specifically on her 'lustrous and flowing robe', (Review of J. Comyns Carr's *King Arthur* 1895: 95) its 'sheen rippling like water to her feet' (quoted in Richards 2006: 27). As Scott observed: 'The entrance of Miss Ellen Terry – glorious in priceless costume – as the Queen Guinevere, intensifies the attention. Now the romance is about to begin and the interest starts in real earnest' (Scott 1897: 376).

A comparison of the surviving costume with contemporary reviews and the illustrations that Bernard Partridge (1861–1945) produced for the souvenir programme confirmed that this was the costume worn by Terry in Act 1 of the production and therefore the dress in which she first appeared on stage. This information brings added significance to the parallels between this surviving costume and Terry's 'Beetlewing dress'. Both costumes were worn by Terry to make her first entrance on the stage. These were therefore the garments which conditioned audiences' impressions of her performances from the start. Terry's decision to make her first entrance in a costume which echoed the 'Beetlewing dress' so closely ensured that her long-anticipated appearance as Queen Guinevere would be forever 'haunted' by the 'ghost' of Lady Macbeth.

Conclusion: Re-membering Ellen Terry

Employing her costumes as a means of rebellion enabled Terry to control the character she communicated to her audience and to manipulate the public reception of her performances. The level of agency Terry was able to exercise over her costume design was unusual and she took full advantage of the opportunity her costumes provided to ensure that she remained an active rather than passive 'artist's model'. Together, Terry and Comyns-Carr recognized and sought to harness the power of 'ghosting' by creating garments which were effectively 're-incarnations' of costumes worn earlier in Terry's career. This approach to costume design enabled Terry to invoke the 'ghosts' associated with her past triumphs, encircling her performances securely within the 'halo' which, as Carlson has observed masks failings and directs the minds of audiences away from the present performance, towards 'previous high achievement' (Carlson 2003: 58–9).

This analysis has focused on one specific form of 'ghosting' and its role within the career of a single actress. It is however, an area of theatre history and costume design which merits far wider investigation and discussion, particularly given the part it continues to play within current theatre practice.[24] Close examination of Terry's costuming strategies, together with a consideration of the afterlives of her stage dress, has, for instance, brought to light at least four types of 'ghosting' which these costumes can facilitate. These are: Self-Ghosting (in which an actor deliberately wears a costume which carries or summons memories of their own past performances); Protection (in which 'haunted' costumes are regarded as 'talismanic objects which carry the benevolent spirits of their past wearers'); Possession (in which a performer deliberately summons the 'ghost(s)' of the previous wearer(s) of a costume and allows themselves and their performance to become 'possessed' by these spirits) and Resurrection (in which the inanimate costume is displayed, rather than worn, and is used to 're-member' the body of the absent performer).

As this examination of her costumes has demonstrated, 'self-ghosting' played a crucial part in Terry's costuming strategies. Terry also appreciated that costumes could offer 'Protection', drawing inspiration from the 'ghost' carried by Sarah Siddons' shoes when performing *Macbeth* in 1888. During Terry's lifetime and after her death, her costumes were loaned to other performers. These new wearers of Terry's costumes became 'hosts' for the spirit of the actress and were able to deliver performances enhanced by this temporary 'possession.' Today, Terry's costumes have entered the final stage of their 'afterlives', one which she and her daughter Edith Craig anticipated when they sought to establish a long-term home for her collection at Smallhythe Place.[25] The costumes which Terry and Craig preserved continue to play a crucial part in sustaining her legacy. These 'talismanic garments' have now taken on the role of 'effigies', with the power to 'resurrect' the lost performer and in doing so, they enable new audiences to 're-member' the famous actress whose 'ghost' they carry in their fibres.[26]

Notes

1 Sybil Thorndike, Transcript of audio recording, Smallhythe Place, 1960.

2 An interview conducted with Terry at the time of the original production confirms that the actress kept the shoes in her dressing room. A copy of this interview, entitled 'How I sketched Mrs. Siddon's Shoes: A visit to Miss Ellen Terry's Dressing Room' is bound within Terry's copy of *Macbeth,* National Trust Inventory Number 3119105.

3 Terry made this remark in a letter sent to the critic Clement Scott (1841–1904) in 1888. (Auerbach 1987: 259).

4 Thorndike, audio recording. For further discussion of the performance history of this costume, see Isaac (2017).

5 Though, as Hodgdon notes, the cardigan may have had 'an interim resurrection' she found definite evidence that it was worn by Estelle Kohler as Paulina in the 1999 production of *The Winter's Tale* and again by Alexandra Gilbreath (who played Hermione in the 1999 *Winter's Tale*) as Katherina in *The Taming of the Shrew* in 2003.

6 Terry, letter from Ellen Terry to George Bernard Shaw (1856–1950), 23 September1896. Letter, published in St. John (1931: 70).

7 For a full outline of Terry's early career see both biographies of the actress and the first two chapters of Terry (1908).

8 Both of Terry's children went on to have significant stage careers. Gordon Craig's work as a theatre director and designer has been well documented and continues to receive widespread recognition. Edith Craig's equally important career as both a theatrical costumier and director has however only recently achieved recognition, largely through the work of Katharine Cockin (2017), who examines Craig's important contribution to the stage and the suffrage movement.

9 For further discussion on this theme see also Jenny Bloodworth (2011: 49–64).

10 One notable exception to this pattern were the dresses which Edward Godwin designed for Terry to wear in the 1881 production of *The Cup.* The diaphanous fabrics and loose cut of these costumes alluded both to the Roman period in which the play was set and the revival of classically-inspired dress promoted by Godwin and other leading members of the Aesthetic movement.

11 Comyns-Carr discusses her own dress and her working partnership with Terry in her *Reminiscences* (Comyns-Carr 1926: 26, 79).

12 Since 1878 these tragic roles had included: Ophelia in *Hamlet* (1878); Desdemona in *Othello* (1881); Juliet in *Romeo and Juliet* (1882) and Marguerite in *Faust* (1885).

13 n.a. 'Lyceum Theatre,' handwritten annotation: *'The Amber Heart, June 7th 1887'.* Press clipping, Ruth Canton Album, Volume 2: 1884–1892. Garrick Collection, London.

14 This costume forms part of the Ellen Terry Collection at Smallhythe Place, Inventory Number NT 1118885.

15 Sadly and much to Terry's disappointment, this was one of the few Shakespearean roles which she never had the opportunity to perform (Terry 1908: 302). Looking back upon her career, Terry confessed that this sacrifice ranked amongst ' the greatest disappointments of her life.' Ellen Terry and Christopher St. John (1932: 97).

16 n.a, 'The Laureates play at the Lyceum', press clipping, Ruth Canton Album, Volume 1: 1892–1898. Garrick Collection, London.

17 These parallels were first brought to my attention by the conservator who has treated both garments, Zenzie Tinker in 2010. Zenzie Tinker. Personal communication with the author. 14 July 2010. Zenzie Tinker's Conservation Studio, Brighton.

18 The surviving costumes worn by Ellen Terry as Lady Macbeth and held at Smallhythe are: SMA. TC/COST.115a, 1118840.1; SMA.TC.115b, 1118843; NT/SMA/TC/114a, 1118839.1 and NT/SMA/TC/114b,1118839.2. For *King Arthur* only one costume survives: SMA/TC/118, 1118843.

19 The actress actually inserted a copy of this interview entitled 'How I Sketched Mrs. Siddons Shoes : A visit to Miss Ellen Terry's Dressing Room' into the final page of a copy of the script for this production. The name of the author and title of the publication are not recorded. See Terry's copy of *Macbeth,* National Trust Inventory Number 3119105.

20 Terry, handwritten annotation on her copy of Joseph Comyns-Carr's *Macbeth and Lady Macbeth: An Essay* (1889: 28); Terry (1908: 307).

21 See also Ellen Terry with Christopher St. John (1932: 96).

22 For further discussion of this working relationship see Isaac (2018: 74–96).

23 George Bernard Shaw quotes here a review from *Saturday Review of Politics: Literature and Art*, 17 July 1897 in his volume, *Our Theatres in the Nineties* (Shaw 1932: 193).

24 As demonstrated by Sladen (2017).

25 Joy Melville has explored Craig's role in preserving Terry's legacy in her joint biography of the mother and daughter. See, in particular, Melville (1987: 250–1).

26 For further consideration of this form of 'ghosting' see: Isaac (2017).

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