

A Note on the Cover

The cover photo of *The Victorian Actress* is of Ellen Terry reading a book over her mother's shoulder. The Terrys were a theatrical family, both women pursued stage careers, and Ellen became one of the Victorian era's most iconic actresses. She enjoyed both popular celebrity and cultural prestige as the leading lady of Henry Irving's management at the Lyceum Theatre even as she belonged to a profession that had not entirely moved beyond its questionable standing with regard to respectability. (In 1895, Irving became the first actor to be elevated to knighthood, emblematising the shifting position of the theatrical profession in the nineteenth century.) The curtain-like photographer's drape behind the women reveals this photo to be a staged representation. In light of that, the fact that they are reading from a text that may or may not be a script evokes one of the central concepts of this book: that the figure of the actress was manipulated and controlled by how she was written in novels and plays of the Victorian period. Moreover, that this photo was taken by the writer Lewis Carroll speaks to the fascination that novelists had with actresses.

On the one hand, this is an intimate scene, domestic in nature as it depicts a mother and daughter intimately connected in the private act of reading. But these are actresses, striking a pose before a curtain. Whether intentionally or not, the full frame of the image reveals the edge of the curtain, playing up the performed nature of the image for consumption by an audience's gaze: there is a world outside of this photo, beyond the curtain's edge. This invites questions about authenticity and ascribes potential agency to the figures in the image. To play a part does not enforce passivity. Ellen Terry was a woman who mediated between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Her daughter, Edith Craig, was a suffragette in the early twentieth century, and Terry appeared in suffragette theatre.

Like this photo, this book is about generational connections, bonds between women, performance, authenticity and relationships between the private and public spheres. *The Victorian Actress* examines how the figure of the actress played a critical part in the development of the novel and the theatre and how, in turn, these literary forms shaped the actress as a cultural figure for women in the public sphere. From the mid-Victorian period through to the use of the theatre for the suffragette movement in the early twentieth century, it traces how the novel and the drama variously constructed the actress's authenticity and her ability to foster sympathetic bonds through affective and narrative strategies.

For Sophie and Noah, with love

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