

## Introduction

A type of all that was lovable in woman: with a personal fascination that none whoever met her will be able to forget; and over and above that, one of the greatest exponents of a noble art that dramatic history records,—who can forget the witching coquetry and melting pathos of Viola as Neilson painted her; the perfect woman, suffering Imogen, or the living realization of the master's ideal Italian maiden whose name is a synonym for passionate love. If Neilson is dead, 'Juliet' is no more.<sup>1</sup>

Typical of the reaction to the sudden and early death of English actress Adelaide Neilson in 1880, this obituary in a local American newspaper insists that her superlative performances of Shakespeare's heroines are unforgettable and unmatched. Yet, memory of her achievements, like that of the majority of women who performed on the Victorian stage, faded remarkably quickly. Fast forward to 2017 and a conversation with a young actress responding to my research on Neilson and her contemporaries, who bemoaned the fact that she had been completely unaware of such histories when studying performing arts, even at drama school. She claimed that knowledge of past women's experience and achievement in the theatre would have been empowering for her. *Victorian Touring Actresses: Crossing Boundaries and Negotiating the Cultural Landscape* remedies such omission. It considers the reality of working in the acting profession in relation to the wider social and cultural environment of the mid-nineteenth century and brings attention back to the contribution of some of the forgotten female performers. The book fits within the large body of feminist historical writing known as 'her-story', which Joan Wallach Scott defines as 'giv[ing] value to an experience that had been ignored (hence devalued) and insist[ing] on female agency in the making of history' (Scott, 1989: 18).

Situated in the context of a perceived crisis in the quality of the national drama and when the dominant ideology regarding gender insisted on separate spheres of activity for men and women, this history of the Victorian actress demonstrates how the period's changing political, economic and social circumstances shaped careers and how the women were themselves agents of change. The book provides a detailed examination of the practical challenges and opportunities typically encountered by the actress at each stage of her working life and explores the career implications of choices made both on and off the stage. It features a range of case studies that show how individual women contributed to and were impacted by developments in professional practice and organisation, thereby revealing dynamic patterns of activity within the theatrical industry and countering the traditional approach separating highbrow from lowbrow entertainment and culture. These trends are discussed within the context of contemporary discourse as revealed in a range of nineteenth-century publications. My work is indebted to the complex picture of theatrical practice that Tracy C. Davis established in her seminal volumes *Actresses as Working Women: Their Social Identity in Victorian Culture* (1991) and *The Economics of the British Stage 1800-1914* (2000a). I aim to supplement her macro-historical studies by offering a more in-depth exploration of the stages in a career and to provide new understanding of the experience of mid-tier performers in dramatic specialisms ranging from tragedienne to burlesque performer. Focusing on women born in the 1830s and 1840s who typically experienced their greatest successes in the 1860s and 1870s, I examine the various strategies they adopted to cope with the demands of the profession and the operation of gendered power on and off stage.

The Victorian period in which the actresses were professionally active, spanning from the late 1840s until the end of the century, is significant as a time of transition, both within the theatrical industry and in wider society. The theatre was evolving from a business model dominated by venues employing stock companies of actors who put on a constantly changing

repertoire of entertainments with peripatetic ‘star’ performers taking the leading roles, to a system in which London establishments favoured long-running productions that could subsequently be toured around the country by what in the US were known as ‘combination’ companies. On the stage, technological innovation and audience desire for exciting visual extravaganza led to ever more spectacular productions, whether it be in the form of sensation drama, historically accurate productions of classical plays or lavish pantomimes with large casts. Victorian drama also reflected changing societal conditions. In no area was this more pronounced than in ideas about the role of women.

The widely held, mid-century patriarchal ideology of ‘separate spheres’, by which upper- and middle-class women were protected and excluded from public life by their fathers or husbands, confined them to a life focused on marriage and children. In this domestic world, they were charged with exerting a morally beneficial influence on the family as suggested by the epithet ‘Angel in the House’, derived from Coventry Patmore’s popular poem.<sup>2</sup> Mary Poovey shows how this binary conceptual model had widespread economic implications:

The rhetorical separation of the spheres and the image of domesticated, feminized morality were crucial to the consolidation of bourgeois power partly because linking morality to a figure (rhetorically) immune to the self-interest and competition integral to economic success preserved virtue without inhibiting productivity. Producing a distinction between kinds of labor (paid versus unpaid, mandatory versus voluntary, productive versus reproductive, alienated versus self-fulfilling), the segregation of the domestic ideal created the illusion of an alternative to competition; (Poovey, 1988: 10)

The actress, as a working woman operating outside the home and exposing herself to public scrutiny for financial gain, challenged such thinking. She had always occupied a provocative position in the economy. In the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries, she was often assumed to be a prostitute or, at the very least, what Kristina Straub terms a ‘sexual suspect’ (Straub, 1992). Although such severe condemnation was less prevalent in the Victorian era, the performer still needed to guard her reputation carefully, especially when touring. Her gender remained significant, particularly since, as Kerry Powell argues, ‘Victorian rhetoric . . . worked to gender the theatre as being distinctively, irrevocably masculine’ (Powell, 1997: xi). Both Davis and Viv Gardner analyse the significance of the geographic environment of London theatres. Davis (1991: 137-63) charts the effect of the ‘sensual typography’ on expectations of the actress while Gardner (2000: 25-41) has shown how the geographical location of London theatres in areas associated with prostitution limited middle-class female theatregoers’ access to performances. Actresses had no choice but to negotiate such districts in order to reach their workplace. Although they had more autonomy than the majority of Victorian women, they were nevertheless locked out of important networks of theatrical power such as the gentleman’s clubs. Moreover, in negotiating employment terms and dealing with the practicalities of touring, the female performer exposed herself to more risks and censure than her male counterparts. Her professional success partly depended upon how she dealt with these challenges. In the last quarter of the century the actress’s labour became less anomalous as new opportunities for education and work for women became more widely available and agitation for female suffrage grew.

Despite the fact that a substantial part of the actress’s career was spent travelling on the road, railway and steamer, touring is under-represented in histories of the stage. Scholarship that addresses the issue typically focuses on the celebrity actress (such as Marshall, 2007). By demonstrating the significance of provincial touring, this book aims to

contribute to the recuperation of regional theatre histories as pioneered by Kathleen Barker (see Barker, K., 1974; Foulkes, 1994 and Sullivan, 2011). While focusing on the local, it reveals professional networks operating across the UK, thus exploring the type of interconnectedness that Jo Robinson defends in critiquing the current emphasis in theatre history on globalisation (Robinson, 2007a). The Victorian touring actress was at least more fortunate than her predecessors in being able to take advantage of developments in transport and communication technologies. For example, whereas in the early 1830s it had taken twenty-two days to sail to America, by the end of the century the same transatlantic journey from Liverpool was reduced to around six days (Sussman, 2009: 84-6). *Victorian Touring Actresses* highlights the practical effects of living and working in such a dynamic environment, in the process uncovering Victorian attitudes towards gender and nationality, as well as demonstrating developments in the professional status and commercialisation of female performers.

In *The Rise of the English Actress* (1993) Sandra Richards devotes one chapter to 'Early Nineteenth Century and Victorian Actresses' and another to Ellen Terry. Justifying her selection of featured performers, she writes 'I chose those whose lives and careers were best documented . . . Actresses responsible for innovations . . . receive the most attention' (Richards, S., 1993: ix). Richards' approach is typical of studies of nineteenth-century actresses. The majority are London-centric (most are even more narrowly geographically focused on the West End stage) and highlight the most esteemed stars of the age, the extraordinary innovators, such as those involved in ground-breaking productions, or those associated with notable institutions or leading men. Favoured subjects include Eliza Vestris for her cross-dressed roles and productions of Shakespeare (see Appleton, 194; Williams, 1973; Fletcher, 1987; Bratton, 2007; Norwood, 2011), Elisabeth Robins as the first British actress to play many of Ibsen's women (see John, 1995; Townsend, 2000), and Stella (Mrs Patrick) Campbell partly because of her association with George Bernard Shaw (see Aston, 2007; Gregory, 2016a). Disproportionate focus has been concentrated on actresses active during the last quarter of the century (see Hindson, 2007). Traditionally more attention has been paid to those who found fame in tragic or classical drama, such as Helen Faucit (see Carlyle, 2000) or Ellen Terry (see Auerbach, 1997; Marshall, 2004; Cockin, 2011), both of whom are primarily remembered for their interpretations of Shakespearean characters; to foreign superstars such as Sarah Bernhardt and Eleanora Duse (see Stokes, Booth and Bassnett, 1988); and to those whose work was experimental or avant garde. At the other end of the scale, music-hall favourites such as Marie Lloyd and Vesta Tilley (Bratton, 2007) continue to receive scrutiny. Jan McDonald's article 'Lesser Ladies of the Victorian Stage' (1988) and Davis's *Actresses as Working Women* (1991) are rare challenges to this focus on celebrity. Davis presents demographic research and statistical analysis of the 'masses' who made up the theatrical profession. Many of her macro-historical conclusions about the socio-economic organisation of the industry and the operation of gender within it are illustrated in the case studies spotlighted in this volume.

The women who are repeatedly featured all experienced professional prominence during the second half of the nineteenth-century and toured extensively. Comparing the women's varied career paths illustrates some of the alternative trajectories available to those employed in the dramatic industry. The individual histories reveal how their unique talents, constitutions, personal and professional connections, previous experiences, and indeed, luck, impacted upon the opportunities open to them and the success of the strategies they developed to exploit them. As a brief introduction to their multifarious biographies, they are presented here in order of birth.

Alice Marriott (1824-1900), had a long and successful career as an exponent of so-called 'legitimate' drama, favouring tragic or 'heavy' parts, and became particularly known

for her performances as Hamlet. She was directress of London's Standard Theatre in 1860 and 1861-63 and of Sadler's Wells between 1863 and 1871 where her husband was lessee. Two of her three children pursued theatrical careers and Marriott worked with them many times with son Richard helping to organise some of her tours after his father's death.

Emily Sanders (1832-75, known after 1857 as Lady Don and hereafter referred to as Don), also took on theatrical management but with mixed results. Not afraid of adventure, the burlesque actress embarked on two major international tours during her career, the first performing with her husband, the larger-than-life figure of Sir William Don, a Scottish baronet. After he died suddenly in Tasmania, she resumed acting in the UK and then set off on her second foreign tour, which lasted four years and included engagements in Australia, New Zealand, Tasmania, California and New York.

Louisa Cleveland (1832/34-1902) began her acting career as Miss Cleveland, but later took the name of successive husbands, performing as Mrs Charles Viner and later Mrs Arthur Stirling). She worked her way up from amateur performance to establish a reputation for tragic and Shakespearian roles. She spent six years in Australasia, where her first husband died. In later life she became part of the theatrical establishment and gave dramatic instruction.

Lucy Rushton (1836?-1909) certainly could not be accused of a lack of confidence. Within two years of her theatrical debut and thus with little stage experience, she opened her own, eponymously named theatre on Broadway in 1866. The failure of this venture precipitated a more erratic professional career and she disappears from the records for substantial periods. In later decades she eked out a living preparing others for the stage, finally being reduced to such poverty that she committed suicide.

Julia Seaman (1837-1909) had a similar line of business to Marriott and, like the older actress, specialised in playing Hamlet and 'heavy woman' parts. Undertaking her first professional engagements at the age of seven years, she came from a family of performers and went on to tour the country for the next five decades. She became the main financial provider for her five children and, in later years, her parents.

Marie Henderson (1842-82) is a good example of an actress whose career was spent in minor theatres. After establishing herself in Liverpool, she had a prolonged engagement at the Britannia Theatre in London's East End before moving into management at the Elephant and Castle Theatre. A devastating fire razed the building and although it was rebuilt, Henderson's final years were unhappy as she gradually succumbed to syphilitic infection.

Emily Cross (1846-1904) showed early promise as a singer, a skill which earned her an apprenticeship with Edward Dean Davis at the Theatre Royal Newcastle. Under his guidance she became an accomplished performer in burlesque and comic opera. She chose to sacrifice a promising career for domestic life as a wife and mother. After taking her daughters to Italy for musical training, she once again appeared in selected roles on various London stages during the 1880s and 1890s.

Adelaide Neilson (1848-80) came from a humble background, but went on to achieve the greatest success of all the women and was probably the only one would have been immediately recognisable beyond the theatrical cognoscente. Her first stage role was as Shakespeare's Juliet, a role that was to dominate her short career, which ended with her premature death in Paris aged thirty-two. Before then she was feted, particularly in the US, where she undertook five high-grossing tours.

Eliza Weathersby (1849?-87) had a talent for singing and comedy and so was ideally suited to the soubrette parts in which she specialised. After a couple of years of acting in London, she crossed the Atlantic in 1869 and became popular on the American stage in burlesque troupes, such as Lydia Thompson's British Blondes. While touring in the US, she

married a Bostonian actor and thereafter permanently settled in America performing in the Weathersby-Goodwin Froliques alongside her husband.

Given that the pool of potential subjects is vast, with hundreds, growing during the century to thousands, of women performing on the Victorian stage, why highlight these particular actresses? Deliberately avoiding what Susan Bennett terms the 'revisionist' historiographic practice that 'only allows women visibility as exceptions' (Bennett, 2010: 72), they have not been chosen because they are intrinsically more significant than many of their contemporaries. Indeed, that is precisely the point. The criteria used for selection was initially based on certain features that all the women shared: each was professionally active in the mid nineteenth century; worked for substantial periods outside of the West End; was acknowledged as skilled in their chosen line of theatrical activity; and achieved a reasonable level of fame in their own right (if married to a man who worked within the industry, her profile must have been more significant than his). Thus they are indicative of what might be termed 'mid-tier' actresses. I then narrowed the field by choosing examples to represent diversity in terms of background, dramatic specialism and career trajectory. During the research process the focus expanded from actresses who had also undertaken at least one tour of North America to include some who ventured to Australasia. Of the most cited subjects, only Cross and Henderson had careers entirely based in the UK.

Women are the subject of the volume but they invariably operate alongside men in the labour market. Some aspects of their working lives illustrate experiences shared by their male colleagues, while other factors, particularly relating to their personal lives, reveal cultural and corporeal issues specific to their gender and sex. Even Terry, 'The best-known and best-loved woman of nineteenth-century England' (Auerbach, 1997: xv), was forced to play a subordinate role when she worked with Henry Irving at the Lyceum. Nina Auerbach provides a telling example of Terry compromising her artistic vision when she wanted to wear a black costume, as opposed to the normal white, in Ophelia's mad scene. She immediately capitulated when Walter Lacy pointed out that Hamlet (played by Irving) must be the only figure in black. The incident is indicative of her subservient relationship to her co-star:

Through the forbidden black Ophelia dress, she learned the limits of her partnership with Irving; she could expect no parity. The godlike actor-manager would be both stage husband and fellow artist, but they were to be in nothing alike. In the Lyceum, as in proper families, woman's nature had nothing in it of man's. (Auerbach, 1997:180)

Terry's repertoire was also circumscribed, with Irving preventing her from performing Rosalind in Shakespeare's *As You Like It* since the play had no suitable part for him (Auerbach, 1997: 230). The gendered hierarchy that facilitated the ambitions of actors at the expense of women's professional integrity played out across the industry and was amplified where there was an imbalance of rank. It may also be seen as a factor in why many actresses with significant public profiles in their own lifetime have slipped from memory or failed to attract retrospective examination.

Although performers specialised in different styles of performance, it is important to recognise that, contrary to the old-fashioned historiography that separates highbrow from lowbrow entertainment, they were all working within the same theatrical culture and so there is a commonality of experience. Lawrence Levine has shown how in America the rigid demarcation between high and low culture did not take effect until the late nineteenth century. He argues that in the earlier decades, rather than being promoted as a leisure activity for the elite, Shakespearean production was integral to popular entertainment and its audience was not confined to one socioeconomic group (Levine, 1988: 21). A similar hybridity pertained in Britain. Theatregoers were used to enjoying a mixed bill in an evening's entertainment and were not concerned about actresses performing across genres.

Jacky Bratton's concept of intertheatricality provides a useful model for considering the numerous ways in which the actresses were connected to each other, items of the repertoire, audiences and their own performance histories. She argues

An intertheatrical reading . . . seeks to articulate the mesh of connections between all kinds of theatre texts, and between texts and their uses. It posits that all entertainments, including the dramas, that are performed within a single theatrical tradition are more or less interdependent. They are uttered in a language, shared by successive generations, which includes not only speech and the systems of the stage – scenery, costume, lighting and so forth – but also genres, conventions and, very importantly, memory. The fabric of that memory, shared by audience and players, is made up of dances, spectacles, plays and songs, experienced as particular performances – a different selection, of course, for each individual – woven upon knowledge of the performers' other current and previous roles, and their personae on and off the stage. (Bratton, 2003: 37-8)

Bratton's emphasis on audience memory is especially pertinent for touring actresses because of the relatively static nature of the mid-nineteenth-century tragic repertoire. Starring performers reprised the same parts on numerous occasions over decades in different theatres and even continents. Pauline from Edward Bulwer Lytton's *The Lady of Lyons* (1838), for example, is ubiquitous. Familiar programmes of entertainment proved popular because audiences could compare the interpretations of a role with that of previous enactors (Williams, 1998: 310). Thus, the performers were all in effect competing with each other even when not playing coterminously. This is particularly evident in press coverage of women's performances as Hamlet, a signature role for both Marriott and Seaman.

Comparisons could also be made even when actresses were playing in different dramas, because of the high incidence of plays featuring similar plots and characters. Playwrights frequently created drama from the same dramatic and literary sources or rushed to duplicate established hits (particularly before the 1886 International Copyright Act). Thus the popular American extravaganza *The Black Crook*, in which Weathersby performed, is linked with a British opera bouffe of the same name, which featured Seaman.<sup>3</sup> Connectivity also crossed genres and lines of business as exemplified by depictions of characters from Walter Scott's historical novel *Kenilworth*. In the 1860s Lady Don enjoyed much success in the UK, Australia and America in the cross-dressed role of the Earl of Leicester in a burlesque adaptation of the novel. Neilson enacted the role of Amy Robsart in a serious dramatisation by Andrew Halliday that opened at Drury Lane on 24 September 1870, repeated her interpretation in the provinces the following year and in May 1873 at Booth's Theatre in New York. Meanwhile Weathersby was earning acclaim for her enactment of Robsart in another burlesque version first given at Wallack's Theatre, New York on 21 September 1872 and with which she toured American cities as a member of the Lydia Thompson troupe.<sup>4</sup> The mesh of interconnections is further complicated by fact that the featured actresses worked with many of the same performers, managers and agents and, indeed, with each other.

Over the course of their working lives many actresses diversified into other areas of enterprise, including: theatrical management of both permanent theatres and touring companies; teaching elocution and stagecraft to amateur and would-be professional performers; and playwriting. In these ways, they contributed to the wider economy of the nineteenth-century dramatic industry. The last couple of decades have witnessed a welcome focus on women's activity as dramatic authors (see Powell, 1997; Carlson and Powell, 2004), an area where women's contribution had previously been underreported or their work

wrongly attributed. Katherine Newey in *Women's Theatre Writing in Victorian Britain* (2005) has identified large numbers of female authors, emphasising the significant role they played in Victorian theatre. Working from the main catalogues of nineteenth-century drama, she calculates they 'produced (roughly) 12 per cent of the plays across the century' (Newey, 2005: 67). None of the actresses in my study are known to have written for the stage although some commissioned or had plays specially created for them.

As Mary Jean Corbett has observed, female performers form a disproportionately large percentage of authors of autobiographies produced during the Victorian and Edwardian eras (Corbett, 1994: 8). Unfortunately, mid-tier actresses tend not to be among them, almost certainly ensuring that their careers were soon forgotten. Writing a history of subjects for whom there are no autobiographies, limited or no biographies, and little extant private writing or letters, presents particular challenges. The only one of the featured actresses for whom a considerable body of correspondence survives is Neilson, yet even these archival materials are frustratingly unhelpful. Private letters to her mother and other correspondents held by the Folger Shakespeare Library in Washington DC lack the anticipated commentary on stage practice, the circumstances of touring or theatrical gossip. Frustratingly, a scrapbook in the same repository was obviously censored, presumably by Neilson herself, with an eye to posterity, again limiting potential revelations.<sup>5</sup> In *Auto/Biography and Identity* (2004) Maggie Gale and Viv Gardner argue actresses have utilised 'autobiography and performance as both a means of expression and "control" of their public selves, of both the "face and the mask"' (Gale and Gardner, 2004: 3). Rushton, Neilson and Weathersby were all involved in a similar process of curating their identities, either through the careful control of photographic imagery or the regulation of information disseminated to the press. The number of published interviews with the actresses is regrettably small, but significant. I interpret them as a form of quasi-autobiographical writing whereby the women deliberately intervene in the narratives created around them. Writing about a later generation, Gale contends, 'A central impulse behind many women's theatre autobiographies from the first half of the twentieth century . . . appears to be precisely the need to discuss work and the experience of labour' (Gale, 2019: 22). Her observation is equally evident in the interviews of the Victorian period, as actresses repeatedly stress the demands of their work, drawing attention to their professionalism, craft and diligent exertion.

Perhaps due to self-aggrandisement, mid-tier actresses rarely receive more than cursory mentions in the autobiographies of performers they worked alongside. Publications of contemporary dramatic critics are likewise reticent. As a subject, Neilson is the exception. A chapter in Westland Marston's *Our Recent Actors: Being Recollections Critical, and, in Many Cases, Personal, of Late Distinguished Performers of Both Sexes* is devoted to her (Marston, 1888: 237-56). She is also the subject of a slim hagiographic volume by Laura C. Holloway entitled *Adelaide Neilson: A Souvenir* (1885), published the year after the actress's death, and appears in a number of books of reminiscences by dramatic critics and in volumes on Shakespearean performers (Winter, 1892; Wingate, 1895; Shattuck, 1897; Clapp, 1902). Even Marriott, who gained a strong reputation as an actress and successfully managed two London theatres, is virtually ignored; a short entry in *The Dramatic List* provides a fraction of the coverage of Neilson (Pascoe, 1879: 233-4, 246-51). The scarcity of representations of the other actresses in nineteenth-century sources marginalises the women and explains why their contribution to the industry has been insufficiently recognised in subsequent writing. Donald Mullin's *Victorian Actors and Actresses in Review: A Dictionary of Contemporary Views of Representative British and American Actors and Actresses, 1837-1901* (1983), in which only Neilson receives mention, is typical of the narrow range of focus. Some twentieth-century scholarship begins to redress the imbalance with Marriott's management of the Standard Theatre briefly discussed in Allan Stuart Jackson's history of that institution (Jackson, 1993),

and both Faye E. Dudden and Jane Kathleen Curry providing short treatments of Rushton's managerial endeavours on Broadway (Dudden, 1994; Curry, 1994). Marriott and Seaman feature in Tony Howard's *Women as Hamlet: Performance and Interpretation in Theatre, Film and Fiction* (2007), Weathersby appears as a minor character in studies of Lydia Thompson (such as Gänzl, 2002) while Don and Cleveland are considered in accounts of actresses in Australia and New Zealand (see Anae, 2006, Gordon-Clark, 2001; Gaby, 2013).

In the absence of biographical records, the histories presented here have been recovered mostly through analysing traces of activity and reception in documentary evidence such as playbills, programmes, images and ephemera in local repositories and national archives, advertisements and reviews in the trade and regional newspapers, and genealogical records of life events. I have benefitted from the exponential growth in digitised newspaper archives, which has enabled me access to information about theatrical activity around the UK, across the US and even in Australia and New Zealand.<sup>6</sup> Before the advent of reliable keyword searching in such resources, it would not have been possible to reconstruct the detailed provincial touring schedules of the actresses. Even so, there are inevitably gaps in their histories, some of which will hopefully be filled in the future. The limitations of the available sources have consequences for my approach and the conclusions that can be drawn. Regrettably I have not found relevant annotated acting scripts that might provide insight into dramatic interpretation or technique. Reviews, particularly of provincial performance, tend to be short or quite generic, typically asserting that an actress's portrayal was powerful or weak rather than giving a detailed analysis of individual moments of the acting. Consequently, my discussion pays more attention to what was played, where and when as opposed to how it was performed. One advantage of such an approach is that it foregrounds popular, commercial performance and eschews a narrative driven by veneration for texts with established critical status. Where documentation supplying an actress's justification for playing a particular part at a given time or place is absent, we can nevertheless consider how the choice impacted her image or developed her range and how it fits with the oeuvre of her contemporaries or the development of the repertoire over time. In this way, seemingly insignificant detail can be utilised to comment on the larger picture and a connection established between the micro events of marginal figures and the macrohistory of Victorian society and theatre. To avoid the danger of too much conjecture, strong emphasis is placed on reception, focusing on how each woman was perceived, even when recorded assertions are unprovable or anecdotal. As Lionel Gossman explains, the anecdote is useful for the cultural historian, not because of its factual accuracy, but 'in its ability to reflect the general reality underlying those facts or the general view of that reality' (Gossman, 2003: 159). Stories that circulate about the women can therefore be revealing about the culture in which they were operating even if their relation to actuality is tenuous.

*Victorian Touring Actresses* is organised thematically with chapters ordered to replicate the progression of a 'typical' career, thus exposing the challenges and opportunities encountered at each stage of their lives. What becomes immediately obvious is that typicality is a slippery concept and that individual actress's experiences are as often exceptional as they are ordinary. Thomas Postlewait points out that while periodisation has lost favour in historiography so that historians less frequently classify and analyse on the basis of shared attributes created by or associated with a particular era, there is still a tendency to use 'grand, singular ideas' to interpret events (Postlewait, 2000: 97). With this in mind, this study does not present a totalising concept, but views the actresses' personal and professional activities within historical context and drawing upon a variety of methodologies.

Chapter 1 illustrates various routes into the Victorian dramatic profession and analyses the potential advantages of different means of learning the craft of acting through examination of the early performance history of selected actresses. This ranges from working

as a child actress to receiving private coaching in dramatic skills. By contrasting the London debut of a relatively inexperienced actress with examples of those who had all undertaken lengthy engagements in provincial and minor theatres before appearing in the West End, the importance of provincial theatres is affirmed, not only in providing formative training but also in contributing to the on-going career of the touring performer.

For an actress with ambitions for stardom on the competitive Victorian stage, establishing a recognisable name and identity was fundamental to her success in gaining and then maintaining employment. Chapter 2 addresses issues of identity by considering how it is framed by the repertoire she adopts and how she chooses to present her own history. Career advancement in the mid nineteenth century was linked to a stratified framework divided into distinct lines of business. Analysis focuses on the progression from juvenile to leading lady and two contrasting dramatic specialisms – the burlesque actress and the ‘heavy woman’ – to reveal the implications of playing specific types of role in terms of employment opportunities and image creation.

Chapter 3 examines the actress’s working life in the UK, looking particularly at the material business of touring, showing how women’s careers reflected and were impacted by changes in the industry and the environmental circumstances in Victorian cities. Working conditions in the theatre and the nature of Victorian travel meant that accidents and injury were common and there were arduous demands upon the actress’s body, stamina and mental health. The necessity for voice projection made her particularly susceptible to ailments relating to the vocal organs and throat. Featured examples demonstrate that the performer’s ability to accommodate bouts of ill health while working depended partly on her wealth and status within the profession. In considering the life of a touring actress, the practicalities negotiated by a ‘star’ performer operating in the British provinces is contrasted with the situation in a touring company using a range of metrics including financial remuneration, the use of agents, mileage and travel logistics.

Chapters 4 and 5 switch the focus beyond Britain’s shores, following the actress as she toured either in North America or Australasia and the colonies and focusing on how the specific circumstances in the different locations affected dramatic practice and performer reception. The volatile nature of Anglo-American relations in the aftermath of the American Civil War presented challenges for those who crossed the Atlantic in search of theatrical work. Analysing the American reception of British actresses and how it was reported at home uncovers conflicting attitudes towards gender, nationality and even beauty. In Australia, New Zealand and Tasmania the more limited size of the industry created different pressures for the women, such as managing professional rivalries and monopolistic practice. The experience of foreign touring is also used to explore how gift exchange functioned within nineteenth-century theatre and the boom in merchandising of celebrity figures.

Having established a successful acting career, a logical next step was to move into theatre management. Chapter 6 explores the dynamics of different managerial models and the consequences of success or failure with featured studies covering tenures in geographically disparate centres. In London Marriott assumed managerial responsibility at the Standard and Sadler’s Wells Theatres while Henderson took the reins at the Elephant and Castle and briefly at the Victoria. Don’s experience at Nottingham’s Theatre Royal provides an example from the British provinces. Further afield, Rushton was manager of a theatre in New York, Don in Tasmania and New Zealand, and Cleveland in Melbourne.

Chapter 7 considers the professional and personal consequences of the choices made by the actress in her private life, examining how aspects of her off-stage conduct, sexual liaisons and marital situation impact upon her public image, creative practice, working partnerships and family. Particular focus is given to mutual support networks provided by theatrical families in which several generations work in the industry. The dynamics of

different marital relationships illustrate some of the advantages and drawbacks of marriage to men working within and outside the profession. The practicalities of coping with pregnancy, childcare responsibilities and family life as a touring actress are explored in relation to mid-Victorian notions about the role of women.

Issues relating to ageing are outlined in chapter 8, beginning with the professional effect of physical changes to the actress's body. Statistics demonstrating the availability and limited nature of the dramatic roles deemed suitable for older women support a wider examination of how age impacted the prospects of theatrical engagement. This is presented in the context of contemporary gerontological discourse. The effects of the wide income disparity that was present at each stage of an acting career continued into old age as the consequences of retiring from the stage, either voluntarily or through ill health, were dependent on financial resources. Some women were able to assume a comfortable retirement, but the less fortunate were forced to adopt alternative income-generating activity, such as teaching, or to access the profession's various charitable funds.

Following this chapter, *Afterlives* provides an assessment of the legacy of the Victorian actress and offers a perspective on the relevance of her experience to her twenty-first century counterparts.

Finally, concise biographies of the nine actresses who most frequently appear in the book provide a quick reference guide to key facts about their lives and careers.

*Victorian Touring Actresses* has three aims: to give a fuller, more nuanced picture of the nineteenth-century dramatic profession and women's history by recovering forgotten or marginalised lives; to re-focus attention away from London's West End by showing the importance of provincial theatres and of international touring in the period before large company tours and the syndicated business model of the early twentieth century; and to examine the career and personal implications of different strategies chosen or forced upon the actress at each stage of her life. The volume serves as a testimony to the extraordinary resilience and creative industry of these 'ordinary' actresses and a demand to revise the history of Victorian theatre to include their contributions.

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<sup>1</sup> *Daily News* (Franklin, Ind.) 16 August 1880, p. 1.

<sup>2</sup> The poem was first published in 1854.

<sup>3</sup> The American version opened at Niblo's Gardens, New York in 1866, the British at the Alhambra, London six years later.

<sup>4</sup> The burlesque was entitled *Kenilworth*, but the author is not identified in advertisements or reviews.

<sup>5</sup> Folger Shakespeare Library, Washington DC (hereafter Folger), W.b.59 Theatrical Scrapbook for Adelaide Neilson.

<sup>6</sup> See Bibliography.