

## 'The elasticity of her spirits': Actresses and resilience on the 19<sup>th</sup> century colonial stage

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Jane has directed many productions and has mentored many emerging writers, performers, designers and directors, especially while in the role of Artistic Director at Union House Theatre at the University of Melbourne 1999-2002. As Artistic Director of here Theatre, work has included: *Aelfgyva*, Jane Woollard, (2003 Melbourne Autumn Music Festival); *True Adventures of a Soul Lost at Sea*, Kit Lazaroo (RE Ross Award, 2005 Trades Hall); *The Time is not yet Ripe*, Louis Esson, (GRAA Best Ensemble, 2006 Northcote Town Hall); *Asylum*, Kit Lazaroo (Wal Cherry Play of the Year, VPL Awards Shortlist, 2007 & 2008 La Mama); *Letters from Animals*, Kit Lazaroo (Storeroom Theatre Workshop 2007), *Topsy*, Kit Lazaroo (fortyfive downstairs, 2007 RE Ross Award); and *Bright, Shiny & Green Nights Underfoot*, Kit Lazaroo, produced at at La Mama, May 2015.

At the 2015 ADSA conference, Jane's paper 'Miss W Treads: Craft as second nature' received an honorable mention from the Veronica Kelly Prize judges.

A close study of the work and lives of prominent actresses on the early colonial stage in Sydney and Calcutta reveals that resilience was a crucial factor in their capacity to not only survive but flourish in the unstable and challenging world of their professional environment. Maria Taylor (1805? - 1841) and Eliza Winstanley (1818 -1882) were two of Australia's early

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theatrical stars. Maria Taylor was a gifted performer with a flexible and positive spirit of play in her performances, despite the many challenges she faced in her private life. Blessed with natural vivacity, a good singing voice and generosity on stage, Taylor's life off stage reads like the narrative of a melodrama, with love affairs, lost children, and a tendency to walk on the wrong side of the law. Her younger colleague Eliza Winstanley led a respectable life, and maintained a diligent practice as an actress in Australia, the United Kingdom and America. Later in life Winstanley transformed into a writer and editor of serialised fiction.

In the preface to her 1859 novel *Shifting Scenes in Theatrical Life*, Eliza Winstanley declares that contrary to popular assumptions, performers are moral, dependable people. She writes that 'the vicissitudes, the trials, privations, and sufferings, attendant upon the life of a strolling player, may serve to develop some of the best qualities that do honor to human nature'.<sup>1</sup> She names these qualities as: 'a high sense of moral duty, patience under disappointment and the pressure of hopeless difficulties, together with the constant practice of the Good Samaritan's spirit'. Today we might describe Winstanley's 'best qualities' as 'resilience'. Elizabeth Wynhausen, in her 2009 monograph describes resilience as 'fortitude in the face of adversity', and writes that the 'essential component' of resilience is 'the resistance that determines a person's capacity to bounce back from traumatic events'.<sup>2</sup> In addition, Wynhausen identifies a quality of flexibility and lateral thinking as fundamental habits of mind in a resilient person's psychological make-up:

Resilient people always see a way of coping, and if the first thing they try doesn't work, they try a bunch of other things, says a psychiatrist I know...<sup>3</sup>

Tracy C Davis writes that in the nineteenth century actresses were exceptions to their sex because they were autonomous professionals, as the stage was one of the few places where women could have agency and independence.<sup>4</sup> The theatre provided a professional context for the traditional 'feminine virtue of industriousness, the study of literature, languages and music, and the preoccupation with dress and personal appearance'. However Davis identifies other 'theatrical job skills' which were developed alongside feminine attributes: 'indefatigability, worldly knowledge, self-sufficiency, mobility, and the freedom to interact with men as colleagues, admirers, pursuers, and economic equals'.<sup>5</sup> These qualities could also be identified as part of the make-up of a resilient personality. Actresses also required a degree

of psychological resilience to cope with critical scrutiny in the press. Lisa Warrington has observed that in the early years of the Sydney Theatre 'a critic might serve as cultural watchdog, arbiter of taste and of common sense, ersatz director offering hints on acting and stage mechanics.'<sup>6</sup> The Sydney theatre critics of the 1830s and 1840s provided severe acting notes, comparing actors and actresses to great performers they recalled seeing in London and the English provinces.<sup>7</sup>

The 'vicissitudes, the trials, privations, and sufferings' which Winstanley identified in the lives of strolling players, were also part of life for the acting companies of Sydney's first permanent theatres in the 1830s and 1840s; the Theatre Royal and the Royal Victoria Theatre. Then as now, Winstanley, Taylor and their colleagues had to cope with fluctuating wages, but unlike their twenty-first century peers, they were also required to provide their own costumes and memorize up to four new parts per week. They had to stay healthy or lose income in a time when cholera, tuberculosis and influenza were prevalent and debilitating contagious diseases. The Theatre Royal and Royal Victoria acting companies had a variety of challenging workplace conditions and scenarios to contend with: house lights that remained alight throughout each performance; patchy lighting on stage that dimmed as the evening wore on; minimal rehearsal; intoxicated and rowdy audiences who hissed their least favorite actors and cheered those they supported; mismatched scenery flats when the backstage crew were intoxicated; stage pistols that did not fire; fellow performers who did not know any of their lines; trap doors in the stage unexpectedly left open; audiences members climbing onto stage during a performance to entertain everyone with their version of a Shakespearean soliloquy; fellow performers who addressed every line to the audience, often with a wink or a simper; fellow performers who were so intoxicated they couldn't stand up; and the challenge of maintaining focus and energy in a program that began at seven o'clock and finished at one o'clock the next morning.<sup>8</sup>

Davis writes that actresses 'defied socioeconomic prescriptions about Good Women, yet by going home as respectable daughters, wives or mothers they denied ideological prescriptions about Bad Women.'<sup>9</sup> Actresses had to contend with personal attacks in the press, snide comments from reviewers about their dress or figure, and popular unexamined assumptions about their personal morality, their sexual availability, and their exclusion from respectable,

educated society. A potent and enduring personal resilience was required if women were to succeed and thrive on the early nineteenth century Sydney stage. Both Maria Taylor and Eliza Winstanley possessed this resilience, although it manifested in their personal and professional lives in a manner emblematic of their personal traits.

Maria Taylor, who arrived in Australia in 1833, was older than Winstanley, and was a natural star.<sup>10</sup> The daughter of two London players, James Hill and his common law wife Eliza Atkins nee Warrell, she had the benefit of a 'Drury Lane education' on the London stage. Her father was an accomplished singer who had a short career at Drury Lane and Covent Garden playing in comic operas with the famous tenor John Braham (c1774 – 17 February 1856).<sup>11</sup> The Sydney critics describe Maria Taylor as 'elastic' in her performances, and this pliable quality is apparent in her personality. Despite many setbacks, she continued to bounce back, retaining her hopeful, flirtatious and spirited personality and performance style, even though in the end she was undone by the unwise choices she made in her personal life. In an action-packed nine years, Maria Madeline Taylor played most of the great roles in the nineteenth century repertoire, at both the Theatre Royal and Royal Victoria Theatre, including Romeo to Eliza Winstanley's Juliet in 1835.

After arriving in Hobart in 1833, Taylor sang at a concert at the Hobart Courthouse and was quickly a favorite with Van Diemen's Land theatre-goers, who were bitterly disappointed when this new star of the colonial stage and her stage manager husband left without warning for Sydney four months later. An article in the *Colonial Times* informs the public that the Taylors 'both anticipate to be engaged at the Sydney theatre', and somewhat unkindly predicts that they 'will have cause and leisure to repent of the abrupt and uncourteous manner they have treated the Van Diemen's Land public, who have shown such a wish to support them.'<sup>12</sup>

Once she had established herself in the acting company of Sydney's Theatre Royal, Maria Taylor was soon known as 'the Queen of the Sydney stage.' The Sydney critics were unanimous that 'One so lady like in her manner is indeed a rarity in this part of the world'.<sup>13</sup> Aside from her 'desirable stature of person, neither diminutive nor masculine - the graceful air of step - and the clear, distinct enunciation of voice',<sup>14</sup> the critics praised her ability to

represent a diverse range of characters. 'Mrs. Taylor is here quite unrivalled as an actress; as the versatility of her genius in such opposite characters as Don Giovanni and Mrs. Haller ... and many other characters of an equally opposite nature, can fully testify.'<sup>15</sup> Taylor was also applauded for her naturalness, and her ability to play the emotional truth of a text. '...it was the perfect manner in which Mrs. Taylor inhaled the spirit of the part that caused her to give so much satisfaction; her ease, vivacity, playful humour, then her deep emotion - were all evinced with the nicest discrimination; it was all emphatically natural...'<sup>16</sup>

Just before Christmas in 1838, Taylor proved her commitment to her craft when she suffered a serious accident at the theatre. The critic in *The Australian* writes:

By some neglect, the scene shifters placed the wrong scene in readiness, unknown to the performers on the stage, and, as Mrs. Taylor was making her exit from the second scene through the cottage door in the flat, she was suddenly precipitated through a vacancy in the stage (which was arranged for the hold of a ship) a distance of twenty feet to the earth; she was scarcely missing before moanings were heard under the stage – persons proceeded immediately below and carried her up to the green room; surgical aid was procured, and after the process of bleeding, Dr. Smith, who attended, lent her his carriage to convey her to her residence.<sup>17</sup>

*The Colonist* reported that Taylor had hit the edge of the stage as she fell, and had 'blood streaming from both her mouth and her nose.'<sup>18</sup> She was 'determined not in any way to put the proprietor to inconvenience in the forthcoming Christmas novelty having already given information of her intention of appearing on Wednesday night, in the character allotted to her in the drama.'<sup>19</sup> In a poetic and creepy coincidence, the role that she was to play in the Christmas novelty was 'Asteria, the Fallen Star'. But this theatrical star had had a bad fall, and ultimately found she was not well enough to play *The Fallen Star* after all, and so Eliza Winstanley took her place. After witnessing Miss Winstanley's performance as Asteria *The Fallen Star*, the critic writes that 'we think the character of Asteria to be deficient in the personation of Miss Winstanley, of the suavity and elasticity that ...it would receive in the hands of Mrs. Taylor.'<sup>20</sup>

Throughout the 1830s Maria Taylor's private life was as much a matter for the press as were her elastic performances. In 1834 her husband had abandoned her and their child, and over the next six years she had relationships with various attractive bounders and con men. Described by one critic as 'a pleasing lively little brunette, with a sparkling and expressive black eye, not particularly pretty, but far from plain'<sup>21</sup> and another as possessing a 'Vestris-like' spirit, she had many male admirers, and was prepared to defend herself in the press, all of which earned her the moral condemnation of conservative churchman Reverend Dr. Lang and his followers.

In 1836 Maria Taylor was in a relationship with the con man John Thomas Wilson, who was maintaining an affair with Mrs. Cavill, a respectable free emigrant who Wilson was promising to marry. Ultimately Mrs. Cavill was duped, seduced and abandoned by Wilson. Her brother Andrew Wyllie published a lengthy account of his sister's fall in *The Colonist* in 1836, an attempt to destroy John Thomas Wilson's reputation by outing him as an immoral philanderer. Wyllie writes that he witnessed Wilson walk with a prostitute to a house 'of ill fame', and then implies that Maria Taylor was also a prostitute, as he had, on another occasion, observed her walking with Wilson to her residence. 'I need say no more about her', Wyllie writes, 'as she is generally known to be a woman of abandoned character'.<sup>22</sup>

Two days later Maria Taylor responded with an emphatic notice to the public in the *Sydney Monitor*:

In answer to ANDREW WYLLIE'S assertions, in a letter of this day's *Colonist*, respecting myself, I take leave to proclaim him, a MEAN, DESPICABLE LIAR! And if any of my relatives were in the Colony, he dared not apply such assertions to me, publicly, or privately.

Taylor goes on to defend her reputation, outlining her financial difficulties since her husband had 'left myself and my child'. She appeals to the sympathy of the public, asking them to consider how 'an injured and oppressed female has deserved the unmerited reproaches of a few heartless enemies.'<sup>23</sup>

John Thomas Wilson fell into considerable debt and fled Sydney in October 1839, leaving the wife of a convict pregnant, as well as driving to suicide the captain of a trading ship, whose

wife had also been seduced by Wilson.<sup>24</sup> A few months after Wilson's departure Maria Taylor took another notorious and handsome swindler as her 'paramour', Pierre Largeteau, captain of the recently arrived French ship *Ville de Bordeaux*.

Even though he did not own the *Ville de Bordeaux*, Largeteau sold it for 3000 pounds in July 1840, and, pocketing the funds, departed for Calcutta with Maria Taylor a week later. At the time of writing it is not known what became of Maria Taylor's teenage daughter, although some accounts report that after Taylor departed for Calcutta, her sixteen-year-old daughter fell pregnant to her Balmain employer and was rescued from an attempted 'double suicide' in Darling Harbour and sent to a charitable institution.<sup>25</sup>

Once in Calcutta Taylor and Largeteau renamed themselves Count and Madame Dhermainville, where they lived the high life. What stories did the Dhermainvilles tell the British community in Calcutta? Maria Taylor must have been a willing accomplice in this ultimate act of theatrical shape shifting. It is easy to imagine how readily she fell into the role of the French actress married to French nobility. Why did Taylor tend to attach herself to duplicitous men? Was she inclined to dupe innocent people, to be part of a financial scam, or was she exceptionally gullible? Was her willingness to go along with Largeteau's criminal activity evidence of her flexible and resilient habits of mind?

Pierre Largeteau contracted cholera and died in early 1841. The affair of the *Ville de Bordeaux* and the fate of Captain Pierre Largeteau and his mistress was a sensation in the French, English and colonial press. Shortly after her lover's death, Maria Taylor a.k.a Madame Dhermainville, made her Calcutta debut in *The Taming of the Shrew* at the Sans Souci theatre. Her prologue before the curtain was an appeal for sympathy from the audience:

As one Adversity has stricken low,  
Is she, who humbly pleads to you now,  
Oh! Had I the power to utter what I feel,  
Then should he know the force of this appeal  
And own as sympathy relaxed each brow  
The Woman, not the actress speak'd now.<sup>26</sup>

Madame Dhermainville's justification of her decision to perform so soon after the death of her 'husband' is a heartfelt example of resilience born of necessity:

Alas! Too soon must I retain the mask –  
 Necessity commands me to the task –  
 And bid my features mimic feeling shew,  
 Whilst dark and heavy lies my heart below;  
 Pause to remember this, ere ye upbraid  
 And let my faults tonight be lightly weighed.<sup>27</sup>

Sometime after arriving in Calcutta, Taylor had become romantically entangled with Captain George Hamilton Cox, Secretary of the Fire Insurance Company. It is not known whether this affair was initiated and fostered as another income stream while Phillippe Largeteau was still alive, or whether Taylor took up with Cox in the weeks after her lover had died and she was alone and in financial difficulties. According to the *Sydney Monitor* George Cox had 'formed an injudicious connexion' with Taylor, and had been 'labouring under great depression of spirits in consequence of his wife and children being daily expected from England.' On 29 April 1841 Cox spent the afternoon with Taylor, attended her performance that evening, and after the play went back to his lodgings at the Bengal Club and 'blew his brains out with a pistol, literally shattering to pieces the whole of his head.' Cox left on his table a number of letters addressed to his family, his colleagues, Maria Taylor and to the Coroner. The tone of the letters is rational - Cox was adamant that he should not be judged insane. 'It was unhappiness; you will find no more, search as you will.'<sup>28</sup> The proceedings of the inquest into Cox's suicide, some of his final letters and mention of his liaison with Taylor were published in *The Englishman*, a Calcutta colonial newspaper. Thus Maria Taylor's name was yet again associated with another sensational series of events in the colonial press.

Two weeks later Maria Taylor also succumbed to cholera. When news of her death reached Sydney, the critic wrote:

As an actress this lady was more successful than any other that ever trod the Sydney boards. The versatility of her talent and the elasticity of her spirits knew no bounds. In private life, whatever indiscretions she might have been

guilty of, were rather the result of a volatile and giddy disposition, inseparable from her professional pursuits, than of a bad heart.<sup>29</sup>

The inscription on her grave stone in Calcutta is recorded in *The Bengal Obituary* and reads 'sacred to the memory of Maria Madeline Taylor who died 13<sup>th</sup> May 1841, aged 27 years.'<sup>30</sup> This 'fascinating actress' who brought the traditions, acting methods and stories of the London stage to Van Diemen's Land, New South Wales and Calcutta; who navigated whole worlds of misfortune, tragedy, broad stage experience and professional challenge with a spirited and inventive form of resilience, was finally beaten by an infectious disease. Taylor's lateral thinking in the face of adversity - the trait that Wynhausen calls 'trying a bunch of other things' - could not save her from 'King Cholera', as the disease was called in an 1852 cartoon.<sup>31</sup>

Like Maria Taylor, Eliza Winstanley also kept bouncing back, and trying new things. Irvin describes Winstanley as 'an indomitable battler, who...managed to achieve what she had set out to achieve entirely by her own efforts. If what she wanted could not be had in one place, she moved onto another.'<sup>32</sup> From her debut as a sixteen-year old until she was in her early twenties, Eliza Winstanley honed her craft, performing intermittently as part of the acting company of the Theatre Royal. By the time she was twenty-two years old, Winstanley's colleagues Maria Taylor and Ellen Douglass Hatch had both tragically passed away, and Eliza, healthy, versatile and diligent in her practice, was ready to step into the leading comic and tragic roles once occupied by her two older peers.<sup>33</sup> It is possible to speculate that Winstanley's personal resilience was also accompanied by vigorous ambition, as once she had fewer competitors for theatrical engagements, she seized the professional opportunities offered to her, and rose to prominence throughout 1841 and 1842, when the *Sydney Gazette* bestowed on her the ultimate praise, naming her the 'Mrs. Siddons of Sydney'.<sup>34</sup>

As noted in this introduction, nineteenth-century actresses were also required to show resilience when weathering criticism from the local press. Acting notes in the guise of 'theatrical reviews' ranged from encouraging notes about accents, pronunciation and movement which assisted performers to improve their craft, to cruel mockery of physical and vocal imperfections. After her marriage in 1841 to Henry O'Flaherty, a tall blonde violinist in the theatre orchestra, Eliza Winstanley's short buxom figure became a little fuller. The critic

writes that her physical appearance detracted from her performance of Mrs. Haller in Kotzebue's *The Stranger*:

There is however, a material drawback (certainly an unavoidable one) to the completeness of the representation, in Mrs. O'Flaherty's obesity of figure. It must necessarily operate in some degree as an alkali upon the idea of sentimentality cankering grief, and brokenheartedness.<sup>35</sup>

Davis describes how in addition to providing employment that celebrated traditional feminine pursuits, the theatre also offered women the opportunity to develop 'other theatrical job skills, namely: indefatigability, worldly knowledge, self-sufficiency, mobility, and the freedom to interact with men as colleagues, admirers, pursuers and economic equals. Therein lay the hazard.'<sup>36</sup> Actresses who could resist the temptations of sex, affairs, and infatuated male fans were better able to avoid moral and public censure in the press. While Maria Taylor seemed to court various scandals, Eliza Winstanley lived a life free of impropriety. The worst thing she did, according to the *Van Diemen's Land Chronicle*, was to marry an Irishman. '..it is only Mrs. O'Flaherty's acting which could reconcile us to the name of O'Flaherty.'<sup>37</sup>

In the latter half of 1841, Eliza encouraged her husband to transform himself from a musician into an actor, and they made a successful tour of Hobart and Launceston, playing the leading roles in melodramas and burlettas. Descriptions of Eliza's performances in the *Van Diemen's Land* press suggest she had developed some Taylorian qualities, playing with confidence, ease and flirtatiousness. 'Mrs. O'Flaherty wore the breeches with becoming grace',<sup>38</sup> writes one, while another remarks that: 'There is only one fault in her acting; even in the most pathetic and tragic scenes a bewitching smile sometimes steals across her countenance.'<sup>39</sup> Marriage and the opportunity to perform on new stages for new audiences allowed Eliza to remake herself, sharpening up her image as a theatrical star, displaying some of the elasticity and effortless glamour that had once been a hallmark of Mrs. Taylor's playing style. When she returned to Sydney in early 1842, it was announced in the press that 'her first appearance since her return to the colony' would be as a member of the company of the Australian Olympic Theatre, Luigi Dalle Case's sparkling new tent theatre.<sup>40</sup> The Olympic Theatre had faced a number of set backs, not the least of which was the concerted opposition of Joseph Wyatt, owner of the Royal Victoria Theatre. Wyatt did his utmost to maintain his theatrical

monopoly in Sydney, but Dalle Case was finally granted a license to present theatrical entertainments in his pretty tent theatre, which featured decorative panels painted by the artist John Skinner Prout. Winstanley's determination to join the company of a new theatre in Sydney, again suggests her resilience, and her confidence in her own capacity to play a leading role in a risky new theatrical venture. There was an air of excitement around the opening of the Olympic Theatre, which promised an alternative repertoire to Joseph Wyatt's Royal Victoria. Eliza's sister Ann Ximenes, a talented singer and actor, was also engaged as a member of the Olympic company. The sisters' commitment to their craft was tested when their father William Winstanley, once a scenic painter at the Theatre Royal, died suddenly at 5:30pm just before the opening of the Olympic Theatre. The Winstanley sisters went ahead with their performance. The performance was also set to be Eliza Winstanley's benefit, so perhaps the additional costs of a funeral drove them to honour their contract. The critic writes: 'We were astonished how these ladies could find nerve enough to continue the performance after receiving so distressing a blow.'<sup>41</sup>

Catriona Mills writes that in Winstanley's fiction, the actress is portrayed as 'an ambitious woman, with financial requirements and an awareness of her professional worth.'<sup>42</sup> Eric Irvin proposes that the extraordinary passage in *Shifting Scenes in Theatrical Life* which describes Alice Thorn and her 'inferior' husband, was a portrait of Winstanley and her husband Henry O'Flaherty:

Among these itinerant actors was a woman whose beauty and talents ought long ago to have been rewarded by a high position in the theatrical world, had she not sacrificed herself to a selfish, worthless husband, who neither appreciated her affection nor understood the motives which kept her slaving in obscurity, when she might have been at the "top of the tree." Alice Thorn was a proud woman, who felt that her husband was her inferior in every respect. She *would* not climb the ladder of fame, because her pride forbade her leaving her husband at the foot of it..."<sup>43</sup>

As Mills suggests, Winstanley was a hard-working, resilient and ambitious performer who reinvented her professional self, and was comfortable with her drive to work and to succeed as a professional artist. Her fiction suggests that she had no patience for men who expected

their wives should be 'his creature, subservient to his whims', and she pitied women who 'tacitly yield to these domestic tyrants, and thereby sink into mere household drudges, and crawl through life like quiet, suffering, patient worms'.<sup>44</sup>

In 1846 Winstanley made herself a new path, when she and Henry departed for the United Kingdom and America. At the time of her departure from Sydney, Winstanley had been performing as 'Mrs. O'Flaherty' for five years. When she made her English theatrical debut at the Manchester's Theatre Royal in 1846, she had reverted to her maiden name, playing as 'Miss Winstanley'.<sup>45</sup> After successful seasons in New York and Philadelphia, and then on the West End stage at Drury Lane (1849 – 1850) she was engaged as a member of Charles and Ellen Kean's company at the Royal Princess's where she remained for nine years. During this time she commenced her second career as a writer and editor of serialised fiction, which she continued while a member of Charles Fechter's company at the Royal Lyceum Theatre (1861-1865).<sup>46</sup> Henry O'Flaherty sank into obscurity, perhaps making a modest income as a teacher of violin and Spanish guitar as he had once done in Sydney, or playing violin in one of London's many theatres. He appears with Eliza in London in the 1851 census when they were visiting or staying at 123 Camden Road, the home of Ann and Henry Ximenes, who had left Sydney for London in 1849, and now lived there with their four-year-old daughter named Eliza. The census lists Henry O'Flaherty's occupation as 'Musician'. Then in 1854 he died at the age of thirty-five, and is buried in the old Highgate Cemetery. Over the next decade, Winstanley continued working as a second tier actress in London, and became a prolific writer and editor. In 1865 she ceased working as an actress and focused solely on her writing.

Resilience was a quality Winstanley explored in her fiction, especially in her novels set in the world of strolling players, and in the theatres of London, the English provinces and in the Sydney of her youth. Her beautiful actress heroines are brought to the brink of despair, contemplate suicide, and are abducted. They watch their children die of starvation, their husbands kill themselves with drink, and are wrongfully transported to New South Wales. Despite these many trials, Winstanley's heroines bounce back, soldier on, learn their lines, repair their costumes, defend their honour, love unceasingly, their hearts and minds ennobled by the high emotion and ideals of the playscripts they commit to memory as part of their working lives. Actors and actresses who were born into theatrical families, writes

Winstanley in *Shifting Scenes in Theatrical Life*, 'are constantly in the society of thinkers and brain-workers; they hear daily the language of Shakespeare, Otway, Sheridan, and other great writers, and their plastic minds receive lessons beyond all school-teaching.'<sup>47</sup> Winstanley also adhered to the 'lessons' and 'best qualities' she had learnt in the theatre as an adolescent.

Eliza Winstanley returned to Sydney in 1879, perhaps with the intention of spending her old age near her brother Robert and his family. Her working life as an artist had spanned three continents and a vast repertoire. She had been a star on the early Sydney stage, had performed numerous times with the Keans at Windsor Castle for Queen Victoria, and worked with many of the great mid-century performers who trod the boards of America and England in the 1850s and 1860s. Her sensational melodramatic fiction was popular, published under her own name, and was adapted for the stage for successful seasons in the 1860s and 1870s. Yet once she was back in Sydney after thirty-three years, she lived and worked there in relative obscurity, earning her living managing a dyeing factory. It was here that she died of diabetes and exhaustion in 1882. Throughout her life Winstanley demonstrated her particular adaptability and resilience, which complemented her ambition, her work ethic and her high ideals for her profession. Living as a widow for most of her adult life, and working as an actress who saw employment opportunities dwindle as she aged, she displayed an indefatigable belief in her professional self, in her own ability to bounce back. Her particular resilience certainly was, to use her words, born out of 'a high sense of moral duty', and the practice of 'patience under disappointment and the pressure of hopeless difficulties'.<sup>48</sup> Eliza Winstanley, like Maria Taylor, changed her name to transform her professional self and support her theatrical identity. Both women achieved critical and popular success, but ultimately Maria Taylor could not sustain a long career. Taylor's buoyant and playful nature, which enabled her to play emotional truth on the stage and allowed her to be open to life's wilder possibilities, ultimately lead her into risky scenarios. Her last months in Calcutta are more flamboyant than Eliza Winstanley's last years in a Sydney dyeing factory, but both women ended their lives having followed a productive and creative path. They helped to build a culture of craft and practice in the first years of the Australian theatre. Their significant contribution, their determination and their resilience are an inspiration for contemporary theatre practitioners.

A century and a half later their example of female industry and skill impresses us now, a beacon shining across the long gaps in our knowledge of Australia's early theatre history.

## NOTES

<sup>1</sup> Eliza Winstanley, *Shifting Scenes in Theatrical Life* (London: Thomas Hailes Lacy, 1864) iii-iv.

<sup>2</sup> Elisabeth Wynhausen, *On Resilience* (Carlton, Victoria: Melbourne University Press, 2009) 3-6.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid* 6.

<sup>4</sup> Tracy C Davis, *Actresses as working women: Their social identity in Victorian culture* (London: Routledge, 1991) xi.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid* 16.

<sup>6</sup> Lisa Warrington, 'Acting the Moor: critical response to performances of "Othello" in Australia and New Zealand, 1834 - 1866', *Australian Studies* 6 (2014): 1.

<sup>7</sup> See *Sydney Monitor* 18 October 1834, 3 'Knowles as Rob Roy played and was dressed worse than any other character we recollect to have seen him enact'; *The Australian* 24 October 1834, 2-3

'With respect to Mr Palmer, who chose Richard the Third on his night, and enacted the chief character himself, we scarcely know whether to commend his courage, or condemn his presumption'; *Sydney Gazette* 24 December 1835 3, 'The genius of our immortal bard has again hovered over the Sydney boards, but it is too gigantic to be sustained by our theatrical fabric.'; *Sydney Monitor*, 24 October 1836, 2 'We have seen John Kemble in *The Stranger*, and Mrs Siddons in *Mrs Haller*. Yet we were pleased with Mrs Cameron on Saturday...Miss Douglas, if she were in London, would become a second, if not a first rate actress'; *Sydney Gazette* 15 March 1842, 3 '...the *Victoria* and the *Olympic* are not *Covent Garden* and *Drury Lane*; Knowles is not Macready, Nesbitt is not Kean, Prout is not Stanfield, Sydney is not London. But while we do not compare, we can at least imitate. If we know, or think we know, the cause which produced the great effects alluded to in the theatres at home, why may we not...put the same causes in operation here, and look with confidence to similar results?'

<sup>8</sup> Lighting: *Sydney Monitor*, 10 January 1835, 2 and Eric Irvin, *Theatre comes to Australia* (St Lucia, Queensland: University of Queensland Press, 1971) 120; Actors not knowing their lines: *The Australian*, 20 September 1836, 2 & *Sydney Monitor*, 10 March 1837, 3; Mrs Taylor flirts with an individual in the audience: *Sydney Gazette*, 17 October 1837, 2; A member of the audience interrupts a performance of *Hamlet* to demonstrate 'the way the King might have been done': *Sydney Monitor*, 15 September 1841, 3; Eliza Winstanley is harassed for four years by the Cabbage Tree mob: See Richard Fotheringham *Australian Plays for the Colonial Stage: 1834-1899* (St Lucia, QLD: University of Queensland Press, 2006) 204 & *Australasian Chronicle*, 31 December 1840, 3; Length of theatrical program: See Irvin, 86-7.

<sup>9</sup> Davis, *Actresses*, 71.

<sup>10</sup> At the time of writing Taylor's date of birth is not known. Her gravestone records her age as twenty-seven years old at the time of her death in 1841, yet she is said to have had a sixteen-year-

old daughter when she died. See C. Bede Maxwell, *Wooden Hookers: Epics of the Sea History of Australia* (Sydney: Angus & Robertson, 1940) 123. Maria Taylor's parents had commenced a de facto relationship in 1805. Her father James Hill died in 1817, and had abandoned Eliza Atkins and their children. The writer of his obituary in *The New Monthly Magazine* notes that 'his private character would not have added to the respectability of the theatrical profession'.

<sup>11</sup> See Graeme Skinner, 'Taylor, Maria Madeline', Australharmony <http://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/register-T.php> (accessed 12 February 2016); *Sydney Gazette*, 11 March 1834, 2. For reference to rivalry with Braham see *Colonial Times*, 5 November 1833, 2.

<sup>12</sup> *Colonial Times*, 25 February 1834, 6.

<sup>13</sup> Cited in *Truth*, 'Australia's first theatrical man died at early age', 6 September 1953, 20.

<sup>14</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 18 March 1834, 2.

<sup>15</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 5 November 1835, 2.

<sup>16</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 30 January 1836, 3.

<sup>17</sup> *The Australian*, 25 December 1838, 3.

<sup>18</sup> *The Colonist*, 26 December 1838, 3.

<sup>19</sup> *The Australian*, 25 December 1838, 3.

<sup>20</sup> *The Australian*, 8 January 1839, 2.

<sup>21</sup> *The Colonist*, 5 November 1833, 3.

<sup>22</sup> *The Colonist*, 7 April 1836, 3-4.

<sup>23</sup> *The Colonist*, 7 April 1836, 3.

<sup>24</sup> <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/wilson-john-thomas-2804> (accessed 17 February 2016).

<sup>25</sup> Maxwell, *Wooden Hookers*, 123.

<sup>26</sup> *Bengal Harkaru* 7 April 1841 in Bishnupriya Dutt & Urmimala Sarkar Munsri *Engendering Performance: Indian Women Performers in Search of an Identity* (New Delhi: SAGE Publications, 2010) 24-25.

<sup>27</sup> *Ibid* 29.

<sup>28</sup> *Sydney Monitor*, 26 November 1841, 4.

<sup>29</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 28 September 1841, 3.

<sup>30</sup> Holmes and Co, (eds) *The Bengal Obituary: or, A Record to perpetuate the memory of departed worth* (Calcutta: Holmes & Co, 1851) online:

<https://books.google.com.au/books?id=T-HwSiLns14C&pg=PA280#v=onepage&q&f=false>, 280.

I am indebted to Dr. Graeme Skinner for this reference.

See <http://sydney.edu.au/paradisec/australharmony/register-T.php>

<sup>31</sup> 'A Court for King Cholera' by John Leech, in <http://www.victorianweb.org/science/health/cholera.html> (accessed 10 April 2016).

<sup>32</sup> Irvin, *Theatre comes to Australia*, 176.

<sup>33</sup> Ellen Douglass Hatch (1812 - 1838) was six years older than Winstanley and made her Sydney theatrical debut at the same time. According to the *Sydney Gazette* of November 1834 she was an Resilience: Revive, Restore, Reconnect, Australasian Association for Drama Theatre and Performance Studies (ADSA) 2016 Conference Proceedings, Volume 1, ed. Rebecca Scollen and Michael Smalley, Artsworx, 2016.

actress of 'superior theatrical attainments'. She died after a protracted illness in 1838 at the age of twenty-six.

<sup>34</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 15 March 1842, 3.

<sup>35</sup> *The Australian*, 28 June 1845, 3.

<sup>36</sup> Davis, *Actresses*, 16.

<sup>37</sup> *Van Diemen's Land Chronicle*, 13 August 1841, 2.

<sup>38</sup> *Cornwall Chronicle*, 9 October 1841, 2.

<sup>39</sup> *Launceston Courier*, 20 September 1841, 3.

<sup>40</sup> *Australasian Chronicle*, 5 February 1842, 3.

<sup>41</sup> *Sydney Gazette*, 10 February 1842, 2-3.

<sup>42</sup> Catriona Mills, *Women at work on page and stage: The work of Eliza Winstanley*, Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Queensland, 2011, 27.

<sup>43</sup> Winstanley, *Shifting Scenes*, 27.

<sup>44</sup> *Ibid* 175-176.

<sup>45</sup> Irvin cites a *Manchester Examiner* review dated 21 November 1846 which critiques the performance of 'Miss Winstanley' (175). A portrait of Winstanley as Lady Clutterbuck in *The Theatrical Times* 14 August 1847 introduces her as 'Miss Winstanley'. In 1849 *The Hobart Courier* reports that while enjoying a successful season at the Park Theatre in New York, 'Mrs O'Flaherty...has resumed her maiden name'. *The Courier*, 14 March 1849, 2.

<sup>46</sup> For an outline of Winstanley's theatrical career in America and United Kingdom, see Irvin, 174 – 182; Mills, 8-9, 28-36, 73 and N.M. Robinson, 'O'Flaherty, Eliza (1818-1882)', *Australian Dictionary of Biography*, Australian National University, online: <http://adb.anu.edu.au/biography/oflaherty-eliza-2520/text3411> (accessed 10 April 2016).

<sup>47</sup> Winstanley, *Shifting Scenes*, 24.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid* iii-iv.