

Only by Failure:  
The Many Faces  
of the Impossible Life  
of Terence Gray

PAUL CORNWELL taught in primary education for almost forty years. His book *Creative Playmaking in the Primary School* was published by Chatto and Windus in 1970 and he wrote a chapter for *Drama in Education 2* (Pitman, 1973). Articles on English teaching and reviews have appeared in *The Use of English, Language for Learning* (Exeter), *Pirandello Studies* and *Teachers World*. A recent book on *Britten and the Cambridge Connection* is in the Britten-Pears Library. Educated at the Perse School, Cambridge, he has a Diploma (Cambridge) and M.Ed (Leicester).



# Only *by* Failure

*The Many Faces  
of the Impossible  
Life of Terence Gray*

PAUL CORNWELL

*Only by 'failure' can I succeed . . .  
Thus ends my work? So it does!  
Are you perhaps wondering why?  
There might be a reason.*

—WEI WU WEI  
*Posthumous Pieces*

*"Failed? Oh, I don't think it failed . . .  
these were seven most exciting years."*

—NORMAN MARSHALL  
*The Quest for Terence Gray, Anglia Television*



CAMBRIDGE

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## Terence James Stannus Gray 1895–1987

DIRECTOR OF THE FESTIVAL THEATRE, CAMBRIDGE 1926–1933

*The post-war world has found an artistic rebirth. It has found a means of self-expression. In architecture, in painting, sculpture, furniture, decoration, all the handicrafts, the theatre, and all other media in which the human mind finds expression in art, new methods, new forms, new inspirations are bursting with life.*

—TERENCE GRAY  
'The Art Theatre Movement'

*The theatre practised as an art-form is a precious thing that must be cultivated wherever civilised man lives . . .*

—TERENCE GRAY  
'I Look at the Audience' *Theatre Arts Monthly*

*In sweeping away the cobwebs of external reality, which were choking the theatre, the theatre as an art-form reappeared and took its rightful place beside the other arts.*

—TERENCE GRAY  
'This Age in the Theatre', *The Bookman*

*One is writing of something that potentially has been established for at least a decade . . . in Prague and in Paris, in Berlin and in Moscow, in Vienna and in Cambridge . . . modern stagecraft has been struggling to birth . . .*

—TERENCE GRAY  
'Theory and Practice of Stagecraft'

*Two days later, the old man caught up with our hero, and presented him with a sack full of butterflies . . . Petron received them graciously, but when the old man had gone, 'What on earth,' he said, 'am I to do with all this beauty?' and he pitched the whole sackful down the cliff.*

—HUGH SYKES DAVIES  
*Petron*

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## List of Works Published by Terence Gray

### Books and Articles

- 1920 *The Life of Queen Hatshepsut* (Heffer, Cambridge) 'Egyptian Dancing' (*The Dancing Times*, October)
- 1922 'Let Egypt Dance Again' (*The Dancing Times*, July) 'Dance Drama' (*The Dancing Times*, September)
- 1923 *And in the Tomb were Found . . .* (Heffer, Cambridge, and Appleton, New York)
- 1924 *Kings and Queens of Ancient Egypt* illustrations by W.M. Brunton, with introduction and chapter on Khafra by Gray (Hodder and Stoughton)
- 1925 *Cuchulainn, an Epic Drama of the Gael* (Heffer, Cambridge) *Stage lighting for 'Little' Theatres* by C. Harold Ridge, foreword by Basil Dean and introduction by Gray (Heffer, Cambridge) 'The Tremendous Lover' (*Poetry and the Play*, June)
- 1926 *Dance Drama, Experiments in the Art of the Theatre* (Heffer, Cambridge) *Festival Review*, from 1926 to 1933: numerous editorial articles as Terence Gray and under various pseudonyms (including 'The Theatre in Paris' and 'Can the theatre be practised as an art-form?')

- 1927 *Red Nights at the Tcheka* by de Lorde and Henri Bauche, translated by Gray, unpublished
- 1928 *Stage Lighting* by C. Harold Ridge, with preface by Norman Marshall and added text by Gray (Heffer), 'Suggestions for the new Shakespeare Memorial Theatre' (*The Bookman's Journal*, XVI-6) 'The Art Theatre Movement' (an address to N.U.T. Conference in Cambridge)
- 1931 'I Look at the Audience' (*Theatre Arts Monthly*, October)
- 1932 'This Age in the Theatre' (*The Bookman*, October) 'The Theatre Shall Be Theatrical' (*Varsity*, October)
- 1934 'Theory and Practice of Stagecraft' (*Theatre and Stage*, Pitman monthly)
- 1941 'Sara Payne's Ballets' (*The Bell*, Dublin, July)
- 1955 *La Doctrine Supreme* by Benoit translated by Gray with foreword by Aldous Huxley (Routledge, London and Pantheon, New York)
- 1958 *Fingers Pointing Towards the Moon* by Wei Wu Wei (Gray) (Routledge and Kegan Paul)
- 1960 *Why Lazarus Laughed, The Essential Doctrine* by Wei Wu Wei (Routledge)
- 1963 *Ask the Awakened, The Negative Way* by Wei Wu Wei (Routledge)
- 1964 *All Else is Bondage* by Wei Wu Wei (Hong Kong University Press)
- 1965 *Open Secret* by Wei Wu Wei (Hong Kong)
- 1966 *The Tenth Man* by Wei Wu Wei (Hong Kong)
- 1968 *Posthumous Pieces* by Wei Wu Wei with copyright Terence Gray (Hong Kong/Oxford University)

- 1973 *Ask the Awakened* published in America (Little, Brown & Co of Boston)
- 1974 *Unworldly Wise* by O.O.O. (Wei Wu Wei/ Gray) (Hong Kong)
- 1977 *La Voie Negative* (Edition de la Difference, Paris), French translation of *Ask the Awakened*
- 1982 *All Else is Bondage* (new edition by Hong Kong U.P.)
- 1999 *All Else is Bondage* (new edition by Sunstar, USA)
- 2002/3 *Fingers Pointing Towards the Moon, Why Lazarus Laughed, Ask the Awakened, The Tenth Man* (new editions by Sentient Publications, Boulder, USA)
- 2003 *And in the Tomb were Found . . .* (new edition by Kessinger, U.S.A.)
- 2004 *Open Secret and Posthumous Pieces* (new editions by Sentient) Forthcoming: *All Else is Bondage* and *Unworldly Wise*

### **Terence Gray's Plays and Dance-dramas**

1. *The Life of Queen Hatshepsut* (Heffer, 1920)
  2. *The Building of the Pyramid*
  3. *The Nameless*
  4. *A Royal Audience*
  5. *And in a Tomb were Found . . .*
  6. *Love Songs and Dirges of Old Egypt (a narration)*
- 2-6 above were contained in *And in a Tomb were Found . . .* (Heffer, 1923).

*The Building of the Pyramid* was first performed in June, 1930, at the London Hippodrome at a special matinee performance to honour the

Egyptologist Flinders Petrie of the British School of Archaeology.

*A Royal Audience* was first performed in February, 1927, in Paris, in a translation by Henri Bauche; then in English at the Festival Theatre in May, 1928.

*And in a Tomb were Found ...* was first performed at the Festival Theatre in May, 1927.

7. *Cuchulainn, an epic drama, a cycle of four plays* (Heffer, 1925): *The Young Cuchulainn* (part one)

8. *The Tragedy of Deirdre* (part two)

9. *Maeve of Connaught* (part three)

10. *The Only Son of Aoife* (part four)

11. *The Eternal Rhythm*

12. *The Poisoned Kiss*

13. *The Renaissance*

14. *The Scorpions of Ysit*

*The Scorpions of Ysit* was first performed as a ballet with choreography by Ninette de Valois in November, 1928, at the Royal Court Theatre, and revised in November, 1932, at Sadler's Wells.

15. *The Cardinal's Bracelet*

16. *The Tremendous Lover*

11–16 were contained in *Dance Drama* (Heffer, 1926). *The Tremendous Lover* first appeared in *Poetry and the Play* in the first edition under a new title in June, 1925 (previously the journal was called *Poetry*).

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As Terence Gray did at the beginning of his book *Dance Drama* in 1926, I dedicate my book to the young dancers and actors who are now entering the profession.

# *Preface*

## **1. A personal visit to the Cambridge Festival Theatre**

I hear the two worn and broken doors being unbolted and I enter through a narrow slit between them, leaving behind the sunshine of a fine sunny day in May. I walk across the empty foyer, my footsteps echoing on the bare concrete floor where once the walls and floor had been covered with carpet, and then through two doors into the semi-dark auditorium of the disused Regency theatre, the bustling Theatre Royal as it once was before being renamed the Festival Theatre in the nineteen-twenties and now standing silent and forgotten on the edge of a noisy Newmarket Road in Cambridge.

In one glance, I take in my view of the empty sunken pit edged in red brick, below the level where I stand, and look across to the worn frontages of the two circles and then, above, up to the vast space of the gods, stretching up high into the darkness towards the ceiling, now full of holes from the theatre's many neglected years. As my guide and I walk on, round the back of the musty theatre, along the narrow corridors past series of doors which had once been the entrances to the boxes and I imagine the noise and the excitement of the evenings of the performances at the theatre, with the applause and the laughter. After a steep climb, we reach the highest level and stand on the dusty floor-boards of the large open space which we call the gods, where today there is ample room for at least a hundred or more others, and we look back, down

towards the stage. I see the Greek trapezium above what was once a proscenium opening and, at the rear of the widened stage, the vast curving cyclorama, one of the first in England. Atmosphere seems to simply drip from the walls and the ghosts of actors past are almost to be heard, the voices of a century or more ago and others of more recent times; even the chanting of the congregations during the days when the theatre was used as a mission hall seems to be there in my mind's ears.

Enid Collett, one-time secretary to Terence Gray and who died at the age of over ninety a year ago, told me that when she was taken back to the theatre, shortly before my own first visit, she had been reduced to tears when she saw the deterioration. She had known the building when it was furnished with plush chairs and the paint was new and bright and colourful and there was always the smell in the air of fine wine and the best gourmet food.

The building, which had once been the Festival Theatre and before that the Theatre Royal, was recently purchased by the Windhorse Trust on behalf of the Buddhists of the Cambridge Buddhist Centre, the previous owners being the Cambridge Arts Theatre who bought the theatre from Gray's father. The Trustees of the Arts Theatre had used the building for over fifty years as a space for storage and scene-construction, lacking the resources and the will to promote a revival of the theatre, which would have made a second professional theatre in the city and Cambridge knows too well the implications of that kind of competition. The New Theatre in Cambridge, once a rival to the Festival Theatre, had been forced through falling audiences to become a cinema and, when demolished, an office block.

Since my first visit, the Cambridge Buddhists have renovated the building, being able to inherit a new roof raised by courtesy of the National Lottery, and they now show their total commitment to the preservation of the theatre and the adjoining house. Their first "open day", when they displayed their new carpets and their bright new paint, was also the beginning of the new millennium, and the preservers of the ancient theatre even managed to recreate the exact entrance doors as they were when the Festival Theatre opened in 1926. They now use the theatre for meditation and for the presentation of their Buddhist festivals. On my second visit, I was able to see a large golden Buddha floodlit in the centre of the stage, looking so theatrical, and I realised that they had given the old theatre, in their own particular and special way, a new lease of life. The Cambridge Buddhists had welcomed me, a total stranger on the day that I first knocked on their door, and given me

every possible help and had showed immense patience as I wandered from room to room and wondered at the old stage-turntable under the floor of the stage and at the dressing rooms where the back-stage Gray would have once roamed. My new friends at the Buddhist Centre were genuinely excited when I returned for a third time, to tell them of my latest discovery, that Terence Gray, in the last part of his long life, had published a series of eight books which, although passionately private to the man, had leanings and sympathies towards the world of Zen Buddhism.

One of Gray's "experiments in the Art of the Theatre", which he conjured up in his imagination over thirty years before his first book of mysticism and had published earlier the same year as the Festival Theatre opened, is called *The Eternal Rhythm*, and in the play he had already displayed his interest, if not his participation, in Buddhism:

I will suggest that in this world sometimes a soul which has achieved self-consciousness meets another soul, one which is unconscious, one whose personality still sleeps, and loves it. Gradually the self-conscious soul awakens the other and develops it until it reaches its own high level of development. But the newly-awakened soul does not stop here, and finally the once unconscious soul becomes greater than the one which has developed it, and surpasses it. There is, perhaps, a strange sort of universal spiritual law about this, a sad, beautiful, tragic inevitability. It seems to be somehow connected with the design of things, it might even be traced to the complicated and intricate workings of the Eternal Rhythm itself. The soul which is now the greater eventually attains a higher sphere of consciousness. What shall we call it? The Buddhists call it Nirvana . . .

(Terence Gray, *Dance Drama*, Heffer, 1926, p 59)

Somehow, oddly perhaps but also true and pleasing, the building which was the Festival Theatre, now in its present guise as a centre for Buddhists, has turned full circle.

## **2. Who was this man called Terence Gray?**

My visits to the Festival Theatre were the way I began my investigation. As a Cambridge theatre-goer since 1943, I knew that a man called Terence Gray had achieved a reputation which extended far beyond the

city. I knew from childhood memories that the Festival Theatre had been still alive, if not exactly flourishing, during my early school-days in Cambridge and I vaguely remember being taken to a pantomime there, possibly a year or two before the theatre died in 1940. Otherwise, apart from the odd reference I had seen in my reading about the theatre in general, I only knew that Terence Gray had once lived in the house, now demolished, at Wandlebury, which is an extensive country estate just outside of the city boundaries now owned by the Cambridge Preservation Society and used by local people for recreation.

So it was with the performances at the Festival Theatre that I began my research, in order to find out why the theatre was well-known and why it is still remembered with warm enthusiasm by theatregoers today. There are several complete collections of the programmes of the Festival Theatre during Gray's time, from 1926 to 1933, held at the Cambridge Arts Theatre, the Cambridgeshire Collection, and in the University Library. The Cambridgeshire Collection in the City Library has newspaper cuttings and sets of local newspapers and journals of the period, and books of memoirs by others who worked there (actors such as Flora Robson, Robert Donat and Robert Morley, and producers such as Norman Marshall and Tyrone Guthrie). The three main references for the Festival Theatre during Gray's time are *The Other Theatre* by Norman Marshall, published in 1947, which has a long chapter on the Festival Theatre as Marshall remembered it fourteen years later, Richard Cave's booklet with a comprehensive set of photographs called *Terence Gray and the Cambridge Festival Theatre* (1980), and Kathrine Sorley Walker's excellent biography of Ninette de Valois (1987) which has much carefully-researched detail of her years at the Festival Theatre with her cousin, Terence Gray.

I soon realised that it was indeed Gray who had provided the creative spark that set the old Theatre Royal, long semi-derelict, on its new path to become the Festival Theatre. He was the co-director, the owner and manager, and later the main producer; in short, he could be described as the theatre supremo. His co-founder was Harold Ridge, an expert on the new European lighting, who had made a huge contribution in the first year but soon dropped by the wayside. The initial mystery, which had attracted me and still does, was how it was that Gray, a man with a limited public education (two years at school at Eton College and one year at Magdalene College in Cambridge) and with serious emotional problems as a child (he was an acute stutterer) and a career post-war in another occupation, could possibly have known exactly what he wanted

to do in the Festival Theatre. His aims and intentions were very clear, however, as can be seen in his writing in numerous articles, despite the fact that he was totally inexperienced in practical theatre. But he had obviously read widely and, as I was soon to discover, he had been enthused by certain theatrical productions and people in the Cambridge University theatre circle immediately after the Great War.

Apart from what is recalled in the personal memoirs written by actors and producers who worked at the Festival Theatre, there seemed to be, as I widened my research, very little to be found about Gray's personal life, although certain features of his behaviour soon became obvious in reading his own writing, particularly in the theatre programme called the *Festival Review* in which the writing was of a more intimate, chatty nature. I personally found that local people who remember him from his brief return visits to the home of his parents at Wandlebury in the post-war years, from 1945 to the sale of the estate in 1955, were very reluctant to talk about him. One such told me, in all seriousness, that he was "not a very nice person at all." Others I contacted, such as Enid Collett (Gray's secretary), were really too old to recall what are now distant years, beyond the kind of factual information that can also be traced in books and articles. It is indeed a long time ago, seventy years since Gray left the theatre. But for me, attempting as I was to read anything and everything in print about Terence Gray and to look for possible links in the lives of other people who were in Cambridge at that time (1926–1933) and somehow had a connection with the theatre, I soon began to get the feeling that Gray was a very unusual personality: a showman and yet a shy man who liked to hide, although undoubtedly also a creative "doer", a real worker, as a theatre impresario and a promoter of plays as well as a manager, a producer and a creative artist very much involved with scenic design. Altogether Gray was a man who lived life to the full.

The complete story of the life of Terence Gray would make an epic widescreen drama, taking the viewers (readers) from the troubles of Ireland to the peace of a rural estate in Cambridgeshire, to Eton College and Magdalene College, to the work of the Red Cross ambulance brigades within gunfire in France and Italy during the Great War, across the deserts of Egypt in search of treasure, to the theatres of Paris and Dublin during the twenties and in 1926 to the old Regency theatre in Cambridge, to Mexico and the legend of Quetzalcoatl, to the sun-blessed vineyards of the Rhone Valley, to the racecourses of Ireland and England, and finally across the countries of the Far East as a new-found

mystic, as Gray was to become in his later life, when he grew a long white beard and went in search of enlightenment. Throw into this mixture the story of his heritage as the son of a rich Irish aristocrat and his two marriages and an affair, the first marriage to the daughter of a lady with the family name of Rimsky-Korsakov and the second to an exiled princess from Russian Georgia, and the end result is a colourful and unique story, and an impossible life for one man.

The descriptions of Gray by writers in local newspapers long after the closure of the theatre suggest something of the turmoil of the seven years of the Festival Theatre. In 1964, but over thirty years after Gray left Cambridge, H.H.H. (*Cambridge Evening News* 10 August 1964) dismissed Gray superficially as the “angry young man of the twenties.” Twelve years later, George Marks, who was a critic during the last years of the theatre, described Gray as a “cult figure and mystery man.” (*Cambridge Evening News* 29 November 1976.) There are many similar remarks in the books of memoirs written by actors and producers of the time, but perhaps the most extreme was that provided by the actor Robert Morley, himself a very flamboyant figure, who in 1966 described Gray as “the only genius I have ever met in the theatre, besides Bernard Shaw” (page 65). Perhaps together the three random comments provide a starting-point, although inevitably just a hazy sketch of the public Terence Gray seen in reflection, but they fail to reveal any secrets about the private man who throughout most of his life wished (and managed) to remain anonymous, hidden by masks and pseudonyms.

At the Festival Theatre, Gray had indicated that he was essentially serious and well-intentioned and a highly creative man of the theatre. Before Cambridge, his personal life had been emotionally rich if not entirely academic, with an unsettled childhood, uprooting from Ireland to Cambridgeshire and with a father who was an active man-of-the-world who travelled widely and was totally preoccupied with his estates and his racehorses. As a boy, the young Terence would often remain at home, lonely and with only the company of his nanny and his private tutor. His two years at Eton College had been a trial for him, suffering as he did from an acute stammer and lacking the social experience that other more robust boys possessed. His year at college in Cambridge during the build-up to the Great War, when his own college was losing students for war service each day and the town was full of battledress and the sound of marching, was far from a happy experience. Post-war, his life remained unsettled, although he managed to gain a certain reputation as an Egyptologist and as a writer during the years when he

was spending time away from his first wife, wandering round the deserts of Egypt. Then from 1926, he started to earn (unfairly) his reputation as a defiant and angry director, for newspaper editors considered then as now that such head-lines were more newsworthy than what was actually being achieved in such a volatile profession. As an impresario, Gray was forced to fight his own private war with the Lord Chamberlain over the censoring of plays which he had wanted to stage. He had also to fight long and hard against the over-opinionated young student critics of the University, young men who became increasingly at odds with Gray's modernist theatre style and who made wild comments about his behaviour, in a way that Gray condemned as naive, uninformed and insensitive. Gray, to his credit, really wanted nothing to distract him from his total concentration on the main thrust of his endeavours, which was to promote the new art of the theatre as seen by (in particular) Edward Gordon Craig, and to replace the outdated realistic presentations of the theatre with something more artistic and vibrant and fitting with the modern world being developed throughout Europe and in America in the years between the wars.

It is Gray's public face which is easier to assess. He can be visualised from the few photographs available, with his black hair and pharaoh beard, wearing a wide-brimmed hat and a black cloak, and often to be seen driving round the town in his old German car. Julian Trevelyan, the artist and son of the poet R.C. Trevelyan (who translated the first play to be seen in the Festival Theatre), was at Cambridge University in the late twenties and wrote that Gray was "an almost mythical figure, shy to the point of embarrassing everyone around him, who could occasionally be seen moving through the foyers, a tall, handsome man with a black beard." (1957, page 19)

Creatively, Gray was streets ahead of most, if not all, of the theatre-people working in England at the time. He had his purpose, he worked at it, and he wished that others would respect the sincerity of his efforts. This confidence, even if seen to be sometimes verging on conceit, may have put the backs up of other lesser mortals, such as the cloistered University critics who were not directly involved in the emotions and the toil and sweat of the actual day-to-day running of the repertory theatre, working all hours of the day and night. Gray's colleagues often found him difficult, that is undoubtedly true. Harold Ridge, his partner, and Harold Prentice, the first producer at the Festival Theatre, were unable to remain very long with Gray, for unknown but many suspected reasons. When in his last season Gray wanted to bring back some of the

now-famous names who had become established in their careers in his theatre, hardly anyone of note was able or wanted to do so, although there could well have been commercial reasons for this. But, disregarding for the moment any debate about the success or failure of the Festival Theatre in terms of its impact on world theatre, it cannot be denied that Terence Gray, almost single-handedly, established his theatre, virtually from nothing with a new unknown company of actors, to become the prime experimental theatre in England in the early thirties. Many who knew the Festival Theatre well and enjoyed the performances described it as an “unique” place. Many student writers were enthusiasts and praised him and did much to spread the news of his achievement. Alistair Cooke, writing for an American journal, and the young student-poet Kathleen Raine, who described in some detail the enrichment which the theatre had offered in her early student days in Cambridge, are just two examples. It has been said that the reputation of the Festival Theatre at the time was such that people came from all over Europe to see certain productions.

The story of Terence Gray is not, of course, just an account of the seven years of the Festival Theatre and he certainly did not disappear at the end of the theatre years into the sunset, settling in peace under the vines in Southern France, as many local writers (and writers of theatrical reference books) seemed to think; for Gray developed an important second life, a life that many would claim to be his main vocation, as a writer of mystical books on the outer fringes of Zen Buddhism. But as in his work in the theatre, Gray still needed to be different, and his attitude in his eight books was unorthodox to an extreme, although like much of his writing about the theatre the eight books brought out the full extent of his humour as well as his deep curiosity about the world in his search for enlightenment. Writing under the pseudonym of Wei Wu Wei for all except his last book, he undoubtedly created his own following, especially at first in India but more recently world-wide. In later life he had a circle of friends, many of them influential Buddhist writers. Today his books, most of which have been long out of print, are searched for on the Internet and have all been recently reprinted.

So here, as storytellers say, begins the story of the Anglo-Irish Terence Gray: Irish Aristocrat born in Suffolk in England, scholar and writer, Egyptologist, historian, playwright, essayist, director, producer, theatrical supremo, wine grower, racehorse owner, wanderer and traveller, and Buddhist/Taoist philosopher. The full story has never been told before, and this attempt to write a biography will probably be considered by

many to be but a first attempt at tracing the details of his long, adventurous life. To sum up, there are still several mysteries about Terence Gray that disturb: for example, what was the truth about his birth, his family upbringing and his unsuccessful schooling, how was it that he could begin to immerse himself in Egyptian archaeology without any training or known academic study, how did he plan his theatre in such detail almost as a military operation, despite being totally inexperienced other than as a hopeful but mostly-unperformed playwright, what really happened to him in the breakdown of the delicate relationship with the student critics and why was it that some Cambridge students promoted a kind of “revenge” in the form of sketches in a public revue in which Gray’s alleged extra-marital affair was aired and attacked? Why was it, indeed, that Gray gave up his theatre after just seven years, offering only the bland statement that he had done all that he wished to do, when there was obviously still so much unfinished?

Many will find within these pages an amazing story and an enigma, an account of a highly influential and yet today largely unknown man, a person who was always wanting to live his life out of the spotlight and yet was always at the same time promoting his own reputation, and a man who died in a country far from that of his origin without anybody apart from his family and his close friends knowing. Whether or not he finally considered his own life a success or a failure is really not important, although he offered one tantalizing clue in the last words of his penultimate book. He wrote in 1968 at the age of seventy-three in *Posthumous Pieces*, “Only by ‘failure’ can I succeed . . . Are you perhaps wondering why? There might be a reason.” What that reason was must and should remain Terence Gray’s secret, as indeed he would have wished.

## *Chronology*

- 1867 Harold Gray born at Graymount, County Antrim, Northern Ireland, son of Major George Gray and Elizabeth Stannus.
- 1894 Harold Gray married Rowena Stannus, daughter of Thomas and Margaret Stannus, of Maghraleave House, Lisburn near Belfast.
- 1895 Terence James Stannus Gray born 14th September and birth registered at Felixstowe, Suffolk, England.
- 1895 Harold Gray appointed High Sheriff, Antrim.
- 1904 Harold and Rowena Gray purchased Magog House, Wandlebury, Stapleford, near Cambridge.
- 1909 Terence Gray entered Eton College (like his father) but stayed for just two years.
- 1914 He entered Magdalene College, Cambridge (like his father). Education was interrupted by war, after just one year, and he did not return.
- 1915 He began service in Red Cross, serving as an ambulance driver in France and Italy. Mother was in charge of French Red Cross hospitals at Compiegne and Troyes.
- 1917 Gray was conscripted into the Royal Flying Corps.

- 1917 Gray married Vera Lowe, daughter of Harvey Lowe and Raissa Rimsky-Korsakov.
- 1920 Published book and article on Egypt.
- 1921 Daughter, Sonia Raissa, born to Terence and Vera Gray.
- 1922 Father elected as M.P. for Cambridgeshire but did not seek re-election in 1923.
- 1922/3 Published articles on Egyptian Dance and *Dance Drama*.
- 1923/4 Visited two sites in Egypt excavated by Guy Brunton, the husband of W.M. Brunton who illustrated three of Gray's books.
- 1925 Published book on Irish hero, Cuchulainn.
- 1925 Stage designs were awarded Gold Medal diploma at Paris International Exhibition of Decorative Arts.
- 1926 Published book on *Dance Drama*.
- 1926 Gray and Ridge opened the Festival Theatre in Cambridge and Gray began his seven years as Artistic Director with three performances in the ADC Theatre, Cambridge.
- 1928 Gray's *The Scorpions of Ysyt* performed at Royal Court with choreography by his cousin, Edris Stannus (Ninette de Valois).
- 1931 Gray took on the pseudonym of Quetzalcoatl.
- 1932 *The Scorpions of Ysyt* revised at Sadler's Wells, with new music by Gavin Gordon and designs by Fedorovitch.
- 1933 Gray retired from Theatre and settled in the South of France at Tain l'Hermitage, where his family had a vineyard.
- 1938 Father received a knighthood for public service.

- 1939 Father appointed High Sheriff of Cambridgeshire and Hunts. Gray returned to Ireland and stayed through the war years.
- 1941 Reviewed a ballet performance in Dublin.
- 1945 Vera Gray died and Gray returned to France.
- 1951 Father died and buried at Hyeres near Toulon, Provence. Property and wealth left in trust for his son.
- 1953 Mother died and buried at Stapleford Church near their home at Wandlebury. The properties in England, Ireland and France passed to Terence Gray.
- 1955 *La Doctrine Supreme* by Hubert Benoit with a foreword by Aldous Huxley and the translation by Gray.
- 1956 Gray's (inherited) horse Zarathrustra, trained by Captain Boyd-Rochfort, won Ascot Stakes.
- 1957 Zarathrustra won Ascot Gold Cup.
- 1957 Gray married a second time, to H.S.H. Natalie Imeritinsky, the second daughter of Squadron Leader H.S.H. Prince Michael Imeritinsky, R.A.F., of Georgia.
- 1958 First of Gray's eight books on Mysticism and Zen Buddhism published in London under the pseudonym of Wei Wu Wei.
- 1968 Death of Wei Wu Wei announced in Gray's penultimate book, *Posthumous Pieces*.
- 1987 Gray died aged 92 in Monte Carlo, leaving a surviving wife, Princess Natasha Mrs Gray, and daughter, Sonia Gray.

## *Beginning a New Life in England*

### **1. A Suffolk Boy**

The birth of Terence James Stannus Gray was registered on the 11th October, 1895, in Felixstowe, Suffolk, by Mrs Rowena Elizabeth Dorothea Gray formerly Stannus. Her husband's occupation was described simply as "landowner." She gave her (their) address, to the Registrar of the district of Woodbridge, as Maghraleave, Lisburn, Ireland, which was her own parents' home, despite the fact that she and Harold had been married for a year and had settled in Graymount, the home and estate which had been inherited by Harold following the death of his father. The birth had been on the 14th September, four weeks before the registration. Thus it was (it seems) a strange beginning for Terence, for there is a mystery about the circumstances and all sorts of answers. There are three questions? Why did the mother take the trouble to bring the baby to England for registration, or was Terence indeed born in Suffolk? Why, in either possibility, was there an interval of one month between the birth and the registration? Also, why offer your address as the home of your parents when the mother was (presumably) living in her husband's house at Graymount? The ledger entry for Terence when he entered Magdalene College, Cambridge, gave his birth-place as Felixstowe and not Ireland. Why, then, was there not a local Suffolk address? The fact remained that Rowena had married a man of a long line of Irish descent, a man who was surely very proud to have an Irish son and heir.

Harold Gray was born in 1867, the son of Major George Gray and Elizabeth Stannus. Elizabeth was the daughter of the Rev. James

Stannus, the Dean of Ross, and Elizabeth Burrowes, who in turn was the daughter of Sir Erasmus Burrowes, Bart. Rowena Stannus, Harold Gray's bride, was the daughter of Thomas and Margaret Stannus. The family name Stannus makes the lineage confusing, because the reality was that Harold and Rowena were cousins. The Gray family can be traced back to Sir Gilbert Gray of Perth, c. 1551, and the Stannus family back to William Stanehouse (Stannus) in the early seventeenth century.

Harold and Rowena were thus very well connected, being members of the Irish upper class in each family and both appearing with extensive entries in Burke's *Landed Gentry of Ireland*. Any irregularity in the story of the birth would have been an acute embarrassment to such people. The Gray and the Stannus families were also devoted Ulster people; later settled in England, Harold and Rowena became active members of the Conservative and Unionist Party, making their own allegiances abundantly clear. Harold had strong Anglo-Irish connections before the marriage: he had been educated in England at Eton College and then at Magdalene College, Cambridge, where he matriculated but did not take a degree and played polo for the University of Cambridge and rowed for his college. In 1895, the year that young Terence was born, Harold was appointed as the High Sheriff of Antrim, an important and highly respected position in Irish society. He was described later as winning the respect of all classes of the community with his dignified manner and kindly courtesy (see Gaskell). He was also a Justice of the Peace for Antrim at Lisburn, the home of his bride.

Later, when Harold became the prospective Member of Parliament for Cambridgeshire in 1922, his supporters in the local Conservative and Unionist Party promoted in the local newspapers some unknown aspects of the character and appeal of their candidate. One, the *Cambridge Chronicle*, had a huge headline on the front page in thick black capital letters of VOTE GRAY, under which they described him, in their attempt to show him as the complete all-rounder, as an extensive landowner in Antrim and with some 1400 acres in Cambridgeshire. The farm vote was vital for Harold Gray if he was to have any chance, as a virtually unknown candidate, to unseat the sitting Liberal member. The description of their candidate continued: he had sailed a yacht round the north of Ireland, he had won several swimming championships, and he had since been twice round the world, visiting India and the United States, and he had been big game hunting in East Africa. Also, if that needed to be topped, he and his wife had been on a treasure hunt on the Cocos Islands in the East Indian Ocean (territory of Australia), one of