

Eileen Gray

Her Work and Her World



Jennifer Goff

revolted against the moral and religious values of the time through a hedonistic lifestyle espousing a form of libertinism based on the rule of 'Do What Thou Wilt'. When he left Cambridge in 1896 Crowley severed all ties with Christianity and began to read up on the subject of occultism and mysticism, reading books by alchemists and mystics and books on magic. In May 1896 Crowley met and befriended Kelly. Their friendship was fostered by shared artistic ambitions and parallels in their background.⁴⁹ Occultism was fashionable in intellectual circles at the time and in their first years of friendship Crowley enticed Kelly to dabble in magical ritual.⁵⁰

Not everyone in their circle was considered respectable. Crowley was also a notorious Lothario and womaniser. Kathleen Bruce describes the Englishmen of the quarter as 'an unsavory collection'.⁵¹ Many ladies feared the loss of their reputation if Crowley displayed an interest in them and it was said that 'no young thing could remain alone in the same room with him in safety'.⁵²

Crowley had come to Paris in 1902 and Kelly introduced him to Gray.⁵³ In his autobiography Crowley comments amusingly on Kelly's ability in portraiture. 'He (Kelly) once picked out an old canvas to paint over and had gone some distance before he discovered that it was his favourite portrait of the Hon. Eileen Grey (sic)'.⁵⁴ This portrait is now unknown.

Initially Crowley was a figure of amusement in Gray's early years in Paris. At times she found her sessions with him rather boring and full of nonsense. However, Gray owned a series of publications by him which she kept throughout her life. His writings and ideas influenced her early lacquer work and carpet work. They also developed her ideas in philosophical thinking.⁵⁵ His ideas regarding the occult were intriguing and she acquired a copy of *The Mother's Tragedy*, one of Crowley's earliest books on poetry and drama.⁵⁶ This publication is one of the earliest to incorporate the occult teaching of the Golden Dawn, and was written in the years following Crowley's initiation into the order, largely during his travels in Mexico and Asia. She eventually designed a rug in homage



1.19 Aleister Crowley, 1900s, black and white photograph © Topfoto/Roger Violette

that 33-year-old Henry was a stockbroker and married to 25-year-old Ethel. The couple divided their time between England and Brownswood. Throughout the 1890s Henry and Ethel lived in London at 1 Creswell Gardens and then moved to 7 Collingwood Gardens. Eileen's relationship with Ethel and her husband would remain a tentative one throughout their lives.

On the death of her uncle George Philip Stuart, fourteenth Earl of Moray and eighteenth Lord Gray, on 16 March 1895, Gray's mother Eveleen stood to inherit the title Baroness Gray in the peerage of Scotland and her son-in-law Henry persuaded her to claim it. Following this Gray's father received royal licence in 1897 to change his name from Smith to Gray and the children's names were changed accordingly. This news appeared in Irish newspapers at the time. On 27 April 1895 *The Enniscorthy News* and *County of Wexford Advertiser* reported, quoting from an article in the *Dundee Advertiser* on 10 April 1895:

Mrs. MacLaren Smith who in consequence of the death of the fourteenth Lord Moray has succeeded to the Barony of Gray is a granddaughter of the tenth Earl and the vicissitudes of families have been remarkably illustrated in her case, in as much as her mother, through whom she inherits, was originally only the seventh in the succession to the title as she had six brothers, all of whom however died without issue. She married first Sir John Archibald Drummond Stewart of Grentully and after his death Mr. Lonsdale Pounden of Brownswood, County Wexford, who had amassed a large fortune, and the present Baroness Gray being the only child of the marriage. Lady Gray married in 1863 Mr. MacLaren Smith of Hazelgrun Lanchashire and has two sons (the second of whom is an officer in the Carabineers) and three daughters.

Another article appeared in the same newspaper on 11 July 1895 under



1.13 James Gray, Henry Tufnell Campbell, Rick Campbell and Eileen Gray, at Brownswood, 1890s, black and white photograph © NMI

where he met his future wife Mina Loy (1882-1966).¹⁶ Gray and Haweis attended the École at the same time.

In Paul Henry's autobiography *An Irish Portrait*, 1951, he provides much insight into the city of Paris at that time and what the Académie Julian was like for Gray when she enrolled in 1903.¹⁷ 'Paris in those years was filled with students from all over the globe, all filled with a high resolve to learn as much as they could and to seize every opportunity to perfect themselves in their particular arts'.¹⁸ Henry describes in detail the Académie, which was in stark contrast to the Slade. 'The Académie Julian was not in any sense of the word a teaching institution. It was not a school with regular classes and teachers, it granted no degree, and there were no prizes. As long as you paid up, behaved properly and did not steal the easels, you were free'.

Haweis's circle was described as a blend of dabblers in black magic, spinsters and elderly ladies.¹⁹ Descriptions of Haweis also vary. Loy described him as preferring the female sex to his own and added that his lady friends were not an attractive lot. According to Loy he served as a token of masculinity in their lives. Many found Haweis irritating because he attempted to ingratiate himself with those with a more luxurious standard of living, and he was known for charming women with a monthly allowance.²⁰ Haweis's memoirs and letters reveal a man who had an equal number of male as well as female friends. He compensated for his lack of stature by an eccentric personality and dress. He is described as having 'flashing black eyes, olive skin, and glossy dark hair, hanging down like a curtain about his head, gave him the appearance of a young Italian who had stepped from a picture by Raphael'.²¹ Haweis wanted to stand out. Paul Henry wrote of him, 'we had to find other ways of showing to the world that we were not as other men'. He continued; 'Stephen Haweis was just down from Cambridge and he was one of the most colourful persons in the quarter, his small neat figure was dressed in brown corduroy, he wore a black beret and his long hair was cut straight across his forehead like a Florentine page; collarless he looped around his neck or throat a long string of amber beads. Sometimes in place of the beads he wore a jade green live snake which often caused much commotion in the studio when it wandered among the easels'.²² Haweis at times flaunted his eccentricities possibly because he had to live up to the reputation of his father. Henry says that 'Haweis, like his father, was something of an oddity, but I liked



2.7 Eileen Gray, 1902, black and white photograph © NMI

It is not only for their beauty that these girls are to be remembered, nor for their talent, though some of them were talented enough and one was a genius. They marked the end of an era, and created a new one without knowing very much about it. To repeat, ad nauseam, most of the girls were as poor as the men, but they cared for 'beauty' and were not content to be dull echoes of the prevailing fashion.²⁵



2.9 Eileen Gray, 1900s, black and white photograph © NMI

The Anglo-Irish aristocracy based their ideas of the French on the popular novels of *la vie de bohème* and thus saw France as a nation of seducers. The artistic quarter of Montmartre was depicted as a sordid area with dangers lurking in every side street. In George Moore's (1852-1933) *Confessions of a Young Man*, 1886, stories of free love were just the sort of thing which concerned respectable people. Haweis also knew Moore, who came to Paris sporadically with Walter Sickert (1860-1942). Haweis said that Moore and Sickert were old friends and 'frequently dined with us at the Restaurant Garnier in the Boulevard Raspail. They both enjoyed young people, though it appeared to me that Moore's interest in them was highly specialised and referred principally to girls'.²⁶ Moore was an Irish novelist, short-story writer, poet, art critic and dramatist. He came from Carra, County Mayo. Originally he wanted to be a painter and studied in Paris during the 1870s, where he befriended the many leading French artists of the day. Whether Gray was ever introduced to him is unclear; but through Haweis she must have been aware of this Irishman who had made such an impression in Paris. Haweis's comments about Moore and Sickert are quite revealing. 'We treated George Moore with great respect. He was a celebrity, but some of us rather enjoyed the off-hand, friendly contempt with which Walter Sickert treated him and which Moore never quite seemed able to tackle'.²⁷ The sordidness, which Moore described in his novel *Confessions of a Young*





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for her. She wrote, 'I am very glad you tore up the letters. It's disquieting to think that they should still be lying about after all these years'.⁷ Similarly when Ruth Anderson entrusted Clough with Eric Clough Taylor's letters to her, Clough closely guarded them. At the time of her final illness, she was particularly concerned for their safety.⁸

From their early letters it becomes clear that Clough kept Gray abreast of news of the Gray family in England. Gray's relationship with her family, especially her older sister Ethel and her husband Henry Tufnell Campbell, had been a tentative one. This was not the case with Thora, who was just a year older than Eileen, and her husband Eric. Thora and Prunella Clough regularly visited Gray in Paris, and Prunella continued to visit on her own on a very regular basis.⁹ Thora and Eileen Gray were strikingly similar in looks, and at times it is difficult to distinguish between them in family photographs. They were often pictured together in childhood, later with groups of gentlemen admirers, on outings or holidaying together. From photographs of Prunella Clough, she at times also bears a striking resemblance to her aunt. Gray and her sister Thora were so close that even after Thora's marriage in 1911, she accompanied Gray and two other female friends to New York in 1912. They travelled all over the United States by train, visited the Rocky Mountains and the Grand Canyon, ending up in California.

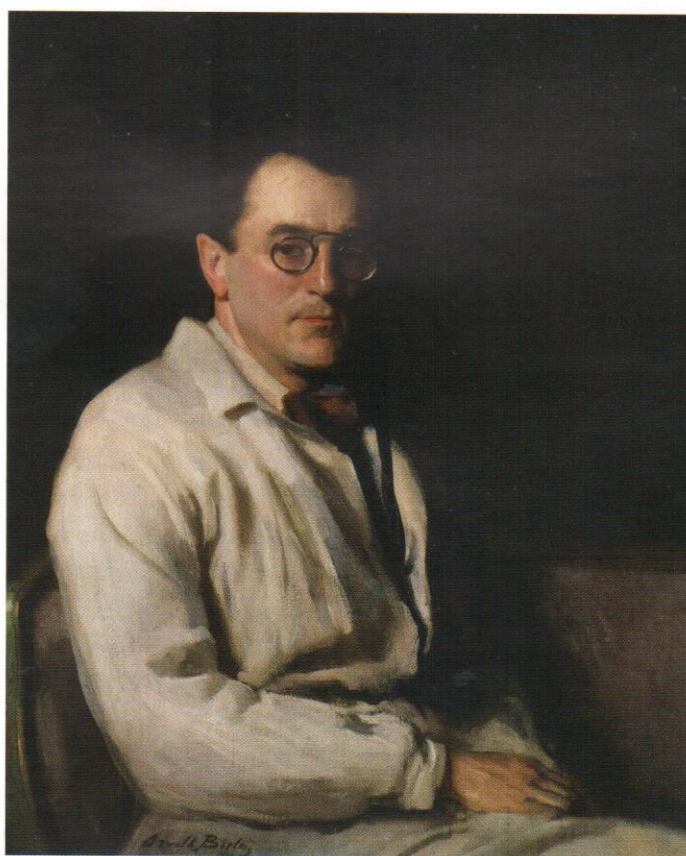
Gray eagerly anticipated news of Thora in Clough's letters. Writing on 10 February 1945, Clough informs her that Thora was inundated with work for the war effort and continued to do everything for the family. Gray was also exceedingly fond of Eric. She proudly sent his poetry to friends, notably to Stephen Haweis, and kept portrait photographs of him taken by the Irish photographer George Beresford who also took a series of Gray's portrait.¹⁰ After the war it became apparent from Prunella's letters that



11.4 Eileen and Thora Gray, 1890s, black and white photograph © NMI

Maeve Binchy that she 'arrived as an Irish immigrant to Paris in 1902. She didn't really intend to stay there forever, but somehow things worked out that way. It was very different to home in Wexford'.³⁸ They continued their drawing studies, enrolling at the École Colarossi in late 1902 to 1903, a popular art school among foreign students.³⁹ Rivalry among students was apparent but also considered engaging. Gray, Kelly and others soon transferred to the Académie Julian by 1903, a private fee-paying school, where students were trained primarily for admission to the École des Beaux-Arts. The Académie prided itself on segregated studios, yet women were taught by the same professors as their male counterparts.

Gray had many admirers during this period of her life, Kelly being one of them. 'To Eileen he seemed someone quite extraordinary, and she took to this talkative Irishman, he was good company'.⁴⁰ Kelly was born in London in 1879; however, his Irish ancestry could be traced back to the tenth century. His father was of direct Irish descent while his mother was half Irish.⁴¹ Kelly said, 'I'm of Irish blood, you know, and apparently in France they imagined that Ireland being damp, was full of people with gout'.⁴² He was educated at Eton College and then Trinity College Cambridge. He attended the Slade School at exactly the same dates as Gray. He went to Paris in 1901, where he remained for many years. He exhibited at the Salon in 1904. He travelled extensively during his lifetime, to exotic locations such as Burma and Africa, as well as closer countries such as Italy and Spain for his inspiration. He painted many pictures of young Burmese ladies, sometimes dancing, often posed. Although he had a somewhat varied subject matter he is renowned primarily for his portraits. He executed several State portraits, paintings of society ladies and gentlemen, bishops and lords of the time, among them a portrait of



1.17 Sir Gerald Kelly, by Sir Oswald Birley, 1920, oil on canvas © National Portrait Gallery, London