

# Max Reinhardt

A Life in Publishing

Judith Adamson



## Max Reinhardt: A Life in Publishing

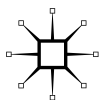


Max Reinhardt, 1982 (photocredit: Caroline Forbes)

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*For Max's grandchildren  
Marina, James and Holly Reinhardt*

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I have relied as well on tapes I made of talks Max and I had between 1994 and 1998; some of the material from these talks is in his privately published *Memories*, a copy of which can be found in the British Library. Max's daughter, Veronica, kindly shared memories of her father and upbringing. Andrew Gammon, the husband of Max's late daughter, Alexandra, added many lively stories about his father-in-law. Francis Greene generously allowed me to quote extensively from Graham Greene's letters to Max.

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In my notes readers will find reference to whatever newspapers, books and journals I have used, the provenance of letters I have quoted, and the call numbers for the *Life Stories* tapes in the British Library Sound Archive.

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# Prologue

One afternoon in late 1941 a handsome and cosmopolitan young RAF Aircraftsman 2 on leave from Northern Ireland went down to the squash courts below his London flat in Kensington Close looking for a game. His name was Max Reinhardt. There he found the actor Ralph Richardson, now a Lieutenant Commander on leave, waiting for a player to come along. Equally matched at squash and both having a quiet war they decided to play again next time they were in London. This chance meeting led to a lifelong friendship and to the establishment in 1947 of a small publishing firm called Max Reinhardt Ltd. It specialized in books about the theatre, which was not surprising; Max had been fascinated by the theatre since, as a young boy visiting Vienna with his mother and grandparents in the early twenties, he had seen the theatre Max Reinhardt's name on tram advertisements. Even when he became a prestigious London publisher with a list of famous writers that included Graham Greene, William Trevor, Georgette Heyer and Alexander Solzhenitsyn, he would occasionally say after meeting someone, 'they must have expected the other Max Reinhardt'.

When as a child he returned home from Vienna to Constantinople he sent a fan letter to his doppelgänger and was rewarded with a reply, but not with a picture. The great man said he did not sign pictures. So the young Max began to buy movie magazines with his pocket money in the hope of finding a picture of the other Max. He was taken to the cinema by his nanny and wrote to the stars he saw on the screen. His first love was Charlie Chaplin, whose autobiography he would commission and publish in the 1960s. The year before his death in 2002 he told *National Life Stories' Book Trade Lives* interviewer Sue Bradley that while he had never believed the stories he read about actors in his youth, the glossy magazines had shown him another possibility outside Turkey where, by

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the time he was in high school, he felt 'a foreigner, more and more stranded'.<sup>1</sup>

His collection of movie magazines was so important to him that when he left Istanbul in 1932 to study at the *École des Hautes Etudes Commerciales* he took it with him to Paris. The other Max Reinhardt had a film in town and our Max had his name printed on visiting cards, which gave him a certain advantage dating chorus girls. Max lost his film books and pictures when he left Paris for London just before the Second World War, but when he met Ralph Richardson in 1941 something of the possibility the magazines had shown him began, as a movie might.

Because Max had graduated from the English High School in Istanbul he never thought of himself as an immigrant in Britain, even when he had been declared an enemy alien and interned for several months on the Isle of Man the year before he and Ralph Richardson met. But he had an immigrant's keenness to know what he needed to know. As though his new actor friend had said, 'Why not play your part like this', he allowed Ralph to direct him in the role of English gentleman.

At Ralph's suggestion John Morgan and Company tailored his well-cut double-breasted suits, Truffitt and Hill cut his hair, George Cleverley made his shoes, the Savile became his club. The year Max Reinhardt Ltd was set up Max married Margaret Leighton, Ralph's protégée and, according to his biographer Gary O'Connor, Ralph's love. The following year the theatrical connections of both Ralph Richardson and Anthony Quayle made it possible for Max to publish the correspondence of George Bernard Shaw and Ellen Terry. Ralph Richardson sat first on the board of Max Reinhardt Ltd, then on that of The Bodley Head when Ansbacher's, the merchant bankers to whom he recommended Max as managing director, bought the firm with Max from Sir Stanley Unwin in 1957. By then Max had become a director of The Nonesuch Press, too. He asked Graham Greene to help him revamp The Bodley Head list and he made it one of the world's top publishers.

Perhaps because he loved the feel of books more than he liked to read them, his were consistently among the most elegant in bookshops. And perhaps because the magazines and pictures he bought as a child had helped him to become the man he was, he championed children's books when few in publishing took them seriously, creating with Judy Taylor and her team the finest children's list in Britain.

In the decades between wartime paper rationing and the takeover of independent imprints by international conglomerates, Max built a small and highly respected publishing empire on gentlemen's agreements, protecting his editors and staff as long as he could from the market forces

that changed the trade forever. He called his authors his friends and for several decades he had fun publishing their work. He could not have taken more pride in their books had he written them himself. Caring for his authors became his life. He was a brilliant enabler, a backstage man who so thoroughly enjoyed his part that he took on a similar role at the Royal Academy of Dramatic Art in 1965, prompting the council with financial advice for thirty years as the academy became the world's leading theatre school.

'Ralphie' and 'Maxie', as they were to one other, played squash every Sunday they could for the rest of their lives. Not a particularly sociable man, when acting abroad Ralph often stayed in his dressing room after a show to write to Max. He asked for books and news and finally for assurance: 23 September 1976 – 'I stagger about the world and am uncertain that anything of our world exists but I think of you and hope that you are SOLID and HAPPY. I have no news... All affection to you and love to you ever.' Soon after Ralph died in 1983 Max made a business mistake that would cost him his beloved Bodley Head four years later when the firm was sold to Random House in New York without his knowledge. After sadly recommending to his old friend's widow that she sell Ralph's shares for the £9613.40 they were worth, he quickly turned defeat into a notable victory against the conglomerates by launching Reinhardt Books. He wanted to call the new company Max Reinhardt Books, but the way The Bodley Head had been sold made that legally impossible, so he could not share the other Max's name on his last imprint. No matter – in championing independent publishing he had become a kind of British hero in his own name and under it he continued to publish Graham Greene, Alistair Cooke and his other favourite writers for another decade.

# 1

## From Istanbul to London on the Orient Express

Max Peter Reinhardt was born on the Grande Rue de Pera in Constantinople on 30 November 1915, a few weeks short of the evacuation of British and Dominion troops from the Gallipoli peninsula. He told Euan Cameron, head of publicity at The Bodley Head for many years and one of his obituarists, that as a young child he had glimpsed decapitated heads impaled on spikes as he was wheeled through the streets by his nanny.<sup>1</sup> But Max more usually recalled the First World War with a less traumatic story set in the city's main railway station built in the late 1880s to receive the luxurious Orient Express in which he would cross Europe many times. In 1918 Max's father, Ernest Reinhardt, was the Austrian captain in charge of the station. He had grown up in Trieste, trained as an architect in Vienna and Prague, and been sent by his firm to Turkey before the war. On duty one day he spotted two of his wife's brothers, both ordinary privates in Italian uniform, arriving as prisoners. He marched them out of the station, then took them home to lunch. 'That was the kind of humane thing that could happen then,' his son was later to say. 'That was the way things were done.'<sup>2</sup>

Max's mother, Frieda Darr, was born in Constantinople into a large family of secularized Jews who had come from the Ukraine, lived for some time near Trieste on the Italian side of the border, then migrated to Constantinople. The Darrs owned Comptoir d'Anatolie, a shipping, insurance and trading agency which represented British firms and well into the Second World War dealt with the Germans too; it certainly faced no financial problems in the First World War when free maritime passage of the Dardanelles was blocked by German mines and submarine nets.

An early photograph shows Max standing on a table between his parents, his arm on his father's shoulder. He looks a sturdy toddler, serious, even stubborn. In another picture, taken when he was four or five, he

seems quite pleased with himself alone in the street on his tricycle, proudly watched from a low window by his favourite uncle, Richard. At maybe ten he appears entirely independent on his bicycle, his hand on his mother's shoulder briefly to balance himself for a quick picture. He was a handsome child, an only and much loved child.

According to Max's *Memories*, his grandfather Haim Darr had eight brothers and sisters, all of whom had children. He said Haim Darr and his wife Dina Klimak added three to the tribe – Emil, Frieda, who was Haim's favourite, and Richard, who became Max's close friend and mentor, and was called Uncle Richard by everyone in Max's second, British life. But Max remembered his family's history propitiously. By another account Haim had 13 children; four are listed in the burial records of Yükksekaldirim Synagogue in Istanbul. Another Darr is buried in the plot closest to Haim. Perhaps she was an earlier wife, which might make Max's story correct, except that Emil is listed in the synagogue wedding records as the son not of Haim but of Nathan, who was either an older son of Haim, or one of the uncles Max thought were Haim's siblings. But these early records are often inaccurate and even now very difficult to verify. Max certainly knew Mary Wraith, the daughter of one of Haim's sons, Josef, who emigrated to Birmingham and sold goods made there in the Middle East. According to Mary's son, Gavin Wraith, as a child Mary had met her Uncle Maurice, who had moved from Istanbul to Finland where he was eventually awarded the White Rose. When Max moved to London in 1938 Mary Wraith was enormously helpful to him and in turn Max was kind to Gavin. But in later years Max called Mary a distant rather than first cousin. What happened to Haim's other progeny, and to theirs, one of whom may have been born in a French concentration camp?<sup>3</sup> Max never talked about these relatives even when asked. But one day on holiday a few years before he died he said out of the blue to his son-in-law, Andrew Gammon: 'The holocaust was a terrible thing' – nothing more.<sup>4</sup>

The Darrs spoke French to one another, which was the language of international Constantinople, and as a child Max was read to in French – Jules Verne, the Comtesse de Ségur, Alexandre Dumas. But he learned Greek first, from his Greek nannies. There were three or four of them before he began school just after the British and French occupied the city at the end of the war and the Greeks occupied Smyrna. His father spoke to him in German and insisted that his first school be German, which would accent Max's English for life. Otherwise Ernest Reinhardt remained a distant figure remembered as a strict father, a shy man who enjoyed Wagner and walking alone. At four Max fell from a wall and