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A Review Essay: Elizabeth Robins

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Elizabeth Robins, 1862-1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist by Joanne E. Gates. Tuscaloosa and London: The University of Alabama Press, 1994. 297 pp. HC $39.95 ISBN 0 8173 0664 1

Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life, 1862-1952 by Angela V. John. London and New York: Routledge, 1995. 283 pp. HC £25.00 ISBN 0 415 06112 1

In his recent (1993) biography of William Archer, Peter Whitebrook rated Archer's great love, Elizabeth Robins, as "one of the greatest actresses of her generation." Yet, despite the availability of Robins' papers at New York University's Fales Library and her highly interesting and informative memoirs, *Theatre and Friendship* (1932) and *Both Sides of the Curtain* (1940), there were no serious studies of her life and career as an actress and important interpreter and presenter of Henrik Ibsen's dramas, accomplished novelist and playwright, and sensible feminist. The need for a comprehensive biography of Robins is now fulfilled, almost simultaneously, by Joanne Gates of Jacksonville State University and Angela John of the University of Greenwich. Both have adequately chronicled and interpreted the colorful life and work of this unique personality of the late Victorian and Edwardian eras.

Elizabeth Robins was born in Louisville, Kentucky, and, during the first decade of her life, lived in New York City, whence her father had moved to avoid the Civil War in Kentucky. At age ten, Elizabeth was sent to live with her grandmother in Zanesville, Ohio, and was spared seeing her mother sink into incurable insanity. In 1880, she returned to New York to seek a career in the theater and was taken on by James O'Neill's Monte Cristo Travelling Company. O'Neill, a well-known actor, took the ingénue under his wing and featured her as leading lady in several romantic productions. Somewhat later, Elizabeth joined a stock company in Boston and was featured in comedies, melodramas, French farces, and Shakespearean repertoires. Already well acclaimed as a very diligent and talented actress, she met the handsome novice actor George Richmond Parks. After a brief, ardent courtship, they secretly married in January 1885, but the marriage soon floundered due to Parks' envy of Elizabeth and his alcoholism. After two stormy years, divorce was averted only by Parks' suicide, which haunted Robins until the end of her life and was apparently a major reason that she never married again. All of this and more are delineated by Angela John in two scintillating chapters and by Joanne Gates in a terse initial chapter.

A comely widow of twenty-three, Elizabeth Robins left O'Neill's company and Boston and was quickly employed by Edwin Booth's theater group, which specialized in large-scale stage productions. In 1888, after two years of hard work with the Booth company, she left for a summer holiday in Europe with Mrs. Sara S. Bull—the widow of Ole Bull, one of the founders of the Norwegian National Theatre—to begin in England and carry on to Norway, with Elizabeth paying for her keep by serving as a "minder" for Mrs. Bull's young daughters. Having missed the ferry to Norway from Hull, Robins journeyed alone to London, where she met the actor William Poel and Oscar Wilde, then emerging as a leading playwright. As Elizabeth later noted in her memoirs, Wilde was one of the first men to take her seriously and was largely instrumental in helping to launch her career as an actress in England. Having rejoined Mrs. Bull and her daughters in August, Elizabeth travelled with them to Norway where she first encountered and was enthralled with Ibsen's plays.

Following her return to London in September, Wilde introduced Elizabeth to Beerbohm Tree at the Haymarket Theatre. He was much taken with her talent and beauty, which she used to good advantage in her relationships with men to establish herself in the theater and the literary circles. As Angela John and Joanne Gates make quite clear, although Robins used her abundant femininity to achieve her ambitions and objectives by cultivating the friendships of men useful to her, she kept her own counsel and her emotions in check. However, she profited from the advice and help of important female friends, such as the American actresses Eleanor Calhoun and Genevieve Ward who proffered good advice on how to utilize the sexual and professional demands of actors and director/managers. By 1889 she had

secured some good roles and had appeared successfully in a few major stage productions. In one of these, Elizabeth attracted the attention of London's premier drama critic, Archer, who was captivated by Elizabeth and fell in love with her; their long love affair was reinforced by their collaboration in popularizing Ibsen's dramas in Britain and in writing several plays and short stories. At their first meeting in June 1890, Archer was aware that Elizabeth's aspirations in the theater were matched by her literary ambitions and her determination "to use her writing to advance her acting career" (Gates 32). Robins later candidly admitted that, if she failed in the theater, she hoped to establish herself as a serious journalist and literary light. During her early days of penury in the London theater, Robins' writing, mostly of travel, kept her occupied and fairly solvent in the long intervals between engagements.

Seeking to enhance her publication possibilities, Robins was advised by friends (no doubt including Archer) to consult W. T. Stead, who in 1890 had published a best-selling account of his experience of the decennial Passion Play at Oberammergau. Robins' interest in Stead and the Passion Play was to a large extent influenced also by reports of his kindness and generosity to all, especially to women seeking careers in journalism or creative writing. She had been thinking of viewing the Passion Play and writing some articles on the planning and execution of its production from the viewpoint of "a fellow performer" but lacked funds for travel and residence in Oberammergau and therefore sought Stead's advice on expenses and his help with letters of introduction. According to Robins' account, as related by Gates and John, Stead—the staunch Nonconformist who still regarded the theater as sinful—encouraged Elizabeth's literary aspirations as a means of weaning her away from the theater.

During their first meeting in the *Review of Reviews* office, Stead pressed Robins to abandon her stage career immediately, but since she demurred—Angela John asserts that "she briefly turned her back on the London stage" to "visit" the Passion Play (104)—he provided her with a mass of literature on the Play and letters of introduction to the main participants and the director that afforded her "unusual opportunities" to study the production of the play from the "inside." Hence she lodged gratis in the home of Johann Diemer (who played Herod) and, though it was strictly forbidden, was accorded a behind-the-scenes tour and access to the back stage because she was an actress and a friend of Stead.

Angela John and Joanne Gates agree that "this journey of an unbeliever was. . .influential in shaping her attitudes towards writing and acting" (John 105) and that "She returned to London transformed [from] her talks with performers and her observations at rehearsals" (Gates 37). Gates, citing Mary Heath's study of the presentation of Ibsen's dramas in England, declares that Robins' Oberammergau experiences were crucial in changing her outlook: "she ceased to regard the theater as the unholy profession. . .and came to see it instead as a mission with a religious purpose" (37). Thus "Stead had brought back the message that Christiantiy was nowhere better felt; Robins brought back a faith dedicated to the moral purpose of a truly artistic theater" (Gates 37). Contrary to Stead's hope that the Oberammergau experience would wean Elizabeth Robins away from the theater, it only strengthened her belief in the educative role and possibilities of the theater and it wasn't long before she converted Stead to her point of view.

In early October 1893, Stead published his conversation with Robins upon her return from Oberammergau three years previous, in the specimen copy of *The Daily Paper* (1 No. 1 [4 October 1893] 14-15), which he was unable to launch. In this interesting exposition, which neither Joanne Gates nor Angela John have utilized or cited, Robins upbraided Stead for treating the English theater "as if it did not exist" and for his refusal "to give a helping hand to those. . .endeavouring to make the stage worthy of Britain." In response to his query, "How can I help?" Elizabeth insisted that Stead's "utter inexperience of the stage, so unique in a London edtior. . .would enable him to bring a perfectly fresh mind to. . .observing the stage as it is." She asked,

> Why do you refuse to help those who are spending their lives to make the theatre as great an agency for good in England as it is in Ammergau? . . . There is. . .struggling into existence a theatre which regards life and art seriously, which lives by the faith which it has in the ideal and which will never be content until it has made the stage a leading element of the national life. But what are you doing to help us? . . . In the battle which we are waging

> against great odds for our art, you never. . .say a word; you sterilise. . .you influence, and. . .you refuse to do the good that lies ready to your hand, ready and waiting to be done.

Stead accepted her logic, but said that at present he could do nothing for her cause "worth doing" until "some day. . .I have a daily paper of my own. I know my present attitude is inconsistent with my general line on every other subject. . . . Some day I shall deal with the theatre on the same lines. But not yet." Later, in 1900, Stead wrote that on

> the wickedness of boycotting the theatre. . .she preached so fervent a sermon, so full of personal application and striking illustration, that it almost sent me to the penitent form. I fear that I was but imperfectly converted, for I have not yet paid my maiden visit to the theatre, not even to see *Hedda Gabler*. . .but from that day to this I. . .count Miss Elizabeth Robins as one of my best friends. (*Review* 22: 343)

Robins never let Stead forget this and during the ensuing three years, as she achieved great success in her leading role in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler*, persisted in asking Stead in their frequent meetings and luncheons, "When are you going to help us?" In summer 1893, as he completed plans for *The Daily Paper*, Stead proposed that Robins "help the press to deal rightly with the stage" by accepting the position of "dramatic critic in chief" for *The Daily Paper*: "Your art is your religion and you. . .would bring heart and soul and brains to the task. Your standpoint and your objective are mine." When Robins replied that she had "neither the time nor the training nor the influence" to serve as drama critic, Stead pressed her to accept the offer because she possessed "faith" in her art, and "without faith there is no salvation—not even for the dramatic critic." If you persist in refusing the position, said Stead, "I shall go on, leaving the theatre to take care of itself but it is you who will be to blame." But Elizabeth could not be persuaded, stating that

> What is wanted is not my help, but yours. When are you going to make that long-promised tour of the theatres, in order that you may see with your own eyes exactly what the stage is [and] treat the stage as seriously as [you] treat politics, literature, and religion?

When he agreed to undertake the "tour," but only with her assistance, Robins declined on the grounds that it was physically impossible for her to be his guide in "the world of the London theatre" because of her nightly commitments on the stage and her projected Ibsen tour in the United States.

Stead now proposed that she organize "a small committee" of persons who took the theatre seriously to meet for lunch once a week and "settle what is to be seen and said" about the theatre and, above all, to "develop a consensus. . .as to what was good or otherwise in plays or players in all London" for him to view. Still Robins demurred, but they did agree on the necessity to establish a National Theatre (also a major objective of William Archer) and she consented to organize a committee of artists and writers to work for the creation of a National Theatre "subventioned. . .by subscriptions raised through the projected *Daily Paper*. . . . A penny a day from twenty thousand readers of the paper would give. . .a subvention of £20,000 a year." *The Daily Paper* failed to materialize, but Stead never forgot Robins' project for his "tour" of the London theatre and for the establishment of a National Theatre, both of which Stead resurrected with her help during the first decade of the twentieth century.

Although Stead was quite disappointed that Robins did not publish her impressions of the Passion Play—because he liked the drafts—he used every opportunity to encourage her literary efforts, still hoping that she might abandon her career in the theater for creative writing. And, despite her "unpremeditated confession of unfaith" (John 125), Stead remained devoted to Robins (as is well apparent in his very ardent letters to her), not only because of his affinity for pretty women but because of his faith in her talent as a writer. Elizabeth always knew that, as with her lover Archer, she could depend on Stead's friendship and generosity. As Robins later wrote, Stead got at "the heart of many things and many people [and] he got at my till then hidden thought" (John 126). She enjoyed his flattery, his insistence that she led the most interesting life of most women he knew, and his attempts to "rescue" her from the dangers of the theater. But Stead and Archer were not the only men interested in Robins' literary career; she was also assisted by the publisher William Heinemann, who assiduously wooed her and published her stories, under the pseudonym "C. E. Raimund" in the *New Review*, and by the notorious Frank

Harris, editor of the *Fortnightly Review*.[1]

By 1900, Elizabeth Robins was well known both in the London theater and literary circles and highly respected for a style influenced by George Eliot, a "feminist critique," and the "psychological realism" of Ibsen (John 120). During 1900 she embarked on a journey to the Klondike and in 1904 published *The Magnetic North*, a best-selling novel for which she was "most praised in her lifetime" (John 120). The journey was prompted by her concern for the welfare of her youngest brother, Raymond, whom she had not seen since childhood. Yet, her relationship with Raymond was intense and through the years they had become emotionally dependent on each other; they were both workaholics, full of "mercurial vitality," and (as her biographers agree) somewhat "wayward." In the late 1890s Raymond, a successful lawyer in San Francisco, was drawn to Alaska, where legal talent needed to settle land claims was in short supply and many prospered by the discovery of gold near Dawson City. The experiences of Raymond and his feckless brother Saxton on the lower Yukon River later formed the basis of *The Magnetic North*.

After almost a year with no word from Raymond and Saxton and, learning of Raymond's alleged conversion to Roman Catholicism, Elizabeth thought of finding Raymond to save him from himself. As Angela John notes, "Ironically, the person who prompted the agnostic Elizabeth to undertake her journey" was the person whom she deemed the "most unflinching follower of Christ I have ever known [Stead]" (126). During several intimate lunches at Gatti's in The Strand, Robins and Stead discussed all aspects of her projected trip to Alaska and, following initial opposition, he approved her resolve. His £300 "advance"—really a loan—made possible the journey and her temporary abandonment of the stage. The "advance" was supplemented by Stead's letters to editors in London and New York on Robins' behalf and he "undertook to take and place articles Elizabeth would write about Alaska" on the understanding that, after repayment, any "profits" she earned from the publication of stories based on her Alaskan venture would be shared between them. Small wonder that Elizabeth Robins later averred "I owed my brother to Stead" (John 126).

Angela John and, to a lesser extent, Joanne Gates, seem convinced that had Ibsen continued producing plays and Elizabeth's career in the theater not begun to wane, it is doubtful whether she would have gone to Alaska. Before she departed from England in late March 1900, Robins researched and wrote a brief article on Nome for Stead to introduce any of her "letters" or articles that he might publish in the *Review of Reviews* or place in other journals. The meticulous diary that, on Stead's advice, Robins kept of her "adventures" in Alaska later provided ample material for several publications that yielded much needed income.

Throughout April, Robins travelled through Canada to Seattle and from there by steamship to Nome, where she became a reporter, photographing and interviewing miners, exploring the tundra, and recording her experiences in her diary. Her account of the latest raw goldfield town was published, with an affectionate introduction by Stead, in the October 1900, issue of the *Review of Reviews* (22: 343-46), the only "letter" he published in the *Review* of the seven she sent to him; but he facilitated publication of the others in such journals as the *Pall Mall Magazine* and the *Fortnightly Review*. The little money earned by these "letters" and other publications on her travels was given to Stead in payment of the "advance" that had made the journey possible and that she was determined to pay back (Gates 133).

From Nome, Elizabeth travelled to the Klondike, continuing her interviews, most of which were never published. The same occurred in her journeys to Skagway, Juneau, and Seattle in late August, where she learned that Raymond was stricken with typhoid in Nome and herself succumbed to the disease. For two months she was critically ill in hospitals. On her recovery, she was joined by Raymond and together they went to see their mother in Louisville and from there she travelled to London. Tired and ill with post-typhoid trauma, she lingered for all of two years and in March 1901 constrained her friends to persuade her to enter a nursing home. Throughout this stressful time and the ensuing three years, Stead provided material and moral support, even though he was deeply involved in his anti-Boer War campaign and hard-pressed financially. When Robins published *The Magnetic North* in 1904, Stead hailed the novel as a grand adventure story in a very warm review and an eight-page summary of the book.

Featuring the work as "The Book of the Month" in the *Review of Reviews*, Stead declared:

> This is a living book; the characters live and endear themselves to the reader. It is impossible to read parts of it without a lump in the throat and tears in the eyes. It is real, it grips the imagination in a way that few modern books do.... It is a wonderful book—one of the best books written by a woman. (*Review* 30: 496)

He was quite correct: *The Magnetic North* was immensely popular and a great success, helped by the attention drawn to Alaska by the publication of Jack London's *Call of the Wild* during the previous year. The success of *The Magnetic North* now seemed to confirm Robins' conviction that her acting career was ending and her future would be a literary one.

During early 1904, Stead asked Robins to write about the London theater for the *Review of Reviews*, emphasizing her view of the theater as "an engine of education" and how it could be utilized to make people think about themselves and their milieu. She complied with a brief essay on "The Need of the London Stage" in the March 1904 issue (*Review* 29: 292-93), which was also a strong plea for an "endowed" National Theatre. Stead's renewed interest in the theater provided the opportunity for Robins to revive the suggestion and invitation in 1890 that she accompany him on a "pilgrimage" to understand the theater. Now, since his daughter Estelle was contemplating a career on the stage in Shakespearean plays, Stead readily took up Elizabeth's suggestion and accompanied her to view Beerbohm Tree's presentation of *The Tempest*. He wrote his impressions of the performance and submitted the article to Elizabeth for comment and revision and, after a long discussion of Stead's critique, she arranged for him to meet Tree at lunch in her home. Throughout autumn, Robins accompanied Stead to several stage productions and they discussed publishing a volume presenting his "theatrical adventures" and his views on his experiences. But the project was abandoned in favor of a series of articles in the *Review of Reviews* on Stead's "pilgrimage" in the theater, which she helped him edit. The result of their collaboration—which is hardly mentioned in John (see 71 and 256 n. 79) and cursorily discussed in Gates (139-40)—was published as "First Impressions of the Theatre" in twenty-four issues of the *Review* from July 1904 through November 1906. In the first instalment, Stead asserted that his "pilgrimage of investigation" was "suggested to me long ago by Sir Henry Irving and Miss Robins" and that he intended to apprise his readers of the results on a monthly basis. Also included in the reviews from 1904 onward was a monthly report on events in the theater.

Following the publication of *The Magnetic North*, Robins became much involved in the women's suffragist campaign and began a series of publications on votes for women (fully listed in John, Appendix 3: 246-47 and described in detail in Gates, chapters 6 and 7). Here was another cause close to Stead's heart and one that he was delighted to have his "Darling Hedda" embrace.

Beginning in August 1906, Elizabeth was impressed by the dynamism of Emmeline and Christabel Pankhurst and their Women's Social and Political Union (WSPU). Although Robins still had "deep reservations about her own full participation in militant [suffragist] activities, [she] accepted the presidency of the Women Writers' Suffrage League" (Gates 159) but declined requests from the WSPU leadership to speak at mass meetings. Instead, she sought to help the "Cause" with her literary efforts and in autumn 1906 began to write a suffragist play *Votes for Women!*, completing it in January 1907. Bernard and Charlotte Shaw, J. M. Barrie, Henry James, William Archer, and, of course, Stead encouraged her. *Votes for Women!* was presented at the Court Theatre on 9 April 1907 in the presence of the Pankhursts, Barrie, and Stead. A great success, much to Stead's satisfaction it "turned Elizabeth from. . .broad agreement with women's suffrage into a committed suffragette publicly identified with the cause" (John 144). The play was also produced in New York and Rome during 1909, and Robins donated a quarter of all royalties to the National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies, headed by Stead's old friend Mrs. Millicent Garrett Fawcett, and to its rival, the WSPU.

In April 1907, Robins began to write, with a publisher's advance of £1000, a novel *The Convert*, based on the play that, according to John and Gates, is still the best known of her literary productions. From April through the summer of 1907, she worked hard to meet the publisher's deadline of 1 September, focusing on the working-class roots of the WSPU and capturing "the spirit of the early WSPU and the early campaign tactics of the organization." But, as Robins completed the work in late August, "she felt some qualms as to its possible effect on her literary reputation" (Gates

166). Stead sought to reassure her in a brief note in the December 1907 *Review of Reviews*—that seems to have eluded both John and Gates—saying that Robins had "flung herself whole-heartedly into the fray on behalf of the rights of women to equal citizenship" and that

> The value of her story, *The Convert*, lies in the fact that it is very likely to make converts for women's suffrage among those who would be impervious to any appeal which came to them in a less seductive guise. It is forcible, persuasive, eloquent, and deploys great power of sympathetic representation of the views of both sides. (*Review* 36: 575)

He also noted that she had recently published a pamphlet entitled *Woman's Secret*, which contends that "The female animal is quite as strong, and often stronger, than the male" and that "Woman purchased civilisation at the price of her liberty."

Robins had been desirous of exploiting the recent resurgence of interest in white slavery as material for short stories and articles, but was distracted by other commitments. Then, in mid-February 1912, she resumed work on the white slavery issue; her efforts were intensified by the death of Stead in the *Titanic* disaster in mid-April and the resurrection of his "Maiden Tribute of Modern Babylon" agitation against juvenile prostitution and the white slave traffic in 1885. The loss of Stead, which for over a week greatly unsettled Elizabeth, "prompted fervent concentration on the very subject which Stead made infamous" (John 186). Stead's "crusade" had forced Parliamentary approval of the Criminal Law Amendment bill of 1885 and now, in 1912, there was a demand, something of a "moral panic," on the part of many reformers and suffragists to strengthen those sections of the 1885 Act dealing with streetwalkers, brothel keepers, and white slavers. At a suffrage meeting in mid-June, Robins alleged that the new bill designed to tighten the old Act being considered by Parliament "owed more to the death of Stead than to concern, at the 'abiding horror of women's lives.'" [2] As Joanne Gates asserts, Robins was firmly convinced that "The example of his advocacy of the regulation of prostitution prompted politicians to draft a new measure in token of his death" (207). Nor did she change her mind when Parliament, under pressure of the "moral panic," finally approved the much-debated new Criminal Law Amendment bill strengthening the white slavery provisions of its predecessor.[3] Her publications during 1912-1913 provided additional "ammunition" for women agitating for even greater restrictions on sexual vice by blaming "male sexuality" for the persistence of prostitution and white slavery.

Elizabeth needed some time to recover from the shock of Stead's death, which left her "dreamlike and full of strangeness. . .as though I were very near something new and transforming."[4] Later, in 1948, Robins wrote a "Memoir of W. T. Stead" that acknowledged the crucial role he had played in her life and career. Until her death in Brighton on 8 May 1952, Elizabeth Robins cherished and honored the memory of Stead.

These two well-written biographies complement each other, although some of Joanne Gates' rhetorical devices detract somewhat from her fluent narrative and Angela John errs on some chronology and accepts uncritically Judith Walkowtiz's flawed estimates of Stead's motivations. Both books provide informative endnotes and serviceable indices; in addition, John offers three appendices, which comprise a list of the plays in which Robins participated during 1888-1902, a chronological list of her major publications, and a list of those on the women's suffrage issue. Gates provides a comprehensive bibliography which adds Robins' published works, plays, and collections of short stories, and a list of her unpublished plays, fiction, and nonfiction (memoirs, political essays, and speeches). Both authors have made extensive use of the massive Elizabeth Robins Collection and the available papers of most of her friends and associates, although only John used what remains of the Stead papers. In sum, Joanne Gates and Angela John merit praise for a job well done.

Eastbourne, England

Notes

1. See Sue Thomas, "Elizabeth Robins and the *New Review*," *Victorian Periodicals Review* 28 [1995] 63-64.

2. Robins, *Way Stations* (1913), 327-28, as cited in John 186.

3. For reprint of the C.L.A. Act 1912, see *supra* this issue *NewsStead* 5-8.

4. Robins, Diary, 20 April 1912, cited in Gates 208.

Round Robin: Epistolary Amours. Stead's Friendship with Elizabeth Robins

Was this a sexual relationship?

Angela V. John, in her biography *Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life* diagnoses the epistolary malady:

> Frequently Elizabeth's men friends would adopt the name of a character she played, thereby enabling an intimacy which they could not otherwise so easily assume. Thus W. T. Stead, moralist and religious crusader, who had never entered the theatre until Elizabeth persuaded him to do so at the age of fifty-five, could write to her in the guise of Hedda: "Oh Hedda Hedda Darling don't you know how I rejoice in your success how I glory in your triumph." (76)

Joanne E. Gates, in her biography *Elizabeth Robins, 1862-1952*, while arguing for Robins' celibacy, provides a comparison in intensity, a parallel in the letters of John Masefield to Robins:

> At the same time that he sought to prove his ideas of the purity of a spiritual relationship between them, with Masefield playing the role of grownup son, his letters to Robins spoke of more erotic sensation. He wrote to her that he felt as if he were in Paradise, and that "son-like" he was eating her joy from her, "drawing the ecstasy from your life, as once before you were my food." (189)

Was Victorian protocol different from ours?

STEAD'S LETTERS TO ELIZABETH ROBINS

Thomas J. Kenny

Elizabeth Robins (1862-1952) was an American actress who became successful in England as an actress, writer, and activist for women's rights. She and Stead became friends in 1890 when she went to London to further her acting career. His letters to her are in the Fales Collection at New York University. He writes to her on 29 January 1891 after their first meeting:

> Because for you the Sun is eclipsed, why should you shrink from telling me all for you cannot think that anyone who feels the light and warmth can doubt the existence of the sun merely because all is dark to another.

Several years later, when her brother was missing, Stead supported her trip to the Klondyke. Directly after her return he visited her and wrote to her in a friendly teasing tone about their meeting (29 December 1900):

> Why. Why my darling Hedda. Just because I love you. That is why.
>
> I dond [sic] say the others do not love you alas. But the moment I sat down I felt my whole nervous system vibrating with a sense of impending snap. And I am afraid I bullied you abominably.
>
> But you have forgiven me—You are always so good to me who deserve it so little.

On 11 September 1903 from Mowbray House, more affection and teasing: "The one thing I care about is that you should be well and happy and near me! Selfishness or not. But you know. You know—Well never mind that."

Both were celebrities and tried to preserve some privacy. On 15 October 1904:

> Hedda dearest do forgive me. Half a dozen newspaper people interviewed me. In the course of the talk I mentioned that you took a serious view of the play as a picture of life. . . . Imagine my horror. I see in D Chronicle a line saying that my companion [my companion crossed out] 'The lady who (Miss Robins) declared. . . it is nothing very bad. But it annoyed me exceedingly. I have been most careful to keep your name out of everything.

He praises her for some help she has given him. On 9 November 1904:

> Beloved Hedda, You were just adorable. . . . I am so grateful to you. You have been an angel to me

always.

And the fact that you don't like my Lady Prendergast Dream love poems does not make the least little bit of difference to my love for you—There! Is that not an absurd remark?

As if I loved you because you were an echo or a mirror of my views, instead of loving you as I always have loved you just because you are your own dear good kind delightful self.

Their friendship seemed to decline in 1905. Stead wrote on 21 April 1905:

> I have tried to lay what was best in me at your feet. It was not to be wondered at that it was not good enough to interest you.
>
> Don't think I am complaining and don't imagine that I wanted you to fall in love with me.

Their friendship seems to have survived some bad moments. On 12 September 1906:

> Do forgive me and take me back into the inner circle of your friendship. . . . None loves you more than I.

Apparently they remained friends until his death on the *Titanic*.

This material is courtesy of the Fales Collection, New York University.

St. Peter's College, New Jersey

CONFIRMATION OF SALUTATIONS
J. O. Baylen

Stead *did* address many of his letters to Robins with such endearments [with varying dates from 22 April 1891 onward]: "Dearest Hedda," "Hedda, My Dearest," "Hedda, dear Hedda."

The following are examples:

28 October 1910: "You darling, you dearest, darling, My own Hedda"

3 December 1910: "My dearest darling Hedda"

14 February 1911: "Beloved Hedda."

Eastbourne, England

INTELLECTUAL ONLY
Alan Cooper

As far as I can gather, Elizabeth Robins and Stead met for lunch and their common interests were intellectual.

When the actress Mrs. Patrick Campbell wrote her memoirs, she described Robins as the first intellectual she had met on the stage.

I enclose some photocopies from Elizabeth Robins' book about her brother *Raymond and I* [published posthumously in London by Hogarth Press, 1956], where she refers to Stead's part in the preparation for her expedition to Alaska.

Huntly, Scotland

[Elizabeth Robins writes in *Raymond and I*]

The most complete Christian of my acquaintance was William T. Stead. He had been my friend for ten years, ever since the day I sought him out after reading what he, a lifelong denouncer of the secular stage, had written on coming home from the Passion Play. (48)

[Regarding her proposed travel to the Klondike] Over how many luncheons we fought the issue I can't tell now, for in spite of his preoccupation with the critical situation in South Africa ("I am, as you can imagine," he wrote, "horribly distraught about this infamous war")—he had to eat somewhere and the Gatti luncheons went on.

He wrote me from his *Review of Reviews* office on January 27th, 1900:

> Alas! I thought that I was ministering to your inmost wish when in such a spirit of ideal self-sacrifice I surrendered you to Mr. Massingham. If I had been vain enough to think that you really wanted to continue our tête-à-tête, I would have soon got him to depart. Therefore, please tell me the first

(continued on page 32)

[Elizabeth Robins, from *Raymond and I*]
(continued from page 28)

day that you are back in town, and lunchable, and come down and let us resume our conversation just where it left off.

Your affectionate grandfather,
W.T. Stead

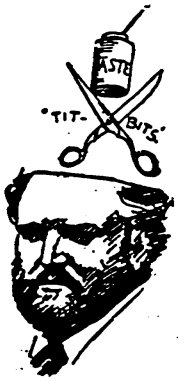
No one could forget the hour when, in one of his Old Testament moods, he flung up his hands and sat back in his chair—as I thought, done with me. For he had thrust out his beard and the sudden intense light was in his eyes: "God is everywhere!" he said. And on that, the prophet vanished as quickly as he had come. It was the very human creature of our own little day who leaned across the table: "If you want so much to go, why don't you?" In sheer stupefaction at his changed words and his changed looks—for he was genial, affectionate now, gay, excited—I sat speechless.

"What's the matter? Money?" He laughed that confident laugh and well he might. I knew he had very little money of his own and still less fear of the lack of it. Though he had little, thousands passed through his hands—passed very quickly. He could always get more—for other people. But these were the pious or the political, or cases of deserving poverty. I fitted into none of these categories. But he told me if I felt a "call" I was to make ready. . .(50). [*Much more follows.*]

"ON THE BRAIN": PHIL MAY'S CARICATURES

Stead featured in the *Daily Paper* and in the *Review of Reviews* the caricatures of Phil May and F. Carruthers Gould. Phil May sketched prominent persons with their obsessions sprouting from the skull. Annie Besant, of course, floated visions of Madame Blavatsky that were originated by Mahatmas. George Newnes, editor of *"Tit-Bits,"* sprouted scissors and paste.

This last enters Joyce's *Ulysses* in the newspaper chapter (where else?) in which headlines parody Stead's famous crossheads, when Leopold Bloom observes Red Murray of the *Evening Telegraph* cutting out an advertisement and notes mentally "Scissors and paste" (*U* 7:32). After *Letters from the Vatican*, Stead was empowered by Pope Leo XIII "on the brain." The Pope's gesture sketched below recurs in *Finnegans Wake*, when Pegger Festy attempts to "lilt his holymess the paws and make the sign of the Roman Godhelix faix" (91.35-36). See *Review* 5 [1892] 343.



MR. GEORGE NEWNES,
Of "Tit-Bits."

MRS. ANNIE BESANT.

MR W. T. STEAD.