



Guide to the Sybil Thorndike letter to Elizabeth Robins, 1922 September 21

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Summary

Collection Title:

Sybil Thorndike letter to Elizabeth Robins, 1922 September 21

Creator:

Thorndike, Sybil, Dame, 1882-1976; Baskin, Lisa Unger

Source:

Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture

Abstract:

Dame Sybil Thorndike was a distinguished British actress best known for her work on stage. In this letter to the actress and playwright Elizabeth Robins, Thorndike thanks her for the gift of some heather from Yorkshire. She also sends her regards and thanks to "Lady Bell" for her support. The letter is addressed to Robins at Rounton Grange, the North Yorkshire estate which was the family home of the writer Florence Bell ("Lady Bell"). Bell and Robins were close friends and collaborators. Thorndike refers to a play; at the time of this letter, she was in rehearsals for the 1922-23 London production of Shelley's *The Cenci* at the New Theater, directed by her husband, Lewis Casson. This letter connecting three key female figures of the London stage is evidence of the strong support network these women formed in a male-dominated arena.

Extent:

0.1 Linear Feet (1 item)

Language:

Materials in English

Collection ID:

RL.11423

Permalink:

<https://idn.duke.edu/ark:/87924/m18h32>

Preferred Citation

[Identification of item], Sybil Thorndike letter to Elizabeth Robins, David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library, Duke University.

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Background

Scope and Content

The collection consists of a single autograph typescript letter from Sybil Thorndike to Elizabeth Robins at Rounton Grange, Northallerton in North Yorkshire. In the letter, Thorndike thanks Robins for sending her a piece of heather from Rounton Grange. Thorndike writes, "I am sure it is going to bring us luck, and I love having something from Rounton on my dressing table. How lovely to think of you up there among the peacocks and the glorious moors! I really think the play is going to be a success." The letter is signed "yours affectionately, Sybil" with a manuscript postscript asking Robins to give her love to Lady Bell, and to thank Lady Bell for her support. The letter is composed on Thorndike's own letterhead stationery, "Miss Sybil Thorndike" at the address of the New Theater, London and listing her husband, Lewis Casson, as Director. The play in production Thorndike refers to is Shelley's *The Cenci*, in which she played the lead, Beatrice. With stamped, postmarked envelope.

Biographical/Historical

Dame Sybil Thorndike was a distinguished British actress whose career spanned sixty years, mostly on stage. She toured internationally in Shakespearean productions, often appearing opposite her husband, Lewis Casson. George Bernard Shaw famously wrote his classic play "Saint Joan" specifically with her in mind. Her most notable foray into film was in *The Prince and the Showgirl* (1957), where she appeared alongside Marilyn Monroe. At the time this letter was written, Thorndike was in rehearsal for her role as Beatrice in the 1922-23 London production of Percy Bysshe Shelley's play *The Cenci* at the New Theater, directed by her husband, Lewis Casson.

Elizabeth Robins was an American actress, playwright, novelist, and suffragist who lived in England for many years. She was an associate of Shaw, Oscar Wilde, Henry James, and Virginia and Leonard Woolf.

Dame Florence Bell ("Lady Bell") was a writer and playwright who was Robins' closest friend and collaborator. Bell was a key figure in promoting Thorndike's stage career. Her ancestral home was Rounton Grange, in North Yorkshire. Robins' 1932 book, *Theater and Friendship*, is in large part about her relationship with Bell.

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Administrative Information

Publication Statement

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Access Restrictions

Collection is open for research.

Use Restrictions

The copyright interests in this collection have not been transferred to Duke University. For more information, consult the copyright section of the Regulations and Procedures of the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library.

Acquisition Information

The Sybil Thorndike letter to Elizabeth Robins was received by the David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library as a purchase in 2015.

Processing Information

Processed by Megan E. Lewis, March, 2017

Accessions described in this collection guide: 2015-0050-LUBMSS484

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Related Materials

Related Material

[Sybil Thorndike and Lewis Casson archive at the Victoria & Albert Museum Theater and Performance Archives](#): Viewed March 24, 2017

[Elizabeth Robins papers](#) held at the Fales Library, New York University: Viewed March 24, 2017

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Names and Subjects

- Theater -- England -- London -- History -- 20th century
- Women in the theater -- England -- London -- History -- 20th century
- Lisa Unger Baskin Collection (David M. Rubenstein Rare Book & Manuscript Library)
- Sallie Bingham Center for Women's History and Culture
- Thorndike, Sybil, Dame, 1882-1976
- Robins, Elizabeth, 1862-1952
- Bell, Florence Eveleen Eleanore Olliffe, Lady, 1851-1930
- Casson, Lewis, Sir, 1875-1969.
- New Theatre (Westminster, London, England)

Collection Inventory

Letter

Folder 1