



# Elizabeth Robins, 1862-1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist

Joanne E. Gates

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From Childhood, Elizabeth Robins dreamed of a successful career on the stage. Her first impulse to visit England, in 1888, stemmed from her desire to secure better opportunities as an actress, and she soon gained celebrity playing Ibsen's heroines. While buoyed by this success, she began writing fiction that treated the feminist issues of her time: organized prostitution, women's positions in war-torn England, and the dangers of rearmament. In her acting, writing, and political activism, she consistently challenged existing roles for women. Robins' work is marked by a number of true-life components, and this first biography to use the vast collection of her private papers demonstrates how thought Robins transformed her own life into literary and dramatic capital.

Robins published several novels under the pseudonym C.E. Raimond, culminating in the sensational male-female bildungsroman, *The Open Question: A Tale of Two Temperaments*, which was set in her native Zanesville, Ohio, and publication of which finally disclosed her identity.

Her fiction is compared to that of Henry James, Edith Wharton, and Willa Cather. Many of her heroines share the characteristics of exhibiting force or willed silence, and Gates' analysis of this trait has implications for feminist theorists in a number of fields.

Robins' writing on behalf of woman suffrage and other women's rights issue in the first quarter of the 20th century represents an important contribution to feminist politics.

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