



PostScripts

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Faculty Scholar Lecture: Joanne Gates

February 23, 1995. It had been a busy semester and, as always, there was way too much to do; but I was headed back to Jacksonville for another lecture, another night away from the comforts of home. Nevertheless, I drove into the parking lot of the Houston Cole library knowing full well that this particular lecture would be enlightening. Joanne Gates' lectures always are.

I had already heard her speak on Robins, and I was curious about what else she might have to say. This was the Faculty Scholar Lecture, and Gates had entitled it "Elizabeth Robins: A Life in Letters." It would, of course, be based on her book, *Elizabeth Robins, 1862-1952: Actress, Novelist, Feminist*, which was published by the University of Alabama Press in 1994 and won the Elizabeth Agee Prize. But instead of a simple overview of the playwright's life, the lecture consisted of letters written by Gates to a woman who had obviously become something like a friend.

I have never been so mesmerized by a presentation. Behind the microphone, Gates became the inspired

colleague of the dead actress and writer as she speculated in letters about the possibilities of televised segments of Robins' life; reminisced about time spent in Robins' former home in England; revealed little known correspondences with Robins' friend, the poet John Masefield; and speculated about Robins' many relationships with those who cared for her deeply.

Never during the hour-long presentation did my attention waver; and by the end, when Gates presented a series of slides, which included pictures of each of Robins' homes and finally photographs of the young and the aging Elizabeth, most of us were so engaged that, and I am surprised by this, many of us were brushing away tears. At the risk of sounding even more sentimental, I have to say that I was deeply moved and highly impressed not only with Gates' scholarly research, but with the way she had connected her own life with Robins' and brought the author into the present for those of us lucky enough to be in the audience.

If you have not read Gates' book, I recommend it.

Susan Methvin