



Elizabeth Robins: Staging a Life

Angela V John

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Beautiful and talented, versatile and charismatic, Elizabeth Robins was one of the foremost actresses of her day. Yet this enduring character was also an active and lifelong feminist, and her life as a suffragette saw her working alongside the Pankhursts in the Women's and Social and Political Union. A prolific novelist and playwright, her play *Votes for Women!* changed the nature of theatre by instigating suffrage drama. She became so well known for portraying characters from Ibsen's plays that she is credited with bringing the playwright's work to prominence. Born in America during the Civil War, Elizabeth nevertheless made her home in England, where she became acquainted with Oscar Wilde, Virginia and Leonard Woolf and Henry James. Oscar Wilde introduced her to the London stage, and before long she had become one of the most popular actresses in London with an assured entry into London's leading artistic and political circles. Encountering heartbreak and solitude (Elizabeth's husband George Park drowned himself in 1887), this remarkable actress became one of the most fascinating characters of the fin de siecle world. In this intriguing biography, Angela John examines Elizabeth's historical identity and, drawing extensively on her diaries, letters and reviews, provides a fascinating study of the social culture surrounding a woman who lived a life in the spotlight.

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