Bell, Clive, 1881-1964.

Clive Bell letters to Gilbert Seldes
1921-1966

Abstract: British art critic and writer Clive Bell (1881-1964) wrote several letters to American theater and pop-culture critic and writer Gilbert Vivian Seldes (1893-1970) between 1921 to 1957, detailing personal matters, mutual friends, travels, and professional events. Also included are autographed notes, written by Seldes and dated 1966, about a meeting between Bell and Seldes and his impressions of Bell.
Descriptive Summary

Identification: MSS 099, F517
Creator: Bell, Clive, 1881-1964.
Title: Clive Bell letters to Gilbert Seldes
Inclusive Dates: 1921-1966
Extent: 6 items (6 p.)
Language: Materials entirely in English.

Administrative Information

Citation: MSS 099, F517, Clive Bell letters to Gilbert Seldes, University of Delaware Library, Newark, Delaware.

Shelving Summary: Box 33, F517: Shelved in SPEC MSS 0099 manuscript boxes

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Biographical Notes

Clive Bell

British art critic and writer Arthur Clive Howard Bell (1881-1964) was best known for his work as an art critic and his membership in the Bloomsbury group both through his own involvement as well as by marriage to British painter Vanessa Bell (1879-1961), Virginia Woolf's sister.

Like many in the Bloomsbury group, he attended Trinity College, Cambridge. Bell married Vanessa Stephen in 1907, and together they had a son Julian. Though their marriage only lasted in name past World War I, they remained on friendly terms until her death in 1961. He is known for his works of criticism.

Bell's first critical work, *Art* expands upon his theory of the relationship between line and color. *Since Cezanne* (1922) and *Account of French Painting* (1932), focus mainly on contemporary French artists. In addition to his works of art criticism, his place in the Bloomsbury group and in England allowed him to write critically about twentieth-century political, artistic, and literary spheres, as seen in his 1923 work *On British Freedom*. Bell also published an autobiographical work, *Old Friends: Personal Recollections* (1956) about the relationships formed in the Bloomsbury group.

Gilbert Seldes

American theater and writer Gilbert Vivian Seldes (1893-1970) was a socialite and cultural critic who worked predominately in drama and television. He was a fervent supporter of American culture as a quality environment in which to produce art.

The second child of liberal Russian Jewish parents, Seldes studied literature at Harvard and became a writer and critic of American high and middle-class culture and social history. His brother George Seldes distinguished himself as a journalist covering European affairs between the World Wars. Seldes married Alice "Amanda" Wadhams Hall in 1923, to whom he remained married until her death in 1954. The couple had two children, one of whom is the actress Marian Seldes.

Seldes worked most notably in the theater and in television and was one of the first critics to turn to television as a medium. He was a drama critic for *Dial* from 1920-1929 and adapted several classics, including Aristophanes's *Lysistrata*, for the contemporary stage. His work in television includes tenure as the first director of the Columbia Broadcasting System from 1937-1945. He published several major books on American culture and popular entertainment, including *The Stammering Century* (1928), *Mainland* (1936) *The Great Audience* (1950), and *The Public Arts* (1956). He worked to apply the same critical standards to all levels of the arts.

Sources:


Scope and Content Note

British art critic and writer Clive Bell (1881-1964) wrote several letters to American theater and cultural critic and writer Gilbert Vivian Seldes (1893-1970) between 1921 to 1957, detailing personal matters, mutual friends, travels, and professional events.

The six letters represent an intermittent but warm correspondence between the two critics, which discussed most often news of one another and their mutual friends in England and the United States. Both men were extremely well-connected to the writers and artists of the time, and mentioned many of their friends and acquaintances as well as major events, including the Festival of Britain, plays performed in Paris and London, authors and books being read, and Seldes's book publications.

Bell often told Seldes of his travel plans, most often to the United States when there was a chance of the two meeting. In particular, a photography tour with British art-historian and broadcaster Kenneth Clark (1903-1983) was mentioned, as well as a trip planned for 1952 as a United States lecture tour. Bell also asked Seldes to produce a modern version of Aristophanes’s *The Birds* to make money and as a personal favor.

Spanish artist Pablo Picasso’s (1881-1973) visits to England are mentioned in two letters. Also mentioned are plays by French dramatist John Anouilh (1910-1987), English playwrights Arthur Wing Pinero (1910-1987) and Christopher Fry (1907-2005), and American-born playwright, poet, and author T. S. Eliot (1888-1965).


Also included are autographed notes, written by Seldes and dated 1966, about a meeting between Bell, Seldes, and Anthony West, which detail Seldes's impressions of Bell.
Selected Search Terms

Personal Names

Bell, Clive, 1881-1964--Correspondence.
Seldes, Gilbert, 1893-1970--Correspondence.

Corporate Names

Festival of Britain (1951)

Topical Terms

Authors, American--History--20th century--Correspondence.
Authors, English--History--20th century--Correspondence.

Form/Genre Terms

Correspondence.
Notes.

Occupation

Critics.
Authors.

Personal Contributors


Related Materials in this Repository

This item forms part of MSS 099 Miscellaneous Literary and Historical Manuscripts.
Arrangement

Arranged in chronological order.
Detailed Description of the Collection

Clive Bell letter to Gilbert Seldes, 1921 April 19 [Box 33 F517]
1 item (1 p.)

Clive Bell letter to Gilbert Seldes, 1937 April 23 [Box 33 F517]
1 item (1 p.)

Clive Bell letter to Gilbert Seldes, 1950 November 20 [Box 33 F517]
1 item (1 p.)

Clive Bell letter to Gilbert Seldes, 1951 October 28 [Box 33 F517]
1 item (1 p.)

Clive Bell letter to Gilbert Seldes, 1957 February 10 [Box 33 F517]
1 item (1 p.)

Notes on meeting with Clive Bell, 1966 January 4 [Box 33 F517]
1 item (1 p.)