

The New York Public Library Billy Rose Theatre Division

Guide to the **Michael Strange papers** 1917-1925 \*T-Mss 1994-009

Processed by Mary Ellen Rogan.

## Summary

Creator: Strange, Michael, 1890-1950

Title: Michael Strange papers

Date: 1917-1925

Source: Gift, Gwenn Thomas-Avillez / Viviane Thomas Trimble, 06/--/1994

**Abstract:** The Michael Strange papers consist primarily of 218 autographed letters, many more then 2 pages in length, from her second husband John Barrymore. These span the years 1917-1925 and coincide with the end of her marriage to Leonard Thomas, as well as Barrymore's and Strange's courtship, marriage and divorce. Michael Strange was John Barrymore's second wife and the correspondence gives insight to the stormy nature of their relationship. Most of the correspondence is love letters which use personal terms of endearment and are almost always affectionate and sometimes sexually explicit.

#### **Conditions Governing Access:**

Original correspondence restricted. Photocopies available for research use.

**Conditions Governing Use:** For permission to publish, contact the Curator, Billy Rose Theatre Division.

**Preferred citation:** Michael Strange Papers, \*T-Mss 1994-009, Billy Rose Theatre Division, The New York Public Library for the Performing Arts

**Processing note:** Processed by Mary Ellen Rogan. The materials arrived in good condition and processing began immediately. Due to the unique quality of these materials, the correspondence series is only available to researchers as reading copies.

# **Creator History**

Michael Strange, nee Blanche Oelrichs, was born in Newport in 1890, daughter of Charles May Oelrichs and his wife, Blanche. Blanche Oelrichs early life consisted of an education at the Brearley

School and later, at Manhattanville Convent School where she had a reputation for pranks. Considered one of the most beautiful of Newport debutantes at her social debut, she was married at 19 to Leonard M. Thomas, a liaison officer of the American Embassy in Paris. She had two sons from this first marriage, Leonard and Robin.

After meeting John Barrymore in 1917, she eventually divorced Leonard Thomas, who was serving in the military during World War I. She married John Barrymore in August 1920. This marriage was problematic from the start. The artistic personalities of both parties led to intense bouts of passion and anger. During the entire period of their marriage, Barrymore was obsessed with the possibility of her infidelity. He was extremely jealous and possessive and these traits, as well as his drinking, aided in the destruction of their relationship. Diana Barrymore, their only child, was born in March of 1921. During the period of their marriage, Barrymore acted in his greatest role as *Hamlet*. She and John Barrymore remained married until 1928 when she quietly divorced him in Europe using the name Mrs. John Blythe. Her third husband was Harrison Tweed.

Blanche Oelrichs took the name Michael Strange at the beginning of her literary career. Known first as playwright, she later was known for her poetry, some of which was published with illustrations done by John Barrymore. Among her works are, *Clair de Lune* based on Victor Hugo's work *L'Homme Qui Rit* [*The Man Who Laughs*], which opened with John and Ethel Barrymore starring in the cast. The play was not a success and the reviews of the critics caused John Barrymore to send letters of rebuttal to the newspapers defending his wife's literary work. Her other well known works are primarily poetry and include: *Selected Poems, Resurrecting Life*, and *Poems*. Her autobiography is entitled *Who Tells Me True*. Michael Strange died in 1950.

### **Custodial History**

The Michael Strange Papers were donated to the Billy Rose Theatre Division in June of 1994.

## **Scope and Content Note**

The Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs Thomas Barrymore) Papers consist primarily of 218 autographed letters, many more than 2 pages, from her second husband John Barrymore and span the years 1917-1925. These years coincide with the end of her marriage to Leonard Thomas, as well as Barrymore and Strange's courtship, marriage and divorce. Michael Strange was John Barrymore's second wife and the correspondence gives insight to the stormy nature of their relationship and includes many love letters. Much of the correspondence from late 1922 to early 1923 contains information on Barrymore's Hamlet which ran in New York during that time period. The correspondence also documents the 1925 London production of Barrymore's Hamlet. Other topics include some of his earlier theatrical works and discussions of events during motion picture filming in Hollywood and on location. His writing about his acting is at times introspective and gives glimpses of Barrymore's creative genius and troubled personality. Interesting aspects of the letters include drawings which Barrymore himself added to the correspondence. Other correspondence is from Michael Strange's admirer Terence whose last name is never revealed, as well as correspondence from the critic, John Jay Chapman. The collection also includes a manuscript copy of a play written by Michael Strange entitled The Dark Crown for which she was accused of plagiarism by Sophie Treadwell. Also included is ephemera such as clippings and gift cards.

#### **Chronology of Dates Relevant to Correspondence**

1917 John Barrymore divorces 1st wife Katherine Harris

1917 John Barrymore meets Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) April 17, 1917 John Barrymore stars in the play Peter Ibbetson 1918-April, 1919 John Barrymore stars in Redemption 1919 Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) sent to Santa Barbara, California to "get over" John Barrymore; begins to write Clair de Lune April-June 1919 John Barrymore stars in The Jest Fall 1919 Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) divorces her 1st husband Leonard Thomas March 6, 1920 Opening night of Richard III starring John Barrymore April 1920 John Barrymore suffers breakdown during run of Richard III August 1920 John Barrymore and Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) marry 1921 John Barrymore films The Lotus Eaters on location in Miami March 3, 1921 Birth of Diana Barrymore April 18, 1921 Opening night of *Clair de Lune* by Michael Strange Summer 1921 John Barrymore and Michael Strange tour Europe Summer 1921 John Barrymore proceeds to Switzerland, climbs Mt. Blanc December 1921 Michael Strange returns from France Winter 1922 John Barrymore in Nassau, Bahamas Spring 1922 Michael Strange travels to Europe with Mrs. Lionel Barrymore April 1922 John Barrymore on Andros Island May 1922 John Barrymore takes ill in the Bahamas June-August 1922 John Barrymore prepares for Hamlet, studies diction with Margaret Carrington at Denby Court, Connecticut November 17, 1922 Opening night of Hamlet in New York starring John Barrymore February 9, 1923 Hamlet closes after 101 performances breaking previous record of 100 performances set by Edwin Booth in 1865 at the Winter Garden Theatre February 1923 John Barrymore sails for Europe; signs contracts with Warner Bros. Spring 1923 John Barrymore travels in Europe July 1923 John Barrymore goes to California to film Beau Brummell November 1923 Hamlet reopens for three weeks in New York December 1923 Hamlet production goes on tour 1924 John Barrymore travels twice to Europe to solicit funds for a British production of Hamlet October 1924 Lawsuit by Sophie Treadwell against Michael Strange for plagiarism for her play Dark Crown November 1924 Michael Strange sails to Europe on the S.S. Mauretania November 1924 John Barrymore sails to England December 1924 John Barrymore rents house on Cheyne Walk January 1925 Rehearsals begin for the London production of Hamlet February 19, 1925 Hamlet opens in London April 18, 1925 Hamlet closes in London April 1925 John Barrymore ill in London April 29, 1925 John Barrymore sails to New York on the S.S. Olympic May 1925 John Barrymore returns to New York May 1925 John Barrymore and Michael Strange officially separate 1926 John Barrymore films Don Juan and The Sea Beast

Arrangement: Series I: Correspondence Series II: The Dark Crown Series III: Ephemera

## **Key Terms**

### Subjects

Actors -- United States Motion picture actors and actresses Theater -- England Theater -- New York (State) -- New York Women dramatists Women poets, American

#### Names

Strange, Michael, 1890-1950 Barrymore, John, 1882-1942 Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616 Treadwell, Sophie, 1885-1970

## **Container List**

#### Series I: Correspondence, 1917-1925 (3 boxes)

This series includes love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange throughout the courtship and marriage and span the years 1917-1925. The letters use personal terms of endearment and are almost always affectionate and sometimes sexually explicit. Of special note are certain pet names used interchangeably by John Barrymore and Michael Strange. These include: Treacle, Fig and Dringal. The letters are often written in the third person and John Barrymore usually referred to himself as father and Michael Strange as "his mother". Occasionally there are marginal drawings done by Barrymore to illustrate his words. Included as well on the letters and envelopes are notes written by Michael Strange placing the letters in the context of familiar events in her life.

Note: Correspondence series is available in reading copies only. Originals (Boxes 1, 2, and 3) will not be given to researchers without the permission of the curator.

#### Chronological

b. 1A f. 1	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1917 (1 folder (2 letters; 5 items)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs Thomas).
b. 1A f. 2	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1917 (1 folder (1 letter; 3 pages, 1 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 3	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1918 (1 folder (2 letters; 10 pages, 2 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 4	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. June 1919 (1 folder (4 letters; 8 pages, 6 photos, 4 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 5	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. June 1919 (1 folder (5 letters; 11 pages, 4 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 6	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. July 1919 (1 folder (5 letters; 5 pages, 5 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 7	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. July 1919 (1 folder (5 letters; 6 pages, 5 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 8	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. July 1919 (1 folder (5 letters; 7 pages, 5 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 9	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. July 1919 (1 folder (5 letters; 7 pages, 1 torn paper, 5 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 10	Correspondence / John Barrymore, July 1919 (1 folder (4 letters; 7 pages, 4 env.))
0. 171. 10	ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

	Series I: Correspondence,. (cont.)
b. 1A f. 11	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. July 1919 (1 folder (3 letters; 10 pages, 2 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 12	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1919 (1 folder (4 letters; 9 pages)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters (Summer 1919) from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 13	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1919 (1 folder (4 letters; 9 pages, 1 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters (Summer 1919) from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 14	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. October 1919 (1 folder (1 telegram, 1 letter; 4 pages, 1 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 15	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. November 1919 (1 folder (5 letters; 14 pages, 4 env.))
	ActorsLove affairs
b. 1A f. 16	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
D. TA I. 10	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. November 1919 (1 folder (2 telegrams; 9 pages.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Telegrams from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 17	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. December 1919 (1 folder (3 telegrams, 8 pages; 1 letter, 4 pages)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters and telegrams from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 18	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. January 1920 (1 folder (3 letters; 3 pages, 3 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters (January-April, 1920) from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 1A f. 19	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1920 (1 folder (4 letters; 10 pages, 1 env.)) ActorsLove affairs
	Love letters from John Barrymore to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 1	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1921 (1 folder (1 letter, 1 env.)) Barrymore, John, 1882-1942Marriage Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 2	Correspondence / John Barrymore, 1922 (1 folder (2 letters, 3 pages))
0. 27 ( 1. 2	Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 3	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. April 1922 (1 folder (4 letters; 8 pages, 4 env.)) Barrymore, John, 1882-1942Marriage
	Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 4	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. April 1922 (1 folder (7 telegrams)) Telegrams from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 5	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. May 1922 (1 folder (3 telegrams)) Telegrams from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 6	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. June 1922 (1 folder (1 letter; 4 pages, 1 env.)) Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
b. 2A f. 7	Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1922 (1 folder (2 letters; 3 pages, 1 env.)) Love letter [Summer 1922] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

Series I: Correspondence,. (cont.)

b. 2A f. 8 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. October 7, 1922 (1 folder (5 letters; 13 pages, 6 env.))

Love letters [October 7 - October 11, 1922] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 9 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. October 13, 1922 (1 folder (6 letters; 10 pages, 4 env.))

Love letters [October 13 - October 19, 1922] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 10 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. October 21, 1922 (1 folder (4 letters; 6 pages, 1 env.))

Love letters [October 21 - October 30, 1922] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 11 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. November 4, 1922 (1 folder (2 letters; 2 pages, 1 env.))

Love letters [November 4 - November 8, 1922] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 12 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. December 25, 1922 (1 folder (1 letter; 4 pages, 1 env.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

- b. 2A f. 13 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1922 (1 folder (3 letters; 10 pages, 2 env.)) HamletShakespeare, William, 1564-1616
   Love letters [1922-1923] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) written during preparation and production of Hamlet.
- b. 2A f. 14 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1922 (1 folder (5 letters; 9 pages, 2 env.)) HamletShakespeare, William, 1564-1616
   Love letters [1922-1923] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) during the preparation and production of Hamlet.
- b. 2A f. 15 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1922 (1 folder (4 letters; 4 pages, 4 env.)) HamletShakespeare, William, 1564-1616 Love letters [1922-1923] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) during the preparation and production of Hamlet.
- b. 2A f. 16 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1922 (1 folder (3 letters; 7 pages, 2 env.)) HamletShakespeare, William, 1564-1616 Love letters [1922-1923] From John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) written during the preparation and production of Hamlet.
- b. 2A f. 17 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1922 (1 folder (5 letters; 12 pages, 4 env., 1 encl.)) HamletShakespeare, William, 1564-1616

Love letters [1922-1923] from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs) written during preparation and production of Hamlet.

- b. 2A f. 18 Correspondence / John Barrymore, July 1923 (1 folder (2 letters; 4 pages, 2 env.)) Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
- b. 2A f. 19 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. September 1923 (1 folder (4 letters; 9 pages, 4 env.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 20 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. September 1923 (1 folder (4 letters; 7 pages, 4 env.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 21 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. October 1923 (1 folder (3 letters; 19 pages, 3 env.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 22 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. October 1923 (1 folder (3 telegrams)) Telegrams from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs). Series I: Correspondence,. (cont.)

b. 2A f. 23 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. November 1923 (1 folder (3 letters; 7 pages, 3 env.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 2A f. 24 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. December 1923 (1 folder (2 letters; 8 pages, 2 env.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

- b. 2A f. 25 Correspondence / John Barrymore, 1923 (1 folder (1 letter; 2 pages)) Love letter from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
- b. 2A f. 26 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1923 (1 folder (2 letters; 4 pages, 1 env., 1 clipping))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

b. 3A f. 1 Correspondence / John Barrymore,. 1924 (1 folder (6 letters; 12 pages, 7 env., 2 encl.))

Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

- b. 3A f. 2 Correspondence / John Barrymore, 1925 (1 folder (4 letters; 10 pages, 2 env.)) Love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
- b. 3A f. 3 Correspondence / John Barrymore. (1 folder (3 letters; 4 pages, 2 env.)) Undated love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
- b. 3A f. 4 Correspondence / John Barrymore. (1 folder (6 letters; 15 pages)) Undated love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
- b. 3A f. 5 Correspondence / John Barrymore. (1 folder (3 letters; 4 pages, 2 env.)) Strange, Michael, 1890-1950 Undated love letters from John Barrymore to his wife, Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).
- b. 3A f. 6 Correspondence / John Jay Chapman, 1922 (1 folder (2 letters)) Barrymore, John, 1882-1942 Correspondence to John Barrymore from John Jay Chapman.
- b. 3A f. 7 Correspondence / Michael Strange. (1 folder (1 letter)) Barrymore, John, 1882-1942 Draft of letter written by Michael Strange to John Barrymore.
- b. 3A f. 8 Terence correspondence, 1922 (1 folder (3 letters; 9 pages, 1 env.)) Correspondence from "Terence" to Michael Strange.
- b. 3A f. 9 Correspondence "A-Z",. 1921 (1 folder) Strange, Michael, 1890-1950 Miscellaneous correspondence [1921-1924] to Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs).

Series II: The Dark Crown, 1922-1924 (1 box)

This series includes drafts, revisions and handwritten notes for the play *The Dark Crown*. This play was never produced due to a controversy with Sophie Treadwell over the idea for the work. Sophie Treadwell accused Michael Strange of plagiarism and Strange never produced the play at the advice of lawyers. Included as well is a copy of a letter from Michael Strange's lawyer over this issue.

- b. 4 f. 1 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Handwritten draft of Michael Strange's play The Dark Crown.
- b. 4 f. 2 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder)
  Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama
  Draft of Michael Strange's play The Dark Crown [annotated by Michael Strange as 2nd writing].
- b. 4 f. 3 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Drafts of Act I of The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.

Series II: The Dark Crown,. (cont.)

b. 4 f. 4	The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder)
	Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849Drama
	Drafts of Act II of The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.

- b. 4 f. 5 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Drafts of Act III of The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 6 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Final draft of Act I of The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 7 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Final draft of Act II of The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 8 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Final draft of Act III of The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 9 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) Poe, Edgar Allan, 1809-1849--Drama Handwritten notes for the play The Dark Crown by Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 10 The dark crown / Michael Strange. (1 folder) PlagiarismTreadwell, Sophie, 1885-1970 Copy of legal correspondence concerning legal dispute between Michael Strange and Sophie Treadwell.

Series III: Ephemera,. 1921-1923 (1 box)

This series includes miscellaneous clippings, gift cards and calling cards belonging to Michael Strange. Included as well is a contract for rights to a literary work she was considering.

- b. 4 f. 11 Contracts / H.-R. (Henri-Ren) Lenormand, 1922 (1 folder) Contract in French between Henri-Rene Lenormand and Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 12 Gift and calling cards (1 folder) Miscellaneous gift and calling cards sent to Michael Strange.
- b. 4 f. 13 Clippings / John Barrymore 1922 (1 folder) Shakespeare, William, 1564-1616 Clippings about John Barrymore in the play Hamlet.
- b. 4 f. 15 Clippings / Eleonora Duse, 1923 (1 folder) Clippings about Eleanora Duse.
- b. 4 f. 15 Clippings / Michael Strange, 1921 (1 folder) Clippings about Michael Strange (Blanche Oelrichs Barrymore).