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EXCEPTIONAL POPULARITY OF ETHEL LILIAN VOYNICH

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Annotation: *This article outlines the popularity of Ethel Lilian Voynich and her great influence upon the development of English literature.*

Keywords: *composer, contribute, portray, feminine, create, depiction, female, novelist, eccentric philosopher.*

Literature is a medium that endeavors and explores the condition of human life and society. Since the literature is recognized as a tool which discovers new, unknown traits of mankind and the society he or she lives the purpose of literature becomes evident. We can say that recent years the interest in literature and its members has increased in the widest sense of this word. Women writers of English literature had a great influence upon the development of world literature. Voynich, Ethel Lilian left great artistic heritage in literature. Ethel Lilian was one of the most significant and a great English novelist.

Voynich, Ethel Lilian (1864–1960), novelist, translator, and composer, was born 11 May 1864 at Lichfield Cottage, Ballintemple, youngest of five daughters of Professor George Boole, eminent mathematician and logician, and Mary Boole, educational psychologist and eccentric philosopher, niece of Sir George Everest, surveyor-general of India, after whom is named the world's highest mountain. After the sudden death in her infancy of her father, the family, in straitened circumstances, moved to England. Hypersensitive, reared amid the chaotic bohemia of her mother's London home – save for two traumatic years in Lancashire with an emotionally abusive uncle – she dressed entirely in black from age 15 until her marriage, in mourning for the condition of the world.

A small legacy allowed her to study music in Berlin. After learning Russian in London from an exiled revolutionary, Sergei Kravchinski, alias Stepniak, she travelled in Russia, giving music lessons in St Petersburg, associating with families of political prisoners, and rendering medical assistance to the poor. In London she married a Polish political exile named Woynicz, recently escaped from Siberia; he became a naturalised British subject, anglicising his name to Wilfred Michael Voynich. The couple assisted

Stepniak in his political work and propaganda until the latter's death in a railway accident; Encouraged and guided by Stepniak, she published translations from the Russian: Stories from Garshin; a selection of Stepniak's pamphlets, Nihilism as it is and the humour of Russia.

In 1896 she had an affair with the shadowy adventurer Sigmund Rosenblum, a.k.a. Sidney Reilly, latterly 'ace of spies' of the British secret service, said to possess eleven passports and a separate wife to accompany each; meeting in London, they travelled Italy together until he deserted her in Florence. The fabric of her first novel, *The Gadfly*, was woven from various sources; not least the emotional shocks of her own life. For the protagonist she drew upon the experiences of both Reilly and her husband: Reilly's early life for the complicated parentage and South American adventures of Arthur Burton, the eponymous 'Gadfly';

Voynich for the character's prison experiences and immersion in nationalist revolution. The character of her heroine, Gemma Warren, 'one of the most impressive attempts of the time to present an emancipated woman', was drawn from Charlotte Wilson, mistress of Russian anarchist Peter Kropotkin. The book proved an international literary phenomenon: a bestseller through numerous editions, it held a special attraction for revolutionaries of all hues, was widely read in the British labour movement into the 1920s and enjoying a vogue amongst Irish republicans. Translated into over thirty languages, it commanded enduring popular and critical appeal in Eastern Europe, where it was acclaimed one of the world's great novels and was adapted for theatre, opera, and cinema.

A film version with a score by Dmitri Shostakovich won an award at the Cannes film festival. Set against a quasi-historical pastiche of the 1840s Italian Risorgimento, the book has nothing to do with socialism. Its appeal derived from the combination of heroic revolutionary idealism, conspiratorial intrigue, and anti-clericalism with the psychological fascination of the central character. Voynich rises above melodrama in the complexity of her unsentimental, if sensational, resolution of moral and psychological problems.

Voynich's first novel, *The Gadfly* (1897), drew heavily on her husband's political experience and idealistic revolutionary zeal, with which she sympathized. A vehemently anti-clerical novel, *The Gadfly* is set in pre-1848 Italy and features both a revolutionary young Englishwoman and the "gadfly" hero of the title. A popular success, the book went through eight impressions in four years, selling in vast quantities in translation in Eastern Europe, where it was made into a film in 1955.

Voynich's reputation as a writer is largely based on *The Gadfly*, but she published other novels featuring revolutionary heroes, such as *Jack Raymond*, the story

of a rebel and a Polish patriot's widow; Olive Latham, about an English nurse and a Russian revolutionary; and An Interrupted Friendship, which continues the story of The Gadfly. None of her later novels are considered the equal of her first, and are chiefly characterized by an obsession with violence and physical suffering.

In addition to novels, Voynich published two translations of Russian stories, Stories from Garshin, The Humour of Russia, and a translation of Chopin's letters. In 1916, Voynich and her husband moved to the United States, where she continued writing, publishing her last novel, Put off Thy Shoes, in 1945.

In conclusion, Ethel remained musically active as well, becoming a member of the Society of Woman Musicians, an organization founded by composer Marion Scott in 1911. Through Scott, she established a close relationship with composer and war poet Ivor Gurney, an inspirational force behind her literary and musical compositions. Following her immigration to New York City around 1920, Ethel began intensive studies in composition and orchestration. These contributed to her creation of a variety of sacred vocal and instrumental works in the 1920s, including Babylon, Jerusalem, and Epitaph in Ballad Form.

Meanwhile, Voynich's works, primarily The Gadfly, gained fame far beyond the borders of her homeland. In our country, almost all of her novels were published several times and gained exceptional popularity.

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