

Natalie Clifford Barney: The Enigmatic Muse at the Heart of Literary Paris



Natalie Clifford Barney (1876-1972) was an American writer, poet, playwright, and salonnière who played a pivotal role in the literary and artistic circles of early 20th-century Paris. A wealthy and independent woman, she hosted a renowned literary salon in her Paris home, where she entertained and inspired some of the most prominent figures of the era, including Ezra Pound, T.S. Eliot, Ernest Hemingway, and Gertrude Stein.



Wild Heart: A Life: Natalie Clifford Barney and the Decadence of Literary Paris by Suzanne Rodriguez-Hunter

★★★★☆ 4.6 out of 5

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Early Life and Marriage

Natalie Clifford Barney was born into a wealthy family in Dayton, Ohio, on October 31, 1876. Her father, Albert Clifford Barney, was a successful businessman and her mother, Alice Pike Barney, was a painter and art collector. Natalie had two older sisters, Laura and Alice.

From a young age, Natalie showed a passion for literature and the arts. She was educated at home by private tutors and developed a love for French poetry and literature. In 1899, she married a young artist named Willard Huntington Wright, but the marriage was unhappy and ended in divorce in 1903.

Life in Paris

In 1902, Natalie traveled to Paris for the first time and quickly fell in love with the city. She moved there permanently in 1907 and established herself

as a writer and salonnière. Her home at 20, rue Jacob became a meeting place for artists, writers, and intellectuals from all over the world.

Natalie's salon was known for its eclectic and bohemian atmosphere. She welcomed people from all walks of life, regardless of their gender, sexual orientation, or social status. Among the regulars at her salon were the poet Renée Vivien, the writer Djuna Barnes, the photographer Berenice Abbott, and the painter Romaine Brooks.

Literary Career

Natalie Barney published her first book of poetry, "Quelques Portraits-Sonnets de Femmes" (Some Portraits-Sonnets of Women), in 1900. She went on to publish several more collections of poetry, as well as novels, plays, and essays. Her work was often praised for its lyrical beauty and its exploration of themes of love, sexuality, and gender roles.

Natalie's most famous work is her novel "A Perilous Adventure" (1931), which tells the story of a young American woman who comes to Paris and falls in love with a woman. The novel was groundbreaking for its frank portrayal of lesbianism and its challenge to traditional gender roles.

Influence and Legacy

Natalie Clifford Barney was a pioneering figure in the literary and artistic world of early 20th-century Paris. Her influence extended beyond her own writings, as she became a muse and inspiration for some of the most prominent figures of the era.

Gertrude Stein described Natalie as "the only American woman who had ever been a man in the art world." Ezra Pound dedicated his poem

"Homage to Sextus Propertius" to her, and T.S. Eliot wrote a poem about her titled "The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock."

Natalie's legacy continues to inspire artists and writers today. She is remembered as a free-spirited and independent woman who challenged conventions and lived on her own terms. Her work remains a powerful testament to the power of love and the importance of embracing one's true self.

Natalie Clifford Barney was a remarkable woman who played a pivotal role in the literary and artistic world of early 20th-century Paris. Her salon was a meeting place for some of the most creative and brilliant minds of the era, and her work continues to inspire artists and writers today. Natalie's legacy is one of freedom, independence, and the power of love.



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