

Classic Poetry Series

Elizabeth Von Arnim
- poems -

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Elizabeth Von Arnim(31 August 1866 - 9 February 1941)

Elizabeth von Arnim, born Mary Annette Beauchamp, was an Australian-born British novelist. By marriage she became Gräfin (Countess) von Arnim-Schlagenthin, and by a second marriage, Countess Russell. Although known in her early life as Mary, "after the publication of her first book, she was known to her readers, eventually to her friends, and finally even to her family as Elizabeth." and she is now invariably referred to as Elizabeth von Arnim. She also wrote under the pen name Alice Cholmondeley.

Life

She was born at her family's holiday home in Kirribilli Point in Australia. When she was three years old the family returned to England where she was raised. Her parents were Henry Herron Beauchamp (1825–1907), merchant, and her mother Elizabeth (Louey) Weiss Lassetter (1836–1919). Arnim had four brothers, a sister and a cousin from New Zealand, Kathleen Beauchamp, who later married John Middleton Murry and wrote under the pen name Katherine Mansfield.

In 1891 Elizabeth married Count Henning August von Arnim-Schlagenthin, a Prussian aristocrat, whom she had met during an Italian tour with her father. They married in London but lived in Berlin and eventually moved to the countryside where, in Nassenheide, Pomerania, the Arnims had their family estate. The couple had five children, four daughters and a son. The children's tutors at Nassenheide included E. M. Forster and Hugh Walpole.

Arnim would later refer to her domineering husband as the "Man of Wrath". Writing was her refuge from what turned out to be an incompatible marriage. Arnim's husband had increasing debts and was eventually sent to prison for fraud. This was when she created her pen name "Elizabeth" and launched her career as a writer by publishing her semi-autobiographical, the brooding yet satirical *Elizabeth and her German Garden* (1898). It would be such a success as to be reprinted twenty times in its first year. A bitter-sweet memoir and companion to it was *The Solitary Summer*, (1899) and *The Benefactress* (1902), *Vera* (1921) and *Love* (1925) were also semi-autobiographical. Other titles dealing with feminist protest and witty observations of life in provincial Germany were to follow, including *The Princess Priscilla's Fortnight* (1905) and *Fraulein Schmidt and Mr Anstruther* (1907). She would sign her next twenty or so books simply as written, "by the author of *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*" and later

simply "By Elizabeth". In 1908 Arnim left Nassenheide to return to London.

Count von Arnim died in 1910, and in 1916 his widow married John Francis Stanley Russell, 2nd Earl Russell, elder brother of Bertrand Russell. The marriage ended in acrimony, with Elizabeth fleeing to the United States and the couple separating in 1919, though they never divorced. In 1920 she embarked on an affair with Alexander Stuart Frere Reeves (1892–1984), a British publisher nearly 30 years her junior; he later married and named his only daughter Elizabeth in her honour.

Elizabeth died in Charleston, South Carolina, in 1941, aged 74.

Literary Career

In 1898 von Arnim started her literary career by publishing *Elizabeth and Her German Garden*, a semi-autobiographical novel published anonymously. She went on to write another 20 books.

Her 1922 novel, *The Enchanted April*, has been adapted five times: as a Broadway play in 1925; an unsuccessful feature film by RKO in 1935; an Academy Award-nominated feature film by Miramax in 1992; a Tony Award-nominated stage play in 2003; and a musical play in 2010.

Her 1940 novel, *Mr. Skeffington* was made into an Academy Award-nominated feature film by Warner Bros. in 1944, starring Bette Davis and Claude Rains; and a 60-minute "Lux Radio Theater" broadcast radio adaptation of the movie on 1 October 1945.

In Goethe's Garden

I from this hillock all my world survey!
Yon vale, bedecked by nature's fairy fingers,
Where the still by-road picturesquely lingers,
The cottage white whose quaint charms grace the way--
These are the scenes that o'er my heart hold sway.

I from this hillock all my world survey!
Though I ascend to heights fair lands dividing,
Where stately ships I see the ocean riding,
While cities gird the view in proud array,
Naught prompts my heart's impulses to obey.

I from this hillock all my world survey!
And could I stand while Paradise descrying,
Still for these verdant meads should I be sighing,
Where thy dear roof-peaks skirt the verdant way:
Beyond these bounds my heart longs not to stray.

Elizabeth Von Arnim