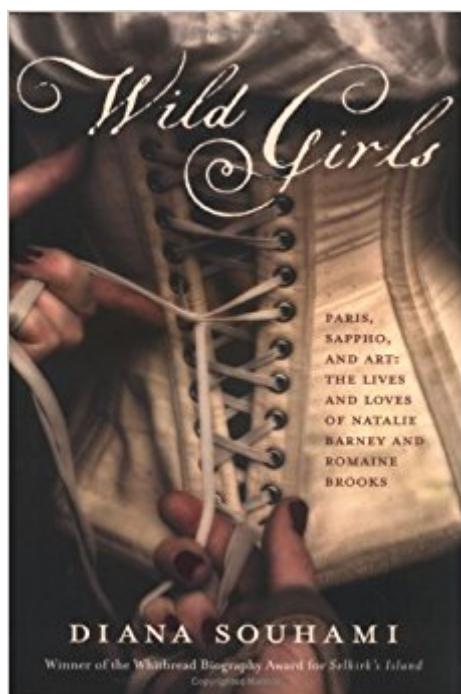


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# Wild Girls: Paris, Sappho, And Art: The Lives And Loves Of Natalie Barney And Romaine Brooks



## Synopsis

Wild Girls is the critically acclaimed true story of two wealthy American heiresses---one an artist, the other a writer---whose stormy, passionate love affair captivated Paris' salons set between the wars. Natalie Barney and Romaine Brooks were rich, American, eccentric, and grandly lesbian. They met in Paris in 1915, and their relationship lasted more than fifty years, despite infidelity, separation, and temperamental differences. Romaine Brooks, a painter, was the product of an unhappy childhood and trusted no one but Natalie. Natalie Barney was passionate about life, sex, and love. Her Friday afternoon salons, attended by Gertrude Stein, and Colette and Edith Sitwell, were a magnet for social introductions and cultural innovations. Drawing from letters, papers, and paintings, Diana Souhami, the award-winning author of *Mrs. Keppel and Her Daughter*, re-creates the lives and loves of this pair of dazzling and wild women. *"Epic romance . . . smartly sex-positive and so good-naturedly shocking."* --The New York Times Book Review *"Real tenderness and pathos . . . not only entertaining but affecting reading."* --The Washington Post *"Their friends were the most bohemian, their parties the most risqué,"* their tortured love affair the most notorious in Europe. Diana Souhami tells a remarkable tale. *--The Sunday Telegraph (UK)* --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

## Book Information

Hardcover: 240 pages

Publisher: St. Martin's Press; 1st edition (November 5, 2005)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 0312343248

ISBN-13: 978-0312343248

Product Dimensions: 6.4 x 1 x 9.5 inches

Shipping Weight: 1 pounds (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 3.7 out of 5 stars 8 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #1,946,920 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #57 in Books > Biographies & Memoirs > Specific Groups > LGBT > Lesbian #966 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > History #3357 in Books > Gay & Lesbian > Nonfiction > LGBT Studies

## Customer Reviews

Though poet Natalie Barney and artist Romaine Brooks rubbed (usually more than) elbows with the artistic elites of Bohemian Paris, neither achieved fame nor acclaim. So it is that Souhami (Mrs.

Keppel and Her Daughter) focuses on their relationships with one another and their many lovers, producing a book that reads more like a lesbian soap opera than a biography. The author describes people each of the two American women encountered, but concentrates less on their interactions with one another than on Barney's affairs with, among many others, Liane de Pougy, Renee Vivien and Lily de Gramont. Barney "liked lots of sex, lavish display and theatricality, and wanted not to bind love to rules, particularly to the rule of exclusivity," Souhami explains. "She divided her amours into liaisons, demi-liaisons, and adventures, and called her nature fidele/infidele." By the time the discussion turns to Barney and Brooks-well past the book's halfway point-readers have been inundated with so many of Barney's flings that it is difficult to keep things straight. Souhami writes in short, declarative sentences ("Alice was seventeen. Her bereaved mother took her on a grand tour of Europe. Alice sketched impressions of Paris, Milan and Rome."), a style at odds with her libertine subjects that gives the impression she shortchanged texture and detail in favor of creating a tally of Barney's multitudinous rendezvous. Photos. Copyright © Reed Business Information, a division of Reed Elsevier Inc. All rights reserved.

Nominee for the Lambda Literary and Judy Grahn Awards. "Epic romance...smartly sex-positive and so good-naturedly shocking." --The New York Times Book Review. "Real tenderness and pathos...not only entertaining but affecting reading." --The Washington Post. "Their friends were the most bohemian, their parties the most risqué, their tortured love affair the most notorious in Europe. Diana Souhami tells a remarkable tale." --The Sunday Telegraph (U.K.) --This text refers to an out of print or unavailable edition of this title.

A fascinating story of two extraordinary lives soaked in the demi-monde at the fin-de-siecle with the world of the rich and artistic as its background. Unfortunately, this telling comes with some irritating costs. The book is studded with bizarrely extraneous footnotes: does any reader of this story really need to be told who Dante, Proust, Cocteau, Sappho, Gertrude Stein, Sarah Bernhardt (among many others) were? Also, the author interpolates little autobiographical asides that have nothing to do with the dual biography at hand and merely comes across as an egotistical affectation. When Souhami actually gets to the story at hand (which in fairness is most of the time), historical errors aside, she tells a wonderful tale of the sapphic world in turn-of-the-century Europe. Very well written when not marred by the author's idiosyncrasies.

Excellent Book about the lives of two incredible women who lived life on their terms and enriched

the literary and art world in Paris from 1900 to 1970.

An absolutely fascinating book about the lives and loves of two stimulating and brilliant women! A must read for those who are interested in women historically

I don't feel like this book offered anything more to the knowledge base than what was already written in Wild Hearts.

Probably the silliest attempt at biography I have ever read. Souhami drifts among dozens of interesting women as though she was at a buffet table. A taste of this and that. In between are uninteresting "discussions" into her own chaotic love life ( I guess). Affairs are all she has in common with the likes of Gertrude Stein and Romaine Brooks. They have proved their art, not she.

i'm not able to travel as often as i'd like, so i often pick up books i call "travel" or "time travel" books. they usually focus a lot on the setting and atmosphere and are set in wonderful, romantic places that are filled with people i'd like to meet. wild girls isn't a good choice if you want a very scholarly biography, but the style was more engaging and descriptive than many biographies i have read. i'm sorry to hear that some of the facts were incorrect and some interesting facts about romaine brooks' paintings were not included, but overall, i really enjoyed this book.i'll admit that i didn't know anything about barney or brooks when i started, but now i'm curious to learn more. i can understand the frustration people who were hoping for a longer story had, because this is a very, very short book. it probably would have been better if it were longer, but it's still an interesting read. it's main flaw is that it focuses on the cast just a bit too much. while the author makes sure to devote at least a chapter to the mother of each woman and each of their long-term lovers, less care is given to devoting enough time to the women the book is supposed to be about, and every person is so quickly introduced that you feel as if you've met the person once, had a wonderful and fascinating conversation, and then later followed the gossip about them to find out whatever happened to them. i would have enjoyed a longer book with more details and more stories. the theme of telling the story of the people through their love affairs is interesting, but not well executed here.the book also would have been much better if it included more of romaine's art, and more details on the pictures. many of them are mentioned in the book but not shown, and i found myself wanting to stop reading and run image searches for the art a lot.

Gray is a difficult colour to master. It is enigmatic, aloof. It can be warm, with tints of peach and pink, or cold, with tints of sapphire and indigo. But no one could ever doubt that American artist Romaine Brooks was a master of gray. From her mysterious, icy portraits of members of the belle ÃƒÂ©poque and the jazz age, to her preference for colorless fashions and dÃƒÂ©cor, to the melancholy of her own day to day existence, Brooks was almost the personification of the colour gray itself. It would take great skill to write a biography of such a woman. Therefore I was ecstatic to discover that Diana Souhami had taken on the task of writing a book on the entwined lives of Romaine Brooks and her long-time companion, Paris saloneuse Natalie Clifford Barney. Both American, both wealthy, both artistic, Barney and Brooks still made an odd pair. Barney was the ever-social butterfly, flitting from flower to flower, beautiful and flamboyant. Brooks was her exact opposite, a withdrawn, flighty creature from a background of insanity, who preferred to live in the shadows, alone. This sounds like perfect material for the talents of Souhami, who has already tackled the lives of such challenging individuals as Radclyffe Hall, Gertrude Stein and Greta Garbo. Souhami also wrote the award-winning "Selkirk's Island", untangling the threads of the life of Alexander Selkirk, the inspiration for Defoe's classic, "Robinson Crusoe". Yes, Brooks and Barney seemed in good hands. I cannot express, then, the disappointment that this anticipated book brought. Distressingly short not only for a biography of two distinct souls, but also an examination of the times in which they lived, the book is riddled with factual errors and blunders. Souhami begins her race by stumbling. In her Foreword she states plainly, one would say almost flippantly, of her use of the Internet as a main source of research-and it shows. The author appears to think that everything you find on the Web is factual, not realizing that the information to be found there is only as accurate as the knowledge of those posting it. This is a fatal error. Souhami seems almost dismissive of her own research, telling us about how much she enjoyed reading the pop-up advertisements she encountered while on the Net for such things as sexy chat, and even giving us a footnote detailing a pill that can help men lengthen the size of their endowment. Souhami further mars the book with the constant insertion of bits and pieces of her own past that, although well written, are disturbingly incongruous and intrusive and give the impression that she would much rather be talking about herself. Next, Souhami falters in her facts, tripping too many times to enumerate, but here are a few major potholes: Lady Mary "Minnie" Anglesey is said on page 40 to be "about to divorce her transvestite husband." Souhami then footnotes that Mary was married to Henry Cyril Paget, the 4th Marquess of Anglesey. This is a gross mistake. Mary Anglesey was indeed married to the 4th Marquess of Anglesey, but she was married to Henry Paget, not Henry Cyril Paget, the 5th Marquess of Anglesey, who was not only infamous for his flashy dressing-up

and obsession for jewelry, but was also Mary's own son (and, for the record, Henry Cyril Paget's wife's name was Lilian). Next we are told that the Italian poet Gabriele D'Annunzio's nickname for Brooks was "Cinerana". This is incorrect; his nickname for her was "Cinerina", meaning, "little gray one". Also, the Baroness Madeleine Deslandes was known as "Elsie", not "Ilsie". On page 141 we are told that Brooks described in a letter the "house" on Capri of the eccentric Marchesa Casati as "simply beautiful", but the author fails to point out that Casati's "house" was, in fact, the famous Villa San Michele, rented from Dr. Axel Munthe. Beguiling anecdotes also slip through the fingers of an author so proud of her diligent international research. No mention is made of the mystery revolving around Brooks' painting "The White Bird" and how some historians believe it is a portrait of Barney's lover, the renowned grand horizontal, Liane de Pougy. Nor are we told that the face of the cat in Brooks' portrait of Baroness Catherine D'Erlanger was deliberately painted to resemble that of her husband's. Nor do we hear of the intriguing story that, after becoming a virtual hermit in Nice, living in a room devoid of everything but a bed and table, and having given away all of her paintings, drawings and writings, beneath Romaine Brooks' death bed was found the only canvas she kept, her portrait of Luisa Casati. Also, there is no mention of the small book, written by Elizabeth de Gramont, another of Barney's paramours, on Brooks' work that was published in 1952. Nor that the normally pathologically reclusive Brooks granted a long interview with French writer Michel Desbrueres that appeared in the Parisian periodical "Bizarre" in 1968, just two years before her death. Souhami also claims that Brooks painted a portrait of artist Elizabeth Eyre de Lanux, but, oddly, there is no reference to this painting in any prior biography of Brooks or in any catalogue of her oeuvre. Has Souhami discovered a hitherto unknown painting? We are given no clue. Perhaps another fifteen minutes of research on the Internet would have cleared up all of this-or better yet some good old-fashioned investigatory legwork and elbow grease that Souhami's research sorely lacks. Next is the matter of Souhami's innumerable and annoying footnotes. She footnotes everyone and sundry with what she must have felt were charming and witty caricatures-Noel Coward is summed up as being "friendly with the lesbian haut monde", composer Prince Edmond de Polignac's only reference says "he died after eight years of marriage" and Luisa Casati is dubbed "the patron saint of exhibitionists". Such sketches are neither charming nor witty, and consistently get in the way of reading the text. As a reader, I also do not need to know such minutiae as how many seats there are in the Theatre du Chatelet in Paris, that Gluck's "Orfeo ed Euridice" was first performed in 1762, or the lyrics to "Auld Lang Syne". It is most interesting to note that even though the author strives to introduce us to every person in the book that some celebrated individuals such as Madame Eugenia Errazuris, a bright grand dame of the beau monde, are left floundering and

unannotated, while poet Anna de Noailles, writer Paul Morand, and interior designer, Elsie de Wolfe, each a distinguished sitter for Brooks, are not mentioned at all (nor is the fact that Brooks' portrait of de Wolfe was often sarcastically called "The White Goat", because of the small ceramic goat that sits beside the designer and mimics her simpering expression perfectly). And worst of all, these intrusive footnotes shine a glaring light on the fact that Souhami never footnotes any of her relevant and/or fascinating facts. How do we know that Liane de Pougy's asparagus soup congealed and her risotto went cold while she, at lunch, waited for writer Max Jacob to arrive, or that after being pelted by preserved cherries by boys at the Long Beach Hotel in New York, a young Natalie Barney ran into the arms of Oscar Wilde for comfort. Where does this information come from? Such charming tidbits require references for future researchers. And here is where Souhami's book fails the most-as a research tool and reference book for the future. Subsequent authors and students cannot use a book rife with easily correctable errors without perpetuating those same mistakes ad infinitum. As a highly respected writer, shame on you, Ms. Souhami. You should have known better.

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