

Free spirit of the revolution

Rebellious University of Oregon graduate Louise Bryant rediscovered

By Phil Lemman
Of the Emerald

"Louise Bryant was one of the ardent spirits of the (Russian) revolution."

"She was naive and untutored."

"She was a girl who would use anybody and anything to further her own ambition."

Louise Bryant is a woman long overlooked by history.

Little has been written about her, even though after her graduation from the University in 1909 she witnessed and wrote about one of the most tumultuous events of the 20th Century — the 1917 Russian revolution — and through her second husband, radical journalist John Reed, was associated with left wing political leaders in this country in the early 1900's.

Yet until actor Warren Beatty released *Reds*, his romanticized film version of Bryant's marriage to Reed and their adventures reporting the revolution, both Reed and Bryant had been consigned to relative obscurity.

Prior to the movie, what recognition Reed received was based primarily on his highly successful book about the revolution, *Ten Days That Shook the World*, long regarded as the most authoritative account of the revolution. An American socialist leader, Reed was treated as an insider and allowed access to documents other journalists never saw. He is the only American buried in the Kremlin, a place reserved for Soviet heroes.

If known at all, Bryant's popularity is from Diane Keaton's portrayal of her in the film.

People wanting to read books by or about John Reed are put on waiting lists at local libraries, but Bryant's two books on the Russian revolution, *Six Red Months in Russia* and *Mirrors on Moscow*, are easy to get from the University library. The Eugene Public Library doesn't have her books in its collection.

But if her literary works haven't stood the test of time, her personality has. She remains a vivid memory to those who knew her — although those memories create differing images.

To some she was a vivacious, charming, attractive woman — and a zealous socialist. To others she was only a shallow social climber, erratic and unprincipled, taking advantage of Reed's stature to make contacts.

She was not an academic standout, described by University Archivist Keith Richard as a "strong average student, no Phi Beta Kappa." The map in her senior thesis on the Modoc Indian War in southern Oregon mislabels Oregon and California.

She was active on campus in her two years at the University, playing the female lead in her senior class play, editing the University literary magazine, *Oregon Monthly*, and serving as art editor for the 1909 annual, then called *The Beaver*. She also was a charter member of the Zeta Iota Phi sorority, now Chi Omega.

But what made her stand out from the 303 other students at the University in 1908 — an unsophisticated, conservative school — was her flamboyant personality and lifestyle.

"I would say that she was a night person, and that studies came secondary," says Gladys McCready, a Eugene historian whose sister was also a Zeta Iota Phi charter member. "I think she pretty much went her own way and did her own thing, which was very avant-garde for those days."

"She was a girl who liked excitement."

McCready poured punch at sorority functions when she was a girl, and met Bryant there. "She was a character who would be very interesting to someone my age because she was one-of-a-kind," she says. "I can't remember any other person who dressed or looked like

she did."

Bryant looked spectacular for her day and age, "almost like a doll," McCready says. She had "quite a lot of coloring . . . much more than people ever wore in those days."

"She was never particularly well groomed and that was kind of a noticeable feature. I know the girls in the (sorority) house always felt that she wasn't too careful about her clothing. But she had nice clothing."

Campus life for someone like Louise, McCready says, would be "pretty dull."

But in town there was "some drinking, and some affairs going on, and that sort of thing, and I think that's what she entered into," McCready says.

"The story was that she was having a very ongoing affair with a man here in town."

The man was a prominent Eugene businessman and man about town. He and Bryant were once chased off the Foley Hot Springs resort with a shotgun after giving Bryant rides around the grounds in a wheelbarrow.

Bryant was not politically active on campus. "She's not a wild-eyed radical or anything," Richard says.

Things were not much different for her in Portland.



Photo courtesy of Oregon Historical Society, negative number 13358. Artist, John H. Trullinger.

After graduating with a liberal arts degree, Bryant moved to Portland and married dentist Paul Trullinger.

But her husband's friends and patients were the well-heeled residents of Portland Heights and the West Hills, not the bohemian writers and artists she sought.

She started writing poetry, most of which was never published, and began her political involvement, speaking in several western states on behalf of the women's suffrage movement.

Bryant's sincerity in her personal relationships and political associations is a lingering question. One of Reed's friends, Nina Faubion, wrote that Bryant was a "brain picker. She picked the brains of all she contacted."

Trullinger's cousin, Linley Chrichton, said "Louise was a very erratic person. She jumped into a project with much enthusiasm but soon tired of it and dropped it flat — just as she dropped Paul. She treated her men, her friends and her activities with equal abandon."

But, she continued, Louise could be "as charming as Cleopatra herself."

Mabel Dodge, one of Reed's former lovers and a prominent New York socialite, wrote that "the girl was clever with a certain Irish quickness, and very eager to get on. I think Reed was a stepping stone, and through

him she met a lot of people she wouldn't have met otherwise. It had not seemed to me that she cared very much for him."

But Reed wrote "In my life as in most lives, I guess, love plays a tremendous part. I've had love affairs, passionate happiness, wretched maladjustments; hurt deeply and been hurt. But at last I have found my friend and lover, thrilling and satisfying, closer to me than anyone has ever been. And now I don't care what comes."

Bryant followed Reed to Greenwich Village, headquarters for the blossoming radical movements of that time. Trullinger had a nervous breakdown after she left, and divorced her in 1916 for "cruel and inhuman treatment, personal indignities and desertion."

Both Reed and Bryant had affairs during their marriage. Bryant had an affair with playwright Eugene O'Neill and another in Moscow with her future husband, William Bullitt.

O'Neill later wrote a play about his relationship with Reed and Bryant, *Strange Interlude*, which won a Pulitzer Prize in 1928.

In June, 1917, Bryant left for England, determined to become a war correspondent. The State Department official who approved her passport request wrote "I suppose I will have to issue a passport to this wild woman. She is full of socialistic and ultra-modern ideas."

Bryant was one of seven female correspondents in Russia during the revolution. She was hired by a syndicate of 18 newspapers to cover the uprising from the woman's point of view. She wrote profiles of female revolutionaries, women's regiments in the Red Army and children caught in the war.

When the revolution ended, Bryant returned home alone to write *Six Red Months in Russia*, a book unabashed in its support of the new government. It was not a success. But when Reed returned home and wrote *Ten Days* in early 1919, his book went through four printings in five months.

Bryant then began speaking throughout the country defending the new Soviet government, soft-pedaling criticisms of the Bolsheviks and strongly opposing the intervention of American troops in the Russian civil war.

In Portland she told a crowd of 4,000 people about her experiences in Russia, her friendship with revolutionary leaders and about the popularity of the new government. The *Oregonian* reporter covering her speech said she hadn't changed much from her days in Portland, describing her as "much the same little radicalist and vigorous reformer."

In late 1919, Reed returned to Russia to work for the Bolsheviks. But his health, never strong, began to fail. She joined him in Russia in August, 1920, shortly before he became bedridden with typhus. He died Oct. 17, three days short of his 33rd birthday.

In 1923, she married Bullitt, the U.S. ambassador to France. They had one daughter, Anne, who now lives in Ireland.

Bryant was divorced by Bullitt in 1930, again for "personal indignities." She began drinking heavily and using drugs and spent some time in a sanitarium. But the cure was only temporary.

Louise Bryant died in 1936 in Paris, a forgotten woman. The official cause was listed as cerebral hemorrhage.

While not known for her journalistic works, a fitting epitaph for her comes from a book on female journalists, *Ladies of the Press*.

"She was well known wherever radical thought foregathered, but little was heard of her in the few years preceding her death. Life flamed high for her, then burned low. She represented an era in journalism which seems to have come to an end."

PIZZA PETE'S ITALIAN KITCHEN
ALL YOU CAN EAT!
SPAGHETTI SPECIAL WITH GARLIC BREAD
\$2.75 TUESDAY ONLY
5 P.M. to 9 P.M.
2673 Willamette • 484-0996
Next to the Black Forest Tavern
Delivery Service

"TROUBLE IN WORKERS' PARADISE".
WEDNESDAY,
MARCH 10,
12:30 pm
EMU FORUM
LECTURE ON THE POLISH CRISIS BY NICHOLAS G. ANDREWS, FORMER DEPUTY CHIEF OF MISSION AT THE AMERICAN EMBASSY IN WARSAW.
SPONSORED BY THE UO RUSSIAN AND EAST EUROPEAN STUDIES CENTER

Self Service Typing
IBM selectric
carbon cartridge
Kinko's • Copies
764 E. 13th 344-7894