



ERNEST Hemingway, D. H. Lawrence, Hart Crane and Gertrude Stein called her a profound influence on their writing.

Others called her a drunk, a thief, a gambler, and a whore. In her short, frenzied life, she may well have been all that and more. It doesn't matter.

All that matters is that Winnipeg-born Mary MacLane was one of the most widely-read and path-breaking writers of her time.

By speaking her mind about everything from social inequality to the joys of same-sex sex, she gave voice to an entire generation of hushed Edwardian women before dying in obscurity.

The Story of Mary MacLane, By Herself, a classic triumph of imagination over experience, appeared in the spring of 1902. When Mary wasn't complaining about toothbrushes or the dullness of local society, she talked with unrestrained passion about how much she loved her brilliant mind, her slim body, the Devil himself (she wanted to have his child), and (gasp) other women.

The effect was electrifying.

Reporters from across the continent sought interviews. Songs were written about her and her "Devil." The popular vaudeville team of Weber and Fields included a burlesque of her book in their Broadway revue of 1902. Cigar manufacturers and booze distributors wanted her name on their products. Buffalo, New York named a new tugboat after her. Young girls everywhere wanted to be just like Mary. Those who misbehaved like her were called MacLanesque.

Mary was immediately pilloried in the local press, banned from libraries and condemned from the pulpit.

Reverend Mr. Gribble of the Episcopal Church likely spoke for many of Mary's neighbours when he revealed that while he had not personally read her book, he was quite sure Mary's writings were the ravings of a perverted, low and coarse mind. Others said she should be locked up. The book reviewer for the New York Times said she should be spanked.

In its first month, Story sold an astonishing 100,000 copies. Before long, her slim red volume was available around the world in 36 languages.

The author was just 19.

a newspaper feature story

published in the Winnipeg Free Press

