**Arlen, Michael (1895-1956)**

Michael Arlen, although now largely forgotten, was one of the most successful novelists of the 1920s. Born Dikran Kouyoumdjian in Ruse, Bulgaria, to Armenian parents, Arlen’s family came to Britain in the early 1900s, and he attended Malvern College. He briefly studied at the University of Edinburgh before moving to London in the mid 1910s and embarking on a career as a writer, initially for A. R. Orage’s magazine, *The New Age*. His first publication was a collection of his pieces from this, published as *The London Venture* in 1920, and it was at this point that he began writing as Michael Arlen.

Arlen produced a steady stream of short stories and novels throughout the early 1920s, all offering a similar whimsical, romantic glimpse of young London socialites, culminating in 1924 with the publication of *The Green Hat*. It was an immediate success (selling 150,000 copies that year alone), and went on to become one of the bestselling novels of the 1920s, enabling Arlen to fund Noel Coward’s play, *The Vortex*. The novel’s doomed love triangle – with the apparently-fallen woman, Iris Storm, in her fast car, and sporting a cloche hat, at its centre – was thought to perfectly capture the “sophisticated 1920s.” It went on to be performed as a play on both sides of the Atlantic, and was turned into a film, *The Woman of Affairs* (1928), starring Greta Garbo. Arlen and his novel quickly became short-hand for a popular conception of the 1920s, and both are referred to in a slew of novels from the time (Michaelis, for instance, in D. H. Lawrence’s *Lady Chatterley’s Lover*, is thought to be based on him). Arlen moved to the United States in 1941 and continued to write until his death, experimenting with a range of genres, including science fiction, but he never again wrote anything as successful as *The Green Hat*.

**References and Further Reading**

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