



Queen Silver : The Godless Girl (Women's Studies (Amherst, N.Y.)

Wendy Mcelroy

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When she was just eight-years-old, a little girl with the odd name of Queen Silver stunned citizens and scholars alike in pre-1920s Los Angeles by hosting six remarkable public lectures on Darwin and Einstein, sponsored by the London Society of Science. A child prodigy and the daughter of famed socialist activist Grace Vern Silver, founder of the Industrial Workers of the World (IWW), Queen Silver was the subject of Cecil B. De Mille's film *The Godless Girl*. She matured to become an international feminist, atheist, and socialist, living a remarkable and inspiring life, of which few feminists today are aware.

Queen Silver: The Godless Girl is a fiery and profound biography of one of America's most amazing feminist thinkers, a woman who remained an active advocate of intellectual independence to the moment of her death in 1998 at the age of 86. Prolific feminist writer Wendy McElroy sympathetically chronicles the life of Queen Silver from personal interviews with her friends, published reports, letters, and a vast library of the family's personal papers. What emerges is a life like none other. A well-known thinker by the time she was 11-years-old, giving speeches titled "Pioneers of Freethought," "The Rights of Children," and "Science and the Workers," Queen challenged three-time presidential candidate William Jennings Bryan to a debate on evolution (he declined); organized an atheist group at her high school; and left home at 15 to marry a doctor three-times her age, which later became the source of a highly publicized divorce.

As a teenager, Queen once served as a defense lawyer for her mother and won. She founded the scholarly and well-reviewed *Queen Silver Magazine*, and overcame personal tragedy and political persecution during World War I's red scare. Queen worked as an extra in movies directed by D.W. Griffith, attended violent and controversial meetings of the IWW, and went into hiding at the advent of McCarthyism. In her later years, Queen received many freethought awards, remained active in the American Civil Liberties Union, and campaigned hard for public libraries.

McElroy tells a complete story by profiling Queen's mother, lecturer and feminist writer Grace Vern Silver, whose struggles for justice in the IWW found her running for Congress, and whose personal education motivated her to inspire the genius in her daughter.

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