

***E. PHILLIPS
OPPENHEIM***



***A DAUGHTER
OF ASTREA***

E. Phillips Oppenheim

A Daughter of Astrea

Enriched edition.

Introduction, Studies and Commentaries by Bella Remington

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Introduction

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Between glittering civility and shadowed coercion, *A Daughter of Astrea* turns on the perilous bargain between private conscience and public power. In this novel by E. Phillips Oppenheim, the conflict is rendered with an elegance that never effaces its stakes, inviting readers to watch how charm, ceremony, and courtesy can be repurposed as instruments of influence. The title's promise of lineage and allegiance frames a story in which identity is less a fixed inheritance than a field of negotiation, and where safety is never merely a matter of doors and locks but of loyalties, perceptions, and the art of seeming.

E. Phillips Oppenheim, among the most widely read British authors of popular fiction in the early twentieth century, built his reputation on swift, urbane tales that mingle romance with intrigue. *A Daughter of Astrea* belongs to that tradition, aligning with the suspense genre while drawing on the social textures of high society and the undercurrents that ripple beneath it. The book emerges from the era that made Oppenheim a household name, when international tensions and cosmopolitan glamour fed the public appetite for stylish, fast-moving narratives. Its setting is distinctly cosmopolitan in feel, moving through the milieus where diplomacy, money, and reputation circulate together.

Without spoiling its turns, the premise introduces a poised young woman whose past and prospects place her in the orbit of men and institutions accustomed to getting their way. Invitations are extended that cannot be blithely refused; confidences are offered that arrive freighted with

unspoken conditions; and choices take shape in rooms where every gesture is a test. Oppenheim builds the opening movement from encounters and observations that gradually tighten into a net of obligation and opportunity. The immediate pleasures are situational—the dinner, the ball, the ride, the quiet interview—yet each scene carries a pressure gradient, as though decorum itself were a veil stretched over hazard.

Readers can expect Oppenheim's signature blend of polish and propulsion: crisp scene-setting, economical dialogue, and a narrative voice that keeps pace without sacrificing poise. The tone is confident and cool, favoring implication over exposition; motivations are revealed through conduct, misdirection, and sudden clarity rather than extended moralizing. Romance is present as a current rather than a destination, entwined with calculations of trust and advantage. Suspense accrues less from violence than from anticipation—doors opened at the wrong moment, names overheard, alliances inferred. The style makes the book inviting to read in long sittings, its chapters arranged as a sequence of invitations to continue and compare appearances with outcomes.

Thematically, the novel explores the maintenance of selfhood under surveillance—how a person becomes legible to others and at what cost. Duty confronts desire, and the border between the two shifts with new information and changing sympathies. Oppenheim treats power as performance: titles, uniforms, and ceremonies operate as costumes through which authority is claimed and contested. Social mobility and gendered expectation add further layers, since a woman's agency must often be exercised obliquely, through reading rooms and reading people. Throughout, the book interrogates justice and expediency, suggesting that

the pursuit of the good rarely arrives unaccompanied by compromise, and that neutrality is itself a choice.

For contemporary readers, *A Daughter of Astrea* remains pertinent because it dramatizes soft power in action—the pressures of image-making, the ethics of secrecy, and the fragility of trust in a networked world of favors and debts. Its interest in manufactured narratives and strategic silence echoes today’s contests over reputation and information, while its attention to a capable female protagonist anticipates ongoing debates about voice and visibility within male-dominated structures. The novel also offers an alternative to spectacle-driven thrillers: it imagines risk as something cultivated in salons and antechambers, where consent is engineered, and the stakes are measured in futures, not just in fortunes.

Approached on its own terms, the book is both entertainment and study, a dancer’s movement through a ballroom whose floorboards creak. It rewards patience with the subtleties of demeanor, the chess-like testing of boundaries, and the small inflections that shift entire relationships. Those new to Oppenheim will find a concise gateway to his larger body of work; longtime admirers will recognize his command of atmosphere and his taste for moral impasses resolved without sermon. Read for its surfaces and for what swims beneath them, and you will see why this early twentieth-century tale still speaks to a century in which appearances govern outcomes.

Synopsis

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E. Phillips Oppenheim's *A Daughter of Astrea* introduces a poised, self-contained heroine whose association with the name Astrea gives immediate weight to her presence and purpose. The opening establishes a discreet encounter that draws an observant outsider into her affairs, hinting at obligations older and larger than any single person. The atmosphere is one of guarded conversation, careful glances, and subtle tests of loyalty. Without declaring its secrets, the narrative signals that the woman's past and her claim—whatever Astrea represents—will compel choices under scrutiny, and that those who cross her path must decide whether to assist, oppose, or remain prudently distant.

Early chapters trace the growing entanglement between private inclination and public danger. The outsider, alert to nuance but initially reluctant, recognizes that the heroine's movements are measured against constraints she can neither openly name nor easily escape. Small courtesies become probes; invitations prove consequential; and favors carry terms. Oppenheim uses these incremental steps to draw the reader from social quiet into quiet peril, allowing hints to surface about rival interests circling the woman's claim. The question of who truly understands Astrea—and who merely seeks to exploit it—emerges, framing a conflict where discretion weighs as heavily as daring.

As the circle widens, the book moves through salons, offices, and inconspicuous meeting places where information trades hands in the form of innuendo as often as documents. The heroine's reserve operates as both

shield and strategy, while the observer's vantage affords the reader a steady sightline through shifting alliances. Oppenheim's pacing emphasizes misdirection and poise, so that simple gestures can alter the balance of a scene. The world beyond the rooms—finance, influence, and rumor—presses inward, and the name Astrea acquires the force of a pledge, inviting faith from some and calculation from others.

A measured revelation reorients earlier episodes without collapsing the mystery. Rather than unmasking everything, the narrative clarifies what the heroine must carry alone and what can be shared. The observer grasps that Astrea is not merely a title or inheritance but a responsibility whose legitimacy must be proved in conduct as well as claim. Travel, whether across borders or through circles of authority, functions as a proving ground. The heroine engages adversaries who prefer shadows, answering them not by theatrics but by steadiness, and each negotiation sets the terms for the next encounter, rounding the story's moral and strategic stakes.

Pressure mounts as rival designs begin to cohere into a recognizable threat. Signals are intercepted, meetings are staged to look accidental, and the costs of a misstep grow plain. The outsider faces a decision: remain a spectator who preserves safety or accept exposure by standing closer to the heroine's cause. Oppenheim lets the suspense accrue through timing rather than spectacle, arranging reversals that feel earned without announcing final answers. The phrase Daughter of Astrea becomes a test in itself—how much the heroine can concede without surrender, and how far adversaries will go to claim influence they cannot publicly acknowledge.

The emotional center strengthens as duty and affection intersect. The heroine's composure, once merely enigmatic,

reads as chosen discipline, and secondary figures reveal their limits under strain. Oppenheim examines the gap between what can be said outright and what must be inferred, letting the characters discover whether trust can be fashioned from partial truths. Social conventions and political convenience apply pressure in opposite directions, forcing a reckoning with the difference between legitimacy and power. The story respects the reader's curiosity, preparing a confrontation that promises consequences while withholding definitive disclosure of its most delicate outcomes.

A Daughter of Astrea achieves its effect by fusing romantic restraint with the quiet mechanics of influence, a combination characteristic of Oppenheim's work. The book's enduring resonance lies in its inquiry into what constitutes a rightful claim—blood, consent, service, or recognition—and how personal conscience operates within entangled public demands. Without spoiling its final turns, the narrative leaves the sense that measured courage can redirect events as effectively as spectacle. In treating identity as both burden and compass, the story invites reflection on justice pursued without fanfare and on loyalties proven in the spaces between words.

Historical Context

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E. Phillips Oppenheim (1866–1946) achieved wide popularity as a British writer of international thrillers around the turn of the twentieth century, publishing swiftly plotted novels for a mass audience in Britain and the United States. *A Daughter of Astrea* belongs to this milieu, in which readers expected glamorous settings, political stakes, and deftly staged encounters across borders. Oppenheim wrote for the circulating-library and magazine markets that flourished after the demise of the three-volume novel in the 1890s, and his fiction spoke to contemporaries preoccupied by Europe's shifting power balance, the etiquette of high society, and the porous boundaries between private wealth and public authority.

Much of Oppenheim's fiction unfolded in the interconnected spaces of London, Paris, and continental capitals, where embassies, legations, and chancelleries coordinated diplomacy under constitutional monarchies and parliamentary governments. The British Foreign Office at Whitehall, elite clubs in St James's, and cosmopolitan grand hotels such as the Savoy and the Ritz furnished recognizable backdrops. Since Anthony Hope's *The Prisoner of Zenda* (1894), writers often invented small European principalities—the Ruritanian mode—to stage succession and treaty dramas. Express railways, the Orient Express (since 1883), and fast steamships sped travel, while telegraph networks and expanding telephone use enabled the instantaneous communications diplomats—and Oppenheim's readers—understood.

The geopolitical climate that framed Oppenheim's early work was defined by Great Power rivalry. The Triple Alliance (1882) and the Franco-Russian Alliance (1894) set the stage for the Entente Cordiale between Britain and France (1904) and the Anglo-Russian Convention (1907), consolidating competing blocs. Crises at Fashoda (1898) and in Morocco (1905–1906; 1911) dramatized colonial ambitions and German–British tensions, while HMS Dreadnought's launch in 1906 symbolized the naval arms race. The 1908 annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina and recurrent Balkan turbulence underscored Europe's volatility. Such developments supplied the contemporary plausibility for tales of secret conferences, delicate treaties, and careers made or broken in drawing rooms.

Espionage and counter-espionage moved from rumor to recognizable institutions during these years. Britain created the Secret Service Bureau in 1909, later dividing into domestic (MI5) and foreign (MI6) branches, while the Official Secrets Act 1911 tightened controls on information. A vibrant press culture, including the Daily Mail (founded 1896), heightened spy scares and international anxieties. Popular "invasion literature," from Erskine Childers's *The Riddle of the Sands* (1903) to William Le Queux's bestsellers, primed audiences for conspiracies and covert missions. Oppenheim's narratives drew on the same atmosphere, portraying polished protagonists whose social access doubled as strategic advantage in matters of state.

British society at the fin de siècle and under Edward VII was marked by conspicuous display and dense networks of influence. Country-house weekends, Mayfair salons, and exclusive clubs mediated political and financial alliances as much as leisure. The halfpenny press broadened the public sphere, and scandals could swiftly alter reputations. Diplomacy itself often unfolded in semi-private settings—

banquet tables, opera boxes, or Riviera resorts—where courtiers, ministers, financiers, and journalists mingled. Such milieus, familiar to Oppenheim’s readership, legitimated plots hinging on discretion, etiquette, and the social performance of rank. They also provided a stage for conflicts between hereditary privilege and emergent meritocratic ambition.

Economic and technological modernity heightened both opportunity and anxiety. Under the classical gold standard, the City of London acted as a global financial hub, while shocks like the Baring Crisis (1890) and the Panic of 1907 exposed systemic fragility. International cartels and syndicates influenced markets and, by extension, politics. Marconi’s wireless demonstrations (including the 1901 transatlantic signal) supplemented undersea cables, and typewriters, telephones, and cipher systems standardized bureaucratic work. These innovations made plausible the rapid exchanges, discreet transfers, and documentary puzzles frequent in Oppenheim’s fiction, where a mislaid cable or intercepted code could recalibrate personal fortunes and diplomatic calculus.

Debates over gender and authority formed an additional context. The “New Woman” and organized suffrage—through the National Union of Women’s Suffrage Societies (1897) and the Women’s Social and Political Union (1903)—challenged assumptions about women’s roles. At the same time, hostesses and salonnières wielded real soft power in elite politics, while legislation such as the Qualification of Women (County and Borough Councils) Act 1907 expanded local civic participation. Oppenheim frequently wrote capable female characters who navigate salons, embassies, and boardrooms, reflecting both the persistence of patriarchal structures and contemporary acknowledgement