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Women Novelists and their Novels in the First Half of Twentieth Century

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Abstract— *For nearly a century and half- from Fielding to the last of the great Victorians- The English novel swept along on a tide of creative energy which reached full power in Dickens's careless vitality and exuberance. Dickens neglected form and style because his need for utterance was so urgent. Later novelists, George Meredith and Henry James among them, had less to say and could afford time to say it more carefully and when after 1914, creative energy became still less abundant, disproportionate attention began to be given to theories of fiction. But other phases of the Twentieth-Century novel intervened. As the masculine force and creative energy died down among men writers, women seem to take those qualities. Women had written fine novels in the early years of the twentieth century.The present paper discusses the women novelist and their novels written in the first half of twentieth century. It also discusses various issues presented in their novels.*

Keywords— *Women Novelist, Novelists of Twentieth Century, Women novelists and Their Novels.*

I. INTRODUCTION

Round about 1910-12, when Wells, Bennett, Galsworthy, and Conrad were maintaining the prestige of the traditional type of English novel, a group ofwomen novelist began to produce able and promising work. Some of the major women novelists who contributed genuinely to the trend setting move are discussed here.

II. ELIZABETH ROBINS (1862-1952)

Elizabeth Robins was an American actress, novelist, playwright, short story author, novelist, suffragist campaigner, journalist, and theatre manager who spent most of her career in Britain. As a dramatist, she is best known for her play '*Votes for Women' (1907)*, which played a central role in the suffrage movement. Her anonymously published and performed play *Alan's Wife (1893),* coauthored with Lady Florence Bell, explored taboo themes such as infanticide, postpartum depression, and euthanasia. She wrote many works of fiction under the pseudonym C. E. Raimond. Her unpublished works, housed in the New York University Library's Fales Collection, are extensive and largely unexplored, and include letters, diaries, journals, promptbooks, plays, novels, and other prose works. Robins wrote constantly, both nonfiction and fiction, and continued to spearhead the women's suffrage movement. She helped direct the feminist journal Time and Tide in the 1920s. She began to publish in the nineties, continued to produce novels marked by a combination of feminine insight and masculine vigour. While Robins was busy being a successful actress, she had to leave England to look for her brother in Alaska, who had gone missing. Her experiences searching for her brother led her to write her novels, *'Magnetic North (1904)'* and *'Come and Find Me (1908)'*. Before this, she had written novels such as *George Mandeville's Husband (1894), The New Moon (1895), Below the Salt* and *Other Stories (1896)* and several others under the name of C. E. Raimond.

III. A BRITISH WRITER AND SUFFRAGIST (1879-1946)

May Sinclair, a restless genius, did not settle to any one type or style. Her book *'The Devine Fire' (1904)* is a long and detailed study of a poetic genius, in which character and discussion are of equal interest. The difficulty of creating a literary genius in a functional work is evident, and perhaps May Sinclair never succeeds in making Savage KeithRickman the Keats-like person he seems intended to be. Though he talks perfect Greek, he is tortured by an imperfect control of English; he has the soul of a young Sophocles battling with that of a junior journalist in the body of a dissipated young Cockney…the child of' Ellas and of'Olywell Street. But even if the whole extensive plan is not realized with uniform success, 'The Devine Fire' is nevertheless a book of uncommon merit.

May Sinclair showed much ability in portraying drab and mean lives, with their jumbled pathos, kindness, and folly in the novels 'The Devine Fire' and *'The Combined Maze'(1913)*. Subsequently she came under the influence of Freud's psycho-analytical theories and of Dorothy Richardson's literary methods.*'May Oliver'*

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*(1919)*babbles with the 'Oedipus complex', spiritual inhibitions, fear of insanity, and thwarted desires. Though always interesting 'May Oliver' is rarely free from the desolating sense of 'horrible tension.'[1]The book *'The life and Death of Harriett Frean(1922)'* produces an impression that it , in its immediate effect, almost as vivid as that of Arnolds Bennett's *'The old wives* Tale. The omission of detail, however, robs Harriett Frean of the rich sense of humanity present in Bennett's novel, and little remains in the reader's memory but the impression of an ugly life. Harriett Frean was encouraged by childhood to strive consciously after 'beautiful behaviour', but the deliberate cultivation of 'her own moral beauty' led to a narrow idealism indistinguishable from disastrous selfishness. The book is also marred by passages of excessive realism,[2] through May Sinclair's tiny realistic touches are always significant.

IV. DEMOLITION OF FOLLIESAND PRETENCESOF SEVERAL GENERATIONSBY ROSE MACAULAY (1881-1958)

Rose Macaulay entered upon fiction as an acute social critic and her brilliance was almost insolent, for she appeared to turn no more than half an eye upon the world. 'Half an eye is enough,' she seemed to say; 'who would need more to detect the palpable follies of this madly comic and tragically delirious world?' In a succession of satirical novels she demolished the follies and pretences of several generations, and her penfalters for lack of other victims.*Orphan Island (1924)* was little more than a satirical paraphrase of Victorian history-too easy game for her keen and glittering weapons. *Potterism (1920)*, the first of the novels to show fully Rose Macaulay's spirit of lively satire- was dedicated to the 'unsentimental precisians in thought, who have, on this confused, inaccurate, and emotional planet, no fit habitation.''*Potterism'* is a synonym for the discarded term 'philistinism'-the worship of commercial success, 'the booming of the second-rate', the admiration of popular things.By the time she wrote *Staying with Relations (1930)* Rose Macaulay had obviously exhausted the satiric vein and there was little inducement to look with interest to further books for her.

Emile Rose Macaulay's first novel, *'Abbots Verney(1906)'* was followed by a sequence of more fictional works, but they made little impact and weren't successful. Thereafter her first successful novel titled *'The Lee Shore(1912)'* was awarded the first prize in a competition.During the First World War, she worked in the British Propaganda Department, serving as a volunteer nurse and a land girl. Later, she became a civil servant in the War Office.After the war, Rose Macaulay concentrated on prose and wrote a series of satirical comic novels emphasizing on the irrationalities of those times. Her first best-seller, was *'Potterism(1920)'*, followed by *'Dangerous Ages'* in 1921.Her satirical novel titled *'Told by an Idiot(1923)'* was proved to be a considerable success. Subsequently, she wrote several other works such as *'Orphan Island' (1924), 'Crewe Train' (1926),* and *'Keeping Up Appearances' (1928)*.Apart from being a novelist, she also served as a journalist and an essayist, publishing some of her more serious works in two collections: *'A Casual Commentary' (1925)* and *'Catchwords and Claptrap' (1926).* In 1932, she published a historical novel titled *'They Were Defeated'* which was based on the life of the poet Robert Herrick. Further, Rose Macaulay published several other works including*: 'Going Abroad' (1934), 'Personal Pleasures' (1935), 'I Would Be Private' (1937),* and *'The Writings of E. M. Forster' (1938).*She published no books during the war. She returned to literature with her travel writings *'They Went to Portugal(1946)*'. It was followed by *'Evelyn Waugh' (1946)* and *'Fabled Shore: From the Pyrenees to Portugal By Road' (1949).* She later returned to fiction with the novel *'The World My Wilderness(1950)*' set against the backdrop of life after the Second World War.Her last novel *'The Towers of Trebizond(1956)',* was a comical story about her eccentric aunt's attempt to convert Muslims in Turkey to Anglicanism.

V. FRAGMENTARY METHODOF PRESENTATIONBY VIRGINIA WOOLF (1882-1941)

As the youngest daughter of Sir Leslie Stephen, Virginia Woolf, original name in full Adeline Virginia Stephen lived in early years amid a scholarly circle such as that glimpsed in her first ad simplest novel, *The Voyage Out (1915)* which presents no difficulty to those who enjoy good talk and are satisfied with action on the mental plane alone. *The Voyage Out* is to some extent reminiscent of Meredith's style, but in atmosphere it has little of the sharpness, the astringency, the hard clear outlines of Meredith. On the contrary, it has a golden radiance; its outlines are tremulous, like a landscape scene through a heat-haze; and the whole book is touched by an extra ordinary sensitiveness, both emotionally and intellectually. If *The Voyage Out* has an affinity with the work of any other writer, it is with E. M. Foster's novels. There is the same sense of life so delicately poised, of people so sensitively balanced in thought and feeling, that

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the harsh breath of common life would cause the very structure of their culture to topple.

About the middle of the nineteen-twenties, in a pamphlet called *Mr Bennett and Mrs Brown*, Virginia Woolf prophesied that we were on the verge of a new great age in English literature. She pleaded, however, that for the present we must 'tolerate this spasmodic, the obscure, the fragmentary, the failure', because (she thought) the young writers were feeling their way towards a new method of portraying character in fiction. The improbabilities over which many readers stumbled in her *Orlando*(1928) would be accepted without a moments surprise if presented in verse. In her story of Elizabeth Barrett Browning's dog, *Flush (1933),* she introduces a world of sensation in which smell is the liveliest sense, as it evidently is to a dog; and invariably in reading Virginia Woolf's books, it is essential that all channels of perception should be open and unobstructed. Reason must sometimes be held in check, as in the case of *Orlando.*

Virginia's most famous works include the novels *Mrs Dalloway (1925), To the Lighthouse (1927)* and*Orlando (1928)*, and the book-length essay *A Room of One's Own (1929),* with its famous dictum, "A woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction." In some of her novels she moves away from the use of plot and structure to employ stream-of-consciousness to emphasise the psychological aspects of her characters.

VI. ADMIRABLE QUALITIESOFWINIFRED HOLTBY (1898-1935)

Winifred Holtby'snovels was torn between her passion for writing and her conviction that she must work for understanding and peace between peoples. Her problem was unresolved when she dies at the age of thirty seven in 1936 and how much it troubled her is made clear in the biography of her by Vera Brittain and also in her own correspondence in letters to her friend.

Her first two novels, *Anderby Wold (1923)* and *The Crowded Street (1924)* established a recurrent theme: the quest for independence, and its cost. Realistic regional novels, they incorporated satire, an element which strengthened in her next three novels, *The Land of Green Ginger (1927), Poor Caroline (1931),* and *Mandoa, Mandoa (1933).* Increasingly ambitious, all these novels are unpretentiously direct and witty in style, imaginative in using Holtby's own experience, and firmly focused on social and political problems. The latter two novels also moved away from Yorkshire, to London and an imagined Abyssinia respectively. Among the other seven books she published are a fine pioneering critical study of *Virginia Woolf (1932)*; *The Astonishing Island (1933)*, a satire; a feminist treatise, *Women and a Changing Civilisation (1934); Truth is not Sober (1934)*, a collection of short stories; and a collection of poems, *The Frozen Earth (1935).* A play attacking the rise of fascism, *Take Back Your Freedom,* was published posthumously, as were a further volume of short stories and two selections from her lively correspondence.

Her long novel *South Riding (1936)*, published posthumously, was enthusiastically received and wide read. In this book she combined admirable qualities as a novelist with a deep concern for social justice, creating a gallery of characters and extracting story interests from the doings of a Municipal Council in her native Yorkshire.

VII. WRITEROFSHORT-STORIESKATHERINE MANSFIELD (1888-1923)

Katherine Mansfield, born in New Zealand became famous first as a writer of short stories which in some respects neutralised in English the manner of Tchekov. As a teenager, she had a few stories published in her high school's magazine. In 1903, she and her sisters were enrolled at the Queen's College in London, England. Katherine perfected her cello skills and worked as an editor for the school's newspaper. While she finished her education, she travelled across Europe, and in 1906, she went home to New Zealand for several years before returning to London.

She was especially happy in her studies of children, whom she made charming and touching without sentimentalising them or abating the natural realism which is under woven with fantasy in the child's life.. These deservedly increased her fame, for there are few finer expressions of a sensitive spirit and an exquisite mind. In 1910, Katherine Mansfield began writing more regularly, and her work was being published. Editor John Middleton Murry rejected a story she sent into the magazine Rhythm, so she sent him her story *The Woman at the Store*, which he accepted. Katherine Mansfield and John Murry engaged in a romantic relationship after the submission of this story. The two were married in 1918. During this time, Mansfield published several stories, including *How Pearl Button Was Kidnapped*, *A Dill Pickle*, and *Millie*. Due to her continuous affairs with other men and women, her relationship with Murry was very unstable, and they continuously separated and reunited, although they never divorced. Mansfield's health began to decline just as her work started receiving international attention. She was diagnosed with tuberculosis in 1917. Despite her health, she published two major collections, Bliss in 1920, and The Garden

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Party in 1922. Murry edited her journals and letters after she died.[3]

VIII. SERIOUS DETECTIVEWOMANNOVELISTS DOROTHY SAYERS(1893-1957)

Dorothy Sayers broke new ground for the 'serious' woman novelist by specializing in detective fiction. She was frequently more ingenious in spinning a plot than convincing or interesting in unspinning it, and the character of her amateur investigator of crime, Lord Peter Wimsey, usually counted for more than the mysteries he solved. The Wimsey books are for the most part better as novels than as detective novels; they have wit, humour, good-character drawing and a quality of high seriousness imparted to them by the author's religious sense, which compels her to view murder as a mortal sin-as a spiritual outrage- not simply as the starting-point of a puzzle procuring thrills for readers and royalties for authors.

Dorothy Sayer's intricate ingenuity can be judged from *The Nine Tailors (1934), Gaudy Night (1934)* in which the detective element is apt to seem annoyingly intrusive and her humour and common sense from *Murder Must Advertise (1933)*. She abandoned detective fiction for religious writings and radio drama before the end of 1930's, but other woman were among the chief providers of crime novels for the rest of half century.

IX. AROMAN3TICAND HARROWING NOVELISTROSAMOND LEHEMANN (1901-1990)

The transition from the ferment of youthful ecstasy to the far from untroubled deaths of mature experience can be tracked in Rosamond's Lehmann's novels from *Dusty Answer (1927)* to *The Ballad and the Source (1944)*.The life of Rosamond Lehmann (1901-1990) was as romantic and harrowing as that of any of her fictional heroines. She enjoyed an idyllic childhood in the Thames valley, and she was much pursued while at Cambridge, but an early marriage to Leslie Runciman was wretchedly unhappy. The phenomenal success of her shocking, first novel, Dusty Answer gave her the means to run off with and eventually marry the glamorous maverick, WoganPhilipps. They lived an apparently charmed existence in Oxfordshire, the golden couple at the very heart of Bloomsbury society. But as Rosamond's novels like *Invitation to the Waltz* and*The Weather in the Streets* became ever more successful, Wogan started on a series of affairs, finally disappearing to the Spanish Civil War, while Rosamond embarked on a tempestuous relationship with Goronwy Rees. When Rees left her she began the most important love affair of her life with the poet, Cecil Day Lewis. Nine years later, he abandoned her for the young actress, Jill Balcon – a betrayal from which Rosamond never recovered. A few years later her daughter, Sally, died at the age of 24, an unendurable loss which led Rosamond into spiritualism in an attempt to find her[5].

X. SHORT STORY WRITERELIZABETH BOWEN (1899-1973)

Elizabeth Bowen's work, wider in emotional range, reached its best in *Death of the Heart(1938),* a movingly perceptive study of disrupting effects of accelerated emotional development in a young girl whose mental development proceeds at the normal slower pace. Elizabeth Bowen, in full Elizabeth Dorothea Cole Bowen, a British novelist and short-story writer who employed a finely wrought prose style in fictions frequently detailing uneasy and unfulfilling relationships among the upper-middle class. *The Death of the Heart*, the title of one of her most highly praised novels, might have served for most of them. Bowen was born of the Anglo-Irish gentry and spent her early childhood in Dublin, as related in her autobiographical fragment *Seven Winters (1942),* and at the family house she later inherited at Kildorrery, County Cork. The history of the house is recounted in *Bowen's Court (1942),* and it is the scene of her novel *The Last September (1929)*, which takes place during the troubles that preceded Irish independence.

When she was 7, her father suffered a mental illness, and she departed for England with her mother, who died when Elizabeth was 12. An only child, she lived with relatives on the Kentish coast.With a little money that enabled her to live independently in London and to winter in Italy, Bowen began writing short stories at 20. Her first collection, *Encounters*, appeared in 1923. It was followed in 1927 by *The Hotel*, which contains a typical Bowen heroine—a girl attempting to cope with a life for which she is unprepared. *The Last September* is an autumnal picture of the Anglo-Irish gentry. *TheHouse in Paris (1935)*, another of Bowen's highly praised novels, is a story of love and betrayal told partly through the eyes of two children. During World War II, Bowen worked for the Ministry of Information in London and served as an air raid warden. Her novel set in wartime London, *TheHeat of the Day (1949),* is among her most significant works. The war also forms the basis for one of her collections of short stories, *The Demon Lover (1945*. Her essays appear in Collected Impressions (1950) and Afterthought (1962). Bowen's last book, *Pictures and Conversations (1975)*, is an introspective, partly autobiographical collection of essays and articles[6].

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XI. SUPREME WOMEN NOVELISTIVY COMPTONBURNETT (1884-1969)

If expert contemporary judgements were faultless, the supreme place among woman novelists of the second quarter of the century maybe given to Ivy Compton Burnett. But the enthusiasm cited among other novelists and the professional critics did not gain for her books*Pastors and Masters*[7]*(1925), Men and Wives*[8] *(1931),Parents and Childeren*[9]*(1941),Manservant and Maidservant*[10]*(1947),* a corresponding large body of readers. Ivy Compton-Burnett occupies an unusual space in British literary history, for, like many novelists of her generation; her work is deeply influenced by British literary tradition. At the same time it breaks with that tradition in an attempt to find an aesthetic that more accurately portrays the social and psychological realities of modern life. However, unlike many of her contemporaries, Compton-Burnett generally has not been viewed as an experimentalist, and her work is rarely examined in the light of Modernist artistic aims. Though she was interested in what constitutes the self and how it can be protected against tyrants and dominators, to use Woolf's terms, Compton-Burnett chose to investigate these subjects from a rigorously objective perspective. Emerging from the long shadow cast by Bloomsbury, Compton-Burnett's novels afford an opportunity to investigate the complex and diverse nature of modernism. She was every bit as experimental as Woolf was, and as Angus Wilson described, "rigorously adapted form and language to accord with her aims, which is surely the only serious experiment to be considered." The Compton Burnett formula combines a Victorian stuffiness of atmosphere and a Victorian appetite for Melodrama, with twentieth-century ruthlessness in stripping off conventional veils of pretence in order to expose make-believers and hypocrites and petty tyrants naked to their souls. Written in prime style with dialogue in which vocabulary and syntax above and below stairs, in nursery and in drawing-room, are scarcely differentiated, the Compton Burnett novels have so far appealed mainly to connoisseurs of mordant irony.

XII. CONCLUSION

The overriding twentieth-century question for both the newly independent Irish state and the six counties that remained united with Britain was that of national identity. While politicians charted public perspectives, writers presented varied possibilities, some mirroring the dominant models, others projecting liberating roles.

Elizabeth Robins explained her use of a pseudonym as a means of keeping her acting and writing careers separate but gave it up when the media reported that Robins and Raimond were the same. She enjoyed a long career as a fiction and nonfiction writer.**May Sinclair** wrote non-fiction based on studies of philosophy, particularly idealism. Sinclair was interested in parapsychology and spiritualism. The war period briefly, and the post-war period at greater length provided **Rose Macaulay** with opportunities for that dispersed irony which she should have maliciously, have contemptuously. Rose Macaulay communicates a feeling of genuine excitement to the reader, as though he were actually meeting these eminent people. **Virginia Woolf** composed numerous enchanting passages which never lacked the firmness and clarity of good prose, even when they incite to the mood of exaltation produced by poetry. She made her prose almost as sensitive an instrument as poetry. She might, indeed, be regarded as a poet who had the misfortune to be born into an age of prose.**Winifred Holtby's** novel weaves together a large number of characters and several plots to represent a complex society; illness and death are repeatedly present, but balanced against a characteristically vigorous optimism; and the quest for individual independence and fulfilment that long-established theme is here given its fullest and most impressive expression.During the writing career, **Katherine Mansfield** was incredibly inspired by the works of Oscar Wilde and Anton Chekhov. At the height of her career, she was considered a modernist, a writer during this time period who went against traditional literary traditions.**Dorothy Leigh Sayers'** work is carefully researched and widely varied, included poetry, the editing of collections with her erudite introductions on the genre, and the translating of the *Tristan of Thomas* from mediaeval French.Writing full time the novelists Dorothy Sayers rose to be the doyen of crime writers and in due course president of the Detection Club. **Miss Ivy Compton Burnett** published sixteen novels between 1925 and 1959. She writes about people, but they seem always to be the same people; they are rarely visualised and then only in the briefest manner, and their communications with one another, which constitute almost all the materials of the novels, are made in a language that is frequently remote from anything to be heard in real life.

Although excluded from many public arenas, Irish women were present in nationalist, suffragist, and literary circles. Their early twentieth-century literature reflects women's responses to national questions but also expresses their neglected concerns, revealing that women's identities transcended definition by a male-dominated state or by male writers.

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