

Queens who were in the closest touch with the men and women whose work and achievement shed glory upon their reigns. Think of Elizabeth and Elizabethan literature; Queen Anne and the writers of the time of Queen Anne; the Victorian literature in prose and in verse, with the roll-call of far-shining men and women!

What is true of British literature is true of world-literature from the time when the old Egyptians gave to the spirit of wisdom the form of a woman, and the Greeks embodied their ideal of liberal culture in the grave majesty of Athene.

In analyzing woman's influence in fiction, poetry, drama and history, it may be premised that only in prose fiction, and in that special form of prose fiction which is called the modern novel, has woman produced a body of original work that is entitled to rank with such epoch-making masterpieces as the Iliad, the Divine Comedy, and Shakespeare's plays. In poetry and drama, while she has touched supreme distinction in Sappho and Elizabeth Barrett Browning, her power has lain rather in sympathetic interpretation than in originality of conception and execution; in history her function has been not to record and narrate, but to shape and inspire. In a word, her influence in fiction is creative; in poetry and the drama sympathetic and interpretative; in history guiding and determining; everywhere pervasive and inspirational.

What are the fundamental qualities and characteristics, the special powers of head and heart which make woman so strong in this great art-form of expression, the modern novel? Rapid intuition is one of these. The average woman gets at things by a flash. She usually overleaps the slower reasoning processes. The details, the successive steps, often weary and annoy her. Insight into character and skill in delicate analysis of motive is another characteristic that has made woman so successful as a novelist. Again, she has superior sensitiveness—innate recognition of the finer and more subtle shades of feeling, as in George Sand's novels; more than this, woman has in an eminent degree the gift of fruitful sympathies. Here we catch a glimpse of those higher elements of imagination and reverence which constitute a woman's elemental power and peculiar influence. She has "le don terrible de la familiarité," and her great contribution to modern literature is the expression of this in the terms of personalism. As Sidney Lanier put it, "the enormous advance from Prometheus to Maggie Tulliver—from Aeschylus to George Eliot—is summed up in the fact that while personality in Aeschylus' time had got no further than the conception of a universe in which justice is the organic idea, in George Eliot's time it has arrived at the conception of a universe in which love is the organic idea; and it is precisely upon this new growth of individualism that George Eliot's readers crowd up with interest to share the tiny woes of insignificant Maggie Tulliver, while Aeschylus, in order to assemble an interested audience, must have his Jove, his Titans, his earthquakes, his mysticism and the blackness of inconclusive fate vithal."