



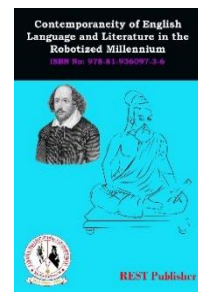
## Contemporaneity of Language and Literature in the Robotized Millennium

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## Intellectual Insights Character Evaluation in Margaret Deland's Literary Works: An Overview

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**Abstract:** Margaret Wade Campbell Deland is a famous American novelist, short story writer, and essayist. She has reflected the American industrial society with its turbulent social, cultural, and economic issues in her novel, 'The Iron Woman'. She contributed to different debates on women's rights and the impact of the growth of industrialization on society in general and women and families in particular. The significance of the 'The Iron Woman' lies in the rejection of how society judges its women. As a middle-class white woman who carries a social philosophy that renders, "the individual" responsible for the "Public good" and larger social problems. Margaret Wade Campbell Deland was a learned and experienced woman. She was fully aware of the feelings and aspirations of various kinds of women. So, she has artistically created three types of women in her novel, 'The Iron Woman'. They are conventional women, true women, and new women. Among the characters in the novel Mrs. Sarah Maitland and Mrs. Helena Richie are two sub-characters. Mrs. Sarah Maitland represents a 'New Woman' in this novel. She is a widow. Yet she is strong in mind and body. So, she is considered an 'Iron Woman'. The title signifies her personality. This paper is an attempt to bring out the merits and demerits of her personality. While she succeeds in her public life, she miserably fails in her family life.

**Keywords:** Novelist, industrialization, the Iron Woman, social philosophy, conventional woman, true woman, new woman.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Margaret Wade Campbell Deland, an American novelist born in 1857, indeed made significant contributions to the literary landscape during the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Her novel 'The Iron Woman,' published in 1911, is a notable example where she engaged with the evolving roles and expectations of women in society during that time. During the period from the middle of the 19th century to the early 20th century, there was a substantial transformation in the societal roles and expectations of American women. Industrialization and urbanization brought about changes in traditional family dynamics and opened new opportunities for women outside the domestic sphere. Women began to enter the workforce, earn their own income, and participate more actively in public life. In 'The Iron Woman,' Deland presents the character Sarah Maitland as a representation of the emerging 20th-century modern "New Woman." This term, "New Woman," encapsulated the changing attitudes and aspirations of women during that era. These women sought greater independence, education, career opportunities, and a re-evaluation of traditional gender roles. Sarah Maitland embodies these characteristics of the "New Woman" by challenging conventional expectations and norms placed upon women. She is depicted as a strong and self-reliant individual who defies traditional roles by engaging in work and being active in the public sphere. This portrayal reflects the evolving attitudes towards women's autonomy

and their desire to transcend traditional domestic roles. Deland's exploration of these themes in 'The Iron Woman' provides valuable insights into the shifting societal landscape and the complex debates on gender roles, women's empowerment, and the challenges and opportunities faced by women during the turn of the 20th century in the United States.

## **2. INTELLECTUAL INSIGHTS**

Deland's 'The Iron Woman' reflects the societal shifts during the early 20th century, highlighting changing gender roles and societal expectations. The character of Sarah Maitland embodies the emerging "New Woman," representing the changing dynamics of women entering the public sphere and challenging traditional gender norms. The character of Sarah Maitland portrays feminist themes, showcasing a desire for independence and autonomy. This aligns with the burgeoning feminist movement of the time, advocating for women's rights, education, and the ability to pursue careers and interests outside of the home. The backdrop of industrialization and urbanization provides context for the characters and their experiences. It underscores the societal changes that influenced the characters' lives, including economic opportunities for women beyond traditional domestic roles. Deland explores the psychological aspects of characters, delving into their emotions and resilience. This adds depth to the narrative, showcasing how characters cope with societal shifts, personal challenges, and evolving relationships.

## **3. CHARACTER EVALUATION**

Sarah Maitland, as the central character and a representation of the "New Woman," is characterized by her determination, independence, and desire for self-fulfillment. Her journey portrays the struggle to balance societal expectations with personal aspirations, showcasing resilience and strength in the face of adversity. David Richie, a key character in the story, represents the evolving attitudes of men toward changing gender roles. He grapples with traditional expectations and ultimately supports and admires Sarah's ambitions, illustrating a shift in male perspectives during this period. Mary Warriner, a contrasting character to Sarah, embodies more traditional roles and expectations of women. Her character allows for a comparison that highlights the changing ideals and aspirations of the "New Woman" represented by Sarah.

## **4. SARAH MAITLAND'S MARRIED LIFE**

Sarah married Herbert Maitland who was "a mild vague young widower who painted pictures nobody bought and was as impractical as a man could be whose partnership in an ironwork was a matter of inheritance. He died after six months of their marriage. As a widow with two little children, Sarah Maitland does not accept the dependency and submissiveness that society projects on women. Her resistance pushes her to indulge in the world of the iron industry and sacrifice the world of womanhood which seems unattainable if a woman decides to get to the patriarchal public sphere and rejects weakness and oppression. She understands very well that the new age of industry needs work, not beauty. With her expanding energy she has decided to deviate from the feminine roles and the true woman ideals that oppress women and restrict them within the sphere of society. Mrs. Sarah Maitland feels herself as a mother and a woman in terms of her ability to work hard, keep up money, and build a nation. She finds pleasure neither in femininity nor in maternity. She is happy with her success in her work. She walked through her iron works as some woman walks through a garden lovingly (p. 105). She considers the ladles of her foundry as the cradle of civilization (p. 107). As a woman worker, she believes in the "production beauty" rather than the feminine beauty. Margaret Wade Campbell Deland wants to present a picture of the modern independent "New Woman" in her novel. But she is also aware of the fault of this female type. She presents Mrs. Sarah Maitland as a strong and dominating woman who fails as a mother. However, she does not consider her work as the reason for her maternal downfall. However, Mrs. Sarah Maitland's failure pertains to her inability to differentiate between her position as an owner of an iron foundry and her role as a mother at home. She understands motherhood is to provide material sufficiently to her son. She has no aesthetic sense of beauty. She treats her home as an office. When her son Blair protests her actions, she answers, "I don't eat flowers" (p. 6). Her lack of femininity makes her unable to differentiate between useful and beautiful. Her ignorance makes her

not understand her role as both a woman and mother. When Mrs. Sarah Maitland learns the shocking behavior of her son, Blair, she realizes that maternity does not mean money. She tries to undo her mistakes and decides to disinherit Blair to push him to work and earn his own living. During the last meeting between them, Blair refuses to accept her as his mother. Hurby his words his mother weeps covering her face with her hands. Her son's harsh words melt her iron soul. Due to an accident in the foundry, she is bedridden. She regrets her failure as a mother in society, enters a dark state of guilt and dies.

## **5. DAVID RICHIE SUPPORTIVE RELATIONSHIP**

David Richie is depicted as a character with a forward-thinking and progressive attitude, especially concerning gender roles and societal expectations. He represents a segment of society that was receptive to the changing dynamics of women's roles during the early 20th century. David exhibits a strong sense of empathy and understanding, particularly towards Sarah Maitland and her aspirations. He comprehends the struggle she faces in balancing her desire for independence and societal expectations, offering her support and encouragement. David respects and admires Sarah's desire for independence and a career. He doesn't attempt to constrain her within traditional gender roles, showcasing an understanding of her need for personal fulfillment and autonomy. David's character challenges traditional gender norms prevalent during that era. He demonstrates a willingness to challenge and question societal expectations for both men and women, envisioning a more equal and progressive society. As a character, David serves as a narrative counterbalance to traditional gender roles represented by characters like Mary Warriner. Through David's character, Deland contrasts traditional expectations with the evolving ideals of the "New Woman" embodied by Sarah Maitland. David Richie symbolizes the evolving mindset of men during the early 20th century, aligning with the changing societal attitudes towards gender equality and women's empowerment. His character is emblematic of a broader shift in society's perception of gender roles and relationships. David's relationship with Sarah showcases a partnership based on mutual respect and understanding. He encourages her pursuits and growth, fostering a supportive environment that allows her to flourish in both her personal and professional life.

## **6. MARY WARRINER'S CONTRASTING PERSPECTIVES**

Mary Warriner embodies traditional and conventional values typical of her time. She adheres to the traditional role of a woman in society, focusing on domestic responsibilities and family life, which were often expected of women during that era. Mary conforms to the prevailing gender roles and societal expectations of women in the early 20th century. She prioritizes her role as a mother and a caretaker, reflecting the societal norms that emphasize a woman's duty to her family and home. Mary serves as a contrast to the character of Sarah Maitland, who represents the emerging "New Woman" challenging traditional gender norms. Mary's character illustrates the contrast between women who embraced traditional roles and those seeking to redefine their roles and aspirations. Mary's character provides a sense of stability and predictability in the narrative. Her adherence to traditional values and her role as a stabilizing force in the family offer a contrast to the more dynamic and unconventional aspects of Sarah's character. Mary's actions and decisions are primarily driven by her concern for the well-being of her family and the preservation of traditional family values. She prioritizes stability and continuity in family life, reflecting the values of her society. Mary grapples with the societal expectations placed upon her as a woman, feeling the pressure to conform to traditional roles despite the evolving landscape that challenges these roles. Her struggle reflects the tension between societal expectations and personal desires. The interactions and conflicts between Mary and Sarah provide a central narrative tension. Their differing viewpoints and approaches to life create a compelling contrast, illustrating the broader societal debates regarding women's roles and expectations during that time.

## **7. CONCLUSION**

Mrs. Sarah Maitland as a mother and a woman reveals how her female identity is culturally constructed which is approved by religious ideology and patriarchal authority. The sympathy that the novelist shows to Mrs. Sarah Maitland in *The Iron Woman* assures her strong argument against the idealization of mothers in all cultural and social prototypes.

In 'The Iron Woman,' Deland masterfully employs these contrasting characters to explore the broader societal transformation and debates regarding gender roles, reflecting the evolving attitudes towards women's rights and autonomy during the early 20th century in America. Through their interactions and experiences, readers gain insight into the complex interplay between tradition and progress in the changing landscape of gender and society.

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