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Female Identities of the Interwar Period

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Humanities

Oral

Title: Female Identities of the Interwar Period

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Faculty Sponsor: Cornish, Sarah

Abstract:

During the interwar period (1918-1945), women in England were faced with conflicting roles and identities. The men had left to fight in the First World War, leaving the women, who had previously occupied domestic and at times subordinate roles, to take over jobs and leadership positions. Women were exposed to and able to participate in public spheres, which caused social changes to arise. However, as the men returned after the war, women were expected to fit seamlessly back into their earlier subordinate positions. Literature of the interwar period written by female authors represents the struggle of female identities for voice, agency, power, and relief from social oppression. This proposed project will explore the identities of women as represented in three British interwar period novels. In Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway*, Clarissa Dalloway is conflicted between her differing identities in public and private spaces. In Rebecca West's *Return of the Soldier*, Jenny, a spinster, struggles to define her social position. Mrs. De Winter of *Rebecca* by Daphne du Maurier attempts to determine her place in a home haunted by the memory of the former mistress. These novels will be analyzed through the lens of feminist narratology, a theory that is used to examine the narrative devices of a text, like setting, characters, and point of view, in relation to gender. Primarily, this project will serve to reveal how employing a feminist narratological perspective when analyzing a text provides an understanding of both female identities and the narrative's function. Secondly, this project contributes to a larger effort to recuperate female authors to disrupt the traditionally-accepted and male-dominated literary canon.