

Hinkson (née Tynan), Katharine

by Frances Clarke

Hinkson (née Tynan), Katharine (1859–1931), novelist, poet, and journalist, was born 23 January 1859 in South Richmond St., Dublin, the fifth of twelve children of Andrew Cullen Tynan, a prosperous farmer and cattle trader, and Elizabeth Tynan (née Reilly). From an early age she was devoted to her father, an outgoing and sociable man elected to Dublin Corporation as a Parnellite in 1891, who was a major influence on her life in contrast to her mother, who was rather strict and disapproving and was an invalid from an early age. Brought up from 1868 in the family home of Whitehall in Clondalkin, Co. Dublin, Katharine had a comfortable and happy childhood. Having attended a private day school in Dublin (1872–6), she was sent to the Dominican convent of St Catherine of Siena in Drogheda, Co. Louth, where she received a scrappy education. Nevertheless she enjoyed the unworldly lifestyle of the nuns and briefly considered entering a convent. At this time she suffered from an ulcerated eye, which rendered her blind for nearly a year, and, though cured, left her severely myopic for the remainder of her life. On returning home after her schooling, she spent much of her time with her father, attending plays and political meetings. Like him she was an ardent nationalist and Parnellite (before and after the Irish Parliamentary Party split in 1890) and briefly worked for the Ladies' Land League; though she admired the level of commitment that Anna Parnell (qv) showed to the league, she largely regarded her own involvement as a social outlet.

She began writing poetry in her late teens, contributing her first published piece, 'Dreamland', to *Young Ireland* in 1875. Encouraged by her father, she followed this with contributions to journals such as *The Graphic*, *United Ireland*, *Irish Fireside*, and *Irish Monthly*, through which she became acquainted with Father Matthew Russell (qv), who was a significant ally in the early stages of her career. He introduced her to Wilfred Meynell who, with financial backing from her father, secured the publication of her first volume of verse, *Louise de la Vallière and other poems* (1885). It was well received, sold well, and rapidly went into a second edition. Though her next publication, *Shamrocks* (1887), failed to make a similar impact, she became a well-known figure among Dublin's literati. Her close friends, many of whom attended her own literary salon at Whitehall, included Alice Furlong (qv), Rosa Mulholland (qv), Dora Sigerson Shorter (qv), and Ellen (qv) and John O'Leary (qv).

One of her most frequent visitors was W. B. Yeats (qv), to whom she was introduced in June 1885. As a young man he greatly admired her work, and came to regard her poetry as a significant factor in the development of the Irish literary renaissance, later writing of their mutual contribution: 'we – you and I – chiefly have made a change and brought into fashion in Ireland a less artless music' (McHugh, 148). She was heavily involved in the production with Yeats of *Poems and ballads of Young Ireland* (1888), a work that in many ways officially launched the revival. For a time

she was an important element in his life, and though in his regular correspondence with her he did not begin to address her as anything other than 'Miss Tynan' until 1889, he considered proposing to her and may have done so. Their friendship later waned, most notably after her marriage. Although Yeats edited a selection of her poems in 1906, he became more and more critical of her work, and was finally estranged from her because of her decision to sell their correspondence for £100 in 1920.

In September 1888 Tynan met her future husband, Henry Hinkson (qv), a Dublin-born lawyer, writer, and classical scholar. After a lengthy engagement, during which she converted him to catholicism, they married in London, 4 May 1893. This necessitated a move to England for Katharine, which she found difficult as it meant leaving her father. The early years of her marriage were further blighted by the death of her first two sons in infancy. She became a prolific freelance journalist, and contributed verse, stories, articles, and reviews to a variety of papers, such as the *British National Observer*, *Pall Mall Gazette*, *Merry England*, *Sketch*, and *Illustrated London News*, and the *American Catholic World* and *Boston Pilot*. Many of her articles display an acute social consciousness; among the issues she regularly tackled were the treatment of shop girls, unmarried mothers, infanticide, capital punishment, and the education of the poor. Her rapid production of novels (from 1895 to 1930 she wrote more than 102 pot-boilers) also did much to boost the family's finances.

Following Henry's appointment as resident magistrate for Castlebar, Co. Mayo, in 1911, she moved back to Ireland with her family of two sons and one daughter, settling initially in Shankill, Co. Dublin, and later Claremorris, Co. Mayo, where she felt extremely isolated. While in England she had tried to maintain an interest in cultural events in Ireland through her rather patchy involvement with the London Irish Literary Society, but she was far from comfortable with the radical climate of the country she returned to. For her, 'affection for England and love of Ireland could quite well go hand in hand'. She became increasingly supportive of Britain after her two sons enlisted to fight in the first world war, and had little sympathy for the Easter rising, which she referred to as a 'rebellion'. After her husband's death in 1919 she left Ireland and, using England as her base, travelled extensively throughout continental Europe. She was forced by financial necessity to keep churning out vast quantities of fiction, poetry, and prose, publishing her last novel, *The playground*, in 1930. She died 2 April 1931 in Wimbledon, London, and was buried in Kensal Green cemetery. Her autobiography appeared in five volumes (1913–24), all of which include sketchy portraits of her many literary friends from Ireland and Britain. Her portrait was painted by William Strang, and by John Butler Yeats (qv) in 1886. Her younger sister Nora Tynan (qv) was also a poet and her daughter Pamela Hinkson (qv) was a novelist.

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Katharine Tynan Hinkson, *Twenty-five years: reminiscences* (1913) (incl. portrait); ead., *The middle years* (1916); ead., *The years of shadow* (1919); ead., *The wandering years* (1922); ead., *Memories* (1924); Roger McHugh (ed.), *W. B. Yeats: letters to Katharine Tynan* (1953); Marilyn Gaddis Rose, *Katharine Tynan* (1974); Anne Ulry Colman, *A dictionary of nineteenth-century Irish women poets* (1996), R. F. Foster, *W. B. Yeats: a life* (1997) (portr.); Rolf Loeber and Magda Loeber, *A guide to Irish fiction 1650–1900* (2006), 1315–1332

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