

## OPPRESSION OF WOMEN UNDER MALE DOMINANCE IN SOCIETY WITH SPECIAL REFERENCE TO WILLA CATHER'S *A LOST LADY*

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### Abstract

This study focuses on Willa Cather's very most famous novel *A Lost Lady* explores the suffering of women and dominated by the male society. In this novel, she raises her voice against male class domination. The novel tells about women among the entire story. *A Lost Lady*, the greatest novel by Willa Cather, presents the defiance of patriarchal norms by Marian Forster, the protagonist of this novel. Marian is initially presented as a householder who devotes her time as a housewife to helping and caring for her husband. He performs the house chores and controls her desire and intent. As the novel moves forward, Marian is shown as a rigid character that embarks on her journey to Argentina after her husband's death and settles there. Marian, a lady of exceptional caliber, can work side by side with her male coworker. She disregards the dos and don'ts in favor of adhering to her own set of standards and abhors male norms in the process, breaking the barrier set up by the male-dominated culture.

**Key words:** Male domination, Women enslavement, Sexual abuse, Oppression, Gender identity.

### Introduction

The fourth generation of an Anglo-Irish family, Willa Sibert Cather, was born on December 7, 1893, not far from Winchester, Virginia. She is an American novelist, short story writer, essayist, journalist, and poet. When she was nine years old, her parents, Charles F. Cather and Mary Virginia Cather, as well as the rest of their family, relocated to Red Cloud, Nebraska. She was a tomboy growing up, dressing like a boy, claiming to be a doctor, dressing in suits and ties, wearing her hair in a bob, and hanging around with other ranchers' kids. It was a component of her rebellion against sexism. Before her death at age 73 from a cerebral haemorrhage at her New York City residence, she had never been married. After her husband's death, she breaks the cocoon of a docile housewife and, rather than being subjected to being a poor widow, embarks on the journey of self-discovery.

The female characters in this novel did not fit the male characters. She enables them to continue their quest for self-identity and opposition to a male-dominated social environment. She is portrayed as a woman who will equally participate in her husband's decision, not as a woman who mindlessly follows her husband but as a figure who has the boldness or talent to help her

spouse. She is a dynamic woman who understands how to compete with men by freely voicing her opinions on every choice her husband makes. She even adopts the male-designed living pattern while challenging society's strict rules. She is presented as being arrogant and forceful, defying the stereotype of a female character who is sensitive and impulsive, attributes that are linked with the feminine gender. She is not like the weaker sex; instead, she displays restraint in every trying circumstance. She is not instantaneous; rather, she is portrayed as a composed woman who takes sensible decisions rather than acting in a hurry.

In our society, women are considered submissive and passive. Although the passage of time has altered things between then and now, women's viewpoints have significantly advanced from the mediaeval to the modern era. However, men still have the traditional view that they should be domesticated and restricted to their houses because of their docile and home-bound nature. The female protagonist of this novel completely rejects the male psyche's belief that women are incapable of performing tasks effectively and are only competent at housework; hence they shouldn't be permitted to do outdoor jobs. She violates the male code, dislikes the plight of a helpless widow, and sets out on her own to travel the world. Her behaviour demonstrates the widespread desire of women in today's society. In a manner, her behaviour demonstrates to us that even though men may be physically weaker than women, their actions carry more weight. If the chain of dominance persists, women may also be able to sever their connections through actions of this kind. They share the same desires as men, but the restrictions have rendered them voiceless.

Until her passing on April 24, 1947, Cather had a long and productive writing career, penning both novels and short stories. She had her letters destroyed at the time of her death. Thousands more letters managed to avoid being destroyed, but Cather's will forbids their dissemination. In Red Cloud, the Willa Cather Pioneer Memorial Foundation was established in her memory. Willa Cather was laid to rest in New Hampshire. Since its release in 1923, *A Lost Lady* has received harsh criticism and a variety of responses. Lionel Trilling, one of the critics, states:

"The wild roses were wide open and brilliant, the blue-eyed grass was in purple flower, and the silvery milk-weed was just coming on. Birds and butterflies darted everywhere. All at once the breeze died, the air grew very hot, the marsh steamed, and the birds disappeared. The boys found they were tired; their shirts stuck to their bodies and their hair to their foreheads" (12).

The novel vividly depicts the story of Marian, who in the novel subverts male norms and values and the male construction of a female identity, i.e., of a docile and submissive female persona, who after her husband's death should be obligated to be at home, but instead, she defies this rule time and again by her bold and valiant conduct and interaction with other male characters in the novel, resulting in defiance of the male-dominated society. She rejects being a traditional submissive and refuses to adopt the stereotypical image of a poor widow, instead standing up as a bold persona who opens up after her husband's passing. Her motivation is clearly clear: being a widow does not mean that a woman's life is over. She is thus portrayed as a fearless woman who, rather than allowing the situation in front of her to scare her, makes her own decision and despises the stereotypes that men have constructed about widows. In this way, she exemplifies the ideal radical feminist, one who believes in making her own decisions and challenging society rather than obediently following the herd. She chooses to confront injustice and the world's crimes on her own terms.

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The sole female character Marian Forrester in the novel *A Lost Lady* represents the defiance of male-imposed norms and values. Instead of conforming to her husband's demands and following his rules as a docile and submissive character, Marian Forrester pretends to be a demure woman, while in reality; she is a free-spirited woman who interacts with every male persona to mark her existence as a strong female. Marian is portrayed as carrying the banner of a rebellious figure that epitomizes radical feminism. As the story progresses, the reader will understand that the captain actually has a controlling nature towards his wife. Her husband, Captain Daniel Forrester, is a side character in this novel and is depicted as loving and caring towards his wife, Marian Forrester. "Mrs. Forrester was twenty-five years younger than her husband, and she was his second wife. He married her in California and brought her to Sweet Water a bride. They called the place home even then, when they lived there but a few months out of each year" (7).

The captain, who is twenty-five years senior to Marian, is shown as a wealthy person in the novel, but when he must choose between honoring his responsibility to the depositors in the bank of which he was an officer and providing for his wife's financial future, he chooses to impoverish her. His decision is an honorable one, but it is a form of betrayal of the marriage contract, particularly that implied between a well-to-do older man and a beautiful young woman. He chooses to let her pay for his nobility, and although she accepts his choice as a compliment (89), she is again subtly betrayed or victimized by masculine self-interest. Although betrayed and victimized, Marian Forrester wrests a bittersweet triumph from her refusal to assume the role of victim. Her "musical laugh" dominates the novel. In *A Lost Lady*, women are victims of masculine heroics, self-interest, and ignorance. (41)

In a culture where men predominate, it is expected of women to strictly conform to masculine customs, yet Marian is depicted as a lady who rejects these expectations and warmly welcomes any male guests to her home. As the lads hesitate to approach Marian with any questions due to her appearance, as we can see in the introduction of the story, Marian instead approaches them by saying:

When the Burlington men were travelling back and forth on business not very urgent, they found it agreeable to drop off the express and spend a night in a pleasant house where their importance was delicately recognized; and no house was pleasanter than that of contractor ,who had built hundreds of miles of road for Burlington over the sage brush and cattle country, and on up into the Black Hills.(4)

Though Marian is originally presented as a modest character in the story, her rebellion for masculinity is hidden someplace under, as we can see from her first opening line. Although she appears timid and submissive in front of her husband, the introduction of this story reveals that she harbours the same defiance and denial towards the hegemonic male hegemony as an inactive volcano. She controls her male counterparts in the narrative, demonstrating that she is not someone to be controlled. When the men ask Marian if she can swim when they return from their vacation, she responds: "We seen a water snake this morning and chased him. A whopper!" Thad Grimes put in (14).

Her statement gave us the impression that she is not easily seduced; rather, Marian's words show what a brave character she is. She enjoys taking on difficulties in life and will often select a challenging road over one that is simpler. When most people, especially women, are afraid of snakes and muddy water, she has the guts to choose the difficult way. Her propensity for such

perilous situations is evidence of her bold and steadfast nature. In this book, Will Cather may be attempting to highlight Marian's bravery. In an era when women were expected to stay inside their homes and care for their families, Marian is shown as a strong woman who will take the bull by the horns. "His eyes were very small, and an absence of eyelashes gave his pupils the fixed, unblinking hardness of a snake's or a lizard's" (17).

She is depicted as a character that may be anxious but is not afraid. She kindly forced some male visitors to sit on the couch when they came to see the ailing Captain at her home, but instead of offering them tea or coffee, she seemed to be telling her maid Mary to get a brandy from the sideboard. (14) Throughout the novel, she is revealed to be breaking the expectations of a good family. One characteristic of radical feminists is their ability to construct new norms out of preexisting ones. She is brave enough to criticize the judge for raising his nephew improperly until she notices a bottle of beer and two glasses on the desk next to the documents. "Is that the way you prepare your cases, Judge? What an example for Niel!" (19)

Even though her husband is being held at the bank, she asks Niel to take a break from his work so that he can drive her home (20). Marian unexpectedly invites Niel to spend some time with Constance Ogden, a person who is the same age as Niel. Marian doesn't feel ashamed or even the slightest bit hesitant as she says to Neil:

"Niel opened his eyes and looked wonderingly about the big, half-darkened room, full of heavy, old-fashioned walnut furniture. He was lying on a white bed with ruffled pillow shams, and Mrs. Forrester was kneeling beside him, bathing husband forehead with cologne. Bohemian Mary stood behind her, with a basin of water. "Ouch, my arm!" he muttered, and the perspiration broke out on his face". (23)

From the sentences above, it is clear that Marian is so confident in her remarks that she not only flirts with Niel but also requests that he spend some time with Constance Ogden, a college student. She is shown in this instance as a woman who, in an era when women's voices were restricted, appears adamantly determined to take the lead for these two young couples. She is shown as a woman, who has the capacity to surpass the standards and values that were established by men. She believes that such impulses should be kept alive and expressed in front of peers who are the same age, since she is aware that young couples have a lot of hidden desires that lurk beneath their hearts. In the society of the time, her action might have been viewed as inappropriate, but she is of the opinion that, whether one's action is appropriate or inappropriate, one should express one's desires fully without regard for the socially constrained standards.

After feminism emerged, discussion of women's rights and equality took up steam. Women in every industry who had previously been subject to male dominance and restraints demanded their identity and equality. In English, the term "feminist" first appeared in the 1880s to denote a belief in the equality of men and women in terms of their legal and political rights. The main power connection in human society, according to radical feminism, is between males and women in the patriarchal system. This idea was first fully developed in the late 1960s. Some radical feminists recognize the concurrent and intersecting effects of other separate categories of oppression as well. Radical feminists in Western civilization hold that the fundamental cause of all other disparities is the oppression of women.

Marian is portrayed as a woman who not only supports women's equality of voice but also has the self-assurance to stand up for what she believes in a world that is predominately male. She acted inflexibly by pouring one glass of brandy to the visitor and then another into her own glass, demonstrating that she doesn't require her husband's consent to consume alcohol even in front of guests. (21) Her bold actions give us the distinct sense that she is unconcerned with any standards

of decency or female behavior. She admits without any difficulty to drinking frequently at home, and we could tell from her brave words:

There was something wild and desperate about the way the darkened creature beat its wings in the branches, whirling in the light and never seeing at, always thrusting head up and shaking in, as a bird does when at in drinking Proclly it managed to get in feet on the me limb where it had been struck, and waned moogaine that perch. As if it had learned something by in bruises, it pecked and crept it's was along the branch and disappeared into in own hole. (20)

In the above lines, Marian is shown as a smart character; she is aware of the fact that for a woman, drinking in front of guests is not socially appropriate behavior, it is a woman's duty to serve the guests proper food; and their male neighbors are seen breaking the code of rules and setting one of their own by drinking and sharing drinks with the guests in front of her husband. She is not hesitant enough to accept the fact that she used to drink it regularly every afternoon as the drink is good for her health; she goes a step further by presenting her views that her friends take tea, like English people, in the afternoon, but she is modern enough to avoid tea and coffee in favor of wine. Thus, it reflects what kind of character Marian has. She is brave, and she believes in walking step by step with her male neighbor; she believes in equality for both sexes, avoiding the contemporary idea that males are born to dominate females and the latter is obedient to the former.

Marian's novel challenges the male notion of women as child bearers and strictly confined within the confines of the home, whose primary work is cleaning, washing, and nurturing a child into an adult. In this work, the female protagonist, who is adored by many of the male characters, forbids shame, which is referred to as an ornament of women, rather than being a negative outcome of her bad behavior. In the novel, we observe that in addition to demanding male attention, she also casts her spouse a protecting glance. We had generally observed that men are protective of the female they are with, we could see a different story as she discusses with Niel:

"For the next few years Niel saw very little of Mrs. Forrester. She was an excitement that came and went with summer. She and her husband always spent the winter in Denver and Colorado Springs, left Sweet Water soon after Thanks- giving and did not return until the first of May. He knew that Mrs. Forrester liked him, but she hadn't much time for growing boys. When she had friends staying with her, and gave a picnic supper for them, or a dance in the grove on a moonlight night, Niel was always invited. These people from Black Tom, Judge Pommeroy's faithful negro servant, who went over to wait on the table for Mrs. Forrester when she had a dinner party".(27)

She seems to be the one who should take care of her husband, not the woman, based on how she describes a previous occurrence to Niel. She asks Niel to take her husband somewhere cold because she thinks it will be good for his health. As the passage comes to a close, we can see her anger towards the captain. Although he used to appear to treat his wife well in front of other people, he was actually failing her because she was developing a rebellious attitude towards her husband. Although she appears to be speaking in a protective manner on the surface, the truth is that she actually wishes her husband would leave the house so that she could live alone for a while without his company and his allegedly problematic attitude.

The female character in this novel shows a defiant attitude when she finishes her whisky and requests Niel's whisky. When Niel politely requests that she take it from the bottle, she responds angrily, "[his] features were clear-cut, his grey eyes, so dark that they looked black under his long lashes, were rather moody and challenging" (29). She does not hesitate to ask for another man's glass, even though she could have had the drink from the bottle, but she prefers Niels', giving us the impression that she was not a person who felt guilty for such behavior. Her move

revealed her arrogance, as we could see. The novel demonstrates how masculine society submits to female desire while the female character consistently defies this. In some ways, the story resembled the emergence of radical feminism.

### Conclusion

This conclusion states that oppression based on gender identity, color, socioeconomic status, perceived attractiveness, sexuality, sexual orientation, and ability are only a few examples of these additional types of oppression. The patriarchal theory does not always hold that all males always gain from the exploitation of all women. According to patriarchal theory, the relationship of dominance, where one party is dominant and takes advantage of the other for their own gain, is the fundamental component of patriarchy. Radical feminists have asserted that men keep non-dominant men and women under control by utilizing social structures and other means.

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