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REASSESSMENT OF CULTURAL SIGNIFICANCE: A CRITICAL STUDY OF WILLA CATHER'S A LOST LADY

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ABSTRACT:

This paper aims at exploring the cultural significance and as it takes place in day-to-day activities with the references to Willa Cather's A Lost Lady. Cather presents different cultural spectrum in terms of the interpersonal and social bonding. The realities, including the characters in her fiction betray the sinuosity of social transactions and stand as statement on the nature of cultural situations. These situations and the fictional characters perceptions, actions and reactions in their final analysis, pinpoint the failure or success of the social transactions. Cather is a writer who

emerged at a transitional moment in the evolution of American culture. The complexity of her novel results from her responses to the shifting historical vestige.

KEYWORDS: Complexity, Culture, Interpersonal, Evolution, Society.

INTRODUCTION

Willa Cather is the embodiment of America. She is one of the finest women and artists of the first decades of the twentieth century who best illustrates the contribution of women to American fiction at the end of the literary era. Cather as an American novelist, short-story writer, essayist, journalist, and poet portrayed the lives of Old World immigrants on the American Midwest frontier in a manner that is both realistic and romantic. Her reputation as one of the most distinguished American novelists rests on her novels about Nebraska and American Southwest.

Cather's novels are in tune with a progressive desire to reform and to find solution for the social changes. As she examines in her life both the societies before and after the change, now she faces the struggle between both of them; struggle between the ideal society and the new changed society, which believes in materialism and selfishness. The struggle between the idealist and the materialist affects the social setting of the society, and the materials affects then social setting of the society, and the social setting of the society, and the social transactions. The ethics, ideas, believes and social setting of both one quite different, social transaction taken off among the people who have the same

social setting, same social believes same way of thinking and dealing, the new society is a very material society, who does not believe in idealism and results in a huge gap between the two non and changed society.

Cather's novels express her deep love of the land and her distaste for the materialism and conformism of modern life. In "Editing Cather," Susan J. Rosowski observes,

Cather's fiction once assumed to be transparent and artless is now recognized for its depth and complexity. Cather is known to be the one of the most prolific of major U.S. Writers, with eighteen volumes and seven hundred periodical pieces to her credit. A writer once dismissed as regional is now

included in the Encyclopedia Britannica Great Books of Western World. (388)

In 1923, *A Lost Lady* was published and it presents the twilight of the pioneer in mournful tones. As in *One of Ours* the West has rejected, and Captain Forrester, the pioneer railroad man in the novel, is an invalid. The generous adventurers have given way to the commercial-minded ones. Materialistic villains like Ivy Peters have the day and the lady has lost her greatness and is fallen victim in the trap of Ivy Peters. The fire of life that the lady preserves in her is the only redeeming quality in the mood of the novel.

Marian forester, heroine of *A Lost Lady*, may be regarded as a victim of Americans materialistic thrust. The whole story is about captain Forrester, an ideal person who belongs to the pioneer, captain Forrester is a railroad builder, handsome capable, cultured, he is wealthy through his own effort and possess a great integrity and he is the husband of Marian Forrester whom the story is about, the Captain as belongs to the old generations, we may say the pioneers those who have a spiritual connection with their lands. *A Lost Lady* focuses on the distance financial forcer and their effects of the society of a small Nebraska town and the impact on the social setting of that town and how the people of Nebraska get affected by the financial changes and results in their social life and social setting. The novel mounts a critique of previous readings, which largely see the novel as mourning the loss of a heroic pioneer past in the face of an exploitative, materialistic age and the effect of that struggle in the society and the social setting and the social transactions. In this novel may also be understood as a response to the expansion of capitalism and its role in the society and far it makes both the old and the new generations.

The value of aesthetic things in an industrial age is a problem that informs Cather's fiction in a much more complex fashion than is acknowledged by either her early critics or her response to them. *A Lost Lady* continues her account of materialism verses ideates and their effect on the social setting of the society and the social transactions amongst the characters of the novel, the struggle of the two generations and how the old generations are fighting for their own values and ethics. She has depicted a very clear picture of Captain Forrester as well as the opposite side of the new generations of the materialist.

In majority of her novels, Cather sheds light on the materialism of the new society and its effects on the social setting and the social transactions, *A Lost Lady* is a very realistic picture of the American society, and how it gets affected with the new changes. People like Captain Forrester could not understand the new material life and why people were mad about money how. This created a generation gap and resulting in lack of communication between the two. The old generations could not have social transactions with the new materialist people and that's why they were isolated from the entire society and kept alone without any role. Through Captain Forrester, we examined the realistic comparison between the life before and after the changes.

Mrs. Forrester is friendly to all of the boys but she is aware of the social distinctions between Neil, who is a nephew of her husband's friend Judge Pommeroy, and the "town boys" sons of local grocers and tailors. The boys themselves recognize that she is "a very special kind of person" and feel that the privileged class it which she belongs is "an axiomatic fact in the social order" (18). One of these boys is, Ivy Peter the embodiment of the new materialistic generations who has a physical ugliness as well moral ugliness. As Ivy's moral and physical ugliness is antagonistic to the wild life and to the physical beauty of the Forrester grove, his presence also suggests a threat to the social equilibrium that the other boys accept and take for granted.

Cather has depicted the new generations with a very ugly character, Ivy Peter, the character who has a physical as well as a moral ugliness. Cather has embodiment the new graciousness the materialist in the Ivy's character, but the same has been created by her in a very ugly way to show us the badness of the new generations and bad they look comparatively with the others. Ivy is simply a very earthly and selfish character who is going to have a much flourished business later on in the novel, he is going to make use of the other character and make a profitable business of the land. For him the land is simply a profitable business and nothing else and that is the opposite of the old generations, for the old generations the land is not simply a business of a kind of property that can make money for them and that's it. It is something else and far beyond being a business. The old generation does not see

the new life as bright as the new generations do. The new machine revolution is unacceptable thing for the pioneers, whereas the new generations were so mad about it.

Captain Forrest has an accident which put his career as railroad builder to an end, and he is home new, Neil, the nephew of judge Pommeroy is nineteen years old now and studies law in the office of Judge Pommeroy. Next summer, Mrs. Forrester called suddenly from Denever because of the Bank failure and after returning back from Derever, Captain Forrester had been ruined financially but he accepted the news so proudly and bravely. That is the starting point of the end of captain Forrester after his accident which puts him home. The financial failure of captain Forrester is a result of new changes of the society, the new material society.

The effect of the new financial failure of Captain Forrester for sure has its own effect on the family of the Captain, means on Mrs. Forrester and that of course effect of on the social transaction between captain Forrester and his wife. Their life is not secured and without any kind of financial support and that's made Mrs. Forrester, the young lady more scared and worried about her life with captain Forrester. The financial failure is not only at Forrester reuse but it is whole over their city sweet water which had its own affect social setting of the city. "All this while the town of Sweet Water is changing, it is future looked no longer bright successive crop failure had broken the spirit of the famers" (88).

The effect of the social setting of the society and of the financial situation changing and how the failure of their business affected their life, the farmers are no longer happy with their own business because of the failure of their business, the farmers had spiritually broken, and there is no hope in Sweet Water anymore. Cather wanted us to see the failure of every aspect of the life after the social changes in the society, after ruling the society by machine as well as materialists who do not care about anything except their own business and money, now the life has become quite difficult and quite gloomy. She starts with the dominant figure of the novel captain Forrester and how did he received the news of his financial failure from the band and now she wanted us to examine the failure of a complete society as well. As a result it the changing society of America, people has lost their normal life and social setting and a struggle between idealism and materialism came to the surface. The struggle has two main sides, the old generations and the new generations, the pioneers and the machine generations, the idealists and the materialist.

Mrs. Forrester suffered regret, melancholy and a sense of elegiac loss. As a normal result for the financial failure of captain Forrester and the new setting of their unsecured life, Mrs. Forrester has to think twice about her life and future as we have mentioned earlier that she is still young while captain Forrester is too old. She had a real feeling of a regret and fear of the future. So many questions have risen to her mind as a young woman with old man without a secured financial source. What will be her future and how will she manage her own life like that only and that obviously affect their life as a husband and wife and affects the social transactions between them.

The struggle between the pioneers and the new generation is the struggle between the idealism and the materialism. The pioneers could not have social transactions with the new generations who believe in materialism and selfishness and machine. There is a kind of a moral collapse in the society all, people were so concerned about money and forget their humanity, everything is for them simply a business, and people have lost their own purity.

Ivy Peter is a symbol of the corrupted generation; he is ugly, crafty, uncouth gossiping and devoid of any sense of fair play. Ivy is simply the embodiment of the materialistic new generation about and just selfish and belier in materials. The selfishness is the general figure of the new generations, they have no mercy on each other and their life is simply business, that's why Cather has depicted a real portrait of the new generations by Ivy Peter, the one who has physical as well as moral ugliness as Cather's described. Neil had come back to Sweet Water after two year at college and the first person he meets is Ivy Peter who had become a lawyer, who tells Neil that he rented and drained the Forrester marsh, "yes along with few other things, Hare to keep none than one iron on the side. I rent that meadow land on the Forrester place, drained the old marsh and into wheat" (89).

As the social change effects on the individual themselves and we could see that clearly in the relationship between Ivy Peter and Neil and the social transaction between them as a struggle between the idealism and the materialism. "He (Neil) felt that Ivy had drained the march quite as much to spite him and Mrs. Forrester as to reclaim the land"(131). We could see clearly the effect of the financial situation changes and its effect on the society and how it creates a lack of social transaction, and that effect of on the social which setting has been material by Cather; "All of shrewd young men, trained to petty economies by hard times, would do erectly what Ivy Peters had done when he drained the Forrester march" (144).

As a result for the materialistic society and the act of Ivy Peter of draining the march, the pioneers struggle had come to one result that they had drown themselves from society, since they could not have any social transactions with the new materialistic society. The new ideas, thoughts and believes of the material society have killed every aspect of the old generations' life and they kept them aside away of their way to acquire everything and make money and benefit of everything by any way and that is the answer to what Ivy Peter did to Forrester's marshes of killing the natural beauty of them and drying them for a more profitable business. The old generations could not understand the mentality of destruction and belief of how do the new generations could see the land simply business that results to a complete isolation.

Marian Forrester got trapped between pioneers and the new generating and finally final the slow dying of her resource of and supports till the end of him, that's why she had changed as a result to the around circumstance and the effect of the society around her "A lost lady" is not merely portrait of Marian Forrester either a nostalgia for the pioneer, it's a great portrait of the straggle and changed society among each other, Cather wanted to show us the effect of the social changes in the society by bringing to the surface the reality of the materialistic new society and comparing it to that of the pioneer.

A character like Neil the nephew of judge Pommeroy who had a social transactions with captain Forrester instead of being one of the new society, Cather in a very smart way wanted to show us that captain Forrester is not anymore but still fighters for idealism, He (Neil) had seen the end of an era, the sunset of the pioneer, he had come upon it when already its glory is nearly spent so in the buffalo times a traveler used to come upon the embers a hunter's fire on the prairie after the hunter is up and gone, the codas would be trample out, but the ground is worm, and the flattened grass where he had slept and where the bony had grazed told the story. (1)

The story tells its heroic legend of the pioneer's days and how they were just as perfect as paradise, the writer wanted us to see a real picture of those days and great where they. The time when the land is just like a mother and not simply a profitable business like the new generation see it, in a very smart way of writing and throughout the chapters of "A Lost Lady", Cather has shown us in a very perfect way a comparison from the real daily life of the American society from two different points of view, the materialists and the idealists and how the struggle goes on between them. Mrs. Forrester is simply one victim who got dragged between their conflict, the thrust of the materialist to acquire everything and make money and use of every aspect of life has affected her life and that's why she got lost, lost between the ideal husband captain Forrester and the materialist example from Ivy Peter and others who gave her a compromise of having a great deal of successful business out of her marshes. The major aim of such a kind of people is not the benefit of the other people since those kind of people don't care about anything except their own business and they never mind to do anything for that. The power chasing of the new generations is their chief aim and interest in life, they were ready to do anything for their success, and actually that is not a success by the eyes of the pioneers and captain Forrester, the success in life should be by destroying the natural beauty of the land and marshes and so on, that's why any kind of social transactions is impossible to exist between the pioneers and the new generations. The lifestyle and the normal daily life have completely changed into a new one with so many emerges to the American society and that create a big gap between the people of the pioneers and the new generations.

Cather has portrayed a very realistic picture of the American society and how the pioneers have been isolated inside the society without social transaction with the around people, the new generations with their selfishness and seeking for money have destroyed the values of the old generations of ethics and spiritual relationship to their land and between each other. In light of the issues traced above, *A Lost Lady* compels further reassessment of Cather's cultural significance for contemporary readers, particularly with regard to her position in American modernism. The basic contention is that Cather's fiction reflects her own psychological experience as well as her aversion to industrial modernity is inescapable and their role in the social transactions.

Cather is concerned with ultimate questions and ultimate values and with the conflict in contemporary times between these and secular values. She has risen throughout her writing more than one question to the society, focusing on the values of the society as well as the ethics which have been replaced with another new one. The post-war values are not the same of those before the war, the people have changed and they have lost their virginity as well those people are not willing to have the same life of anymore else. The life and the way of the daily life have completely and totally changed and the new one has no connection with the last one of before the war and there is a huge gap between the two of the societies.

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