

I. Introduction

1.1 Introduction to the Thesis

My dissertation entitled "Assertion of Female Individuality in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*" is a feminist study of Cather's novel *A Lost Lady*. On a cursory look one may compare Cather with other novelists who merely present a submissive wife, a patronizing husband and male domination over the entire female race. But beneath the surface, her assertion of female individuality is more vibrant. Through the portrayal of the character like Mrs. Forrester, Cather dismantles one after another stereotypes attached to femininity. Her female protagonist is 'hero' like and doesn't fit in the role the society aspires. She is bold and wants to live her individual life freely without any male clutch. How can Mrs. Forrester be happy with her husband who is twenty five years older than her? She disregards the societal norms and values by changing her lovers one after another. She flirts with Ivy Peters, Niel Herbert, Frank Ellinger and leaves them when she feels they intrude to her life and property. She takes care for her lovers, not her husband.

Cather asserts female individuality by depicting a bold character like Mrs. Forrester. She doesn't care what society thinks about her. She solely thinks about her individual life. When Niel Herbert tells her about people's comment on her relation to him with a view to draw her back from villain Ivy, she openly resists: "But I can't bother about their talk. They have always talked about me, always will. Mr. Peter is my lawyer and my talent; I have to see him" (132). Hermione Lee examines the character of Mrs. Forrester and says:

She manipulates her own image in order to manipulate others She is the enchanting lady Forrester, to Ivy Peters she is a woman with a

bucket and rolled-up sleeve, good for few laughs. In her domestic life with her husband, glimpsed in a few touchingly mater-of-scenes, she is another person again, patient and practical. (206-207)

Mrs Forrester never loses her individuality. Though, she is with her husband she neither loves him nor makes any treatment at his illness. Instead, she puts her husband's whole assets on her lover Ivy Peter's palm. Such unbearable scene bitterly pinches at Daniel's heart, and he welcomes his death after he meets several strokes in his life. But Marian, surrounded by hosts of her lovers as attracted by her beauty, gets no time to shed even a single drop of tear at his death. Instead, she remains busy in attracting another new lover Mr. Henry Collins. Why she cares Niel when he is sick but not her husband? It is because, her physical need is not fulfilled by her twenty-five years older husband.

Cather presents bird symbolism in *A Lost Lady*. Most critics failed to decipher the meaning of bird symbolism. They generalize that the wounded woodpecker symbolizes Mrs. Forrester. But, in depth, the bird has a stronger association with the ill Captain. Just as the woodpecker retreats to its hole, so too does the captain retreat to his sweet water property, specially the house. Just as the blinded woodpecker will not survive since it cannot sustain itself without sight, the captain is unable to survive the strokes. Marian, then, not physically injured as is the captain, survives. In refusing to do what is expected of the wives of her husband's generation, Marian chooses life. As she explains to Niel, "You see two years, three years, more of this, and I could still go back to California - and live again. But after that . . . Perhaps people think I've settled down to grow old gracefully, but I've not. I feel such a power to live in me" (106).

Asserting the female individuality Cather elects to end *A Lost Lady* with the affirmation that women can survive, control their destinies and live their life. Her ending startles us since we expect submissive role of Mrs. Forrester but that hints the universal victory of females.

1.2 Sketch of Cather's Biography and Her works

Willa Cather was born on December 7, 1873 at her maternal grand-mother's house in the village of Back Creek Valley, Virginia. Her father Charles Cather was an Irish descent gentleman of Virginia and her mother Mary Virginia Cather, an Alastian. Cather got no opportunity to go to school at her early age in Virginia. It might be either by her mother's poor health or by her father's financial difficulty or by not having schooling facility in Virginia that she was prevented from her formal primary education in school. Her father Charles Cather (1848-1928) was a farmer raising sheep in Virginia and a Real Estate businessman in Red cloud. He married Mary Virginia Boak, the daughter of William Lee Boak and Rachael Seibert Boak from Back Creek Valey, Virginia on December 5, 1872. They had seven children, among whom Willa was their eldest daughter. She loved her tender-hearted father rather than her mother.

When she as ten years old, her family moved to the prairies of Nebraska, later the setting for a number of her novels. It is said that her real life began when she moved to Red cloud, Nebraska. In E.K. Brown's words: "Willa Cather's Virginian childhood is a prelude to her years of experience and preparation, not a part of them". (Willa Cather : A Critical Biography, 5). If her birth place works as a prelude to her future life, Red Cloud soil and its pioneer women have acted as the actual materials and fictional characters in her novels. Cather herself says: "The ideas for all my novels have come from things that happened around Red Cloud when I was a child

(qtd. in Bennett, 77). Nebraska, which has now got so much popularity in the United States because of Cather's novels, was not her actual birth place. But it was a frontier land of her childhood experience, which could help her to shape her best feminist novels, *O Pioneers !* (1913), *My Antonia* (1918) and lots of other novels and short stories, leading her at the peak of greatness.

Since Cather's father was a Real Estate businessman in Red Cloud, her encounter with her father's clients from different walks of life widened her horizons and provided her opportunities to study human nature as a preparation for her novels. Her father's physical and mental beauty naturally surpassed in child Cather to build up her feminist career to help the poor and oppressed women of the frontier. Her mother Mary Virginia (1850-1931) possessed a strong will and stubborn nature, on the contrary to her easy going husband Charles. But she had a talent of carrying out all the traits of the sophisticated Virginia women. She revealed an unchallenging skills to enjoy life by arranging parties and other entertainments. She was helpful to poor and cared for the sick people. In Red Cloud, Mrs. Cather seemed such a benevolent women who took more interest in social works than to her family. But she had good sense to let her children develop their own personality and allowed them to be individual. Such free atmosphere developed her individuality and provided her chances to study the things and person of her surroundings for the preparation of her novel writing.

After her permanent settlement in Red Cloud, Nebraska, She got chances to develop her personality through her contacts with her other pioneer women from various nationalities. She was sent to Red Cloud High School for her formal education at eleven. She had good teachers in Red Cloud, and she was fortunate in finding several adult friends whose intellectual or artistic interests stimulated her own

developing mind. At the age of twenty-one she was graduated from the University of Nebraska and spent the next few years doing newspaper work and teaching high school in Pittsburgh. Her writing life started when she entered the University of Nebraska (1890) for her higher education. To run her study in the university, she was forced to write articles for the journals to earn money. She met several difficulties during her life. The male-domination of the Victorian society was another difficulty she met as a woman in the university.

Cather's family lineage is also equally important to identity her as a feminist novelist. Her grandfather William Cather had married Caroline Smith whose female strength and humanistic approach to the poor and oppressed helped Cather to mould her feminist spirit. Her maternal family lineage is also equally important to identity Cather as a feminist novelist as she was born at her maternal house and affectionately cared by her maternal grandmother Rachael Elisabeth Seibert Boak (1816-1890). From her very birth, She heard about her great grandfather Ruhamah's domination over her grandmother Boak. It developed her feminist characteristics, which proved to be very fruitful for her future novels. Apart from this, Cather was also much impressed from her grandmother's generosity to the poor and oppressed. Such legacy of her feminist grand mother, which had direct impact on sensitive child cather's developing mind, has been explored for her novels.

Cather's writing career began when she was a university student. She began her career as a journal writer and also wrote reviews of some important plays and musical events when she became a dramatic critic for The Nebraska States Journal (1896). She also worked as the Managing Editor of "Hesperian", the University Journal and also worked as a joint-associate Editor of "The Lasso" with Louise Pound. After her graduation from the University of Nebraska (1895), Cather faced a

double life problem — She wanted to be a writer, but she had to earn her bread for her living. To solve her economic problem. She wanted a full time job, but she could not get it immediately. Then, she continuously wrote for the journals and worked for Sarah "Harris's Courier" (1895), and "Overland Monthly" (1895) in Lincoln. In 1896, She moved to Pittsburgh as an Editor for The Home Monthly and became a very popular journalist. She worked as an Editor for "The Sombrero" (1894), "The Cosmopolitan" (1896), "The Leader" (1897), "The Library" (1900) and "Saturday Evening Post" (1902).

In 1903 her first book, *April Twilights*, a collection of poems, was published, and two years later *The Troll Garden*, a collection of stories, appeared in print. The most fruitful event of Cather's journalistic life was her meeting to Miss Sarah Orne Jewett, a most popular story teller, who suggested her to leave out her journalism and write novels finding free time and quiet place to perfect her writings. Following her advice, she resigned her journalistic career and extended her pen to write novel writing. After the publication of her first novel, *Alexander's Bridge*, in 1912, Cather devoted her full time to writing and, over the years completed eleven more novels including *O Pioneers !*, *My Antonia*, *The Professor's House* and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Cather's other novels. *A Lost Lady* (1923), *My Mortal Enemy* (1926) and *Sapphira And The Slave Girl* (1940) are remembered for her feminist concern.

Cather's novels are written in different circumstances and different moods, but the main theme of these novels is to pour out her female experience to portray the true picture of women's life. When we study her novels closely, we get Cather intending to curtail men's excessive power with a view to make women powerful and happy. She has written women-centered novels with the intensely known materials and created familiar autonomous women protagonists defending against male suppression.

1.3 Literature Review

Willa Cather as a novelist is known for her advocacy of women's right and their higher social dignity. So, it is obvious that her works are mostly viewed through feministic approach. But her some works are viewed by many other Critical apparatus. Basically, her presentation of heroines in her novels, revolt against the corrupt victorian males, female experiences and power play in the society are critically examined through feminist eyes. Marxist undercurrent is another point on which many critics passed fascinating criticism. Similarly, how Cather rewrites the women's history is a quest of some new historicists.

Doris Grumbach examines the presentation of heroines in Cather's novel and concludes that: "She has created heroines who are larger than life and stronger than the men around them; her male characters seem to be weak and ineffectual in contrast" (9). She further writes: "The women in her women-centered novels are the 'heroes' of new kind with new life history having right to exercise full power and strength" (14). The presentation of autonomous female protagonist in her novels are a break from the existing tradition of the masculine heroes of the early twentieth century novels.

Cather's style of writing novels is also analyzed by many critics. Praising Cather for her beautiful style, Marian Marsh Brown and Ruth Crone write:

Willa Cather's art . . . her style . . . Intangible as style is, there is ample evidence that hers can be termed fine, artistic, beautiful and even classical. It is economical, controlled and disciplined, refined and fastidious, clear and sharp . . . Her style is never an end in itself, but always a fitting implement. (152)

About Cather's style, she herself answers: "Style is how you write, and you write well when you are interested. A writer's own interest in a story is the essential thing . . . The emotion is bigger than style" (Letters, 79).

The bird symbolism in Cather's *A Lost Lady* also attracts criticism from many critics. Elizabeth Elz writes: "Cather's *A Lost Lady* employs birds as a metaphor for the entrapment the protagonist's experiences" (28). She further says "the peaceful woodpecker maimed by Ivy Peters, who as a man represents society" (31). Similarly, Anneliese H. Smith in a journal named "Finding Marian Forrester : A Restorative Reading of Cather's *A Lost Lady*" demonstrates that all of the men associated with Marian betray her. She states:

Ivy Peters uses Marian to establish himself in the community, the captain elects to impoverish Marian to save his reputation; and Niel abandons Marian when she does not meet his definition of a widow; the captain chooses to let her pay for his nobility . . . again she is subtly betrayed or victimized by masculine self-interest. The captain has the power in the marriage because he is a man and part of the hierarchical system. The captain builds a house and then he wants to furnish it with a wife. (223)

She further states: "Just as the woodpecker is mutilated by Ivy Peters, Marian suffers injury from the men with whom she comes in contact" (224).

But Beth Burch forwards different criticism about the role of Mrs. Forrester. She sees Forrester as an autonomous character. She writes: "The freed Mrs. Forrester, like the wounded woodpecker, finds her way home- to California, where she

eventually marries wealthy Mr. Collins, who, as she says, cares for her well; at least he provides her material comfort and access to society once again" (9).

Commenting on the same issue J. Gerald Dollar argues that Marian is "helpless and directionless as the blinded bird" (192). Another critic Domma Pastourmatzi in her essay "Willa Cather and the Masculine Cult" writes about Cather's compulsion to adopt masculine cult. She says:

While Willa Cather exploits the cultural definition of manhood in order to delineate the identity of the lady killer, she questions the viability of the masculine paradigm by exposing the dangers of the traditional hetero-sexual love hunt. Cather may have not been a militant feminist. but her imagination was undoubtedly gendered. (2)

But some other critics view that amidst her severe financial and social inconveniences, she encountered several catastrophic events of her own life. But it had no effect on bold Cather.

In short, Cather's literary creativity occupies a good position in English literature. She has received fascinating criticism from different critical terrain. Her works are examined mainly through feminist eye. But, neither of the critics finds assertion of female individuality in her *A Lost Lady*. My dissertation, therefore, seeks to prove how Cather asserts female individuality in her *A Lost Lady*.

1.4 An outline of the Thesis

This research paper primarily seeks to prove how Cather asserts female individuality with the help of feminist theory. Cather as a feminist raises feminist voice and wants to establish female gender equal to male in the society. This dissertation consists of four chapters. First chapter, "General Introduction" gives

introduction of the whole thesis. Second chapter, "An Overview of Feminism" draws feminist theory of different critics who advocate for the separate female individuality. Third chapter, "Texture of Asserted Individuality: Feminist Reading of Cather's *A Lost Lady*" applies the tool discussed in chapter two to analyze how Cather asserts female individuality. Lastly, "Conclusion" provides the synopsis of the whole thesis. In this way, a research of Cather's *A Lost Lady* will be completed finding a new idea that is not yet duly explored. Cather's depiction of autonomous female characters in her novel consolidates her aim of liberating women from the male clutch and asserting their own individuality.

II. An Overview of Feminism

Feminism is a distinctive and concerted approach inaugurated in the late 1960s. It is a political movement struggled for social, legal and cultural freedom as well as equality for the women. The western civilization is pervasively patriarchal, male-centred and male controlled. It is:

From the Hebrew Bible and Greek philosophic writings to the present, the female tends to be defined by negative reference to the male as an "other or a kind of non-man. By her lack of the identifying male organ, of male powers, and of the male character traits, they are marginalized in the patriarchy. (Abrams, 235)

Because of which women are conditioned to derogate their own sex and to cooperate in their own subordination. Feminism views that the issues like masculine and feminism view that the issues like masculine and feminine are the cultural constructs. As stated by Simone de Beauvoir in "The Second Sex" one is not born, but rather becomes, a women. . . it is civilization as a whole that produces this creature. . . which is described as feminine" (993).

Feminist criticism examines the ways in which literature (and other cultural productions) reinforce to undermine the economic, political, social and psychological oppression of women. However, just as the practitioners of all critical theories do, feminist critics hold many different opinions on all of the issues their discipline examines. In fact some feminists call their field feminism in order to underscore the multiplicity of points of view of its adherents and offer ways of thinking that oppose the traditional tendency to believe there is a single best point of view. Though, we have diverse opinions about feminism, the word feminism refers to the principle of

asserting women's rights, independence and authority. In other words, it advocates the rights and claims of the women. It means that women should enjoy similar legal, economic, social and political rights which men have been enjoying since a long time.

The domination of men over women and their discriminating attitude to them had given birth to the feminists who started to revolt against men for the guarantee of women's right and authorities. But the word 'feminist' got worldwide popularity only after the international women's year 1975. The feminist concept had come into existence since a long time, but the feminist ideology generally popularized with the feminist critics' theories on feminism during 1970s and 1980s as an outcome of the feminists' advocacy of women. The feminist theories, such as, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own* (1929), Kate Millet's *Sexual Politics* (1970), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977) and Toril Moi's *Sexual/Textual politics* (1985) and *Feminist Literary Criticism* (1980) have heralded a new era in women's literature raising their voices for women. These feminist critics view on women are different, but the aim of each critic is to awake women and support them by attacking men.

Generally, the feminist is one who takes the favour of women advocating for women's right. The belief that men are superior to women has been used, feminists have observed, to justify and maintain the male monopoly of positions of economic, political and social power in other words, to keep women powerless by denying them the educational and occupational means of acquiring economic, political and social power. That is, the inferior position long occupied by women in patriarchal society has been culturally, not biologically, produced. Feminists don't deny the biological differences between men and women; in fact, many feminists celebrate those differences. But they do not agree that such differences as physical size, shape and

body chemistry make men naturally superior to women, for example, more intelligent, more logical, more courageous, or better leaders.

Feminism is defined by various critics in different senses. As it is originated from the political movements of the women. Toril Moi, the British feminist critic of 1980s have used the term "feminist" or "feminism" in political sense. She classifies the words 'feminist', 'female' and 'feminine' in different senses and says:

I will suggest that we distinguish between 'feminism' as a political position, 'femaleness' as a matter of biology and 'femininity' as a set of culturally defined characteristics. . . The words 'feminist' or 'feminism' are political levels indicating support for the aims of the now women's movement which emerged in the late 1960s. (17)

An important precursor of the feminism is Virginia Woolf who has revealed the cultural, economic and educational disabilities within the patriarchal society. A male dominated society always prevents the women from realizing their productive and creative possibilities. Her central argument is that women do not have money and a room of their own. They do not have separate space for writing. Though she never adopts a feminist stance, she continually examines the problems faced by women writers. Rejecting a feminist consciousness, she hopes to achieve a balance between a "male self realization" and female "self-annihilation" (822). According to her, literature is open to everybody. She opines that libraries can be locked but freedom of women's mind cannot be locked. Woolf has imagined a society in which men and women will come together in purpose and desire:

Women are supposed to be very calm generally, but women feel just like as men feel; they need exercise for their efforts as much as their

brothers do; they suffer from too rigid restraint; too absolute a stagnation, precisely as men would suffer; and it is narrow-minded in their more privileged low-creature to say that they ought to confine themselves to making pudding and knitting stocking . . . it is thoughtless to condemn them or laugh at them, if they seek to do more or to learn more than custom has pronounced necessary for sex. (822)

Talking about feminist theory, Valerie Bryson forwards her radical thought. For her it is essentially a theory of, by and for women; as such, it is based firmly in women's own experiences and perceptions and sees no need to compromise with existing political perspectives and agendas. She writes:

It sees the oppression of women as most fundamental and universal form of domination, and its aim is to understand and end this [. . .]

Women as a group have interests opposed to those men; these interests unite them in common sisterhood that transcends the division of class or race, and means that women should struggle together to achieve their liberation. (*Feminist political Theory: An Introduction*, 181)

Women are always desired in a submissive and docile objects so that they can overpower women. Bryson, therefore proclaims that the basic principles of the feminist approach is women-centred understanding of the world. Women's powerlessness, victimization, lack of resources and marginalization constitute women's timeless history. Therefore, she sees the importance of women's struggle to assert the important role of female race. She wants to empower women by asserting female individuality.

A much more radical criticism launched by Adrienne Rich in her essay "Notes Towards a Politics of Location" (1980), forwards her radical view about feminism.

She asserts:

{ . . . } the common oppression of women, the gathering movement of women around the globe, the hidden history of women's resistance and bounding, the failure of all previous politics to recognize the universal shadow of patriarchy, the belief that women now, in a time of rising consciousness and global emergency, may join across all national and cultural boundaries to create a society free of domination, in which sexuality, politics, work, intimacy, thinking itself will be transformed.

(637)

Rich here, insists on creating a society without domination, subjugation and marginalization. She, similarly, argues that when women come up with a single voice there will be decline in patriarchal power. She does not see patriarchy as an unchanging and monolithic structure of oppression, but allow for the possibility that patriarchal power may be challenged and feminist victories won.

All feminist activity, including feminist theory and literary criticism, has as its ultimate goal to change the world by promoting gender equality. Thus, all feminist activity can be seen as a form of activism, although the word is usually applied to feminist activity that directly promotes social change through political activity such as public demonstration, boycotts, voter education and registration, the provision of hot-lines for rape victims and shelter for abused women, and the like. Emergence of feminist critics in the western countries remapped and retheorized the male dominated critical terrain. They began to develop systematically a self-conscious theory with the realization that women should struggle together to achieve their own liberation. They

came up with the slogan that "the personal is political" and that a new theory and strategy for women's liberation could only be based on women's experiences, not on abstract speculation. Kate Millet's polemical and hard-hitting *Sexual Politics* (1970) has rocketed the fame of feminism. By "politics" Millet refers to the "mechanisms that express and enforce the relations of power in society," she furthers, " western social arrangements and institutions as covert ways of manipulating power so as to establish and perpetuate the dominance of men and the subordination of women" (Abrams, 238). Millet argues:

In all known societies the relationship between the sexes has been based on power, and that they are therefore political. This power takes the forms of male domination over women in all areas of life; sexual domination is so universal, so ubiquitous and so complete that it appears 'natural' and hence becomes invisible so that it is perhaps the most pervasive ideology of our culture and provides it most fundamental concept of power. (25)

Millet's *Sexual Politics* marked an important stage in political feminist writing on literature. She used the term 'patriarchy' to describe the cause of women's oppression. Patriarchy subordinates the female as an inferior male. Power is exerted directly or indirectly in civil and domestic life to constrain women. Millet and other feminists have attacked social scientists who treat the culturally learned female characteristics (passivity, docile, submissive, weak, etc.) as natural.

Millet recognizes that women as well as men perpetuate these attitudes in women's magazines and family ideology. Sex roles as perpetuated in society are in her view repressive. The acting out of the roles in the unequal relation of domination and subordination is what Millet calls 'Sexual Politics'. Her emphasis is political in the

sense that she aims at struggle to raise consciousness among the oppressed and to effect a radical change in the power relations between oppressor and oppressed.

Accordingly, Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in their work "The Mad Woman in the Attic" (1980), discredit the literary stereotypes of women. The male tendency of creating images about women is deconstructed by them. Almost all literature present 'male' as subject and usurp the power position but women are depicted powerless creature. Females are represented as powerless objects and given no prestigious position. They are shown in literature as they are to be to suit the male ideology. In this way the masculine in our culture has come to be identified as active, dominating, adventurous, rational, creative; the feminine by systematic opposition to such traits, has come to be identified as passive, timid, emotional and conventional.

They write:

Before the woman writer can journey through the looking glass towards literary autonomy. . . she must come to terms with the images on the surface of the glass, with, that is, those mythic masks male artists have fastened over her human face [. . .] a woman writer must examine, assimilate and transcend the extreme images of "angel" and "Monster" which male authors have granted for her.

(596)

Gilbert and Gubar are of the opinion that the true self of women has never got space in literary domain. Images such as "angel" and "monster" always kill female creativity, and woman must kill the aesthetic ideal through which they themselves have been killed into art before woman can write. They express their anxiety," the images of "angel" and "monster" have been so ubiquitous throughout literature by

men that they have also pervaded women's writing to such an extent that few women have definitively "killed" either figure" (596). Throughout most male literature, a woman is portrayed as "a sweet heroine inside the house " and " a vicious bitch outside" (604). We find such monsters have long inhabited male text. Mock scorn of female creativity affected the self images of women writes, negatively reinforcing messages of submissiveness conveyed by their angelic sisters.

A much more radical criticism has been launched in France by Simone de Beauvoir. She makes wide ranging critique of the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object, or "other" (*The Second Sex*, 1949). She views that men treat themselves as "subject" who is assumed to represent humanity as dealt in "the great collective myths" of women in the work of male writers (1949). Beauvoir's "*The Second Sex*" (1949) is scholarly and passionate plea for the abolition of the myth of the "eternal feminine" (1949). This seminal work has become a classic of feminist literature where she establishes the fundamental issues of modern feminism by arguing that man defined human, not woman. She further says that women are not born women. Women is woman is just a gender concept. But gender itself is nothing but a social or a cultural construction. Beauvoir attacks the parochial concept of man possessing his freedom and transcendence but a woman being doomed to immanence. She refuses the notion of a female essence prior to individual existence. She has attacked the patriarchal myths of women:

To say that woman is a mystery is to say, not that she is silent, but that her language is not understood, she is there but hidden behind veils; she exists beyond these uncertain appearances. What is she? Angel, demon, one inspired, an actress... But one considers woman in her

immanent presence her inward self, and one can say absolutely nothing about her. (998)

Similarly, E. Porter defines feminism as a perspective that seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex (Beasley, 27). Other feminists have argued that mainstream thought is simply a part of three ongoing processes: excluding, marginalizing, and trivializing women and their accounts of social and political life. Women are trying to attack male writing as well as they are seeking redefinition of their identity in their writing.

The major interest of feminist critics has been to reconstitute all the ways that deal with literature so as to do justice to female points of view, concerns and values. Many feminist critics have decried the literature written by men for its depiction of women as marginal, docile, and subservient to man's interests and emotional needs and fears. Such feminist studies have served to raise the status of many female authors hitherto more or less scanted by scholars and critics and to bring into purview other authors who have been largely overlooked as subjects for serious consideration.

Pondering over the purpose of feminist study M.H Abrams states:

The often-asserted goal of feminist critics has been to enlarge and recorder the literary canon that have come to be considered "major" and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history criticism, scholarship, and teaching. (237)

Therefore, the often-asserted goal of feminist critics have been to enlarge and reorder the literary canon that have come to be considered "major" and to serve as the chief subjects of literary history, criticism, scholarship and teaching. They began to develop systematically a self-conscious theory.

In addition to this, women broke years of silence to discover the shared nature of problems. They thought that women should struggle together to achieve their own liberation. Many radical feminists ponder over that the basis of women's oppression lies not in social organization or physical domination, but in a male control of culture, religion, language and knowledge that limits the ways in which we can think and cause patriarchal assumption to be internalized by women as well as by men. Feminists have challenged the claims of philosophy and political theory to embody reason and universality, arguing that these are based on a male paradigm that ignores or devalues experiences and ways of thinking associated with women, so that objectivity in fact means the subjective perception of men. Masculinity is associated with quality such as light, reason, and activity, whereas femininity recalls passivity and emotion.

One of the accomplishments of feminist scholarship of the past twenty years is its demonstration of the constructed character of gender. While feminist theorists may disagree about just what gender then is most theorist agree in rejecting the view that gendered traits are essential aspects of being a biological male or a biological female and treat gender difference as a socially constructed mode of organizing society and culture. Helen E. Longino writes:

Masculinity is taken to consist in aggressiveness, independence a.k.a. dominance, emotional control or lack of affect, insensitivity to the feelings of others, self-confidence, taciturnity. Femininity is taken to consist in submissiveness and dependence, gentleness and nurturance, sensitivity to others, lack of emotional control, lack of self confidence and excessive chattiness. (24)

Feminist work contesting the traditional understanding of gender has been of several kinds: one sort examines the conceptual and empirical underpinnings of gender thinking in western cultures; another sort engages in cross cultural study. Feminist researchers have developed several types of argument to invalidate the supposition that gender is a set of correlated natural kinds and to support the notion of the constructed character of gender. Longino again writes, "Women in almost every culture are subordinated to men and are responsible for domestic life" (25). Another critic Genevieve Tly Lloyd views that the reason of female race is controlled and they are linked with emotion and subjection. She writes:

The male is more complete, more dominant than the female, closer to casual activity, for the female is incomplete and in subjection and belongs to the category of the passive rather than the active. So too with the two ingredients which constitute our life principle, the rational and the irrational: the rational which belongs to mind and reason is of the masculine gender, the irrational, the province of sense, is of the feminine. (Lloyd qtd. in *Feminist in Academy*, 28)

As Lloyd goes on to demonstrate this separation of reason and feeling is implicitly and often explicitly linked with a division between the realm of public action, which is the site of development of a full, rational, autonomous self consciousness and a realm of domesticity identified with the feminine.

Every woman living in a male-dominanted culture lives with the awareness that, merely by virtue of being a woman, she risks sexual victimization. Longino expresses her anger as, "whether repressed or available to consciousness, however, we experience our worlds through a lens shaped by asymmetric vulnerability. Women's

subjectivity is conditioned by, among other things, the vulnerability of our bodies, a vulnerability identified by our culture with who we are" (32).

Women have been subjected to the gaze of psychologies since the earliest day of the discipline, one hundred years ago. At moments when women stepped out of "their place" or an eruption of feminist threatened the social order, male intellectual and social critics of the day felt impelled to decide the question of "women's nature" (Jeanne Marecek, 103). Woman's nature was taken to be separate from human nature (i.e., man's nature), implying that, Whatever they were, women were not fully human. Marecek again avers, "Orthodox psychology has not hesitated to render its judgement of women's nature" (103). In the late nineteenth century questions of women's nature were addressed in terms of mental capacity. Efforts to assess these capacities were carried out with reference not to skill and abilities but, rather, to various lobes, areas, and physical dimensions of women's brains.

Many Poovey, another prominent feminist, argues that the stereotypes and attitudes formulated in writing by men that reinforced the devaluation of women's lives, such as those, depicting women as angels or where must be revalued. In her work "The Differences of Women's Studies: The Example of Literary Criticism" she writes:

Despite the claims that the terms man and mankind were representative of all human beings, that is, early proponents of women's studies argued that the knowledge commonly assumed to describe and analyze "man" didnot equally apply to women, because what counted as knowledge was actually limited to the activities generally performed by men. Thus, history usually concerned itself with wars, politics, or wage labor, not with domestic relations, philanthropy, or housework;

[. . .] because man had written almost all of the "great" works on "universal" themes – like war, works on "universal" themes – like war, heroism, and territorial expansion, while women writers had confined themselves to "inferior" subjects like marriage and domesticity. (135)

Some feminists argue that the most important obstacle to a woman's freedom was not her biology, or the political or the legal constraints placed upon her, or even her economic situation; rather it was the whole process by which femininity is manufactured in society. To illustrate it more Beauvoir writes "no biological, psychological or economic fate determines that the human female presents in society; it is civilization as a whole that produces this creation" (Beauvoir qtd. in Bryson, 153). At the most basic level of human consciousness, each individual seeks domination by asserting himself as subject and the other as object. In "The Second Sex" de Beauvoir argued that freedom and responsibility could be achieved by women that are historically denied to them. Beauvoir forwards her view, women are "defined and differentiated with reference to man and not he with reference to her; she is the incidental, the inessential as opposed to the essential, He is the subject, he is the Absolute– She is the other" (100).

Women's subordination was no longer based on physical necessity; the only thing preventing women from seeing themselves as subject in their own right was the artificial idea of womanhood engendered by society, which still saw women as secondary objects, acquiring meaning only in relation to men. If women were to be free, they must therefore be freed from this prevailing idea, and persuaded to take responsibility for their own lives, rather than accepting the security of dependence or the bad faith represented by conformity to the feminine idea. The aim of Beauvoir

was, therefore, to reveal the artificial nature of womanhood, Beauvoir argued that women could lead independent, rationally ordered and autonomous lives once they were freed from artificially restricting myths and cultural assumption. She here implies that only by denying her femaleness that a women can achieve humanity, and devalues traditionally female qualities such as nurturing.

When the women's movement developed in France after 1968, Beauvoir was an active participant and convert to the idea of female solidarity she called herself a feminist and organized the campaigns to legalize abortion; she defended the need for separate women's organization free from the threat of male domination, and stressed on sisterhood and the value of female friendship. Her proposed theory saw women as independent, fulfilled and liberated being. "For individual pioneers things might be hard, but this was only to be expected at a time when "The free woman is just being born" (The Second Sex, 723). and she believed that changes in education, culture and morality were all working in women's favour. She writes:

What is certain is that hitherto women's possibilities have been supposed and lost to humanity, and that it is high time she be permitted to take her chances in her own interest and in the interest of all. (724)

It showed that women could make choices, they could reject their traditional roles and they could apparently, find happiness and fulfillment in so doing; as such, it was a symbol of the possibility, despite everything, of living one's life the way one wants to for oneself, free from conventions and prejudices.

Modern liberal feminists assume that women are individual possessors of reason, that as such they are entitled to full human rights, and that they should therefore be free to choose in equal competition with men. The second wave of feminism which erupted in equal 1960s protested against the failure of society to deliver to women the promises of independence and self expression.

Present day feminists think that women's problems were shared and they could only be ended by collective political action. A new theory and strategy for women's liberation could only be based on women's shared experience, not on abstracted speculation. The New York Red stockings Manifesto of 1969 quotes Margans as:

Women are an oppressed class. Our oppression is total, affecting every facet of our lives. We are exploited as sex objects, breeders, domestic servants, and cheap labor. We are considered inferior beings whose only purpose is to enhance men's lives we identify the agents of our oppression as men. Male supremacy is the oldest, most basic form of domination . . . all men receive economic, sexual, and psychological benefits from male supremacy. (598)

A central message of this must be that it is not unjust laws or economic systems that are responsible for women's oppression but men, that men as a group have interests opposed to those of women and that it is therefore against the power of men that the battle must be fought.

To wrap up, the feminist theory not only unveils the male oppression over female, their control of private as well as public life of female race but also asserts female individuality and consolidates their voice against patriarchy. In the next chapter

Cather's text *A Lost Lady* will be analyzed minutely with the help of feminist approach discussed above. Cather's depiction of her heroine usurping all kinds of social, economical and physical is power that help to dismantle all stereotypical roles of female is major point of departure of analysis. Cather bestows all kinds of power to her feminine heroine Marian Forrester that is denied by most of the contemporary writers.

III. Texture of Asserted Individuality: Feminist Reading of Cather's *A Lost Lady*

With the help of feminist theory this research paper primarily seeks to prove how Cather asserts female individuality. Cather, as a feminist, raises feminist voice and wants to establish female race equal to male.

From the very beginning of the novel we find Mrs. Forrester bold, who seems asserting her individuality by denying the submissive and docile roles of women which the society has rewarded to all women. An instance can be drawn from the text. When captain Forester's friends come to visit him, his wife, Mrs. Forrester also "comes out to the porch" to greet them. When his friends meet her they feel "gay challenge" in her eyes. Cather writes:

Even the hardest and coldest of his friends, a certain narrow-faced Lincoln Banker, become animated when he took her hand, tried to meet the gay challenge in her eyes and to reply cleverly to the droll words of greeting on her lips. (Cather, 5)

Conventionally, women were supposed to be inside the four walls and be happy with their submissive roles. But it is Mrs. forester who challenges the role provided to her by the society. Cather depicts her character to be more active and assertive that she aspires to be "outside" which symbolically dismantles the old patriarchal walls erected by male ideology to thwart women from any progressive activities. Cather avers, " She was always there, just outside the front door, to welcome their visitors" (5-6). Her assertion of female individuality becomes more vibrant in succeeding paragraphs. She is presented a hero like character as she "comes out" from the kitchen" waving buttery iron spoon" and shaking "Cherry-stained fingers" to welcome the guests of her husband (6). Her coming out from the kitchen waving spoons and hand symbolizes

her desire to dismantle the limited territory devised by the male values and norms. She asserts her role, her existence and her individuality by coming out denying the conventional roles of female.

Cather's portrayal of Mrs. Forrester twenty five years younger than her husband and her constant flirtation with young gays also disrupts the traditional concept. She primarily thinks about her but not about the plight of old and sick husband. Discarding the predatory view of her society, she shows her bold characteristics. She always keeps her individuality upperhand. Cather writes, "Whatever Mrs. Forrester chose to do was lady-like" because she did it" (6). Cather even presents "bull" imagery to enhance the individuality of female. She is shown unfeared by male clutch ie "bull" is later chased by it but remains unharmed. The line from the text, " She had forgotten about the bull and gone into the meadow to gather wild flowers" (6), shows her assertiveness. Whatever she likes, she does it no matter, she is ready to pay anything for it.

When the story marches ahead she is shown more assertive, even more than males. She comes out from her parlour to see the boys having picnic and admonishes them. The natural objects which are often associated with females also appear unconventional. Cather avers: "The wild roses were wide open and brilliant, the blue-eyed grass was in purple flower, and the silvery milkweed was just coming on. Birds and butterflies darted everywhere" (10).

The roses presented as wild, open and brilliant also manifest her inner strength. Moreover, Cather presents a "bird" symbolism to disrupt the age long docileness and submissiveness of female race. The woodpecker presented in the novel represents female as Niel Herbert says, "It ain't a he, anyhow. It's a female. Anybody would know that" (16). But if we go ahead with the plot line, we find bird unharmed

and uninjured. Though the society i.e. male ideology intend to cripple it, it intends to snatch its freedom "It was not bleeding and did not seem to be crippled" (17). Ivy Peters, another representative of male society, aspires to hear the bird flutter with pain. He, intending to deprive its freedom, draws from his pocket a metal slingshot and some round bits of gravel, and speaks, "I won't kill it. I'll just surprise it, so we can have a look at it" (16). Here, we can see Ivy exhibiting the male ideology. He even catches the bird and tries to restrain it with some instruments which are supposed to abduct women's freedom. He took from his pocket a little red leather box, and when he opened it the other boys saw that it contained curious little instruments: tiny sharp knife blades, hooks, curved needles, a saw, a blow pipe, and scissors and said, "some of these I got with a taxidermy outfit from the *youth's companion*, and some I made myself" (16). It covertly indicates that some stereotypes he obtains from the society i.e. "youth's companion" and some he designs himself to impede their freedom. In addition to this, Ivy reduces the being of bird to an insect. He says, "She is as lively as a cricket", as in male dominated society female obtain only the granted identity (16). As in Beauvoir's assertion, the bird i.e. female are not born female but they are made so. Ivy releases the bird after crushing its freedom. Cather expresses the very concept "as if it were a practiced trick, with one of those tiny blades he slit both the eyes that glared in the bird's stupid little head, and instantly releases it" (17).

Despite Ivy's "practiced trick" the bird manages to "rose up" to assert its identity in the cloudy surrounding of male chauvinism. It's noteworthy to analyze Ivy's act of "sliting both the eyes" of the bird. It is with the purpose of depriving bird to see the reality and to utilize her for their own purpose. But Cather twists the plot in

such an unconventional way that the bird manages to accomplish its survival. Cather avers:

The bird rose in the air with a whirling, corkscrew motion, darted to the right, struck a treetrunk,—to the left, and struck another. Up and down, backward and forward among the tangle of branches it flew, raking its feathers, falling and recovering itself. (17)

The bird "rose" in the sky despite some difficulties. The branches upon which the bird strikes are the boundaries erected by the society even though the bird "flew" raking its feathers, falling and recovering itself which clearly manifests the assertion of female individuality because bird here is linked with female race. Cather's *A lost lady* employs bird as a metaphor to represent women's entrapment in marriage and society but her bird (the blinded female woodpecker) asserts its individuality which supports the vested interest of Cather. Cather demands all the females to struggle hard for their identity which is blurred because of male domination.

The bird symbolizes the plight of women in the society. The bird was wounded, blinded and freed. How can a hurt woodpecker be able to survive in such hostile environment. The bird's initial assertiveness again comes at stake and returns to its own destiny. It could not recover the initial boldness, so return to the hole," as if it had learned something by its bruises, it pecked and crept its way along the branch and disappeared into its own hole" (18). But Cather, very covertly, asserts female's individuality when Niel Herbert tries to rescue that female woodpecker, loses his balance and wounds himself. And he was rushed to Mrs. Forrester's house where she (Mrs. Forrester) treats him as if she is the hero. Other males Ivy Peters, Blum boys and their company seemed very frightened but "Mrs. Forrester was concerned, but not frightened" (19). Mrs. Forrester orders others to leave the room and others are bound

to obey her," Ivy cursed himself, but he had to go". There was something final, about her imperious courtesy, _____ high and mighty, he called it" (19-20). She does not hesitate to kiss him which also enhances her assertiveness. All these aforementioned events give the impression of female assertiveness which my research seeks to prove. Mrs. Forrester, the feminine hero of the novel asserts the role of agent which may startle us at the first sight. But Cather wants female race to be active and assertive, not like that of conventional heroines. Marian's kissing also gives her the role of agent not of patient.

On the other hand, Cather's male characters in the novel are given submissive roles. They don't seem dominating to any female characters. Rather, they feel small and timid in front of Marian Forrester who acts like the dominating figure. To give the women equal space in the universe, she has devised her novel in this way. Marian is given highhanded personality.

Female assertiveness becomes more vibrant when Marian Forrester's husband falls from the horse and becomes sick. His sickness loses his authority over Marian. Male superiority comes at stake and his faded power gives rise to Marianne Forrester who not only snatches financial power but also pushes Captain out from the entire world. She keeps on changing the males for her personal satisfaction. She gets more dutiful towards other males than towards her sick husband. She is totally individualistic. She does whatever she likes despite the orthodox rules and regulations of the society. Marian posits as a burden like bondage of being somebody's wife. She despises that system where men lead an active life, the women survive it as a habit. Just as the mutilated female woodpecker flounders while trying to make progress, Marian whirls as she attempts to reestablish herself after her husband experiences

financial crisis and dies. She assumes complete responsibility of the house and experiences a reversal of her fortune.

John H. Randall in his essay "The Landscape and the Looking Glass: Willa Cather's Search for Value" explains that:

the woodpecker symbolizes the lost lady . . . the slow, wheeling flight of the bird after Ivy releases her is similar to Marian Forrester's hectic flustering. While Marian flains, she never loses sight of what she wants – a return to her life of economic security. And just as the woodpecker appears to recognize its perch, Marian knows when she wants her perch to be, so she struggles and racks her feathers, but she does succeed. (184)

Randall, in his criticism finds Marian similar to the wounded woodpecker in many ways but unlike woodpecker Marian is able to assert her existence in the hostile environment. In "*The Awakening* and *A Lost Lady*: Lying with Broken Wings and Raked Feathers", A. Elizabeth Elz comments on the bird imagery. She writes:

Bruised and battered from not having the money to live as she desires, Marian refuses to submit; instead she struggles, just as the woodpecker did, to regain her place but Marian's struggle is also different from the woodpecker's. Once the woodpecker regains its branch, it . . . disappeared into its own hole. In comparison, Marian does not disappear into some dark hole; she lives albeit many difficulties. (18)

Restored to society (without the assistance of Niel) Marial is not in her original position, but unlike the woodpecker that will surely die due to its inability to fend for itself, Mariann enjoys several years of living; she is strong enough to sustain herself.

Yet another critic Susan Rosowski in her "Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*: The Paradoxes of Changes" maintains though the woodpecker has been a metaphor for Marian, it does not represent what will happen to her. For, unlike the woodpecker, "She can interact with those who batter her" (24). More importantly, 'through her interaction, she achieves freedom by manipulating the patriarchal system. Her freedom is not one achievement, it is a conglomeration of moments-her marriage to the captain (Cather 143); her dismissing of Ivy Peters who carried Niel to her bedroom (19); her removing of her economic interests from Judge Pommery's control (128); her holding a dinner party of her own (135); her leaving Sweet Water (146); and her marriage to Henry Collins (149). Each of these episodes demonstrates how she comes to master the moment and provide for herself. In spite of the difficulties she faces, Marian never stops dreaming that she can regain the life she has lost.

Second, in contrast to the woodpecker that regained the same branch from which it had been hit, Marian has a life similar to the one she had with the captain, but not the same life – not the same perch. She, being twenty-five years younger than her husband, makes hearty welcome to the male visitors at her home. She is the subject of admiration for all young boys from the neighboring towns, Omaha and Denver. Cather writes, "She was always there, just out the door to welcome their visitors" (5). She is more attractive to the groups of young boys, with whom she plays romance, especially to Ed. Elliot, 'the Don Juan of Sweetwater and Ivy Peters, the most immoral lawyer. Why does Marian move against her husband running after the young boys? It's all to assert her individuality and to give a big jolt to the age long male domination.

Marian, who is isolated from any female community is a distinctive character in the novel. She breaks all the conventions and stereotypical roles devised by the

society for the whole female race. She denies all the stereotypical roles that hinder her individuality. She leaves no stone unturned to assert her individuality. She is ready even to pay the large bill for the sake of her individuality. None of the male characters in the novel can dominate her. She plays with one after another males but leaves them when she feels they obstruct her individuality. J. Gerard Dollar in her essay "Community and Connectedness in *A Lost Lady*" illustrates this:

Belonging to no community of women, Marian parallels the blinded woodpecker that is isolated in its hole. Unable to navigate, the woodpecker will remain in its hole until it starves. Instead of finding a sanctuary in the hole as the woodpecker does, Marian rails against her predicament. Although Marian's desire frightens Niel, Marian is not afraid to "plan and plot". (142)

Marian does not want her existence to be defined by others. She has survived the scandal of her fiancé's death, and broken legs from a fall of a mountain. With her broken legs, she was like the woodpecker whose eyes have been slit – dependent on others for her survival and protection. Rescued by and married to the Captain, her life, which up until that point had been a perilous flight from first a scandalous man and then a careless man, is secure. With the change in the captain's fortunes and his failing health, however, Marian again flounders as she searches for a new perch. When Marian was physically injured and unable to care for herself, she was the blinded woodpecker, now she will flail until she can regain control of her flight.

Her assertion of individual becomes more vibrant when she starts lovemaking with other young men while her husband is sick on bed. She speaks "What's to hinder us from getting a sleigh at the livery barn and going down to the sweet water" (51). She enjoys in the company of males leaving her husband suffer alone. Marian's

attraction to the young boys is due to the following reasons: Firstly, Captain Daniel Forrester grows older in age when Marian Forrester blooms in youth. Secondly, Captain Forrester's decline of health makes him disable and handicapped. So he fails to earn money to fulfill the demand of his wife. Thirdly the failure of his economy due to his ill-health or his bank failure due to the Great Depression of the United States is the failure of his wife's fidelity. Lastly, the extra-ordinary beauty of Marian Forrester attracts the boys. Her individual thought and feelings are given priority instead of her husband. She dislikes to be indulged in the house. She likes no barriers for her. She wants to be free and boundless so she says "I hate bein' shut up in the house" Her love making with other young men also consolidates her individuality. In chapter five her romantic love with Ellinger while her husband is fighting with death also enhances her individuality:

He [Ellinger] put his arm through hers and settled himself low in the sleigh. "You ought to look at me better than that. It's been a devil of a long while since I've seen you."

"Perhaps It's been too long," She murmured. The mocking spark in her eyes softened perceptibly under the long pressure of his arm. "Yes it's been long," She admitted lightly. (52-53)

Of course, her romantic love with Ellinger when husband is counting his last breathe helps to assert her individuality. She forgets her duty towards her husband rather she goes on fulfilling her physical need that are not fulfilled by her old husband. She utilizes her youth in full fathom not with her aged husband but with those young men whoever comes in her touch. Marian's anti-husband feeling occurs to her mind when she cannot fulfill her desire for sex from her twenty five year older husband. When she blooms in her youth, her husband fades away with wrinkles on his

cheeks. Then she knows no fidelity, no loyalty and no responsibility for him. She shows him negligence even at his serious illness, and Niel Herbert, the narrator of the novel, attends him. Her romance with the young boys brings her satisfaction temporarily in the physical sense. She neither loves her husband nor makes any treatment at his illness. Instead, she puts her husband's whole assets on her lover Ivy Peter's palm. Such unbearable scene bitterly pinches at Daniel's heart, and he welcomes his death after he meets several strokes in his life. But Marian, surrounded by hosts of her lovers as attracted by her beauty, gets no time to shed even a single drop of tear at his death. Instead, she remains busy in attracting another new love perhaps the final, Mr. Henry Collins. All these activities show that she is ready to do anything for her individuality. In "Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*: The Paradoxes of Change", Susan Rosowski maintains: "The concern of the book is not to be with change itself, that, for better or worse, is a fact. Instead Cather focuses on human adaptation to change-on characters who struggle to maintain value within a framework of mutability" (52).

Furthermore, Cather gives her heroines a heroic quality that allows them to be dominant over males. Whoever comes in touch of Mrs. Forrester, she becomes more assertive. She never compromises her individuality, her individual freedom and identity with any of the male characters hovering around her. Some are attracted by her beauty and youth, some are attracted by her wealth but she never allowed them to be dominant over her. Rather, she takes the agent's role and make others assist to achieve her desires. Her dominant role can be noticed when she return home after passing a romantic time with Elliger. She says "Drive Slowly. It doesn't matter if we are late for dinner. Nothing matters" (Cather, 55). For her, nothing matters except her individuality in full sense. How can Marian be satisfied with a man? When she felt

Ellinger trying to snatch her freedom and identity, she chooses another man to dance in her desires. She again starts her romantic love to quench the thirst which was not fulfilled by her husband. Her another partner Niel comes to entertain her. The more her husband is in worse condition, the more she enjoys the company of young men.

Cather writes:

After a few moments she rose. "Come", she whispered, "Mr. Forrester is asleep. Let's run down the hill, there is no one to stop us. I'll slip on my rubber boots. No objections!" She put her fingers on his lips. Not a word ! I can't stand this house a moment longer. (63)

Discarding all the worldly affairs, she wants to fly with her desires. No one can stop her in asserting her individuality. She cannot stay in a house where she can't fulfill her desires and wishes. She even claims that she will be asserting her individuality forever. She says, "I've always danced in the winter, there's plenty of dancing at Colorado springs. You would't believe how I miss it. I shall dance till I'm eight . . . I'll be the waitzing grandmother ! It's good for me, I need it." (64). Her intention of dancing upto eighty years covertly asserts her individuality. She doesn't like to lose her authority even in future. She doesn't even hesitate to comment upon the vigour of Niel with whom she is in enjoying romantic moment. She sighed and took his arm, "My dear boy, your shoulders aren't broad enough" (65). In "The Song of the Lark and A Lost Lady: The Evolution of Lark into Woodpecker", Michel Hardin contends that Marian achieves freedom at the second dinner party, over which she presides, because she in control of her action". After the Captain had died [Marian] allows Niel to carve the duck, a job which had been the Captain's. Clearly, cutting the duck refers back to Ivy's cutting of the woodpecker, but the difference is

that Marian is now directing the moment; she and not any of the men is deciding the action" (Hardin, 45).

In addition to this, her individuality becomes more vigorous when Forrester family suffers financial crisis Mr. Forrester's could not tolerate that struck and his sickness intensifies whereas Marian remains unaffected. Cather describes her as, "Mrs. Forrester seemed unaware of any danger" (68). She is so powerful among male company that they feel themselves very insecure without Marian Cather writes:

We saw last winter that we couldn't do anything without our lady Forrester. Nothing came off right without her. If I had a party, we sat down afterward and wondered what in hell we'd had it for. Oh, no, we can't manage without you. (80-81)

She hovers over male company to assert her individuality. She disfavours to play the submissive and docile role devised by male authority to the whole female race. Niel, a role model of patriarchy tries to be dominant over her when he finds Marian flirting with Ivy Peters. He tries to draw the boundary around her but she denies the boundary that Niel aspires to delimit her. Niel says, "Why do you allow him to speak to you like that; Mrs Forrester? If you'll let me, I'll give him a beating and teach him how to speak to you" (104). When she feels Niel being authoritative over her she instantly reacts against him. Her assertion of individuality becomes more powerful when she tries to solve the financial problem herself her husband, who is now submissive and powerless cannot help her family. So, she tries to solve it by hiring Ivy Peters. Conventional thoughts that females are to be limited within the household chores is dismantled here by Marian who finds herself only one lady to solve her present financial crisis. Marian avers:

Don't tell your uncle; I've no doubt it's crooked. But the judge is like Mr. Forrester; his methods don't work nowadays. He will never get us out of debt, dear man? He can't get himself out. Ivy Peters is terribly smart, you know. He owns half the town already. (105)

She comes up with new methods to solve their crisis. Without acknowledging her husband she endeavors to solve that crisis with her own idea. She employs Ivy Peters who is smart and able instead of Judge Pommery that was employed by her husband.

Cather presents Marian Forrester in a very distinctive role. She is aware of all kinds of worldly affairs. She knows more about business affairs than males; she knows how to solve the financial crisis; she even knows how the male gaze is trying to dominate her and what not? She breaks all the walls of patriarchy erected by her male counterparts. She does one thing more vigorously and vibrantly i.e. she asserts her individuality at any cost. She speaks abruptly with Niel:

You see, two years, three years, more of this, and I could still go back to California – and live again. But after that . . . perhaps people think I've settled down to grow old gracefully, but I've not. I feel such a power to live in me, Niel. (106)

She seems powerful and she herself asserts that she has power to live in her for many years to come. She is not like her weak husband who is going to be obliterated from the scene she wants to establish her in the society with full power and vigor unlike that, which the male chauvinistic society wants.

All she (Marian) wants is to be free from the age long domination that the female race had been facing. She wants to rewrite the history; remake her life in the way she likes. Cather, that is why, makes Marian more powerful and dominating.

Marian Forrester goes on dismantling one after another walls erected by males.

Cather writes, "Mrs. Forrester had been quickening her pace all the while" (10).

Marian says, "so that's what I'm struggling for, to get out of this hole" (. . .). "Out of it ! When I'm alone here for months together, I plan and plot" (110). Marian calls male clutch "hole" and wants to be released from it. She struggles against it to be free. She even wants to be free from her husband. She likes no boundary. She wants total freedom. Commenting upon Marian's activities Niel Herbert asks, "Did you leave Captain Forrester alone?" (112) She without any regret, speaks, "Yes Nothing will happen over there. Nothing ever does happen" (112) ! Cather herself writes about Marian in this way "she had asked nothing and accepted nothing" (112). Her demeanor towards the townspeople was always the same, easy, cordial and impersonal. How can anybody accept anything that is against, his/her will, that will impede their individuality.

Judge Pommeroy, another agent of male dominated society, gets surprised when he understands Marian. He describes to his nephew that:

[. . .] he had never seen these women look so wide-awake, so important and pleased with themselves, as now when he encountered them bustling about the Forrester place. The Captain's illness had the effect of a social revival, like a new club or a church society. The creatures grew bolder and bolder [. . .] she had ceased to care about anything.
(118)

Besides, Marian's assertion of her individuality not only energized other women to assert their identity but also helped to shake the age long domination. They are as according to Judge Pommeroy, being more powerful and assertive. They are pleased with the new role in the society. The new "creature" becomes more bolder and ceased

to care about anything else except her identity and individuality. This consciousness rise in her is due to the assertion of her individuality. Now, with her new role, she left males to consider females as superior to all human race.

After the death of Captain Forrester, she becomes more assertive. She undertakes all business in her own hand. She employs Ivy Peters, young boy, as her lawyer to solve her financial problems. To the surprise of Niel Herbert, She tries her best to solve her problem herself. When Niel admonishes her about the other people's thinking about her she discards anyone's thought and says:

I don't bother about their talk. They have always talked about me, always will, Mr. Peters is my lawyer and my tenant; I have to see him, and I'm certainly not going to his office. I cannot sit in the house alone every evening and knit. If you came to see me any oftener than you do, that would make talk. (132)

She becomes so assertive about her individuality that she does not care anybody's talking about her. This age long domination, according to her, will perverse as until she takes any initiatives against her. She is not ready to follow the code and conduct devised by the male ideology. She does not like to be bounded inside the house alone and knit rather she likes to do whatever she prefers. She is with changed mentality. She herself says " Times have changed, but he (Niel) doesn't realize it" (133). She does not care what the society talks about her. As a widow she was preferred to be submissive, calm and docile but she, to their surprise, becomes, more bold and assertive. She is successful in teaching the society that females also have their own identity and individuality. At last even Niel understands that, "She was not willing to immolate herself, like the widow of all these great men, and died with the pioneer period to which she belonged; that she preferred life on any terms" (145).

Annellese Smith in her "Finding Marian Forrester: A Restorative Reading of Cather's *A Lost Lady*" demonstrates that: "all of the men associated with Marian betray her; Ned Montgomery, Marian's fiance, is shot by another woman's husband; Frank Ellinger marries Constance Ogden; Ivy Peters uses Marian to establish himself in the community; Harney, her yet another lover, fell on rocks and killed instantly; the Captain elects to impoverish Marian to save his reputation; and Niel abandons Marian when she doesn't meet his masculine self interest. The Captain, according to Smith, "Chooses to let her pay for his nobility . . . again she is subtly betrayed or victimized by masculine self interest" (224). The Captain has the power in the marriage because he is a man and part of the hierarchical system: "As the captain's wife, however [she] must fit into his dream. The captain's dream was to build a house that [his] friends would come to, with a wife like Mrs. Forrester to make it attractive to them. The Captain builds a house and then wants to furnish it with a wife," a wife like Mrs. Forrester. Any woman who married the Captain would have been "Mrs Forrester" thus Marian is reduced to possession. But Captain cannot survive to maintain that hierarchical system that he aspires to establish. Rather he is wiped out from the scene and who survives is Marian Forrester who sustains even in very difficult situation.

Mrs. Forrester is not content to allow her life to end with her husband's death. Instead, she will use Ivy Peter to advance herself until she can marry the wealthy English man Henry Collins. For Niel Herbert the novel is a tragedy in the sense that Mrs. Forrester is not willing to die as a female, a wife. He cannot understand why she wants to continue living in the new society rather than his idealized version of the old order and convention. Marian goes on changing the male counterparts and ultimately meets her death rather than to be a submissive wife to anyone. During her life she is

always in company of males denying the male devised territory for females. She dines with males; opines with them and even drinks with them. She never thought of her being female and submissive. Niel, who always wanted her to be true in womanly role, later understands that "Mrs Forrester is not willing to be a wife, but wants to live in the new social order" (Dollar 34). He was startled at the last part of novel when he saw Ivy Peters entering her house and putting his arms around her. He leaves the town feeling contempt for her because she does not suit his ideology. His male ideology is devastated when he found her in reversal role of lady.

Marian as a feminine hero denies the economic, social and even psychological oppression of her by male society. She does not care about her husband and even her house. After her husband's death Ivy Peter, her new lover, starts spending much more time at the Forrester place. He often plays cards with Mrs. Forrester in the evening and has started bringing young friends there. The local gossip comment that Mrs. Forrester has begun chasing younger men, and Niel finally approaches her about it. She laughs and tells him that "it is better to have guests than be bored" (109). Her switching to Ivy Peter as her personal lawyer and her ties with the friends of her dead husband's clearly indicate her assertion of individuality. She holds control over economic, social and psychological power which the women in patriarchal society have been hindered since long.

Women are supposed to be very calm generally but Marian dismantles such rigid restraints over female race. The parochial view of patriarchy over female is broken down to pieces by her self-assertive behaviour and activities. When Captain Forrester and Judge Pommeroy leave to visit the bank which turned bankrupt where captain has heavily invested his money, Marian enjoys with Frank Ellinger in her own home, inside the chamber of Captain Forrester which was discovered by Niel. He

came there to console her for her misery thinking that she might have been shattered by this crisis but he found her in such a condition which he had never thought of. He thought Marian same as other ladies—submissive, docile, dependent and ladylike—but to his dismay he found something else. He came there with a rose to give her but later dumps the roses into mud in rage after discovering her in such condition. His mental image of Mrs. Forrester has been ruined.

Women's powerlessness, victimization, lack of resources and marginalization constitute women's timeless history. Therefore, Cather sees the importance of women's struggle to assert the important role of women's race. She wants to empower women by asserting female individuality. So, she depicts a character like Marian Forrester who concretizes her motive of dismantling all male clutch and their powerplay over female race. Niel's description of Marian as a bird "How light and alike she was! like a bird caught in a net" (Cather 92) later fails. We cannot help but think of the first scene where the bird is injured but this scene symbolically foreshadows the death of Captain Forrester. As the visually impaired bird would meet its death, the Captain is also wiped out through the scene after the stroke. As captain Forrester starts to fail more and more, her drinking also increases. She experiences the elixir of her life when we see the Captain slowly counting down his last moments of his life.

Through Cather's *A Lost Lady*, the hidden history of women's resistance is materialized. The women in that time of rising consciousness start asserting their individuality by creating a society free of domination in which sexuality, politics, work, intimacy, thinking itself will be transformed. And Marian does so. Marian denies to sacrifice her individual desires and needs for the sake of her husband and societal values. She transforms the role of females which has long been validated.

When Mrs. Forrester and Ellinger take a sleigh into town together, she turns to him and comments on how glad she is to be away from the house and Constance. She marches ahead onto transforming the age long images of women. She defies the stereotypical roles given to her by any male. She goes on changing her lovers and husbands when they become dominating to them. Cather avers: "he (Niel) had given her a year of his life, and she had thrown it away" (145). Her individuality is so asserted that she even cannot imagine a life with bounded territory. She is very different from any other women". It was Mrs. Forrester who made that house so different from any other" (146). She is different in her nature in her behaviour and even in her activities.

Cather is of the opinion that when females come up with strong voice against males and when they give up sacrificing their liberty and identity for the sake of male, the society can be free from domination. She doesn't perceive patriarchy as an unchanging and monolithic structure of oppression, but sees the possibility that patriarchal power may be challenged and feminist victories will win. The description that Will Cather gives of Captain Forrester is one of an already defeated man. "He is described by what he used to be not what he is. His further decline throughout the novel is symbolized by his reduction to first one crutch, then two" (Dollar 45). Captain's succeeding failings, Niel's failing of maintaining male (old) order in the society and Ellinger's failing of dominating her sexually give rise to Marian's success in maintaining her individuality. She never submits her individuality for the sake of any other persons. She manages to pursue her individuality from all means. She does not accept her husband's patronization and has succeeded to drift out of Niel's ken where he aspired to lock-up in the name of societal norms and values.

Since time immemorial all literary works present 'male' as subject and usurp the power position but women are depicted powerless creature. They are shown as powerless object and given no prestigious position in the society but Cather, here, endeavors to transform this role. Marian, in *A Lost Lady* is depicted as a hero, all powerful all assuming lady. She holds power in her house and also in the whole society. She usurps all the power — economic, psychological and social— and remains in a prestigious position in the society. All affairs of her house are conducted by her, her guests also respond her more than her husband. She breaks all the conventions and stereotypical roles of females. Niel at the very end part of Novel speaks out:

I have known pretty women and clever ones since then, — but never one like her, as she was in her best days. Her eyes, when they laughed for a moment into one's own, seemed to promise a wild delight that he has not found in life. (147)

Marian was always in "her best days" never yielding to anybody, any power. She denies any types of images that the patriarchal society aspires to link her with. She seeks to eliminate the subordination, oppression, inequalities and injustices women suffer because of their sex.

Another noteworthy thing to consider upon in analyzing Cather's *A Lost Lady* is the title itself. Why Cather chooses to entitle her novel as 'Lost Lady'. She elects to be a lost lady rather than to sacrifice individual desires and freedom. Marian is portrayed as a lost lady who never yields to any male clutch that always tries to capture her. The major interest of Cather in this novel is to establish feminine voice in the society. Defying the age long domination of males, Cather presents a self assertive character who consolidates the voice of women by asserting female

individuality in the male dominated society. All male written literary works presented female in very docile, submissive and meek roles. But Cather being herself a staunch feminist tries to enhance the role of females by subverting the role model of females that are totally different from the ones in male written literature. Her portrayal of Marian's character rejects all the stereotypical roles played by females in male literature. She does not let female sex to derogate their own sex. She writes against the pervasively patriarchal, male controlled and male centred view through the help of Marian Forrester who always seeks to assert female individuality. Cather's presentation of autonomous female protagonist in her novels are a break from the existing tradition of the masculine heroes of the early twentieth century novels. Lastly, Cather sums up her ideas that freedom and responsibility that are historically denied to them could be achieved by women if they will to do so.

IV. Conclusion

Willa Cather chooses to end *A Lost Lady* with the affirmation that women can survive, control their destinies and live their life in the way they desire. Depicting Marian Forrester as the chief character of her novel she has materialized the aforementioned point. Marian, her female protagonist, is content to fly from one man to another in search of life she wants. In refusing to do what is expected of the wives of her husband's generation, Marian chooses life. As she explains to Niel:

You see, two years, three years or more of this, and I could still go back to California—and live again. But after that . . . perhaps people think I've settled down to grow old gracefully, but I've not. I feel such a power to live in me. (Cather 106)

She is all powerful, all assertive and never yielding to any authority.

In addition to this, in asserting her individuality Marian despises her home. "Having no desire to be the true woman she completely disregards her duties as a wife" (Seyersted 135). Marian proclaims that she despises house because it's so small and looks like a pigeon house (81). As the pigeon house is for the domesticated birds kept for show or sport, Marian hates to be just an object of demonstration. She avers, "I can't stand this house a moment longer" (63). She abhors the confinement of the house which ties her in stereotypical role model.

Cather's hero dismantles one after another stereotypes that are designed for females. She refuses to be confined within home, denies to be a true wife and rejects all societal norms and values. What she always thinks is her individual desires. Marian has no husband or children to consider at last, she is in possession of her own body and mind. When she enters alliances that require her to submit to the authority

of men, the decision to do so is her own. She represents the new woman who was evolving in society. However, she does not seek societal approval for her quest of independence. Commenting on the assertiveness of Marian, Rosowsky, a critic, writes "Marian, as like that of injured woodpecker whirls until she finds a safe perch from which to reestablish herself" (57) Without a husband or children Marian manages to escape the oppressive Sweet Water property. Her escape liberates her from all the dominations.

Marian as a feminine hero of the novel asserts female individuality creating situations that suits her. Breaching the age long role model of females, Marian tries to reestablish herself in the society. She never lets any males to dominate her. Patricia Cell writes Marian's "dominance over Ivy never changes not even when she is poor. She never falls into his clutches; instead, she turns to him in a painful compromise, as a conscious decision, in a time of need" (6). She always thinks about freedom. She doesn't like anybody curtailing her liberty. Though female, Marian never allowed anyone to think that females are submissive, docile and meek. Another critic Sarah Grand states, "It's the woman's place and pride and pleasure to teach the child." Therefore, since" Marian teaches the town boys the polite manner of society, they represent her children; she is their teacher. Of course, she has the power of directing the situation" (Grand 273).

Cather, portraying Marian as a hero of *A Lost Lady* subverts the granted role of female race. As a wife she discards the traditional role model and as a widow she fails to submit her individuality. She posits as a burden like bondage of being somebody's wife. She despises that system where men lead an active role. She will not suffer negative consequences as she continues living outside that the society dictates.

Marian's focus is on adapting to the situation in which she finds herself in order to reclaim the life she chooses.

Female individuality is asserted vibrantly in Cather's *A Lost Lady*. Marian controls not only homely affairs but also business affairs which is not supposed to be women's cup of tea in traditional sense. She utters "I cant sit in the house alone every evening and knit" (132). Knitting, limiting within homely chores and sacrificing self interests for males are not Marian's interests rather she marches ahead in fulfilling her self desires. Marian dreams of escaping, dancing, living and resuming her life. In Beth Burch's view, Marian's freedom originates with Ivy Peters, who discards her after he purchases the Forrester place and marries another lady:

The freed Forrester, like the wounded woodpecker, finds her way to home to California where she eventually marries wealthy Mr. Collins, who as she says, cares for her well; at least he provides her material comfort and access to society once again. (9)

To synopsise, Cather's *A Lost Lady* asserts female individuality in full sense by depicting Marian Forrester as a hero of the novel who defies all conventions and boundaries erected by patriarchy to confine female. The age long history of women's suppression comes at stake with the assertiveness of Marian Forrester. As a female she does whatever she likes to do and there is no one to restrict her freedom. She rises above her injuries to reclaim her life even in very difficult situations. She does not want her existence to be defined by others, particularly males. She redeems herself from all kinds of male suppression by asserting her individuality.

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Acknowledgements

I would like to express my sincere gratitude to my supervisor, Mr. Devi Prasad Gautam for his scholarly counseling, candid suggestions, essential materials and fruitful incitement for the existence of this dissertation in its present form. Any attempt to verbalize my gratitude to him is bound to be inadequate. The ambition of the completion of this research would have never come true had there been not his indispensable comments.

I owe my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Krishna Chandra Sharma, Head of the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, for the approval of this dissertation in its present form. I am grateful to Dr. Sanjeev Upreey and Dr. Arun Gupto for their valuable suggestions. I am equally indebted to Mr. Puspa Acharya and Mr. Shankar Subedi for their cooperation in many ways. Only with their support, the dream of the completion of the thesis has materialized so soon.

I would equally like to express my respect to my parents Khima Nanda Dhakal and Dil Kumari Dhakal. My special thanks goes to my better half Shova Neupane (Dhakal) for her help during my research. Thanks to my friends Buddhi Raj Sharma, Buddhi Acharya and Anup Sapkota for their useful suggestions and help. I also like to remember my Guru and brother Kabi Raj Bhandari and my cute 'bhanji' Amisha Basyal. And finally, I thank Jeeten Maharjan (Jee Computer Center) for contributing his invaluable time to type this thesis.

Toya Nath Dhakal

June 2008

TRIBHUVAN UNIVERSITY

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Assertion of Female Individuality in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*

A Thesis

**Submitted to the Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences, Tribhuvan
University in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of
Master of Arts in English**

By

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June 2008

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Approval Letter

This is to certify that the thesis entitled “Assertion of Female Individuality in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*” by Toya Nath Dhakal, submitted to the Central Department of English, Tribhuvan University, has been approved by the undersigned members of the Research Committee.

Members of the Research Committee:

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Abstract

My dissertation entitled "Assertion of Female Individuality in Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*" subverts the role model of female that is devised by male ideology. Cather's presentation of autonomous female protagonist who asserts her individuality dismantling the complacent roles of female in the society aspires to establish female voice in the society. Cather's hero Marian Forrester disrupts the old patriarchal walls erected by male ideology to thwart women from any progressive activities. Marian does whatever she likes without thinking what will be the society's response. Depicting Marian twenty five years younger than her husband, Cather allows her hero to go beyond the limited territory of patriarchy. Marian remains busy on changing her lovers leaving her sick husband on his death bed to assert her individuality. She controls not only domestic chores but also undertakes business and financial affairs. Cather by portraying Marian as the hero of the novel proves that freedom and responsibility, that are historically denied to them, could be achieved by women.

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