

The american frontier and the western hero



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The American Frontier and the Western Hero The literature of the nineteenth century represents different prototypes and characters typical for this historical period. In the works, *The Virginian* by Owen Wister and *The Wide, Wide World* by Susan Warner the authors create strong male and female characters able to fight and survive in any circumstances. Thesis Female and male characters from both works fight with harsh reality of life and go through sufferings in order to become free from social constraints and false values imposed by the society.

The main character in Owen Wister's novel is the Virginian, a cowboy who tries to establish the standards for the cowboy stereotype. He is a real hero who possesses the features of an ideal man, and personifies high moral values and physical strength. Wister depicts the Virginian as a person who is able to distinguish what is good and what is bad, and who follows his personal beliefs. He is described as: "The dealer had styled the Virginian " a black-headed guy." This did well enough as an unflattered portrait" (Wister, 34). The Virginian tries to make a better world paying a special attention to universal order and peace during the Johnson County War in Wyoming. The main character of Susan Warner's novel is "Christian Character", Ellen Montgomery. Female characters in the novel are depicted through minor themes such as the themes of motherhood and religion. Christianity and church was a strong force which dictated social norms and social order. At the beginning, Ellen is depicted as a devoted parishioner who follows all values and commandments.

The main similarity between the male and female characters is their desire to fight for freedom and justice which limits their behavior. The Virginian is a leader who possesses self-belief and tolerance, which helps him to create the

reality; he is a high moral person who fights for justice, harmony and orderliness of the universe. For instance, the Virginian is against lynching which represents lack of government's actions and laws. Similar to this character, Ellen resists Christian values and rules imposed by her mother. For instance, Warner (1996) describes: " Ellen's task was no longer painful, but most delightful. She hoped she was doing some good". In some cases, her behavior is atypical for a woman of her historical epoch but she is depicted as a rebellious person, alien and masculine.

Both protagonists embody personal democracy which helps them to fight with social rules. Both of them are unselfish and courageous people. To some extent, both of them inherit the ideals of liberal persons based on personal freedom and social justice. Both of them are philosophers who do not subdue to common norms. " The man had given one nod to the Virginian, and the Virginian one to him; and now he was already below them on the descending road" (Wister 1998, 67). Both authors describe minor characters to depict the society and diversity for human beings. Ellen's mother is stuck to values preached by the society. In the Virginian, Owen Wister opposes large ranchers and aristocracy values to those followed the main character. Both works show that century-old values and traditions dominated in the society and guide behavior of the majority.

The main difference between the male and female characters is social values and traditions influenced their norms and morals. The image of hero is caused by the feeling of personal freedom and mobility, and masculine force. Social values help the Virginian to form hero's individual identities and let him stand out from the crowd. In contrast, Ellen's code of values grows out of women's culture, which is sustained by sermons and sentimental fiction.

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Reading a book she exclaims: " The Lord is my Shepherd; I shall not want...."
Long before she had finished, Ellen's eyes were full, and her heart too. " If only I could feel these words as mamma does!" she said to herself" (Warner 1996). She is depicted as sympathetic and compassionate, sentimental but a woman full of common wisdom.

In sum, male and female characters of the nineteenth century have much in common fighting for justice and honesty. It is possible to say that Ellen and the Virginian are a little bit " crazy" when follow their own codes of norms. But this very feature helps them to keep away from ignorance and complacency existing in the world.

Works Cited

1. Warner, S. *The Wide, Wide World*. 1996
2. Wister, O. *The Virginian*. Forge Books; 1st Forge edition, 1998.