

Declaration of dependence: cather's critique in a lost lady



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In the words of Arthur Erickson, a Canadian author in the early 20th century, "Illusion is needed to disguise the emptiness within". This quote is referring to the figurative mask that people will put on to conceal their weaknesses, insecurities, and lack of fulfillment that they have. In *A Lost Lady*, Marian Forrester is a prime character that obscures her weaknesses. Continually in the novel, Mrs. Forrester's disguise of being emotionally, physically, psychologically, and financially strong is stripped on the account of the absence of the man in her life to keep her stable; without this constant to depend on, she habitually and instinctively becomes helpless until she finds a way to regain a man to take care of her.

To begin, Ms. Ormsby, before she was introduced to Sweet Water's slow, undeveloped environment, was dependent on her fiancé, Ned Montgomery, "a gaudy young millionaire of the Gold Coast" (Cather 93). In this relationship, Marian was undoubtedly spoiled to death by her future husband while at the same time, depending on him for everything financially, outside of her wants for materials. Soon to be Mrs. Montgomery had, from the start, attempted to attain someone to hold her by the hand to walk her through life. However, when "Montgomery was shot and killed in the lobby of a San Francisco hotel by the husband of another woman", it interrupted Marian's paradisiacal future (Cather 93). With this screwball thrown into nearly widowed, 19 year old Marian's life, she sought refuge and relief from a younger crowd in the mountains while waiting for "the affair to blow over" (Cather 93). Following the event of her fiancé's death, Marian discovered a younger group of acquaintances in the mountains where she immediately "persuaded young Fred Harney...to take her down the face of Eagle Cliff" (Cather 93). This

again conveys the lost lady's need for a man to guide and entertain her. But another one-eighty was taken in Marian's life when "the rope broke, and [the two mountain scalars] dropped to the bottom" where Harney's life and Ormsby's legs were taken (Cather 93).

After search parties were launched and people scoured the mountain for the deceased and injured, it seemed that fate would yet again allow Marian to have a man to rely on. In time, a search party located the two and among this group was Captain Daniel Forrester, who carried her through "all the most dangerous places on the trail" (Cather 93-94). Marian immediately fell in love with her savior. With Marian and her hero married, Mrs. Forrester had found a way to fulfill her needs for complete dependence on another man. Even with the addition of a new husband, the bride of the captain found it necessary to obtain a secret lover. One could argue that "Marian Forrester's tragedy was her deficient sense of honor: she chose sexual and material gratification above sacrifice" but simultaneously her constant need for reliance on another (Smith 221). Later, when Captain Forrester had "come home a poor man", as the captain's health and wealth declined, as did the attainment of Marian's dream life. Mrs. Forrester "flourishes as a result of her husband's prosperity and suffers by his loss of fortune" (Rosowski 240).

Following the death of Captain Forrester, Marian's countenance shifted from a mysterious, jubilant, and vivacious woman to a gloomy, melancholy widow. As a result of the misfortune of the Forresters and the passing of Captain Forrester, Marian switched lawyers, rented out her land, and put great amounts of trust into one of the most least likely, Ivy Peters. Since "the Forresters [had] come down in the world", and Ivy was paying for the rent <https://assignbuster.com/declaration-of-dependence-cathers-critique-in-a-lost-lady/>

which they couldn't " get along without", Marian was now relying on another man (Cather 57-58). With the great amount of money that Peters was putting into the Forrester household, Niel and Marian had " to get along with Ivy Peters" despite how uncivil and ill-mannered he was (Cather 68-69). In this instance, Mrs. Forrester was extremely dependent on Ivy Peters financially making her follow the pattern of the demand for a man to relieve her of her immediate issues. Through the limited perspective of Neil Herbert, the reader is introduced to the story of the lost lady. Neil's " earliest apprehensions of Marian Forrester are of her ' original self'" which in reality, don't exist because Neil did not understand at the time that the only change in the lost lady was the lack of a male guide in her life.

Concluding Marian's journey, she acquires " a rich, cranky old Englishman" named Henry Collins (Cather 97). Even at the end of her life, now Mrs. Collins, " seemed to have everything" as long as there was a strong wealthy man to finance, comfort, console, aid and guide along the way (Cather 98). As shown above, Marian appears to have life put well together as long as there is a man present in her life when in reality, as soon as that man is taken from her company, she loses control financially, emotionally, physically, and ultimately all other forms of life.

Works Cited

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Rosowski, Susan J., " Willa Cather's *A Lost Lady*: Art Versus The Closing Frontier" (1982). *Great Plains Quarterly*. Paper 1635.