

Women and gender role in my antonia by willa cather

Literature



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Thesis ment on Gender Roles in Antonia by Willa Cather Willa Cather in her novel my Antonia makes a firm stance regarding the ' Modern Woman' by using their powerful natures and their boldfaced sexuality of the female characters in the novel. This novel was written a year before women were allowed to vote in the United States. And it comes to show us that the power of women does not only lie within being able to voting rights but it extends beyond it, they are capable of much more and they should take a stand against the societal stereotypes and make new roles for themselves in all walks of life. Willa Cather was a progressive feminist and she has highlighted issues in the novel which are under the media limelight in the present world. Written in 1918 this novel can be very relatable in the present century as compared to the time it was written. This comes to show us how far behind we are in the movement towards reaching equality within genders. Through her narrative she has given us examples of women who didn't abide by the societies typical roles set for women and did what they believed in. She has also given us an insight to what atrocities these women face by the common public, women included and especially the patriarchs of our society when they decide to stand for themselves and their principles. She has given us examples of Antonia and how she was condemned by the people in her neighborhood for working on the fields, and how Antonia had to raise her child as a single mother without Jim's support. Then secondly, she has also discussed one of the most eminent issues of even the present generation. The rape of women and sexual and physical assault by men who believe they have the right to treat women in any way possible because they are the superior to women. Ironically, throughout the narrative it's the women who

have been shown to have strong and powerful personalities to have broken norms and stood for their purposes where as men such as Jim have been shown to be weak, who despite wanting and believing in certain things didn't follow through because of the fear of breaking the societal norms and therefore conformed to them.

Roles in genders are an instrument made by society to create suitable restrictions and standards for the different sexes to conform to. However, the start of the twentieth century as a consequence of the twentieth amendment, these lines got blurred and a new set of gender roles began to form where by the women joined the workforce, and started to become more independent and less dependent on their male counterparts.

My Antonia is a symbol of this movement and consists of stories about females with strong ideals. Every character in the story displays a dominant personality who didn't fear to push themselves to new challenges and take risks to eventually become successful in their chosen career paths.

Moreover, another interesting element about this story is stark contrast from the reality where the women are portrayed as resilient, energetic and agile and the men are ' passive and weak', a move towards breaking gender stereotypes.

Interestingly though, Antonia itself is written through the eyes of a male narrator by a female writer. Antonia caters the message of feminism in a very humble way. The main character Antonia is shown to be a girl with strong ideals since childhood. She was ambitious but also considerate of her responsibilities. As a child she is keen to learn English and adjusted to her new environment. After her father's demise, she preferred working on the

fields with her elder brother instead of playing at home to divide his responsibility. She didn't fear what the people had to say about her taking the role of a man, while working on the fields. However, by the end, as a grown woman she was a wonderful mother and wife. She was happy and satisfied with all she had accomplished in life. Even though it was very different, compared to the success of other women in the novel, she is shown as the perfect embodiment of a woman with feminist principles who achieves a 'positive compromise' in all acts of life.

Lastly, the writer explores the elements of assault and masculinity and through it portrays the failure of the misogynistic patriarchal roles of the society. The argument can be augmented by four episodes. Firstly, the condemnation of Antonia when she was working in the field. Secondly, Lena's enabling presence in the development of male subjectivity, the rape and sexual assault of Antonia by Wick Cutter and lastly the bride that was fed to the wolves by Pavel.

Reference:

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