

Portrait of the Ideal American Woman in Early 20th Century in Cather's A Lost Lady

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ABSTRACT: *The greatness and majesty of America today are always related to the history of women as documented in literary narratives. The female character named Mariam Ormsby in the novel A Lost Lady written by Willa Sibert Cather in 1923 reflects the idealization of American women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries based on various aspects, especially on the views and assessments of Captain Daniel Forrester and Neil Herbert. The research method used in the analysis of the novel is the Structuralism Approach based on Feminist Literary Criticism. Literature has implicit messages through structures built by authors with certain tendencies which will then be interpreted by readers and literary researchers. Then feminist literary criticism aligns the issue of women's social life with the structure of literature. The results of the discussion in this article find a portrait of an ideal woman as depicted by Mariam Ormsby as an American woman, namely a woman who is adaptive, communicative, fashionable, affective, cognitive, skilled, anticipatory, patient, and loyal. Women may be advanced, smart, rich, and successful in the public world, but they also continue to carry out their natural nature in the household and family life. They are known as New American Women in the history of American women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They are also known as typical New Victorian Women who successfully achieved their ideals in the public world while simultaneously successfully building their domestic life in the family and household.*

KEYWORDS –*portrait, ideal woman, America, novel A Lost Lady, Willa Cather*

I. INTRODUCTION

America is a great country that has a wide influence in the global world today built by the existence of the presence of men and women for hundreds of years since the early waves of immigrants until now. American women have contributed greatly to ushering in the history of this great nation in various social issues such as the development of colonies, the revolution for independence, anti-slavery, the feminist movement, economic recovery, constitutional amendments, and others. Abbas [1] views that the portrait of women in ushering in the glory of the American nation from time to time is very heterogeneous. The typical heterogeneity of American frontier women is a collectivity from various languages, ethnics, culturals, and religious backgrounds that gather in one American national identity that moves towards progress, prosperity, tolerance, and democracy. The diversity of languages comes from the main languages of Europe and Asia such as English, French, Austrian, Swedish, German, Norwegian, Russian, and Chinese integrated into one national language, namely American English. The diversity of their ethnic and cultural backgrounds is Anglo-Saxon, Bohemian, Germanic, Norwegian, Jewish, Slavic, and Oriental. Their religions are also diverse, including Protestant, Calvinist, Norwegian Church, Catholic, Jewish, Animist, Dynamist, and others.

The most prominent notion of American women throughout the late 19th and early 20th centuries is known in two sides, namely Traditional American Women and New American Women. Cineotta [2] describes

traditional American women as housewives who experienced a repositioning of their position by going out with men to farm and build colonies together. The process of achieving the achievements of the American nation since the frontier immigrants in the old nation of America in the 17th century and the frontier immigrants in the new country of America in the 19th century until today is the result of the collaborative hard work of men and women in building settlements and opening agricultural land. Women must struggle as men struggle to survive in order to overcome extraordinary life challenges such as disease, limited food and clothing, wild natural conditions, disturbances from wild animals, and threats from Indians. This spirit of independence, competitiveness, and hard work was inherited by traditional American women as the forerunner to the birth of the concept of new American women who aspire to progress, prosperity, equality, and justice. This concept was initiated by young educated women who are identified as modern women. They do not completely reject the traditional American family order, but they emphasize the need to adapt to social changes and reposition its role in keeping with the times.

The presences of American Women must be traced from the presence of traditional women as a series of historical life of American women. Olsen [3] views traditional American society education as skills acquired by a girl sufficient to be able to read, write, and count. Skills that are suitable for her are sewing, cooking, caring for babies, music, and art. All education and skills acquired by women are intended to support their role as wives and housewives. They have been in America since the arrival of the British and Europeans in the 17th century until the establishment of colonies on the east coast of America called the old nation. The Puritans who first arrived in Jamestown, Virginia in 1607 aboard the Mayflower brought spiritual values in forming a traditional family order in the society of the colonies. They dominated the areas of Plymouth, Massachusetts Bay, and New Haven. The Puritans known as Pilgrims agreed to build a sense of justice and equality in the American Colonies. The traditional female type continues in the frontier society in the western region of America since the 19th century such as Nebraska, Illinois, Virginia, and others called new country. The social fact of the presence of the frontier in the western region of America is part of the history of American society and Willa Sibert Cather is part of the frontier generation community that can be considered as the genetics of various literary narratives such as the novels *O'Pioneers!*, *My Antonia*, *A Lost Lady*, *My Mortal Enemy*, and others.

The research in this article focuses on the novel *A Lost Lady* written by Willa Sibert Cather in 1923 set in Sweet Water, Omaha, Denver, Burlington, Black Hills, Colorado, Utah, California, Nebraska City, Kansas City, Wyoming, San Francisco, Chicago, and others. At that time, two characterizations of American women emerged, namely American Traditional Women and New American Women. Based on the views of men such as Captain Daniel Forrester in the narrative of this novel, the ideal woman is a figure who is able to combine both American Traditional Women and New American Women as played by Mrs. MarriamOrmsbyForrester. The literary researchers in this article are interested in exploring the notion of Mrs. MarriamOrmsbyForrester so that Captain Daniel Forrester considers her as the ideal American woman.

II. RESEARCH METHOD

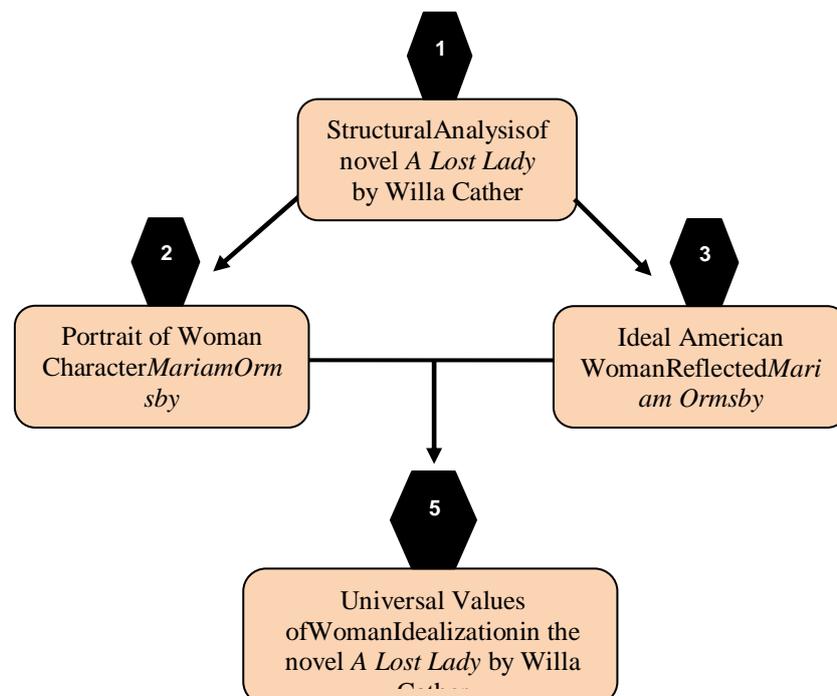
The analysis conducted on the novel *A Lost Lady* is a literary research. The object of the research is the imaginary work of the writer Willa Sibert Cather who documents the portrait of American women in the character of Mariam Ormsby Forrester Collins. In the world of literature according to Damono [4], literary narratives cannot be viewed as pure expressions of imagination because the author's thoughts and feelings are always connected to the social background that influences his/her life journey. The author grows and develops in a certain social environment that forms his own perspective on the society around him. This fact is the basis for the conception that there is a causal imitation relationship between literary narratives, authors, and portraits of society. In this case, the fictional character Mariam Ormsby Forrester Collins in the novel *A Lost Lady* can be considered as one representation of the portrait of American women imbued by Willa Sibert Cather as the author. Based on this causal relationship, we literary researchers explore the portrait of the ideal American woman according to American men in the late 19th and early 20th centuries by focusing on the literary narrative

of the novel *A Lost Lady*. The research method used in the analysis of the novel is the Structuralism Approach based on Feminist Literary Criticism.

In general, it can be understood that literary structure has the capacity for the meaning of literary narratives. Literary structures are built by authors with a specific intention to include implicit messages that will later be interpreted by readers of literature. According to Wellek and Austin [5], literary structures such as characterization, plot, setting, theme, diction, style of language, and others do not just appear, but all parts of the structure have meaning in supporting the author's universal goal which is framed in literary narratives. The author has a specific intention, for example, placing a public female character who maintains her traditional role in the family. Another example, the author has a specific intention by taking a physical setting in the western region inhabited by a frontier community with a background of a successful businessman's social setting. Iswanto, et al. [6] said that the social background in the real world is always connected to the setting in literary fiction narratives. So, researchers emphasize that literary research on certain issues in people's lives can be traced through the meaning of literary structures.

The alignment of women's social life issues in literary structure research uses the concept of feminist literary criticism methodology. This literary criticism emphasizes issues related to women's social life in literary narratives such as gender discrimination, inequality, injustice, sexual violence, racism, slavery, and so on. On the other hand, feminist literary criticism can also be used to describe the notion of women, reformist women, ideal women, great women, and so on. According to Djajanegara [7], feminist literary criticism is a spotlight on the situations faced by women in literary narratives. Madsen, D.L. [8] supports this idea by stating that feminist issues are part of literary fiction narratives. In principle, feminist literary criticism is an assessment of women in literary products. In this article, the researchers build a literary structure research method based on feminist literary criticism based on the following flow:

Chart 1. Construction of research steps in the novel *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather on the issue of the Ideal American Woman



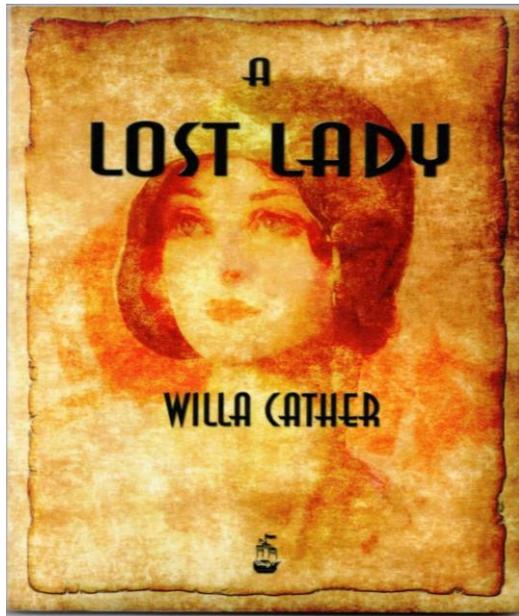
Operationalization of the research construction of the issue of the American Ideal Woman in the late 19th and early 20th centuries in the narrative of the novel *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather in literary analysis based on the chart above is carried out in five stages. The first is to explore the narrative structure of the novel *A Lost*

Lady in its entirety and comprehensively, especially in the presentation of the female character named Mariam Ormsby and the male character named Captain Daniel Forrester and other characters. The gender relations between the female and male characters are the basis for determining the feminist issues analyzed. Then in the second stage is to describe the portrait of Mariam Ormsby in order to explore the idealization of women in the social life of the American Frontier people. Then in the third stage is to examine the existence of a female character named Mariam Ormsby in reflecting the American Ideal Woman in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. The fourth which is the last stage is to provide universal meaning to the universal values of feminist issues related to the idealization of women in the narrative of the novel *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather.

III. RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In this section, the results and discussions are divided into four parts, namely the Narrative of Willa Cather's Novel *A Lost Lady*, the Gender Relations of Mariam Ormsby and Captain Daniel Forrester, Mariam Ormsby Reflects on the Ideal American Woman, Universal Values of the Idealization of Women in the Novel *A Lost Lady*.

3.1 Narrative of the Novel *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather



Mariam Ormsby was a beautiful and intelligent woman who was the wife of a successful railroad entrepreneur named Captain Daniel Forrester. He was a major contractor who had built hundreds of miles of railroad tracks in Burlington to enter the Black Hills, connecting the eastern to western regions of America. He was a man who spoke less, but thought and worked more. Although the age difference between the husband and wife was twenty-five years, their household was harmonious and happy. They were known by the frontier settlers as a generous, kind, and helpful family. Children such as Neil Herbert, George Adams, Ed Elliot, Don Juan, and others enjoyed playing and visiting the Forrester family home. The family lived in a large, beautiful, nice, comfortable, and spacious house located in a valley about a mile east of the city of Sweet Water, between Omaha and Denver, “*The house stood on a low round hill, nearly a mile east of town; a white house with a wing, and sharp-sloping, roofs to shed the snow*” (Cather, 2012:3).

The Forrester family home was crowded with businessmen, officials, lawyers, and successful people. They attended various activities such as meetings, parties, and ritual celebrations such as Thanksgiving, Christmas, and others. Mrs. Mariam Ormsby Forester appeared as an ideal wife in welcoming her guests with hospitality and elegance. Mr. Captain Daniel Forrester was very proud of his wife in managing the kitchen, organizing the house, maintaining family harmony, interacting well with neighbors, being good at communicating with business colleagues, having an elegant appearance, and others. After decades later, Mr. Captain Daniel Forrester had a stroke and his company's shares collapsed so that his savings were drained. In the past, the house was very luxurious, filled with high-class furniture, many important people came, and almost every night there was a banquet while playing cards. Now the situation has changed, the Forrester family home is no longer maintained, in fact some parts are damaged, the furniture is old, and some are sold to cover the family's living expenses. The splendor, luxury, and glory of the Forrester family slowly disappeared.

Mrs. Mariam Ormsby Forester remained faithful in caring for her husband, Mr. Captain Daniel Forrester who had a stroke. She now handles family assets such as rice fields, gardens, stocks, proverties, and others to maintain the family's economic needs. Cather [9] narrates that Captain expressed his wife, Mrs. Forrester as a woman who was very valuable to him. After several years, Captain Daniel Forrester died, closing the chapter of his life peacefully. Since her husband's death, Mrs. Mariam Ormsby Forester moved to California

and Chicago and then married an old British conglomerate man named Henry Collins. Her husband was a good man who loved her and gave her many facilities including a luxury car made in France. They traveled around the world such as visiting several countries in Latin America and Europe. Twelve years later, news was heard that Mrs. Mariam Ormsby Forester had died.

3.2 Gender Relations of Mariam Ormsby and Captain Daniel Forrester

The main relationship between Mariam Ormsby and Captain Daniel Forrester is a relationship in the social space of the household, namely Mariam Ormsby is the wife of Captain Daniel Forrester. Cather [9] tells that this husband and wife are able to build a harmonious household, even though there are many differences between them such as family background, age, character, profession, and so on. Captain Daniel Forrester has a military background involved in the American Civil War 1861-1865 and had to work hard to become a successful contractor, while Mariam Ormsby was raised in a comfort zone family as the daughter of a big businessman who enjoyed the luxuries of life. Captain Daniel Forrester is twenty-five years older than Mariam Ormsby. Captain Daniel Forrester is a caring, firm person, speaks only when necessary, and prefers to work, while Mariam Ormsby is a cheerful, communicative, attractive, and interactive person. Captain Daniel Forrester is a careful, meticulous, hard-working, and competitive businessman, while Mariam Ormsby is a housewife who is able to adapt to social, helpful, cognitive, and affective environments.

The sustainability of gender relations between Mariam Ormsby as a wife and Captain Daniel Forrester as a husband in building a household is based on two strong foundations, namely a relationship of affection and understanding in each other's positions. Captain Daniel Forrester loves his wife and Mariam Ormsby respects her husband. As a form of affection, Captain Daniel Forrester fulfills the family's material needs and always opens active communication with his wife. For example, he fulfills the needs of food, clothing, house, entertainment, and gives his wife inner satisfaction such as attention, happiness, and loyalty. Likewise, Mariam Ormsby provides services that enable her husband to live peacefully, peacefully at home, and be enthusiastic about working in the public world. For example, she shares ideas with her husband in solving every problem, both in domestic and public life. She always makes her husband happy and at home. She is also patient in accepting the reality of life in facing various problems such as economic difficulties and illness. For example, she calms her husband's anxiety when the company's shares collapse and his savings in the bank are increasingly depleted. She even patiently cares for her husband who has a stroke and faithfully accompanies him until he dies.

During her happy married life that lasted until Captain Daniel Forrester died, Mariam Ormsby's ability to support and sustain her husband's profession in the public world. Mariam Ormsby became a productive communication partner in dealing with the ups and downs of her husband's career as a railroad contractor. Likewise, Mariam Ormsby socialized elegantly, adaptively, and productively with her husband's business partners so that public relations in her husband's work environment could be harmonious and long-lasting. With a harmonious and happy household atmosphere, Cather [9] describes the mood of Captain Daniel Forrester who loves and is proud of his wife. Likewise, Mariam Ormsby always appreciates her husband's affection and loyalty. In gender relations like this, Fromm [10] said it was an idealization of husband-wife love that was built on the basis of affection and understanding, not because of lust and one-sided egoism. Like someone who loves a flower, he will love and care for it with all his heart. The idealization of this household love can be achieved if both husband and wife are able to control their sensuality, psychology, and emotions. On the other hand, this idealization is difficult to achieve if they are controlled by their sensuality, psychology, and emotions.

3.3 Mariam Ormsby Reflects on the Ideal American Woman

The idealization of American women reflected by Mariam Ormsby is based on Captain Daniel Forrester's notion of his wife. Willa Cather's novel *A Lost Lady* narrates the existence of Mariam Ormsby's idealization as an American woman which includes Adaptive, Communicative, Fashionable, Affective, Cognitive, Skillful, Anticipatory, Patient, and Loyal.

1. Adaptive

Mariam Ormsby came from a wealthy business family in the Metropolitan city of California who enjoyed a comfortable atmosphere and was pampered by her parents. After marrying Captain Daniel Forrester, she was able to adapt to the social environment in the frontier area which was natural, conservative, traditional, communal with a collective spirit. When Mariam Ormsby became a widow after Captain Daniel Forrester death, she managed to property, business, and finances until she was seen as an independent widow. Then she remarried an old man who was a British conglomerate named Henry Collins, she managed to adapt herself to her husband's social atmosphere. She always accompanied her husband on various business visits to several big cities in America, Europe, and Latin America.

2. Communicative

Mariam Ormsby has a good, active, and open communication capacity towards people from various backgrounds such as profession, social status, social class, culture, habits, mindset, and age. She showed it when welcoming her husband's guests at home such as Cyrus Dalzell as the President of the Colorado and Utah railroad company, Judge Pommeroy as a great lawyer, Doctor Dennison as a senior medical officer, Mr. Ogden as a successful transportation entrepreneur, and so on. In addition, she socialized and communicated with her neighbors who were generally frontier communities who worked as farmers ranging from children, teenagers, adults, to grandmothers and grandfathers. She was also able to manage her workers in the fields, housemaids, and servants through good communication language.

3. Fashionable

Mariam Ormsby always appeared with neat, charming, and elegant makeup according to the atmosphere and social environment she faced. She arranged the house neatly, artistically, and beautifully so that people always recognized the big house with a large yard surrounded by flower gardens and various plants. The atmosphere of the Forrester family home was very comfortable and shady in Sweet Water so that many important people from officials, businessmen, and community leaders came to visit there. Mrs. Mariam Forrester who always appeared charming with neat makeup and was good at managing the house so that people saw her as a beautiful and modest lady.

4. Affective

Mariam Ormsby is a good housewife, friendly, cheerful, personable, and able to position herself in domestic and public relations. She is able to build a comfortable, peaceful, and calm atmosphere in her household life with her husband and the people in her house. She also shows the same thing in the public environment when she is dealing with important people from officials, businessmen, community leaders, and neighbors. Her affective attitude makes her neighbors' children such as Neil Herbert, George Adams, Ed Elliot, Don Juan, and others happy to play and visit the Forrester family home.

5. Cognitive

Mariam Ormsby was a housewife who was intelligent in giving constructive ideas to people. She was often used by her husband to exchange ideas in solving various problems in the company such as management, finance, partnerships, resource empowerment, and so on. Her intelligence made the children of her neighbors such as Neil Herbert, George Adams, Ed Elliot, Don Juan, and others happy to play, visit, and study at the Forrester family home.

6. Skillful

Mariam Ormsby has various skills in supporting the lives of herself and her family, such as managing property, farming, banking, and so on. She is also skilled at arranging her house which is surrounded by beautiful grasslands and gardens neatly arranged with lush flower gardens that are pleasing to the eye. The location of the Forrester family house is very strategic because nearby there is a lake and two rivers that separate the house from Sweet Water City.

7. Anticipatory

Mariam Ormsby was able to think strategically and act appropriately when there was a problem. For example, America experienced a monetary crisis that caused panic in national banking which resulted in interest rate cuts, stock prices fell, and the currency value fell drastically. Captain Daniel Forrester's bank deposits continued to dwindle because they were withdrawn to pay the salaries of employees, railroad

workers, mechanics, and others even though the project was stalled due to the national economic crisis. This difficult situation could be overcome because Mrs. Mariam Forrester had taken strategic steps such as saving and purchasing valuable assets so that her husband's economic difficulties could be overcome properly.

8. Be patient

Mariam Ormsby showed her patience when Captain Daniel Forrester fell from a horse during an inspection of his project in the hills and he fell ill so he had to rest for a very long time at home. The railway construction project handled by Captain Daniel Forrester could not be continued so that his income also decreased. In this situation, Mariam Ormsby patiently took care of her husband until he recovered. Likewise, she patiently accompanied her husband who had a stroke until he died. Mariam Ormsby's patience was also tested when she was a widow because people accused and slandered her of having an affair with a young man named Ivy Peters. Mariam Ormsby remained patient in managing her property and banking business until she finally moved to California City and lived happily with her second husband who was a British conglomerate named Henry Collins until the end of her life.

9. Loyal

Mariam Ormsby showed her loyalty when her husband, Captain Daniel Forrester experienced various problems that had the potential to disrupt household harmony. Various problems that tested Mariam Ormsby's loyalty as a wife were Captain Daniel Forrester was sick from falling from a horse and only staying at home, his railway construction project went bankrupt which drained his savings in the bank, he had a stroke which resulted in his economic productivity being completely paralyzed, and he could no longer play his biological role as a husband. This situation did not shake Mariam Ormsby's loyalty as a wife who accompanied her husband, Captain Daniel Forrester until the end of his life.

3.4 Universal Values of Idealization of Women in the Novel *A Lost Lady*

Mrs. Mariam Ormsby Forester Collins in the novel *A Lost Lady* reflects the universal values that an ideal woman should have as a wife. Women in the midst of changes in progress and social change always adapt to progress and change without eliminating the natural nature given by The God of Allah SWT. The natural nature that has become a tradition in society since the beginning of life on this earth is a wife and housewife who has the responsibility to maintain family harmony and the sustainability of household life. Women may be advanced, smart, rich, and successful in the public world, but they also continue to carry out their natural nature in the household and family life. In the history of American women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the term New American Women was known, namely women who successfully achieved their ideals in the public world while simultaneously successfully fostering their domestic life. This type of woman is also called New Victorian Women.

IV. CONCLUSION

The female character named Mariam Ormsby in the novel *A Lost Lady* written by Willa Sibert Cather in 1923 reflects the idealization of American women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. Idealization is based on various aspects, especially on the views and assessments of Captain Daniel Forrester and Neil Herbert. The results of the discussion using the Structural Approach and Feminist Literary Criticism methods are divided into four parts, namely the narrative of the novel *A Lost Lady* by Willa Cather, the gender relationship between Mariam Ormsby and Captain Daniel Forrester, Mariam Ormsby reflects the ideal American woman, universal values of the idealization of women in the novel *A Lost Lady*. The portrait of the ideal woman as depicted by Mariam Ormsby as an American woman is a woman who is adaptive, communicative, fashionable, affective, cognitive, skilled, anticipatory, patient, and loyal. Women may be advanced, smart, rich, and successful in the public world, but they also continue to carry out their natural nature in the household and family life. They are known as New American Women in the history of American women in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. They are also known as typical New Victorian Women who successfully achieved their ideals in the public world while simultaneously successfully building their domestic lives in the family and household.

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