

**WILLA CATHER'S IDEAS ON THE CONCEPT OF WOMAN  
IN MY ANTONIA: A FEMINIST STUDY**

**A THESIS**

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## ABSTRAK

Skripsi ini berjudul *Willa Cather's Ideas on the Concept of Woman in My Antonia*. Skripsi ini bertujuan untuk mengungkap bagaimana cara kerja patriarki dalam melawan perempuan, kemudian mengungkap agenda feminist yang dapat menggantikan kerangka patriarki tentang perempuan sehingga melahirkan kerangka berfikir yang baru mengenai gambaran wanita yang mandiri dan bisa terlepas dari aturan-aturan baku patriarki sebagaimana yang dicita-citakan feminist. Di dalam skripsi ini juga terlihat bagaimana kehidupan pengarang Willa Cather mempengaruhi hasil karyanya.

Untuk menganalisa konsep gambaran wanita yang ideal menurut Willa Cather dalam karya ini, penulis menerapkan *teory gynocriticism*, yaitu bagaimana pengarang wanita menghadirkan karakter wanita didalam karyanya, yang digagas oleh Elaine Showalter. Penulisan skripsi ini menggunakan metode kualitatif dan melaporkan hasilnya dalam bentuk deskriptif.

Setelah melakukan penelitian, penulis menemukan bahwa dalam memberikan gambaran mengenai konsep wanita, Cather mendukung agenda feminist dengan menggambarkan konsep wanita yang bertolakbelakang dari sudut pandang patriarki. Cather menekankan bahwa pada dasarnya wanita juga memiliki hak yang sama seperti laki-laki. Melalui novel ini Cather menegaskan bahwa wanita bisa menjadi makhluk yang mandiri, pintar, bertanggung jawab, bahkan bisa menjadi sosok pahlawan bagi orang-orang di sekitarnya.

## CHAPTER 1

### INTRODUCTION

#### 1.1 Background of the Research

Literary works are interesting to be analyze because it is a kind of writing valued as work of art, and is unique, it also has special qualities on each. Usually, literary works can be the reflection of human life, since we have found many literary works that illustrate about all segments in life. Thus, all literary works can be analyzed in various ways and it will produce the different interpretations of the reader respectively, and one of the approaches that can be used to analyze literary works is feminist approach.

For long time, literary work has become a culture regime and has a close relationship with the representation of gender. Feminists are united by the idea that women's position in society is unequal to men, as stated in the book Critical Theory Today: "Traditional gender roles cast men as rational, strong, protecting, and decisive; they cast women as emotional (irrational), weak, nurturing and submissive" (Tyson 85).

Patriarchal system dominates and controls all aspects of women life. It causes the women become the victim of patriarchal culture in which they are oppressed by men. The feminist criticism appears to support women in fighting male domination and authority in society. One of the medium of feminist critics is literary work.

One of the literary works that are regarded to enrich the feminist ideas and try to challenge the patriarchal system is Willa Cather's literary work. One of her literary works is the novel entitled My Antonia. Feminism indeed develops since 1960's, but the spirit of woman to stand against male domination can be seen in this 1920's literary work. Cather lived in the period where men dominated all aspects in life. When the novel was published in 1918, in literary works, woman characters are usually described as a weak and unreliable human being especially by male authors. Female authors did not have much contribution in literature. They did not have their own style in literature. But through My Antonia, Willa Cather presents the main character that has feminist sides which is unusual for women in the early of 20<sup>th</sup> century.

My Antonia is widely considered as Cather's masterpiece and it is also her most problematic novel for feminist critics. As stated by Mencken in the Great Short Works of Willa Cather that: My Antonia as one of the best [novel] that American has ever done (xx introduction).

Willa Cather is an outstanding example of a writer whose work is deeply rooted in a sense of place and at the same time universal in its treatment of theme and character. The corner of earth that she is best known for depicting is Nebraska, where she lived as an adolescent and young woman and where she was educated. This dominant subject is the setting for all or significant parts in My Antonia.

My Antonia is a novel that tells about how women can achieve their dreams in order to reach happiness in their life. Here, the dreams are not only in the form of wealth, but also in the form of simple life with a great true love.

## CHAPTER 5

### CONCLUSION

After analyzing My Antonia by using expressive approach and gynocriticism, the writer concludes that Willa Cather through this novel actually provides a feminist framework about being a woman in order to resist the patriarchal framework. Patriarchy constructs the women to be submissive and dependent truly to her husband or other men, Cather stands against this framework, she depicts that women can be independent, can decide in every aspect of her life, can determine the path her life without men interference. This is definitely a feminist interest in this novel.

Through the main character Antonia, Cather conveys her idea about the new concept of woman who can stand against the old perspectives about woman which created by patriarchy. Cather shows the reader that she has different ideas with the concept of woman which appeared in her era.

Through the research, the writer discovers five uppermost concept of woman which are most spotted by Cather within the novel, the concept of woman in family and in society.

In family, the writer finds out that for Cather, woman must be a smart person in order to get an admission from the others that they can be and do something to the others. And also be a hero for her family, it is to erase the old perspective about woman who just can be a dutiful wife and a lovable mother for her family, but also

can be a bread winner who can increase her family's financial. And be a responsible for their mistake, then learns to be better.

In society, the writer finds out that for Cather, woman must be a good friend, not only for the people in her age, but also for the elder in her environment in order to get a good image in the society. Last, woman must be a humble person who has an attitude that always makes people around her felt comfort, calm and proud of her.

The result of this research shows that within her novel Cather really conveys her feeling and thoughts about the concept of woman who stand against the patriarchy system.

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