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THE VARIOUS PHYSIOGNOMIES IN WILLA CATHER'S *SHADOWS ON THE ROCK*

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ABSTRACT

On reading Cather's Fiction, I enjoy her writings which have special objects and it attracts the attention of all the readers. In this fiction *Shadows on the Rock*, Cather tries to bring out the passionate and hardworking people who have considered themselves as a responsibility person in surviving in this prevailing world. This fiction brings out the challenges that people faced in their transition period from the old world in to the new world. In this article I try to mark a small mark on my opinion.

Key Words: Cather, *Shadows on the Rock*, transition period, nature, consciousness

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INTRODUCTION

Cather novels usually bring the idea of her age and her personal happiness and sufferings. *Shadows on the Rock* is of no exception. Her first visit to the city of Quebec and its history and its Roman Catholicism and its European tradition kindles her imaginative power. It became the inspiration for her novel, *Shadows on the Rock*. The story of Euclide Auclair, an apothecary, clearly pictures many effects of Old and New World Origins. The family is the primary source of this novel. For Madame Auclair, Household goods were household Gods. In this novel Cather exposes her talent by giving more importance to the household things like sofa and fireplace. This novel is the composition of all the incidents that includes in the daily life of Quebec. There are so many incidents in this novel, each and every incident is seen by Cather and it is illustrated through Auclair's Family.

Critic's View

Critics like John Chamberlain, Kenneth C. Kaufman, complained and showed their disappointment. Kaufman noted,

Through her eyes we see, as through a peep hole, a gigantic stage where Titans play their destined roles and come to heroic ends. The effect, according to Carl Van Doren, in the New York Herald Tribune Books, was to create a domesticated novel. Obligated by her method to forego heroism at first hand, Van Doren concluded, Cather has had to run the risk of a certain lack of sinew, and her narrative does not have the force of that in *Death Comes for the Archbishop*. Judged on its merits, however, and not in comparison to *Death Comes for the Archbishop*, *Shadows on the Rock* did indeed have its champions, and the novel was a popular success.

Most of the critics focused only on the negative side of the novel. 12-year-old Cecile Auclair daughter of Euclide, became the icon of Cather's Optimistic Nature. According to the seasonal changes and its atmosphere, a young girl Cecile adopted herself to be a family in that tradition. Not only Cecile, the characterization of all people in this novel has

distinct affinities, they are not merely portrayed by traditional novelist, they have psychological conflicts and cultural location and they begin to find the meaning of their life. This novel is not just the exposition of meaning, but it is constructed to learn to make the meanings to the readers. Cecile stands at the junction of Old World and New World. This junction is something beautiful and it is neatly sketched in this novel.

Cather expresses her emotions in the Quebec City, which is unfamiliar to her, because she used to paint Nebraska and its atmosphere and also its people. She discovers the inner minds of the people and she portrays it through all the characters. Euclide and Cecile are successfully depicted by Cather with full of emotions. This novel brings the dissatisfaction and disappointments of many critics, still it never stops the readers from reading this as it contains the items which would be liked by them.

Augmentation and Acquisition

Shadows on the Rock is impacted with series of incidents which it happened in day today life. The story begins in 1697, in the city of Quebec, Cather tries to bring to our eyes its inhabitants, values, ideals and beliefs that prevailed there. The people in the city struggled and tried hard to accept the transformation from the Old World to the New World. Cecile following her father, came to understand, that she has to prepare herself to be in France. Cather displays her mood in this novel, she had a great pain, because she lost her father and her mother was also affected by stroke. In her letter published in "The Saturday Review of Literature" she asserted as

"She is not interested in , "Indian Raids or the wild life in the forest", but in an orderly little French household that went on trying to live decently. The subject of *Shadows on the Rock*, she claimed , was the curious endurance of kind of culture, narrow but definite,..... a kind of feeling about life and human life that I could not accept, wholly , but which could not but admire. As such, it resisted action and even conclusion and thus defied conventional plot. It is hard to state that feeling in language, she

explained; it was more like an old song, incomplete but uncorrupted, than a legend. The text was mainly anacoluthon, so to speak, but the ,meaning was clear."

In illustrating her work as anacoluthon, she said, "I took the incomplete air and tried to give it what would correspond to a sympathetic musical setting: tried to develop it into a prose composition not too conclusive, not too definite." Cather uses narrative elements to control time and seasonal changes throughout the story; she begins her novel by October 1697 and ends in the next year with the same incident. *Shadows on the Rock* demonstrates Cather's belief in the value of maintaining the continuity of the traditions of European civilization in the New World as opposed to the delight and pride which her compatriots have traditionally taken in their attempts to create a new and better society in the New World. In some respects it resembles Sterne's *Sentimental Journey* where scenes and characters separate and come together at the command of the author, and at last fall into an delicate harmony of tone and atmosphere. The characterization, because it is brief, must be handy. Necessarily, much is left to the imagination of the readers. Cecile and Euclid faced their daily routines with local problems and political issues of that time, being an American author Cather can easily present the injustices and inequities of the Old World very clearly. She tries very hard to bring and to preserve the civilization of Europe in the New World.

The great man, the Count de Frontenac portrays his glory as a military man and his approach towards death is exclusively written in this novel. He, even at the age of 70, is ready to accept the order from the king of France. His approach to the life is remarkable. Cather never looks at the age of characters. Cather expresses the city life through this Count de Frontenac. His role is essential in looking the city life for the readers. The character Bishop Laval holds a special place in the church. For four decades he has been helping the people in the church, even after his retirement. Cecile has a great soft corner and respect for him as he offers a protection on a cold January night to the young man Jacques Gaux, without him Jacques will not be there. Cecile behaves as if she were a mother to Jacques,

she lost her mother, but her nature is nurtured by the teachings of her mother. Cecile takes her little Jacque to the Holy Family Hill along with the Quebec people, her nature and relationship with Holy Mother is splendidly depicted. Cecile became the care taker of Jacque, so she felt a lot when her father gets a call from the king to come to France once again. By introducing Pierre Charron, Cather stresses on the sacrifice, endurance and stoicism of Cecile. The real patriot Charron has made a history in the World War. His name is used as a character in shadow on the Rock by Willa shows us how she pays homage to the soldiers.

Cecile is not only the character she was a concept in this novel. Cecile depicts the old culture and the new culture. Her marriage with Pierre Charron and their children who are the true Canadians, become the product of the new culture. This novel shows the vitality in the French Culture and the Canadian culture. Cecile manners and her character is the primary theme. From her tender age she begins to follow her mother's nature. She learnt everything from her. Her helping tending which she received from her mother urged her to serve Jacque. Antoinette Gaux left him to attain her desires. Mothering to Jacque is a perfect embodiment of Cather. Cather succeeds in blending the nature with her novels. Though Cecile is not related to Jacque in anyway, her nurturing character effected in a marvelous way. Cecile behaved like a mother to him. Jeanne Lebar and Antoinette Gaux are the two contrasting characters in this novel. Jeanne represents her significance by rejecting marriage and also her motherhood. Antoinette Gaux has many desires and so she disappeared herself from her parenting his son. Madame Auclair as an absent mother teaches her daughter, these different women characters in this novel provides the clear picture of the society. Each and every woman character is well shown with a lot of difference in their personalities.

Features in "Shadows on the rock"

"Shadows on the Rock" is a modern novel. Cather abandons the descriptive reflective style of her major novels and adopts more dramatic modes of narration. The title "Shadows on the rock" seems to have a great philosophy of life and also art

too. Female characters are the source of this novel. Jeanne Lebar, a female character, has a story with full of conventional ideas. She devoted herself in helping others, she is telling this again and again to Jacques. Cather attempts to discuss the transition period through this novel. The discussion of social problem helped us to interpret the novel in so many ways. Along with the huge development of modern science and technology, Cather is a learner. Many critics argued and accepted her as a learner. The capacity to see the nature and the life of the people and her ability and her sensitivity towards life is reflecting in her novels. "The Shadows on the Rock" is the one, which portrays her feelings and her abilities. As a novelist, Cather has a deep sense of consciousness and she shows in her novels deeper through characters. She wishes to be inside the character; she looks through her eyes and never strains herself to make the readers to understand the society. She simply exposes her mind, which she learns from the external atmosphere. While reading "Shadows on the Rock", one can find the influence on Biblical nature throughout the novel. The compassionate nature and adopting the situation come from Bible. In her novels, she uses her eyes as a key opener to the readers. She believed that every art should be a simplified one, it must reach the readers. Cather brings out strong relation between human and nature. In her novels nature and human binds together. This novel particularly pictures the entry of European tradition towards the people. So many have followed French Culture, but how the people surrender themselves to the nature and learn to survive after the entry of another culture is clearly depicted in this novel.

During her life time, she has a world wide experience. Everyone should understand the meeting point of the Old World and the New World. Cather's character is mostly associated with reality that Cecile and Euclide prove in this novel. Cather's power of observation and her ability to see clearly makes this novel a unique one. Recognition of her character like Charron is the best example for how she paid homage to the real heroes. This novel brings out the changes in each and every corner of the society.

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