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THE SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE OF FEMALES AND MALE CHAUVINISM OF MALE CHARACTERS AS DELINEATED IN *SWAMP ANGEL* AND *AS FOR ME AND MY HOUSE*

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Abstract

This research article at the outset, outstandingly analyse the central theme of passive attitude of female and domineering sense of male characters in the fictional world of fervent writer Ethel Wilson, who is a pioneering feminist writer in Canada. This article proceeds with the analysis of the male and female characters in the novel *Swam Angel* and *As for me and My House*, where Ethel Wilson unmask the realm of women, where they undergo tumultuous suffering all through their life and finally they win victory over every bitter experience and failures and they discover empowerment in themselves.

Keywords

Women, Submissive, Passive, Domineering, Chauvinism, Discover, Identity,
Canada, Empower.

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**THE SUBMISSIVE ATTITUDE OF FEMALES AND MALE CHAUVINISM OF MALE CHARACTERS AS
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It is an accepted fact that the twentieth century has seen Canada's plenty in fiction writing. During this period, the novelists in Canada gave considerable favour among the reading public. Ethel Wilson and Sinclair Ross are recent entries in the literary scene. Ethel Wilson is a pioneer so far as women's writings in Canada are concerned. She is not exactly a feminist writer in the conscious political sense of the term, though her novels project the problems and experiences of women in the male dominated society. The Central theme in Wilson's novels is a woman's search for freedom and independence, a theme which has been prominent in most of the Canadian woman writers. The familiar pattern that emerges from Wilson's writings is that of a woman withdrawn from her routine surroundings, who sets out on a lovely path of self-discovery using her power within. But in the final analysis, this woman discovers from her felt life that the world is hostile and chaotic, ruthlessly shaped by accident and chance and that the larger vision of life's purpose is achieved not by leading an isolated life but by entering into a significant human relationship with others which is not easily achieved but must be sought after. In the words of David Stouk,

"The pattern is mythic and familiar one but what involves and disturbs the reader of Ethel Wilson's fiction is certain coldness in the narrative voice, an implied emotional preference for retreat, isolation, and distance, which is in tension with the author's vision of unity and her theme of human responsibility". (P.2)

Swamp Angel has been acclaimed as a feminist novel of the 1950's; looked upon as a social history of the British Columbia of her times; applauded for its Christian humanism, praised as a study of involvement in mankind and complemented for its recognition of ambivalence and responsibilities in life. The novel, like the poems of Wordsworth, also depicts the glories and grandeur of Nature and seeks to establish its links with humanity. The novel has an epigraph which expresses the significance attached to the Swamp Angel, the central symbol. Historically the gun was deployed by the Federal Army of the USA, perhaps to quell the anti-slavery rioters. In the epigraph of the novel *Swamp Angel* is described as:

"A 8 inch, 200 pound... gun mounted in a Swamp by the Federals at the siege (1863) of Charleston S.C. subsequently, there was an issue of small revolver, inscribed "Swamp Angel" (SA 11)

The gun, thus is a symbol of power against oppression Nell Severance, a powerful, willful old woman and a former circus juggler, wields the Swamp Angel as a matter of habit and with a sense of pride. It has its phallic associations, a kind of traditional male power. It has often been argued that Ethel Wilson not a conscious feminist writer. What really matters is not the label by which one is known or wants to degree of commitment with which one is wedded to an ideology. Ethel Wilson explores the problem "Woman's search for freedom and independence" (Stonk 7) as early as in the 1940's and the 50's. The women of her novels are guided by a quest motif which cannot keep them chained to their families built on patriarchal foundations.

Ethel Wilson's story begins with a desperate woman Maggie, whose failed marriage has made her withdraw herself from her husband. She seeks to assert her true self in isolation, but finds it ultimately in an enlarged supra-personal community. She understands that she can no longer live with her husband who does not love her in return and she gains the courage to leave her husband. Not only Maggie is courageous but Nell severance also is strong willed and the men around them with whom they are associated are developed as a part of the novelist's overall design in *Swamp Angel*. Maggie involved in a constructive and meaningful interaction with a larger community – the world outside the family at the three loon lake lodge, a holiday Resort and a Fascinating Fishing Center attractive to Tourists. Maggie joins the Gunnersens, the owners of the Lodge, as a cook and family takes over as the Manager and Supervisor of the lodge. The Novel has a dramatic opening with the image of migratory birds returning home for the spring where as Maggie is all said to abandon her husband, Vardoe. Ethel Wilson identifies herself - with the heroine of the Novel Maggie Vardoe. Ethel Wilson discovers from her life that the world is hostile and chaotic.

According to Ethel Wilson, though women undergo suffering throughout their life, ultimately, they win victory over every bitter experience and failures because they have the heart to win. The novel ends on the positive note when the writer insists on certain universal values of love, faith and humanistic inter-relationship in the world where people seem to live in loveliness and insulation and this humanistic assertion will go a long way in bringing out a united world. The writer has assumed the pattern of journey in the novel. The journey becomes a metaphor of self-discovery and the protagonist's quest for the community relationship and values. Ethel Wilson has used a style that is at once apology, elliptical and fragmented. Perhaps this jarring, disharmonious structure may best be suited for the portrayal of the subject of the relationship which is a very complex one. The novel *Swamp Angel*, no doubt, focuses on a theme which has universal importance.

Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* (1941), an acknowledged classic of Canadian Literature, has received extensive critical attention. What has been virtually ignored by the critics, however, are the possibilities inherent in the novel when the heterosexual assumption or the assumption that every character in literature is exclusively heterosexual, until proven otherwise is called into question. This novel throws light on the years of drought and depression that scorched the Canadian Prairies between the two world wars. Like the other Canadian writers, Ross had no Canadian tradition, either of the court or the Church, folklore, ancient history or mythology. He however, turned to nature and humanity and created a work of art. The Canadian novel, like the people in Canada, has a close affinity, with the country of origin – England. However, the Canadians looked with mixed feelings towards the United States as a big brother. Co-existence is necessary and yet one's identity has to be maintained. The Canadian novel does not have a protagonist like the hero in *Moby Dick* who hurts himself

at the universe; he rather turns upon himself. Puritanism added to this major trait in Canadian writing and self-blame can be recorded as a quality which distinguishes it from that of its southern neighbours. Its affinity for England, its desire for affirming its identity and its puritan attitude make the Canadian novel introverted and introspective. The Canadian protagonist blames himself and engages in painful and destructive soul-searching in an attempt to discover his own defectiveness. Another salient feature of the Canadian novel is the impact of natural surroundings.

According to W. H. New, Ross's world is an ambivalent and ambiguous one where the absolute do not exist. W.H. New explains that Ross "blurs the edges of his images, and delivers various contrasting view points to undercut the notions of truth and reality" (P 54). Sinclair Ross believes that humanity's conception of truth and reality are often trained with hypocrisy, false-fronts and small-mindedness and therefore, these notions are impossible to recognize. The absence of absolute affords Ross the opportunity to suggest multiple meanings in his writing. For example, while reading Ross's *As for Me and My House*, the readers are told numerous times that Philip is an artist but how far the readers will believe it is doubtful. The readers get this information only from Mrs. Bentley, but the readers is another instant of ability as the readers are left in doubt, wondering if there is any hope for Mrs. Bentley's future or she would continue to suffer in silence.

As for Me and My House is the first novel of Sinclair Ross. The entire story revolves round the two main characters Mr. Philip Bentley and Mrs. Bentley. The hero Philip, a painter and an artist, is also a preacher. He is loved by his wife, Mrs. Bentley immensely but he is very indifferent towards her. He does not reciprocally her love and passion. His affair with the young girl Judith, results in Judith giving birth to a child and dying in the process. Mrs. Bentley is magnanimous enough to adopt the child. She bears all the burdens and shoulders all the responsibilities singly still she showers her deep love and affection on her husband and she continues to pamper and favour him. But the tragedy is that she does not get anything in return. She is very patient and submissive. Her needs, wants and desires are confined to a particular boundary. She suffers a lot in the male Chauvinistic society. She takes all the pains but her husband enjoys the fruit of it. Mr. Bentley is frustrated and depressed. He is hardly able to express anything openly and his life both as painter and preacher seem to be an utter failure. Even when Philip, in spite of being the seducer, taunts his wife of her friendship with Paul Kirby, she remains silent. As Sedgwick explains, "the worst violence of hetero sexuality comes with a male compulsion to desire women and its attendant deceptions of self and other." (P 198)

The main problem of the characters in this novel is that they do not want to express anything outwardly and nobody wants to sort our things and set them right.

In *Swamp Angel*, Maggie is very independent and adventurous. She goes for a self-analysis and frees herself from the bond called 'marriage' and leads a life as she likes. She makes an attempt to come to terms with herself both through isolation and social interaction. She involves herself in social activities and adventures like fishing and summing which women normally would not prefer to do. About the fishing Lodge, Donna Smith rightly says:

"The fishing lodge is a way of living gently the land and with the land. It integrates the human and the natural. It depends on human love and hard work." (P 162)

She desires liberty and recreation which she ultimately achieves. She has a good interaction with the people around her and enjoys life to the fullest. She has courage to speak out openly that she is not contented with her married life and dares to break the bondage and

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come out of it. She has confidence and self-determination which make her more independent and contented. She is able to keep everything under control and manages everything on her own. She never cares about others, of what they will say about her decision or how they will react to her behaviour. But on the contrary, in *As for Me and My House* all the characters suffer psychological tensions. Ross's vision of life centers round the psyche, the soul and the consciousness of men and women. Mrs. Bentley feels inferior to her husband and hurts herself. She finds comfortable in playing her piano. Her piano is her only companion but a good companion. The inner struggle of the characters is delineated meticulously by the novelist. In spite of all the sufferings and isolation, Mrs. Bently is prepared to adopt Judith's baby as she feels that it is as much Philip's baby too. This show to what extent she is submissive to her husband and fulfils his desires. Philip having many false fronts suspects his wife. This shows his male chauvinism.

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