

EDNA PONTELLIER'S ENDEAVORS AS THE MAIN CHARACTER IN KATE CHOPIN'S "THE AWAKENING" IN THE NINETEETH-CENTURY LIBERAL FEMINISM

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ABSTRACT

This study analyzed the struggle of Edna Pontellier in the 19th-century liberal feminism in the novel entitled *The Awakening* written by Kate Chopin. Liberal feminism assumes that the main problem of gender inequality is the domination of institutions by men. Men control the economic sphere, political sphere, along with other things. 19th-century liberal feminism put its focus on women's equal liberty. In general, the novel is about Edna Pontellier, the woman who was trapped in the figure of a mother and wife. She struggled as a woman in the 19th-century to get equal liberty and follow her desires. The researcher used the qualitative method in analyzing the struggle of Edna Pontellier. The results of this study show Edna's struggles to pursue her desires through Mill and Taylor's 19th-century liberal feminism theory. She wanted to get the same political rights, economic opportunities, and education that men get. The results also showed the two things that lead Edna to become a figure of liberal feminism: an unhappy married life and her desire to free herself.

Keywords: *19th-century, liberal feminism, struggle*

INTRODUCTION

Social issues and literary works are closely related. There were many social issues discussed as the main topic in literary works. A social issue is a problem that occurs in society. One of the approaches that discuss the relationship between literature and society is a sociological approach. According to Ratna (2009), the basis of the sociological approach is the existence of an intrinsic connection between literary work and society. The phenomenon of the social issue is experienced and

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observed by the author. In other words, the author is a part of society. Therefore, social issues are raised in literary work because the author wants to deliver their aspirations of the social issue through their work.

Some researchers discussed social issues in literary works (Amanda, 2015; Charlotte, 2015; Kadie, 2016; Kouhestani, 2013; Meryem, 2011; Mohammad, 2017; Morgan, 2017; Neena, 2016; Yolanda, 2011). One of the social issues raised in literary work is feminism. However, only a few types of researches deeply discussed feminism in literary works. Based on that consideration, this research focuses on the feminism issue in a novel.

The Awakening is a novel written by Kate Chopin. This novel has highly reflected the issue of feminism in the late 19th-century. Edna Pontellier is the main character. She found that she was trapped in the figure of a wife and a mother. She followed her desires to be free and looked for her true happiness, but in the end, she realized that everything that she fought for was worthless. Society at that time did not appreciate a figure of a woman. The problem of the study is: (1) What are Edna's endeavors in 19th-century liberal feminism? (2) What things lead Edna Pontellier to become a figure of liberal feminism?

LITERATURE REVIEW

A novel is a fictional prose narrative of substantial length (Crane, 2007). The novel is a proudly anti-theoretical genre, one that attaches more significance to the moral adventures of its unpretentious *hommes moyens sensuels* than to the misguided intellectual projects of its introverted system-makers and maladjusted bookworms (Greaney, 2006). In conclusion, the novel is the anti-theoretical genre and a fictional prose narrative of substantial length. A novel and a character are always related to each other because a character makes the story interesting.

Character

Nature in its purest form was embodied by a character. Although a character is often used interchangeably with brilliance, few people would agree that this is an unqualified praise to human nature (DiBattista, 2010). Another definition of a character is the most frequently fictive persons or fictional analogy to human beings (Jannidis, Herausgegeben,

Gerhard, Matias, & Simone, 2010). In conclusion, a character is a human nature used for literary figures.

Kinds of character

The main character is frequently referred to as a protagonist, and his or her battle with an antagonist may be the catalyst for the plot. Minor characters are frequently static or constant, remaining the same from the beginning to the finish of a work (DiYanni, 2000). Besides, another kind of character usually denotes a persona with more complex and differentiated features. A typified character in literature is dominated by one specific trait and is referred to as a flat character (Klarer, 2004). Generally, the major character is also known as a round character. They are complex and sometimes unpredictable. A minor character is also known as a typified character. They are uncomplicated and unchanging.

Characterization

Characterization is only incidentally an exercise in plumbing the hidden, inner meanings that later writers would present as the very ground of personality (Arata, Haley, Hunter, & Wicke, 2015). Characterization is the process of ascribing features (of many sorts) to a character in a text and the interpretive process through which readers acquire an impression of that character (De Temmerman & Boas, 2018). Therefore, characterization is the writer's way to tell the information of characters in their stories.

Feminism

The beginnings of the feminist movement are traced in the history of feminism. With the first wave of feminism in the late nineteenth century, the feminist movement arose. The feminist movement, as a whole, occurred in three waves, each dealing with various facets of the same issue, with the first wave focusing on the suffrage campaign in the 19th and early 20th centuries. The second phase (from the 1960s through the 1980s) focused on legal and unofficial inequities. The perceived failings of the second wave of feminism spawned the third wave (the 1990s-present) (Tandon, 2008). Feminism is the concept that men and women are created equal. Men as a group are favored in most civilizations. To achieve gender equality, social movements are required, with the realization that gender inevitably overlaps with other social structures (Freedman, 2002). Feminism comes in a variety of shapes and

sizes. All of them, however, are based on two core beliefs: 1. Women are now in a subordinate position in society; as a result, they face certain injustices and systematic disadvantages. 2. Women's subordination is not inevitable nor desirable: it can and should be addressed by political action (Cameron, 2018). Feminism is defined as sexual equality paired with a desire to ending sexual dominance and changing society. Because only feminism significantly confronts the idea of men and women, as well as the social framework that sustains the difference, it symbolizes substantial shifts in social thought and politics (Kunjakkan, 2002).

Feminism may be viewed as a collection of theoretical works as well as a social and political movement. Feminism has endeavored to evaluate the status of women in society and to advance their interests in both cases. Feminism has had a significant impact on cultural studies, and they share the belief that knowledge creation is political and situated, as well as a desire to connect with or participate in political movements outside the university (Barker, 2004).

Liberal Feminism

According to Jaggar (as cited in Smith, 2010), liberal feminism assumes that the problem of gender inequality is the domination of institutions by men. Men control the economic sphere, political sphere, along with other things. Liberal feminism focuses primarily on transforming these existing structures. Therefore, the membership and power inside these institutions are shared across gender lines.

Liberal feminism embraces liberalism's essential beliefs, but contends that the application of liberal individual rights to women has been inconsistent. The explanation for this discrepancy, according to a liberal feminist, is bias and prejudice towards women, which has its roots in pre-modern, patriarchal systems of thought and social order. The patriarchal belief that women are less intelligent than males is patently false. When it comes to the public spheres of law, politics, and work, there is no major difference between men and women, according to liberal feminism. Liberal feminism's message is arguably best summarized as "equal rights for women" (Axtmann, 2003).

Liberal feminism also emphasizes helping individual women to transcend the limits of their gender socialization patterns. Individuals in this philosophical category contend that women deserve equality with men because they have the same abilities as men. The major goals of

liberal feminists are personal empowerment, dignity, self-fulfillment, and equality (Smith, 2012).

The goal of liberal feminism is to create a society where equality of opportunity is guaranteed. The origins of feminism stem from the late 18th-century with Mary Wollstonecraft's publications, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, and later John Stuart Mill's article, "The Subjection of Women." This theory is rooted in the classic liberal thinking that individuals should be free to pursue their own goals and interests. Crosianos (2009) stated that liberal feminists agreed that the rights and opportunities of women should be facilitated. It can be done by passing equal rights legislation, affirmative action, and other opportunity laws or politics.

Liberal feminism stresses equality in terms of equal rights and equal opportunity for women. The liberal tradition viewed freedom as freedom from interference, especially from the government. Such freedom was seen as enabling individuals to advance according to their talents and abilities, unhampered by external regulations or barriers. To the liberal, equality meant the equality of opportunity (Braverman, 2012).

The 19th-Century's Liberal Feminism

According to Mill and Taylor (as cited in Tong, 2009), liberal feminism in the 19th-century focused on women's equal liberty. There are two main thoughts from Mill and Taylor that can be understood as the way for women in the 19th-century to achieve equal freedom. First, the ordinary way to maximize aggregate utility (happiness or pleasure) is to permit individuals (especially women) to pursue their desires, provided the individuals do not hinder or obstruct each other in the process. Second, society must provide women with the same political rights, economic opportunities, and education that men get.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

Research Design

In this study, the researcher uses a qualitative research method that explores the struggle of Edna Pontellier as the main character in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* in the 19th-century's liberal feminism. The researcher applies this method because this study directly observes the novel using library research to get more appropriate data.

Source of the Data

The source of the data is from the novel *The Awakening*. Whereas the data for the research comprised all sentences and dialogues which were related to Edna Pontellier as the main character in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The novel consists of 508 pages (with other selected stories of Kate Chopin). It was published by Wordsworth Editions Limited in 2015. The genre of the novel is feminist literature.

Data Analysis Procedure

The data analysis procedure included the data organization to make sure whether they are suitable for the theory that is used in this study. The researcher draws the result of data analysis by using the narrative presentation.

RESULT OF THE STUDY

The struggle of Edna Pontellier in the 19th-Century's Liberal Feminism

Based on two main thoughts from Mill and Taylor that can be understood as the way of women in the 19th-century to achieve their equal freedom, the struggles of Edna Pontellier in the 19th-century's liberal feminism are:

1. The ordinary way to maximize aggregate utility (happiness or pleasure) is to permit individuals (especially women) to pursue their desires. But at that time, women have not given the freedom to achieve their desires and happiness. Edna is a figure of a woman that wants to pursue her desires, set herself free from everything that she does not want. The struggle of Edna Pontellier in the 19th-century's liberal feminism can be found in the statement from the novel below:

"A feeling of exultation overtook her as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. Her unlooked-for achievement was the subject of wonder, applause, and admiration. Each one congratulated himself that his special teachings had accomplished this desired end." (p. 27, paragraph 7, lines 1-7)

This statement explains that Edna began to realize that she has the power to achieve her desires (when she tries to swim and she can do it by herself) and she found hope to follow her desires. Edna wanted to achieve more for herself, and this is one of the forms of Edna's struggle in 19th-century liberal feminism.

"She was happy to be alive and breathing when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odours, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in, and she found it good to dream and be alone and unmolested." (p. 57, paragraph 9, lines 2-7.

This statement shows Edna's feelings when she is away from her husband and her children. She found it interesting to be alone with herself, she was enjoying things around her and discovering new things.

"She was happy to be alive and breathing when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odours, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places."

This statement represents that Edna began to realize that she doesn't like to be bound with her husband and her children just like the other married women. She wanted to be independent.

"The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason?" (p. 78, paragraph 13, lines 1-2).

This statement shows Edna's discontentment about the things that she had in her life. All the things do not belong to her, it belongs to her husband. She felt bad for herself because she is not an independent woman.

"Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: it is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by dribblets. I won a large sum this winter

on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laid pore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge that myself, but I feel that I have gained ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laid pore. I can live in the tiny house for a little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come to stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it like the feeling of freedom and independence." (p. 78, paragraph 15, lines 1-11)

This statement shows Edna's satisfaction with the things that she got from herself, the things that she had as a result of her hard work, and the things that she can achieve because of her desires.

"I know I shall like it like the feeling of freedom and independence."

This sentence indicates how Edna felt after getting something from her hard work, the feeling of being free and independent.

"Whatever was her own in the house, everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and merge deficiencies from her resources." (p. 82, paragraph 2, lines 1-4)

This statement shows Edna's independent side. She appreciated every little thing that she got from her resources.

"... Everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and merge deficiencies from her resources."

This sentence represents Edna's satisfaction when she can supply herself with her resources.

"... There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal women, the one who

rules, who looks on, who stands alone. (p. 87, paragraph 17, lines 4-7)

This statement shows Edna's independent-woman figure that suits her personality. It also points to Edna's attitude when she followed her desires and achieved something for herself.

"Every step which she took towards relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to 'feed upon opinion' when her soul had invited her." (p. 92, paragraph 7, lines 5-9)

This statement shows that Edna began to realize the meaning of her life. She found the place that suits her life. It represents Edna's feeling after doing what she loves and following her desires, she found her true happiness.

"She thought of Leonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul." (p. 113, paragraph 27, lines 1-2)

This statement shows the reality of Edna's life. She knew that her husband and her children are part of her life, but she couldn't give her life to them. It indicates Edna's true personality towards her life, free and independent.

2. Society must provide women with the same political rights and economic opportunities as well as the same education that men enjoy. At that time, the same political rights and economic opportunities still need to be voiced. There are a few sentences from the novel that can be seen as a form of Edna's struggle to get an equal opportunity in society:

"Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole (Louisiana people of pure French descent), was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles." (p. 9, paragraph 11, lines 1-2) This statement shows even though Edna had become a part of the Creole family, she still socializes with other people. It points that Edna has the

freedom to socialize not only with the Creole family but also with others.

"...I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laid pore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality."(p. 78, paragraph 15, lines 1-11)

This statement shows Edna's work was finally being appreciated by someone. Even though society at that time did not appreciate a figure of independent woman, but because of her hard work she finally could reach someone's attention. It indicates Edna's happiness because her work is being appreciated by someone.

"Whatever was her own in the house, everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and merge deficiencies from her resources." (p. 82, paragraph 2, lines 1-4)

This statement shows Edna's appreciation of the things she got from herself. It represents Edna's independent side and one of the results of her struggle in 19th-century liberal feminism.

Things that lead Edna Pontellier to become a figure of liberal feminism

An unhappy marriage life

"Her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of fate. It was amid her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and ardour which left nothing to be desired. He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. Add to this the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a catholic, and we need seek no further for the motives which led her to accept Monsieur Pontellier for her husband." (p. 17, paragraph 33, lines 1-11)

This statement explains that the marriage of Edna and Mr. Pontellier is not because of love.

“Her marriage to Leonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of fate. It was amid her secret great passion that she met him.”

This sentence indicates Edna’s unhappiness towards her marriage because she couldn’t choose the life she wants to live.

“She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Libreville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense “longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her.” (p. 18, paragraph 36, lines 1-8)

This statement shows that Edna underwent her role as a mother and a wife half-heartedly. It indicates that Edna was trapped in a figure of a mother and wife, which she thought did not fit her.

“Without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna hastened her preparation for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving into the little house around the block.” (p.82, paragraph 1, lines 1-4)

This statement shows Edna's indifference towards her husband. It represents Edna’s individualistic side, as the result of the unhappiness in her marriage.

She wanted to free herself and follow her desires.

“Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream, to feel again the

realities pressing into her soul. The physical need for sleep began to overtake her; the exuberance which had sustained and exalted her spirit left her helpless and yielding to the conditions which crowded her in." (p.31, paragraph 13, lines 1-5)

This statement shows how Edna dealt with reality, her desires are just like an impossible dream to her but it began to awaken her soul. It points to Edna's true desires that collide with reality.

"Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: it is a caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by dribblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laid pore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge that myself, but I feel that I have gained ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laid pore. I can live in the tiny house for a little or nothing with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come to stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence." (p. 78, paragraph 15, lines 1-11)

This statement shows Edna's satisfaction with her achievement. She followed her desires and it made her feel happy. It represents Edna's happiness because of the success of her hard work.

"Whatever was her own in the house, everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and merge deficiencies from her resources." (p. 82, paragraph 2, lines 1-4)

This statement shows that Edna wanted to be an independent woman that can fulfil her needs with her resources. It indicates that Edna's wanted to follow her desires to get something for herself from her resources.

"Every step which she took towards relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the

deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to 'feed upon opinion' when her soul had invited her."(p. 92, paragraph 7, lines 5-9)

This statement shows how Edna began to realize where she belongs to. It represents Edna's feelings about her desires.

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Conclusion

After analyzing the data, it can be concluded that Edna Pontellier's character in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* represents her struggles in 19th-century liberal feminism. She tried to fight for her rights to pursue her desires. She wanted to get the same political rights, economic opportunities, and the same education that men get. The researcher found the data of the two main things from the statement in the novel that leads her to become a figure of liberal feminism: An unhappy marriage life and her desire to free herself. Edna Pontellier is a figure of liberal feminism because she shows us her struggles as a woman in the 19th-century. Through the statement from the novel she tries to be an independent woman, even though in the end she chose to end her life because she was afraid of the ignorance in society at that time, she is still considered as a figure of liberal feminism in the 19th-century.

Suggestion

It was suggested for further research to be conducted with other aspects of feminism, such as cultural feminism, ecofeminism, black feminism, separatist feminism, socialist and Marxist feminism, and radical feminism.

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