



**AN ANALYSIS OF MAIN CHARACTER'S REJECTIONS AGAINST THE
STEREOTYPES OF WOMEN IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING***

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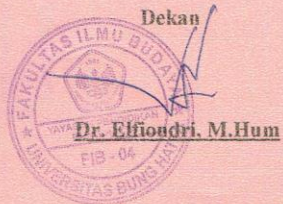
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Abstract

The purpose of the research is to analyze the stereotypes of women in nineteenth century Louisiana America as reflected in the novel *The Awakening* written by Kate Chopin. The writer studies about the stereotypes of women through female main character and how she rejects women's stereotypes. The analysis uses feminism theory. The technique applied is close reading. The results show that the women have four main stereotypes: 1) *piety, such as attending Sunday sermon*, 2) *purity, such as having the art skill in painting, nurturing the children, preparing the meals for children and taking the children to bed*, 3) *submissiveness, such as receiving the guests, returning the visits of the guests and writing letter to husband*, and 4) *domesticity, such as looking after the servants*. All of the stereotypes result in oppression for the women because they get many responsibilities around the house, so the women reject these stereotypes by *denying the status as a mother, enjoying to be alone and making painting as an excuse to abandon the children, denying her marriage, damaging her wedding ring, disobeying her husband's command, skipping her regular duty to receive the guests, making money and ignoring her husband's order through the letter and buying a new house to escape from housekeeping duties*. Her actions of rejections show that she wants to get the rights to be free to act, to have time for her own pleasure and becomes herself.

Keywords: *the stereotypes of women, piety, purity, submissiveness, domesticity, rejections*

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Reason for Choosing the Topic

Literature is created by human that contains the reflection of their life. Literary work can be a media to see how people live in certain period, for example what kind of problem usually happen in that time. The story is told by using main character and supporting characters. For example the story in the novel is influenced by the situation that happens in the society. According to Pickering and Hooper, the creation of literature is a uniquely human activity, born of man's timeless desire to understand, express and finally share experience (1981: 307). Therefore, the story in the novel indirectly shows people activity in real life. There is no time limit when the author writes the novel and the people still like story in the past.

In this research, the writer would like to see the reflection of women's life in nineteenth century America. Sailus (2003) writes that nineteenth century women of America vocally fight for change and reject the traditional stereotypes of women. The women are usually expected to live their lives largely homebound, taking care of the cooking, cleaning, and child rearing. Free time for women is not supposed to be spent socializing but for doing other things related to sewing socks to laundry. Very few women have the same opportunities for education as men. Women are also entirely shut out of political activity. Women are also so bound to their husband that they are barely considered people at all.

One of the greatest literary works that reflects the women situation in past time is the novel *The Awakening* written by Kate Chopin. *The Awakening* tells about the portrait of female main character who lives as upper class lady in Creole society. She feels burden by the stereotypes of women of nineteenth century Louisiana, America. Finally she rejects the stereotypes of women by acting not responsible by breaking the rules as a wife and as a mother and focuses about her freedom as a human.

The study about woman who wants to get her freedom to act in the middle of many rules in the society is included in feminism study. According to Cruea (2005), during the mid-nineteenth the women strived to improve their status and usefulness to society. The women had rising awareness about their subordinate in patriarchal society of the 1800s. Radek (2001) writes that at this time the women confronted their traditional characteristics. Women were thought to be more pure, innocent, and morally superior to men; however, they were also more easily corrupted.

Based on biography of Kate Chopin in KateChopin.org, actually her name is Catherine O'Flaherty born in St. Louis, Missouri, USA on February 8, 1850. In 1899 Chopin published *The Awakening*. At that time the novel is not very famous and regarded has controversial content about woman. Therefore the writer is interested to analyze about *The Awakening* because the content portrait the life of stereotyped women in Louisiana in 19th century and why female main character rejecting women's stereotypes.

1.2 Objective and Scope of the Study

The scope of this study is limited to analyze the stereotypes of woman who live in 19th century Louisiana. The focus of research is female main character's rejections against the stereotypes as a wife and as a mother.

1.3 Formulation of the Problem

Based on background of the study, the researcher formulates the research questions as the following:

1. How are the stereotypes of women in the novel *The Awakening*?
2. How does the female main character reject women's stereotypes in the novel *The Awakening*?

1.4 Theoretical Framework

In this part, the writer would like to explain about the theories used to analyze the data from the novel *The Awakening*. The writer would like to study about the feminism and the stereotypes of women seen from this novel.

1.4.1 Feminism Theory

Based on the topic chosen about female main character who rejects the stereotypes of women, the researcher applies feminism theory. Feminism is one of the literary criticisms that puts the focus of analysis on women. Feminism shows woman's awareness about her individuality and how she sees the problems related to her rights as a human being. Mahajan and Randhawa (2016) write that "Feminism is basically a set of ideologies and movements that have a common

aim of defining, establishing and achieving equal rights for women in all domains of life may it be social, political, cultural, religion, economic, etc.” It means that the study about feminism is very wide included many fields. Feminism happens when women suffer from injustice and not get their proper rights because their status as a woman.

Feminism can be found in literature such as in novel, short story and drama. Henderson and Brown (2011) write that:

The first act of feminist critic is to become a resisting rather than asserting reader and, by this refusal to assent, to begin the process of exorcising the male mind that has been implanted on us. On the thematic level, then, the reader rejects stereotypes and examines woman as a theme in literary works.

It is clear from the quotation that the topic in feminism in literature is woman. In this case, she rejects the stereotypes of women made by male domination. This source has relation to this research because the main character in *The Awakening* is a woman. She refuses to continue to behave like what images the woman should have.

Moreover, Showalter (2000) write that feminism in literature describes about the stereotypes of woman who live in certain time. She writes that:

The feminist critique as a sort of feminist criticism envisions the women as the readers of those male produced texts. The feminist thus, try to trace out the images and stereotypes of the women exposed in

the male texts. This is also called traditional feminist criticism where women are the consumers of the production in literary writing.

It can be concluded that the images and the stereotypes of women in the past can be seen in the story. Generally the images are made by men. The men decide how the women should behave. The rules become common in the society then become the stereotypes for woman about their right attitudes.

In addition, the feminism in the literature portrays about the life of female character who faces inequality rights. According to Kennedy and Gioia (1995),

Feminism examines how sexual identity influences the creation and reception of literary works. Feminism takes a central percept that the patriarchal attitudes have dominated western thought. Feminist criticism attempts to correct this imbalance by analyzing and combating such attitudes. Feminist critics include analyzing how the images of men and women in imaginative literature reflect or reject the social forces that have historically kept the sexes from achieving total equality.

It can be seen from the quotation that in literature the images of women's life is a reflection of their real life about women to have the same equality in the society. Related to this research, the female main character rejects the stereotypes that become burden for herself and breaks the rules that limit her rights as a human being.

1.4.2 Definition of Stereotypes of Women

Before the writer describes about the stereotypes of woman in the novel, the writer would like to explain about definition of stereotypes of women. According to Collins Dictionary,

A stereotype is a fixed general images or set of characteristics that a lot of people believe represent a particular type of person or thing. If someone is stereotyped as something, people form a fixed general idea or image of them, so that it is assumed that they will behave in a particular way. For example: There has always been a stereotype about successful businessmen and He was stereotyped by some as a rebel.

It can be seen that the stereotypes are the images of someone that already exist in the society. The stereotypes make the person should behave like the expected. In this research, the stereotypes of women are the general images of women in *The Awakening* as seen through Edna Pontellier as female main character who is an upper class lady. It means that her behaviors are expected like what a lady should be.

According to Cruea (2005), Barbara Welter first introduced the term “True Woman” prescribing nineteenth century female bound by the kitchen and nursery.

A True Woman was designated as the symbolic keeper of morality and decency within the home, being regarded as innately superior to men when it came to virtue. “Piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity” were thought to be natural to women.

It can be concluded from the quotation that the natural images of women are piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity.

Radek (2001) writes that “The Cult of Womanhood” is a term coined by Barbara Welter to describe the process of acculturating the ideal women in America.

Welter identifies four main virtues that a “true” woman must exhibit:

1) Piety, 2) Purity, 3) Submissiveness, and 4) Domesticity. The images attached to nineteenth century women are passive, timid, domestic, illogical, emotional, hysteria, social and familial, dependent, unable to resist temptation, pure, content, no sexual/sensual, and the sphere is private.

It is clear that Cruca and Radek have the same opinion. The stereotypes of women can be categorized become piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity.

Furthermore, about the four main virtues, Fortin (2005) writes that:

The wife in early nineteenth century was to complement her husband, reflecting credit on him and herself. A man took a wife to look after his affairs, and to prepare his children for their proper stations in life. It was a wife’s duty to care for her husband’s interests. She was to be mistress of the family and run it well enough so that her husband would only enjoy it and could focus his attention on the matters of the world. As long as the household could be managed within the bounds of the husband’s income by a woman who practice and taught piety, purity and submissiveness, then all

was as it should be. Books devoted to housekeeping and cooking, made it perfectly clear that a woman's domain was her home and she was expected to have total charge of all within.

Based on these sources the writer concludes that the main stereotypes of nineteenth century women are piety, purity, submissiveness and domesticity. The writer would like to explain more detail about these stereotypes as follows:

1.4.2.1 Piety

In simple words, piety means the quality as religious person. Cruea (2005) writes that "a True Woman was expected to serve as the protectress of religion and civilized society. She was known as the "Angel in the House" whose primary function is to impart moral guidance to her family". According to Sotelo (2014), "the ideal women were pure, religious and obedient. They were forced to conform with societal beliefs". It can be concluded that the women must become a religious person because she must educate her children based on the rules in their religion.

1.4.2.2 Purity

Purity can be defined as free from immorality. The woman is expected to behave as an ideal woman in physical and characteristic. Cruea (2005) writes that:

Nineteenth century woman practiced devotions at the shrine of fashion and beauty. The ideal of true womanhood was early imprinted upon young girls to prepare herself chaste for her future husband and learning the skills necessary to manage a household and rear children. Motherhood was valued as the most fulfilling and essential of all

women's duties with the task of shaping the values of their sons, who were likely to have a direct impact on the nation's success.

The quotation means that the purity of a woman is to become a good mother for her children. According to Sotelo (2014),

Nineteenth century women of Louisiana were supposed to embody youth, beauty, and feminine purity. Women should also entertain beautifully. Women were expected to paint, play, and sing. They were also expected to be eloquent speakers and be able to converse in multiple languages. Women were expected to marry young and when they did marry young, it was celebrated.

It can be concluded that pure women also must have many skills such as art and language. They have complicated responsibilities that happen in the house. They have duties, they have to look pretty and they also must show that they are educated people.

Pitre (2010) writes that "women were supposed to be the mother women. It means that woman must be a good mother for her children. Sotelo (2014) also writes that:

Nineteenth century women of Louisiana were expected to raise a large family. Women were the role models for what their daughters should become. Women were put on a pedestal and expected to adhere to the standards set by the society. They should believe in private education.

It can be seen that the women may have many children and take care of a big family. They become the teacher in the house even though they do not have formal education.

In addition, Smith (2011) writes that:

Perhaps the most valuable service performed by the women of colonial Louisiana was their ability to assimilate and transfer culture to subsequent generations. Far more frequent than men, women—either as mothers or caretakers—passed along foodways, religious beliefs, folklore, music, and their own cultural worldview to the children at their knees. The mother singing lullaby, the nun teaching young girl how to pray the rosary or how to knit a stocking, the enslaved housekeeper combining ingredients for dish or telling a Bouki and Lapin folktale—all imparted rich and varied cultural components that combined to make Louisiana the unique and culturally vibrant state it is today.

Finally it is clear that in the stereotype as purity, the women have the functions to take care of the children and to teach them about their culture. People do not go to public school at that time and the teacher model is the mother. The mother has the ability in many fields in house domain.

1.4.2.3 Submissiveness

Submissiveness means obedience. It means that the women are expected to obey something without arguing. Sotelo (2014) writes that nineteenth century women were expected to obey their husbands' commands. Women were viewed

as their husbands' properties and treated like objects instead of people. According to Cruca (2005), woman was supposed to reflect her husband's wealth and success, and to prepare her children to continue the husband's legacy of success. It means that the woman is very important because it will influence the children. As the teacher she will teach her children to be success like their father.

1.4.2.4 Domesticity

Domesticity means home and family life. It means that the images of women that can be seen from her activities around the house. The stereotypes in domestic make the women have responsibilities to her husband, children and household. Sotelo (2014) writes that women are expected to work diligently and make marital and maternal sacrifices. It means that the women are responsible to housekeeping and everything related to manage the household. According to Svoboda (2004), women were expected to marry and care for their home and family and were not encouraged to get an education or pursue a professional career. It is clear that the stereotype in domesticity limits the woman activities only around the house.

1.4.3 Previous Studies

The research about the novel *The Awakening* is done by Linda Ayscue Gupta (2009) in her paper entitled *Deconstructionist and Feminist Analysis of The Awakening*. She applies deconstruction theory by Charles E. Bressler and feminism critics by Elaine Showalter. The points of deconstruction that she finds are 1) Grand Isle/the city, 2) Awakening/sleeping, 3) Agency/passivity, 4)

Individuation/conformity, 5) Art/motherhood, 6) Sensuality/frigidity, 7) Hopelessness/hope and 8) Solitude/relationship.

Different from previous research, in this research the writer analyzes about the stereotypes of women in nineteenth century Louisiana through female main character and how she rejects the women's stereotypes.

1.5 Method of Research

Based on the theories used for the research, method of this research is descriptive method. Whitney (1933) writes that "Descriptive method is the existence of fact with correct interpretations. Descriptive research studies about the problem in the society, with the system which acts in society together with certain situations including the relationship, activities, behavior, point of view with the process which happened and the influences of phenomenon". It means that this method suitable with the research because the writer wants to analyze the stereotypes of women in 19th century Louisiana, USA.

In addition, the source of data is taken from the female main character, Edna Pontellier in the novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin. According to Robert (1999), "Character may be defined as a verbal representation of human being. To find out the data about the character, the writer sees from the action and speech of the main character, the description and commentary of the narrator and the other character about the main character". It means that to explain about the stereotypes as a problem for female main character the writer can get the data from her

actions, behaviors, statement, description from the author of novel and also from the other character in the novel.

To hold a good research, the writer follows some steps, first in collecting the data, the writer uses close reading technique. Jacobus (1999) writes that “Close reading takes the form of writing, discussion or silent observation, should be based on questioning the text. Close reading requires that you take the text seriously enough to study it, to read and read it, search for details that might otherwise go unobserved, examine the text for special words and term and refer to the dictionary to be sure of their meaning when necessary”. It means that to do this research the writer read the novel carefully to get the correct data about women’s stereotypes in 19th century Louisiana. Second, the writer classifies the data based on the chapters. The last step is interpretation of the data based on the topic of analysis.