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Dr. Pennington

English 305: Essay 4 Proposal

March 27, 2020

Title: This Just In, Women Have Desire: How Edna Pontellier Bashes Gender Stereotypes in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

Commented [1]: I like the title!

Overview/Thesis: Kate Chopin uses Edna's character to break free of the stereotypes held for women in the 19th century. Chopin, a long-time rebel of gender stereotypes herself, uses Edna to depict the captivity of a patriarchal society and how she herself pushes expectations to the wayside. In this essay, I will argue, using examples from the novel, how Edna Pontellier chooses not to follow the expectations set for her as a woman in 19th century society. Whether it be in the way that Edna is the foil of the maternal figure Madame Ratignolle or simply that Edna is a woman with desires, she consistently disregards gender stereotypes of the time including the four cardinal values of a true woman as described by Barbara Welter.

Commented [2]: the topic idea is very strong. Your thesis will make a more concrete claim about the cult of true womanhood. It may be that you narrow that focus down to what your title seems to indicate--women and desire. That would also connect to a psychoanalytic reading, for Freud created controversy by stating that women had desires, just like men.

Why is this a good thesis?: This entire novel is a critique of patriarchal society. Edna is an autobiographical character representative of Kate Chopin, who commonly went against gender stereotypes, so there is plenty of evidence to support the claim that Edna fights gender stereotypes. The biggest down side of my thesis is that it has probably been argued hundreds if not thousands of times before, so there are plenty of people who have argued and will argue this thesis better than I can.

You outline is strong, but consider narrowing focus to the A section on desire? Doesn't Edna also have desire of Ratignolle (think of their hands) and Reisz (whose piano playing moves her to tears).

Stereotype I: purity

A. Topic sentence

- a. Chopin uses Edna's affair with Alcée Arobin and love for Robert to challenge Welter's cardinal value that women must remain unwaveringly faithful to their husbands.
 - i. How it relates to thesis: I'm going to argue that Edna doesn't abide by Barbara Welter's rule, supporting my thesis that Edna break stereotypes set by her gender

Stereotype II: domesticity

A. Topic sentence

- a. By purposefully not accomplishing her household duties , Edna challenges Welters' stereotype that women are limited to the domestic sphere.
 - i. How it relates to thesis: same as stereotype I

Stereotype III: submissiveness

A. Topic sentence

- a. Edna breaks yet another stereotype set by Welters, the idea that a woman must yield to her husband's authority, by disobeying Léonce and making her own decisions.
 - i. How it relates to theses: same as stereotype I

Abstracts

1. Gassman, Jennifer Youngblut, "A textual analysis of the role of women in historical fiction for young people" (2006). Graduate Research Papers. 3.
 - a. In her essay, Jennifer Gassman compares the role of women in literature in pre-feminist era historical fiction to contemporary historical fiction. She chose twelve novels written before 1970 and twelve novels written after 1970 to analyze and look for patterns. The big question Gassman was looking to answer was: how does the portrayal of women in historical fiction differ from before and after 1970 and can any pattern of portrayal be identified? Gassman was able to identify common themes in the portrayal of women in novels from both time periods including few females taking on masculine roles, female without a male counterpart either experience independence or displaced dependencies, few female characters are portrayed as educated, most female characters play the role of wife or mother, and mental health problems, often undiagnosed, seemed to often accompany female characters. In the end, Gassman's research of finding changing patterns in the portrayal of women in historical fiction can not be accepted or rejected because themes were common among the novels from both time periods.
 - b. I intend to use Gassman's essay to find more characteristics of gender stereotypes of the time, and then explain how Edna does not abide by them.
2. Welter, Barbara. "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860." *American Quarterly*, vol. 18, no. 2, 1966, pp. 151-174. *JSTOR*, JSTOR, www.jstor.org/stable/2711179.

In “The Cult of True Womanhood,” Barbara Welter claimed that a domestic or true woman should possess four cardinal values: piety, purity, domesticity, and submissiveness. Piety is valued among a woman because, unlike intellectual pursuits, it does not remove a woman from her “proper sphere,” the home along with controlling any desires. A woman must maintain her purity until marriage and must remain committed to her husband. Women are to remain submissive to their husbands as stated by God, and a woman’s rightful place was in the home doing domestic work which included cooking, tending flowers, and needlework. If a woman upholds these cardinal values she is an “ideal woman” and is frail and feminine.

Welter’s cardinal values are going to be the framework for my essay. I’m using her cardinal values as my main argument for how Edna does not abide by gender rules. I will argue how Edna goes against each of her cardinal values except for piety because while Edna is not very pious, there is not much direct evidence that points to this throughout the novel. While it would be nice to address all of Welter’s cardinal values, I feel that a paragraph on piety would be lacking.

3. Schweitzer, Ivy. “Maternal Discourse and the Romance of Self-Possession in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*.” *Boundary 2*, vol. 17, no. 1, 1990, pp. 158–186. *JSTOR*, www.jstor.org/stable/303221.

Ivy Schweitzer focuses on the romance genre written by female authors including *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Awakening*. She discusses several topics such as Edna’s role as a mother as compared to her “virgin birth” at the end and the significance of the bird symbolism in the novel.

I plan to use Schweitzer’s essay to further my own argument and include her arguments as evidence that I had not thought of before.

4. Showalter, Elaine. “Tradition and the Female Talent: The Awakening as a Solitary Book.” *Case Studies in Contemporary Criticism*, 2000, pp. 202–221.

Showalter describes how Kate Chopin went beyond what any writer before her time had done by writing about women’s sexual and personal emancipation. In the beginning of her career, Chopin followed the literary example of authors before her, but by the time she wrote *The Awakening*, she believed that literary success came from defying tradition. This change closely resembles Edna’s attempts to stay a domestic woman in the beginning of her story and then casting off of those duties as the story progresses.

Timeline

1. March 27: Turn in proposal
2. March 28: Receive feedback on proposal and give feedback to group members
3. March 28-April: Write Feminist essay
4. April 1: Turn in Draft