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ENGL 305, Proposal

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Working Title : Edna Pontellier as a Creole Outsider

Bones :

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1qxViBdNsWVY_8OKOXK6kX3qfU0P1ZLNy7KYYxxh

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1. Thesis Statement : In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin used the shift in Edna's identity to emphasize a want for women to be free from the societal standards of the time period. The aforementioned is highlighted through Edna's outsider status in multiple communities, including the Creole society as a whole and the women of the same society. In this society, women were expected to conform to the cult of true womanhood in which the identity of American women was "within the domestic sphere as wives, mothers, and housekeepers" (Delikonstantinidou 54). Edna's lack of conformity to societal standards from multiple levels shows her disapproval of the cult of womanhood, the Creole society, and the lack of independence of women as a whole. Through this, Chopin shows disapproval of the same ideal by herself and other women of the time period. Women no longer wanted to be stuck in within the frame that society deemed as womanhood. They were ready to break free. To be an outsider was not a bad thing. To be an outsider meant to take a step toward more freedom for women.
 - a. The cult of true womanhood

- i. In the nineteenth century, the cult of true womanhood surfaced, which was essentially the expectation that the identity of American women was “within the domestic sphere as wives, mothers, and housekeepers” (Delikonstantinidou 54).
 1. Purpose of Source : Defines the cult of true womanhood
 2. Disciplinary Focus : Academic
2. Support 1 : The common expectation of women in the Creole society.
 - a. Dorothy H. Jacobs = “Mrs. Pontellier, wife and mother is defined by her relationship to husband and children.”
 - i. Purpose of Source : Relates Mrs. Pontellier to the cult of true womanhood
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Academic
 - b. Mr. Pontellier assessing a sunburnt Mrs. Pontellier “looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (Chopin 2).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Supports the claim that women were viewed more as property and less as human beings.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Literature
 - c. “Oscar introduced her to New Orleans and the resort of Grand Isle” (Toth).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Connect Chopin’s real life to Edna
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Biography
3. Support 2 : Independence signified through transitioning from married name to only first name.

- a. Original title of novel was *A Solitary Soul* (Toth)
 - i. Purpose of Source : As an outsider, Edna was alone.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Literature
 - b. The name “Edna” is used 155 times throughout the novel, while Mrs. Pontellier is only used 58 (Chopin).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Independence
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Literature
 - c. Kate Chopin began writing to support her six children after her husband died in 1883. Without a husband, she had the ability and necessity to be independent. (Toth).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Connecting Chopin to Edna’s independence.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Biography
4. Support 3 : Edna’s masculine traits show the correlation between being free and being a man and relations toward the women’s movement to vote.
- a. In Chopin’s time, men were the artists because the models for inspiration were typically nude women. The men would buy paintings of these women to add to their possessions. It was absurd to think that a woman would want to paint another naked woman. This was what was the truth up until the late nineteenth century (Barker).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Art was a masculine trait during the time Chopin lived.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Historical

- b. Once Edna married “she gave up her art. She became one of her husband’s possessions, and her life was one of sadness and unfulfillment” (Toth).
 - i. Purpose of Source : The character Edna Pontellier was based off of a real person named Edna Pontillion.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Historical
 - c. Women gained the right to vote in 1920, more than twenty years after Chopin’s novel was published. Women did not desire the right to vote, a manly privilege, overnight. Women had been fighting for independence in the United States since 1848 when the first women’s rights convention was held in Seneca, New York (Rutgers)
 - i. Purpose of Source : Real world application of a woman’s want for more freedom surrounding the time the novel was written/published.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Historical
5. Support 4 : Edna is an outsider even within the women of her society.
- a. “The central character, Edna Pontellier, is a Kentucky Presbyterian and an outsider to Louisiana and the Creole culture” (Toth).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Edna is not from the Creole society and therefore has to work harder to be a part of the society. She is an outsider from the start.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Academic
 - b. Edna’s status outside the Creole society is noted when Madame Ratignolle refers to Edna being “not one of us; she is not like us” (Chopin 23).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Edna is an outsider and this is stated in the text.

- ii. Disciplinary Focus : Literature
 - c. “Chopin did not challenge men and patriarchy in the open and direct way of present-day authors. Instead, she presented, almost instinctively, the tragedy of a young woman trying unsuccessfully to break away from traditional sex roles” (Normann Nilsen 28)
 - i. Purpose of Source : Chopin was not direct in her claims, but she still made a statement against the patriarchy.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Biography
 - d. “Edna becomes aware of political crises related to her position within Creole society” (Thornton 50)
 - i. Purpose of Source : Edna is aware of political crises that directly relate to the real world at the time the novel was written/published.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Academic
6. Support 5 : Edna’s suffering and death were the result of being unable to fit into both societal and personal realms.
- a. “Edna's despair is couched in a language that is related to the fin-desiecle atmosphere of the 1890s, in which spleen and a sense of doom were fashionable” (Normann Nilsen 28).
 - i. Purpose of Source : Sense of doom is a popular theme during this time period. This could explain why Edna commits suicide at the end of the novel.
 - ii. Disciplinary Focus : Historical

7. Conclusion

Works Cited

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