

SELF AWARENESS THAT LEADS TO EDNA PONTELLIER'S EGOISTIC SUICIDE IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* NOVEL

Submitted by:
Ivett Sherdianti
13020110130039

English Department Faculty of Humanities
Diponegoro University
Semarang

Abstract

Ada beberapa faktor yang menyebabkan seseorang berakhir dengan keputusan untuk bunuh diri. Novel *The Awakening* karya Kate Chopin bercerita tentang Edna Pontellier, istri dari seorang Creole yang hidup tertekan karena suaminya dan standar sosial Creole hingga ia kehilangan jati dirinya. Penulis menggunakan metode studi pustaka guna mencari data data relevan yang berkaitan dengan topik yang dibahas. Penulis menggunakan pendekatan eksponensial untuk menjelaskan unsur intrinsik novel tersebut untuk memberikan informasi yang jelas tentang karakter, setting, dan konflik yang ada didalam novel. Pendekatan psikologi sosial digunakan untuk memahami seberapa besar dampak lingkungan sekitar terhadap cara berpikir dan bertindak suatu individu. Penulis menemukan korelasi antara cara Edna berpikir dan bertindak dengan standar sosial Creole saat itu. Sedangkan untuk menganalisis proses kesadaran diri tokoh Edna Pontellier, penulis menggunakan teori *self awareness* guna mengkaji proses kesadaran diri yang dilalui Edna satu per satu. Penulis juga menggunakan teori *suicide* oleh Emile Durkheim untuk menganalisis aksi bunuh diri yang Edna lakukan di akhir cerita novel. Penulis kemudian mengkategorikan aksi bunuh diri tersebut kedalam tipe *egoistic suicide* sesuai dengan faktor-faktor penyebabnya.

Kata Kunci: *Kesadaran diri, Bunuh diri, The Awakening, Creole, Psikologi Sosial, Teori Self Awareness, Teori Suicide, Emile Durkheim.*

1. Introduction

1.1 Background of the Study

As an individual grows in self awareness, he will better understand why he feels what he feels and why he behaves as he behaves. The state where an individual wants to

change things that he does not like from himself to match his internal expectations, most likely will influence his behavior to change, too. They will compare the situation that they face with their inner thought of their self. This is the time when people start to aware of their own selves. The one theory that can be used to analyze this process is self awareness theory. In the end of the novel, the main character Edna decides to commit suicide by drowning herself into the sea.. A French sociologist, Emile Durkheim also states in his book *Suicide*, that the term suicide is used to all cases of death which is a direct or indirect result from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he clearly knows that will produce this kind of result (1897: xii). He defines three types of suicide; anomic suicide, altruistic suicide, and egoistic suicide. In this thesis, however, the writer uses only one type of suicide that is egoistic suicide to analyse Edna's suicide due to the fact that among those three types, egoistic suicide is the most suitable one to be applied in Edna's case. Through this thesis, the writer is interested to explain about the self awareness process of Edna Pontellier which seen in this novel, and how further her awareness affects her behavioral changes. The writer is also interested in figuring out the factors behind Edna's decision to commit suicide and the correlation of her self awareness to her suicide.

1.2 Scope of the Study

In this research, the writer focuses the study on the intrinsic aspects that consist of character, setting, and conflict, and the extrinsic aspects that discuss the process of self awareness in the character of Edna Pontellier and her egoistic suicide act.

1.3 Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to analyze the process of self awareness happens inside the character Edna Pontellier and prove that it leads to egoistic suicide using Durkheim's theory of suicide.

1.4 Methods of the Study

1.4.1 Methods of Research

The writer uses a library research in order to acquire data and make this thesis more accurate. The writer looks for the data from the library and also uses the internet to find some of online books, articles, and journals to support the topic of the thesis. All of these datas found will be used to support the writer's arguments and theories written in this research to create a good statements.

1.4.2 Methods of Approach

In this thesis, the writer uses two methods of approach, related to the scope of the study above. The first one is exponential approach to explain the intrinsic aspects; character, setting, and conflict. The second one is social psychology approach that is applied in the extrinsic aspects. "Social psychology is the study of the individual human being as he interacts, largely symbolically, with his environment" (Dewey & Humber, 1966: 3 in Sarwono, 2011). Since human is a social beings, social psychology is used to understand how an individual behaves in a society and how the society affects the behavior of an individual.

1.5 Scheme of the Study

CHAPTER 1 : This chapter contains the background of the study, purpose of the study, scope of the study, methods of the study, and the scheme of the study.

CHAPTER 2: This chapter tells about the summary of the novel's whole story.

CHAPTER 3: It consists of the discussion of the intrinsic and the extrinsic aspects of this thesis.

CHAPTER 4: It is the main part of the thesis as it analyses the story of the novel connected with the theoretical review above.

CHAPTER 5: This chapter contains the analysis result of the thesis.

2. Summary of the Novel

3. Review of Literature

3.1 Intrinsic Aspects

Intrinsic aspects include theme, plot, setting, character, conflict, and language style (Semi, 1998: 35). In this research, the writer uses some of the aspects: character, setting, and conflict. Heryanti's thesis entitled *Moral Masyarakat Amerika yang Terefleksi Dalam Novel The Awakening karya Kate Chopin* (2006) analyses the society around Edna Pontellier and the social abnormalities seen in the novel. Meanwhile, another study entitled *The Awakening by Kate Chopin: The Process of Edna's Awakening* (Smith, 2011) analyses the process of Edna's awakening. It does not see the process as the influence from the society, but the process comes mostly from Edna's own mind. Yet in this thesis, the writer will analyze the process of Edna's awakening as the result of the society's influences to her, which later leads to her suicide.

3.1.1 Character

As Wellek and Warren states in *Theory of Literature*, "describing in details the physical appearance and another analyzing the moral and psychological nature" (1948: 227). E. M. Forster in *A Handbook to Literature* divides character into two, namely round character and flat character (Holman, 1985: 187). Round character is the most complex character in a story. Flat character is a character constructed by a single idea or quality.

3.1.2 Setting

Abrams (1999: 284) said that in a narrative or dramatic work, the whole setting in which its action happens are the general locale, historical time, and social environment; the setting of one episode or scene in narrative or dramatic work is the specific physical location where it takes place. Setting of place explains the setting of each scene within such a work is the particular physical location in which it takes place (Abrams, 1999: 284). Setting of time explains to the readers when the events of the story happen. Setting of social background means the social environment and the system of society that surround the characters.

3.1.3 Conflict

Wellek and Warren (1948: 285) define conflict as "something dramatic, referring to the clash between two balanced powers, implying the presence of actions and responses". Both of them believes that actions and responses develop the conflict. There are internal conflict and external conflict. Internal conflict means the struggle within an individual. External conflict is a conflict happens between two or more individuals.

3.2 Extrinsic Aspects

3.2.1 Theory of Self Awareness

"The idea of self awareness theory is when people focus their attention to themselves, they evaluate and compare their behavior to their personal standards and values" (Aronson, Wilson, and Akert 2010: 119). Duval and Silvia in *Journal of Personality and Social Psychology*: "Self Awareness, Probability of Improvement, and the Self-Serving Bias" define, "when people become aware or conscious of their self, they become objective, judgmental observers of themselves, seeing their self as an outside

observer would” (2002: 49). Normally, people will only see their self only from their own point of view, therefore, they will be lenient to their self. On the contrary, when people start observing their self, they will learn to see their self from others point of view. It will make them aware of the disparity between their behavior and their internal standards. If they can change their behavior to match their internal standards, they will do so. According to Duval and Silvia (2002: 52), if people feel that they cannot change their behavior, being in this state of self awareness is really troublesome because they will be confronted with disagreeable feedback about their self.

Carver & Scheier in Aronson, Wilson, and Akert (Social Psychology New Edition, 2010: 121) states that there are some stages of this awareness process:

1. Someone came across a self-focusing cue in the environment, this cue will create a state of self awareness which makes he awares of and thinks about himself.
 2. Compares his current thoughts or behavior to his internal standards or expectations for himself.
 3. Do they match?
 4. If yes is the answer, everything will be fine.
 5. If the answer is no, he should choose to change his behavior so it matches his standards and feel great about it, or he cannot and will not change his behavior and feel terrible.
- This second option will most likely makes an individual to escape and flee away from the state of self awareness.

3.2.2 Theory of Suicide

This theory was first established by a sociologist, Emile Durkheim in the 19th century. In his book entitled *Suicide*, he states that the term suicide is used to “all cases of

death which is a direct or indirect result from a positive or negative act of the victim himself, which he clearly knows that will produce this kind of result” (1897: xii). Suicide exists when the victim; at the moment he commits his act, knows the result of it with certainty. The victim is a melancholy whose life is a burden to him. It can occur for personal reasons, but it cannot account for the suicide rate. Durkheim (1897: 100) believes that an action is shaped by the society. It shows the cause and effect relationship between individual and the society.

There are three types of suicide according to Durkheim:

1. Altruistic suicide; happens as the result of the excessive regulation of individuals by social forces, which means individuals become too intimate to society and willing to take his own life for the sake of the collective expectations.
2. Anomic suicide; happens when the society does not regulate individuals sufficiently. Society is going through some sort of change, disambiguation of norms and values, rapid social changes, causes individuals feel confused and lost.
3. Egoistic suicide; happens when individuals insufficiently integrated to the society and social groups. They are not included in many social activities therefore they feel unattached, useless, and disappointed (1897: 105).

3.2.2.1 Egoistic Suicide

Egoistic suicide, according to Durkheim (1858-1917), occurs to the “self who is characterized by deep meditation and self-examination, deep in depression, feeling worthlessness, and believe that he/she fails to personal and or social expectations.” After the process of self-examination, one self will come to a conclusion whether he/she succeed to his/her personal and or social expectations or not. Lonely self who has no

company will most likely drawn into a deep depression and feeling worthlessness. The desperate lonely self affects the communion through his sadness as he no longer has anything else to achieve. Durkheim said that in the state of egoism, in which the individual ego asserts itself to excess in the face of the social ego and its expense, it may called as the egoistic the special type of suicide springing from excessive individualism (1897: 168). The individual generates to the slightest shock of circumstance because the society made him as a prey ready to suicide (1897: 173). Durkheim finds that unmarried persons seems to commit suicide less than married persons. It can be inferred that marriage life and family multiply the chances of suicide as unmarried person has in fact an easier life. Durkheim also finds that at each age, the amount of wives in the suicides of married persons is far higher than that of unmarried women in suicides of unmarried persons (1897: 127). This, however, is not because wife is less protected than an unmarried woman. On the other hand, according to Durkheim, family can also take the role as a powerful safeguard against suicide if it is strongly constituted so that it can give a greater protection to its family members (1897: 160). Society cannot disintegrate without the individual simultaneously detaching himself from the social life. The more the groups of society which he/she belonged has weakened, the less he/she depends on them, the more he/she depends only on him/herself alone and figures out there is no rules of conduct than what are founded on his/her private interests (Durkheim, 1897: 167).

3.2.2 New Orleans in the Late Nineteenth Century

New Orleans is a city at the southeastern Louisiana, US. At that time, New Orleans dominated the Caribbean as the most active port city and trade destination for sugar, cane, rum, tobacco, and fruit. New Orleans soon become one of the most powerful cities

in the Union. By the mid 1800s, the city filled with the dazzling visitors with chic Parisian couture, fabulous restaurants, and sophisticated culture. According to Caver and Williams (1991) in their articles “*Creoles*”, in Louisiana, the term Creole is used to identify the French-speaking populations of French or Spanish descent. In the nineteenth century, they were the leaders in business, agriculture, politics, arts, and as the slaveholders. The people of upper class society has used car as their vehicle. According to Melosi (2010), the first gasoline fueled car was built in 1876 in Germany. However, it took several more years for the gasoline fueled cars to sweep the American market. In addition, during the nineteenth century, gasoline stove was already popular. The first commercially produced gasoline stove designed by Englishman, James Sharp, hit the market in around 1834. It became popular by the end of that century for being easy to use than the wood or coal stoves (Bramen, 2011).

4. Discussion

5. Conclusion

After analyzing *The Awakening* novel, the writer comes to a conclusion that self awareness is a normal process that might happen to every human being. This process can take an individual to a stage where he/she changes his/her behavior to match his/her personal expectation. Edna Pontellier has been through a self awareness process. She measures that she has not reached her expectation yet because it is difficult to fulfil the social expectation. Hence, she experiences some behavioral changes and commits suicide. As the final result, the writer figures out that there are three events that marked Edna's process of self awareness. The first one is her friendship with Madame Adele Ratignolle, a fellow Creoles wives, the second one is her dangerous romantic relationship

with Robert, and the third event is her friendship with Mademoiselle Reisz, an unconventional artist. Shortly, after those awareness processes, Edna begins to change her behavior to match her expectation. There are four events marking her behavioral changes in the form of rebellion. The first event is when she starts to ignore all of her social responsibilities as a Creoles high-society wife. The second event is when she insists she will not join Leonce, her husband to go to New York to attend her sister Janet's wedding. Then the third event is Edna's decision to move out from Pontellier's big house to a small "pigeon house". The fourth event is her scandal with Alcee Robin who has a bad reputation as the city's seducer. However, after all of those rebellion acts that Edna did, the high point of her self awareness process is when she witnesses Adele Ratignolle in childbirth. The writer also finds out some factors causing Edna's decision to end her life in the end of the novel by drowning herself into the sea. The writer considers this act as the egoistic suicide regarding the following factors. The first factor is in the 1800s there were more suicides of married people than unmarried people; because marriage life and family multiplied the chances of suicide, while life was easier for those unmarried people. Edna's duty both as a wife and a mother to her family weighs her and complicates her life. The second factor is the Pontellier's family failure to take a role as a powerful safeguard against suicidal for its members. There is no strong family constitution which makes Edna less depend on them. The third factor is the social expectation towards Edna to behave as the ideal Creoles wives. It burdens Edna, and finally she detaches herself from the society. After her self awareness process, Edna realizes about herself and what she wants. Edna feels that she can no longer live as what her husband and the society expect her as a wife to live. The final factor is Edna's

selfishness. She follows her fantasy dream of a wild romance and fails to consider the needs and desires of anyone else but herself. Thus, by using the Durkheim's theory of suicide, the writer concludes that Edna's suicide is a type of egoistic suicide.