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Dr. Pennington

ENGL 305

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Feminist Paper Proposal

Overview

In my essay I am going to argue that Edna's sexual awakening in *The Awakening* occurs because of the women in the story, rather than the men. I specifically want to look at Edna's relationship with Mademoiselle Reisz and how Mademoiselle Reisz stands for a certain kind of freedom that Edna wishes she had. My running thesis is as followed: Mademoiselle Reisz of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* sheds light on the homosexual desires that are hidden deep within Edna Pontellier, pushing her to break free of the patriarchal society she lives in while also opening her eyes to the possibility of her homosexual desires.

I think this thesis is a strong one because it explains exactly what I am going to be arguing by putting Mademoiselle Reisz first and then moving into her relationship with Edna. I'm sure that I will still make changes to this thesis as I move through my analysis, but I do think that it is a good starting point because of the specificity and the concrete argument within the thesis.

Outline

1. Body paragraph 1 topic: Mademoiselle Reisz
 - a. Topic sentence: Mademoiselle Reisz is a woman who continuously fights against the traditional roles of women and embodies numerous lesbian characteristics of the time period.

3. Body paragraph three topic: Edna's encounters with Mademoiselle Reisz
 - a. Topic sentence: Throughout the rest of *The Awakening*, Edna continues to feel repressed homosexual desires, desires that Mademoiselle Reisz tries to help her accept or bring to the forefront by taking on the role of Edna's refuge and solace.

- i. How topic sentence relates to thesis: I want to talk about how Mademoiselle Reisz becomes a person that Edna can explore her desires with and how Mademoiselle Reisz encourages her to break free of her traditional gender roles.

- b. Potential topics to discuss:

- i. Chopin impromptu
 - ii. Their last encounter

4. Body paragraph four: Edna Pontellier

- a. Topic sentence: Because of her experiences with Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna wishes for a world where she can truly be herself and be free.

- i. How topic sentence relates to thesis: I want to explain how Edna is changed because of her experiences with Mademoiselle Reisz and how she wishes for a certain kind of freedom that she realizes she cannot have in this lifetime.

- b. Potential topics to discuss:

- i. Her death
 - ii. The sea and what it represents
 - iii. The metaphorical lesbian

Source 1: “Art is an unnatural act: Mademoiselle Reisz in ‘The Awakening.’”

In this article, Kathryn Lee Seidel examines Mademoiselle Reisz as a stereotypical lesbian artist of the late nineteenth century. Seidel explains how Mademoiselle Reisz’s relationship with Edna is contrasted with the other traditional relationships in the story and how that contrast shows that lesbianism is a reality to be embraced. She argues that Mademoiselle Reisz is portrayed in a stereotypical way so that readers will recognize her and then embrace her. I will use this source in my first paragraph about Mademoiselle Reisz and potentially in my second two body paragraphs about her relationship with Edna to explain how lesbianism is portrayed in the story.

Source 2: “Undermining Heteronormativity in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*”

In this article, Susan G. Weber discusses the notion of heteronormativity in *The Awakening* and argues why the story should be read more queerly. Weber writes that even though the story is framed in a heterosexual world with heterosexual relationships, Edna’s relationships with her female friends are much more complex and varied than her relationships with male characters. Weber explains that Edna’s desires are not purely heterosexual but that Chopin uses heterosexual norms to cover up the more subversive themes. I will most likely use this source throughout my entire paper to explain how homosexual themes are present in the story despite the overwhelming heterosexual themes.

Source 3: “The Metaphorical Lesbian: Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening*”

In this essay, Elizabeth LeBlanc uses the idea of a metaphorical lesbian to explore the character of Edna Pontellier. LeBlanc explains that Edna is not really a lesbian but could be because of the behaviors she engages in with other women that stop just short of sexual. The essay explores Edna’s actions with characters in the novel, both male and female, in order to gain

a better understanding of how these encounters are different and why they point to the argument that Edna experiences homosexual desire in a heterosexual world. I will use this source in my paragraph on Edna to talk about the barriers she faces in her world and how her encounters with Mademoiselle Reisz can be seen as an act to break down those barriers.

Timeline

Proposal due: October 21

Peer review proposal: October 24

Draft days: October 25-26

First draft due: October 28