

**NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OVER WIDOW'S STATUS
IN EDITH WHARTON'S *THE AGE OF
INNOCENCE*(1920) : A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH**



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ABSTRACT

DWI SEPTI NOVITASARI. A 320 110 124. NEGATIVE PERCEPTION OVER WIDOW'S STATUS IN EDITH WHARTON'S *THE AGE OF INNOCENCE* (1920): A SOCIOLOGICAL APPROACH. RESEARCH PAPER. SCHOOL OF TEACHER TRAINING AND EDUCATION. MUHAMMADIYAH UNIVERSITY OF SURAKARTA. 2015.

*The problem of this study is how negative perception over widow's status is reflected in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*. The objective of this study is to analyze the novel based on the sociological approach. This study belongs to qualitative method. In this method, there are two types of data source, namely primary data and secondary data source. The primary data source is the novel with this study. The researcher collects the data from both, primary and secondary data source in a short of document as evidence. The study uses library research of descriptive analysis. Based on the analysis the researcher draws some conclusions as follows: first, in the novel, Edith Wharton disagrees if widows is a bad attitude in New York Society. Second, Edith Wharton builds her story in the novel by using social reality of American society in nineteenth century.*

Keywords: Widows, *The Age Of Innocence*, Sociological Approach.

A. Introduction

A widow is a woman who lost her husband or her husband is dead., while a widower is a man in that situation. These terms are not applied to a person after he or she becomes divorced from their former spouse, though they may sometimes be used after the former spouse has died.

The Age of Innocence novel is written by Edith Wharton or Newbold Jones. She was born on January 24, 1862 in New York City, is perhaps a great city's greatest novelist. This novel is her twelfth novel. It is published in 1920 and released by D. Appleton and Company as a book in New York and in London. In 1921, *The Age of Innocence* novel became the first novel written by a woman to win a Pulitzer. Her other novel are *House of Mirth* (1905), *Ethan Frome* (1911), *The Custom of the Country* (1913), etc. The story of *The Age of Innocence* is set in upper-class New York City in the 1870s. It is very interesting to be read because this novel reveals some real conflict in human life, such as sex deviation, divorce, and also discrimination between upper and lower class. *The age of Innocence* describes the lives between Newland Archer, May Welland and Ellen Ollenska. It deals explicitly with themes of sexuality, that is considered taboo for woman to leave her husband and chooses to love someone else. Edith Wharton also writes about discrimination between upper and lower class that time.

There are four reasons why the researcher is interested to analyze the novel. The first, *The Age of Innocence* has good quality. There are many people who are interested in reading and giving the response or critic. The novel also tells about story that is easy to understand. The author does not use difficult words or language to deliver his idea. Then, in this novel the author gives the moral message that we must loyal with our husband or wife. Although they are already die or still alive beside us.

The second reason, *The Age of Innocence* has an interesting story about the society in upper class and lower class in America. Wharton tells the story by Newland, May, and Ellen Olenska as major character in her novel. It tells about Newland who will marry with May, but he falls in love with Ellen,

May's cousin, who is newly separated from her abusive husband. Based on the public responses, there are many people who are interested in reading *The Age of Innocence*.

Third reason, *The Age of Innocence* is a novel by Edith Wharton that is different from her novel before. Wharton takes the upper and lower class society America in nineteenth century.

The last reason is Wharton describes the character, setting, plot, style, and point of view in *The Age of Innocence* clearly. Wharton takes some characters who have different personality in this novel. They also have different background. The setting in *The Age of Innocence* is also interesting, it happens in America. Wharton used the language that is easy to understand. So the readers who read this novel can understand the story of the novel, so that the researcher want to research using sociological approach.

Sociology is the study that deals with human's life in the society (Saraswati, 2003: 2). Swingewood (in Faruk, 1994: 1) also states that sociology is a study on people in society and on the social process and the institution embedded on it. Therefore the basis of the understanding is the society thus sociological theory is the appropriate approach in this research.

Based on the background of study, the writer concerns to analyze "How the Negative Perception over Widow's Status of the major characters reflected in *The Age of Innocence*?"

The objectives of the study are mentioned as follows: first to analyze Edith Wharton *The Age of Innocence* novel based on structural elements of the novel, second to Negative Perception over Widow's Status of the major and some minor characters by means of sociological perspective particularly Sociological Approach.

There is some research that is used by the researcher as a guidance of this study, the first previous research related to the study was conducted by Muhammad NurulFurqon at SebelasMaret University (2008) in his research paper entitled "Hegemony in Marriage in the Upper Class New York family of the 1870's as reflected In Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence*" focuses on

the phenomenon of hegemony had been occurred in the upper class New York society of the 1870's.

(<http://dglib.uns.ac.id/dokumen/detail/8911/Hegemony-in-marriage-in-the-upper-class-New-York-family-of-the-1870s-as-reflected-In-edith-whartons-the-age-of-innocence>)

The second research is also review form that was done by MustikaSalamah entitled *The Influence of Social Norms on Individual Manners in The End of 19th Century Entitled The Age Of Innocence in Edith Whartons Novel* focused in the transition of 19th to 20th centuries that have many changes in American society. As many immigrants from many countries that come to that country make the condition of American society become more complex. By more complexity of America added by more improving industry and technology make changes of Norms that hold in American community slowly but sure happened.

The third research is also review form that was done by Lestari Maria Eka (2011) at Sanata Dharma University, A Study of Rebellion against Patriarchal Society as Seen in the Character of Ellen Olenska in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* focuses in analysis of the major character shows that Ellen Olenska is open minded, brave, independent, artistic, and eccentric. She lives in the society which still holds patriarchal system and sticks with its custom and tradition. It is the Old New York society whose members are all people that come from honored and respectable families.

Sociology of literature is studied and analyzed based on the sociological perspective. In sociology is the study of both the outside forces and the ways in which experience is given meaning by people in interaction with others. Sociology is essentially the scientific and objective study about people in society, it also studies about some social institutions and social processes (Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood 1972: 11). Sociology is related to the description of the ways people adapt by themselves with the certain societies. The description of socialization mechanism, the cultural processes that happen gradually or revolutionary with some effects of that changing.

According to Lowenthal (Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood 1972: 16). States that the main purposes of sociology are find at the heart of different works of literature and which expresses many aspects of thought and felling on subjects as varied as social class, work, love, religion, nature, and art. Meanwhile, Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood (1972: 22) confirm that the basic purpose of sociology is to understand the nature and workings of all societies and man's position within them. It has purpose to achieve an understanding of social behavior and social institution whereas literature is created based on phenomena as social life.

Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood (1972: 17-21) state that the sociology of literature is divided into three kinds: (1) sociology of the author, it focuses in the author's view about his society and live (Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, 1972: 17), (2) sociology of the society of the author where lives, it is the study about the influence by the society and social condition in which particular literature works appears (Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, 1972: 18), and (3) sociology of the reader of audience, it is the study about the influence of the literary works to the reader. It can be on their response, opinions, their way of life, the attitude of the reader after reading the literary work (Diana Laurenson and Alan Swingewood, 1972: 21).

B. Research Method

In this research, the researcher uses a qualitative research. It is a library research while data sources need literary data. This kind of research has purpose to analyze literature using a sociological approach. They are: (1) determining the type of the study (2) determining the object of the study (3) determining data and data source (4) determining technique of data collection, and (5) determining technique of data analysis.

The object of the study is Negative Perception Over Widow's Status in Edith Wharton's *The Age of Innocence* (1920) a Sociological Approach. It is analyzed by using a sociological approach. There are two data sources which are needed to conduct this research. They are primary data sources and secondary data sources. The primary data are the main data obtained from all

the words, dialogues, phrases and sentences in the play. The source of primary data is *The Age of Innocence* (1920). It is published by Edith Wharton. The secondary data are the supporting data taken from literary books, criticism, and some articles related to the play. The sources of secondary data are taken from other sources related the study, such as: website, dictionary, and some books which support the research. In conducting the study, the writer uses the techniques in collecting the data as follows: (a) Reading the original novel *The Outcast* several times (b) Determining the characters of novel (c) Taking notes of important things for both of primary and secondary data source (d) Classifying data by determining the relevant data.

The technique used in analyzing the data is descriptive analysis. The steps which it taken by the researcher in analyzing the data are as follows: the first is analyzing the data based on its characters and structural elements. Focus will be paid on the character and the structural of analysis of the novel. The second step is analyzing the data based on sociological approach. Focus will be paid on the negative perception over widow's status in this novel.

C. Finding and Discussion

1. Finding

a. Social Aspect

In this novel, Edith Wharton shows the social aspect clearly. These aspects consist of social structure, social status, and social activities. In the late nineteenth century, American class structure is divided into three parts, upper-class, middle-class, and lower-class. This phenomenon inspired Edith Wharton to criticize it through the character. Edith Wharton puts the character of Newland Archer as the representation of the rich people. Newland is a lawyer in New York. He also comes from an upper-class family and lives with his mother and sister.

Mrs. Archer, who had long been a widow, lived with her son and daughter in West Twenty-eight Street. An upper floor was dedicated to Newland, and the two women squeezed themselves into narrower quarters below. In an unclouded harmony of tastes and interests they cultivated ferns in Wardian cases, made macramé lace and wool embroidery on linen, collected American

revolutionary glazed ware, subscribed to *Good Words*, and read Oida's novels for the sake of the Italian atmosphere (TAOI: 26).

Edith Wharton also writes the order character who also representation of the rich people, Mrs. Manson Mingott. She was an amusing episode to the young man.

A visit to Mrs. Manson Mingott was always an amusing episode to the young man. The house in itself was already an historic document, though not, of course, as venerable as certain other old family houses in University Place and lower Fifth Avenue. Those were of the purest 1830, with a grim harmony of cabbage-rose-garlanded carpets, rose-wood consoles, round-arched fireplaces with black marble mantels, and immense glazed bookcases of mahogany; whereas old Mrs. Mingott, who had built her house later, had bodily cast out the massive furniture of her prime, and mingled with the Mingott heirlooms the frivolous upholstery of the Second Empire.(TAOI; 20)

The social condition in America also inspired Edith Wharton to criticize that condition through the plot of the story. Edith Wharton describes the important of marital status. It can be seen when Ellen want to divorce from her husband, and her family in New York is didn't agree with her opinion. She is having name bandied about her divorce in her New York family. All people talked about her divorce because her husband always brute. This described from the story as quoted as follow:

“Well --- she left him; nobody attempts to deny that.”

“He's an awful brute, isn't he?” continued the young enquirer, a candid Thorley, who was evidently preparing to enter the lists as the lady's champion. (TAOI; 11)

b. Economic Aspect

Economic aspect in the life covered the structure of livelihoods, living high class, and also the application of economic principles.

Structure of livelihoods for example:

Banker is a good job.

The question was: who was Beaufort? He passed for an Englishman, was agreeable, handsome, ill-tempered, hospitable and witty. He had come to

America with letters of recommendation from old Mrs. Manson Mingott's English son-in-law, the banker, and had speedily made himself an important position in the world of affairs; but his habits were dissipated, his tongue was bitter, his antecedents were mysterious; and when Medora Manson announced her cousin's engagement to him it was felt to be one more act of folly in poor Medora's long record of imprudences. (TAOI; 14)

Living with high class.

The New York of Newland Archer's day was a small and slippery pyramid, in which, as yet, hardly a fissure had been made or a foothold gained. At its base was a firm foundation of what Mrs. Archer called "plain people"; an honorable but obscure majority of respectable families who had been raised above their level by marriage with one of the ruling clans. (TAOI: 37)

Application of economic principles: Ellen leaves her husband, and lives with her grandmother, Mrs. Manson Mingott. They are living high class.

A visit to Mrs. Manson Mingott was always an amusing episode to the young man. The house in itself was already an historic document, though not, of course, as venerable as certain other old family houses in University Place and lower Fifth Avenue. Those were of the purest 1830, with a grim harmony of cabbage-rose-garlanded carpets, rose-wood consoles, round-arched fireplaces with black marble mantels, and immense glazed bookcases of mahogany; whereas old Mrs. Mingott, who had built her house later, had bodily cast out the massive furniture of her prime, and mingled with the Mingott heirlooms the frivolous upholstery of the Second Empire. (TAOI; 20)

c. Political Aspect

By nineteenth century, the Democracy and the Republicans party ruled American successfully. Both parties have their own characteristic. The Republican party belongs to the middle and lower class that they can get support and fund from morality and Christian group, while the Democracy party belongs to the upper class that they can get support and fund from unions and ethnic minority.

The role of the community or someone in the political process: In that time, New York have many rule. Especially, enjoinder about divorce from their spouse.

“Well --- then --- what more is there? In this country are such things tolerated? I’m a Protestant --- our church does not forbid divorce in such cases.” (TAOI: 83)

d. Cultural Aspect

Cultural aspects of the novel *The Age of Innocence* include customs or traditions prevailing at that time, the arts and the other public works.

Customs or tradition prevailing at that time:

“Culture! Yes – if we had it! But there are just a few little local patches, dying out here and there for lack of – well, hoeing and cross-fertilising: the last remnants of the old European tradition that your forebears brought with them. But you’re in a pitiful little minority: you’ve got no center, no competition, no audience. You’re like the pictures on the walls of a deserted house: ‘The Portrait of a Gentleman.’..... (TAOI: 96)

The arts and other public works:

Mr. Letterblair was a widower, and they dined alone, copiously and slowly, in a dark shabby room hung with yellowing prints of “The Death of Clatham” and “The Coronation of Napoleon” (TAOI: 74)

e. Science and Technology

Science and technology aspects contribute to the character and characterization and theme.

The contribution of science and technology aspects to the characters and characterizations is reflected in the major character. Newland Archer has a skill as a lawyer. He is clever, he can operate electronic. He also uses the telegram to communicate with his client.

From the office he sent a note by messenger to Madame Olenska, asking if he might call that afternoon, and begging her to let him find a reply at his club; but at the club he found nothing, nor did he receive any letter the following day. (TAOI; 97)

Theme is also contributed by the science and technology aspects. By technology, Newland can help his client from another country. He makes a relation by using telegrams, because he can't meet his client. At that time, the suitable means of communication is telegram, so they use it. They also use telephone, for example:

The telephone clicked, and Archer, turning from the photographs, unhooked the transmitter at his elbow. How far they were from the days when the legs of the brass-buttoned messenger boy had been New York's only means of quick communication!" (TAOI: 263)

f. Religious Aspect

US religion consists of three main faith: Protestantism, Catholicism, and Judaism. In the novel, Edith Wharton only shows one of the US religions, that is Protestant. This phenomena portrayed are in Newland Archer that he is Protestant.

"Well --- then --- what more is there? In this country are such things tolerated? I'm a Protestant --- our church does not forbid divorce in such cases." (TAOI: 83)

The quotation above explains that Protestant religion is well known in American society, in the nineteenth century. In the novel, Wharton also mentions when Archer and May church marriage.

Half an hour later, when Archer unlocked his own front-door, he found a similar envelope on the hall-table on top of his pile of notes and letters. The message inside the envelope was also from May Welland, and ran as follows: "Parents consent wedding Tuesday after Easter at twelve Grace Church eight bridesmaids please see Rector so happy love May."

B. Discussion

Literature is a social institution, using as its medium language, a social creation. Literature 'represents' 'life' is, in large measure, a social reality, even though the natural world and the inner or subjective world of the individual have also been objects of literary 'imitation' (Wellek and Warren, 1962: 94). Then, both Ferguson and Smith were suggestion that as society becomes increasingly commercial and industrial, man and his arts are unintentionally torn away from a living organic relation with society itself (Laurenson and Swingwood, 1972: 29).

Sociology refers to a social science involving the study of social lives of people, groups, and societies. Sociology is essentially the scientific and objective study about people in society; it also studies about some social institutions and social processes (Laurenson and Swingwood, 1972: 11).

Lowenthal in Laurenson and Swingwood states that the main purpose of sociology is to find at the heart of different works of literature which expresses many aspects of thought and feeling on subjects as varied as social class, work, love, religion, nature, and art (Laurenson and Swingwood, 1972: 16).

The relation between literature and society usually discussed by starting with the phrase, derived from De Bonald, that 'literature is an expression of society'. It is assumed that literature, at any given time, mirrors the current social situation 'correctly', it is false; it is commonplace, trite, and vague if it means only that literature depicts some aspects of social reality (Wellek and Warren, 1962: 95)

Edith Wharton explains some aspect in the story such as, social aspect, economical aspect, political aspect, science and technology aspect, cultural aspect and religious aspect. The social aspect contains social structure and social status. Social structure shows that most of the characters in the novel work as a lawyer and banker. Then social status shows that they

are in the upper class society. They live in New York that has Old Fashioned.

Economical aspect also contributes in the story of the novel. Ellen leaves her husband in French, and she lives with her grandmother in New York. In her grandmother house, she lives richly, because Mrs. Manson Minggot is a one of rich people in New York.

Edith Wharton also shows the political aspect in *The Age of Innocence* novel which in New York have a many rule, such as enjoyment about divorce.

Cultural aspect contribute to *The Age of innocence* novel. Variety of rich culture in New York, such as some paintings.

Science and technology aspect contributes the novel. It can be seen from the statement that he sent a message from telegram to Ellen Olenska.

The religions for the most of people in New York are Protestant. Religious aspect is reflected in the daily life of Newland archer who plays the main character in the novel *The Age of Innocence*. He get married in the church.

Based on the sociological analysis in *The Age of Innocence* novel, the writer concludes that Edith Wharton as the author of this novel explains the social condition in New York. She shows the condition in nineteenth century.

Edith Wharton criticized the social reality in New York although the theme, story and characterization in *The Age of Innocence*. This story theme of widow's status is not a good way to solve marriage problem. This is represented in the main character of the novel. Ellen is potrayed as a young widow. But in the end she decided to return to her husband and live happily.

Edith Wharton tells the reader that she did not agree about the views of American society. Especially in New York. Edith Wharton thinks that widow's status is not all bad behavior. We cannot judge every widow have a bad attitude without many reason.

The essence of this novel Edith Wharton criticized about negative perception, especially in the case of widow's status. Cases like Ellen lot happens in real life, many women are want to be free like she wants. But she didn't know about the impact in society. Social status became a major factor in terms of widow's status.

Based on all the aspects that are reflected in *The Age of Innocence*, there is a connection between this novel and the community in nineteenth century. Based on the analysis, it would have been for the author to declare the social conditions that match the main idea Edith Wharton seen by a sociological perspective.

D. Conclusion

After analyzing *The Age of Innocence*, researchers describe the following conclusions;

The first is based on structural analysis it is clear that in *The Age of Innocence*, authors disagree if being a widow is a bad attitude. Because at that time a widow is not receive in New York society, and think this is a bad behavior. The author's idea is expressed in the major character: Ellen Olenska. A widow from New York old fashioned with many rules in her society. But she wants to be different from the other. She wants to be free.

Secondly, based on sociological analysis, it can be concluded that there is relationship between this novel and the social reality of American society in nineteenth century. This novel describes the social, economic, political aspects, science and technology aspects, and the last is the religious aspect. Edith Wharton wanted to tell the social problem in American society, especially in New York.

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