

## CONFLICT IN NICHOLAS SPARKS' NOVEL *THE NOTEBOOK*

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### Abstract

The objectives of this paper are to identify the conflicts revolving around the main characters in *The Notebook*, to describe and to explain how the main characters are able to deal with the conflicts in *The Notebook*. Conflict as a concept can explain many aspects of social life such as social disagreement, conflict of interests and fight between individuals, groups or organization. Conflict in literature refers to the different drives of the characters or forces involved. Conflict may be internal or external. This paper uses descriptive qualitative and library research methods as the topic deals with social matter, that is conflict, in a novel. Social matter is in the realm of descriptive qualitative approach so this method deserves to be applied. The results show that there are four kinds of conflicts: man against man, man against society, man against nature, and man against self and the main cause of the conflicts is love and with love the conflicts are resolved by the main characters.

**Keywords:** conflict, resolution, love, The Notebook

### 1. Introduction

*The Notebook* is a romantic novel published in 1996 written by Nicholas Sparks, an American novelist whose works in romance are very famous. This is his first book published. The story in *The Notebook* was set in New Bern, North Carolina in the pre- and post-World War II era. The novel was about the romantic journey of a couple, Noah Calhoun and Allie Nelson who were madly in love towards each other. They came from two different worlds. Noah was from a poor family, while, Allie; came from a very respected and wealthy family, her father worked for a tobacco firm. The difference in their social statuses became a gap that they had to overcome in order to be together. The story in *The Notebook* showed the readers that the power of love could win against everything that came in the way. The main characters' struggles were so hard to find their ways to be together although the situation was not on their sides. The complicated situation created the conflicts. Conflicts had made the story became more fun to follow. That was why it was very interesting to study about those conflicts and to find how the characters in the novel could resolve those conflicts. This study was selected since conflicts had been experienced by people in their lives and resolving the conflicts would be very significant. It would give pride and joy to people who were involved when it was successfully done or was simply able to go through it. (Taylor: 1981)

## 2. Literature Review

Conflict is an actual or perceived opposition of needs, value and interest. A conflict can be internal (within oneself) and external (out of oneself). Internal conflict is a private war within oneself. It could be anything from deciding between two or more choices, to deciding many things in our personal life. There is internal conflict between good and evil, strength and weakness love and hate. Internal conflict refers to emotional or analytical struggles a character has due to his values, his role and society, or the company he finds with himself. The characters of a story will struggle against the circumstances of external conflict and they may even suffer internal conflict resulting from the issues of external conflicts; but this is not as simple as internal conflict. External conflict occurs when characters are involved in the world's woes, such issues as community, nature, government and other characters are all examples of external conflict (Castle: 2007) External conflict manifests itself as Man against man, Man against nature, Man against society. Tennyson(1967: 14) says: "The basic conflicts most frequently cited are:

- a. when the individual in conflict with another individual
- b. the individual in conflict with himself,
- c. the individual in conflict with outside force or forces."

Conflict as a concept can explain many aspects of social life such as social disagreement, conflict of interests and fight between individuals, groups or organization. Conflict in literature refers to the different drives of the characters or forces involved. Conflict may be internal or external-that is, it may occur within a character's mind or between a character and exterior forces. A character may as easily find himself or herself in conflict with a natural force, such as an animal or a weather event, like a hurricane. The literary purpose of conflict is to create tension in the story, making readers more interested leaving them uncertain.

There may be multiple points of conflict in a single story, as characters may have more than one desire or may struggle against more than one opposing force (Peck: 1983). When a conflict is resolved and the reader discovers which force or character succeeds, it creates a sense of closure. Conflicts may resolve at any point in a story, particularly where more than one conflict exists, but stories do not always resolve every conflict. If a story ends without resolving the main or major conflict(s), it is said to have an "open" ending. Open endings, which can serve to ask the reader to consider the conflict more personally, may not satisfy them, but obvious conflict resolution may also leave readers disappointed in the story.

The basic types of conflict in fiction have been commonly codified as "Man against man", "Man against nature", and "Man against self." In each case, "man" is the universal and refers to women as well. These are several types of conflict classifications as presented below:

- a. Man Against Man. "Man against man" conflict involves stories where characters are against each other. This is an external conflict. The conflict may be direct opposition, as in a gunfight or a robbery, or it may be a more subtle conflict between the desires of two or more characters, as in a romance or a family epic. This type of conflict is very common in traditional literature, fairy tales and myths. One example of the "Man against man" conflict is the relationship struggles between the protagonist and the antagonist.
- b. Man Against Society. Here man stands against a man-made institution (such as slavery or bullying), "Man against man" conflict may shade into "Man against

society". In such stories, characters are forced to make moral choices or frustrated by social rules in meeting their own goals.

c. Man Against Nature. "Man against nature" conflict is an external struggle positioning the hero against an animal or a force of nature, such as a storm or tornado or snow.

d. Man Against Self. In "man against self" conflict, the struggle is internal. This is a conflict that is usually associated with an external conflict. A character must overcome his own nature or make a choice between two or more paths - good and evil; logic and emotion.

### 3. Research Method

Method of research is an important thing to know in order to do a research; therefore, an author of a research must know about the research method that must be used for the research. There are several types of research method. An author can use a descriptive method or descriptive qualitative research method for the paper. In analyzing the data of this paper, a qualitative descriptive method is used. In this method, the analysis begins when all the data have been collected. Moleong (2006: 4) states that qualitative descriptive method is a research procedure that produces descriptive data in the form of written or oral words from people and observable behavior. In this case, the research focuses on analyzing the conflict in Nicholas Sparks' *The Notebook*. Therefore, descriptive qualitative method is properly applied in this study. All the data are analyzed based on personal ideas, and paraphrasing. This is how qualitative method works (Abdul: 2019).

### 4. Results and Discussion

#### 4.1 Data

The plot in *The Notebook* is not set chronologically; it starts with the present to flashback and then goes way back deeper and goes forward to the present time again. So in order to avoid the confusion, the data presented in this paper are organized chronologically, starting from the first time when Noah and Allie meet. *The Notebook* has some conflicts (man against man, man against society, man against nature, and man against self).

#### Man against man

"Would it have made a difference even if you'd got them? Of course. I always wondered what you were up to. No, I mean with us. Do you think we would have made it?' It took a moment for her to answer. I don't know, Noah. I really don't, and you don't either. We're not the same people we were then. We've changed. Both of us." She paused. He didn't respond, and in the silence she looked towards the creek She went on. 'But yes, Noah, I think we would have. At least, I'd like to think we would have.'" (Sparks: 60)

#### Man against self

He continued to think about Allie, especially at night. He wrote her once a month but never received a reply. Eventually he wrote one final letter and forced himself to accept the fact that the summer they'd spent with one another was the only thing they'd ever share (Sparks: 26)

#### Man against society

She had quietly rebelled Against this ideal since childhood... (Sparks 18)

### Man against nature

I'm so afraid. I'm afraid of forgetting you again. I isn't fair I just can't bear to give this up her voice breaks as she finishes but I don't know what to say. I know the evening is coming to an end and there is nothing I can do to stop the inevitable. In this I am a failure. (Sparks: 190)

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## 4.2 Analysis

Based on the data found, the conflicts would be resolved by means of tracing and discovering.

### a. Conflict between Allie's Parents and Allie-Noah (man against man)

During Allie's and Noah's earlier relationship, Allie was so afraid of her parents' finding out that she was having relationship with Noah, for Noah was out of their standard. From this problem Allie tried so hard to hide it from them. Whenever she wanted to meet Noah, she would:

"Most of the summer she had to make excuses to her parents whenever they wanted to see each other." (Sparks, 1996: 25)

But then a secret cannot be hidden forever,

"I got home a little late that evening, and my parents were furious when I finally came in I can still picture my daddy standing in the living room smoking a cigarette, my mother on the sofa staring straight ahead. I swear, they looked as if a family member had died. That was the first time my parents knew I was serious about you, and my mother had a long talk with me later that night. She said to me, 'I'm sure you think that I don't understand what you're going through, but I do. It's just that sometimes our future is dictated by what we are, as opposed to what we want.' I remember being really hurt when she said that." (Sparks, 1996:58)

There was nothing wrong with Noah, though Noah was a likeable person, everybody liked him when they got to know him better, even her parents liked him but:

"It wasn't that they didn't like him – it was that he was from a different class, too poor, and they would never approve if their daughter became serious with someone like him. I don't care what my parents think. I love you and always will she would say. We'll find a way to be together. (Sparks, 1996:25)

Unfortunately the summer was over and Allie together with her parents had to go back home. Her parents' job in New Bern had been finished. They took Allie with them leaving New Bern, Noah and friends for Winston-Salem.

"But on the end they couldn't by early September the tobacco had been harvested and she had no choice but to return with her family to Winston-Salem. Only the summer is over, Allie not us he'd said the morning she left. We'll never be over. But they were (Sparks, 1996:25)

### **b. Problem of Mail**

Noah was not aware of what was happening to Allie, why he had never got answers from her.

"'You never answered my letters.'

'You wrote?'

'Dozens of letters. I wrote you for two years without receiving a single reply.' "(Sparks, 1996:59)

Noah saw her reaction. It looked like it was news for her. She did not know anything at all that Noah had ever written her letters.

"She slowly shook her head before lowering her eyes. "I didn't know.." she said finally, quietly, and he knew it must have been her mother checking the mail, removing the letters without her knowledge. It was what he had always suspected, and he watched as Allie came to the same realization. "(Sparks, 1996:59)

There was no doubt about it that her parents, especially her mother played a role of the missing letters. As it was mentioned earlier that they did not approve their relationship. Her mother did everything to get Noah away from Allie.

It was wrong of her to do that, Noah, and I'm sorry she did but try to understand Once I left, she probably thought it would be easier for me to just let it go. She never understood how much you meant to me, and, to be honest. I don't even know if she ever loved my father the way I loved you. In her mind, she was just trying to protect my feelings, and she probably thought the best way to do that was to hide the letters you sent, That wasn't her decision to make, ' he said quietly. I know." (Sparks, 1996: 59-60)

Because of this, all of the time Allie thought that Noah had forgotten her. In chapter seven, Allie admitted that she wrote Noah the letters too but she had never sent them as she was afraid that Noah did not feel the same as Allie did in the summer they had spent together.

### **c. Conflict between Noah and self (man against self)**

The day when Allie had gone, Noah was in deep sorrow and emptiness and the feelings went on for days.

"When she left three weeks later, she took a piece of him and the rest of summer with her. He watched her leave town on an early rainy morning, watched through eyes that hadn't slept the night before, then went home and packed a bag. He spent the next week alone on Harkers Island. "(Sparks, 1996:14)

Since he had been young, Noah liked to spend his vacations alone in solitude places. Forests and rivers had always been his favorite places as isolation helped him clear his mind. That was why after Allie had left, he went to Harkers Island to be alone, to get away from stress and sadness.

"When he got a little older he spent most of his weekends and vacations alone. He explored the Croatan forest in his first canoe, following Brices

Creek for twenty miles until he could go no further, then hiked the remaining miles to the coast. Camping and exploring became his passion, and he spent hours in the forest, whistling quietly and playing his guitar for beavers and geese and wild blue herons. Poets knew that isolation in nature, far from people and things man-made, was good for the soul, and he'd always identified with poets." (Sparks, 1996:24)

While isolation was good for the heart that longed for peace, no one could live in isolation forever, so he decided to move out of the city to find a job for a living and to get his mind on the track again. Distraction was all he needed right then.

"Eventually he decided to leave New Bern to help get her off his mind, but also because the Depression made earning a living in New Bern almost impossible." (Sparks, 1996:25-26)

#### **d. Conflict between Allie and Herself (man against self)**

After finding out the truth about Noah, she found herself wavering for she had never thought she would hear anything from him again. Now she felt confused as to what she was about to do. She had thought about this for days before she finally came with a decision. She was going to see Noah again and she knew where he was. She never felt so confused in her life before. This would hurt Lon if he ever found out about her going to see her former lover.

"... she sat alone on the porch swing of her parents' home, one leg tucked beneath her. The seat had been slightly damp when she sat down; rain had fallen earlier, hard and stinging, but the clouds were fading now and she looked past them, toward the stars, wondering if she'd made the right decision. She'd struggled with it for days and had struggled some more this evening but in the end she knew she would never forgive herself if she let the opportunity slip away." (Sparks, 1996:16)

By driving her car she went on her own. New Bern had not changed much. She could find her way to it easily by only relying on memory she has from 14 years ago she visited this town. She was now in New Bern, and she checked in a hotel then unpacked her bags. She felt guilty to Lon for being here. Lon was a successful and good man, whom she loved and to whom she was engaged too, but she did not understand why the urge of coming here to see Noah with her own eyes was so strong.

"Thinking these things made her feel guilty about being here, and she knew she should pack her things and leave before she changed her mind. She had done it once before long ago and if she left now, she was sure she would never have the strength to return here again. ... realizing that if she quit now she would always wonder what would have happened And she didn't think she could live with that. (Sparks, 1996: 18-19)

She knew there was no turning back now but just before she was about to leave, hesitation rode her mind. She wavered between following her brain and her heart. Her brain was telling her that it was crazy but her heart was telling her to see Noah.

"She turned it over in her hand a couple of times, thinking – you've come this far, don't give up now, and almost left then, but instead six o'clock She

knew she had to leave in a few minutes-she didn't want to arrive after dark-but she needed a little more on the bed again. She checked her watch Almost time. Damn.' she whispered. What am I doing here? I shouldn't be here. There's no reason for it," (Sparks, 1996:21)

#### **e. Conflict between Allie and society (man against society)**

Allie never agreed on the thought of marrying a person from the same social status. Love did not work that way; love could reach beyond everything whether it was status, age, race, gender, location, or religion belief. And besides she had human rights; she chose the man she wanted to get married with, not to be chosen by anyone, or even parents,

"... in the caste system of the South, family name and accomplishments were often the most important consideration in marriage. In some cases they were the only consideration." (Sparks, 1996: 18)

She always refused the idea, though not saying it out loudly. She still thought that a man was born with choices, choices that they were up to pick whatever it was. A society could not dictate her life.

""The same as I did back then. That it's wrong, that it isn't fair. It was a terrible thing for a girl to learn, that status is more important than feelings."  
"(Sparks, 1996: 59)

To be growing up in a strict family she had never spoken out her ideology, simply because she loved her family. But Noah was the only man she wanted. She chose her happiness over her family and society.

"... she had quietly rebelled against this idea since childhood..." (Sparks, 1996: 18)

#### **f. Conflict between Allie and Anne (man against man)**

When Allie had arrived in New Bern she thought of her parents back at home in Raleigh. She remembered fourteen years ago, her parents were furious when they found out about her and Noah, especially her mother. She had always been suppressing her will on Allie.

"...she thought about her parents and what they would think of her behavior. No doubt they would disapprove, especially her mother. Her mother had never really accepted what had happened the summer they'd spent here and wouldn't accept it now; no matter what reason she gave."  
(Sparks, 1996: 20)

Another example of her mother being too tyrannical on her will was when she forbade Allie to pursue her talent, painting. She thought:

""My parents didn't think it was proper for someone like me to paint for a living. I just stopped after a while. I haven't touched a brush in years."  
"(Sparks, 1996: 64-65)

Noah was the one who encouraged her to paint again because he thought she was talented.

""Do you think you'll ever paint again?" I'm not sure if I can anymore. It's been a long time. You can still do it. Allie. I know you can. You have a talent that comes from inside you, from your heart, not from your fingers. What

you have can't ever go away. It's what other people only dream about. You're an artist, Allie.' The words were spoken with such sincerity that she knew he wasn't saying it just to be nice. He truly believed in her ability, and for some reason that meant more to her than she expected. "(Sparks, 1996:65)

#### **g. Conflict between Noah and Allie (man against man)**

Noah had strong curiosity to know the reason she came all the way here. He learned the fact that she was engaged with someone. But her coming was confusing him. She could have written him letter instead of telling him in person.

"Then he asked:

Allie, do you love him?

She answered automatically. 'Yes, I love him'

The words hurt. But again he thought he heard something in her lone, as if she were saying it to convince herself. He stopped and gently took her shoulders in his hands, making her face him. The fading sunlight reflected in her eyes as he spoke. if you're happy. Allie, and you love him. I won't try to stop you from going back to him. But if there's a part sure, then don't do it. This isn't the kind of thing you go into halfway. Her answer came almost too quickly. I'm making the right decision. Noah. He stared for a second, wondering if he believed her. Then he nodded and they began to walk again." (Sparks, 1996: 46-47)

Noah was still holding hopes for her to love him. She still loved him, though only he did not know it yet. He asked her in the hope of finding out if her feelings for him were still there.

"Would it have made a difference even if you'd got them?" Of course. I always wondered what you were up to." No. I mean with us. Do you think we would have made it? It took a moment for her to answer.

I don't know, Noah. I really don't, and you don't either. We're not the same people we were then, We've changed. Both of us, She paused. He didn't respond, and in the silence she looked towards the creek. She went on. 'But yes, Noah, I think we would have. At least, I'd like to think we would have.' (Sparks, 1996: 60)

Allie and Noah were now having another problem coming. After dealing with her mother, she now had to face Lon just when she and Noah enjoyed their times together. She felt sorry for him, but he knew better that it was just a matter of time that Lon was going to find out.

"I'm sorry,' Allie said. I had no idea this would happen." Noah shook his head, Don't be sorry. We both knew it was coming to some form or another. It's still hard. I know.' He finally turned to her, reaching for her hand." (Sparks, 1996: 139-140)

#### **h. Conflict between Noah-Allie and nature (man against nature)**

Noah and Allie had now been married for almost forty-nine years and had four children and also two grandchildren. But in the late era of their lives they were faced with illness. The illness was not ordinary, and made them apart. Another conflict came from nature that they had to endure, a conflict that tested their love life once again.

"....sickness has come to us, both of us. We are in the final minutes in the day of our lives, and the clock is ticking. Loudly. I wonder if I am the only one who can hear it." (Sparks, 1996: 161)

Allie had Alzheimer. It was a terrible disease that came to few people. People who had Alzheimer would gradually forget things, and become worst in time to the stage that they did not remember anything in their lives, their family, their spouse, their children, themselves, anything at all. It was worst than amnesia as it changed personality, showing hallucination, and degraded brain ability to think like a baby. It was incurable.

"I'm so sorry to have to tell you this,' Dr. Barnwell began, 'but you seem to be in the early stages of Alzheimer's... My mind went blank and all I could think about was the light that glowed above our heads. The words echoed in my head: the early stages of Alzheimer's. My world spun in circles, and I felt her grip tighten on my arm. She whispered, almost to herself: Oh, Noah... Noah... And as tears started to fall, the world came back to me again: ... Alzheimer's... It is a barren disease, as empty and lifeless as a desert, It is a thief of hearts and souls and memories. (Sparks, 1996: 167)

Both Noah and Allie were shocked with the news. They were afraid of what was coming next. Oblivion was an absolute probability for him. Allie would not remember herself and Noah. She would not remember that they were ever married, that she had children, friends and family. She would be a completely different person. Noah stayed by her side, comforting her even though he was afraid of himself

#### **i. Conflict between Noah and society (man against society)**

Noah for hundreds of times had to deal with scientists who claimed that Noah might be delusional. As they thought people with Alzheimer could not remember anything at all. They said if Allie could remember at random moments and could communicate fluently then Allie might not have Alzheimer, or Noah was lying about it. But Noah knew her better than anybody did.

"But this is where the similarity ends. This is why Allie is considered a miracle, because sometimes, just sometimes, after I read to her, her condition isn't so bad. There is no explanation for this. 'It's impossible,' the doctors say, She must not have Alzheimer's. 'But she does. "(Sparks: 185)

"And though you may call me a dreamer or a fool or any other thing, I believe that anything is possible. I realize that the odds, and science, are against me. But science is not the total answer; this I know, this I have learned in my lifetime. And that leaves me with the belief that miracles, no matter how inexplicable or unbelievable, are real and can occur without regard to the natural order of things. "(Sparks, 1996: 4-5)

What the scientists did not understand was that the miracle only happened to Noah and Allie when they spent times together. Only when she was with Noah, Allie could manage to compose her mood stability and if he was lucky she could remember him.

""You can't possibly understand it if you use only your training and your books,' but they shake their heads and answer: Alzheimer's does not work

like this. With her condition, it's just not possible to have a conversation or improve as the day goes on Ever."(Sparks, 1996: 186)

Two weeks after being treated in hospital for having stroke, he missed Allie. It was night time now, he should not bother Allie during this hour, but he missed her so badly. Despite not being able to walk normally, thanks to stroke, he then made himself out of his mom and went to Allie's. But there was another problem, from his room; Allie passed the nurse's desk. There was no way he could go there without being noticed.

"... standing, I cross the room and open my door. I peep down the hall and see Janice seated at the main desk. At least I think it is Janice. I must pass this desk to get to Allie's room, but at this hour I am not supposed to leave my room, and Janice has never been one to bend the rules, I wait to see if she will leave, but she does not seem to be moving, and I grow impatient. I finally exit my room anyway, slow-shuffle, slide-the-right, slow-shuffle. It takes me to close the distance, but for some reason she does not see me approaching. I am a silent panther creeping through the jungle, I am as invisible as baby pigeons. In the end I am discovered, but I am not surprised. I stand before her. Noah, she says, what are you doing? 'I'm taking a walk,' I say. 'I can't sleep.' 'You know you're not supposed to do this.' I know. I don't move, though. I am determined. You're not really going for a walk, are you? You're going to see Allie." Yes, 'I answer. Noah, you know what happened the last time you saw her at night. I remember. You shouldn't be doing this. I don't answer directly. Instead I say, I miss her. I know you do, but I can't let you see her." (Sparks, 1996: 208)

Once again the writer of the novel showed that the power of love was undeniably able to create miracles, to do things beyond possibility, and to conquer everything. Nicholas Sparks had his own way for the readers to believe in true love. By believing in true love, the main characters in *The Notebook* could make solution to their problems, though not all the problems have the solution.

## 5. Conclusion

After reading the novel, looking for the data, and analyzing them, it can be concluded that Nicholas Sparks, in his novel *The Notebook* uses conflicts such as man against man, man against society, man against nature, and man against self to drive the plot of the story. As Nicholas Sparks raises the theme of love in the novel, the conflicts or the problems are universal. It means that the conflicts can be understood by many people in all ages and in all places. Love is also the reason why the conflicts happen in the novel, and the main characters could hold their beliefs in love and solve their problems. Not all the conflicts are given the solution by Nicholas Sparks in the novel but those unsolved conflicts are not very relevant to the study and they are not touched. Finally, it is clearly seen that by relying on the power of love, the main characters could cope with all the problems coming in turns to them.

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