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Sexual Liberation for Women in *The Awakening*

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Abstract

To present a female iconoclastic character as a heroine of a novel was really a challenging endeavor for a female writer of 19th century. Kate Chopin, breaking all the restrictions and taboos of the contemporary society, dares to construct a character of Edna Pontellier, who thoroughly refuses to play a mere role of a mother-woman. Edna surpasses all the limitation, imposed over women by the dominating patriarchal society. She refused to be a puppet of her husband. She denies of being a mere property which her husband possesses. Edna dismantles the male-made ethics of motherhood, womanhood or sexuality very boldly. Adamant and firm on her own stand, Edna chooses complete sexual liberation in her life. She takes sexual satisfaction not as a physical intercourse between a husband and wife but as a blend of physical and mental intercourse where sex is not taken as a duty but as a crucial aspect of life.

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Abstract

1. Introduction

From its earliest publication, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has provoked controversy regarding its main character Edna Pontellier's "adulterous" behavior. After the publication of this novel in 1899, she had to stop writing because of the hostile reviews of that novel. Chopin, in *The Awakening* exposes an iconoclastic female character who dares to break the unethical social restrictions imposed over women. Edna seeks for absolute sexual freedom on that society where extra-marital relation is a taboo. And, to reach her desired location i.e. sexual freedom, she surpasses and violates the code of conduct the- then American women used to practice. Edna, without any hesitation, mocks the male-made rules and regulations imposed over women.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* is, as Chopin's Biographer Emily Toth posits, "a case study" of nineteenth century feminism. The nineteenth century American socio-cultural structure was smoothly and excessively protective to the women to express their feelings. At that context, Chopin tried to protest against the tradition of playing with the women as puppets by presenting an extravagantly rebellious female character Edna whose endeavor towards liberation was to be reckoned with. Edna's involvement in extra-marital sexual intercourse clearly denotes Chopin's longing for women's emancipation towards sex.

Kate Chopin was born Katherine O'Flaherty on February 8, 1850 of an Irish and French descent in St. Louis, Missouri. Kate was blessed by having many female mentors throughout her childhood; either the strong and independent widows in her family or the intellectual nuns of her school, who taught Kate to live a life to the mind as well as the life of the home. After only two months into her term at Sacred Heart, she came home and was to be educated by her great-grandmother. Her mother was barely 16 years old when she married Thomas O'Flaherty.

At the age of 19, Kate met Louisiana native Oscar Chopin, a cotton broker, and married him on June 9, 1870. The last writings in her Commonplace Book are the diary of her 3-month European honeymoon. As was typical for a woman in her era, she doesn't mention sexual matters, yet she records the consummation of her marriage on June 12 in Philadelphia. The couple established their new home in New Orleans and awaited the birth of their first child, presumably conceived while honeymooning in France. When Oscar's brockrage business failed in 1879, he decided to move north to his family's plantations on Natchitoches Parish, and it was then that Kate became acquainted with the Creole community that became such an important focus of her writing. In 1882 Oscar contracted swamp fever and died from complications of the disease in January of 1883, leaving Kate to return to St. Louis with their six young children. A year later, Kate's mother also died and Kate, emotionally burnt out from the losses in her life, got comfort from a family physician, Frederick. He suggested that she start writing as a way of expressing her anger and disappointment with life. She needed to turn her writing into a way to support herself and her six children. She never actually was able to live off her earnings from writing, but she supported her family with income from real estate she owned in Louisiana and St. Louis.

Growing up in a family of independent females, Kate O'Flaherty Chopin chose freedom over security, independence over convention. After the sudden death of her husband, Kate rejected social norms, carrying on an affair with Albert Sampite of Cloutierville, Louisiana. Sampite appears as a model for several Chopin's characters including two lovers of Edna Pontellier, the heroine of *The Awakening*. In 1884, Chopin ended her relationship with Sampite and returned to her native land St. Louis, where encouraged by Dr. Fredrick Kolbenheyer, a family friend, began to write professionally. During the 1890s her stories appeared in leading magazines and at the end of the decade she published her masterpiece *The Awakening*, detailing a woman's disillusionment with her safe but boring marriage.

Chopin wrote for many years and her popularity was extreme until critical disapproval of her novel, *The Awakening*, poor health, and concerns about her family slowed her down. For a little over a decade, Chopin was hosting a literary salon, and her “Thursday’s” were the place to be for everyone with niche. Kate was also a member of women’s groups. She joined the St. Louis Children of Sodality, and was also a charter member of the prestigious Wednesday Club, which she left when it became more structured; but it remained loyal to her. In 1899, when *The Awakening* had been condemned by most male reviewers, the Wednesday Club invited Kate to do a reading and over 300 women came to applaud and praise her. Contrary to rumours, *The Awakening* was not banned, nor was Chopin ever denied membership in any literary societies. Copies of *The Awakening* were only taken off St. Louis library shelves when they had worn.

Kate lived her life the way she wanted to and wrote what she felt, thought, and wanted to say. When asked about her writing and what she chooses to write, she says, “Certainly not everything I think about!”

“[...] a pioneer in her own time, in her portrayal of women’s desires of independence and control of their own sexuality” is how Emily Toth describes Kate Chopin in her introduction of *Kate Chopin’s Private Papers* (119). Many people felt that Kate foreshadowed future events in her writing like Per Seyersted, a 29 year old graduate student working on his M.A. at Harvard, when he said “How did she know all that in 1899?”

Kate Chopin wrote many different things in her career as a writer. Her first work was a piano polka written for her daughter called, *Lilia’s Polka*. She began her story writing career in 1889 by publishing her first poem *If it Might Be*, in a Chicago periodical called *America*. Later in 1889, Kate published her first two short stories, *Wiser than God* and *A Point at Issue*. In 1890, came her first novel, *At Fault*. The book was privately published and paid for by Chopin herself. It did receive many negative reviews because it involves women

alcoholism and affairs. In 1890, Kate attempted to publish another novel titled *Young Dr. Grosse*. The novel was rejected many times by publishers and she eventually destroyed the manuscript in 1896. On January 4, 1893, Kate Chopin published what became one of her most famous short stories, *Desiree's Baby*, in *Vogue* magazine. The story, included in a short story collection the following year, follows the short marriage of Desiree who is abandoned as a baby and adopted and raised by a loving family. After she and her husband have a baby, and the baby has a dark complexion, her husband accuses of being black descent and makes her leave. The story ends with Desiree disappearing into the bayou with her baby. Ironically, only days after she leaves, the husband discovers a letter left to him by his mother which explains that it is he who is of mixed race. *Desiree's Baby* was later included in *Bayou Folk*, a collection of twenty-three stories and sketches published in 1894. Chopin next produced a twenty-one story collection, *A Night in Acadie*, Published in 1897 which shows her "increased concern for the plight of women in 'Victorian-era America'" (May and Trosky105). During the time that Kate was writing the stories included in *A Night in Acadie*, she wrote only one or two days a week; reserving most of her time for raising her children. Aside from her writing, she also held a literary salon at her home at 3317 Morgan Street in St. Louis. After *A Night in Acadie's* publication, Kate worked on third collection, *A Vocation and a Voice*, which included work previously rejected by magazine publishers. Publishers who felt the work dealt too explicitly with love, sex, and marriage rejected this collection. Included in this collection is Chopin's most famous short story, *The Story of an Hour*, in which an ill woman learns of her husband's accidental death. The story examines the woman's reaction to her sudden and unexpected independence and ends surprisingly when she discovers her husband is actually alive. Even when the collection was rejected, Kate continued writing, and aside from her short stories she produced poems and submitted essays to several St. Louis periodicals. It was also during this time that she was working on what is

now considered her masterpiece, *The Awakening*. Before publication of *The Awakening*, Chopin wrote another now-famous short story, *The Storm*. *The Storm*, about two lover's infidelity during a thunderstorm, shows Chopin's interest in passion and sexual liberation. *The Awakening* was published in 1899. This work was condemned in its time because of its sexual openness. It was rediscovered in the 1950s and has since received many accolades for the beauty of its writing and for its modern sensibility. With the stormy weather surrounding *The Awakening*, her editors decided to suspend publication of her third collection of stories, *Vocation and a Vice*. The collection was not published until 1991, 87 years after her death.

Chopin in *The Awakening* exposes her female protagonist with an extravagantly rebellious spirit to break out of the unreasonable social limitations imposed over women. Possessed of a questioning inward life, Edna holds a profound longing for an absolute freedom that she lacks in the society where she exists. And, to attain her longing she revolts against the limitations by violating the modes and codes of contemporary American women's behavior. Though she predicts the risks of her adventurous course, she is ascertained to be insurrect, 'even to suffer' than to survive submissively before the social injustices.

People in the late nineteenth-century American society were caged by custom which often seemed comfortably protective. Thus protesting against such case of illusory custom and convention, in most of her works, "Chopin portrays many people who will not or cannot leave the cage and others who remain within but yearn to be without, and still others who dare, sometime only for a moment, to break beyond the bars towards experience which is satisfying but perilous also" (Leary VI). *The Awakening* with its characters of various natures and actions obviously reflects Chopin's attempt of doing so. But since her elementary concern is woman's emancipation, her characters are mostly women of different attitudes, realistically representing the attitudes of women in the contemporary world. She even in the time when it was too much to imagine the idea of true anatomy for women or as a single sexual standard

for men and women often portrays her women protagonist with a frank sexual passion and radical personal emotions.

The story for the contemporary moral people was deemed morbid and unwholesome reading because it presents a married woman's casual sexual liaisons without providing an uplifting lesson to purify the tale. The novel condemns the slavery of a wife to husband and children. It was inexcusable for a woman novelist in 1889 to write neutrally about another woman's adulterous behavior. There is parallel between the heroine of the novel who breaks away from the conventional feminine roles of wife and mother, and the author who breaks away from convention of literary domesticity. Both of them seem to be oscillating between two worlds caught between contradictory definitions of femininity and creativity.

Edna's explicit violations of the modes and codes of feminine behaviors of her time shocked contemporary critics. Thus blustering and condemning reviews began to appear very soon after the publication of the novel. They described *The Awakening* as 'morbid', 'essentially vulgar', 'glided dirt' and so on; and considered it as an attack on morality and religious value.

Criticizing the longing for sexual freedom of the heroine of the novel *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier, Rosemary F. Franklin says that "the longing she feels for the unattainable beloved is the source of her depression [...]" (502). Lawrence Thorton, similarly argues: "Trapped in romantic longings whose objects are always vague and shifting [...], and in a culture whose code of duty and responsibility make escape impossible [...], Edna's fate is clearly foreshadowed in the imagery of defeated flight" (53).

There are not only the negative comments on *The Awakening* but also the admiring ones. Some critics thank Chopin for her endeavor to present a character like Edna Pontellier who is, by her behavior, far ahead of her time. But most of the critics of this novel focus on something else than the poignant theme of "sexual liberation for women" which the story is

dealt with. Chopin's *The Awakening* is intensely and excessively protective towards the women who seek their sexual freedom or who don't want to live their life with stereotypical sexual life.

During her lifetime Edna never surrenders before a masculine force with which she has been fighting. She has given her life to the nature, the ocean which is itself a feminine power. She has lived her life practicing her sexual freedom- first with her husband Leonce, then with Robert, and then Alcee Arobin. Even at the end of her life she practices sexual freedom with the nature by giving her body naked.

2. Theoretical Modality

I. Gender and Sexuality

According to Merriman Webster, gender is, "the behavioral, cultural or psychological traits typically associated with one sex" – while sex is defined as " either of the two major forms of individuals that occur in many species and they are distinguished respectively as female and male"(qtd. in Kate 1). In other words, gender is subjective sex is objective.

The difference between sex and gender is of paramount importance to women and the feminist movement. The feminists always put themselves against the gender discrimination. There is no doubt that gender is a social construct and sex natural.

In most of the communities gender is guided by the sex. To take an example of a Neapli society, females are not supposed to plough and males cooking and doing the dishes. Females trying to subvert the andocentric or male-made cultural constructs are taken as iconoclasts.

To go through the history of gender and sexuality in feminist literary movements, we could refer Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex* (1949) as a milestone for this movement. By the publication of this book Beauvoir contributed greatly for the worldwide emergence of the talk of gender and sexuality in feminist literary movements. Another prominent feminist is Virginia Woolf who voiced strongly in favour of the "absolute equality" and the 'erasure of differences' between the sexes. Woolf voiced for radical change like 'freedom of sexes' for the advocacy of the suppressed values which, according to her thought, were affecting the concept of power, family and social life. Beauvoir, unlike Woolf, insists against " the cultural identification of women as merely the negative object or the 'other' to men as defining and dominating 'subject' who is assumed to represent humanity in general"(Abrams 234). She argues that one is not born, but rather becomes, a woman. It is civilization as a whole that produces the creature which described as feminine. She also attacks the patriarchal myths of

women presuming the female essence prior to the individual existence in the work of male writers.

Going through the different cross- currents like Suffrage Movement, Civil Rights Movement and Liberation Movement from the very early part of the twentieth century feminism in fact was established in the form of a theoretical discourse only in the late 1960s as a part of the international women's movement. Establishing gender as a fundamental category of literary analysis, it tried, then, to present women reader and critics with different perceptions to their literary experiences insisting that experiences of women in and with literature are different from those of men. Mary Elman's *Thinking about Women* (1968) is the another book involved in exposing the sexual stereotyping of women both in literature and literary criticism and demonstrating the inadequacy of established critical school and method to deal fairly or sensitivity with work written by women. Feminist criticism, then, very quickly moved beyond merely expressing sexism in one work of literature after another promising to begin to record new choices in a new literary history.

Kate Millet's analysis of sexual politics of literature in her *Sexual Politics* (1969) added a note of urgency to Elman's scornful anger defining 'politics' as the operation of power relations in society. Millet argues that Western institutions have manipulated power to establish the dominance of men and subordination of women in society. She also criticizes Freud's psychoanalytical theory for its male bias and analyzes the fiction of D.H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Norman Mailer and Jean Janet uncovering how they dignified their aggressive 'phallic' selves and degrade women as submissive sexual objects in their work.

In 18th and 19th centuries, gender feminism was lagging behind due to the lack of consciousness and the lack of activism. Some feminists advocating sexism or sexual freedom went far away from gender issues. They confined themselves to lesbianism.

As the time headed away, while the 20th century consciousness emerged, only then the feminists started writing about the genderism freely and frankly. They even talk about transexualism and transgenderism with very complicated discussions. But the critics of transexualism and transgenderism blame them of being overtly complex in gender identity. Unfortunately, many transgender people have encountered prejudice and discrimination within the feminist movement itself.

Since the theory of class conflict is a key to why radical feminism is seen to be anti-male. A class, the radical feminist would define, can be nothing more than an arbitrary grouping of people or things that share common characteristics that is useful to whoever is defining the category. For radical feminists, gender is the common characteristic. Not only radical feminists but many other fields use gender as a dividing line. For example, medicine often separates the sexes. Women are examined for breast cancer and men for prostate problems. But medicine does not claim-as radical feminist does- that the basic interests of men and women conflict. The sexes share the same basic biology that requires the same approach of nutrition, exercise, oxygen and a common sense of lifestyle. There is no attempt to deny the shared humanity of men and women.

By contrast, radical feminism does not say that there are some issues on which men and women differ or should be approached differently. It says there is a fundamental class conflict based on gender. It says:

[...] men and women do not share the same basic human needs politically such as freedom of speech or the protection of private property. The two genders do not have the same political interests. This is like the doctor saying that the two sexes do not have the same biological needs. Thus what many of us would consider to be a basic human right- such as freedom of speech-

becomes a tool by which men oppress women through pornography, through the very use of language such as "history" rather than "her story." (McElroy 6)

Radical feminism consciously adopted this theory to produce "post-Marxist Feminism". Gender became the sorting point by which humanity is divided into two classes with antagonistic political interests. The political interests of every woman are the same, just as the political interests of every man are the same.

We have already discussed that radical feminists take gender issues as their very own. Now we are going to discuss what, actually, the gender feminism is. We can find some sort of differences between 'feminism' and 'gender feminism'.

Feminism is concerned about the equal opportunity and fair treatment for both men and women. It specifically raises the status of women from their traditional roles and weak positions for modern society.

On the other hand, gender feminism has risen as a offshoot of feminism in about late 1990 in America, lead in part by some radical feminists, and is engulfing and overtaking the traditional feminism. Gender feminists' concerns are about equal outcome and equal sex. The gender feminists always speak as Xah Lee says "against women-hurting patriarchy, rape of women's will, glorification of menstruation and vagina, demand more women in military and with special protections, formalize flirting, erect sexual laws to equate sex, promote gay and lesbian rights"(1).

II. Search for Liberation

To renounce Liberty is to renounce being a man, to surrender the rights of humanity and even its duties.

Rousseau, Social Contract I, 4

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights that among these are life, liberty and pursuit of Happiness.

Jefferson, In Congress, July 4, 1776

Those who hide their complete freedom from themselves out of a spirit of seriousness by means of deterministic excuses, I shall call them cowards.

Sartre, Existentialism

The natural liberty of a man is to be free from any superior power on earth, and not to be under the will or legislative authority of a man, but to have only the law of nature of his rule.

Locke, Civil Government IV, 21

The aforementioned quotations have clear depiction of the notion about liberation. In general understanding we can say it is an individual's freedom of action within the social group and in relation to other individuals. Different social, cultural, authoritative, and many other man-made factors may hinder the freedom of an individual. Even more, women may be doubly exploited: first by the common hindrances and second by men's perspectives and behavior of 'second sex'- a submissive and complementary to them- towards women. Women therefore have to battle with more obstacles for their perfect individuality. Their first effort should be in equating themselves to the males eliminating all kinds of gender inequalities and discriminations in society and establishing their own analogous to that of their 'selves'.

As an intelligent and right conscious being, every human being always opines for liberation- liberation from every restrictions and taboos. To talk about women who, almost all over the world, are marginalized and suppressed or thwarted to exercise the complete liberation have time and again unified to voice for their freedom. It is the masculine sphere of unnecessary impositions over women that force them breaking general codes and conducts of

the society. From the very ancient time women have been considered as subordinates to men. They have been confined within the sphere of domesticity directly controlled by men.

To go slightly back to the history of Women's Liberation Movements, we find some feminist activists trying really hard to break the male-made social norms and values. They think if the women are the way they are it is because the society has made them that way. They can only change their lives significantly by changing society. These feelings in turn create the circumstances of oneself as a member of a group and the feeling of solidarity so necessary to any social movement. There are primarily two concepts responsible after the women's search for liberation.

The first concept is that men are more important than women. Men are supposed not only superior but also more important, more significant, more valuable and more worthwhile. This value justifies the idea that is more important for a man, the "bread winner", to have a job or a promotion, than a woman. More important for a man is to be paid well, to have a good education and, in general, to have preference over a woman. It is the basis of the feeling by men that if women enter the particular occupation they will degrade it and that men must leave or be degraded, and the feeling by women that they can raise the prestige of their professions by recruiting men, which they can only do by giving them the better jobs. From this value the attitude that a husband must earn more than his wife to suffer a loss of personal status and a wife must subsume her interests to his or be socially castigated. From this value comes the practice of redrawing men surviving in the armed forces and punishing women for having children. This concept is confined with the gist that men do the important works in the world and the work done by men is what is important.

The second core concept is that women are here for the pleasure and assistance of men. This is what is meant when women are told that their role is complementary to that of men; that they should fulfill their natural "feminine" functions; that they are "different" from

men and should not compete with them. From this concept comes the attitude that women are and should be dependent on man; for everything but especially for their identities, the social definition of who they are. It defines the few roles for which women are socially rewarded- wife, mother and mistress- all of which are pleasing and beneficial to men, and lead directly to the "pedestal" theory which extols women who stay in their place as good helpmates to men.

The eradication of sexism and the practices as mentioned above are obviously the major goals for women's liberation movement. But it is not enough to destroy the set of values and leave a normative vacuum. They have to be replaced with something. A movement can only begin by declaring its opposition to the status quo. Eventually, if it does not succeed, it has to propose an alternative.

Yet from the plethora of ideas and visions the women liberation activists have thought, discussed and written about, the two basic ideas which express the bulk of their concerns could be plucked. They can be called Egalitarian Ethic and Liberation Ethic.

The Egalitarian Ethic means exactly what it says. The sexes are equal; therefore the sex roles must go. The cramped little categories of personality and social function to which we assign people from birth must be broken so that all people can develop independently as individuals. This means that there will be an integration of social functions and life styles of men and women as groups until, ideally, one cannot be anything of relevance about a person's social role by knowing the sex. No longer will there be men's work and women's work. No longer will humanity suffer a schizophrenic personality desperately trying to reconcile its "masculine" and "feminine" parts.

But the Liberation Ethic says that is not enough. Not only must the limits of the roles be changed, but their content as well. The Liberation Ethic looks at the kinds of life currently being led by men as well as women who also oppress people thinking as people can be

alerted to make a more humane existence for all. So much of our society is hung upon the framework of sex role stereotypes and their reciprocal functions that the dismantling of this structure provides the opportunity for making a more viable life for everyone.

It is important to stress that these two ethics must work together in tandem. If the first is emphasized over second, then we have a women's right movement not one of women's liberation. "It is just dangerous to fall into the trap of seeking liberation without the due concern of equality" is what Jo Freeman says, "...this is the mistake made by many of the left radicals"(8).

Searching for liberation is the basic human right. To search for one's own liberation does not mean to seize others' rights. Women's longing for liberation is obviously not targeted towards the cutting off of the man's liberated life cycle.

3. Textual Analysis

An Outline of the Story:

The Awakening opens in the late 1800s in Grand Isle, a summer holiday resort popular with the wealthy inhabitants of nearby New Orleans. Edna Pontellier is vacationing with her husband, Léonce, and their two sons at the cottages of Madame Lebrun, which house affluent Creoles from the French Quarter. Léonce is kind and loving but preoccupied with his work. His frequent business-related absences mar his domestic life with Edna. Consequently, Edna spends most of her time with her friend Adèle Ratignolle, a married Creole who epitomizes womanly elegance and charm. Through her relationship with Adèle, Edna learns a great deal about freedom of expression. Because Creole women were expected and assumed to be chaste, they could behave in a forthright and unreserved manner. Exposure to such openness liberates Edna from her previously prudish behavior and repressed emotions and desires.

Edna's relationship with Adèle begins Edna's process of "awakening" and self-discovery, which constitutes the focus of the book. The process accelerates as Edna comes to know Robert Lebrun, the elder, single son of Madame Lebrun. Robert is known among the Grand Isle vacationers as a man who chooses one woman each year—often a married woman—to whom he then plays "attendant" all summer long. This summer, he devotes himself to Edna, and the two spend their days together lounging and talking by the shore. Adèle Ratignolle often accompanies them. At first, the relationship between Robert and Edna is innocent. They mostly bathe in the sea or engage in idle talk. As the summer progresses, however, Edna and Robert grow closer, and Robert's affections and attention inspire in Edna several internal revelations. She feels more alive than ever before, and she starts to paint again as she did in her youth. She also learns to swim and becomes aware of her independence and sexuality. Edna and Robert never openly discuss their love for one another, but the time they spend alone together kindles memories in Edna of the dreams and desires of

her youth. She becomes inexplicably depressed at night with her husband and profoundly joyful during her moments of freedom, whether alone or with Robert. Recognizing how intense the relationship between him and Edna has become, Robert honorably removes himself from Grand Isle to avoid consummating his forbidden love. Edna returns to New Orleans a changed woman.

Back in New Orleans, Edna actively pursues her painting and ignores all of her social responsibilities. Worried about the changing attitude and increasing disobedience of his wife, Léonce seeks the guidance of the family physician, Doctor Mandelet. A wise and enlightened man, Doctor Mandelet suspects that Edna's transformation is the result of an affair, but he hides his suspicions from Léonce. Instead, Doctor Mandelet suggests that Léonce let Edna's defiance run its course, since attempts to control her would only fuel her rebellion. Léonce heeds the doctor's advice, allowing Edna to remain home alone while he is away on business. With her husband gone and her children away as well, Edna wholly rejects her former lifestyle. She moves into a home of her own and declares herself independent—the possession of no one. Her love for Robert still intense, Edna pursues an affair with the town seducer, Alcée Arobin, who is able to satisfy her sexual needs. Never emotionally attached to Arobin, Edna maintains control throughout their affair, satisfying her animalistic urges but retaining her freedom from male domination. At this point, the self-sufficient and unconventional old pianist Mademoiselle Reisz adopts Edna as a sort of protégé, warning Edna of the sacrifices required of an artist. Edna is moved by Mademoiselle Reisz's piano playing and visits her often. She is also eager to read the letters from abroad that Robert sends the woman. A woman who devotes her life entirely to her art, Mademoiselle serves as an inspiration and model to Edna, who continues her process of awakening and independence. Mademoiselle Reisz is the only person who knows of Robert and Edna's secret love for one another and she encourages Edna to admit to, and act upon, her feelings. Unable to stay away,

Robert returns to New Orleans, finally expressing openly his feelings for Edna. He admits his love but reminds her that they cannot possibly be together, since she is the wife of another man. Edna explains to him her newly established independence, denying the rights of her husband over her and explaining how she and Robert can live together happily, ignoring everything extraneous to their relationship. But despite his love for Edna, Robert feels unable to enter into the adulterous affair. When Adèle undergoes a difficult and dangerous childbirth, Edna leaves Robert's arms to go to her friend. She pleads with him to wait for her return. From the time she spends with Edna, Adèle senses that Edna is becoming increasingly distant, and she understands that Edna's relationship with Robert has intensified. She reminds Edna to think of her children and advocates the socially acceptable lifestyle Edna abandoned so long ago. Doctor Mandelet, while walking Edna home from Adèle's, urges her to come see him because he is worried about the outcome of her passionate but confused actions. Already reeling under the weight of Adèle's admonition, Edna begins to perceive herself as having acted selfishly.

Edna returns to her house to find Robert gone, a note of farewell left in his place. Robert's inability to escape the ties of society now prompts Edna's most devastating awakening. Haunted by thoughts of her children and realizing that she would have eventually found even Robert unable to fulfill her desires and dreams, Edna feels an overwhelming sense of solitude. Alone in a world in which she has found no feeling of belonging, she can find only one answer to the inescapable and heartbreaking limitations of society. She returns to Grand Isle, the site of her first moments of emotional, sexual, and intellectual awareness, and, in a final escape, gives herself to the sea. As she swims through the soft, embracing water, she thinks about her freedom from her husband and children, as well as Robert's failure to understand her, Doctor Mandelet's words of wisdom, and Mademoiselle Reisz's

courage. The text leaves open the question of whether the suicide constitutes a cowardly surrender or a liberating triumph.

Edna's Search for Sexual Freedom

The nineteenth century idealists' notion that a woman did not have "passion" as a man had, and the contemporary restrictive social scenario led women's solidarity towards homosexual relationship. The women then preferred homosexual relation than heterosexual involvement, extra-marital sexual intercourse than husband-wife sexual intercourse. The then society imposed severe restriction to the friendship between a boy and girl but it admired the friendship between /among same sex. So homosexuality was highly practiced at that time. Written at that context, *The Awakening* obviously bears some sort of characteristics which are unbearable to the protective male dominated society. Edna, the heroine of the novel *The Awakening* surpasses every boundary and involves in extra-marital sexual affair.

Edna Pontellier, the heroine, presenting herself as an iconoclast, violates the contemporary American women's general behaviour. According to Lucina Chandler, "the woman [...] has control over her own person, independent of the desires of her husband". (qtd. in Stange 506). Because of her background of severe restrictions and present marriage with a fatherly protector Leonce -a man twelve years senior to her who does not make much of emotional and sexual demands on her-Edna's sexual desires have never been yielded and satisfied. "She is fond of her husband [...] with some unaccountable satisfaction that no traces of passion or excessive and fictitious faction warmth her affection" (Chopin 47).

Stuck in the world of business Mr. Pontellier not only fails to appreciate the beach, while they were in tour to Grand Isle, but also treats his wife as a possession or something else that he can acquire. When she rejoins him a little sunburned he looks at his wife as one looks at a piece of personal property which has suffered damage "(Chopin 18). Mr.

Pontellier's business on his own business created frustrations on Edna. He used to leave her alone for several times a week that created sexual dissatisfaction on Edna.

Edna's close relation with Creole women who used to enjoy a complete freedom of an outward and spoken expression of affection and undoubted physical intimacy, as Elaine Showalter mentions, "[...] 'girls routinely slept together, kissed and hugged one another' but these caresses were not interpreted as erotic expressions" (Introduction VII), awakens Edna's sexual passion and she begins to rebel for her freedom of sexual satisfaction. Kenneth Elbe writes: "she is woman, the physical woman who despite her Kentucky upbringing and a comfortable marriage, must struggle with the sensual appeal of physical ripeness, a struggle with ego itself" (Xiii).

Edna's involvement with Robert is her bold step towards her search for sexual freedom. She was dissatisfied with her sexual life when Robert became her friend, a close friend. Edna affectionately becomes close to Robert realizing that she is capable of having a man. Edna was so committed for the fulfillment of her sexual desire that she followed Robert wherever he went. So he escaped to Mexico predicting unfavorable situation. She justified her relation with Robert as love and ran after him for the fulfillment of that thing which she was deprived from her husband.

Violating the general conception that a woman has to be ready to go to bed anytime as her husband wants, Edna refuses Mr. Pontellier's urge to go for bed. Mr. Pontellier's so-called masculinity reproaches Edna but she simply replies, "Leonce, go to bed [...] I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again, I shall not answer" (Chopin 45). Edna wants her sexual life be guided by her own instinct. No imposition is welcomed and entertained.

Edna was very conscious about her sexual right: "Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream [...]. The physical need for sleep began to overtake her"

(Chopin 45). Margaret Fuller writes about the condition of female sexual freedom: "Woman is a flower, man the bee. She sighs out of melodious fragrance and invites winged laborer. He drains her cup, and carries off the honey. She dies on stalk: he returns to the hive, well fed as praised as an active member of the community" (qtd. in Showalter, Introduction XXV).

Edna is not like what Fuller says. She is bold, self-decisive and ready to face any kind of challenge that comes to obstruct her. She possesses the sole authority of her body. She can drag her body where she intends. She is the sole fulfiller of her own desires. Nobody has the authority to control her. And she never accepts others unnecessary share in her happiness.

Edna is rebellious. She is not like Adele Ratignolle who is called "a perfect mother-woman". She is not one of the "women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands and esteemed it as a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels "(Chopin 10). Not only Edna, almost no woman can actually be the perfect mother-woman devoted to husband and children and nothing else that Mr. Pontellier and other like him desires.

Even though Edna's neighbors are extremely friendly to her, she can never be one of them. She fails to understand their unspoken rules and conventions. So she remains as an outsider to Creole culture. Mrs. Pontellier is a respectable middle-class woman who is well acquainted with sexual norms, but in the name of society or anything else she is not ready to sacrifice her right of searching happiness either that is sexual or of any kind.

As we have slightly discussed above about the homosexual attraction or lesbianism in 19th century, we can find Edna and Madame Ratignolle's relationship indicating the closeness of female-female relationship. This is Edna's another search of sexual freedom. Edna is attracted to her friend's beautiful appearance, their ability to communicate and understand each other is not only sympathy but also love and their interaction is quite erotic. Edna's ability to share her feelings and thoughts with Adele highlights her inability to do so with her

husband or any other. Her husband not only fails to emotionally connect with her, but also fails to satisfy her physically. Possibly, Edna is able to talk with Madame Ratignolle only because her friend, as the incarnation of femininity and motherhood, knows how to respond to others and minister to their sexual needs.

Edna's husband is quite an extremist. As Edna's behavior changes and she seems quite disappointed towards the household works. He wants radical and sudden change in her behavior without much of fight. Leonce's regular absence from his house, his too much affection towards money and Robert's companionship awakens Edna's sexual desires.

Edna's search for freedom is boosted as she becomes of friend of Mademoiselle Reisz. Reize is the person who clearly chooses whom she wants to and does not to be nice like other women. An unmarried woman who lives as an artist, Mademoiselle Reisz further disregards social convention by refusing to keep up a facade of politeness and amiability. She isolates herself from people and lives as she chooses, and her behavior represents an extreme that Edna is tending towards, though to a lesser extent. Edna's proximity to Reisz is a clear depiction of her search for sexual freedom whether that is homosexual or heterosexual. Reisz is somehow abandoned by the society and she is quite happy to receive the friendship of Edna.

Male attitude towards women at the turn of nineteenth century was negative. We can find this notion in the conversation between Doctor Mandelet and Mr. Pontellier. Women were considered ill, or even mentally unbalanced, if they dared to defy convention and ventured outside of the domestic sphere assigned in them. While the two men do not make misogynistic comments, it is apparent that they considered women to be childish, inferior beings with reduced intellectual capacities and unstable temperament. This notion becomes clear as Dr. Mandalet says:

[...] Women my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism-a sensitive and highly organized women, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be is especially peculiar [...]. When ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to cope with their idiosyncrasies the result is bulging. Most women are moody and whimsical. (Chopin 98)

There may be several other reasons for women to rebel against the patriarchal society, but the first and foremost reason is man's inferiorizing tendency and unnecessary imposition. Leonce and Dr. Mandelet, both the men are completely negative towards feminist movement of their times. They, in their discussion, refer to the contemporary feminist movement in a disparaging way. Mr. Pontellier bemoans that his wife has "got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women" (Chopin 98). He does not hesitate to relate it with her refusal to do household work and to sleep with him. As Mr. Pontellier, Dr. Mahadelet speaks condescendingly of these feminists, who, he implies, are somewhat silly for considering themselves intellectual beings. To these men, the feminist movement of their times is analogous to a disease that transforms good wives and mothers into typical, deluded beasts. It is a misguided social movement that recruits brainwashes vulnerable women.

For Edna, love rather than marriage is the most significant tie binding man and a woman. She feels unfaithful to Robert whom she loves than to her husband whom she had married when Alcee Arobin kisses her. Such thinking is counter to everything that her society believes and is quite radical for her time. Even if Edna is true to herself and acts according to the dictates of love, others will judge her by the conventions of marriage and deem her unfaithful.

Edna rejects so-called social norms and customs. She enjoys the rights as Thomas Jefferson has said that the human being has the rights of "life, liberty and pursuit of happiness". As her husband is out she involves herself with Arobin. As Edna speaks, Arobin

fails to understand. This denotes that a man is unable to understand a woman's feeling and sensations. Edna calls herself a wicked example of femininity because she is consciously refusing to be everything that society demand of her, the devoted wife, the self-sacrificing mother, and the chaste maiden. She has just acknowledged that she loves someone besides her husband and knows that she wants to do something about it. However, Edna does not feel bad about herself. Although she recognizes that she does not measure up to the ideals of society, she also feels that she is being true to herself and that she can not be otherwise. The standards that society holds up for women are false, not her.

Why does Edna sleep with Arobin if she is really in love with Robert? This kind of question may be raised and it is a very genuine question too. Edna sleeps with Arobin because she desires him at that moment and she simply acts on her impulse. She does not particularly feel disloyal towards Robert and her husband because she considers herself as a free woman, able to sleep with whomever she chooses. She feels slightly guilty towards her husband only because she is still living in his house, and she feels regret because Roberts had not gotten there first before Arobin.

Edna's hope of sexual fulfillment in the person of Robert gradually fades away as he does not remain in connection with her from Mexico. Though he also has an affectionate intimacy with Edna, Robert does not want to make the unfortunate blunder by going beyond the limits of social expectation. So, he suddenly leaves for Mexico to avoid their physical union and tries to ignore by not writing at all for a whole year. Edna then realizes that, "he does not justify her sexual passion. And he is certainly unworthy of immolation" (Shaw 199), though there was no one else except him whom she wanted near her. Therefore, in the process of seeking an alternative way for satisfying her sexual desire, she has frequent sexual intercourse with the scoundrel Arobin in their mutual sexual attraction. In Per Seyersted's words, this is her "open-eyed choice to defy illusions and to question the sacredness of

morals" (qtd. in Walker 66). Similarly, Sandra Gilbert argues that, "her rapidly developing sexual relationship with Arobin acts like a narcotic upon her' offering her a cup of life' that drugs and drains of awakening egotism even while her choice to drink it down manifests the new freedom she is attempting to define" (363).

Edna decides to leave her husband's house knowing that she can not continue an affair while still living there. She sees it as grossly hypocritical of her to continue living as one of his possessions while treating her body and her person as her own.

Edna shows almost surprising lack of emotion towards Arobin. Her attitude is almost completely neutral and she exhibits neither the sexual attraction nor the awkwardness that one might expect. However, her relative indifference does make sense. She is not particularly attracted to Arobin and their result was simply the result of momentary whim. She did not spend that much thought going into it so there is no reason why she should analyze it afterwards. Similarly, she makes no promises about whether or not it'll happen again: if it does, it does; if it does not she would not really care that much either.

The fact that Edna and Arobin spend their morning after cleaning her house has symbolic meaning. Just as Edna is removing old fixtures from the wall and dislodging dust everywhere, so is ripping away whatever prejudices, ties to convention and entrenched social privilege she may have previously had. She is forging a new path for herself but before she can do so, she must first get rid of the beliefs of the old attitudes of her past.

Edna leaves Leonce just because of his extensive business prospects. Leonce is very careful of his business rather than Edna and the children. As Edna leaves the house, he still can not guess that it is his fault after her departure from home. On the other side, Edna enjoys enormous originality and independence after moving into the pigeon house. Having already led people to expect "radical" behavior from her, there are no longer any barriers to prevent her from asserting her individuality and sexuality.

Robert and Edna's relation blooms as he returns from Mexico. Edna seems to have taken on the role of pursuer in this relationship: she knows what she wants and she is trying to get Robert to admit his love for her. She is reversing the traditional male-female roles and refusing to play a coy, which is why she admits that her behavior may be considered "unwomanly". In addition, it is Edna who initiates physical contact with Robert. Whereas earlier she simply grabbed Arobin's wrist, here she kisses Robert's mouth unsolicited acting on her sexual desires even though she is married. Edna is remarkable character in early twentieth century fiction. She is breaking off all taboos and trying to have not just one, but two, extra-marital affairs. Whereas upper-middle class women were expected to repress all traces of sexuality, Edna's sexual desires are central to her personality, and she acts on them with pleasure and confidence rather than shame.

It is significant to note that Edna declares herself to be the possession of no one. She is not simply property that Leonce can give to Robert and she tells Robert he is foolish if he thinks this is to be the case. When she asserts that, "I give myself where I choose", she is alluding to the fact that she has already given herself to Arobin (Chopin 155). Thus, while Edna is deeply and madly in love with Robert she is still rejecting the traditional definition of marriage which declares a woman the property of her husband.

By Edna's completely satisfying sexual relation with Arobin, "[d]esires, she understands can exist independently of love. But love retains its magical aura; indeed her sexual awakening with Arobin generates an 'even fiercer, more overpowering love for Robert" (Showaller, Introduction xii). Lewis Leary commenting on the climax of the story, says that, "aroused by love outside of marriage and by passion, she seems finally [...] a beautiful sleek animal waking up in the sun; uncased and vulnerable" (xv).

As Edna's last attempts to convince Robert and achieve him sexually fail, she becomes frustrated and she starts recollecting the past what she had done. Edna's final loss of

hope justifies her relation with Arobin as a convincing act, awakening her to the fact that love and sex are not equivalent. She realizes that sex is an "instinctive" fundamental force of nature that attracts men and women to each other and [...] spurs us blindly on towards procreation" (Lichtenberger 970). Therefore, processing the 'self ownership' over her own body she thinks that she is free to have sex with whomever she prefers. She says: " Today it is Arobin, tomorrow it will be some one else" (Chopin 299). Although she loves somebody else, she has right to choose the sexual partner who satisfies her carnal passion most.

To the end Edna remains true to herself. In deciding to kill herself, she is refusing to sacrifice her illusions for anyone or anything including her children. In a world where she is limited to being a wife and mother she is trapped in an unfulfilling marriage. The island was the original place where she started awakening sexually or mentally and now she has returned to the ocean water, she first realized her mental, physical and emotional potential while discovering how to swim, so it is only natural that she destroys this potential by drawing herself.

Before she dives into the ocean she stands naked meaning she is sexually still explicit and this time she wants her sexual passion be performed with the nature itself, in the sun and feels once again reborn. Edna destroys herself but paradoxically, she is also reclaiming her life. She is asserting that her life is hers to have and to destroy and she is refusing to sacrifice it on behalf of society.

Edna's Desperation for Freedom and Self-discovery

Edna Pontellier is much more desperate for freedom, that kind of freedom which is not only sexual but also sensual and social. They are briefly mentioned as follows:

Spiritual desperation

In *The Awakening*, Edna experiences much spiritual desperation in course of her self-discovery, which empowers her with strength to fight for the complete emancipation that she

desires for. Edna's first experience of spiritual longing can be noticed when she hears a piece of music being played by Madame Reisz. The narrator tells that "there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him" (Chopin 65). Edna, later, entitles the piece 'solitude' as it, through imagination, exceeds her into the solitary world of freedom where patriarchal power has been 'naked' and before the female's victorious and abandoned flight (the bird flying away the man) from the boundary of male regime. This is the bird "soaring above the level plain of tradition and prejudice" with its "strong wings" (217).

Similarly, Edna's first learning to swim emboldens her with such a strong spiritual longing that it makes, later, almost everything happen in the novel. It "empowers her to aspire to achieving what no woman had achieved before; that is shaping an independent consciousness and possessing absolute control of her body and soul" (Anastasopoulou 26). The experience, later, significantly leads Edna to the final embrace of spiritual liberation through death by drowning. When she swims for the first time, "[a] feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no women had swum before" (Chopin 70-71). This feeling of power is the arousal of potency which later functions as a weapon for battling against patriarchal myth of womanhood, and the desire of swimming far out is her latent will for breaking the social bonds and stepping out of them.

Edna's mood in that night is one of detachment and aloofness. She stays outside alone firmly denying going to bed with her husband. It is at this point when "Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream [...] to feel [...] the realities pressing into her soul" (81).

Edna's spiritual longing reaches climax in the scene of her voyage to Cheniere Caminada and her nap there in the cottage of Madame Antoine. Sailing to the Cheniere for mass, she feels "as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast [...]" (87). This is the revelation of her desire to be freed from her marriage. The manner of her waking after the nap makes explicit reference to the 'myth of sleeping beauty'. "How many years have I slept?" she inquired 'the whole island seems changed. A new race of being must have sprung up leaving only you and me as past relics.'" Robert too, jokingly falls in with the fantasy. He replies, "You have slept preciously one hundred years. I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed reading a book" (96). Edna's falling asleep, here, is a symbolic emulation of death. When she awakens, she washes herself and beholds into the mirror. "Her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed" (Chopin 95). They are the imagery implying the brightness of a resurrection, or a newly born person. Edna's fantastic mythical enactment represents her intrinsic desire for a novel identity of her own in company with Robert. This becomes so inextricable that in her farewell party again she experiences "the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable" (232).

Rebellion for Social Liberation

Edna Pontellier, having awakened "to realize her position in the universe as a human being and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" feels that it was not a condition of life which fitted her, and begins to struggle with growing ferocity to discard and even to destroy the conventions which she has lived with (Chopin 33). Her target of attack, basically, is over marriage, morality and patriarchy for they are the major social elements to violate her freedom in her understanding.

Marriage, in Edna's perception, is the first component to entrap her into social limits by exploiting her individual 'self'. She is convinced that "a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth" (Chopin 172). So she begins to examine whether marriage is or is not a powerful agent in the development and formation of woman's character by fighting a battle to escape from her matrimonial restraint.

Edna's disgust with marriage in the novel apparently begins just after the gentle caresses of Adele. Overridden by the first experience of an acute affection of her own sex, she confesses her marriage to Leonce as 'pure an accident' and 'mistaken' act. "The acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian, was not for her in this world" (Chopin 47). It steps up more by her deep affection for Robert Lebrun. The reasons for she chooses another man is to seek the freedom that she lacks from the former one. Her affair with Robert "is genuinely narcissistic one; the sense of fusion exists because Edna's lover is really a part of herself [...] incorporated into her consciousness" (Wolf 274). She sees an entire freedom in relation with him because he, in her perception, is not exclusive of herself, ruling over her and controlling her body and works.

In response to Leonce's anxiety of her being "burnt beyond recognition" "Edna makes her first self examination. "She held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically" (Chopin 5). Her hands, in Edna's opinion, are not detachable of her proprietary body. For her, having denied her right over her own body is like Elizabeth Cady Stanton argues; "to deny [to woman] the right of property is like cutting off the hands" (qtd. in Stange 506). So she observes them critically to know how they could be the property of her husband. To prove her mastery over the things attached to her body, she withdraws the rings from her husband which she had given to him before leaving for the beach. "She slipped them upon her fingers; then clasping her knees she looked across at Robert and began to laugh. The rings sparkled upon her fingers. He sent back an answering smile" (Chopin 5). In having "Edna put

on the rings herself, Chopin suggests that the chief item of property owned by the proprietary Edna is Edna herself' (Stange 506).

On the very nights of her learning to swim, Edna steps out of her role of devoted wife by denying to go to bed with her husband. "Leonce, go to bed, she said, 'I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to.'" Objecting his possessive attitude toward her she says, "Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you" (Chopin 80).

Edna becomes gradually detached from her husband and children, but increasingly close with Robert. She feels sad in night with her husband but happy either to be with Robert or to be alone. She is fond of her husband, with no trace of passion or excessive warmth and she shows a habitual neglect to her children. "Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare she did not miss them [...]. Their absence was a sort of relief [...]. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (Chopin 48).

Early in the next morning of her denial to Leonce, she sends for Robert and joins with him to Cheniere Caminada. While sailing across the bay to Cheniere, "Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening [...] leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails" (87). Here, the 'anchorage' of Edna's feeling, is the convention of marriage and loosening the 'chain' is getting released of it and entering into her dreamed world of freedom.

Edna's revolutionary attitude toward the conventional marriage becomes more severe after Robert's unexpected leave for Mexico. She begins to engage herself most of the time on painting, neglecting her family and children, and shirks her wifely duty of Tuesday Reception by not staying at home on the day. She rather calmly reports her shocked husband that she went out because she simply felt like doing so. The reception days are accepted as a professional ambition of the husband. So by resisting them, Edna presents herself as an able

woman “to abandon the ‘mother –woman’ role and experiment with an alternative identity” (Gray 63).

The violent scene of stamping the wedding ring is Edna’s more rigorous effort of breaking the marital bonds. “Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heed upon it, striving to crush it.” She is so furious that “[i]n a sweeping passion she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter are what she wanted to hear” (Chopin 135). Both the acts of violence are intended upon the bonds of marriage and the domestic role that has been assigned to Edna as a wife.

As Leonce is away on his business leaving her alone following the advice of Doctor Mandelet, Edna plans for a great step of abandoning the marital bonds for her autonomous existence. “She leaves the home purchase with the wealth of her husband [...] and enters a home of her own choosing. She leaves Leonce, and supports herself ‘on the income from her art and from a legacy of her mother’” (Gray 70). Edna’s dinner party for her twenty-ninth birthday and for the ceremonial celebration of living her husband’s house is of the greatest significance in her revolution of abandoning the ‘mother-woman’ identity. She sends the children to their grandmother and invites only few and selected guests with discrimination. The dinner with an atmosphere of splendor and luxury is “an overthrow of her marriage, all of the more an act of aggression because Leonce will pay the bills” (Showalter, Introduction xxiii).

Edna presides the party in a powerful and autonomous manner. Magnificently dressed in satin and lace gown, with a cluster of diamonds in her hair she “enacts the part of the person she has metaphorically become: ‘the regal woman the one who rules, who looks on, who stands alone’” (Gilbert 363). This moment of her mastery represents her victory over her

ownership of the self. She considers herself resurrected with a new identity having on more authority of anybody else over her body and work, and claims that she is no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possession. Now she can give herself where she chooses. To prove her ownership over her body she sleeps with Arobin and declares, "To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me; it doesn't matter about Leonce Pontellier [...]" (Chopin 299).

Edna's Rebel against Male Dominance

The Awakening by Kate Chopin is a novel that focuses on a female heroine. Unlike many female heroines, Edna Pontellier does not allow her life to be surrounded by male control. Many novels of this time allow a female to be the main character but ultimately the men that surround her decide upon her fate. Rebecca Dickson wrote: "With Mrs. Pontellier, Chopin rejects assessing women according to their sexual status" (38). Chopin's novel focuses on the "awakening" of Edna Pontellier from oppression of male dominance. Edna Pontellier was a victim of male dominance from an early age. Her father, a colonel, was the head of her household throughout childhood. It was normal; a way of life, Edna's "awakening" begins in her early adulthood. When she decides to marry Leonce, her father disapproves. By marrying Leonce against his wishes, she begins to break from this oppression. Little does she know that this is only a taste of what is yet to come? Edna is able to settle with Mr. Pontellier for a while before her need for freedom strikes again. She lets Leonce work while she had the children and maintains the household. While on vacation for the summer, she starts to "awaken" again. She begins to stop following her husband's orders. For example, Edna refuses to come inside when Leonce asks her to. He gives many reasons for her to come inside (temperature, insects) but she kindly refuses. Then, when he decides to join her outside, she goes into the house. Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, to feel again the realities pressing into her soul. Chopin uses this passage to

convey how Edna is feeling. She is getting a second taste of breaking from this male dominance oppression that surrounds her. The reader is left with the impression that Edna now understands what she wants. This “awakening” is the initial clue given to the reader that the men that surround her will no longer oppress Edna.

Once the summer comes to a close, Edna’s “awakening” is in full bloom. She liberates herself financially by starting to paint; Leonce sees this change in her behavior but knows that there is nothing he can do to change it. When he leaves for business, Edna goes so far as to move out of their house. When she informs Leonce in letter which does not ask for his permission, but simply states what her plans are and that he can be sure that she will follow through with them. The oppression that she once felt from her husband is now shattered. She has stepped up toward liberation from his male dominance, which has now controlled her life for so many years. Barbara C. Ewell wrote: “Edna’s central insistence on her “own way” exposes intolerable constrictions on southern places for women” (35). As Edna is breaking away from the male control of her husband, she is also entering the possibility of more male control of her husband; she is also entering the possibility of more male dominance from Robert. While Robert is gone, Edna is able to keep breaking away from male dominance by wanting to be with him. She fantasizes how she could be with Robert and not her husband, which draws into the central part of the story, her “awakening” from this oppression. When Robert returns, though, she makes it quite known that he will not control her either, Edna and Robert are talking in their second meeting (at the coffee house) about why Robert never made any effort to see or write Edna. His justification is that she is still “owned” by Leonce. She makes him aware of her new found liberation by stating, “You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free’ I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, ‘Here,

Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours, 'I should laugh at you both' (Chopin 107). His face grew a little white. "What do you mean?" he asked (108). Robert is rather surprised by this comment. He is unaware of how free Edna has become since he left Mexico. When she explains him that neither he nor Mr. Pontellier can control her, he gets his first taste of Mrs. Pontellier's "awakening." In her literary journal, Rebecca Dickson wrote: "Certainly Robert should go pale, for this woman wants to control not only her story, but his as well, which is contrary to everything he has learned about the known universe. It is hardly surprising that he disappears after Edna's announcement that she is no longer a possession" (42). Mrs. Pontellier has now completely broken away from male dominance. Her husband has been left uncontrollable with all of her decisions. She undermines his authority in every way possible painting, selling the house, failing in love with another man, no longer having visitors on Tuesdays, etc. she also has realized the mistakes she has made in the past. Therefore, she will not make these same mistakes with Robert. She is sure to tell him upfront that men will no longer control her. Her "awakening" has taken over every aspect of her life.

There is another man in her life, though; he also attempts to take control of her. Alcee Arobin, a practiced womanizer, tries to dominate Edna through illicit liaisons rather than marital proprieties. While Edna is exploring her own character and potential to be set free from this oppression, Alcee tries to reduce their relationship to a mere adulterous affair that he manipulates through shallow compliments, practiced sensuality, and oily devotion. But he fails and is often frustrated when Edna's attention wanders. Edna so firmly maintains control of their affair that Alcee becomes passive and the roles actually reverse. While she is moving out of Leonce's house, we find Alcee in a dust cap almost acting as if he was one of her servants. Chopin uses Alcee as a character to show the reader how Edna's new "awakening" is taking control of her life. Instead of man telling her what to do, she is now instructing men. Her new freedom is now proven. She may come and go as she pleases. When Robert tries to

tell her to stay with him instead of going over to Madame Ratignolle's house for the birth of her baby, she defies his wishes and goes anyway. She is not allowing a man to take control of any situation in her life, even if she loves him.

All of these actions that Chopin decided Edna should take are repeatedly proving that Edna is "awoken." She is no longer a subject to the oppression she once felt from the male gender. Dr. Mandelet also tries to intervene in Edna's life. Although he is only trying to give her advice, she refuses to let him have anything to do with her life. Also, she is probably aware that Leonce has spoken to the doctor about her behavior and letting him intervene would not only allow the doctor to make her decisions but it would also give Leonce the control in which he desires. After the baby is born, he tries to interrupt Edna's narrative, gently convincing her to confide in him. But Edna will not cooperate. She is wary of the doctor's efforts and will not allow Dr. Mandelet to advise her on how to handle her marriage or her children, however well intentioned he may be. Chopin puts the doctor in the story to reiterate the fact that Edna has broken free of this male dominated world. He symbolizes that even the most well intentioned, harmless males will never have a say in her life again. It doesn't even really have to do with what he is trying to help her with. All it concerns is the fact that he has male genitalia. She has been suppressed for so long that she will not chance losing this freedom in which the whole novel is focused on. Chopin uses every encounter that Edna has with a man in this book to prove that she has "awoken" from oppression from male dominance. Through Edna's father, Leonce, Robert, Alcee, and Dr. Mandelet there is no doubt left in the readers mind that Edna will no longer be oppressed. She steps up to every male in different ways proving her newfound liberation. Through out the story, the reader may watch Edna grow and watch her become more and more "awake." When the book is coming to a close, Chopin writes, "She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again (116). "This passage gives the reader the knowledge that Edna

is going into this final scene of her life with open eyes. She is “awake” and aware of her actions. She realizes that she will drown because of her, not Leonce or the children will she turn back for. Sadly the oppression is gone, and so is her life.

4. Conclusion

In the novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, the main character Edna Pontellier has somehow a comfortable life. She has a caring husband, cute children enormous amount of money and extremely large house. Yet with all of this Edna is not satisfied with her married life. Edna wants freedom to explore her mind and find her position in the society. In other words, she wants to discover herself.

This story took place in the late 1800's when women's liberation was never heard of. On that era, wives were supposed to find happiness by serving their husbands and taking care of the children. There were no option within the restrictive boundaries of marriage and divorce was never an alternative. Women's lives were austere and self-enrichment or self gratification was often times cast aside relative to the more mundane tasks of daily life. Most women accepted this but Edna did not. She figured that life was more constantly doing for someone else. She wanted time for herself in order to figure out who she was. Some may see this as selfish but everyone is entitled to "me", time and space. Although she did not go about it in the best way at times, Edna still was going in the right direction.

Edna's marriage to Leonce Pontellior was against her father's wish because Leonce was of a different religious faith. Edna who had not experienced many male relationships before this was naïve when it came to men. As Edna had never experienced any male domination in her life, she simply became rebellious to tackle her husband's notion of taking her as his personal property. After six years of their marriage, Edna felt some sparks of awakening on her and she headed towards there where she could get complete freedom from any sort of restrictions.

The contemporary society where Edna exists believes that women are the possession of men and they are there to assist men. They are "second sex" as Simone de

Beauvoir says. Women are supposed to serve their husbands, please them and do household works--caring the children and working in the kitchen. They are not supposed to transcend the feminine functions. Their every happiness and sorrows, praises and complaints must be in accordance with men's wishes. The society considers them 'different' from men and warns not to compete with them but to depend on them for everything, especially for identifies, the social definitions of who they are. One who does not seek her identity through man is a threat to the society and its value.

Edna endeavors to break the status quo of the society. She goes beyond the social norms and values or impositions. Breaking every boundary that is supposed to bar only the women, Edna has awakened to the consciousness. Edna leaves caring her children, denies sleeping with her husband, rejects doing household works and all in all leaves her home in search of freedom she opines.

Some critics call Edna 'not a mother woman' as she is not performing "motherly" activities. But where they are stuck is the definition of "motherly" activities. To suckle, to clear the dirt of the children and to sit with them the whole life is motherly for them. Nobody denies that a mother remains close to her children than the father but this does not mean that she has to do everything to rare them. Mr. Pontellier is very angry as he notices the child crying inside. He does not even hesitate accusing Edna of being not a mother-woman. He says: "If was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (Chopin 7) He consumes his time reproaching his wife for not paying attention to the children rather than going to care them.

Edna clearly denies going bed with her husband on the night of her learning to swim, Leonce gets annoyed and impatient the bedroom. From outside "They heard him moving about the room; every sound indicating impatience and irritation" (98). He was

very astounded to find her behaving like that because “[a]nother time she would have gone at his request.”

In each and every activity, Edna seems rebellious. Throughout her life she is searching her sexual freedom. She was, obviously, involved in intercourse with her husband but that was only physical. She was in search of that intercourse that was primarily emotional and secondarily physical.

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