



# **RADICAL-LIBERTARIAN FEMINISM OF THE MAIN CHARACTER IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING***

**A THESIS**

**In Partial Fulfilment of the Requirements for  
The Sarjana Degree Majoring Literature in English Department  
Faculty of Humanities Diponegoro University**

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## **PRONOUNCEMENT**

The writer confirms that he compiles this thesis by himself and without taking results from researchers in S-1, S-2, S-3 and in any diploma degree of other universities. The writer does not take any quotations from other research papers unless referenced otherwise.

Semarang, October 2017

Yeremia

## **MOTTO AND DEDICATION**

*Skip this page if you do not want to ruin the image of this paper*

**Yeremia**

*O Aja Ya kan*

**Samuel 'Young Lex' Alexander**

*God made so that happiness can be found around the corners of the world*

*Then He made the world round*

*Then He laughed again and again*

**Anonymous**

*I've been looking forward to this*

**Count Dooku, *Star Wars Episode III: Revenge of the Sith***

*This paper is dedicated to*

*My family and to*

*The people who helped me*

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I wholeheartedly agree to the fact that this thesis is still far from the ideal thesis and for that, I am open to constructive criticism that may help this thesis grow into a better one for us all.

In the end, I expect that this thesis will be useful for readers who are looking to gain more insight about radical-libertarian feminism in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

Semarang, October 20<sup>th</sup> 2017

Yeremia

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## ABSTRAK

Skripsi ini membahas feminisme radikal-libertarian dalam tokoh utama *The Awakening* karya Kate Chopin. Hal yang menjadi fokus utama dalam skripsi ini adalah aksi-aksi yang telah dilakukan oleh tokoh utama tersebut novel yang menunjukkan bahwa dia memiliki jiwa feminisme radikal-libertarian. Untuk dapat menganalisis hal tersebut, penulis menggunakan teori feminisme radikal-libertarian.

Tujuan penulisan skripsi ini adalah menjelaskan aksi-aksi tokoh utama *The Awakening* dan bagaimana aksi-aksi tersebut dapat membuatnya menjadi seorang feminis radikal-libertarian.

Metode penelitian dalam skripsi ini menggunakan metode *close reading* dan teori pendekatan yang digunakan adalah teori pendekatan feminis Bressler dan Djajanegara. Dalam analisis novel, penulis menggunakan teori Rosemary Thong. Data yang digunakan berupa konflik-konflik tokoh utama dengan tokoh lain di dalam novel, penyebab tokoh utama melakukan pemberontakan terhadap patriarki, serta perjuangan tokoh utama sebagai feminis radikal-libertarian.

Hasil analisis novel tersebut menunjukkan bahwa terdapat kecenderungan feminisme radikal-libertarian di dalam tokoh utama *The Awakening*. Hal ini dapat dilihat dari sikap-sikap tokoh utama yang tidak mengikuti standar kewanitaan yang diinginkan oleh patriarki. Penyebab tokoh utama melakukan perjuangan ini adalah keinginan tokoh utama untuk bebas dari masyarakat dan suaminya patriarkis, serta keinginan tokoh utama untuk mencari cinta sejatinya. Tokoh utama telah berjuang untuk meraih hal-hal itu dengan cara tidak mengikuti perintah dan permintaan suaminya, dengan menjadi seniman, dan dengan membeli rumah baru untuknya.

# CHAPTER I

## INTRODUCTION

### 1.1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

Feminism is a movement dedicated to empowering women ever since its rise in the 19th century. It is one of the fastest growing movements, and is a movement that changes the way the world perceive women. Feminism strive to create a paradigm where women are seen not as a thing or a possession of men, but as an equal human being and as a free individual. Feminism wants to bring women out of the second-sex paradigm and bring equality between the sexes. Feminism has been a persistent movement ever since it is devised, and is only growing even wider in range.

One of the writers who embraces feminism is Kate Chopin. Kate Chopin is a writer with a very distinctive view on the world of women. Many of her works are about ‘chained’ female characters, either by her own desire (“A Shameful Affair”) or by the social structure (“La Belle Zoraide”). She has her own way of writing about women, and there is no doubt that she is one of the most prominent feminist authors in the history of literature.

As one of the most prominent feminist authors in the world, Kate Chopin surely knows how to write all about female characters. Although her husband allows Chopin to be creative in her life, as a woman living in an era where women emancipation is not so famous, Chopin herself lives a life like any other women trapped behind the patriarchal social structure. With a life like hers, it would only natural for Kate Chopin to write about women and their ‘fight’ to show that women are not just another mindless subject for the whim of men.

Chopin is the author of the famous novel *The Awakening*, a story of a mother trying to find her own individuality. The main character of *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier, wants

to see the world outside of the borders of womanhood and motherhood. She misses her individuality greatly, defies her husband's whims, conducts an affair with another character, and cheats on him with another character. All show that she belongs to no one but her desire. She meets characters that moulds her view on individuality and in the end, she kills herself because of her inability to find her escape from her motherly impulses.

Even though the end of the novel tells a woman's failure in finding her individuality, the novel is still about the struggles of a woman trying to escape from her confinement and to find her individuality in which feminism always strives to achieve.

The novel is one of the first novels that talks about finding individuality of a female character, Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has been the subject of many researches. One researcher who conducts an analysis on the subject is Anjana Dhir (2011) from Heinrich-Heine University. Dhir, who researches the subject on a fulfilment for a course on American realism and naturalism in short stories, titles her research as Female Empowerment in Kate Chopin's "The Awakening". In her research, Dhir uses the theory of imagery to find the subtle female empowerment in the subject. She analyses the Creole society that the main character lives in and signifies the imagery hidden behind the events in the novel. She concludes that the main character's suicide in the end of the novel as a symbol of her victory, as she now has taken her own life by her own choice.

While Dhir bases her research of female empowerment in the novel by looking at the subtle imagery and the symbolism, she has yet to find the correlation between feminism itself and the main character actions in the book. Although she manages to find the hidden symbolisms, the main character actions themselves are not the cause of the symbolisms. Dhir analyses the female empowerment theme on the base of how Kate Chopin chooses her words

and arranges the sentences, not by signifying the character development of the main character.

This research stands in opposition to Dhir's research because this research is about finding how Kate Chopin applies radical-libertarian feminism in the research subject. Dhir's research is limited to how the French-Creole society works in the novel but not giving any emphasis on the main character's non-Creole background. The importance of this research compared to Dhir's research is that this research is trying to analyse the development of the main character itself. This research talks about finding the significance of the main character's actions and how integrated her actions are to the radical-libertarian feminism world. This research analyses the main character herself, and how she, as a female character, wants to find her individuality, cope with the patriarchal world around her.

This research is important in that it tries to find the essence that makes the novel still relevant as a research object even in the 21st century. Radical-libertarian feminism is a movement that is still going strong, and by researching this novel and the subject of radical-libertarian feminism in it, it will only strengthen the radical-libertarian movement in bringing equality between the two sexes.

In writing this thesis, the writer will discuss what feminism is, specifically the radical-libertarian one, and how it affects the life of Edna Pontellier as the main character of the novel. Furthermore, the writer will discuss the patriarchal society of New Orleans and Grand Isle in the 19th century, how the century perceives female characters in general, and the life of the main character at that time. The writer will discuss the patriarchy in New Orleans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, the life of Edna Pontellier in said society, the conflicts between the main character with herself and the other characters, her causes of defiance, and will analyse the struggles of the main character to reach her goal of being an individual.

## **1.2. RESEARCH PROBLEMS**

1. How is the patriarchal society in 19<sup>th</sup> century New Orleans in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*?
2. How does Edna Pontellier live her life in New Orleans society in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*?
3. What are Edna Pontellier's conflicts with the other characters in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*?
4. What are the causes of Edna Pontellier's defiance in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*?
5. What are Edna Pontellier's struggles to achieve her individuality in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*?

## **1.3. PURPOSES OF THE STUDY**

1. To describe the patriarchal society in New Orleans in the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*
2. To analyse how Edna Pontellier live her life in New Orleans society in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*
3. To analyse the conflicts between Edna Pontellier with herself and the other characters in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*
4. To analyse the causes of Edna Pontellier's defiance in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*
5. To analyse Edna Pontellier's struggles in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

## **1.4. METHODS OF THE STUDY**

### **1.4.1. Research Approach**

Based on the background of the study above, the writer uses feminist approach to analyse the content of the novel. Because there are many feminist theories, there can never be one definite way to approach a text using a feminist approach. Bressler says that one way to approach a text using a feminist approach is to expose stereotypes of women in said text (1999:190).

Although Bressler does give the writer a peek at what the writer needs to be done to approach a text using a feminist approach, Bressler does not exactly pinpoints all the important points the writer needs to convey to approach a text in a feminist way. To further explains it, Djajanegara (2003: 51-53) says there are seven points that the writer needs to consider if the writer wants to use feminist approach in a text. Those points are the identification of the female characters in the text, the standings of the female characters, the life goals of those female characters, the actions and knowledge of the female characters that is narrated directly by the author of the text, the words of those female characters and the way they say those words, the male characters that interacts with the female characters, and the author of the text itself.

### **1.4.2. Method of Data Collection**

The writer has conducted an extensive bibliothecal research on the subject of feminism. George (2008:6) said that library research at the basic is a process that “involves identifying and locating sources that provide factual information or personal/expert opinion on a research question”. Therefore, to find the needed data and a sizable information on the

research subject, the writer uses Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, books, and articles from the internet to write this thesis.

## **1.5. ORGANIZATION OF THE STUDY**

### **CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION**

This chapter is divided into five sub-chapters. Those chapters are background of study, research problems, purposes of the study, methods of the study, and the organization of the study.

### **CHAPTER II: THE AUTHOR AND HER WORK**

In this chapter, the writer gives a short biography of Kate Chopin and a synopsis of *The Awakening*.

### **CHAPTER III: THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter, the writer explains the theories that are applied in the study. The theories in use are general theory of feminism and a more specific radical-libertarian feminism,

### **CHAPTER IV: DISCUSSION**

In this chapter, the writer analyses the findings based on the research problems. The writer analyses the patriarchy in New Orleans and Grand Isle in the 19<sup>th</sup> century of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, the life of Edna Pontellier in New Orleans society, the conflicts of Edna Pontellier, the causes of Edna Pontellier's defiance, and the struggles of Edna Pontellier.

## **CHAPTER V: CONCLUSION**

## CHAPTER II

### THE AUTHOR AND HER WORK

#### 2.1. BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Kate Chopin was not always Kate Chopin at first. In St. Louis, Missouri in 1850, Kate O'Flaherty was born to Eliza and Thomas O'Flaherty. She was the third child out of five, but unfortunately, her siblings died too early.

In 1870, when she was just twenty, she married the son of a Louisiana born cotton entrepreneur by the name of Oscar Chopin. Oscar pretty much adored and worshipped his wife because she is independent and smart. Oscar gave her a degree of freedom. After they married, Oscar and Kate moved to New Orleans where she had seven children, all when she was just under twenty-eight. Oscar though was not too business minded (as in, he was not a good entrepreneur), and because they did not have a lot of money they had to move to his old home in Louisiana. Oscar died of a freak disease there by 1882. In 1884, Chopin moved back to St. Louis and returned to her mother. Not long after she moved there, Chopin's mother died, leaving Kate alone with no one but her and her children. Because she wanted to feed her children, she started to write and illustrate. She published her very first novel titled *At Fault* in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Chopin published *The Awakening* not long after.

Her life as a writer ended in an abrupt and frustrated manner when she died of a cerebral haemorrhage on August 22 1904.

#### 2.2. SUMMARY OF KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING*

Edna was always an obedient wife and a dedicated mother, but one day, she realized that everything she had been through was nothing compared to the life out there. She was

tired of being a mother to the two and was tired of having to follow her husband's words. That was when she met Robert Lebrun, the son of the house owner. Her meeting with Robert incited Edna's first awakening to the greater parts of life she had not been able to see and dwell in because of her motherly duties.

When her husband left for a job and when her sons left her for a visit to a distant family, she tried to explore the world out there. Her meetings with many people fuelled her will to be 'awakened'. She realized that she was missing many important things to her.

In her journey, she met two important figures that told her two different views on how to perceive womanhood. The first person she met was Adele Ratignole, a singer who was pregnant at the time Edna met her. From Adele's childbirth, she learned how a woman would always be entitled to care for their sons and daughters, a fact that Edna could not accept as one thing that could help her find her individuality.

The second person to meet her was Mademoiselle Reisz, an artist living in a self-exile. When Mademoiselle Reisz told Edna that the secret of a woman's individuality lied behind a woman's asexuality, Edna could not accept it too, as she liked sex too much for her to let it go.

When her sons left her for a visit to a distant family member and her husband went to conduct a business affair, Edna tried to embrace the masculine side of the gender, going as far as buying herself a house, which was a very masculine thing to do at the time. Though it was going well at first, she could not leave her motherly desire just like that.

In the end, when everything she had tried failed to help her find the individuality she desired, her last resolution to the question was death. She killed herself by drowning herself in the sea, all with her childhood memory in her mind.

Source: *The Awakening*.

## **CHAPTER III**

### **LITERARY REVIEW**

#### **3.1. Intrinsic Elements of Prose**

##### **3.1.1. Characterization**

According to Kennedy, characters are imaginary people who inhabit the novel (1983). Wellek and Warren describe characterization as form of a novel's allegory and that the type of character written in the novel can be one of the things that can change the dynamics of the narrative (1949:227).

Murphy (1972: 162-173) says that there are nine ways to characterize a character in a novel. Those nine ways are: the personal description as narrated by the narrator of the novel, the description made by another character in the novel, the speeches of the character, the character's past life, the conversation of other characters regarding the character, the reactions of other characters towards the character, the direct comments commented by the author of the book towards the character, and the thoughts of the character.

##### **3.1.2. Setting**

Abram says that setting is the locale, the historical time, and the social circumstances in which every actions within the novel occurs. The physical location of an episode within the work is the setting of the novel (2009:330).

Wellek and Warren say that a setting is an important aspect that will have a major effect on the plot. On the same note, an author can use settings as means of characterization, as a setting may describe what a character is or is not (1949:229).

## **3.2. Extrinsic Elements**

### **3.2.1 Radical-Libertarian Feminism**

Radical-feminism is a branch of feminism that perceives women as a pawn of the patriarchal system. Unlike the other branches, who fight to gain their places in the patriarchal society, they want to get rid of the 'system' itself, claiming that they exist not to reform the system, but to revolutionize them. In their revolution, they strive to change how the system works. They do not conform to the system established by patriarchy but they wholly change the system, making it possible for women and men to have common grounds separated neither by biological nor mental capabilities. Radical-feminists, unlike any other branches of feminism, think that their oppression comes from the very fundamental fact of them all: that they are oppressed for having a female reproductive organ.

Thong says that 'women's oppression for being a woman' is hard to interpret (2009:49). Thong interprets the sentence as the following five points: that women were always historically the first one to be oppressed, that women's oppression is widespread and has existed in every society, that women's oppression is the hardest to abolish and changes on class-based society will not remove it, that the oppression of women will cause horrible sufferings to its victim, and that the oppression of women is the base of other models of oppressions.

Radical feminists share those five principles and develop ways of dealing with them according to the aspects of gender traits they embrace. Thong splits radical-feminists into two camps who believe in the same principles and problems, but with their own different ways of handling them. Those two camps are radical-libertarian feminists and radical-cultural feminists (2009:49).

The differences between the two radical feminists can be seen in the way they see and handle the women's physical and mental nature. They also have their differences regarding how to perceive masculine and feminine gender traits, a woman's sexuality, and motherhood.

### **3.2.1.1. Radical-Libertarian Feminism on Gender Traits**

First, radical-libertarian feminism puts emphasis on gender traits. While the radical-cultural feminism puts emphasis on women's natural aspects and feministic tendencies, the radical-libertarian feminists reject the idea, thinking that women oppressions exists because of their feminine aspects. Instead of wholly embracing their feminine aspect, radical-libertarian feminists think that women should embrace the masculine side of the human psyche as well. Thong (2009:50) says that the term 'bitch' is a term that describes what women should be in that they are androgynous, embracing the masculine and feminine aspect of the human psyche and 'has no liking for the indirect, subtle, mysterious ways of the eternal feminine'. She added that 'a "Bitch" does not want to limit herself to being a sweet girl with little standing in the way of power' and that 'she wants to embrace the masculine characteristics that permit her to lead life on her own'.

Beauvoir (1949) says that a woman is never born as a woman, but the individuals that will later become women have to go through a process of reaching such state. Radical-libertarian feminism adheres to that opinion. They rejected the idea that that there are connections between the human sex (male and female) with the human gender (masculine and feminine). They claim that this connection is a construction of the patriarchal society to keep women passive by branding them with traits such as 'affectionate, obedient, and cheerful' while branding the men with traits such as 'tenacious, aggressive, ambitious, and competitive'. Instead of wholly embracing traits of one gender, radical-libertarian feminism

thinks that women should balance the two if they want to be seen as an individual with unique personalities (Thong, 2009:51).

### **3.2.1.2. Radical-Libertarian Feminism and Sexuality**

The second topic is how radical-libertarian feminism sees sexuality and its importance for women liberation. Radical-libertarian feminism thinks that sexuality can be both a blessing and a curse. In one point, they see the heterosexual form of sexuality as a form of oppression, saying that heterosexual majority has oppressed the sexual minorities. According to Shulamith Firestone (1970), any kinds of sexual contacts, be it incestual or homosexual, are acceptable in the eyes of radical-libertarian feminist. Most importantly, Firestone put emphasis on the belief that they should assume control over their own sexuality and should take back the rights to practice things that will give them the satisfaction they seek. Women should be allowed to embrace things that will give them a sense of freedom, not to join in things that will only help men dominates them (Tong, 2009:66).

### **3.2.1.3. Radical-Libertarian Feminism and Motherhood**

The third difference between radical-libertarian feminism and the other types of feminism lies within motherhood. While the cultural part of radical feminism thinks that the women is empowered by having the ability to be pregnant and to give birth, radical libertarian feminism thinks that natural pregnancy is a form of oppression made by the patriarchal system. Firestone (1970), who is a vocal objector of this oppression, explains that natural pregnancy creates a bond that is oppressing to both the mother and the children, therefore creating a form of paradigm where mothers should always feel inclined to feel bonded with the children. The link motherhood creates chains women into what can be called as a slavery of body and mind; body because society expects women to have the utmost of

cares when handling the children they have birthed and mind because they are forbidden from having any oedipal relationship with their children.

Aside from being a chain for women, radical-libertarian feminists think that natural motherhood is another obstacle for the establishment of an androgynous society. Firestone herself thinks that as long motherhood is still around, both women and children cannot fully express themselves. While natural means of reproduction is still the norm, there will be distinctions between females and males, therefore making it difficult for a truly androgynous society to exist. Aside from being an obstacle to the establishment of an androgynous society, natural reproduction is the root of possessiveness, a vice that will create hostility and jealousy (Thong, 2009:75).

## CHAPTER IV

### ANALYSIS

#### 4.1. THE PATRIARCHY IN NEW ORLEANS IN THE 19<sup>TH</sup> CENTURY

##### 4.1.1. The Women of New Orleans are expected to obey their husbands

Ever since the dawn of ages, women have been the subject of countless oppression by the patriarchal society. *The Awakening's* New Orleans is not one to bend the rule, as the state of New Orleans is still ripe with hegemonies that put women as the second number in the sexual hierarchy. The female characters of this novel are still under the chains of subordination imposed by their husbands or fathers. There are three major points of women's bondage in New Orleans' society, and those three bondages have three different subjects to whom women are subjected to.

It is no secret that the husbands of New Orleans tell their wives to be a loyal and caring companion for them. In *The Awakening*, the trace of this oppression can be seen from the eyes of Edna Pontellier, the main character of the novel. Edna Pontellier meets many other characters, some who shows the reality of women oppression within the society she lives in. Two of the obvious examples of how women are bound by the husbands can be seen from the relationship between Edna Pontellier and her husband, Leonce Pontellier and the relationship between Adele Ratignolle, a friend of Edna's, and her husband.

Leonce Pontellier is a man who cares highly of his possession. He has many assets and he cares for them in equal manners. The New Orleans society deems him a good husband and a good father, whose generosity put him in a good position in the eyes of women in New Orleans, as can be seen in the quote 'and the ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily, all declared that Mr Pontellier was the best husband in the world'

(Chopin, 1992:13). He sees Edna and his children as an extension of those assets, saying that Edna's tendency to play under the sun as 'destructive' to one of it, quoted in "'you are burnt beyond recognition,'" he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of property.' (Chopin, 1992:3).

While Leonce Pontellier is not inherently possessive with his wife and is willing to let her roam free after he follows an advice from a friend, Leonce does exhibit a trait of masculinity halfway in the novel, evident when he expects Edna to stay in the house and to receive the guests from other houses to keep his business afloat. He expects his wife to be obedient and is angry when she does not do so. His anger comes from Edna's search for her individuality, something that he does not expect from his wife. He, to an old friend of his, mentions Edna's disobediences as making him uncomfortable, and it can be seen in the quote 'She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me,' (Chopin, 1992:124).

Leonce Pontellier is the perfect description of what husbands of *The Awakening's* New Orleans should be. He is protective of his possession, and the society deems it fit for him to see his wife and children as one. The others admire him for his attention and his gifts to his family, while in reality he is blind to the plight of his wife, who is struggling to find her way out of his shadow.

#### **4.1.2. The women of New Orleans are told to be a good mother**

The writer sees another trace of men's domination against women in *The Awakening* in the presence of another character in the novel, Adele Ratignolle, a friend of Edna. She has many children and is truly embracing the nature of womanhood to be a mother and a caretaker for their husband and children. The narrator of the book describes her as an ideal woman of the society and proceeds to tell the readers that a husband who does not adore her deserves a death with a slow torture.

While this hyperbole can be seen as a way to empower womanly qualities through her womanly traits, it has the same emphasis on women's bondage to every family related things. Just like the hegemony that men who bought gifts for their families are good men, a woman who embraces the loving mother stereotype is deemed as a good woman in New Orleans society of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*.

One day in an exchange between them, Edna declares that she is not willing to give herself to the children, but she is willing to give them the 'unessential' like money and her life (Chopin, 1992:90). Adele rebukes the thought, saying that 'women who would give her life for her children could do no more than that'.

This exchange is the evidence of the fact that *The Awakening's* New Orleans society is still constricting to women. Adele Ratignolle thinks that women who has already given her children her life cannot offer more than that. It implies that Adele, the ideal woman character in the society, does not know female's individuality, the thing that Edna is trying to find and keep to herself in the course of *The Awakening*.

#### **4.1.3. The Women of New Orleans Need to Give Her Independence**

In the topic of independence, women of New Orleans have little of the kind. All of the women are expected to be obedient to their husbands or their fathers. Women who do not have a male counterpart in their lives are seen as pariah in the society, and Mademoiselle Reisz is an example of that. Mademoiselle Reisz is an old woman who choose not to get married simply because she cannot find the right man for her ('if I were young and in love with a man, it seems to me he would have to be some grand esprit...' Chopin, 1992:155). She is a talented pianist and a self-proclaimed artist and is called to an event held in Grand isle in the beginning of the novel to play the piano, which is something that she is willing to do only because Edna is present to hear her play. She is reclusive and unpopular in the society of New

Orleans, which can be seen in this quote: ‘In truth, he did not want to know her at all, or anything concerning her—the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street’, (Chopin, 1992:112) mainly because she has chosen to retain her independence.

Another evidence of how women should give her independence away lies in the sentence uttered by Leonce Pontellier ‘nice girls; it’s time they were getting married’ (Chopin, 1992:97). While this sentence might be short and unassuming in itself, Leonce Pontellier was the one who said it. Leonce, as mentioned before, is the description of a perfect New Orleans man. His way of thinking is accepted in the eyes of many people in New Orleans’ society. He conforms to the will of the society, hence this makes him tolerable and agreeable to *The Awakening*’s New Orleans society.

As stated by Thong, female oppression is virtually everywhere, even when the oppression is indirect. The few examples mentioned above show how strong the hegemony patriarchy imposed on the female characters of *The Awakening*. Although Edna does not openly declare that she is against the hegemony, she shows radical tendencies that contradicts with the society’s view on women. Edna establishes herself as a character that shows how oppressed the women of *The Awakening*’s New Orleans are.

## **4.2. THE LIFE OF EDNA PONTELLIER IN NEW ORLEANS SOCIETY**

### **4.2.1. Personal Life**

#### **4.2.1.1. Edna is a Woman of Her Husband’s Possession**

In the start of the novel, the narrator of the novel explains the world from the point of view of Leonce Pontellier, a business magnate who is married to Edna Pontellier, the main

character of the novel. From Leonce's point of view, it can be seen that Leonce sees Edna as his sole possession. Leonce sees Edna as an object for him to care for and a pair of ears that must always heed him in his time of needs.

Before her eventual self-awakening, Edna herself is a woman who at first sees herself as a woman of Leonce Pontellier's belonging. She knows that she is 'owned' by her husband because she asks for the wedding ring to be returned to her when she is done playing around with Robert Lebrun. The evidence of it can be seen in 'Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach' (Chopin, 1992: 4). In here, she has not found her individuality yet. She still believes that the wedding ring in her finger is an object that symbolizes her bondage to the wedding that she deems an 'accident'.

Before the vacation to Grand Isle, Edna has always been the woman who is trying to please her husband by adhering to his whims. She will do everything he wants for her without thinking on the subject. For some time, she tries to learn how to cook because her husband does not find the food cooked by the cooks to be appetizing, evident in the line 'Once she went to her room and studied the cookbook during an entire evening...' (Chopin 1992: 98-99).

#### **4.2.1.2. Edna is a Mother of Two and is expected to Act like One**

Edna is a mother of two children, Raoul and Etienne Pontellier. They are both children that is independent in some measure, as they are not used to running to their mother when something happened to them, which can be seen in 'If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort' (Chopin 1992: 14).

Because of her children's tendency to be independent, Edna does not feel entitled to safe-keep them constantly. She cares for them in a manner that is indirect. The evidence of

her indirect love is when she decides to them buy them candies ‘she stopped at a confectioner’s and ordered a huge box of bonbons for the children...’ (Chopin 1992: 156). There is an intense longing in her soul for them, as quoted in ‘feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing’ (Chopin 1992:36). Her indirect acts of compassion often eludes her husband’s view. While the other mothers of New Orleans are not ashamed in showing their devotion to their children, Edna Pontellier declares that she is not a mother-woman, as quoted in the novel ‘In short, Mrs Pontellier was not a mother woman’, (Chopin, 1992:14). Her husband, who is the perfect icon of how *The Awakening*’s New Orleans society is patriarchal, thinks that the act does not please him. It is evident when the narrator narrates his discontent towards Edna’s failing in her motherly duty, which can be seen in the quote ‘It would have been a difficult matter for Mr Pontellier to define his own satisfaction or anyone else’s wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children’ (Chopin, 1992: 14).

Edna adheres to how radical-libertarian feminists see motherhood as she tends not to be possessive of her children. Seeing that her children are an independent bunch, she does not feel compelled to keep watching them at all time, nor is she compelled to act like a ‘normal’ mother of that time.

#### **4.2.1.3. Edna is a Daughter of a Patriarchal Man**

Edna is a daughter to a war veteran who adheres to the restrictive patriarchal ways of living. He is written only in a few parts in *The Awakening*, but although he is not a major character that has an effect on Edna’s character development, his minor appearance does tell the readers a bit about the world the characters are living in.

From the little words that come out of his mouth, it is evident that he is a character that is even more patriarchal than Leonce Pontellier. Before Edna and Leonce get married, it

is Edna's father that staunchly objects to the thought, which can be seen in the quote 'add to this the violent opposition from her father and sister Margaret to her marriage...' (Chopin, 1992:35). Edna, who does not feel like being controlled by her father, decides to marry Leonce in order to show that she is not someone to control.

Another dialog that put emphasis on Edna's father's patriarchal tendency is when he and Leonce talks about Edna's disobedience. He advised Leonce to 'put your foot down and hard; the only way to manage a wife.' (Chopin, 1992:135-136). This act of coercion is a proof that he is willing to use force to dominate his wife, an act that is now unacceptable in the eyes of society as Leonce himself does not like the idea of using force to make Edna submit to him.

## **4.2.2. Social Life**

### **4.2.2.1. Edna Associates with Other Women of Her Stature**

#### **4.2.2.1.1. Edna and Adele Ratignolle**

Edna Pontellier associates with other women she met in Grand Isle. From the association, she meets Adele Ratignolle, a woman that is heralded as the perfect woman in the eyes of the society. Adele Ratignolle, like Edna, is married to a man and she mothers many children. She plays the piano, much like Mademoiselle Reisz, but her playing the piano never moves Edna. Unlike Edna, she shows an obvious devotion towards her husband and her children, which is something that Edna does not find amusing. Despite their constant contradicting views on the world of womanhood and motherhood, nevertheless Edna sees Adele Ratignolle as a close friend.

#### **4.2.2.1.2. Edna and Madame Lebrun**

Aside from Adele Ratignolle, Edna associates with Madame Lebrun, who is a mother to Robert Lebrun. Madame Lebrun is the bridge that connects Edna and Mademoiselle Reisz by giving Edna the address of the Mademoiselle's house.

#### **4.2.2.2. Edna Associates with an Artist**

Mademoiselle Reisz is a talented pianist and a self-proclaimed artist, and Edna's meeting with her is one of the most important things that bring Edna's individuality out. The mademoiselle is fond of Edna's defiant nature, and although there is never a hint of intimacy between them, Mademoiselle Reisz sees Edna as someone who is different from the others and it is evident when she says that Edna is the only one worth playing the piano for.

Mademoiselle Reisz is an artist, a title that Edna is always striving to reach. She tells Edna that a true artist is someone with a soul that 'dares and defies' (Chopin, 1992: 120). It implies that an artist must be brave and be defiant, which Edna presses that she has them both in her.

The mademoiselle sees them both in Edna's soul, as she declares that it is her sole reason for her willingness to play Chopin's *Impromptu* when Edna visits her in her New Orleans house. The evidence is when Edna says: 'show me the letter and play for me the Impromptu. You see I have persistence. Does that quality count for anything in art?' to which the Mademoiselle replies: 'It counts with a foolish old woman whom you have captivated,' (Chopin 1992:121)

Edna's meeting with the Mademoiselle is one point that arouses Edna's will to have her individuality awakened, making it an important meeting that set the course of the novel. While her meeting with Adele Ratignolle only helps the readers pinpoint Edna's discontent with life of a 'perfect' woman of New Orleans, it is Mademoiselle Reisz that guides her way

in finding her individuality. Mademoiselle Reisz's playing of the piano give Edna a way of seeing things outside of the box. It stirs a rebellion in Edna's soul and it pushes her to do things that synergises with the tenets of radical-libertarian feminism. From her, Edna learns a way of opening herself to new opportunities to find the radical aspects inside of her, and in front of Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna declares that she is willing to break free from the loveless marriage between Edna and her husband by admitting that Edna loves Robert.

### **4.3. THE CONFLICTS OF EDNA PONTELLIER**

#### **4.3.1. The Conflicts between Edna Pontellier and Her Husband**

##### **4.3.1.1. Edna is Forced to Listen to Her Husband**

Edna is someone who can think for herself, but her husband does not think her able to do so. Because the two of them represent a contrasting ideology, with one representing oppression and the other representing freedom, there are many conflicts between Leonce and Edna. Edna is a woman that is trying to break free from the chains of patriarchy while her husband is the embodiment of that chain. There will be clashes of ideology between them.

The very first conflict takes place in the beginning of the novel, particularly after Edna's husband returns from the club. Edna, who is sleeping at the moment, is forced to check on one of her children by her husband. While Edna thinks that it is unnecessary to do so, her husband keep forcing her to do so. He is adamant in thinking that one of his children is sick with fever. When Edna says that she does not want to do so, her husband tells her that she is inattentive. He reproaches her and says that she neglects her children.

Because Edna is tired of his husband insistence, she finally checks on the children. When she returns, she does not answer her husband's question and instead leaves him for the

porch. There, she cries her heart out for reasons unknown. She does not cry because of her husband's insistence, as evident in this quote: 'She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband....' Chopin, 1992:11-12). She cries not because of the cruel fate that brings her to this moment of life, either, which is proven in this quote: '...lamenting at fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken' Chopin, 1992:12). She cries because she wants to cry for herself.

From here, Edna shows another side of her radical-libertarian feminism aspect. She shows individuality that is unbound to her husband's action and is even unbound to the whim of fates. Chopin writes Edna in a way that makes her free from fate, which is a basic thing that is normally seen as the absolute dictator of a human's life. Edna, adhering to radical-libertarian feminism, breaks the system imposed by the natural order. She does not want to be obedient to the dictating laws of fate and instead cries because she pushes herself to cry.

#### **4.3.1.2. Edna Rejects Her Husband's Offer to Enter the House**

The second conflict between the two of them can be seen when Edna rejects her husband's offer to come inside the house after the gathering in Grand Isle has ended. Her husband tells Edna to come in. First, he calls her with an irritable tone, to which she rejects. Second, he calls her with a softer approach than the first, which she also rejects. The act makes her husband grow even more impatient and irritated. She instead tells her husband to go to bed and says that she will not talk to him again. Her husband is then left angered by her insolence, choosing to stay awake and to watch over Edna instead of catering to Edna's wish.

#### **4.3.1.3. Edna Does not Want to Accept Guests in Reception Day**

Another conflict is when Edna does not attend her reception day after the Pontellier household returns to New Orleans. Instead of exchanging pleasure with the other families, Edna chooses to go out for a stroll, as quoted in 'I found their cards when I got home; I was

out', (Chopin 1992: 96). This act of insolence makes her husband angry with her and they both get in an argument. The repercussion brings her husband out of the house to dine alone and Edna is flustered because of it. Right after the intense argument has ended, Edna locks herself in her room and throws her wedding ring to the ground. She hopes to destroy that ring. By doing this, she pronounces her intention to be radical by breaking the object that symbolizes her bondage.

#### **4.3.1.4. Edna Neglects her Household Duties**

The fourth conflict is when Edna announces her wish to do things she wants to do to her husband. She neglects her household duties and instead she does things she has never been able to do with her constant submissiveness to her husband. This again angers her husband, and when he confronts her on the topic, she chooses to answer him ambiguously, not giving him the answer he is looking for. Its evidence can be seen in this particular quote: "It isn't on account of painting that I let things go." Chopin, 1992: 109).

### **4.3.2. The Conflicts between Edna Pontellier and Adele Ratignolle**

#### **4.3.2.1. Edna is not a Good Mother in Adele's Eyes**

Edna cannot and will not replicated Adele Ratignolle, who is a mother woman and a good wife to her husband. Edna, who is trying to find her way out of the constriction set up by the society around her, cannot fathom how Adele Ratignolle can live a life like that. Although they are close friends, it is evident that they do not see each other's way of seeing things as acceptable to one and the other. Many of their conflicts are indirect in that they are not the ones who directly argue with each other, but Adele's ways of living have often put Edna deep in thoughts about the constriction that the society has put on women. Although the

number of conflict between them is limited, their conflicts are what puts the novel on course and conflicts that jumpstart Edna's character development.

The first conflict between them can be seen when they trade words on the topic of motherhood. Adele is lenient with being a mother that is willing to give her family everything she owns while Edna is not, thereby further pronouncing the difference between them. This conflict happens because of Edna's rejection of the traditional motherhood point of view and about women submissiveness in general. In saying that a woman has herself to keep, Edna does not conform the way of thinking that women who give their lives cannot give anything else.

#### **4.3.2.2. Edna is not an Obedient Wife While Adele is Obedient**

The second conflict is an indirect conflict between Edna and the Ratignolle couple. When Edna visits their house, the Ratignolles understand each other perfectly, a feature that Edna cannot achieve with her husband. While her husband speaks, Adele Ratignolle will listen to him with her fullest attention and is content with it. Their exchanges are joyful ones. Edna however, cannot see how does a life like that can be enough for Adele. She sees Adele as a prisoner of her own life, not able to see the colours of the world at its fullest, as described in this quote from *The Awakening*: 'She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle, -- a pity for that colourless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment' (Chopin, 1992: 107). This conflict signifies Edna's view on women's freedom and how bland a marriage like the Ratignolles' is. Edna thinks that a marriage where the wife is always willing to listen to the husband is not a good marriage for the wife.

#### **4.3.2.3. Edna is Repulsed by Natural Labour While Adele is Not**

The third and the last conflict can be seen when Edna watches Adele while the latter is delivering her baby. The sight proves to be agonizing for Edna. The childbirth makes her uneasy and it makes her want to leave. It brings many emotions to Edna's mind, particularly those that troubles her. Edna's discontent towards the nature of childbirth and her uneasiness when she is witnessing one is an implied proof that she is unwilling to see such suffering on women. She describes the scene as torturous and is degrading to women, which is a way of thinking that radical-libertarian feminists share.

#### **4.3.3. The Conflict between Edna Pontellier and Robert Lebrun**

Edna's awakening cannot happen without the 'catalyst' that is Robert Lebrun. He is introduced in the beginning in the novel, playing around with Edna at a beach in Grand Isle. He is a man who is trying to find his place in the world, constantly searching for ways to reach for his ambition. Unlike Leonce Pontellier though, he is not too ambitious in his search and is not one to overlook other people's feelings. He and Edna spend time together in Grand Isle, and not long after, both of them fall in love with each other. Edna loves him because he is the one that has made her realize how much she is missing in life by being submissive to Leonce.

Although they seem to complete each other and is the power couple of the novel, everything changes when Robert travels to Mexico in search of a new business opportunity. Much like Edna's conflict with Adele Ratignolle in a way that they have occasional arguments with each other, the conflicts between Edna and Robert are often indirect.

The conflict between them is apparent when Robert decides to go to Mexico without telling Edna of when he will be leaving. The news is relayed to her in the dinner event. Although Edna has yet to admit her longing for Robert to the others, nevertheless she is

surprised to find that Robert will be leaving the night after the dinner. This conflict is the first conflict that puts Edna at a loss for what she should do. When Robert is trying to go, she is put in a state of confusion, trying to do things to keep her mind occupied and is unable to make up her mind whether she should go to the Lebrun's family house or not. This conflict can be seen as the first sign of Edna's radical awakening, as she, in Robert's departure, finds a newfound longing that signifies her will to be free from her marriage with the patriarchal Leonce.

#### **4.4. The Causes of Edna Pontellier's Defiance**

##### **4.4.1. Edna Does Not Want to be Subjugated**

In the beginning of the novel, the narrator describes Edna as a woman that is not one to fall under anyone else's subjugation. She is not a woman like any others, and the signs of her self-expression can be seen when she first married Leonce Pontellier. Her marriage to Leonce is not a marriage that her father and her sister agreed with, that is why she decides to go on with it. Edna rejects her father's wish for her to join him in her sister's wedding, putting her and her father at odds with each other. From here, it is evident that Edna is not a woman that can act like her sisters or her peers in that she is independent and is not one to be subjugated under the pretence of 'lack of filial kindness and respect' (Chopin, 1992:135). She is even glad when her father finally takes off to the wedding, not even slightly burdened by her father's threat that her sisters might not speak to her again because of her insolence.

Her insolence is a proof that she is willing to be direct, even when she faces her father, one of the most patriarchal figures in the novel. Because the tendency to be direct is one of the traits in the masculine side of the gender spectrum, Edna shows that she embraces not only the feminine side of the traits, but also the masculine one. This part shows that Edna

adheres to the radical-libertarian feminism views on gender trait. She embraces the masculine side while not throwing her feminine side away, which is what radical-libertarian feminism thinks that humans should do in order for the world to reach an androgynous society.

#### **4.4.2. Edna No Longer Feels the Sensuous Pull of Her Husband**

One of the reasons why Edna wants to be free is because she no longer feels sexually attracted to her husband. Along the course of her marriage, she is a person that is not sexually attracted to her husband and she only marries her husband because she wants to show her patriarchal father and sister that she belongs to no one to control. Although she finally succumbs to her husband sometimes in their marriage, everything she has done until the moment she meets Robert Lebrun is actually a force of habit. She is no longer sexually attracted to her husband and is trying to find ways to get out of his shadow. Edna does not want to do anything to do with her husband's business or even the Pontellier family's good name in general. She prefers to do things her own way and decides not to think much of the other things, which raises the ire of her patriarchal husband.

This sexual realization is one of the most important points in her self-awakening, and Edna only notices that she wants her sexual side to be explored when she meets Alcee Arobin.

Alcee Arobin is the infamous playboy whom Edna meets in the race track. His pleasuring demeanours awakened Edna's desires, acting like narcotics to Edna as quoted in 'his (Arobin's) presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotics upon her' (Chopin, 1992:147-148).

Alcee, with his words, managed to stir something Edna that she does not find pronounced when she spends her time with her husband or Robert. It appeals to 'the animalism that stirred impatiently within her' (Chopin, 1992: 149). When Alcee kisses her,

Edna returns the kiss passionately with the narrator describing the kiss as one that Edna replies as 'natural'.

Although Edna at first discourages Alcee from coming to her, she succumbed to his advances nonetheless and through him, she comes to a realization that she is a sexual being whose desires are yet to be satisfied when she lives with her husband.

#### **4.4.3. Edna Wants to Find Freedom from Her Loveless Marriage**

Ever since Edna falls in love with Robert Lebrun, there are no indications in the novel that she still wants to be with her husband. It is a repeated motif that she marries her husband only because she does not want to be controlled by other characters around her. Although she starts to grow fond of her husband, the lack of passion between her and her husband dissolute it. She starts seeing her marriage as one that does not happen because of love, but because it is an accident, one which 'masquerade as the decrees of Fate' (Chopin, 1992: 35).

Edna is not a woman that is not susceptible to love. She is infatuated with many men before she marries Leonce. In fact, she bravely admits that she is willing to go out of her way to stay away from the person she does not love and to get closer to the person that she loves. What makes her different from the other female characters in that novel is that she wants to find love on her accord. She cannot be forced to love someone that she does not really love, and she expects a certain degree of warmth from the one she loves for that love to truly prosper in her life.

She finds it in the presence of Robert Lebrun. She feels that there is something between them that she does not find in her relationship with Leonce. She is not afraid of getting caught 'cheating' on Leonce with Alcee, but she does give a second thought whether the act will hurt Robert or not. It is apparent in the following quotation 'she did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun' (Chopin, 1992: 147).

## **4.5. The Struggles of Edna Pontellier**

### **4.5.1. The Struggles of Edna in Defying Her Husband's Wishes**

#### **4.5.1.1. Edna Breaks Her Husband's Patriarchal System**

Edna does not like her husband's tendency to put her in his own system. In *The Awakening*, Edna's husband is a man that is above using violence to get what he wants from his wife, which is a stark contrast to Edna's father. Although he is the embodiment of patriarchy on that society, he is very generous with his wife and to his children. He cares for them in his own way, and he does not think twice about buying his family gifts as long his wife and children obey him.

This exchange pinnacles in a risk and reward system that stems from patriarchy. If you are obedient and you can follow the tasks that have been asked of you, you will be handsomely rewarded. This might seem a bit convenient for Edna – she only has to follow her husband's whims to get a proper sustenance – Edna rejects the idea of bowing to her husband's every wishes.

Edna is not one to stick around with a restricting system. Although she might have thrived by living on the system that her husband has created for her, she does not want to live in that system. She does not want to be able to sustain herself through the system that is not created by her. She wants to get out of the system and create her very own system where she can live independently.

These acts of defying her husband's wishes parallel with the basics of radical-libertarian feminism. Because Edna does want to be obedient to her husband, she embodies one of important points of radical-libertarian feminism, which is rebellion against the

established system. She wants to be outside of the system the society has created for her. What she is looking for is not material wealth that obedience will give to her; she is looking for the gift of freedom, a life where she can love anybody she truly loves. Her independence comes with several setbacks, but Edna is not afraid of facing the consequences. As long as she is free, she is ready to face the problems ahead.

#### **4.5.1.2. Edna does not Attend Her Reception Day**

This act is another form of declaration of independence from Edna. While other women will be satisfied with keeping the house clean and guests happy, Edna is not the one who is satisfied with such trivialities. She cannot be bothered to wear reception dresses and put on smiles for people she does not care about. That is why when Edna and the rest of the family return to New Orleans, Edna does not attend the reception day her husband expects her to attend.

This is another example of how Edna does not want to be oppressed with trivialities that a businessman's wife is expected to do. It shows how radical Edna is and how she is willing to forget all of her mundane duties that are enforced on her by her husband. At the end of the day, when the Pontelliers are having a dinner, Edna bravely says that such matter is not important and that her husband is making such a fuss over it.

When Edna does not attend the reception day, it is the first moment where Edna acts because of herself and not because of other matters. While she has Robert to accompany her back in Grand Isle, nobody sets the route for Edna when she is back in New Orleans. In this moment, she does things because she wants to, not because her husband or Robert tells her to. Here, Edna starts to act on her previous realization. The spark of rebellion in her mind is no longer a mere thought as she starts to pave way for her own system.

## **4.5.2. The Struggles of Edna to Lead Her Life**

### **4.5.2.1. Edna Wants to be an Artist**

As radical-libertarian feminism perceives women as pawns for their male counterpart, Edna is the embodiment of radical-libertarian feminism in the novel. Throughout her life, she has always been a pawn to the people around her. She is an obedient wife, a mother of two, and someone who has not the chance to show her individual talent as a painter. Everything changes, however, since the moment her narration enters the novel. She meets many characters that help her find her individuality. She realizes that she is not a free woman, and that is the first step of her radical-libertarian awakening.

Along the course of the novel, Edna has always tried to be free from the bonds that have chained her. She has done many things in order to reach a certain degree of freedom she always expect to get. Although it is Robert that becomes the catalyst of her awakening, her actions in the novel show that there is always a spark of individuality in Edna's mind.

The first thing that signifies her radical-feminism tendency is her wish to be an artist in the world of painting. It is one of the things that Edna does to 'awaken' herself. Edna has always been the one with an eye for artistry in her family, with her father even acknowledging her ability as a painter. To be an artist, one must have a soul that is brave and defiant, as Mademoiselle Reisz told Edna, and Edna has the two qualities in her as it manages to captivate the old Mademoiselle. However, she says that 'it isn't on account of painting that I let things go' (Chopin, 1992: 109). It is suggesting that painting is not the only reason why she decides to let go of things.

### **4.5.2.2. Edna Searches for Mademoiselle Reisz**

The second act that Edna does to find her own self is to find Mademoiselle Reisz on her own accord. Edna goes through a substantial journey to find the Mademoiselle, going

from houses to houses to find her address all by herself and by her own wishes. Although Mademoiselle Reisz is an unsavoury character that is not widely liked by the society, Edna still wants to go to her. Edna does not care whether her name will be tarnished if she congregates with the Mademoiselle. She wants to find the Mademoiselle because the latter can help her awaken herself by playing Chopin's *Impromptu*.

Although this act may not seem so radical compared to her other acts, Mademoiselle Reisz is not a woman that is liked by Adele Ratignolle, the perfect woman of *The Awakening's* New Orleans, which is evident in the quote 'it was useless to ask Madame Ratignolle, who was on the most distant term with the musician...' (Chopin, 1992:112). As the perfect woman of the society, Adele indirectly depicts the society's wishes of not knowing more about the reclusive Mademoiselle. Knowing that, Edna still decides to visit the hermit-like Mademoiselle. Edna defies the society's wishes in order for her to be able to fulfil her own wishes.

These acts of defiance parallel with one of the tenets of radical-libertarian feminism on how it sees gender traits. While the women of *The Awakening's* New Orleans are expected to embrace the feminine side of the gender trait spectrum, Edna decides not to do so and just follow what her heart desires. By not wholly embracing the feminine side of the gender spectrum, she has become a 'bitch' of that era. She has laid the foundation of an androgynous character in the novel and she has made herself a depiction of radical-libertarian feminism.

### **4.5.3. The Struggle of Edna to Find her Sensuous Nature**

#### **4.5.3.1. Edna and Alcee's Obedience**

Alcee is very obedient to Edna. He is willing to do anything to please her, which is apparent from the quote 'his attitude became one of good humoured subservience and tacit

adoration' and 'he was ready all time to submit to her moods,' (Chopin, 1992: 149). He is the absolute gentleman of that era, submitting himself to the female characters' every whim because by doing that, the female characters will fall for him.

Edna is no different from the many women who have fallen to Arobin's advances. Thanks to his good humour and zealous obedience, Alcee manages to get on Edna's good side and starts to spend time with Edna. With Robert and her husband far away from her, Edna finds a liking in Alcee's present.

This part of the book might indicate Edna's need for a companionship and this might make her look like someone who cannot stand on her own feet, but there is another thing that must be taken into consideration before a conclusion can be taken. Edna likes Alcee not out of love. Edna likes Alcee because with Alcee around, she feels that she can assert control. Edna is always written as a free souled character that is forced to do things that contradicts with her own choosing. She always needs to obey the rules her husband, her friends, and the society have imposed on her. She never has the moment to make others bend to her will.

With Alcee, it is the other way around. Alcee is a devoted man that is willing to obey Edna's humour, good or cold. He plays with her, indulges her, and kisses her hand. He will go if Edna tells him to go and he will stay if Edna tells him to stay. With Alcee around, Edna feels like she finally has power over others.

#### **4.5.3.2. Edna and Alcee Trades a Kiss**

Edna, along the course of the novel, has never feel free in the world of sexuality before she meets Alcee Arobin. From Alcee, Edna learns that she has forgotten about her sensual nature. The loveless life that she has been living with her husband has dulled her sensuality, making her live through blind obedience where she must fulfil her husband's wishes without giving her own wishes a thought.

Alcee Arobin is an infamous playboy with many achievements on his side. He has spent great many times with many different married women, and Edna is another trophy that he is trying to win. Edna meets him in the horse-racing track, and ever since their meeting, Alcee has been trying to indulge Edna in order for him to win her heart.

Edna, who is discontent with Robert's and her husband's departure, has struggled to find someone else to channel her affection to. Alcee is the only person that is available, and from there they start to go to see each other out and they start to share intimate moments. One moment they share a kiss, and Edna finds out that the kiss 'was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded' (Chopin, 1992:159). However, even though Edna regrets the kiss, she does not feel ashamed and she does not feel any remorse by doing so. In fact, she only regrets her kiss because it 'was not the kiss of love' and 'was not the kiss that held this cup of life to her lips' (Chopin, 1992:160), indicating that she regrets it because she does not kiss Robert or her husband with the same passion she kissed Alcee.

This indicates that Edna is ready to unleash herself to the world of sexual liberation. The kiss may come out of nowhere, but Edna does nothing to keep it at bay. She instead brings Alcee closer to her and indulges herself in his lips. It is the first kiss that brings the natural reaction from her body, and she gets it not from the man she loves nor from the man that has provided her with things that has sustained her up to that moment.

Edna's feelings and actions at that point reflect how radical-libertarian feminism sees sexuality. In radical-libertarian feminism, every kinds of sexualities are acceptable in their eyes as long as the females take the lead. While in reality she is married to her husband and is in love with Robert, she does not see them both being capable in fulfilling her wishes due to the fact that are not present at the moment. Edna feels that it is only right for her to indulge herself with Alcee's presence. She dares herself to kiss Alcee passionately, and that is what

signifies Edna's willingness to go all out to be sexually free. She does not care about the love of her life that is far away from her nor does she care about the man who provides for her; she cares only for the freeing of her sensuous nature. Edna brings herself to the liberation of her sexual nature by not pushing Alcee away and by not feeling any guilt nor remorse.

#### **IV.5.4. The Struggle of Edna to Buy the Pigeon House**

In some parts of the novel, Edna has been trying to find a way where she can live by herself and without having to feel any reproach from her husband. She has disregarded his order of attending the reception day and she has avoided the motherly responsibilities that is forced on her. She has shown her individuality throughout the novel by these non-conforming acts, but nothing shows more of her willingness to be free than when she buys a house for herself.

Edna nicknames the house the Pigeon House because of its small size. She buys this place because she wants to be free from everything that she has ever been 'contracted' with. By moving from the place that is owned by her husband to a place that she owns, Edna indicates that she is finally ready to leave everything and to embrace her new life as a poor yet an individual woman.

Edna has done two major things to get herself the money to buy the Pigeon House. The first one is selling her painting to Laidpore, who is her mentor and broker in painting. From him, Edna manages to earn some money.

The second thing that makes money for Edna is the race track. Edna, who grows up alongside her father as someone who watches horses, knows how to make a fortune through horseracing. From the money she has collected, Edna buys the Pigeon House without giving it a second thought.

Earning money might be a small thing to do in this age, but women are never expected to hold their own money or to even make money for themselves. In *The Awakening's* New Orleans, women are expected to dwell on their husband's fortunes if he has one. They are expected to live comfortably with their husbands' coffer. They only need to bear children and to take care of them.

This patriarchal system is one thing that Edna cannot live with. In her crusade to find her own individuality, Edna cannot let herself be enslaved to the system that has imprisoned her since she marries Leonce. Like the system that Leonce has set up for her in the Pontellier household, Edna feels the need to break out of the system that the patriarchal society has imposed on her. When she has the chance to break the system, she takes it and goes on with it. She does not look backward at the comfort that her husband has provided for her nor does she look around her for things that may bring her family into ruin. The pinnacle of her search for individuality ends with her affording the Pigeon House, which is something that no other women will do. Radical-libertarian feminism emphasizes on women's escape from the established system, and Edna does just that. Edna leaves her comfortable box for a brand new beginning, choosing to live a life of a free woman with little money to her name rather than living a life where the finely decorated windows are her prison bars and the regal curtains her chain.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

Radical-libertarian feminism is a type of feminism in which the females strive to break out of the system that has been created by patriarchy. In radical-libertarian feminism, the females are trying to create another system where they are not an object of any man or even any woman. In that feminism, the females are an individual and a being that knows how to live their life without having to hear anybody barking orders at them. They are free in their own reign and they have the capability of doing things they want to do without having to feel any remorse from breaking the society's chain on her.

Edna lives in a society where females are treated like breeding stocks. In the society, females are expected to give birth to children and to treat their children properly. To be seen as a good mother, they have to keep their children under a constant watch. They are allowed to do things that they like, but their main purpose is to be a good mother and a good wife. Again, Edna does not have the traits mentioned above. She treats her children the way she wants her to treat them, not in the way the society wants her to treat them. Edna sees childbirth as a torturous form of a woman's responsibility as well. From these acts alone, Edna parallels with how radical-libertarian feminism sees motherhood. She never shows any kind of possessiveness towards their children and she is disgusted at childbirth, which is a natural means of reproduction.

Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* is such an individual. After all that she has been through, Edna never shows a moment of doubt regarding all of her society defying actions. Looking at the things that she has been through and the things she has did, Edna has unknowingly put herself in the shoes of a radical-libertarian feminist. She pushes the

society's agenda aside so that her own agenda can thrive She wants to break out of the system that has been imposed by her husband. The system that is rewarding to her is not the system that she is looking for as she is not looking to be rewarded for her obedience and willingness to listen. She is persistent in her getaway and she does not want every inch of her husband's shadow near her. She decides that she should be free to love someone else that she truly loves by going out with Robert behind her husband.

Edna's insistence shows that she has a tendency to be radical, which is a thing that no other women of that time have. Her escape to the Pigeon House proves her insistence, which is something that any radical-libertarian feminists should have in order to be able to break away from the chain.

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