

Chapter II

Review of Related Literature

The review of related literature consists of relevant theories and criticism, which become the ground to denote feminism in Edna's awakening. First, I involve the criticism on the author, to gain some understanding how feminism is specified in Edna's awakening. All those critics' review hopefully can reveal Kate Chopin's purposes in writing her masterpiece. And credible presumptions why Kate Chopin fictionalizes Edna's character and what she undergoes, can render the importance of Edna's awakening as well. In addition, a brief history, background and various reviews on The Awakening are also significant for feminism aspect in it. The history of The Awakening can disclose that its tragic end is the result of female subordination in literary world. Several criticism on Edna's awakening in The Awakening are also expected to be able to show woman's sorrow under male repression. Then, I implement literary theory, that is characterization, to trait the feminism ideas in Edna and female exploitation in the community. In addition, I also involve a brief information about the background and system of Creole community, because the female exploitation in the story is owing to the community system. And for the discussion on radical feminism, a brief definition about radical feminism, self ownership and voluntary motherhood theories are necessary.

II. 1 Literary Criticism

The literary criticism consists of the criticism on Kate Chopin and the criticism on The Awakening. Yet, I am using both of them as the supporting details for my topics on feminism.

II. 1.1 Kate Chopin's View on Feminism that is Reflected in The Awakening.

Several critics' opinions on Kate Chopin are essential to understand Kate Chopin's view on feminism, that it expressed in her narration. As I have mentioned in my background of the study, Kate Chopin is severely indicted when she fictionalizes The Awakening. Chicago Times-Herald reviewer for example, rebukes Kate Chopin since she undertakes "the overworked field of sex fiction". Shortly national press also condemns Kate Chopin and displays an appall that a "refined" and "poetic" writer could produce a "nauseating" novel (Walker 14).

The nineteenth century "cult of gentility" requires women to be in charge for preserving the ethical and pious atmosphere of her family and, by extension, the nation. As a matter of fact female literary works are ought to cling on some criteria of morality and ethics in their peculiar manner. Unless they do, their work will be either disregarded or is reproached as "unladylike" (10).

Therefore, a symphatetic portrait of a woman who abdicates her domestic responsibilities in favor of her own needs by a female author really undermines the structure of civilized society. As a consequence, if Edna Pontellier is guilty of domestic desertion as well as sexual indiscretion, Kate Chopin as her creator is equally guilty (Walker 143). Thus, harsh dismay against The Awakening brings

not only the bar of the fiction but also Kate Chopin's third short-stories collection, as well as the end of her literary career.

Still, considering her satiric self-justification in Book News on July 1899, Walker in "Biographical and Historical Context" views that Kate Chopin never repents of having composed The Awakening. Walker notes that although Kate Chopin apologizes for the behavior of her heroine, her statement 'I never dreamed of Mrs. Pontellier making such a mess of things' admits that "Edna Pontellier is a character with a mind of her own" (14). A book always tells about the writer, who or what character he or she is, how he or she looks on life and so on. Through one of the character in her book, an author can express her opinion. And, Walker has an opinion that Kate Chopin straightforwardly acknowledges that she agrees with Edna's choice and decision for they are her own.

In addition, Kate Chopin deliberately remarks that her attitude is reflected in Edna Pontellier to retort the negative attitude on the novel, that does not see Edna as a fictional creation, instead as a woman who deserves to be lectured for behaving badly (143). St. Louis Globe-Democrat analyst, as an illustration, is one of many other critics who views that Edna's improper attitude has to be moralized. Whereas, St. Louis Globe Democrat analyst writes "one feels that the heroine should pray for deliverance from temptation", New Orleans Times Democrat reviewer chided Edna for not being appropriately maternal (143). Furthermore, some critics deem that Edna's death at the end of the novel is the perfect punishment that she deserved. Specifically, the reviewer of Public Opinion announces that he or she is "well satisfied when Mrs. Pontelieer deliberately swims out to her death in the waters of the gulf" (143).

Yet, Walker sees Kate Chopin as a realistic woman, since Kate Chopin perceives that in Edna Pontellier's situation, both her awakening and death are necessary and inevitable. In other words, Kate Chopin is conscious that many women sympathize Edna's self-determination, unfortunately attempts to attain it are fatal (14). Walker in "A Critical History of The Awakening" also asserts that Kate Chopin through The Awakening intends to express her sympathy toward woman's efforts fighting against woman subordination. Chopin seemingly has something in her mind when she entitles her masterpiece, The Awakening. Walker explores that the word awakening is associated with "new beginnings, new understandings, and hope for the future, all of which are positive". Nor did Chopin title her novel "Edna's Awakening" or "One Woman's Awakening" but rather "The Awakening," which suggests that Kate Chopin sees something universal in Edna's experience. Primarily Chopin wants to criticize the culture bearing woman's relish for self identity (16).

According to Unger, The Awakening signifies Kate Chopin's interest in woman problems, particularly marriage implications on women (Unger 206). Kate Chopin questions the slavery of conventional marriage and bondage of a wife to husband and children. Indeed, The Awakening criticizes marriage, since marriage demands woman to be a devoting mother and wife, a role that eliminates woman's individuality.

In addition, Jules Chametzky is rather surprised with Kate Chopin's insight into "women question" (Wolf 235). Chametzky writes that Kate Chopin neither does uphold free sex nor extramarital affair. On the contrary, Kate Chopin admirably discloses woman position, and the pressures against woman's true

awakening to her position condition. Yet, Kate Chopin's heroine, Edna, still keeps struggling to free her self from being an object or possession that is either defined in her functions or owned by others (235).

Approving of Chametzky, Seyersted, a Norwegian publisher of The Complete Works of Kate Chopin, feels Chopin as "an author ahead of her time" in regard to her interests in the conflict between the changing social circumstances and the truths of human nature (Walker 147). Kate Chopin sees each human being, out of his or her sex, age, race and religion, as individual. And she realizes that she still lives in discriminative circumstances, yet she can tell that the society is proceeding into modern day which value each person's individuality

Seyersted also values Kate Chopin's reputation to be as significant as the position of Stephen Crane, Hamlin Garland, Frank Norris, and Theodore Dreiser- "The American pioneer writers of the 1980s", even he finds out that Chopin is a level above those writers (147).

Ironically, if Kate Chopin's sex has induced her to be frowned and outcasted in the past, today her sex again sways her stature, and at present it is largely on her behalf. Concurred with the resurgence of American feminism, feminist reviewers keen on ascertaining the works of American woman writers which have been unfairly disregarded and they now reckon Kate Chopin as an initial liberationist (Unger 202). Moreover a survey, conducted in the nineteenth eighties by Paul Lauter of the Feminist Press, reveals that Kate Chopin is the thirty seventh most regularly instructed American writer in colleges and universities

II 1.2 The Criticism on The Awakening

The review on The Awakening is also related to the period of time since it was published in 1889. To grasp the aspect of feminism, I observe the society's responses before and after feminism concurs.

Up to 1899, "Victorian sexual taboo" (Walker 10) that rates a book quality based on its moral message is still placid in literature. Automatically, dispute and controversy follow up The Awakening's publication. As an illustration, St. Louis Daily Globe Democrat reviewer specifies it as "unhealthy book" (14) while The Post Dispatch criticizes 'The Awakening is too strong drink for moral babes', and should be labeled 'poison' (14).

Yet, not all critics condemn The Awakening and its dissolute heroine negatively. Chametzky, for example, remarks that Edna is interesting not because she is "a woman" whose experience sustains other women, but because she is "a human" who has desire and flaw (Wolf 235). Whilst, Serysted retorts that female readers incline to sympathize a portrait of a woman's growth into self awareness. At any rate, he also pessimistically presumes that the critical responses, probably owing to the predominantly masculine tradition in literature, will never tolerate The Awakening (235).

In addition, Kenneth Ebbel, a New Critical critic was the few who comments The Awakening as a "first rate novel" owing to its plain idea; about woman's discontent in her marriage, which is exceptional during that age (Walker 143). While John R. May in "Local Color in The Awakening" repents that readers of The Awakening center only on the heroine's awakening to her sexual desire. As a result they fail to perceive human themes in her narration. May adds that the story

in fact does not merely talks about a woman's desire for sexual fulfillment outside of her marriage. Sexuality in the novel signifies a more fundamental human yearning for emancipation, and the sorrow that Edna undergoes is an impressive narrative about the anguish of human restrictions (May 113).

In any event, American moral sense and literature interpretation also experience a tremendous movement that in 1956 the public generally becomes much more materialistic and liberal. As a result, when professional reviewers, based on formalist theory, leave aside "moral judgment", sensual nature of woman is not interdicted anymore (Walker 141). Furthermore, the accelerated growth of female literary in academics in the 1970s and 1980s, and the simultaneous extension of feminist literary theory movement have interpreted The Awakening as an agreeable issue (147) .

In fact, in 1988, The Awakening, together with some well known classic; such as Chaucer's The Canterbury Tales, Milton's The Paradise Lost and Melville's Moby-Dick get to be the subject of the sixteenth volume in the Approaches to Teaching World Literature, series published by the Modern Language Association. And, The Awakening is the first work by a female author to be included in this series. Besides, The Awakening has become part of the Critical Editions series published by W.W. Norton, which indicates that it is frequently discussed in literature classes (141-2).

II. 2 Literary Theory

For the literary theory, I only use characterization as my tool to analyze the female exploitation in the community and Edna's feminism.

II 2. Characterization

Human nature is always interesting because it is always neither black nor white, and fiction through characterization offers an unparalleled opportunity to observe human nature in all its complexity and multiplicity. Characters in literature are an author's imaginary representation of a human being, specifically of those inner qualities that determine how an individual reacts to various conditions, or attempts to shape his or her environments.

Thus reading a novel certainly is observing and following the characters' reaction to some extended series of actions and attempts to shape events. Yet, to be convincing in their actions, characters must be consistent in their behavior. They must behave consistently unless there is a sufficient reason for the change. The reason of the change itself also must be clearly motivated and understood by the readers, immediately or at least by the end of the story. In addition, characters must be plausible or lifelike. They must behave commonly and humanly so that everyone who reads them will think that they could happen or come from the author's experience (Perrine 85).

In addition, to create a lifelike characters, it is not enough for characters to be fitted only with physical appearance but also mental qualities and social relationship. Alike human being in real life, the characters have a life, an identity. They are put in a social relationship, who and what they are. They also have to deal with problems and questions, thus characters are accommodated with mental qualities, capability to think, sense, choice and act (84-5). The Awakening records the process of Edna's movement out of ignorance into knowledge. Edna

at first is a plain housewife, but then she questions her status as an individual in the universe and finally struggles to determine her own self identity.

Obviously, Edna in her awakening undergoes a change. Yet, basic change in human characters seldom occurs suddenly and to avoid superficial characters, a change has to be qualified with three conditions. First, the characters must be able to make such changes. The circumstances also have to be strong enough to motivate him or her to change. And the change itself must be reasonable, not too drastic or vice versa (87). Edna 's awakening also does not suddenly reform, her nature as an individual makes her change possible. Then, she also lives in the community that regards wife as a man's property, which is shown through male character's attitude on her. Adele Ratignolle's lavish appearance and function as mother and wife also show man's ownership over woman. In addition, Adele Ratignolle is a foil character, a character which serves to clarify and emphasize another character, usually the main character (Potter 21). The presence of Adele Ratignolle, that is born as a mother woman and devoting wife, opposes Edna's character as an independent woman. Thus, I need to study the contradiction between Edna and Adele to understand Edna's rebellion for self identity.

Perrine also adds that a writer in presenting his or her characters with their problems, may explain it either directly or indirectly (Perrine 87). When an author applies direct exposition method, the author explains it straight out, by exposition or analysis in introductory block of what a character is like, or plays as a narrator or has someone else in the story to tell readers who the character is like. In indirect exposition, the author shows us the character in action; readers infer what he is like from what he thinks or says or does. Author can also use other

characters; comments on the main character in order to help readers imagination about the main character (87). To seek for the essence of feminism in Edna's awakening, I need both direct and indirect exposition of Edna Pontellier. First, I analyze the community system that exploits woman through male's attitude on woman, which is reflected in Leonce, Arobin and Edna's father comments and speeches. Then, Adele is a foil character to Edna, since she represents the ideal model of a Creole wife. Edna's behavior and choices, especially her death in the end also reveal her individual being, which at the same time also proves that she is a feminist.

II. 3 Other Theories

Besides literary criticism and literary theories, I need data about Creole community and feminist theories for my analysis. The background of the Creole community gives short information about the community system, that can show the female exploitation in the story. My feminist theories consist of a brief definition of a feminist, of which group of feminist Edna belongs to, and of what struggles and goals. In addition, all the feminist theories are in the frame work of literature.

II. 3. 1 Creole Community.

Occupying the southern half of Louisiana and parts of Alabama and eastern Missouri, the Creoles were the descendant of French and Spanish colonist of the eighteenth century. Some of them became very wealthy as sugar cane planters,

others were less successful economically, but all were bound by Catholicism, strong family ties and a common language, French (Walker 60-1).

The Creoles lived a life of sensation and careless enjoyment. They loved to dance, gamble, fish, attend feasts, play on the fiddle and to live without much thought of the morrow. In addition, New Orleans, in which Edna lives, was called a Southern Babylon because of the quadroon and octoroon mistresses supported openly by Creole men. Quadroons, having one quarter Negro blood, were of course considered fully Negro by the society and it is probable that the mother of a quadroon girl was pleased and economically relieved to have her daughter become the mistress of a wealthy white man (61).

In addition, Stange in "Personal Property: Exchange Value and The Female Self in The Awakening" also explains that the Creole system recognizes a wife's status as one of her husband's property (Stange 204-6). In order to understand this property system Stange refers to Veblen's argument in The Theory of The Leisure Class: An Economic Study in The Evolution of Institution. Principally Veblen argues that woman is a "man's trophy" (215). Man's identity and position in the society depend on other's perception. Ironically they are not identified based on who he is, instead on his wealth. Thus he has to manifest his assets through extravagant life style in the company of an attractive wife who is designed to appear in lush beauty with jewelry and fair skins (215). Therefore, aimed to display her husband's properties, a wife of a reputable Creole, is not ought to go working for additional wages. She should merely concentrate on her role as a mother and wife, restores her perfect charm, and consumes "vicarious leisure"

(215), prestige and high status that is gained not thorough hard efforts yet owing to heritage or marriage (215).

II 3. 2 Feminist Theories

Generally feminism is a set of beliefs, values and attitudes centered on the high evaluation of woman as human beings (Hunter 4). Further, feminism argues that woman has to value her autonomy and works for condition that favor her independent control of her destiny (4). As a free individual, woman should not accept her life passively and determines her way of life by her own.

However to analyze feminist aspect in one literary work, I cannot set it apart from social science. As a matter of fact feminism belongs to social science, ensuing gender disimbalance disproportion in a society, that push women into a secondary class.

In social science, feminism is classified into four major groups; which are "liberal, radical, Marxist and socialist" (Fakh 80-98). From the four major feminism branches, I choose to study radical feminism partly because I base my thesis on Stange's critics "Personal Property: Exchange Value and the Female Self in The Awakening" which suggests that what Edna seeks in her awakening is self ownership (Stange 201-17), which belongs to the thinking of radical feminism. Besides, radical feminism is one of the backgrounds of American literary thought in the nineteenth century, while it is important to note that Kate Chopin is an American novelist.

II 3. 3 Radical Feminism

The broad outline of radical feminism in social science considers that the community system, patriarchal system particularly, imposes women because they are physically weaker than men. While radical feminism, in the frame work of literature, rejects women traditional role as a wife and mother.

In addition the movement urges the abolishing of the nuclear family, which they regard as male-dominated household, in which both wife and children are members of an oppressed class (Horton 564). In a male dominated household, man, as a husband and father, is the head of the family, who leads and orders the family. Ruled and controlled, wife and children are in the weak position in the family and they totally depend on the man. Besides, radical feminism argues that women have been wrongfully pledged into their role as wife and mother just as they have reproductive organs that allow them to bear children. Unfortunately, women have rendered helplessly to her defined role as mother and wife owing to the social structure that is constructed by, of and for men. Worse, women have been part of this system for such a long time that although they are paralyzed, they have already come to accept it as the true value of womanhood, thus completing the vicious cycle of the exploitation (564-6). In Edna's story, I want to argue that Edna is a feminist because she refuses to be defined as a mother and wife by the society.

After all, since the substance of fiction is the exploration of the interplay of human relationships, and since in western society the male female relationship is fundamental to all others, radical feminism establishes some points to view the new relationship between men and women (569). First, radical feminists demand for freedom and true equality thus it counters the assumption that all women are

born to be mother and wife. Then, it also persists on women prerogative to authorize her own body, including the choice of whether to bear children or not (569-70). My analysis referred to both points, which lead to self ownership and voluntary motherhood.

II 3. 4 Self-Ownership and Voluntary Motherhood

Self ownership and voluntary motherhood are prerogatives that feminist insists on as the key to "female autonomy", female personal freedom to be in her main control of her destiny (Stange 203). Implicitly self ownership signifies woman's right to have and own her self, but actually self ownership is a wife's right to refuse marital sex (203). In other words, a wife, independent of her husband's desire, can determine when, where and how they perform sexual intercourse. Further self ownership is related to voluntary motherhood, woman's right to choose when to be pregnant. Indeed, a woman can settle when she wants to have children and how many. Besides a woman is ought to like the idea that she will have a baby. If she is not pleased with the idea, she will have the right to give it up.

However, the feminist community, who enhances voluntary motherhood, strongly counters to consume any birth control devices. This resistance to birth control obviously denies the sustenance of option and authority for women to have sex without taking the risk of pregnancy. Yet, the employment of voluntary motherhood, purely without birth control devices at the center of self-ownership, consequently would make motherhood central to a woman's life and identity (203). Woman's capacity to bear children, her sexual function, distinguishes her sexual

life from man's. Thus radical feminists sets apart reproduction from woman's sexuality. When a woman performs a sexual intercourse without any effective contraception, she has to be aware of the potential pregnancy. And because sexuality with reproduction as its part belongs to herself and since she is a free being, she can refuse to have sexual intercourse when she feels she is not ready yet to be a mother (204-5). Simply stated, self ownership and voluntary motherhood claim sexual value of a woman, so that a woman can decide to withhold or to give in order not to be a sexual object. Besides, she can define her own identity, whether she wants to be a mother or not.

Edna in the story practices both self ownership and voluntary motherhood. Because her sexuality belongs to her, she refuses sex from her husband to whom she feels no affection. She also demonstrates voluntary motherhood, withholding herself from motherhood, when she finds out her individual being does not fit her role as a mother. My analysis in chapter three studies both the female exploitation in the community system and the essence of feminism in Edna's awakening through characterization.

