

Chapter III

Edna as An Autonomous Individual.

In order to find the essence of feminism in Edna's awakening, the analysis of her character will be based on fundamental thought of self ownership, property rights and sexual values which are related to voluntary motherhood. All these notions allow woman to be an autonomous individual who is free to live on her own way. Meanwhile, since feminist is against the female exploitation and my review is about radical feminism, my first discussion definitely is on how the community system exploits women. I take a look into the exploiting community system via characterization. First, I analyze the attitude of male characters toward Edna, and also Adele Ratignolle's characterization as the foil character. Then, both appearance and performance of Edna's hands are also analyzed. On one hand they reveal the ownership of Creole husbands over their wives, on the other hand, they suggest the idea of Edna's ownership on herself. Understanding male repression toward woman in the Creole community, I can apprehend Edna's motivation and quest in her awakening. Edna's speeches, series of actions and choices in the story are also analyzed for they all are her attempts for self possession, which represents self ownership and voluntary motherhood implementation.

3.1 Creole Wives as Social Wealth

Before discussing on Edna's feminism, I want to take a look into the patriarchal community system that definitely always stands on men's interest. Therefore I analyze some speeches and comments on the male characters, among other things are Leonce Pontellier, the Colonel and Arobin, on Edna that disclose men's attitude toward women. Adele's characterization in the story also helps me to see the fact that a Creole wife is her husband's wealth status that brings a prestige for him. Then, Edna's hands in naked, sunburned and ringed state also show the male ownership over women.

3.1.1 Creole Male Characters' View on Edna Pontellier

In the beginning of the novel, Leonce Pontellier, who spends his summer vacation at an exclusive Creole family resort, eyes his wife as she walks up from the beach. "You are burnt beyond recognition" (Chopin 3), Leonce says "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (3). For its beginning, the novel intentionally presents Edna in the perspective of male, her husband specifically, to render who Creole wives are as they seem to their husbands. And Edna is presented as how Leonce views her, as an object, valuable even treasured. Thus the opening scene introduces Edna as a valuable property and Leonce as her owner, signifying that Edna is merely a thing to be possessed and guarded rather than a person to be heard and attended.

Then, later when Leonce learns of Edna's intention to abandon her home and move out into a private residence, he

begged her to consider first, and foremost and above all else, what people would say. He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered . . . That was such a thing which would never have entered to his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity It might do incalculable mischief to his business prospects (122).

The reason why Edna leaves does not bother Leonce, Leonce is too concerned on the impact of Edna's leaving on his business. Certainly, to Leonce, Edna is an instrument to gain reputation in the society, instead of a wife to be understood and cared for.

In addition, I view that this Creole husband's ownership over his wife is similar to enslavement. Although the Creole wives are not mentally abused, in fact they live prosperously, this system acknowledges the superiority of the husband that effects on the exploitation on the inferior wife. A possession, a Creole wife is like a slave whereas her husband is her master, who owns her. Further, alike a slave who has to serve and obey his or her master, the Creole wife, who is owned by her husband, also has to obey and submit to her owner. In addition as her owner, her husband definitely has the freedom and authority whether he wants to keep, dispose or set his wife free. Therefore a Creole wife, who completely depends on her husband for her life security, has to reserve her own will and mind to please and not to oppose or annoy her husband.

Thus, Edna's father condemns Leonce for being "too lenient" (95) when Leonce does not interpose his influence or authority to force Edna to go to her

sister's wedding. He completely disagrees with Leonce for letting Edna do what she likes. He says "Command, coercion are what needed. Put your foot down good and hard, the only way to manage a wife" (95). The fact that Edna's father enforces Leonce to interpose his authority to force Edna to go to her sister's wedding shows that as a property, a wife is controlled and headed by her owner.

Anyway, a Creole man has the power to hold and control woman for he functions more than master, indeed he invents woman. The idea that woman is man's invention is offered through Alcee Arobin, a disreputable flirt. In the grand dinner to celebrate Edna's birthday, Alcee Arobin states that "It might be amiss to start out by drinking the Colonel's health in the cocktail which he composed, on the birthday of the most charming of women-the daughter whom he invented (108). Man made, Edna is not only her father's invention but also her husband's invention. First, Edna is brought out or to be invented to the world by her father, yet Edna is an invention that is designed for another invention by another man, her husband. Marking her as a valuable possession, Edna's husband invents her as a form of wealth and mother of his children. Thus it can be said that a Creole wife is born to be invented by man, for man and on the necessities of man. Thus for more supporting details on the community system, I am moving my discussion on Adele's presence that represents the image of idolized Creole wife.

3.1.2 Adele As The Foil Character.

Having charm which is portrayed as "the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm" (10), Adele is the image of woman who the Creole society love and

adore. Therefore before I point out the exploitation, I need to take a look into Adele's charm for the characteristics of an idolized woman.

It is interesting to note the selected words, such as "gold, sapphires, cherries, some other delicious crimson fruit" (10) to illustrate Adele's beauty. Stange holds that these words construct feminine images (Stange 207). And since Adele's charm is what the Creoles venerate, femininity obviously is one figure of the Creole community to characterize beauty.

Meanwhile, femininity interestingly is referred to motherhood. "Possessing feminine and matronly figure" (Chopin 19), Adele Ratignolle indeed is the archetype figure of a mother woman. In fact, Edna sees Adele as the representation of "Madonna" (10). Incorporated in the image of the Virgin Mary, the Madonna has existed in western cultures for centuries. She is the young, beautiful, and pure woman who is at once a mother and a virgin, a source of comforts and supports, fulfilled in giving, submerged in the male figures who make use of her. Self sacrificing, Madonna exists intending mainly to make men feel happy and successful (Hunter 31). Adele's sewing, which she holds constantly in her hands, also indicates her total self giving to her family. A Creole wife is designed to display her husband's fortune on behalf of her husband's dignity in the community, and she does not need to work. She only has to maintain her beauty and focuses her attention on her domestic responsibility as a mother and wife. And, all Adele's labors, her sewing and sorting on her husband's laundry, are house chores. In addition, Adele's job actually does not come from work for usefulness. Edna cannot understand why Adele bothers to make winter night garments during summer vacation (Chopin 11). Besides, like Edna, Adele also employs quadroon nurses

and maid to assist her in completing the domestic tasks. Obviously Adele's labors mainly build up her image as a dedicating housewife. So, physically splendid and magnificent mother figure, Adele is the ideal model of a wife that the Creoles demand, and hence of what Leonce Pontellier expects from Edna, to be a "mother woman" (10).

Nevertheless, performing all society's figure of beauty, Adele's entire presence is aimed to remind the property system in which Creole woman is a form of wealth and owned by her husband. As one of her husband's assets to bring prestige, Adele has to display her husband's prosperity, by appearing extravagantly. Adele is always lavishly clothed with "fluffiness of ruffles" (19). Yet, she in contrast also dresses "in a negligee which left her arms almost wholly bare and exposed the rich melting curves of her white throat" (72). In her rich and elaborate, yet revealing clothing, Adele is excessively covered while her body, which is the sign of wealth to expose, makes such coverings redundant. Obviously, Adele's beauty is her "conspicuousness" as a form of wealth (Stange 205). As her husband's prestige to attain reputation in the society, Adele's beauty has to be manifested and exposed, clearly seen and perceived with eyes in an prodigal draperies.

Nevertheless, Adele's charm is the reproduction and representation of the society. Adele as a form of wealth has to look beautiful, yet her beauty should be at the extent of the Creole society standard. In other words, Adele does not have an identity, her existed selfhood is an identity that the society has furnished. And the society forms her into a possession, owned by her husband and defined to function as a mother and wife.

In addition, Adele always wears “doeskin gloves with gantlets (19) to restore her hands perfectly white, which again reminds her status as wealth. According to Stange, a Creole wife who brings her husband’s reputation is always characterized with perfectly pale hands (Stange 205), and if Adele is marked with the gold of thimble, Edna is marked with the gold of ring. Thus it is interesting when Edna’s hands are narrated in three different states, each of which has its own importance. The next analysis is not on Edna’s hands’ looks only but also their function.

3.1.3 Edna’s Hands in Leonce’s Interest

In the beginning of the story, Edna’s hands appear naked and sunburned which do not bear the sign of her status as Leonce’s wife. The sight of the hands without the ring does not store her status either as a married woman nor her husband’s wealth prestige. Not only are they naked, but also sunburned which may give an indication of outdoor labor. A Creole wife whose husband is not very prosperous has to help him, whether at plantation or at home. Working, she cannot restore pale and soft hands. Thus Edna’s sunburned hands would repeal her value as a sign of Leonce’s wealth. Since Edna conveys Leonce’s wealth status and reputation she must appear to perform no labor. Therefore Leonce was pretty bothered when he sees Edna “burnt beyond recognition” (Chopin 3). Hearing her husband’s critique, Edna

Held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically, drawing up her lawn sleeves above the wrists. Looking at

them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped them upon her fingers (3).

So, although Edna's naked hands suggest another identity to Edna they also "remind" (3) both Leonce and Edna of the ringed hands, which bear value. And the showy and luxurious ring obviously brings back Edna as Leonce's prestige. Besides it is important to remember that Edna gets her sunburn while she enjoys a vacation at her husband's expense at the respectable and luxurious resort on Grand Isle. In addition although her hands and wrists are part of her body, Edna holds out and examines as if they belonged to someone else. Indeed they do belong to someone else or at least her husband, Leonce, Edna's owner. Thus how Edna views her own body can be seen through the engagement of her hands and arms. And Edna views her body, which is the sign of Leonce's ownership, as alienable and detachable.

3.2 Edna's Qualities of An Autonomous Individual.

So characterization obviously has shown that the community system takes wife as husband's property, and exploits Creole women. As a media to get a reputation in the community, Creole women in Creole men's eyes are only objects. This indicates that Creole women belong to the lower class than men in the community. Further being a property, a wife is not in control of her own destiny as her master has a concern in it. Therefore radical feminism urges for freedom and equality for

both genders by accepting woman as an autonomous individual who owns herself. I find some characteristics of an autonomous woman in Edna's independent, Edna's private possession, Edna's authority over her own body, and Edna's own choice to define her own identity.

3.2.1 Edna's Independent for Freedom

Belonged to their husbands, Creole wives are not free. After making a confession that he is in love with Edna, Robert moans "You were not free, you were Leonce Pontelien's wife" (Chopin 143). Robert is aware that they cannot get together unless Leonce Pontelien is willing to set his wife free. So it is obvious that the husband, the owner of his wife, holds control over her. As a result a Creole wife completely relies on her husband for her life assurance. Nevertheless, letting her husband control her life, a woman admits and supports the exploitation of her gender. Thus, in order to free herself from the property system, she has to set her self on her own feet. Woman obviously does not belong to anyone else, she belongs to herself. So she definitely should be independent and take control her own destiny. And Edna in my opinion is an independent being.

In the opening scene when Edna sees her hands without the ring, she reaches her hands asking for the ring, which her husband obediently drops into her palm, and Edna puts on the ring by herself. This time the stresses of the opening scene is not on the importance of the ring's value and symbol, yet on Edna's attitude. Stange sees Edna's hand gesture is unlike, indeed contrasted to the bride's passive reception of the ring (Stange 202). For years woman qualities have been

stereotyped as modest, delicate, and tender. These qualities, though glorify man characteristics; courage, strong and intelligence, are not highly valued in a society hence woman is weak and subordinate to man (Mills 266). Thus the wedding ritual, which has the groom first to give the bride the ring, shows each gender's status in marriage life. The man who starts and directs the giving of the ring, certainly is the leader, whose rank is above his wife. The ritual also connotes that the woman has to wait for her husband's direction to follow. Edna in contrast does not wait passively until her husband remembers of the ring and hands it to her, yet she takes an initiative to ask for it. Edna's attitude definitely is different from the woman image in the wedding ritual, who is submissive to her husband's guidance. Therefore, Edna's gesture in my opinion shows her independent. Stange also states that the opening scene foreshadows the turning point of the plot at which Edna, resolves "never again to belong to another than herself" (Stange 203).

Her choice of friends also characterizes Edna's nature as an independent individual. "Edna had had an occasional girl friend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type-the self contained, she never realized that the reserve of her own character had much, perhaps everything to do with this" (22). Edna is tempted to make friends with people, in the same type with her own, for they have something in common, the "self contained" (22) character.

Then, Edna's description "was not a woman given to confidences, a characteristic hitherto contrary to her nature. Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself . . . The dual life-that outward existence which

conforms, the inward life which questions" (18) also tells Edna's independent. As an independent, Edna relies in her own opinions, free from others' influence. Hence, Edna cannot accept things easily, and her independent empowers her "to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her" (Chopin 17). Her independent questions her whether it is her own choice to be a mother and wife or the society's decision for her. Moreover, Edna does not feel her independent individual fits her role as a mother and a wife who is controlled and headed by her husband. So, in her self searching for an identity, Edna decides to leave her marriage. As Edna told her husband that "wedding is the one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth", Edna sees that marriage has formed her into property and restrains her from being free and independent.

3.2.2 Edna's Private Property and Individuality

Leaving he marriage, Edna also denies all wealth her husband affords, and lives financially independent on her income from her sketches and mother's legacy. And her insistence to keep her income and mother's inheritance includes another characteristic of an autonomous individual, that is property right.

Creole wife, who signs her husband's social wealth status, individually does not hold properties. What she owns only her children and beauty, but both are devices that maintain her status as a property owned by her husband. And logically what a property owns automatically will be regarded as its owner's property too. And the correlation between a Creole husband and a Creole wife is possessor and possession. Thus what a Creole wife owns belongs to her husband

too, and this system is legitimated within a law, called Napoleonic Code. Napoleonic code was still in force in Louisiana in the 1890s, assigning that a wife's property is legally identical with her husband (Stange 206-7). In other words, the Creole wife has no separate property in their own right. Even though her material needs are luxuriously accommodated, due to her status as a sign of wealth, all those supplies emphasize her status as propertiless property of her husband. Unlike other Creole wives, Edna keeps separated properties, her mother's legacy and her income from her sketches. The sketch of Madame Ratignolle is another example of object that Edna retains as her own property. Edna smudges and crumbles Adele's sketch between her two hands when she finds that her sketch does not resemble to Madame Ratignolle (Chopin 15). Destroying the sketch, Edna enforces her property right on the sketch.

Meanwhile, Edna attains all her private properties by using her hands and eyes. In producing her sketches that brings income for her, both hands and eyes give service. Certainly Edna, who makes use of her hands and eyes, recognizes them as her belongings. If they belong to Leonce, they only function to reveal Leonce's wealth. Hence, Edna cannot use them to attain private properties, that sign her existence as an independent individual. She uses them to work to earn her own money, that allows her to leave her marriage. So Edna's hands and eyes are Edna's properties that help her to gain private properties. Thus I point that the first property Edna holds is her body for hands and eyes are part of a body. In addition, Stange who quotes Stanton declaration that 'in discussing the right of woman, we are to consider first what belongs to her as an individual', (Stange, 204) also proposes that what Edna considers as her property is, first her body

(204). Considering her body as her private property, Edna also realizes that she has and owns her body. As a consequence Edna has authority over it, which is another quality of radical feminist.

3.2.3 Edna's Authority Over Her Own Body

Having authority over her body, Edna proves that she is an autonomous being. Her body is part of her selfhood, thus an autonomous woman, who owns herself, authorizes her own body. A Creole wife, who signifies her husband's wealth, on the contrary cannot authorize her body for she is merely a property, whose body and self belong to her husband. Thus authorizing her own body, Edna individualizes her self being. And Edna authorizes her body by practicing self ownership and voluntary motherhood.

Man's sexual life positively is different from woman's, owing to woman's capacity to deliver children. Nevertheless, since Edna owns her body, she also owns her sexuality and reproduction, which are the private attributes of her body. Therefore it is up to Edna or any woman, whether she wants to be a mother or not, a right which radical feminist terms as voluntary motherhood (Stange 205). Further, because sexuality and motherhood are separated, self ownership, a right to choose whether she wants sex for pleasure or for a baby, is also urged. Obviously self ownership and voluntary motherhood are prerogatives on the ground of woman's capacity as an individual. They claim ownership of woman's sexual value (216). And by authorizing her body whether to give or withhold, to refuse or to allow sex, a woman can practice self ownership and voluntary motherhood.

In Edna's case, first she leaves her husband on bed alone until she ultimately leaves his house to move into the pigeon house. In my opinion, sexuality is a physical expression between husband and wife, while Edna feels "her marriage to Leonce Pontelier was purely an accident" (Chopin 23). Having no love and passion to her husband, Edna has no desire for him and after her first successful swim, she stays on the porch, refusing Leonce's repeated orders and entreaties to come inside to bed.

'What are you doing out here Edna? I thought I should find you in bed' said her husband, 'Are you asleep?' she heard him moving about the room; every sound indicating impatience and irritation. Another time she would have gone in at his request. She would, through habit have yielded to his desire" (40-1).

Former Edna, who has not been awakened of her possession and authority over her body, still lets her husband make use of her body to please his sexual desire, although she is reluctant. Yet, this time she says, "I meant to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to" (Chopin 40-1). Edna clearly states her persistence on her will to withhold herself sexually from her husband.

Later Edna even stops sleeping with her husband altogether so that Leonce complains to the family doctor, "'she's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women; and you understand we meet in the morning at the breakfast table' " (135). Withholding herself sexually, Edna exercises the "eternal rights of

women" (135) in insisting that she has a self and that she owns that self. Edna owns her own selfhood and body, thus she is free to authorize it, withholding sexually to refuse sex from her husband.. Nevertheless as Edna is free to withhold herself, she is free to give herself too. No longer sleeping and living with her husband, Edna declares herself free to have sex with whomever she chooses. She says to Robert "I am no longer Mr. Pontelier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose" (129). And Edna's self giving is chosen because she has presumed the choice of not giving as well.

She refuses to give herself to her husband, as a matter of fact she refuses to give herself to her children too. "Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for any one. Then had followed a rather heated argument" (67). In this argument Edna "explains" (67) to Adele

"I would give up the unessential, I would give my money, I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself." And Adele answers, "A woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that . . . I'm sure I couldn't do more than that" (67).

Adele could not do more than giving her life, for her life already belongs to her children and husband. Different from Edna, Adele is a mother who never withholds thus she cannot choose what to hold, she only gives. And withholding nothing, Adele cannot make out of giving more than she already gives, while Edna cannot at first identify what she has chosen to withhold "I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is

revealing itself to me” (67). It takes time for Edna to get it clear. In the beginning of the story, after an angry exchange with her husband about her job as a mother, she sits outside in the dark feeling an “indescribable oppression” and “a vague anguish” (8). Edna is still unable to identify what is wrong with her. But then just as her individual self is struggling for recognition, she finds it is increasingly difficult to accept her role as wife of Leonce Pontellier, and mother of her children. The mother role to Edna is a “fate” (24) that “had not fitted her” (24). Edna realizes that her identity afforded by her marriage within Creole society is a false identity, for it is not her own choice, yet a public role that is consigned to her.

So, “trying to determine what character of woman” (109) she is, Edna deliberately gives up her social domestic duties as the lady of the house, moves out from the family home into a private space, the pigeon house, and withholds sex from her husband. All forms of values that Edna denies are the duties and function of woman as wife and mother. In refusing to embody the role that is determined by the society, Edna is defining her own identity.

3.2.4 Edna’s Freedom to Choose Identity

The community has believed that a woman is destined to be a mother, since she is born with reproductive organs. A woman’s physic also favors her nature to be a mother. As one illustration, Martin Luther says “Women have narrow shoulders and broad hips. Women ought to stay at home, the way created indicates this, for they have broad hips and a wide fundament to sit all upon, keep house and bear and raise children” (Mills 270). Nevertheless, the truth of the assumption that

woman is destined to be a mother is relative, for it launches from the male dominated community, that tends to stand on men's interest and benefit. Thus radical feminism accuses that the role as mother and wife, which is labeled to woman, is an exploitation. The community has defined an identity for a woman as a mother and wife, without asking for her consent, in some sense also makes her motherhood involuntary too.

In the Creole community, motherhood is a "role" (10) that is produced and paraded. Adele, for example, produces her maternity through public discourse. She always insists on talking about her condition in which she has her fourth pregnancy, and voicing her constant thoughts of her children.

Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she . . . was beginning to think of her fourth one. She was always talking about her 'condition'. Her 'condition' was in no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation (10).

Adele produces her "role of "mother woman" by thinking and provoking thought. For her role as a mother woman, her children are all that she concerns about and she has to declare it to everyone else about that. Stange also sates that her two year intervals between her pregnancies might represent intentional spacing that keeps Adele in or nearly in the condition that provides her identity. Adele has to produce the condition of motherhood, because motherhood to her is an intentional

developed identity for herself. Nevertheless, Adele's motherhood is contrasted with the character of motherhood itself. Mother women "were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals" (10). Motherhood certainly demands the dismissal of a woman's individuality, becoming a wife and mother, a woman orientates her life and all her concerns for her husband and children. Nevertheless, Adele's motherhood is not voluntary nor involuntary. Her condition does not allow her to choose, by becoming pregnant, Adele already becomes a mother. And again, the fact that motherhood takes a woman's life is dramatically expressed in the scene when Adele, who is usually in control of her presence, becomes pathetically hysterical and paranoid during labor and childbirth. Yet, after her ordeal in childbirth, Adele still whispers exhaustedly, "think of the children, Edna, think of them" (148). Based on Michael's argument in his book, The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century, Stange states that "by being a woman she is already sexually at risk" (Stange 210). Motherhood takes a woman's life, for pregnancy and labor put woman at life risk, that might result in her death. And voluntary motherhood, referring to the risk of pregnancy, condemns the system that identifies as well as enforces all women as mothers.

Meanwhile, unlike Adele, Edna does not embrace the role of a "mother woman" (Chopin 10). What makes her "not a mother woman (10) is her refusal to "give herself for her children (62). In fact Edna's motherhood seems to be imposed and unwilling. "She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart, she would sometimes

forget them" (24). Even her children's "absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her" (24). And if Adele's motherhood gives her an identity, Edna's denial of motherhood gives her an identity as "not a mother woman" (10). Refusing to be a mother-woman, Edna chooses her own identity. In the mean time she also disposes the oppression that dictates her to be wife and mother.

Withholding herself from motherhood, Edna is practicing a voluntary motherhood. Insisting on her right not to be a mother and refusing to "sacrifice" herself for her children, Edna owns herself. And Edna withholds herself from motherhood, that takes a woman's life, by withholding herself from life. Thus, after showing that Edna represents all the characteristics of an autonomous individual, my last argument is that Edna's death in the ending of the novel shows that Edna's awakening has been fully achieved.

3.3 Edna's Freedom Through Death

To understand Edna's resolution to die, I refer to Stange's review who says that female subjectivity and woman's right in The Awakening are grounded in "absolute selfhood" (Stange 206). On his or her existence as an individual, each person is a free and responsible agent, determining his or her own life. It is also important to note, that The Awakening originally was entitled A Solitary Soul, which is inspired by Maupassant's short story "Solitude" (Unger 223). Edna is the "Solitary Soul" (235), since the beginning Edna is all alone. Edna struggles alone searching for her own identity as an individual, alone and free from the

society. She says to Doctor Mandelet, “I am not going to be forced into doing things I want to be let alone” (Chopin 119). It is the society and its system, that Edna wants to get rid of. Forming her into a possession that is owned and controlled by her husband, and defining her to be a mother that has to “efface” her “individual” (10), the society limits her freedom as a free individual.

Nevertheless, the society on the contrary would also cast Edna’s new being. Robert is the presentation of the society that does not and “would not” (153) understand Edna’s freedom, though Robert loves her. “Good bye- because I love you” (148) is his parting message. Robert goes because his understanding has been too far determined by the conventions of his society, therefore he leaves. He is an honorable gentleman in the society’s standard. Perhaps the convention can accept his infatuation to other men’s wives in summer, but when he realizes that his relationship with Edna is no a longer romantic game, Robert behaves like what the society expects a honorable gentleman to. Although Edna has told him “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possession to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose” (129); to Robert, Edna still belongs to Leonce Pontellier for Robert remains trapped by the conventional norms, from which Edna has broken free. Hence, Edna cannot see the meaning of Robert’s departure for she has disowned and rejected the society and its system.

However, Edna finally understands that Robert and the unity of their love are not the answers for her self-searching. In fact she admits that although “there was no human being she wants near her except Robert “ (151), “the day would come when he too and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone” (151). Edna is all alone in determining the meaning of her life., even her

children has no right to control and bind her personal being. However, Edna has considered to sacrifice herself for her children. A maternal quality, a temptation to give herself for her children, overwhelms Edna after she witnesses Adele's enduring the agonies of childbirth. And Adele's plea "to think of the children" (148) asks her to sacrifice herself for her children. Edna "meant to think of them But not tonight" because at that night Edna intends to give her self to Robert. But then, she finds out that Robert leaves her, and she gets alerted of the other significance behind Robert's leaving. She realizes that the society would never tolerate her decision to leave her domestic responsibilities. Even Robert who loves and wishes to be with her, cannot accept Edna as a free individual now. So Edna spends the rest of the night thinking about the children, considering whether she wants to maintain her new individual being, free and independent, or she has to go back to her old life, as a submissive wife and mother. And it is told that her children reappear as her enemies, "antagonists who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days" (151). Edna knows what a return to a normal mother woman life would mean for her. To permit herself to return to her identity as a mother and wife would deny and thwart her awakened self. Returning to a life of submissive of conformity is the return she refuses to make, and Edna "knows a way to elude them" (151) and "was not thinking of these things" (151), as she walks down to the beach. Edna has made her own resolution, she refuses to conform. Thus, Edna cannot pursue her present time for she refuses to bear the role as mother and wife. Yet, there is no future for her either, for the society "would never understand" (151) her new individual

being. Thus, her last sight about her childhood tells about her wish to return to her past, when she has not become Edna Pontellier but the free Edna.

Edna has asserted her individuality and womanhood; and she is also an “absolute self” (Stange 206), all alone to determine her own life and being. Hence, determined to live on her own way, Edna chooses death as her gate of freedom. Through death, Edna can signify her self determination to live as a free independent being.