

Consolidation Through Rebellion in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

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Abstract—This paper examines Kate Chopin's heroine Edna's journey for self-actualization in *The Awakening* which was published in (1899). The period represents the first wave of feminism and New Woman era. Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* portrays the patriarchy, oppression and marriage as compelling forces that assume women to fulfill the expectations of a devoted true woman. Chopin presents Edna's rebels against the moral and social restraints set on women by the patriarchal society in order to become an individual as she refuses to be casted as a typical traditional Victorian mother and a wife. To understand Edna's rebelliousness, Chopin uses a variety of pictures and encounters with people as instruments. It's clear that she has a rebellious streak. Chopin's deliberation, in this sense, is to not condemn Edna's rebellion in proclaiming her sexuality and seeking independence through the consolidation of her mind, body, and spirit, but rather to paint her as the 'new woman' who gains control and awareness of her sexual and artistic potentials. Therefore, this research work attempts to study Edna's trials and tribulations in achieving self-understanding by resisting patriarchal subordination and finding autonomy by pursuing her own goals.

Index Terms—feminism, patriarchy, oppression, rebel, sexuality

I. INTRODUCTION

The Awakening, published in 1899, is a 19th-century symbolic work that addresses important women issues that had been disregarded for ages. From being attacked after its publication with Willa Cather stating, "Miss Chopin has devoted such exquisite and sensitive, well-governed a style to such trite and sordid a theme" (Cather, 1899, as cited in Elz, 2003, p.13), to being compared to the French novel *Madame Bovary*, to being banned for nearly half a century, it was clear that the idea of a woman fighting for her own identity in *The Awakening* was considered dangerous for the society. Later, the novel was rediscovered in the 1960s as a classic feminist one, and ever since it has remained a fundamental work in the American literary canon.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin depicts the Creole society of New Orleans in which men and women's duties are firmly defined and divided. Women are the caretakers, while men are the providers. Early in their marriage, Edna notices her unequal relationship with her husband Leonce Pontellier because she recognizes that she was not his social equal and that she is a "valuable piece of personal property" (Chopin, ch. I, p.3) for him. While on vacation at Grande Isle, Edna encounters people she believes will complete her life. Robert Lebrun, a man with whom she fell deeply in love, was one of them. As the events of the novel take place during the end of nineteenth century when marriage was considered a sacred bond that cannot be broken, Edna embarks on a journey where she challenges the set norms of patriarchy by leaving her husband and children to discover herself. Chopin depicts the social and emotional difficulties Edna encounters. Although Chopin never labeled herself as a feminist, she was a proponent of women empowerment. As a result, Chopin portrays Edna as one of the earliest female characters in literature to challenge and rebel against patriarchy. Once Edna recognizes her rights and asserts her emotional and physical desires she exemplifies the idea of a "new woman."

II. LITERATURE REVIEW

A series of previous and recent studies indicate that Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* presents the rebellion of a married woman Edna Pontellier against 19th Century patriarchy illuminating a woman's struggles, the myths regarding motherhood, and Edna's awakening to her sexuality and eventual journey toward autonomy. Contemporary scholars analyze the novel from different perspectives with many seeing *The Awakening* as a subversion of patriarchal male dominance. According to Rula Quawas (2009), the female protagonist Edna's success is solely evaluated by her obedience to the divine plan—marriage and motherhood—as it was for her predecessors. She goes on to say that what distinguishes Edna from them is that, "she recognizes that this pattern of Victorian True Womanhood, which is in fact a patriarchal ideology that expects woman to be perfect in her virtues but denies her autonomy as a human being, and those predictable relationships, which it subsumes, are inadequate, for they limit her role narrowly to the home sphere as a subservient caretaker" (Quawas, 2009, p.481). Another Chopin critic, Zoila Clark, focuses on Chopin's use of bird imagery "to discuss the systematic nature of oppression" in her "Feminist Approach to Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," stating that "the main goal of Western feminism was to achieve liberty, disregarding equality and fraternity," and that

"Edna Pontellier, Chopin's protagonist, achieves this individuality, but it is fraternity which might bring equality and freedom for all" (Clark, 2008, p.335).

In addition, Wenhui Hong (2011) examines the gender-space relationship in his essay "Space and Female Subjectivity in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," claiming that "the spatial settings in the novel are, first of all, implicative of power relations" and that the geography and community of the island are "metaphors of patriarchal control" (Hong, 2011, p. 89). Mercy Ezeala and Regina Rudaityte examine literary images of women based on French feminism's assertion that language makes women; however, casting doubt on these representations they contend that "*The awakening* presents divergent voices acknowledging the women's relationships with the norms associated with motherhood and wifehood while parodying these women for unquestioningly living up to the expectations of society" (Ezeala & Rudaityte, 2020, p. 28).

In these critical discussions the one area of substantial agreement seems to be about Edna's rebellion against insurmountable patriarchy in order to become an autonomous subject in search of an identity of her own. According to Per Seyersted (1969), with the eventual shift to the pigeon house, Edna continues to defy social convention, regulations, and what is expected of her as a woman., and that she has "a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual" (Chopin, ch. XXXII, p.245). Joseph Urgo (1987) believes that what Edna accomplishes in *The Awakening* is more of a prelude to rebellion than a true rebellion. He further comments "that in order to live in society she must silence herself. This she rejects. The rebellious quality of *The Awakening* is that Edna would rather extinguish her life than edit her tale" (Urgo, 1987, as cited in Singh & Kumar, 2022, p.180). In the New Woman -debate, Kate Chopin's role appears to be more than evident. Ann Heilmann (2008) states "in its quest for female self-determination, *The Awakening* aligns itself with nineteenth century female traditions of writing, in particular the Anglo-American fiction of the New Woman. Chopin's frank treatment of female sexuality broke new ground at a time when married women held no legal rights over their bodies, and when few other female or feminist writers hazarded openly to explore women's sexual desire"(p.87).

Lawrence Thornton (1980) interprets Edna Pontellier's revolt as a political stand against a woman's social standing, while establishing a distinction between *Madame Bovary's* Emma and *The Awakening's* Edna Pontellier. He states "While Edna Pontellier and Emma are both narcissists, Edna becomes aware of political crises related to her position within Creole society that sharply distinguish her from Emma" (Thornton, 1980, p.1). In "Circadian Rhythms and Revolt in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*," Robert S. Levine looks at Edna's rebellion against the prerequisite of compromise in human life. He suggests that a close examination of the sleep-wake pattern will reveal Edna's radical rebellious tendencies and demonstrate "a more comprehensive rebellion against the regular circadian rhythms of her husband and, eventually, of her community" (Levine, 1982, p.71). Finally, Aparecido Donizete Rossi's Gothic concept fits Edna Pontellier's "solitary soul" that rebels "in order to unveil the awakening of a woman's identity and independence--a shift away from the reductive patriarchal metaphors such as the Angel in the House" (Rossi, 2015, p.76).

III. DISCUSSION

Until the nineteenth century, a woman's function within the confines of matrimony was limited to housework and acting as a caretaker and nurturer. Men, on the other hand, were the family's representatives, and they made all economic, social, and political decisions. According to a 13th century Christian Theologian, Thomas Aquinas, women were "created to be men's helpmeet, but her unique role is in conception..." (Compton's Interactive Encyclopedia, WIC, 1994). In terms of their role, this was still true for most women in the nineteenth century, as the technological advancements of the industrial revolution reduced the role of women in the nineteenth century to that of a home-staying wife, while men dominated the political, economic, and social domains. As a result, when the market economy was introduced in America, the ideology of female domesticity rose. As a result of this divergent categorization of duties, which required white women to stay at home and not work, an idea of a true woman developed in the 1850s in the United States. In her article "The Cult of True Womanhood: 1820-1860," Welter (1966) explains that "The attributes of the true Womanhood, by which a woman judged herself and was judged by her husband, her neighbors and society could be divided into four cardinal virtues piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity" (p.152). Only women who possessed these qualities were considered worthy of the community's admiration. However, American women were becoming increasingly dissatisfied with the social, political, and legal restrictions imposed on them due to their gender. Patriarchy and inequality spurred a feminist movement in response to this injustice. As a result, by the end of the nineteenth century, women's restrictions and subjugation prompted "an awakening in the feminist consciousness whose motives were the need to correct and discuss gender equality" (Arezki & Mahmoudi, 2013, p.171.).

Kate Chopin may not have been an outspoken feminist suffragette like Charlotte Perkin Gilman, Mary Wilkin Freeman, and Edith Wharton, but "In her short stories she frequently engaged with the themes of New Woman fiction: the importance of female independence, tomboyish heroines who refuse to be feminized, women's conflict between art and love, unconventional marital arrangements, marital oppression, prostitution, and congenital syphilis" (Heilmann, 2008, p.93). As a result, Kate Chopin's writings were significant in depicting the situation of women at the time. The phrase "New Woman" has its origins in the organized movement of the first wave of feminists who emphasized women's issues and as a term was first time featured in an 1894 essay by novelist Sarah Grand called "The New Aspect

of the Woman Question." Cruea (2005) while examining the origins of feminism and the Woman Movement in the nineteenth century states that "The New Woman phase of the Woman Movement focused primarily on entirely "emancipating" women from the social expectations and conventions forced upon them by tradition" (p.198) and that "New Woman asserted her right to sexuality and separated it from her public reputation" (Cruea, 2005, p.201).

This concept obviously influenced Chopin's image of the "New Woman," who, according to her, should have her own identity and be in charge of her own body. An idea that is diametrically opposed to the ideology of a true woman. Consequently, in many of her short stories, including "The Story of an Hour," "A Pair of Silk Stockings," and "The Storm," Chopin deliberately deconstructs the role of a 19th century stereotyped role of wife. Similarly, she introduces a number of female characters in her novel *The Awakening*, including the stereotypical Victorian self-sacrificing Madame Ratignolle, who devotes her life to her husband and children, and Edna Pontellier, who defies the traditional roles of wife and mother, thus failing to fit into the general code of true woman. As Russ Sprinkle (1998) states: "...yet willing to give up everything—even her own life—for the freedom of unencumbered individuality, Edna Pontellier epitomized the consummate New Woman of the late nineteenth century." (para. 4) In a nutshell, Edna of *The Awakening* is Chopin's "new woman" who chooses to leave her family and seek artistic and sexual independence in order to escape the social constraints imposed by her marriage and its expectations. In her famous article "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as Feminist Criticism," Toth (1976) contends: "The novel moves us because it illustrates the need for women's psychological, physical, social, and sexual emancipation—the goals of feminists in the twentieth century as well as the nineteenth" (p.231). Therefore, the work follows the feminist critical tradition from a century ago, which highlights the enormous restrictions imposed on women.

Chopin establishes an existing tension between Edna and her husband's relationship from the beginning of the novel. It begins with Edna spending time at the beach with a young man Robert. Mr. Pontellier's lack of interest in his wife's activities and his separate trips to play billiards indicate that they both live separate lives. Mr. Pontellier expects Edna to perform the role of a mother to his children while ignoring her interests and desires. "She couldn't tell why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life" (Chopin, ch. III, p. 11). Chopin's depiction of Edna's personality in the winter pajamas scene in the beginning of the novel lends an insight into Edna's views on self-reliance and independence. Edna, unlike Adele, is certain that her children's summer requirements are sufficient and is not interested in forecasting their winter demands, a practical tendency that would later prompt Léonce to doubt Edna's dedication to her children because she does not exhibit panic and concern regarding their health and comfort. Edna clearly does not pay attention to her husband's warnings that their child is sick, "If it wasn't a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?" (Chopin, ch. III, p. 10) but she insists that he is not in pain. Léonce is a patriarchal man who believes that a woman has a set of responsibilities, therefore Edna's behavior is unacceptable to him because she does not represent the ideal cult of womanhood. Edna does not place her children at the center of her life, in contrast to the patriarchal ideal of a mother-woman who sees motherhood as the pinnacle of her existence, therefore; her husband sees Edna as someone who lives in an emotional, fictitious universe and is unconcerned about reality because she lacks the sense of responsibility to her children and husband that is traditionally associated with true womanhood. When her children visit their grandparents, she, for example, does not miss them, "Their absence was a sort of relief,...It seemed to free her of a responsibility, which she had blindly assumed, and for which Fate had not fitted her" (Chopin, ch. VII, p. 36). Although Edna adores her children, she also recognizes that she isn't made out to be a selfless mother willing to give up her identity for them.

Chopin employs certain images as tools to comprehend Edna's rebelliousness. It's evident that rebelling is in her nature, whether it's against her church and family as a young girl by marrying a Catholic or against society as an adult. For example, near the beginning of the novel, the detained parrot represents Edna's life, as she, like the caged parrot, is trapped in matrimonial bondage. The image of a caged bird reminisces Chopin's previous short story "Emancipation: A Life Fable," a fable about a caged bird who accidentally experiences freedom. The cage represents the patriarchal world and the bird in it- a woman. This imagery is carried on in *The Awakening* where Edna feels trapped in her house like the bird is in its cage. Edna believes that, just as Léonce owns the parrot, he also owns her, making her his property. Indeed, Léonce, as a true patriarchal man, believes that he must supervise Edna as an object that he owns and looks "at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property" (Chopin, ch. I, p. 3). As Mizic (2015) explains "Bird imagery is a tool that Chopin uses to show Edna's dissatisfaction with the tenets of the cult of True Womanhood" (p.18) Edna realizes that her relationship with her husband is one of inequality because she realizes that her husband looks at her as his "valuable piece of property" rather than an individual. This sense of powerlessness in an unequal relationship causes her to question the constraints imposed by her marriage and, as a result, she rebels.

Chopin also employs the imagery of the sea to convey Edna's rebellious spirit. It is while she is at the sea, she feels that "The voice of the sea speaks to the soul" (Chopin, ch. VI, p. 26) and she realizes that her existence encompasses more than simply the bonds of marriage, which are primarily focused with fulfilling her husband and children's needs. Beyond these roles, there was more of herself and her desires to find. She initially declines Robert Lebrun's invitation to the water, but then changes her mind and opts for a swim in the sea. Edna experiences new feelings as she ventures into the sea. As Chopin puts it "Mrs. Pontellier was beginning 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, ch. VI, p. 25). Therefore, in *The Awakening*, the sea is a metaphor for liberation, since it contrasts with Edna's household imprisonment. Edna learns to

swim and enjoys speculating in the open sea, and she feels “like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, with over-confidence” (Chopin, ch. X, p. 52). This image of Edna walking like a child represents her progress toward freedom. As she controls her body, the act of swimming becomes a metaphor for the accumulation of her strength and realization of her own capacity. For Edna:

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (Chopin, ch. X, p. 53).

This sudden awareness of her own body and soul gives Edna a sense of freedom. As swimming makes Edna a more challenging and self-assessing individual; it also reinforces her understanding of her own supremacy because she is in control of her movements. In fact, it becomes Edna’s consolidation “of self-ownership, physical, mental and spiritual, which in turn triggers two fundamental insights that determine her progression from disengaged wife to autonomous subject: in control of her body, she becomes aware of its potential for pleasure and learns to claim her right to self-determination” (Heilmann, 2008, p.87). In the water, Edna recognizes her own strengths and feels liberated to break free of the constraints of patriarchal responsibilities.

Edna also encounters a number of people that inspire her rebellion and quest for self-awareness. Adele Ratignolle, Edna’s closest friend, is one of them, and Chopin portrays her as a “faultless Madonna” and an exemplary “true woman.” However, when Chopin describes Adele, it is clear that she is satirizing the expected traits of a “true woman,” “Madame Ratignolle had been married 7 years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time, she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one” (Chopin, ch. IV, pp. 16-17). Despite the fact that they both live in a Creole society, their perspectives are vastly different. Adele, for example, embodies the concept of a perfect mother woman who “idolized their children,” “worshipped their husbands,” and, “esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angel” (Chopin, ch. III, pp. 14-15). Edna Pontellier, on the other hand, is the novel’s protagonist who is always considering breaking away from the established institutions such as marriage, church, and society. The true woman Adele, may stand out as she receives adulation for carrying out her domestic responsibilities in the family and community, but Edna resists patriarchal conventions and forges her own path. Adele’s idealized family image gives Edna “a sense that she could not happily continue in the role of wife and mother; a sense of stasis and discontent above all else” (Pozorski & Martine, 2018, p. 1). Although they were friends, with Adele functioning as Edna’s mother figure, these two women are diametrically opposed, as indicated by their disagreement over their roles as self-sacrificing mothers. Adele feels that a mother must sacrifice her life for her children, to which Edna responds that she “would never sacrifice herself for her children” (Chopin, ch. XVI, p. 90), and that she would give “the unessential” such as wealth but not herself, and that she will determine how much of herself she will give to others including her children. Edna’s skepticism about expectations from a mother is demonstrated in the subsequent exchange between the two ‘I don’t know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by unessential’, said Madame Ratignolle, cheerfully; ‘but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that—your Bible tells you so. I’m sure I couldn’t do more than that’. ‘Oh, yes you could!’ laughed Edna (Chopin, ch. XVI, pp. 90-91). Edna is certainly aware that a woman is capable of much more than only being a mother. Edna also notices Adele’s inability to comprehend that a mother woman might defy social rules and moralities that limit her. This argument emphasizes the basic difference between the two: Adele is content being a mother and wife. Edna, on the other hand, refuses to be seen as a person whose value is determined by her ability to bring happiness to her husband and children. In fact, she has “pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment” (Chopin, ch. XVIII, p. 107). Edna’s discomfort with her status as a wife and mother is evident in this remark; she yearns for a womanhood separate from her children and from patriarchal norms. Finally, when Edna learns that Adele embodies everything she doesn’t want to be, this dialogue serves as a catalyst for her awakening and ultimate rebellion.

Mademoiselle Reisz, in contrast to the true woman figure Adele, is the other significant female character whose unreserved lifestyle and autonomy not only astounds but also inspires Edna. She is an unmarried pianist who has lived life unconventionally and on her own terms. Chopin utilizes her character to highlight the idea that in the nineteenth century, a woman might either be an artist or a wife. It seemed impossible for a woman to have it all. According to Papke there are only two categories of women in Edna’s society: “Women either become wives and mothers ... or exiles” (Papke, 1990, p.39). Mademoiselle Reisz leads an exiled life of a recluse, shunned by the society as an eccentric “no longer young, who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample on the rights of others” (Chopin, ch. IX, p. 48). Elizabeth Fox-Genovese (1994) while commenting on Mademoiselle Reisz’s emancipation contends that “for the possibility of female independence her life may be austere and frugal, but it is her own”(p. 260). So, for the sake of her art, she has sacrificed her sexuality, as she later cautions Edna: “The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth” (Chopin, ch. XXVII, p. 118). Edna is drawn to Mademoiselle Reisz’s personality because, unlike Adele, she has created an identity for herself as an artist. When Edna hears her play music, she feels a renewed sense of isolation, her emotions relax, and a slew of images of freedom and solitude come to mind:

When she heard it there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him. (Chopin, Ch. IX, p. 49)

As Edna imagines the bird flying far away, this quote reveals her longing for liberation and expectancy. The bird's representation is analogous to Edna's liberation; unfortunately, no one is willing to assist her in breaking the rules. It also reveals how music stimulates her creative mind. Mademoiselle Reisz notices Edna's agitation, even tears, and realizes that music provides her with a sense of solitude, which is necessary for her to seek self-expression through art. Mademoiselle Reisz, obviously, plays a big role in Edna's artistic understanding and freedom. Edna is inspired to be a woman in her own right by Mademoiselle Reisz, who encourages her to recognize her own needs. When Edna comes to see her and tells her she wants to be an artist, Mademoiselle Reisz is astounded and warns, "To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts--absolute gifts--....And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul" (Chopin, ch. XXI, p. 120). Edna's friendship with Mademoiselle Reisz not only inspires her to be an artist, but it also teaches her how to overcome the limitations imposed by society on women and prepares her for more exposure to the masculine public arena. Mademoiselle Reisz embodies the image of a free woman artist for Edna finds inspiration in Mademoiselle Reisz's talent and decides to pursue painting.

As the summer draws to a close, Edna returns to New Orleans with her family; the music and swimming have led to her feminist awakening, and she recognizes the connection between mind, body, and soul. Edna openly resists her husband by not attending the Tuesday get-togethers with the guests. Her defiance catches Leonce off guard, resulting in an argument. Edna stomps on her ring and throws it away in a fit of rage; in doing so, Edna vows open rebellion against patriarchy, subjugation, and objectification of women. Edna's decision to throw away her wedding ring represents her liberation from "burdensome and disheartening" role of a wife. Edna's defiance has a deeper significance according to Jahan (2017) "She is the most rebellious when she, in a fit of dissatisfaction of her marriage, flings her wedding ring upon the carpet and attempts to crush it.....Edna's inability to crush the wedding ring, prophecies that it would not be easy for her to be liberated from the shackles of the patriarchal codes of conduct. But her fingers without wedding ring, renders her to paint, make drawings, and earn her living independently without any obstruction that impedes or is burdensome for her" (p.67). Edna becomes melancholic after this experience and perceives her surroundings to be hostile and unpleasant. She craves independence, so she creates a personal space in the attic for herself, which she uses as a studio where she "dabbles" in her artistic talent. Edna becomes obsessed with painting as a way to escape domestic and familial responsibilities, but her husband warns her against "letting the family go to the devil" (Chopin, ch. XIX, p. 109). Unfortunately, Leonce misdiagnoses Edna's desire for her own space and identity as illness. Leonce dismisses her as insane and mentally unstable, reflecting a typical patriarchal mindset; he tells the doctor that "she has some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women," (Chopin, ch. XXII, p. 124) which further explains Leonce's refusal to accept that his wife has transformed into a new woman with her own identity.

Furthermore, Edna's excuse for not going to her sister's wedding was because she feels "a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth" (Chopin, ch. XXII, p. 126) is an act of rebellion in that it defines marriage as a consolation event that imprisons women and prevents them from achieving their own freedom. Therefore, Edna remains at home, content in her solitude, "she breathed a big, genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her" (Chopin, ch. XXII, p. 137). In response to Edna's refusal to attend the wedding, her father accuses Leonce of not knowing how to manage a wife. By declining to attend her sister's wedding, Edna certainly disturbs the pillars of patriarchy and dominance in her family.

Edna's rebellion progresses to independence and liberty when she chooses to move into "a little four-room house around the corner" from her husband's house with a single servant; she states, "I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence" (Chopin, ch. XXVI, p. 151). By creating an individual space for herself, Edna seeks further autonomy and individuality. Edna discusses this with Mademoiselle Reisz who asks her "What does your husband say?" "I have not told him yet, I only thought of it this morning. He will think I am demented, no doubt" (Chopin, ch. XXVI, p. 152). Nevertheless, Edna leaves the house without waiting for her husband to respond. Her new home is known as "the pigeon house" because of its modest size, but it has made Edna fully conscious of experiencing life in a new perspective, where she appreciates her experiences: "The pigeon house pleased her. It quickly took on the intimate character of a home, while she imbued it with a charm that radiated like a warm glow" (Chopin, ch. XXXII, p. 180).

Furthermore, Edna's relationships with Robert and Arobin also reform her personality to a newly awakened individual. Through these relationships, Edna finds an expression to rebel against patriarchal presumptions that a "good woman" is expected to find sex frightening and disgusting" (Tyson, 2014, p.86). Edna's fixation with Robert is a projection of an unmet sexual urge that she masks behind romance. Robert is delighted to play his part in this romance. The ideal love relationship with Robert may have satisfied Edna's emotional and passionate longings, but it could not meet her physical needs owing to Robert's absence. She attends horse races and meets Alcee Arobin, a philanderer with whom she had sexual experiences as "a flaming torch" (Chopin, ch. XXVII, p. 159), and with whom her "sensuality,... unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature's requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom" (Chopin, ch. XXX, p. 200). Edna has defied her husband's image of her as "a valuable piece of personal property" by first deciding to be an artist and then by exploring her sexuality.

Edna's decision to visit Adele during her childbirth reveals Adele as a true mother woman who, while concerned for Edna, cannot comprehend Edna's independence and advises her to be more cautious, "You seem to act like without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone" (Chopin, ch. XXXIII, p. 184). She also reminds Edna about her children and how her needs and aspirations may have an impact on everyone around her. This conversation is significant because Adele's words have an impact on Edna, who is torn between her emotions. She realizes that in her pursuit of freedom and individuality, she will "trample upon the little lives" of her children. It further demonstrates the pervasiveness of patriarchy and the power it wields over women. It becomes clear to Edna that in order to oppose patriarchal norms, she requires support, which she does not receive from even Adele, let alone the society. Despite the fact that Edna has always rejected patriarchy, whether in opposing her father by marrying a catholic or by fleeing an unequal marriage, she realizes that it is her children that "sought to drag her into their soul's enslavement" (Chopin, ch. XXXIX, p. 219). According to Schweitzer (1990), "The children are a constant reminder for the confinement of her marriage to Edna," (p.163) they become an impediment to Edna's quest for self-awareness as she realizes that the essence of motherhood in her is forcing her to "sacrifice herself for her children" (Chopin, ch. XVI, p. 90). Edna also realizes that in a patriarchal culture, women are denied the opportunity to assert their sexuality or establish their individuality; a woman's role is to dedicate her life to her family and be a devoted wife and mother. This standard is the primary motivator for Edna's suicide.

After removing the "unpleasant, pricking clothing," she walks into the sea for the first time. "It seemed strange and dreadful to stand naked under the sky!" Edna exclaims "How delicious!" (Chopin, ch. XXXIX, p. 220). She feels like a new born individual with unique perspective on the world and freedom, and she eventually takes control of her existence. As Gilbert (1983) states, Edna is a heroine "journeying not just toward rebirth but toward a regenerative and revisionary genre, a genre that intends to propose new realities for women by providing new mythic paradigms through which women's lives can be understood" (p. 59). As Edna swims, she thinks about her husband and children, but then realizes that they no longer inhabit her body. Edna does not return to the shore and instead chooses to take her life as a final act of rebellion in order to not "sacrifice herself" (Chopin, ch. XVI, p. 88). Her overarching goal is to find meaning in her life and to live it on her own terms as she breaks the society's paradigms of the "true woman." Even though Edna's act of terminating her life is tragic, it is the final and ultimate triumphal declaration of her feminist awakening and her ultimate revolt against masculine subjugation and patriarchal oppression. Even her death is her decision, as she depicts the scene of her own death and makes it apparent to the world, as an artist would.

Gray (2004) considers Edna's death "as an escape from the oppressive ideology of patriarchy which prevents women from realizing their own-selves. Edna finds death as the only act to be free because she realizes that death will free her from the control of others" (p. 54). Edna's death, according to Rula Quawas (2009), is the apex of her unyielding resolve and courage to live as an adult woman, and that in doing so, is "An identity discovered, an attempt made to establish it, and a willingness to die instead of adapting it to traditional molds, bear witness to heroic courage" (Quawas 2009, p. 492). Thus, Edna sees suicide as the ultimate act of patriarchal oppressive resistance because it allows her to break free from patriarchal society's expectations on women. As a result, her death is a celebration of her rebellious spirit.

IV. CONCLUSION

In summary, Edna's rebellion is defined by her relationships with various men and women, her responsiveness to her creative impulses, and her sexual revelation. Despite being influenced by two mother figures, she rejects both the perfect mother-women, Madame Ratignolle, and the independent woman, Mademoiselle Reisz, as role models. Through her relationships with Leonce, Robert, and Arobin, she comes to perceive herself as a human being with needs and desires who is capable of breaking free from patriarchal oppression, which hinders women from claiming their own independence and having self-esteem. In truth, she seeks autonomy and independence from patriarchy and therefore rebels by uniting her spirit, intellect, and body, as well as by exercising her creative tendencies. Edna takes up swimming as a means of releasing her spirit. In the water, Edna gains control and awareness of her sexual and in painting her artistic potentials, thereby, rejecting the norms of the true woman and transforming herself into a new woman and, more importantly, an individual. Edna's sexual awakening motivates her struggle against patriarchy. Edna claimed for herself the right to choose sexual partners outside of her marriage by seizing the right to give or withhold her body as she pleased. These become a mechanism by which Edna achieves freedom and internal congruence. Hence, Edna emerges as a new woman who defies patriarchal conventions that allow men to transgress in marriage but not women. As a result, Edna's rebellion unites her soul (individuality), body (sexuality), and mind (creativity), resulting in her liberation from marital oppression. However, once free, Edna begins to see the barriers patriarchy places in the way of a woman carving out her own space in the masculine world. Edna commits suicide as the ultimate expression of her freedom and individuality after realizing that she can't be both an artist and a mother at the same time. It is evident that Chopin does not condemn Edna's rebellion in proclaiming her sexuality and seeking independence from patriarchy through the consolidation of her mind, body, and spirit, but rather paints her as the new woman. As Schaefer (2017) observes, "Edna's independence anticipates the modern woman who would emerge decades later with suffrage. Hence, Chopin's novel not only converses with the feminist addresses that came to New Orleans with Susan B. Anthony in

1880s and 1890s, but also foresees the questions of female subjectivity that will arise once suffrage is granted and women form identities and roles outside the home” (p.4).

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