

Chapter 3

Exploring Three Female Characters: Edna, Adèle and Reisz

This chapter is going to explore three female characters in *The Awakening* through Kate Millet's patriarchal framework. Millet's theory will provide a general scope of how the state of women's oppression came to be. I will focus my analysis on three major female characters: Edna Pontellier, Adèle Ratignolle and Reisz. The analysis of these characters will demonstrate how women are oppressed under patriarchal system or, to be more precise, how they incarcerate themselves to the system. This chapter is divided into four major parts with the analysis of the three female characters' identities corresponding to Millet's proposal of womanhood as patriarchal construction. I will discuss how each female character is portrayed as inferior to the males and oppressed by her own womanhood built by patriarchal authority. The analysis should not only prove the overwhelming nature of the patriarchal system but also hint that verifiable resistance for women is to stand outside the male dominated sphere.

Oppression as Constructed Womanhoods

In this chapter I will examine the boundary of Millet's theory of the patriarchy in *The Awakening*. As previously mentioned in the last chapter, patriarchy is created to favor male dominance and, in the same time, to relegate female to subordinate position. Gender identities are constructed by men in order to create and maintain the hierarchy of power. I notice that patriarchy functions exclusively in *The Awakening* through the establishment of the ideological state of womanhood, which functions in reality through the roles of wife and mother - the two main positions of women in the family. By investigating the position of each gender in the family, it should be possible to pinpoint the root of women's oppression.

Of course, the relationship in the family is what drives the plot of *The Awakening* as it politically implies the hierarchy of gender power in the patriarchal structure. The gender role in the family structure is established to reinforce men's power. The practice of dividing family units according to the gender roles of

father/husband, mother/wife is assumed as common and most certainly "natural"¹ in nearly all cultures. Millet's patriarchal framework seeks to debunk this myth by declaring that these "natural" roles are all culturally male inventions. Family, being founded on the constitution of male dominated society, creates the concept of womanhood by designating female identity as wife and mother whose functions is limited to domestic work. This patriarchal construction, according to Millet, is supposed to serve male's biased ideas of the gender division of work and marriage authority, in which the supposedly superior "natural" qualities of men are the only acceptable attributes. Pushing the Millet's framework to its limit, it is possible to say that the very existence of women and the ideology of womanhood are completely defined by the patriarchal system.

It is easy to see how female identity and womanhood are constructed when the roles of men and women in the family are compared. Men, in the "natural" role of father/husband, have the most powerful authority in the family because they ideologically position themselves in this role. The ideological position of a father is then a justification for men to establish themselves as a family leader. Hence, a male figure who inhibits the ideological position of the father/husband automatically inherits the favorable character traits such as decisive, strong, brave, i.e., "natural" qualities that enable men to function effectively in the social structure. The male's supremacy in the division of labor runs in parallel with myth of authority in marriage. With the constructed belief of superior "natural" abilities, patriarchy asserts that men have the rights to own women as their possession, which is performed in reality through the act of marriage. Thus, the status of a wife and its ideology of wifeness are constructed by patriarchy. A woman is a "wife" because she is defined by the patriarchal position of a husband. It is only through the ritual of marriage that she is able to have any say in the patriarchal social structure. Moreover, the status of wife also forces women to sacrifice their selfhood for they become their husband's property upon the moment of their marriage. As an ideal wife, women are expected to devote their entire life to serve family by responding to the endless domestic

¹ The word "natural" emphasized in the quotation mark is the term that suggests ambiguity and irony as it is an ideology socially constructed by patriarchy, not 'natural' as its literal meaning.

chores. Once women are assimilated into the family structure, the fabrication of the mother role is inevitable. As Millet states in *Sexual Politics*, patriarchy declares that women are "naturally" born to be a mother and they cannot escape from this maternal destiny (1969, section The Second Chapter). Their maternal functions within the patriarchal system are tied to women's nature. For instance, a mother is expected to instinctively dedicate her life to children. In reality, the essence of motherhood is established by men in order to push the responsibility of child care to women, so that men can have chances to gain money and social value from working outside the house. It is as though men created the concept of women and its corresponding ideology to enslave their other half.

Metaphorically speaking, the unjust gender relationship in the patriarchal system is equivalent to the manipulation of men over women. That is, by constructing the roles of wife and mother or the ideologies of wifedom and motherhood, women are made to feel as though they are "naturally" bound to these positions. To demonstrate the extent of Millet's argument, I would like to show a little scene at the Grand Isle resort, in which despite the exclusion of any male figures, the women still internally behave according to their constructed roles. It seems that the women have internally assimilated their roles naturally. The Grand Isle resort is set up as an exclusive women's sphere where the men are excluded, yet it is languished by the presence of the patriarchy. The resort's supposedly feminine identity is established by the fact that Madame Lebrun who is a widow landlady. The women mostly stay in Grand Isle resort during the summer while the men come to the resort only on weekends. However, instead of pointing female autonomy, this image usage rather enhances the critical problem of women's oppression because these images signify the idea that women are oppressed and imprisoned in domestic works although there are no authoritative husbands appearing in female sphere.

Of course, the idea of oppressed women under male hierarchy is actively presented throughout the novel. *The Awakening* makes the reader realize that the women's sphere in fact becomes a prison of female roles for it is structured by the patriarchal hegemony. The patriarchal ideology socially limits women's individuality into a typical role of mother and wife. Women cannot perform other social roles while men can have various roles as husband, father, provider and ruler. As a product

of patriarchal ideology, women are imprisoned in the submissive roles of mother and wife. Reinforcing Millet's idea of the constructed wifeness and motherhood, the novel begins by presenting the scene that Mr. Pontellier perceives his wife as his own property and blames her for not responding to the mother's task, which is going to be analyzed later in the part of Edna's oppression. This suggests the idea that husband, as a provider and family leader, absolutely dominates his subordinates. As *The Awakening* progresses and their characteristics become more vivid, the female characters explicitly become the major characters in the novel. Examining them via the Millet's feminist lens, it should be obvious that all three female characters share their consciousness of the inferior sexual status in the patriarchal domain. The female characters are conscious of the patriarchal system; however, the question is how Edna, Adèle and Reisz relate themselves to it. I would like to categorize the nature of this dynamic relationship between the three female characters and the patriarchal system as the followings: Edna tries to resist the system, Adèle chooses to conform to it entirely and Reisz totally rejects it. These women may position themselves to the patriarchal system in varying degree; however, none of them could claim to make impact on women's oppressive status as long as they remain within the system.

Adèle: The Exploited Patriarchal Woman

The Awakening presents the idea of woman's oppression through the socially constructed gender differences between male/female and masculinity/femininity in the patriarchal system. In my opinion, one of the aspects that made *The Awakening* so controversial is Chopin's portrayal of Adèle Ratignolle. As previously mentioned, *The Awakening* contains numerous Victorian social constructions that influenced Chopin. Of course, another way of saying this is that Chopin was aware of the period's strict social convention, yet she boldly went on to write the novel anyway. Chopin's perspective of the rigid Victorian's convention is obviously channeled through the contrast between Adèle Ratignolle and Edna Pontellier is that the former fits the ideal patriarchal ideologies of womanhood of the time while the latter does not qualify any ideal womanhood. Perhaps if Chopin had chosen to portray Madame Ratignolle as her protagonist instead of the rebellious

Edna, her writing career and her biography might have turned out differently. Judging from these factors, it should be safe to say that Adèle Ratignolle, the woman who completely embraces the Victorian norms, is the obvious case of patriarchal exploitation.

Adèle is the perfect model of patriarchal conformity in Millet's framework. According to Millet's concept of patriarchy, the purpose of constructing female gender identity is simply to push the domestic work to women. Male authority cunningly sets up ideology about woman's "natural" roles in society, obliging women to obediently fulfilling their duties without questions - a kind of ideological enslavement. Under the ideological apparatus of the female gender, women genuinely believe that they have to behave according to patriarchal standard. In the Victorian context, it is "natural" for women, writers included, to behave like Adèle rather than Edna. Patriarchy further constructs more essences of female gender identity, claiming that women are "naturally" born to be wife and mother. With these artificially assembled "natural" roles, women are forced to respond not only to domestic tasks but also to tend their babies, an act explained simply as maternal instinct. Thus, women's identities are established to reinforce male domination. In fact, to be recognized as a woman at all, one has no choice but to conform to the ideology of womanhood. Adèle, who constantly performs the tasks that define the ideology of wife and mother throughout the novel, is undoubtedly the Victorian society ideal woman. However, through Millet's framework, her behaviors are ironically overturned. Her devotion to the patriarchal standard becomes submissive gestures. The sacredness of wifehood and motherhood, the good values Victorian women must upkeep, is nothing but physical slavery in disguise.

Adèle is described as a very charming and attractive Créole woman. She is, in short, a rather superficial character, which is painted with cliché social expectation of womanhood in order to reinforce that it is men who describe and condition what is beauty and what is not – there is no natural beauty in women except the ones assigned by men. Her beautiful figure represents what men want to see from a woman's body. Adèle is described in the novel as the "fair lady of our dreams" (p.51). Although she is praised for her beauty, it is suggested that she is objectified as a sexual object. Her described beauty is like a fair Madonna whose beauty is

evaluated like a portrait – a surface superficial description. Hence, Adèle is dehumanized to object status, not only by her husband but by all Créoles.

To reinforce a female character like Adèle, who is an ideologically oppressed woman, Chopin creates Mrs. Lebrun, a landlady of Grand Isle's resort. Although Mrs. Lebrun has her own accommodating business and her financial status is considerably prosperous, she often complains of her unhappiness. Despite her numerous property that brings her "*the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright*". (p. 9), she strongly believes that her financial status would be better if her husband were with her:

"If your father had only lived!" ...It was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life. (pp. 56-57)

Her perspective is dominated by the patriarchal idea that women cannot earn money as well as men. Mrs. Lebrun believes that her husband would provide her with better financial status and happiness without the awareness of her own potential to manage her resort. She, like Adèle, makes a hasty conclusion that women should naturally be under male dominance.

The obvious patriarchal oppression that Chopin sets for Adèle Ratignolle is her status as "model of wife and maternal figure", who believes it is "natural" to devote herself to her family in order to intensify the idea of women in the patriarchal society as submissive wives. The description of Adèle below echoes Millet's patriarchal concept as it typifies the completely submissive women in the male dominated society:

...They were women who idealized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.

Many of them were delicious in the role; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm...Her name was Adèle Ratignolle. (pp. 9-10)

The excerpt describes Adèle's idealization of the Victorian role of mother and wife figure, dedicating her life to domestic duties, assuring that her husband and children are happy. Despite the graciousness of the vivid religious imagery, Chopin's tone of voice in the excerpt is quite sarcastic. By comparing the submissive behaviors of women to individuals who "*grow wings as ministering angels*" through having the "*holy privilege of efface[ing] themselves*" to men, Chopin cleverly reveals the condition of gender role and women's identity. It seems that in order to be considered a woman (or angel) at all, one has to go through the "*holy privilege*" of carrying out the ordeals defined by the patriarchal roles of wife and mother. In addition, Chopin's description also indicates that patriarchy functions through ritualization that requires the participation of women. Considering the excerpt through Millet's feminist lens, the use of religious reference is extremely ironic. If women's participation in patriarchy is equivalent to physical slavery, Adèle, who clearly is the arch angel because she is "*delicious in the role*" (p.19) that is "*the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm*" (p.19), is working for the devil all along. All in all, her happiness relies on the domestic well being of her family. With her strong determination to play the role of wife and mother, Adèle is happy to serve her husband and children with constant devotion.

Chopin's portrayal of Adèle vividly presents Millet's idea of woman as a child bearer - the basic position of women in the patriarchal society. Women's works are non profitable for women must take care of family members and be responsible for all domestic work. They are considered not to have the "natural" capability to earn money like their husband. Therefore, women are socially defined by motherhood. The tasks assigned to women are housework and childbearing - the socially constructed maternal instinct. The ideological apparatus of childbearing is equivalent to men's taking advantage from women. The idea of childbearing is clearly parallel to Millet's gender division of work. By dividing the social and domestic spheres, patriarchy obstructs women from the right to attend university, vote

or engage in male careers (Snodgrass, 2006). A husband only assumes the role of the family ruler and provider. Therefore, women's position is restricted to the domestic sphere only. Limited only to the domestic sphere and childbearing ideology, women are devaluated to merely a productive machine, giving birth to laborers and human resources for the family and society.

Adèle is legibly an exaggerated figure of a mothering woman. Chopin is quite determined to show that, through Edna's eyes, Adèle is overactive in her maternal duty:

Seeing her prepare the new clothes for her children, Edna's mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter garments the subject of her summer meditations. (p.10)

By acting out her predestined social expectations and values, Adèle's role in the novel is to make Edna question her relation with the patriarchal concept of motherhood. Adèle's affectionate feeling for her children is visible in the scene that she dedicates herself to children even her life:

Her little [children] ran to meet her. Two of them clung about her white skirts, the third she took from its nurse and with a thousand endearments bore it along in her own fond, encircling arms. Though, as everybody well knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin! (p.31)

Moreover, during the scene of Adèle's actual childbearing, through her pain and exhaustion, she reminds Edna to "*think of your children first*" as she could sense that her friend is about to venture outside the patriarchy or, to be exact, her standard of womanhood (p.294). Adèle's endurance of her pain during her childbirth

in order to warn Edna of her friend's maternal role reinforces her status as the idealized maternal figure.

Obviously, Adèle's determination to her duty intensifies the contradiction between her "perfect" motherhood and Edna's complete lack of it - a mirror reflection that projects Edna's downfall as a mother in the Victorian context. This maternal contradiction is especially visible in the novel's description:

Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind, though she could not induce her to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework, which Adèle begged to be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert.
(p.36)

The excerpt above shows that Adèle cannot detach herself from motherhood, as she is greatly obsessed with her maternal tasks. It is apparent that Adèle is willing to sacrifice her happiness to her adored family while Edna is ready to give up her family for her pleasure. Contrasting to Edna who identifies herself with her soul - the individualistic self, Adèle identifies herself with the social status as a wife and mother figure, and that causes her lack of her own identity. Existing as wife and mother is standard identifications of Créole women in the male dominated society. Therefore, Adèle is literally a "selfless" oppressed individual which is contradicting to Edna's attempt to maintain her sense of self despite her status of being her husband's property.

Despite her seemingly total submission, Adèle, unlike Edna, is not frustrated by patriarchal social system. She is unaware of her inferiority in the Créole society. Her complete submission can only highlight the effectiveness of the oppressive patriarchal ideology. In Adèle's case the patriarchal oppression is so overwhelmingly complete that she cannot detect its presence as the power of the feminine ideology makes her feel that womanhood is entirely natural. Unlike Edna

who has tendency to resist the roles of wife and mother, Adèle is proud of them as she is praised for maintaining the dual roles ideally. She is determined to maintain her devotion for family and hopes that Edna follows her example. Adèle further reinforces the idea of ideological oppression when she tries to keep Edna in the patriarchal convention by preventing the relationship between Edna and Robert. This can be seen in the conversation between her and Robert:

"I only ask for one; let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

"Why?" he asked himself growing serious at his companion's

"...If your attentions to any married women here were ever offered

with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the

gentleman we all know you to be, and you would be unfit to

associate with the wives and daughters of the people who trust you."

(pp. 50-51)

Adèle demands that Robert must not destroy Edna's marital status. Her interference in Edna's affair intensifies her submission to the patriarchal ideology and its insistence in monogamy, which is a form of marriage invented by men in order to keep women under their control. Thus, by speaking "*what she believed to be the law and the gospel*" (p.51), Adèle completely identifies herself with the male domination system and is quite content of such submissive condition.

From Adèle's actions, it is suggestive that women's oppression is partly caused by their willingness to live under male dominance without being aware of the fact. Like other Créole women who live within the confinement of the patriarchal convention, Adèle has grown to revolve her life around the "natural" idea of sexual division and domestic work. Women are manipulated to believe that they are weak and must be protected by men as a result of the patriarchal constructed ideology of

womanhood. The gender system makes women surrender themselves to their submissive roles of wife and mother. The ideological apparatuses of these roles cause them to blindly devote their lives to their husbands and children. They see themselves as "naturally" inferior to men; therefore, they feel completely obliged to obey the patriarchal rules. It is apparent that Adèle is a manifestation of the slave by her own ideology forced up on her because she solely believes that women should be submissive to men. She worships her husband and devaluates herself to the lowest rank of familial hierarchy – the role of the family servant. The cause of Adèle's submissiveness is her unawareness of the political power in sexual relationships; she does not realize that she is suppressed and imprisoned in the social roles constructed by masculine ideology. I will then compare Adèle's patriarchal submission to Edna's awakening to the construction of masculine domination.

Edna: The Frustrated Woman in Constructed Gender Role

Edna's frustration of the relationship in her family represents Millet's attitude toward patriarchy. Unlike Adèle, who is happy to play her assigned roles in the family and marriage, Edna outwardly questions her existence within the system. What I am saying here is Edna feels that she is being oppressed in the roles of wife and mother, which is contrast to Adèle's nonchalant attitude. To understand the difference between Edna's and Adèle's perspectives toward patriarchy, it is necessary to understand the novel's presentation of the former's family relationship. I will still be using Millet's framework to identify the root of patriarchy in Edna's family unit.

Edna Pontellier begins her journey toward patriarchal emancipation as a young and attractive wife of a wealthy businessman, Léonce Pontellier. Like other Créole women who live in patriarchal society, Edna's existence is proved by her marriage which forces her to stand in the society as a wife in an upper middle class family. Of course, the condition for her marriage is also a social one. Edna did not marry because of love but rather for economic and social status. As a wife of Mr. Pontellier, Edna inevitably admits that it brings her the luxurious and convenient life.

This idea is remarkably shown in the scene that Mr. Pontellier can qualify the society's ideal husband:

Mr. Pontellier gave his wife half of the money which he had brought away from Klein's hotel the evening before. She liked money as well as most women, and accepted it with no little satisfaction.

Mrs. Pontellier was always very generous with the contents of such a box; she was quite used to receiving them when away from home...And he ladies... declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better.
(pp. 16-17)

From Millet's perspective, this need for masculine dependency is purely an ideological issue. The patriarchal establishment constructs the concept of femininity in order to claim that women are naturally incompetent and impotent; therefore, they require the male assistance, which is manifested in reality through marriage and family unit. Because of this ideological necessity, women are conveniently pushed to family institution and imprisonment of wifeness and motherhood.

It is useful to note that Edna's emancipation or her difficulty in understanding the patriarchal system is a result of her being raised and dominated in the extremely masculine environment and ideology. In other words, her awakening in the novel is impeded by the patriarchal order from the moment of her birth. Her life, from childhood to her marriage and before her awakening, is an endless encounter with the patriarchal force. From an early age, Edna has lived under the patriarchal restriction. Her father, a colonel, is the head of her family who enforces the patriarchal restriction by demanding strict attention to Presbyterian practices from his family's members. Although Edna tries to oppose against him by marrying Léonce, who is a Catholic, she still falls in the patriarchal trap in the role of his wife. She fails to rebel against the patriarchal hegemony and even becomes victimized by her own decision. Her father's patriarchal restriction does not only influence her childhood but comes to haunt her again when the Colonel gives Léonce his marriage advice:

"You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce," asserted the Colonel. "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it." (p.186)

The colonel's words imply that he strongly believes in patriarchal ideology and practice. His belief is very extreme for Léonce, who likewise also adopts patriarchal ideology, wonders that "the Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave". From this little scene, I would like to draw the attention to the fact that Edna's decision to marry Léonce comes from her awareness of the patriarchal control. It seems that she is aware of the patriarchal convention in her youth, to a certain extent. Even if the level of awareness is only at the level of escape – unintentionally running away from one patriarchal force only to be trapped by another. It is precisely her being conscious of the system that frustrates her; a consciousness of its existence that could not be wholly identified. This frustration, I would like to propose, is a mental oppression of sort. She is, in short, a woman who has the tendency to defy but could not free herself from patriarchal social binding.

Edna's husband, Léonce, is the representation of patriarchal system. He assumes the role of the dominating male who firmly believes in the constructed roles of husband and wife and for all family members to act accordingly. He sets himself a masculine standard and dutifully follows patriarchal expectation by being a good family's provider. Moreover, he also expects his wife to be an ideal example of female domestication. Léonce's assumption of these patriarchal functions clearly reflects Millet's proposal of gender work division. In other words, he insists that his wife should always be a servant who performs domestic duties and bears children or to perform the roles of wife and mother similar to Adèle. Judging from Léonce's attitude, it is apparent that he only identifies Edna as his "wife" and the "mother" of his children rather than as an individual woman. His ignorance represents Millet's proposal that it is the patriarchal system that defines and constructs the concept of women rather than relying on some sort of natural reference. Thus, married to Mr. Pontellier, it is socially crucial for Edna to obey her husband's demands since they are parts of society's expectation. Edna must first act out her patriarchy's assigned status

as an obedient wife in order to be recognized as a female being in the society. In term of hierarchical order in the family, Edna is inevitably forced to be the inferior one as the ideology of wifeness requires that she must devote herself to her husband and be unobtrusively submissive. Needless to say, the conflict between Edna, as a conscious individual, and the ideologically oppressed reality is the source of her oppression. It is possible to interpret that her internal turmoil is in itself a kind of mental oppression rooted in her frustration of the unjust social treatment.

The vivid example of the Edna's oppression is presented in the scene that her husband, who believes that she should completely sacrifice herself to her family, reproaches Edna's non-maternal behavior. According to patriarchal constructed maternal functions, Edna is expected to be a devoted mother whose main priority is her children. When she does not fulfill this expectation, she is blamed for being non-maternal, which is a contemptible characteristic in a patriarchal society:

Mr. Pontellier reproached his wife for her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hand full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. He talked in a monotonous, insistent way...

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day...(pp. 7-8)

Mr. Pontellier's reproach to his wife implies Millet's sexual division of work in a patriarchal society. Women are typically enslaved in the role of wife and mother while men are the providers outside the house. The reproach suggests the inequality between men and women. The workloads of the two sexes, placed upon them by social expectation, are blatantly unjust. While men do the work outside and relax at home at night, women can never stop their domestic work. The husband's

duty is limited only to his workplaces but the wife's duty requires full time dedication. As a mother, Edna is supposed to care for her family even at night – an interminable task of women.

The scene does not only present Edna's imprisonment, but it vividly shows Mr. Pontellier's complete dominance of his wife as he totally shifts the domestic duty to her. Metaphorically speaking, their relationship is similar to one between master and slave, for the master can condemn the slave when the latter ignores his/her duty. His rhetorical question of "*If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it?*"(p.12) indicates that he has severed all the ties between himself and his children. His speech also suggests a hierarchical order, in which the father is of the highest rank. Mr. Pontellier puts himself in the top chain of command as he looks after the financial well-being of the family members as they are his properties in the patriarchal logic. His wife is like someone he employs to look after the rest of his possession. In this logic, even the children, Edna's own flesh and blood, are ranked above their mother. This is apparent in the fact that Edna cannot make her argument against the idea that the wife must be ruled by her husband because she has not grasped the potential of her womanhood. The hierarchical relationship of the Pontelliers proves Millet's idea of the male as the dominant authority in familial relationship. The wife is at the lowest rank in the hierarchy since she has to serve all family members. Under the role of a wife and mother, Edna surrenders to the idea that a woman cannot escape from her task.

Moreover, in the framework of Millet's patriarchy, the marriage and family relationship also degrades women's value by objectifying them. Women are seen as husband's property in the patriarchal society. In fact, the male is expected to own his wife in order to justify his masculine status. The vivid evidence in *The Awakening*, showing that Edna is viewed as her husband's possession, can be seen when Léonce criticizes Edna for her unkempt appearance as "*You are burnt beyond recognition,*" he added, *looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damages.* (p.4). This suggests that Mr. Pontellier objectifies Edna as his possession, with her being his "*valuable piece of personal property*". Moreover, by assuming the role of the owner, it is apparent that he clearly devalues his wife and dehumanizes her as an object. His action indicates

that he is a materialistic person who evaluates his circumstances by money. His character can be identified as a businessman who adores money and appreciates the value of commodity. He associates Edna with cost and benefits, thinking that Edna's burnt skin defaces her appearance and diminishes her value; therefore, he, her owner, will possibly gain less benefit from his wife being damaged goods. Léonce's dehumanizing worldview is tied to his involvement with capitalism, another male-dominated social sphere. It is useful to point out that Léonce's "look" at his wife is an exclusively male gaze. His devaluation of Edna, more or less, reflects the gender division in the patriarchal system, in which a woman could never cross the great division to the male orientated business field:

Léonce is not a 'cotton broker' in the old sense, but a commodities broker who deals primarily in futures. ... [He] reminds Edna of the basic law of the spectator: 'The way to become rich is to make money, my dear Edna, not to save it.' Léonce places his emphasis on the making of money, as if it were an organic product, like the cotton he undoubtedly never sees. (p.7)

By the phrases "reminds Edna of the basic law of the spectator", Léonce emphasizes that women could only watch men make money but could never do it themselves. The almost snobbish tone of his voice, his "emphasis on the making of money" and his dismissal of Edna's ability to be the bread-winner further confirm Millet's ideology of masculinity. The economy remains an elusive sphere to women but a natural one to men. In short, the male's ideologically privileged ability to hunt for food and capital in the society coupled with the effectiveness of the feminine ideology, further confirm the myth of gender differences.

If Léonce believes in the masculine economic field "naturally", it should be no surprise that Edna, who still lives in the patriarchal sphere at the beginning of the novel, also unconsciously performs the "natural" role of a wife. In other words, patriarchy conceals the constructed essence of gender roles by making the behavior of

husband and wife seems instinctively “natural”. Edna’s reaction toward her hand, her very body, reminds her of the bondage she has when she is her husband’s possession:

She 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 finger. (pp. 4-5)

Her action - surveying her hands critically - implies that she does not even recognize her body as her own. She is suddenly aware of the existence of her hands as if they are new parts of her organs. Edna’s critical survey of her hands hints that she does not recognize that they belong to her. Instead, they seemingly belong to her husband, the owner who severely examines them. The fact that Edna is not conscious of herself suggests her loss of identity. She is still her husband’s possession in the patriarchal system. This leaves her unable either to possess her own body or to make her own decision. Moreover, Edna’s action to “*reach out for rings from Léonce and slipping them up on her finger*” also reinforces her oppressed status as the objectified wife. Her action resembles the process of getting remarried, in which the bride adopts the ring from her groom. Marriage, as previously examined, undermines women’s condition because of its manifestation of patriarchal ideology. By getting remarried, Edna once again allows her husband legal rights to objectify her as his property. She is not only oppressed as an inferior person but also as an object, which is assessed purely by its physical appearance. Thus, Edna’s action of repeating the marriage suggests the idea that when she returns to husband, she belongs to him again. Hence, the unjust hierarchical relationship between men and women remains everlasting if one remains within the patriarchal system.

Edna’s awakening, the initiation of the will to resist from the patriarchal system, begins not from her desire to reject her inferiority and be equal to men but from the conflict between her non-wife/maternal personalities and social expectation

toward the mother's roles. Edna challenges and questions the concept of feminine duties from the beginning of the novel. She has divergent characteristics from standard Créole women as she refuses to devote herself to her husband and children. By functioning as a foil to Adèle, who typifies a patriarchal conformist, it is possible to interpret that Edna carries a tendency to resist the patriarchal system with her unwillingness to take family as absolute priority.

Refusing to believe in devotion of the natural feminine instinct, Edna is certain that no one, even her beloved family, should claim to own her 'self'. Her belief is contrast to patriarchal ideology toward wifedom and motherhood that governs nearly all women in the male dominated society. With very little awareness that the ideologies of wifedom and motherhood are in fact the root of her female oppression, she is only frustrated by them. That is, she is only partially aware that she does not fit in the ideal roles of obedient wife and dedicating mother. Her failure to identify with the nature of the patriarchal system is the source of her frustration; nevertheless, it also initiates a spark of resistance as well.

Hence, from the conflict between patriarchal construction of wifedom and motherhood confining in Edna and her willingness to maintain 'self-ownership', we can see that such conflict is Edna's mental oppression - the cause of her suffering. Edna's mental oppression is different from Adèle's social oppression. Adèle is not frustrated with the roles of wife and mother and unintentionally dedicates her life to serve her family, while Edna, with her non-wife/maternal tendency, feels that she is oppressed by these male-dominated ideological roles. I also like to mention that Edna's tendency to resist is also shared by Chopin. Despite the vivid portrayal of Edna's patriarchal submission, Chopin manages to insert a comical outlet for her protagonist suppressed yearning for freedom, a little metaphor that cites us the potential of womanhood. At the beginning of the first chapter, there is an image of the parrot imprisoned in a cage, which symbolizes Edna who is also trapped in the patriarchal closure. The parrot, like its female counterpart, demonstrates the tendency to resist the "house pet" role placed upon it. The rude words repeated out by the imprisoned parrot can be compared to Edna's frustration. Chopin makes it clear with the parrot's mocking words of "*Go away! Go away! For God's sake*" (p.1) is heard

only by Mr. Pontellier. Although the parrot cannot escape from the cage, it still desires solidarity and freedom. Similar to the parrot, Edna begins to desire solitude and becomes frustrated by her inner demand to break out from the restricted patriarchal sphere. Likewise, even though Edna realizes that she cannot escape from the patriarchal society, resistance is certainly possible.

Reisz: A Social Outcast from Female Identity

The analysis of Adèle and Edna offers the idea that women cannot define their own identity for their husband and society regards them only as wife and mother. Furthermore, the hierarchy in the family further oppresses a woman once they assumed the roles of wife and mother. This means that women possess the lowest rank in the family hierarchy and are expected to care for their family members all the time. Consequently, Edna, whose characteristic does not qualify the patriarchal expectation, must suffer. She, however, develops the tendency to resist the system. Yet, some female characters, like Adèle, are innocently satisfied by this kind of oppression and commit themselves to laborious duties. Her willingness to dedicate her life to being a mother and wife indicates that she, like other Créole women, is ideologically dominated. However, the last female character, Mlle. Reisz, does not experience this kind of oppression.

In the structure of *The Awakening*, Mlle. Reisz has a profound influence on Edna. She is the only character in the novel that can understand and see Edna's true character and potential. Moreover, she is Edna's sole supporter in her search for freedom. At first glance Mlle. Reisz seems to be the most insignificant among the three female characters because she appears to be the least oppressed and is openly independent. A closer look will reveal that despite her having the ability of an artist, she too is oppressed by the ideology of womanhood in patriarchal society, which approves only of women's existence through marriage and beauty. To maintain her social status and to exist in such a society as a "woman" at all, she must be married to men and carry the appearance of womanly charm and grace, like Adèle. The husband's wealth and family's economic status are indications of women's social

position. Under this patriarchal logic, there is absolutely no space or identity for a single woman. Hence, Reisz is automatically counted as a social outcast since she does not fit the patriarchal expectation of married couple. This is why she is not considered to have any social status. In fact, it is almost as if she does not even exist among people despite being a musician who earns her own living. If she is a victim of patriarchal convention, it is simply because she does not follow them; therefore, she is ironically rejected by the system. In rejecting the patriarchal convention of womanhood, Reisz ceases to be recognized as a woman.

As an outsider, Reisz is mentioned only by her last name through the novel. None of the Créoles calls her by her first name. It is suggestive that there is a gap of unfamiliarity between the Créole people and Reisz. This gap implies that she is isolated by people in her society. Reisz is portrayed as a radical woman who tries to isolate herself from the patriarchal society. She refuses to live among the Créoles and prefers isolation. Her embodiment is completely contrasted to Adèle as she has no characteristic of wife and mother. Her non-maternal characteristic can be seen in her annoyance of children's noise as "*she was dragging a chair in and out of her room, and at intervals objecting to the crying*" (p.63), and her condemnation of the amateurish musical performance of the children. Reisz's characteristic is similar to that of a man for she denies any feminine characteristics and adopts masculinity as her personal feature. She is fearless, quick-tempered and in general a "*disposition to trample upon the rights of others*" (p.64). Moreover, her body is "*ungraceful curves and angles that gave it an appearance of deformity*" (p.166), showing that her physical outlook is similar to men's. Unlike Adèle, men detest her disfigurement; therefore, she can be regarded as a patriarchal rejection because of her appearance alone.

Also, Reisz's portrayal as an outsider of femininity represents the idea that she is a victim of the patriarchal constructed femininity whose value is also judged by beauty. Her ugly physical appearance pushes people away from interacting with her. Her characteristics and physical appearance do not conform to the patriarchal convention of a good and attractive woman. In the patriarchal society most standards are set by men including preferable characteristics and personal attractiveness. Reisz is an example of a woman differentiated from the Créole

stereotype; therefore, the society judges her as a person who is not preferable - a mad, aggressive and ugly woman. In contrast to Reisz, Adèle's beauty is praised and acknowledged by the patriarchal society. Adèle is compared to a "*faultless Madonna*" (p.26), a perfectly beautiful figure. Her beauty attracts many male admirers. Nevertheless, the comparison between Adèle and Reisz could only highlight the fact that no matter whether women are beautiful or ugly, the standards of beauty are judged and measured according to the patriarchal perception. Men could never reach women's real beauty but through their own false dimensions.

In term of her female identity in the society, Reisz's circumstance is slightly different from the previous two female characters as she is condemned for not being men's property. She is considered by people in her society as a social outcast, for she remains single while other women of her age usually get married. The reason for her to be single is that she finds no man suitable for her and she does not fit the desirable standard of the society. In the patriarchal society where women's existence is proved by marital status, a single old woman is viewed negatively. In the patriarchal society where marriage is an indicator of women's status, Reisz's remaining single and earning money by playing music often comes under negative reaction. Reisz's independence, while usually celebrated in the present time, reinforces her status as a social outcast in the context of the novel. It is hard for a single woman to live by herself free of judgment and prejudice in the patriarchal society, in which women's identity is measured by her marital status.

Moreover, in the Créole society, like the cases of Edna and Adèle, women are superficially judged through their husbands' wealth. A wife needs not work and earn money because the society assigns her husband as the family's provider. Reisz is an example of woman's attempt to earn her own living in the economic system dominated by successful businessmen like Mr. Pontellier. A woman who takes up a career as musician is marginalized in the patriarchal economic system. Her ability to make money, despite being equivalent to men's, remains unrecognized in the patriarchal sphere. Although Reisz earns the money by herself with her career as a pianist, the novel suggests that she cannot maintain good living condition or to be more exact, will never be considered in the same level as men. Reisz's financial difficulty is expressed through the scene of Edna's visit to her house. This is

demonstrated in the “*very atmosphere of the shabby, unpretentious little room*” (p.252). This description hints at Reisz’s unstable financial status and the sense of rejection of her ability from the patriarchal society in general.

Hence, from the exploration of female characters, it is obvious that these characters embody oppression under patriarchal hegemony. Women’s entrapment in the roles of womanhood, which is remarkably presented throughout the novel, suggests the idea that the patriarchal society does not allow women any space or the possibility of gender differences. Edna, Adèle and Reisz are defined as property, laborer and social outcast. In the patriarchal social structure, they cannot reach for or even see themselves in any other better roles. To present the idea how women react to their inferior status, Chopin depicts the solutions for female characters through various ways. Unintentionally, Adèle completely conforms to the patriarchy while Reisz radically isolates herself from the patriarchal society. Adèle and Reisz show us the power of patriarchal system to oppress women that women must, in some way, internalize some patriarchal ideology to their actions. To reinforce the greatness of patriarchal power, in the next chapter I will offer the failure of Edna’s struggle against her oppression, by patriarchy. Edna’s awakening of her own power leads her to attempt to emancipate herself from patriarchal oppression.

However, I will point out that Edna cannot escape from this oppression without her realization of the completeness of patriarchal power. Her attempt to resist the system by contemplating her experience with other oppressed characters, such as Adèle and Madame Reisz, ironically reinforces patriarchal domination. To put it simply, even Edna's struggle and emancipation depend on the patriarchal system. Together in the same chapter, I will clarify Edna’s failure by revealing that she has been trapped throughout the novel with her total belief in the constructed roles of wife and mother. The patriarchal oppression illustrated in the novel becomes a closed system that demystifies the common notion of how gender roles are naturally defined and assigned at birth. Therefore, even Edna herself is let to believe that she will be a slave to her children through her maternal duties.