

Chapter 4

The Patriarchal Chain: Edna's Paradoxical Resistance and Its Failures

I have demonstrated the female characters' search for the solution and ultimately their failure to solve the problems of living under the patriarchal society of the Créoles in the previous chapter. The main point I would like to emphasize from the analysis of the female characters is the fact that *The Awakening* provides the subtle idea of the greatness of the patriarchal system. Women cannot break free from it as the patriarchal system powerfully imprisons them in the constructed ideology of their supposedly "natural" femininity and women's roles. This should be, according to Millet's theorization, considered as women's oppression under the patriarchal construction of female identity. Women cannot identify themselves beyond the patriarchal value. They can only exist as the inferior binary opposition of men. It should be safe to say that *The Awakening* is largely dominated by patriarchy.

Edna is unaware that her oppression is founded on gender ideology created by the patriarchal system. This gender ideology works through the construction of female identity, which defines women as weak, impotent and inferior to men. Besides, this ideology subtly creates the belief that women are naturally born to be wife and mother, so women must dedicate themselves to serve their husband and children. Gender ideology has been intricately enclosed in the society for a long time and people participated in it "naturally". To put it simply, Edna's ignorance of the male dominated power leads her to the false belief that she, with her power, can resist its oppression. Keeping the idea of patriarchal domination in mind, I am going to specifically focus on analyzing Edna and the nature of her failed quest against patriarchy. The purpose of this chapter is to emphasize the overwhelming patriarchal power that confines Edna's life.

The Paradox of Edna's Awakening

Chopin portrays Edna as a symbol of women's emancipation from the physical and mental restriction of the constructed roles of wife and mother in the patriarchal society. With her determination to search for physical and mental freedom, Edna decides not to conform to the command of the male figures, the obvious representation of masculine dominance. Edna increasingly demonstrates the patriarchal resistance in many scenes throughout the novel. However, I notice that her resistance is not quite well defined. I sense that Edna fully believes in her self and her will power but I do not think she completely comprehends the power of the enemy she is struggling against such as in the following scene, in which she ponders her defiance toward Léonce:

With a writhing motion she settled herself more scrutiny in the hammock. She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at the moment have done other than denied and resisted. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did. (p.31)

Taking the novel's feminist stance into consideration, this scene cannot be regarded as a normal quarrel between husband and wife within the family context but is Edna's contemplation of her resistant gestures toward Léonce. By remembering that she "had submitted to his command", Edna has accidentally, for the first time, identified herself as a victim of her husband who is the patriarchal figure of the family. In fact, Edna's uncertainty in this scene actually represents the nature of her struggle. Because Edna wonders that she "could not realize why or how she could have yielded" to Léonce in the past what she is saying is she does not fully understand the patriarchal system. Edna, incomprehensively, submits to Léonce as his wife in the first place because she

"could not at the moment have done other than denied as resisted." In other words, Edna's sudden rebellious drive comes purely from her "feeling", which is another word for the will power that "had blazed up, stubborn and resistant" for emancipation rather than a careful assessment of the patriarchal system. That is, she simply counter-reacts against any patriarchal representations in front of her without fully scrutinizing what actually constituted and constructed the system to begin with.

I would like to advance that Edna's resistance against patriarchy is a process of trials and errors that begins with instances of success but ultimately ends in failure before she reaches realization near the final part of the novel. To elaborate this hypothesis, Edna's resistance from the patriarchal system is not immediately successful because it requires her intent consideration of her previous failures caused by her ignorance of the hegemonic status of patriarchy and the limit of her own power in the social sphere. It is suggestive that Edna's ignorance is induced from the awareness of her power as a female individual who believes she can become an autonomous being but entirely fails to comprehend that it is the logic of the patriarchal system that creates the gender values and qualities of Edna's desire in the first place. Indeed, it is possible to say that Edna's states of trial and error resemble a kind of illusion. Edna's awakening to her own power creates the illusion that she, with this will to resist male dominance, is able to overcome every patriarchal obstacle. Being under such delusion, Edna becomes more confident but is less aware of the patriarchal system that governs the society. This illusion of awakening is essentially inspired by Mlle. Reisz's music

The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth. (p.66)

If we consider that Edna's resistance is caused by two factors: her yearning for solitude and her illusion of her own power, we will see that Edna undoubtedly tries to resist the patriarchy by gradually leaving the constructed inferior roles, in order to reach her autonomous being, without the awareness of hegemonic power of patriarchal ideology. Thus, the relationship between Edna and the patriarchal system is a paradoxical one. The more she thinks she successfully resists a particular representation of masculine authority, the more she is trapped by the system that creates her logic of gender struggle. Therefore, her resistance, inspired by her delusion, is unsuccessful.

Trapped in Illusion: Edna's Multiple "Awakenings"

Because Edna is trapped in the illusion of emancipating from patriarchy, I would like to take this opportunity to contemplate the meanings behind the novel's title *The Awakening*. The question raised among the critics and readers is where or when does Edna's awakening occur in the novel? Some state that Edna's awakening occurs when she is able to swim at the first time while others argue that Edna's awakening appears in the scene of her committing suicide. Conversely, my thesis will offer that actually Edna's awakening is consistently presented many times throughout the novel. Therefore, I believe Edna's awakening is not a singular instance of realization like a Joycean's epiphany but rather a continuous sleep-awake routine. It is Edna's state of half-awake that continues throughout the novel until the moment she comes to the realization of her actual relationship between herself and patriarchy, her true awakening prior to her suicide. Moreover, I would like to draw the parallel between Edna's continuous states of half-awake with her failure in resistance attempts mentioned earlier. The parallel should highlight the point that it is impossible for Edna to be fully "awaken" and become an autonomous female individual until she gains the awareness of how patriarchy functions. Meanwhile, she will remain in the dream-like state, in which she only thinks that she could free herself from patriarchy.

In my opinion, the first moment of "awakening", Edna's first moment of realization of her power as a female individual, occurs during the recollection of her childhood memory rather than when she learns to swim, which many critics and the novel itself seem to indicate. Of course, I am not going to compare or discuss the significance of being the first moment of Edna's awakening, instead I will proceed to further draw a parallel between her childhood memory and her swimming experience, which I will call her second awakening, as being a reflection of the overwhelming patriarchal power. I become aware of her moment of "awakening" when Edna recalls her childhood memory portrayed as her running away from service prayers:

First of all, the sight of the water ...made me think - without any connection that I can trace -of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. Oh, I see the connection now... and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of. (p.41)

In the framework of Millet's *Sexual Politics*, the religious group like Presbyterian is undoubtedly a patriarchal institution that maintains gender hierarchy through religion in the same manner as other patriarchal institutions such as family and society. Thus, the passage suggests the idea of a woman's awakening as Edna releases her frustration against the force of her patriarchal father. It is apparent from the passage how Edna realizes that she does not appreciate her father's forcing her to attend the Presbyterian practice and begins to resist by escaping to the meadow. From the passage, it is visible how the image of the meadow is vividly compared to the sea. The reference to the sea used in this scene actually signifies Edna's emancipation journey and patriarchal resistance, her first "awakening". This similarity indicates

that Chopin intentionally portrays the parallel between the image of the sea and the meadow. The description that the meadow “*seemed as big as the ocean*” suggests the idea that the meadow is functionally the same as the sea, as both of them are natural spaces where Edna feels free from her emotional restrictions. In addition, the description of Edna “*throw[ing] out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water*” is an allusion to the scene that Edna is able to swim in the first time, the scene that also represents her realization of her own ability.

I also notice that the way Chopin chooses to describe Edna's memory is very unique. The recollection is narrated through the protagonist's inner monologue, as the use of the words "I" and "me" suggested, rather than being told through the voice of the omniscient narrator as with the rest of the novel. It is possible to speculate from Chopin's sudden changes of writing style and the similarities between the meadow and the sea that Edna's thinking back through her childhood memory functionally foreshadows her second awakening - a parallelism between Edna's realizations of power in the two similar natural spaces. Moreover, the writing style implies that Edna is conscious of the whole rebellious ordeal. Edna selectively recalls the particular memorial scene of the moment that she is “*running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by [her] father that chills [her] yet to think of*” into the meadow, as a vivid picture to her, since it has been the turning point of her life, bringing her to the process of patriarchal resistance. Edna reflexively begins to gradually resist the patriarchal power once she accepts that she is frustrated by her father's command. We can see that Edna has a tendency to resist her oppression since she ceaselessly initiates her frustration under her father's governing throughout the story. Thus, by choosing to oppose her father, she is consciously forming a resistance against male power in her mind. Yet, such resisting consciousness has been suppressed since Edna, in her adolescence, cannot possess men whom she adores, so she unconsciously disregards it and tries to live under the social norm. This particular childhood incident parallels with her increased confidence. When she is able to swim for the first time, Edna enters her second "awakening" and no longer tolerates male domination.

Edna's second "awakening" is presented when she swims in the sea in the party night. Remarkably, Edna's swimming in the sea brings her to the awareness of her own power, which leads to her determination of resistance to the patriarchy. Her ability to swim strengthens her mind. When she swims in the sea she emancipates herself with the awareness of her own power. It is almost as if Edna is born as a new person. To remark more on the emancipating scene, I noticed how Chopin's depiction of Edna's swimming in the sea is similar to human's process of maturation. This scene provides an image of a child who moves unstably to the moment that he can walk by himself. Edna "*was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realize its powers, and walks for the first time alone*" (p.27). To "totter", "stumble" and "clutch" like a "child" suggests Edna's instability and impotence at first. This is because of Edna's immature realization of her own power. Then, the moment that she can swim which is portrayed as a "*sudden realization of...powers*" and "*walking for the first time alone*", signifies the moment that her ability to stand by herself is initiated. The entire scenes seemingly symbolize the process of Edna's emancipation that after swimming in the sea, she realizes that she can do anything. This realization seemingly empowers Edna to stand up against patriarchy. It is apparent that there is a parallel between her experiences of running through the meadow during her childhood and her birth of power as she actually swims in the sea. Despite the novel's presentation of Edna's gaining power and self-confidence from these two experiences, she has not achieved her true awakening. She is still trapped in the state of half-awake, a delirium of sort, without understanding the overwhelming power of the patriarchal system. She is "awakened" to the illusion that she can resist patriarchy entirely. Thus, these two "awakenings" ironically serve as a metaphorical manifestation of Edna's failure in the process of emancipation.

Under the illusion that she has "awaken", Edna determines and believes that she can break free from the patriarchal system but she is ironically imprisoned by it. Living in the society where male authority's gender ideology is a part of their daily lives, women cannot successfully resist the patriarchal system since they unintentionally adopt this ideology in the forms of the wife's and mother's roles, including social convention, values and belief. Although such ideological forms are

set up with the purpose of suppressing women under their power, women inevitably conform to them, taking for granted that this ideology causes them to be inferior and oppressed. Likewise, Edna will never accomplish in resisting this oppression because when she resists the power used by patriarchy, instead, she is even suppressed by it. This idea is vividly shown in the novel when Edna decides to exploit Léonce Pontellier by marrying to him purposely to rebel male dominated power passed through her father's order, thinking that this will help her to be able to break free from father's authority, as described in the novel:

Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him...she was mistaken. Add to this the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic, and we need seek no further for the motives which led her to accept Monsieur Pontellier for her husband. (pp. 46-47)

Edna has not been mindful that her action will worsen her conditional status as the marriage forces her into the status of a wife, which is more inferior and submissive than her present status as a daughter. She is not aware that her married life and status of a wife will bring her further suffering in the future such as endless household chores and child bearing. Edna's ignorance of patriarchy's complicated traps appears repeatedly throughout the novel despite the fact that she has been "awake" since her childhood. Moreover, her perpetual entrapment in the patriarchal logic fits with the theoretical framework of Millet. Edna's illusion of empowerment in *The Awakening* implies that as long as they live in the patriarchal sphere they will never be able to resist the patriarchal power. They cannot escape from the masculine ideology that restrains their lives for even in their empowerment they believe that they can be equal to men; therefore, they unintentionally accept their inferiority as women - the identity patriarchy always insists. Hence, living in the patriarchal sphere, women are

determined to fail in their resistance against male power just like Edna who has merely "awaken" to multiple illusions.

Throughout the novel there are three factors causing Edna's resistance against her oppression from patriarchy which are her frustration, her desire for individuality and her illusion of her own power. These factors progressively inspire Edna to oppose male power, represented by her father and husband. Having been oppressed since she was a child, Edna's frustration has gradually increased and it makes her begin to oppose male power at a very young age. Edna's awakening to solitude occurred through her female bonding between her and Mlle. Reisz. It initiates her solitary soul and her desire for individuality. Suddenly, Edna begins to realize her potential. This realization causes her misapprehension that she can achieve everything and strongly inspires her attempt to reject male domination. These factors trap Edna in her own illusion that she can break free from the patriarchal oppression and gain her individual life.

Working with the idea that Edna attempts to resist patriarchal power, I found that she fails to emancipate from the oppression because she is actually trapped in the patriarchal construction of women. According to Millet's theory in *Sexual Politics* mentioned in chapter two, women's oppression is done through the patriarchy's process of socialization which constructs female identity in three dimensions: temperament, role and status. I would like to use these dimensions as methodology to analyze Edna's resisting attempts along the plot line before she reaches her true awakening near the end of the novel. I intend to use Millet's idea in order to demonstrate that Edna's resistances in the patriarchal domain are completely ineffective. This is because any instance of Edna's successful resistance will be undermined later by the patriarchal logic that exists like a chain. To put it loosely, Edna might be able to resist the conditions that create temperament but she will be obstructed by the criteria of role later on. Edna's convoluted chain of success and failure should bring to mind her state of half-awake mentioned earlier. Like a delirium, the more Edna attempts to break free from the system, the more she becomes paradoxically trapped in the patriarchal power. Her resistances ironically service patriarchal supremacy.

Edna's Failure to Resist the Patriarchy's Temperament

To illustrate how Edna fails to accomplish her intended rebel, I would like to introduce the temperament as the first oppression she attempts to oppose in *The Awakening*. Millet defines the dimensions of temperament as the male construction of psychological gender classification to make women believe that it is normal to be the subordinate of men, despite the fact that both sexes share similar manners and behaviors. Temperament basically includes the patriarchal placement of inferiority to women such as perceiving that women lack power and ability because of their feminine characteristics. Temperament works through the psychological mechanism, which makes women perceive themselves as "naturally" passive, ineffectual and ignorant. These negative characteristics are nothing more than a form of gender justification. Under this ideological illusion, the superior masculine men have the "natural" rights to rule over the weaker sex. Hence, patriarchy's usage of temperament is the basic structure to explore the cause of women's oppression under male domination. In patriarchal perception, women cannot achieve anything without men's guidance as they are "naturally" weak.

The idea of Edna's failed resistance to temperament is first introduced in the scene that Mlle. Reisz initiates the solitary soul in Edna through her music. Edna is inspired to yearn for her individuality as she listens to Mlle. Reisz's music. Edna's consciousness toward "solitude", her mental image of her individual self, is awakened by Mlle. Reisz's music. Edna is not only awakened to her "solitude", but she is also aroused to resist patriarchy, "the abiding truth" that has always been on her mind. The interaction between Edna and Mlle. Reisz through music is an indication of female solidarity, which is a way for female empowerment in order to resist patriarchal temperament. The female solitary bonding between Mlle. Reisz and Edna is considerably another opposition to the patriarchy. Mlle. Reisz helps Edna to become aware more of herself and this will lead Edna to participate in the process of emancipation later in the novel. Indeed, judging from the passage it is possible to argue that the "solitude" Mlle. Reisz inspired in Edna's mind is that of her own. Mlle.

Reisz does not have a social bond to people in her society as she behaves differently from other women. She is independent of husband and children while other women of her age get married. Mlle. Reisz suggests her opposition to the patriarchy through the idea that she does not need to live under the patriarchal tradition. Mlle. Reisz does not want a husband to provide for her. She lives by herself, earning money from playing music. It is obvious that Chopin portrays Mlle. Reisz as an autonomous being who is able to survive in the patriarchal society alone rather than depending on men - a perfect figure to resist the dimensions of temperament. Thus, what Mlle. Reisz infuses in Edna is the self-confidence that she too could gain female solidarity she so desires.

At first glance, the understanding between Edna and Mlle. Reisz may suggest that they are capable of gaining autonomy through solitude. However, I notice that they are not freed from patriarchal influences even in their attempts to gain solidarity. What I am saying is that even their "solitude" depends on patriarchal construction. Taking a closer look at the excerpt, it may appear as though both female characters communicate the idea of "solitude" through music. Edna begins to paint the image of "solitude" in her mind as she listens to Mlle. Reisz's piano playing. The gestures of playing and listening to music suggest artistic communication, which signifies an avoidance of language usage, bypassing any patriarchal ideologies that are part of the spoken words. Using music as their bonding instead of patriarchy-invented language implies that these two female characters refuse to accept the patriarchal reliance. Edna too seems to become a woman who could resist temperament at this point. My question is does Edna identify "solitude" with the abstract sound of music or with the concrete fact that Mlle. Reisz, a well-known social outcast, is artistically performing music? Edna's listening to Mlle. Reisz playing can also mean that she also would like to be the solitary soul. By seeing a real life autonomous being for the first time, she follows this artist role model and is ready to "*take an [impression] of the abiding truth*" (p.66). What Mlle. Reisz initiates to Edna is an "impression", a representation of an autonomous idol she would like to imitate. I have analyzed in chapter three that Mlle. Reisz also suffers from patriarchal oppression as she is expelled from the society as a social outcast and a disfigured

woman. Mlle. Reisz's negative classification is an opposite extreme of the favorable patriarchal women's traits. Thus, Mlle. Reisz's autonomy is not entirely self-governed or outside of patriarchal logic but constructed from male rejected qualities. Therefore, her "solitude" is a confirmation of patriarchal superiority rather than a representation of women's autonomous strength. Moreover, their gestures of solidarity, the fact that they require a special medium beside the usual means of speaking in order to relate their feelings, ironically confirm their inferiority in the patriarchal perspective. The need for music implies that they cannot be autonomous within the patriarchal mainstream. Should Edna take an impression of Mlle. Reisz entirely, she would also have to accept the "truth" that the autonomous being she always desires, which currently appears in the form of the rejected artist, is a patriarchal construction. Thus, the image before her is just another form of temperament.

As I have mentioned earlier above in this chapter, Edna's realization of her potentiality, initiated by her ability to swim for the first time, leads her to the more confidence of standing by herself. Therefore, she continues her effort to escape from the status of a submissively reliant wife. It is considerable that Edna's ability to swim breaks the patriarchal attitude toward women that they are naturally unable to do anything without men's guidance. Edna's husband, for example, looks down upon her ability. He tells her that she will never be able to swim in this summer and does not pay attention to her swimming although Edna sees it as her great accomplishment. Thus, Edna's achievement in swimming shows the idea that she destroys men's temperament of female prototype and proves, for an instance, that men should not characterize women according to the patriarchal stereotype.

Awakening to her own potential, Edna begins to reject the patriarchal oppression by refusing to accept her husband's authority. She decides not to obey him anymore. This can also be counted as her opposition to patriarchal temperament as she gives up the femininity's qualification as passive and obedient, which is a wifely characteristic favored by patriarchy. Her rejection immediately occurs after her first swimming when she neglects her husband's suggestion, and increasingly refuses to obey his command. Edna's rebel to her husband is contrast to her obedience before her realization of power. Yet, as the story progresses, Edna still

falls for other male figures such as Arobin and Robert. It is as though her successful resistance against temperament with Léonce is mere contingency because she will later fail again.

It is easy to see how Edna's attempt to resist the patriarchal temperament is unsuccessful. She cannot deny patriarchal fabrication of femininity and establish new Messences of her female characteristic as long as living in patriarchal society. Her predicament is caused by the limitation of the society as it does not have a positive way to respond or deal with different substances of femininity that is not defined by male authority. That is, Edna cannot identify herself if she totally rejects the identity and characterization; she must be fit in some female essences perceived by patriarchy. Characterizing herself differently from typical women in her society, Edna will surely live with difficulty for there is no position for her to fit in. Therefore, she does not have any of her autonomous stances.

Edna's Failure to Resist the Patriarchy's Sex Role

As the novel continues, after Edna stops being obedient to her husband, she progressively quits her role of wife and mother. Her action, analyzed incongruent with Millet's framework, indicates the higher level of her resistance against patriarchy. She is resisting to another dimension of women's oppression in Millet's socialization - sex role. Sex role is a result of the psychological distinctions between masculine and feminine. Sex role further makes a distinction between male and female through the constructed gestures and attitudes related to each gender's characteristics. In other words, sex role is what patriarchy sets up in order to determine what male and female should think or act. Millet states that sex role is a conduct of manner that is delicately circulated in the society as it guides and limits people's gesture and attitude, forcing people to behave in their sexual category.

Millet does not make the clarification of what are each gender's gestures and attitudes. She says that women's oppression in sex role is not mainly done through the limitation of those gestures and attitudes; instead, it is done through a

division of work for each gender, the core of women's oppression. Patriarchy separates works between male and female by the differentiation between career and domestic works. Patriarchy arrogates that male should respond to the career works whereas the domestic works should belong to female. Under the ideology that men, by nature, are capable of pursuing achievement, ambition and interest; therefore, are able to work in their profitable career. Thus, men transcend themselves to the superior status of family provider while women are stuck with housework that brings no profit yet requires infinite dedication. Moreover, sex role does not only assign women to housework but also to infants attending because patriarchy asserts that women are naturally maternal being and instinctively respondent to children. This is the origin of why women are imprisoned in the domestic sphere while men can work and celebrate outside. It is obvious that women cannot deny their gender roles as wife and mother because such roles are elaborately set up in the society, making people believe that those constructed roles are natural tasks. Despite being trapped in patriarchal elaboration, Edna is determined to deny her wife and mother status, as the wife of Mr. Pontellier and a mother of two children, through both of her attitude and actions. It is as though she is vigorously trying to ignore these patriarchal facts of the women's roles in her attempt to reach her solitude.

Edna's resistance to her oppressed roles does not actually occur after her first swimming; it is consistently presented in the portrayal of her married life in order to suggest how Edna sees the frustration via her marriage. At the beginning of the novel Edna reveals the idea that she is not a maternal and wifely figure as she states that she will not allow her family to possess her "self". Contrasting to other women in her society, especially Adèle, a role model of Créole wife and mother, Edna does not see family as her priority for which she should sacrifice her soul. Hence, in order for Edna to oppose the idea of family, she must remove herself from the roles of wife and mother. Unfortunately, this task is impossible in patriarchal sphere as it requires that she must split from both roles simultaneously. I will analyze two important scenes from the novel that demonstrate her failures in the resistance against Millet's criteria of role.

Her actions in the novel reveal that she can split from the role of wife but she cannot leave her maternal role; therefore, she cannot achieve her aim to become an individual, who is completely free from any roles hailed by patriarchal ideology. Chopin describes the "natural" roles of female, the roles of wife and mother, as "*domestic harmony*" (p.145). The word "*harmony*" Chopin chooses here also suggests that both wife and mother exist simultaneously. This is because Edna is still trapped in the patriarchal ideology that being a mother is what she is "naturally" determined to be, while she is completely blind to the fact that both wife and mother are culturally constructed. I find it useful to divide Edna's resistance of sex roles into two parts. I will explore Edna's rejection of the wife role first as she clearly loathes her marriage. Then I will proceed to analyze her attempt to reject the role of mother. I realize that Edna will eventually fail in her resistance toward the dimensions of roles; therefore, this division of wife and mother is purely for convenience.

The Awakening shows us the development of Edna's process of walking in her path to autonomy. One of the main reasons for her desire is that Edna is suppressed under her married life. In order to resist marriage, Edna gradually stops obeying her husband's commands - gesture signifying her rejection of male domination. An interesting action I would like to point out from the excerpt is that not only does Edna throw "*her wedding ring*", which represents the status of a wife on the carpet. She also "*stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it*" (p.134). The act of throwing the ring may be an emotional one but the word "striving" suggests that she has contemplated her decision. Although the ring, a symbol of patriarchal binding, is undamaged, Edna's violence clearly implies that she has come to a conclusion that she is unwilling to no tolerate the role of Léonce's wife. Her rage signifies her relentless desire to destroy her marriage. To intensify her wife role rejection, Edna ignores the responsibility to her domestic tasks, which is equivalent to the "natural" assignment of women in the family. Edna's resistance is shown in the scene that she repudiates to stay home on Tuesday evening, which has always been the Pontellier's the family tradition of *reception day* that Edna *had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before* (pp.128-129). The reception is obviously important to Léonce because it indicates his social status, symbolizing his

masculine achievement and ambition. By undermining Léonce's holy custom, she is directly destroying the family structure. Of course, her resistance gesture provokes a strong counter reaction from Léonce:

"Out!" exclaimed her husband, with something like genuine consternation in his voice... Why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday? What did you have to do?"

"Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out."

"Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse," said her husband, somewhat appeased, as he added a dash of cayenne pepper to the soup.

"No, I left no excuse. I told Joe to say I was out, that was all."

"Mercy!" exclaimed Edna, who had been fuming. "Why are you taking the things so seriously and making such a fuss over it?"
(pp.129-130)

Judging from Léonce's bewilderment, it is indicative that he, who has always believed himself to be the "natural" authority in the family, is undermined by the wife's unexplainable calmness. He thinks Edna cannot deny the family tradition. The tension between husband and wife clearly suggests that their expectations in the patriarchal system suddenly come in conflict. When Léonce asks Edna naively, "What did you have to do?" his tone of voice suggests that he is totally unaware of Edna's rebellion. This is because Léonce "could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world". Edna's calmness implicates her awareness of the fabricated role of wife. Her seemingly successful resistance is visible in the nonchalant way Edna reacts to her husband's questions. She resists male domination

as she has not "*left some suitable excuse*" as her husband commands to justify her irresponsibility. Her answer, "*Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out*" and her scorn that Léonce is "*taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it*" clearly signifies Edna's will in breaking down the gender hierarchy in the family. Moreover, the way Edna answers Léonce's questions also suggests the distance in their relationship. It is as though she is only a person who lives inside Léonce's house rather than his submissive wife - an image of an autonomous individual. Her resistance increases in degree that

Léonce could see plainly that she was not herself...Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward" (p.148).

Léonce could sense her autonomous individuality. His restlessness confirms that Edna has liberated herself from the role of wife and can "*never take another step backward*".

To complete the resistance against the dimensions of role, Edna must emancipate herself from mother role. I have observed in the previous chapter that Edna actually always has a tendency to reject being a mother-woman. Edna is portrayed as a female character that is not a maternal figure. This idea can be seen in the quarrel between her and Léonce over her neglect domestic works:

"It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family."

"I feel like painting," answered Edna. "Perhaps I shan't always feel like it."

"Then in God's name paint! but don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter."

"She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go." ... "Let me alone..." (p.147)

The argument above shows that Edna completely leaves the domestication as she claims herself as a *"painter"*, an artist who represents the free individual. Favoring her individuality, Edna gives up her functions in family in order to be *"alone"*. Moreover, Léonce's comparison of Adèle and Edna in art and domestic work also reinforces the contradiction of the two women from patriarchal perspective. Edna's purpose in art is distinct from Adèle. While Adèle plays music in order to *"please"* her family, Edna paints to *"please"* herself as it is a way for her to temporarily escape from the oppression. Besides, Adèle plays music in order to teach it to her children, but Edna makes her children her object of drawing. Their attitudes toward domestic duties also differ greatly. Adèle is an ideal mother as she identifies herself to children, while Edna is resistant to motherhood as she sees herself as priority. She always reveals her fortitude that she will not sacrifice her *"self"* to anyone even her beloved children. Instead, she sometimes regards them as burdens as Chopin describes sarcastically in the excerpt:

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... Their 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. (pp. 47-48)

This sarcastically impulsive love that Edna has for her children in the above excerpt suggests her inner conflicts between her "natural" role as mother with passion toward children and her desire to be free from maternal role. This inner conflict also shows that she is aware of the fact that she is imprisoned in the mother role. There is no denial that Edna loves her children but she also hates to be stuck in the task of responding to them. Hence, with these mixed emotions between the guilt of non-motherhood and the suffering in maternal tasks, Edna, already motivated by her desire for patriarchal resistance, unintentionally rejects the role of mother. By "*unintentionally*", I mean that she is uncertain if the mother role can even be rejected in the first place.

Edna's attempts to resist the patriarchal oppression through the rejection of mother role fail because she is still trapped in the patriarchal ideology of the "natural" feminine identity. Despite attempting to run away from her motherhood, she is finally drawn back to it when she witnesses Adèle's birth giving:

Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls that come and go. ..She began to wish she had not come; her presence was not necessary. (p.288)

On the personal level, Edna is trapped in the conditions like a kind of guilt at her maternal imperfection caused by the patriarchal ideology of ideal women in maternal roles. But what shuts her from the feeling of guilt is her strong desire for individuality, making her leave maternal role and drives her inward consciousness to "*revolt against the ways of Nature*". Edna's denial of motherhood is shown in the

recollection of her own far away, *unreal, and only half remembered* experience that she tries to suppress. Witnessing Adèle's giving birth leads Edna to the maternal experience that is "*pain*", "*stupor*" and "*deadened sensation*", causing Edna "[to begin] to wish she had not come". Nonetheless, her "*uneasy*" feeling and "*agony*" suggest the conflict within her mind whether she should escape from this motherhood or embracing it as part of herself:

She might have invented a pretext for staying away; she might even invent a pretext now for going. But Edna did not go. With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene torture. (p.288)

Despite the wish to escape this situation, Edna continues her witnessing her friend's birth scene because a state of mother drives her to witness the "*scene torture*". This scene implies that Edna will surrender to her own motherhood.

Theoretically speaking, Edna cannot completely reject being a mother if she remains in the patriarchal sphere. Edna's unawareness of the patriarchal logic of the constructed feminine role is the cause of her guilt that prevents her from reaching the total freedom of individuality. She cannot rid herself of the ideology of constructed motherhood. Instead of emancipation, Edna once again believes that the role of mother is essential to her. Her realization occurs near the end of the novel as Adèle dramatically hails her back into the patriarchal logic:

Adèle, pressing her cheek, whispered in an exhausted voice: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (p.288)

Listening to Adèle, Edna feels like it is impossible or even wrong for her to reach for an individual life. As Adèle, who gratefully occupies her place in the patriarchal sphere, emphasizes to Edna that she should "*think of the children!*" she is reminding her friend to remember her "natural" role as a human being. Of course, Edna, who is still unaware of the patriarchal logic at this point, follows her friend's advice and believes once again the importance of motherhood. Thus, her attempt in resistance of the role dimensions is in vain because she cannot split herself from the domestic and maternal tasks simultaneously. At this moment Edna remains only a "woman", not an "individual", in the patriarchal sphere.

Edna's Failure to Resist the Patriarchy's Gender Status

The last factor of women's oppression in patriarchal construction of gender identity, according to Millet, is gender status. Millet defines the gender status as the results from gender division of work, the previous factor of women's oppression. Millet does not give any explanation how the works based on sex role and the status relate to each other. But in my attempt to make a connection of these two factors, I find that the gender status can be described as position in sexual hierarchy divided into superiority and inferiority. Based on the ideology that men respond to the career, which transcends their status to a family's provider, men arrogate themselves to superiority in family hierarchy. Contrastingly, by assigning that women should respond to domestic works causes them inevitably to have inferior status as their works provide no benefit and values. Consequently, women must rely on men in order to economically and socially survive, causing them the submissiveness and inferiority.

Considering the relationship between *The Awakening's* plot and Millet's framework, we will see that they are related to each other in a logical sequence. What I have done so far is analyzing Edna's failed resistance attempts, portrayed in various important scenes, against the patriarchal dimensions of temperament and role. The

analysis of status should complete *The Awakening* chain of patriarchal traps, which will further emphasize the overwhelming patriarchal system as the sole construction of female identity. Also, my analysis in this part will be a complement of the puzzled picture about the link between Edna's journey to individuality and her denial of inferior status.

The idea of Edna's resistance against her role is initiated in the novel when she, after identifying herself as an opposing wife to her husband, decides to move out from her family's house in order to live in seclusion as described in the novel:

The pigeon-house pleased her...There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to "feed upon opinion" when her own soul had invited her. (p.245)

The description above clearly demonstrates how Edna is deeply obsessed in her individual life. The word "*pigeon-house*", named by Edna, signifies the idea of her freedom, which she always yearns for. Besides, it suggests that Edna is finally able to find the place which she can completely dominate after her hard attempt, similar to the pigeon which is able to find its way home over a long distance. Being in her own space, Edna initiates her "*sense of having risen in the spiritual*" as though Edna's self is born again to the higher status, separating from patriarchal suppression. Narrated through Edna's perspectives, this scene reinforces her resistant consciousness because Edna sees that *No longer [is] she content to "feed upon opinion" when her own soul ha[s] invited her*. The "*pigeon-house*" motivates Edna's realization to protect her own power from the weakness of inferior status.

From feminist perspective, it is patriarchy that establishes those ideological conventions and makes people in the society conform to them with the purpose to subordinate women to male power. In *The Awakening*, the idea of patriarchal oppression on female status exists in various social conventions from the general practices to serious morality. It is obvious that women in the Créole society are entirely oppressed through their social conventions, for example, women's devotion to family and monogamy. The idea of monogamy is considerably the most serious convention as it is a prohibition rather than conventional practice. Monogamy is a practice of fixing a woman in subservient role in order to confine her to the family.

Edna makes a great effort to free herself from the inferior status by resisting those conventions with the strong determination to gain individuality. The most significant evidence of Edna's resistance is shown in her action of having affair with Alcée Arobin, which signifies that she is breaking the moral convention of monogamy. Rebelling against the monogamy, her action suggests that she is not afraid of patriarchal power because she has already perceived herself as equal to men as she rejects men's objectifying women property. Seeing herself as individual, Edna "give[s] herself where she choose[s]" to show that she needs not to be submissive to any male power.

Again, Edna's attempt is in vain because she cannot transcend herself from the inferior status. This is because Edna cannot completely stop patriarchal subordination to women. Although Edna can break free from Léonce's oppression, she is finally trapped in her inferior position again because she is subordinated by Robert's patriarchal ideology. Despite his strong passion for Edna and her willing to be with him, Robert needs to follow the ideological conventions as he tries to reject the illicit sexual relationship with her. Hence, Robert, as a part of patriarchy, fully adopts the patriarchal ideology to subordinate Edna's status, seeing Edna as her husband's property.

The First Step to Liberation

In contrast to Edna's attempt, the analysis of Millet's patriarchal dimensions of temperament, role and status shows that Edna cannot overcome the system completely. For example, in resisting temperament, she was later trapped in the dimensions of role and status. As a matter of fact, my analysis also shows that her resistance of each of them is also a failure in itself. This is because Edna herself is ignorant to the patriarchal hegemony and its ideology circulated in her society. Being unaware of the fact that patriarchal oppression to women is done through the psychological, cultural and class construction of gender identity, women perceive themselves by nature and psychology. They, consequently, cannot deny the idea that they are female because they are unconsciously forced to believe it. It is comprehensible to see Edna's failure in her resistance against patriarchal oppression, as she will never be able to totally reject her believed "self". Edna fails because she strives for gender equality by trying to match the male superiority. Her persistence to resist patriarchy this way is impossible and futile. By initiating any form of resistance, Edna, and to a certain extent, the second wave feminist movement, confirm their inferiority that the patriarchal system has always assumed.

In addition, Edna's repeated resistance against male domination confirms the paradox of her resistance. Without her awareness of patriarchal supremacy, the more Edna tries to reject the patriarchal power, the deeper level she is trapped in the position to reinforce patriarchal supremacy. All of Edna's attempts could be narrowed down to a single act of resistance because of its repetitiveness. Her will to resist becomes a weapon to undermine her endeavor to struggle for freedom as it reinforces the hegemonic power of patriarchal ideology. All in all, my analysis with Millet's theoretical frameworks of "patriarchy" and "patriarchal construction of female identity" elucidates how women are oppressed and defeated in patriarchal sphere.

In the next chapter I would like to offer the idea of Edna's triumph over patriarchal oppression. I present that Edna can eventually achieve her individuality as

she emancipates herself from patriarchal system via her action of committing suicide. Failing in the process of emancipation by trying to revolt against patriarchy from within the system, Edna awakens to the truth that she will never be able to reject the patriarchy as long as she lives in male dominated sphere since she has internalized and relied upon patriarchal ideology. Therefore, she decides to leave the patriarchal sphere by swimming into the sea. Edna then stops her female identity at the moment of her death. Hence, she is able to gain her individuality, a sexless gender, which completely frees her from the constructed female identity in death.