

Chapter 5

The Liberation of the Individual

Will Edna Ever Be Liberated? The Debates on the Ending

In the previous chapter, my thesis presents the analysis of how Edna's attempts to struggle against patriarchal oppression are inevitably doomed to fail. Applying Millet's idea in *Sexual Politics*, I find that Edna is eventually unsuccessful in her attempt in resistance to the patriarchal power. This is because the patriarchy is a complex hegemonic social system that functions through its ideological construction of gender identity. Despite her great effort to neutralize the patriarchal power of gender construction, her actions paradoxically trapped her in the position that reinforces male domination. Thus, to continue existing in the society is to conform entirely to the patriarchal construction of sexual essence and identity. Edna's and, to a certain extent, Mlle. Reisz's endeavor for gender equality, ironically turns into a verification of their inferiority instead of an effective strategy for female autonomy as the patriarchal system is designed to uphold masculine superiority. Hence, Edna's resistance is determined to lose to the patriarchy because she will never be able to deny her "naturally" constructed female even with her "awakening" to her own power.

It is apparent that the analysis of the novel using Millet's theoretical concepts of patriarchy significantly leads us to identify the source of women's oppression. However, there is clearly a sharp contrast between Chopin's intention in writing the novel and the criticisms it received, given the prejudice against Chopin during her lifetime and the rise of the feminist movements that adopt *The Awakening* as its exemplary call for female rights. Should *The Awakening* is to be read mainly through Millet's defeatist patriarchal framework, I strongly feel that the novel offers the public more than just a wild fantasy of an immoral woman or a failed demonstration of the female struggle. As I have previously explored in the first chapter of my thesis, the most debated topic is whether the ending of the novel, Edna's suicide, reinforces the celebration of female emancipation from patriarchy or confirms the pointlessness of the struggle. Here, I would like to reaffirm my thesis that I believed *The Awakening* is designed to celebrate female attempt to emancipate from

male power since Chopin rigorously provides the solution for Edna's self-defeating resistance cycle distinctly in the end of the novel. That is, Edna's committing suicide is presented as her solution that enables her to free herself from the patriarchal system. The ending of *The Awakening* presents the idea of Edna's resolution for her resistance. Now she completely comprehends the consequences of the repeated failures caused by her own determination to oppose patriarchal system. She consciously initiates her suicide as the way to elude her oppression in constructed female identities. In my thesis, the idea of suicide is also portrayed as Chopin's exploration of the relationship in struggle between women and patriarchy. Edna's suicide is not a defeat. In fact, it is a kind of female's empowering ritual that provides a resolution to Millet's patriarchal framework. In death, women can successfully resist the patriarchal power via their freeing themselves from constructed roles.

In order to validate my thesis regarding the ending of the novel, I would like to begin by presenting various criticisms, which both celebrate and denounce Edna's suicide and the ending of the novel. However, I must say that after doing a thorough research, most criticisms tend to condemn Edna's action. I will begin with the criticisms against Edna's death and to a certain extent, Chopin's writing. With Chopin's intention of creating *The Awakening* opened to interpretation, the ambiguity should remarkably arouse the controversy among readers and critics over the end of the novel.

Yet, there are some critics' ideas of an unverifiable ending of the novel because Edna's ending is unknowable. Does Edna actually commit suicide? Or who could ever really know that death is her real desire? The answer to these questions seem to appear in Michael Gilmore's "Revolt Against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of *The Awakening*" that the story of Edna herself "*has to end in death*". (1988, p.63) This is because, said Gilmore, there is a change within her since she is awakened to her desire for freedom and individuality that leaves her without any place to stand or assert her identity in the society. Therefore, death is the only place to accommodate her new identity. In other words, Edna's suicide is not a direct consequence of her desire to rebel against the prejudice patriarchal system. It is rather her desperation because she there is simply nothing for her to cling on to in the society.

Among the critical debates surrounding the novel's ending, George M. Spangler comments on Edna's suicide scene in "The Ending of the Novel" as *"unsatisfactory because it is fundamentally evasive"* (1970, p.208). Spangler begins his work by his personal prejudice and doubt to the novel's positive feedback toward the end of the novel from many critics' works whose critical response to Chopin's *The Awakening* are positive. This is because Spangler found that Chopin's portrayal of Edna's death prevents the novel from the canonized status:

Then, the conclusion Mrs. Chopin chose for The Awakening allows for pathos and poetic justice to please the sentimental and moralistic- a dubious accomplishment indeed- it also leads to a painful reduction in Edna's character. For in the final pages Edna is different and diminished. She is no longer purposeful, merely willful; no longer liberated, merely spiteful. And the painful failure of vision (or, more likely, of nerve) implicit in the change prevents a very good, very interesting novel from being the extraordinary masterpiece some commentators have claimed it is. (pp. 210-211)

In his argument, Spangler offers that if Edna is finally able to fulfill her wish *The Awakening* will be the great novel. With his analysis, Spangler sees that Edna's suicide indicates a woman's failure as her attempt, attached to herself, is "diminished". Spangler's conclusion arrives from basically the same source as those of Gilmore: desperation. Unlike, Gilmore, however, Spangler suggests it is Chopin who is desperate to compromise with the "sentimental and moralistic" to the extent that she is willing to kill her protagonist at the end rather than letting Edna live to fulfill her potential in rebelling the oppressive male forces. All in all, *The Awakening* would be an "extraordinary masterpiece" for Spangler if Chopin ends the novel with the portrayal of Edna persisting for her place as a rebellious woman in the patriarchal society. Needless to say, my work in the previous chapter has already contradicted that of Spangler. Should Chopin decide to follow Spangler's advice, Edna would just end up being another Mlle. Reisz.

There are many critics who declare Edna's resistance against male domination as in vain. I have mentioned them earlier in the first chapter of this thesis and I would like to quickly summarize them. In Jennifer B. Grey's "The Escape of the 'Sea': Ideology and *The Awakening*", the author states that Edna's suicide indicates her unsuccessfulness in the attempt to break free the natural construction of gender identity, based on Althusserian ideology and state apparatus. Donald Pizer, as well as Grey, presents Edna's failure in female struggle against patriarchy. With his article "A Note on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* as Naturalistic Fiction", Pizer presents that Edna cannot resist the natural power which determines people's lives and faiths.

Here are some criticisms that praise Chopin's and Edna's accomplishment in women's struggle for freedom. Per Seyersted, Chopin's earlier scholarship who "*most responsible for bringing Chopin's work to wide public attention*", declares that Edna's suicide is initiated by her own inspiration of "spiritual emancipation". What Seyersted achieved in defining Edna's suicide as a type of spiritual awakening is that he separated the liberation of the individual's mind from the actual physical death. Romanticist tone aside, Seyersted's criticism is valid because it totally negates the patriarchal society, its rules and ideological factors, entirely and instead, focuses on the emancipation of Edna's mind. Thus, Edna's suicide signifies her understanding of her own nature as a woman. In death, Edna finally becomes the female individual she struggles to achieve during the course of the novel. It is a death that seeks to inspire the readers rather than to overwhelm them with sadness or contempt. To back up his criticism, Seyersted boldly predicts that *The Awakening* will successfully gain positive criticisms from feminist critics as "*most female readers...are likely to take to their hearts this deeply moving portrait of a woman's growth into self-awareness*" precisely because of Chopin's "daring" portrayal of Edna's death. Needless to say, his prediction comes true as the novel is adopted into the Feminist cannon.

Continuing on with the praise of the ending, Sandra M. Gilbert, a feminist critic, states her idea that Edna's suicide does not constitute her tragic end but a rebirth. In "The Second Coming of Aphrodite: Kate Chopin's Fantasy of Desire", Gilbert glorifies Edna's heroic suicide saying that it transcends her to

Aphrodite – a mythological goddess who is born from the spume. It is clear that Gilbert is trying to draw symbolic parallelism between the seas portrayed in *The Awakening* by relating it to the sea, the symbol of giving birth that is associated with Aphrodite. The connection works quite well on a symbolic level. The sea is the place where both Edna and Aphrodite stand-alone with nakedness and pleasure under the moon. Gilbert also significantly associates Edna and the goddess that Edna will be “suicidally borne back in to the sea...as Aphrodite”. Hence, according to Gilbert, Edna successfully liberates herself from the patriarchal system at the novel’s end. What Gilbert's interpretation achieves is that the connotation of death and tragedy normally associated with suicide scene are embedded with the sense of femininity. On a grander scale, the association Gilbert made between Edna and Aphrodite could be said to have evade Millet's patriarchal framework as the symbolic significance of the scene functions purely on feminine value.

To particularly respond to the novel’s controversy, I would like to advance the idea that Edna, near the end of the novel, manages to come to a decision and is able to break away from the patriarchal oppression and acquire her desired individuality near the end of the novel in this chapter. The methodology I am going to use in providing the solution to the patriarchal problems in *The Awakening* is that I would like to offer the analysis of Edna’s struggle against patriarchal oppression in *The Awakening*, especially in the scene of Edna’s committing suicide, which is the most controversial and powerful scene in the novel. I speculate that at the moment of her death Edna is able to break away from her gender identity constructed by the patriarchal authority. I will prove in my analysis that her death is truly her triumph as she is able to gain her autonomous individuality she seeks ever since her childhood. As a matter of fact, I think that Edna's suicide is not the process that signifies death in itself but her careful constructed moment of her liberation, which represents her achievement in her attempt to emancipate herself from patriarchal oppression. In other words, I would like to perceive Edna's suicidal scene as her contemplative decision to bring an end to her repetitive failures - the process that signifies patriarchal dominance in the novel. In order to achieve this, I'm going to use Millet's theoretical frameworks again as a base to explore the solution for Edna’s stagnant struggle.

On a Path to Liberation

I come to realize that Edna's resistance against the patriarchal criteria of temperament, role and status, indicated by Millet as women's oppression, is eventually accomplished when she stops identifying herself with female gender identity. To clarify this understanding, I would like to provide an explanation of how Edna's suicide, which is supposed to indicate her failure in Millet's framework, finally becomes a key for her successful emancipation. Her action of suicide is a progress that celebrates the uniqueness of the feminine identity rather than strives from gender equality within the patriarchal sphere - the same objective that Edna tries to achieve. What I mean is that if an individual whether he/she stops his/her "natural" male/female identity, the individual will cease to belong to any patriarchal sexual categorization. This progress of emancipation is initiated in the scene of her final argument with Robert as he walks out of her life:

"Something put into my head that you cared for me; and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild dream of your some way becoming my wife."

"Your wife!"

"Religion, loyalty, everything would give way if only you cared." "Then you must have forgotten that I was Léonce Pontellier's wife."

..." I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both." (pp. 281-282)

Edna's harsh response to Robert's marriage proposal is quite significant as it shows that she reaches the understanding of how patriarchy functions. Robert's marriage proposal is equivalent to his asking her to switch her co-actor in the same patriarchal play. Hence, Edna's frustration springs from her realization that Robert, rather than being a person who once encouraged her "awakening" by teaching her how to swim,

is not so different from her husband who constantly objectifies her as his property. Moreover, Robert's marriage proposal further indicates that he could only function in the roles that patriarchy designed for him. There is no question that Robert is part of the patriarchal system and is trying to drag Edna into it with him. As a patriarchal representation, Robert conveys male ideology to Edna by insisting that he should wait until Edna's husband gives her to him legally to avoid breaking any moral and cultural standards despite Edna's intense passion for him. In other words, Robert cannot see any other possibilities that he could be with Edna besides the roles of husband and wife, which Edna has experienced enough already. At this moment Edna sees her dream to break free from patriarchal oppression collapses as she is still objectified by Robert. His argument with Edna clearly shows how patriarchal ideology strongly imprisons people in their conventional belief and fabricated social roles. All in all, it is safe to speculate that Edna's retort toward Robert's plan is not some sort of whim but a mediated decision based on her experiences within and against the patriarchal system.

It is noticeable that Edna's repeated resistances during the course of the novel, rather than continue to progress statically until the end, suddenly stop after her argument with Robert mentioned above. In my opinion, this sudden stop represents Edna's realization that she must change her strategy if she is to overcome the patriarchal system. She chooses to commit suicide instead of persisting with her usual strategy of resisting the patriarchal criteria. After her argument with Robert and the witnessing of Adèle's giving birth to her children, Edna continues to contemplate how she should relate herself to the patriarchal system with her new knowledge of its devices:

Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. (p.300)

At first glance, the excerpt above obviously shows Edna's desperation to possess Robert. However, a closer look reveals that she does not blindly love Robert in the manner of a female protagonist in a romance. Instead, she completely understands the nature of her desperation and its resolution. The “*despondency*” that “*comes upon Edna in the wakeful night*” indicates that Edna’s despair comes with her moment of realization. The source of Edna's trouble is her understanding that her power cannot dominate Robert even though she is “awakened”. This is because her multiple “awakenings” and Robert himself function within the boundary of the patriarchal logic. In short, Edna's demands of possessing Robert cannot be reached in reality. Both of them cannot exist in the same hierarchy, the equality of gender, without one of them objectifying the other through the roles of husband and wife.

At this point, I find it quite intriguing that in response to her “*despondency*”, Edna's next stream of thought should be “[t]here was no one...that she desired” (p.300). This sentence is quite ambiguous. Does “no one...in the world” mean that she only desires Robert or that she desires nothing? This ambiguity becomes clearer in the next sentence as Edna reveals her resolution for us. When Edna ponders that “*there was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert*” (p.300), it means she is still attached to Robert, the representation of patriarchy. Edna totally understands that she cannot completely reject the patriarchy because she still relies on it. Thus, her understanding of the system is parallel to her attachment of Robert. However, when Edna realizes that Robert and every part of patriarchal representations will eventually “*melt[s] out of her existence, leaving her alone*”, her resigning in losing him implies her awareness of the possibility of detaching herself from patriarchy. It is possible to interpret her admittance that Robert can one day cease to have any meaning in her existence; therefore, her decision further implies that she completely accepts her failure in trying to resist or exploit the patriarchal system.

Thus, the “*no one thing in the world*” that she wishes for is the desire for autonomy beyond the patriarchal sphere. We can interpret this incident as Edna’s moment of epiphany. She comes to a moment of sudden understanding that she will not be able to struggle against male dominated oppression. This is because as long as she exists in the patriarchal Creole society, Edna will always be a subject to the

masculine power structure. Like her desire for Robert that is never materialized, her resistance in the patriarchal sphere is comparable to trying to be an imperfect male. Edna's experience in roles as daughter, wife and resistant woman clearly presents her needs to rely on various masculine representations in order to even define herself in the social structure. Her realization that she desires for "*no one thing*" becomes her definite resolution that she does no longer want to rely upon the patriarchal logic. To Edna, a way to accomplish her struggle for individuality is that she must leave the patriarchal sphere, a source of her oppression. Therefore, to escape from the imprisoned roles as a wife and mother that are suppressed in the family hierarchy and stuck in endless domestic works, Edna must emancipate herself to the region where patriarchal ideology cannot reach her. This realization that the patriarchal system can be rejected is what inspires her to commit suicide at the beach.

In choosing death as her solution, Edna's action can be interpreted as her method to "*elude*" the patriarchal system that oppresses her both physically and mentally. It is obvious that Edna's suicide is a contemplated decision because she understands that her resistances against patriarchal system are traps, bringing her down to deeper level of subordinating to male power. By her realization, Edna comes to a decision that she must remove herself from the system as "*she knew a way to elude them...when she walked down to the beach*" (p.300). The word "*elude*" here refers to Edna's attempt and desire to get away from her children, another unit of the patriarchal system similar to Robert. Moreover, the act of Edna eluding her children is not that of a mad woman but a decision from a sane and contemplating one as indicated in her "*knowing of a way*", as exactly as she "*walked down to the beach*" leaving her male dominated society. The significance of Edna's walk to the beach is that she is literally rejecting the patriarchal sphere occupied by male power and moving into a natural space, in which she is the solitarily physical human being:

The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above,

reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water. (pp. 301-302)

The image of the sea from the excerpt is sharply contrasting. While nature is certainly beautiful with "*white beach*" and the sea that shines of "*the million lights of the sun*" it is also very frightening. The sound of the sea is described as "seductive" that is "*inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude*". The word "abysses" here conveys a sense that there is something dangerous underneath the water. The hidden danger of the sea is totally contrasted to the beauty of the surrounding beach. All in all, the menacing description of the environment connotes that Edna is no longer in the space occupied by masculinity but moves into one dominated by nature. It is useful to point out that despite the description of "a bird with a broken wing" that "reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water", a symbolic image that seems to represent Edna's failure in her struggle against patriarchy, she is literally alone in this scene. The third person omniscient narrator describes the scene. What appears before Edna's senses are "*the water of the gulf*", "*the voice of the sea*" and "*along the beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight*". The falling bird is not part of Edna's perception or her plan to free herself for patriarchy. She is no longer symbolically associated with it. If there should be any form of patriarchy inside this natural space it is in Edna's mind.

Indeed, her effort in freeing herself mentally from patriarchal ideology can be seen in Edna's desires to "elude" her own guilt at her rejection of the female roles in order to maintain her self-ownership:

She had said over and over to herself: "To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me; it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier - but Raoul and Etienne!" She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children. (pp. 299-300)

The above excerpt presents Edna's reconciliation with her inner conflict of her relationship between herself and her roles in the patriarchal system. Edna's conscience presented in the passage reinforces the idea that although she is trapped in stagnant failure in resistance by her false "awakenings", she insists not to give up her quest for her individual soul. She is thinking "over and over" of her relationship with the male figures who have involved in her life. She considers her affair with Arobin, while also thinking of her husband before she finally concludes that all of them "[make] no difference to [her]". Her indifference suggests that she is aware and has come to terms with the uselessness of her actions in the patriarchy-designed roles of wife and lover. Edna's statement of "*to-morrow it will be someone else*" vividly echoes the futility of switching roles. She is now conscious of its uselessness and is going to reject it entirely. She chooses to submit to death rather than to allow herself to be oppressed under false ideology in the patriarchal morality of monogamy. Beside the complete rejection of the husband and lover roles, Edna also makes her stance regarding her maternal role as she reflects upon her conversation with Adèle. What Edna "[understands] now clearly" when she looks back and recognizes how she "*would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children*" is that it is finally possible to stand by her words. Her maternal roles, the "*natural*" responsibilities she shares with Raoul and Etienne, can be rejected as she embraces her constructed death. Her children now become her "*unessential*". In choosing to die in this natural environment, Edna only needs to sacrifice herself for her soul. She is in control of her circumstances as she can now recognize the patriarchal devices and choose to free herself from them. This full knowledge of the patriarchal system and her decision to methodologically resist and reject it constitute her true awakening.

The End of Patriarchal Oppression: Edna's Suicide as Ritual of Emancipation

Edna's conception of her individual soul ultimately occurs at the moment of her suicide. In my opinion, Chopin's portrayal of Edna's suicide scene is very ritualistic. It is a moment similar to a religious ritual, in which she creates for herself. I am aware that the concept of Edna's ritualistic suicide connotes a sense of "acting to leave female identity", which could undermine my earlier proposal of

Edna's quitting her constructed feminine in the patriarchal society as a means to free herself from its ideological structure. I would like to state that Edna's ritualization of her death is a singular act. Thus, Edna's suicide suggests an end to her roles rather than its repetition. I will now focus on analyzing the ritualistic narrative of Edna's ritual for her individual soul that begins with her contemplative walk into the sea and ends with her gaining her "liberal individual" identity.

What Edna desires and tries to achieve in constructing this ritual is her self-ownership - a unique individual identity that is not constructed by patriarchal ideology or any social interaction. The withdrawing of her old identity is a logical and vital part of her process to gain new identity as an individual. Edna's suicide plays with the technique of juxtaposition. Her death unexpectedly carries a positive sense of liberation. In contrast to the traditional connotation of suicide as a path toward death, Edna's ritual in *The Awakening* means to be reborn and to have new identity as a liberal individual. She begins her birthing ritual by

...leaving her clothing in the bath-house. But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her. (p.301)

Chopin portrays Edna removing her clothes as she is about to walk into the sea. It is as though time turns backward in this scene as Edna is being compared to a baby whose delicate body is irritated by the "pricking garments". The image of Edna "[standing] naked in the open air" revealing herself "[to] the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her...for the first time in her life" clearly alludes to a baby who is going to be baptized in natural surrounding. Of course, I am only referring to the image of baptism here metaphorically. Nevertheless, it is useful to draw the comparison between Edna's ritual and the

Christian one. Her baptizing ritual is different from traditional Christianity in the fact that she is practicing it herself. Edna is her own master of ceremony, a position that signifies her independence from religious institution that reinforces patriarchal dominance. Moreover, her nakedness implies the idea of removing the representations of the constructed female identity that have imprisoned her in the wife and mother roles. The symbolic significance of this ritual is that in Edna's perception, her identity is no longer the superficially constructed "feminine" one shaped by her social interaction in the patriarchal society. Hence, this ritualized suicide is an effective method in gaining her self-ownership as Edna's action of "*leaving her clothing*" indicates her achievement in resigning from the patriarchal constructed roles.

The vivid image of Edna's rebirth in *The Awakening* thematizes Edna's struggle against patriarchal system that oppresses her in the constructed female identity. Her intense desires to be reborn as an individual reflect how much she feels oppressed by the system. I would like to further explore the significance of Edna's awakenings that each time Edna "awakens" and alters her roles in the patriarchal structure she will simply be caught in the fabricated social roles. These roles are direct products of the patriarchal invention that binds women to their constructed female identities such as an obedient wife, uncaring mother or impulsive rebel. Her determinable resistance attempts are also repeated shifting roles. She cannot be separated from them completely if she remained in the patriarchal sphere. Thus, for Edna to fulfill her desire for autonomy, she must "split" from these restraints that have imprisoned her reality through the roles of wife and mother. That is, she must not identify herself both physically with patriarchal roles and mentally by regretting her feminine and maternal roles.

The possibility of Edna splitting herself from the patriarchal logic is presented through her appreciation of her rebirth. In acknowledging that she can split herself from her restraints, her first experience of solitary nakedness brings her the great satisfaction as "*How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known*". (p.301) Again a contrasting emotion appears in Edna's mind. She feels "strange and awful" to "stand naked under the sky", yet she

also finds this experience "delicious". These words seemingly come from a mad woman who is losing her mind about giving up on life. If we view the contrast between her feelings of "awful" and "delicious" in a linear frame of mind, it should be reasonable to see that rather than implying madness, the word "delicious" signifies Edna's change of perception. The surrounding nature maybe "awful" but she chooses to see it as something "delicious". I find this description peculiar as the word "delicious" is not normally associated with nature. This strange word choice implies that Edna chooses to reinterpret nature according to her perception rather than perceiving it like a normal person. This reflects that Edna is not the same woman she once was in the patriarchal society. If anything, she is now acquiring the means to see the world anew - to see the possibility of splitting herself completely from the patriarchal system. She is reborn as a new person as Chopin reinforces in the next sentence. Her feeling of being like "*new-born creature opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known,*" indicates Edna's desires to face the world with her new self, in which she gains from her decision to split from constructed female identity that has been suppressing her for a long time. In other words, her "awakening" is her ability to see and elude patriarchal traps rather than to blindly fight for impossible gender equality in the male-dominated sphere. On a grander perspective, this "new-born creature" can be viewed as a being of knowledge. This reinforces the notion that her ritualistic suicide is founded on Edna's carefully planned strategy instead of the desperation of a defeated woman.

The actual suicide scene also symbolically represents Edna's true awakening from the patriarchal sphere. It could be said that Edna is awakened in her own ritualized death as she believes that suicide is the best solution to emancipate from patriarchal oppression. Taking the novel's structure into consideration, it should be apparent how this scene mirrors Edna's previous false "awakenings". This progression clearly parallels with Edna's change of perception in the previous paragraph. We can interpret Edna's first movement into the sea as a sign of her complete preparation and willingness to die. Her determination to finish her planned ritual is even more intense with the novel's depiction of the grave image of the sea:

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. (p.301)

The sea with “foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles” connotes the image of a dangerous snake slithering around Edna and bearing its intention to kill her. Instead of retreating, Edna continues to walk out to the deeper, colder part of the sea. Her steadiness, while connotes her bravery as she totally disregards the danger of the sea, also reinforces the scene’s ritualistic sense. She is so calm because these events are carefully planned and set up. Edna is not panic or over joyous. In fact, the scene lacks dramatization as Edna only "lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke". The simplicity of Chopin's description of her body movement suggests that, for Edna, this swim is just like any other: very calm and composed because the swimmer realizes what she is doing.

More importantly, the image of the sea continues to reflect Edna's calmness as though the surrounding has become part of her. In contrast to the menacing portrayal of the sea when Edna begins her swim, it is "suddenly sensuous, enfolding [Edna's] body in its soft, close embrace". I notice that Edna's familiarity with the sea is similar to the way she felt the first time she was able to swim and her childhood memory of running away from prayer:

She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end. (pp.301-302)

The excerpt above presents Edna's recollection of her false "awakenings" in "she remembered the night she swam far out" and "thinking of the bluegrass meadow that she had traversed when a little child". Her first-time swimming awakens Edna to be aware of her own power, while her escape into the meadow awakens her to the realization of frustration and resistance within patriarchal oppression. It is visible that Edna's collective memory as she swims "on and on" manages to fold every moment of her awakenings into a single event. Every one of Edna's failed resistances and false awakenings is condensed into her final swimming session, signifying a vicious circle of repetition. Given Edna's acknowledgement of the futility of her resistances and the fact that this particular swimming session embodies the essence of repetition, it is possible to state that at this moment, she is awakened to the ultimate realization and is now totally aware of 'way to elude this repetition'.

In swimming on and on, she repeatedly acts it with the full awareness of its useless consequence. Edna's futile resistances are metaphorically compared to her unfinished journey in the sea and meadow where the natural spaces *had no beginning and no end*. However, now Edna has learned and realized how to be free from her resistance of the vicious circle. That is, she must *[go] on and on* her journey until *exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her* (p.302), so that she will be free from all restraints by her death and becomes an autonomous "*new-born creature*". With this knowledge in mind, she will now be able to put a stop to the ideological confinement forever by swimming until no actions could ever be repeated - until she is finally exhausted and perished in the sea.

In giving herself to the vast expanse of the sea, Edna achieves the aim of her ritual as she is able to emancipate herself from patriarchal sanctions of the female roles of wifehood and motherhood. The moment of her achievement is presented when she mentally overcomes her guilt about rejecting the female roles. With her full awareness of the patriarchal system, it is safe to say that when Edna thinks of her husband and family that "*[t]hey were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul*"(p.303), she can now decisively break all the ties with them. Her words can now be taken literally as she swims toward her death. Her family could no longer "possess her body and soul".

Moreover, Edna's achievement is intensified through her recollection of Mlle. Reisz's sarcastic remark:

How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew! "And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies." (p.303)

If Edna's suicide is her plan, then Mlle. Reisz's words above should not be taken at face value. Indeed, the fact that Edna thinks of Reisz at the critical moment of her suicide suggests that it is Reisz who is mocking the "pretentious" artist. That Edna figures out every part of her ritualistic suicide shows that she too "*possess[es] the courageous soul that dares and defies*", even more courageous than Mlle. Reisz. In this case, Edna's action does not only enable her to go beyond patriarchal confinement but also further than Mlle. Reisz's unconvincing rebellious attempt. Although Mlle. Reisz initiates the idea that artist must be able to stand outside the social restraint, she herself cannot fully follow her idea. Edna, on the other hand, has every right to call herself an "artist". This is because Edna is the artist that "dares" to create to her own death. In dying, Edna is able to "defy" the patriarchal binding that Mlle. Reisz could not even imagine and comprehend. Mlle. Reisz's resistance against patriarchal society does not free her from social restraint at all. Her position as a radical woman is just another role designed by the patriarchal system. In addition, it even traps her to the lowest rank of social hierarchy as a social outcast. While Mlle. Reisz fails to prove her idea, Edna certainly achieves them at the last moment of her death.

The Awakening ends with the moment of Edna's dying breath. In my opinion, the entire novel is processed for this only moment, the passing of Edna's life that signifies her triumph over patriarchy. Based on the parallel between the novel's plot and Chopin's portrayal of Edna's life, it is possible to consider that *The Awakening* is written purposely to celebrate the protagonist's death:

She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air. (p.303)

In her last consciousness, Edna is swept back to her nostalgic childhood memory. The moment that she is embracing death, she simultaneously returns to the moment of her happiness in her childhood. This nostalgic scene is essential in proving Edna's achievement of her individuality. Because this is the final moment of her life, it is comprehensible that her instinct recalls the memory of childhood happiness. What is intriguing about this particular set of memory is that it completely disregards Edna's experiences with her husband and children, even inspirational male figures like Robert and Arobin, as though they are of no importance to her. Edna's indifference toward her adulthood spent in patriarchal circle indicates that she can now utterly eliminate her old constructed female identities, even though she has been forced to accept them as part of her life. In her death, she manages to "split" her individual identity from the patriarchal constructed feminine one. Besides, it is apparent that the description of images flashed in Edna's mind is filled with physical sensation perceived through the five senses. Even in her last breath, there is no doubt that she can "feel" the sea, "look" into the distance, "heard" the sound of a barking dog, feeling calm and in control of her fear and can "smell" the flowers' odor lastly. The lucidity of the images that are perceptible by her senses indicates that Edna is unconsciously "living" in such moment. It is believably "real" to her than the memory of her family, the patriarchal constructed roles and relationship. Perhaps her childhood is the only moment she wishes to live. This memory, so to speak, is the evidence that Edna finally reaches the moment of individuality that she has desired through her life, which, given her oppressive circumstances, is only achievable by death. Hence, in ritualizing her death, Edna is reborn as a "liberal individual". Her death epitomizes her success in breaking the static resistance as well as other

patriarchal constructed feminine roles. Obviously, the ritualization of her death is a singular action that parallels with the end of the novel. It is an action without any continuity; therefore, it successfully breaks the chain of Edna's repetitive resistances.

Conclusion

All in all, what my thesis offers is the analysis of Edna's struggle against patriarchy that oppresses her through the constructed female identity. After considering the novel using the feminist theoretical concepts of Kate Millet, I find that the best solution for Edna to emancipate from the realm of patriarchal oppression is via her death. Perhaps it is the only solution that Chopin thinks of as she writes the novel. Chopin portrays Edna as a woman who fiercely determines to be "free" from patriarchy by trying to form her resistances. Only by learning from her experiences and interactions with other characters. However, her attempt to resist against the constructed female identity happens to function within the patriarchal boundary because, according to Millet's framework, it is patriarchy that defines womanhood. Millet's theory of the patriarchy is a good starting point in considering the concept of female identity even with its limitations such as only identifying the origin of women's oppression but not the solution. Moreover, there is no definite origin of women prior to what Millet's proposes as the patriarchal convention. How can a woman define herself or celebrate her uniqueness if her identity has to be formulated from being an inferior opposition to her masculine opposite? If I were to use Millet's framework solitarily, Edna's entire resistance process would constitute her quest to be an imperfect male in the patriarchal society.

Therefore, to work within Millet's framework is to reinforce the need for masculine values to even define women's identity. A woman will never be an autonomous being within a patriarchal society. The case of Mlle. Reisz should emphasize the limitation of Millet's theory. It is as though Edna's existence in all female roles is designated by patriarchal ideology circulated in social standard. Edna's process of emancipation triggers the inescapable chain of repetitive assuming

different social identities within the patriarchal convention. She could never be herself. No matter what aspects of patriarchal construction of female identity Edna rejects, she could never be successful as long as she lives in male sphere. Every position is a patriarchal trap that confirms women's inferiority. Thus, the process of Edna's resistances from patriarchy resembles a vicious cycle of sort. Her resistant progression is in itself a single act of endless repetition.

To break this vicious cycle, it is necessary to reject or negate the patriarchal convention entirely. This is because for women to even form a resistance against the patriarchal system is to confirm that she is also part of the play. Edna's awakening, in my opinion, is precisely her awareness of this crucial information. In acknowledging this patriarchal trap, she chooses to commit suicide in order to end her resistances and gain her freedom within the patriarchal convention. Edna's decision to commit suicide is perfectly understandable as her emancipation from oppressive factors in temperament, role and status. In death, she is able to quit all female roles leading her to become what she has always desired - a liberal individual. Thus, it is unverifiable whether Edna is a winner in her battle against patriarchal system because her emancipation does not cause the declination to the hegemonic institution. But we could say that she definitely achieves her goal of individuality by the ritualized suicide. Edna transcends herself beyond the gender ideological restraints, while other female characters are still oppressed in the patriarchal sanction of ideological womanhood. In life, under the oppressive patriarchal ideology, Edna exists only as a self-indulgent wife and mother who stubbornly desires for "*something unattainable*", which, given her attempts throughout the novel, is obviously the liberation to the level of female autonomy. In death, especially as a representation of feminism, Edna is a heroic woman who successfully resists patriarchal oppression and achieves her freedom.

On a grander scale, it is possible to say that *The Awakening* is ahead of its time both in the time of writing and its place in the feminist canon. Needless to say, among the female writer's works in the same period, *The Awakening* stands out as the most important feminist novel. The major difference that separates *The Awakening* from the prevailing attitudes of most women in nineteenth-century society is its obvious acknowledgement of women's oppression under various patriarchal

constitutions. The novel fully tells the story about woman's process of emancipation from patriarchal system through sophisticated presentation of the protagonist's resistance approach. *The Awakening* stands as a rejection of the conventional ideas about women's roles of wife and mother and inspires them to break free from patriarchy in order to celebrate female individuality. In addition, it could be said that Edna is a perfect figure of feminist resistance. She epitomizes the well-rounded central character that experiences both the world of patriarchal conformity and radical isolation through her emancipation process. Indeed, she uses these experiences to her full advantage by assimilating them into her own resistance method that ultimately changes our perception of her from that of a submissive wife to a free woman - a sign of successful progress for the oppressive female.

My analysis of the novel shows that despite the fact that *The Awakening* is written in the period of the second wave feminist movement, the novel itself laps into the third wave. It is even possible to say that the novel encompasses and represents the entire feminist movements. Edna's unsuccessful awakenings could more or less, be taken as a criticism of the limitation of the second wave feminist movement that emphasized on gender equality. The failure of the second wave feminist movement mirrors that of Edna as to gain gender equality is to accept the patriarchal accusation of women's inferiority. Her death, which signifies her achievement in gaining her individuality, reflects the mentality of the third wave feminist movement that celebrates the uniqueness of the female rather than trying to share the same social hierarchy as men. These parallelisms between Edna's life and the feminist movement should be more than adequate to clarify Chopin's and *The Awakening's* status as avant-garde feminist writer and novel.