

Edna's "Moments of Being" and "Wild Zone" of Female Sexuality: A Gynocritical Study of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

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Abstract

This paper studies Kate Chopin's reinterpretation of female sexuality and personal autonomy in *The Awakening* through the lens of Elaine Showalter's Gynocriticism. It argues that Edna's struggle with the traditional idea of female sexual abstinence, self-sacrifice, and silence symbolizes her insatiable desire to redefine female identity. The articulation of her overt sexuality in the novella offers a new gateway of understanding a 'female self'. Edna's physical autonomy awakens her to a subversive, compelling, dynamic and liberating "wild" female self within. Edna in her journey into the untamed zone of sexuality through "moments of being" catches a glimpse of the forbidden trajectory of self-knowledge. She yearns to reach her selfhood through these utterly individual moments of awareness, intense power, beauty and personal significance. The unfolding of her female interiority reveals a strong connection between wildness of female eros and creativity. Chopin identifies this so called evil, unrestrained sexuality as an elixir of woman empowerment. Edna's wandering into her sexual wilderness embodies a new female archetype who writes her own story of resistance and power through her body. Edna's gradual alienation from androcentric idea of chastity, marriage, motherhood, her celebration of female body, and the final rejection of 'happy-ever-after reality' evoke a volcanic eruption of a new femininity in the female literary tradition.

Keywords: Gynocriticism, wild zone, moments of being, sexual emancipation, woman empowerment

Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* is seen as the landmark work of early feminism. It is one of the earliest American novels that focus on women's issues without condescension. In this novel, Chopin records psychosexual diversity of a female mind who struggles to free her own mind, body and soul from the confines of male domination and yearns for establishing a subjective identity. The novel centers upon Edna, a woman who exceeds her obligatory female roles in search of her 'true self' and 'genuine desire'. Though she is introduced in the beginning of the novel as a happy housewife with two boys and a rich, ideal husband, she finds no contentment in her traditional role of a dutiful wife, a loving mother, a gracious hostess or a dependable friend. This internal unrest coupled with her experiences of one summer in Grand Isle, surged with her interactions with a few catalysts drives her onto a vague, forbidden journey of discovering her true self. Her sensuous quest creates a new identity of a woman who is neither a wife nor a mother. Her struggle with the traditional idea of female sexual abstinence, self-sacrifice, and silence symbolizes her insatiable desire to redefine female identity. The articulation of Edna's overt sexuality awakens her to a subversive, compelling, dynamic and liberating "wild" female self within. Edna breaks her silence and creates her own story of resistance and power through her body. Edna in her journey into the untamed zone of her sexuality through "moments of being" catches a glimpse of "women's truth"; the truth that refuses to assert her self-identity only through pre-determined role of sex negating the 'essential femininity'. The individual moments of intense power, beauty and personal significance that she experiences with awareness and personal intensity unveils a deeper insight about the untamed zone of female self. She understands her personal worth and hidden connection between herself and the universe. Edna's awareness to psychosexual diversity in *The Awakening* reveals a connection between female sexuality and personal autonomy. Her sexual autonomy leavens her imaginative creative self; thus reveals the connection between the wildness of female eros; and the liberation of female mind and imaginative creativity. Edna's erotic quest and the affirmation of artistic self in the novel establish sexual liberty as a source of personal empowerment and therefore Chopin asserts dynamic female sexuality as an invaluable experience for a woman. Subsequently, Edna's psychosexual expedition towards her gradually developing "new consciousness" unveils the wild zone of female experiences, values and grievances.

According to Showalter, women's writings must articulate "what they have really known, felt, and suffered" to remain no longer unrepresented or misrepresented in literature (Showalter, 1981). So, in her essay "Toward a Feminist Poetics", Showalter (1979) coined the term Gynocriticism to suggest that women should construct a female framework to analyze or create their own writing in response to androcentric criticism. In this framework, woman as a reader, author and character come together in what Showalter (2000) sees as a shared "female subculture". She propounds that Gynocriticism identifies and "celebrates a new consciousness" in female writers who try to define an authentic self, turning to "female consciousness" and female literary tradition which they have already held within. This approach, according

to Showalter is courageous and sincere; it keeps closely to what women feel. This women-centered criticism recognizes the energy and life-force latent in female characters which make them heroic, passionate and subversive. It represents “a literature of their own” by aiming at the recovery and re-evaluation of the works of women writers as a form of expression of women’s experiences. It shows female tradition as a “positive source of strength and solidarity” for women which can create its own symbols out of woman’s own experience. In brief, Gynocriticism is a concept of creativity, literary history or literary interpretation based entirely on female experience where we find literary representation of women, by women and for women (Showalter, 1981). Following Showalter’s Gynocritical approach this paper attempts to study Chopin’s *The Awakening* as a woman’s writing unveiling women’s truth by articulating female feeling and desire, by creating a wild zone of her experience, by redefining gender and sexuality; and above all by exploring the aesthetic of self-conscious interiority of female mind from a female perspective.

In her cultural model of Gynocriticism, Showalter identifies such a unique female experience in female literary tradition (Showalter, 1981). Based on Ardener’s diagram, Showalter develops the idea of female “wild zone” as a theoretical foundation of women’s difference in that model. According to her, wild zone or “Female space” refers to a place where men are forbidden to enter, it’s a “no-man’s-land”. This “dark continent” of women’s life focuses on those aspects which are intangible for men and can never be experienced by them. It offers such a unique female experience which makes the silent to speak, invisible to become visible and allows a life for the symbolic female consciousness. This is the place where the female wild self can thrive: where woman can leave behind their muted voices and shout their own realities (Showalter, 2000, p.201). Thus the phrase “female wild zone” blazes images of wild female self which “goes its own way, neither domesticated nor controlled.” As Mary Daly says, “wild” is the name of the self in woman, of the enspiriting Sister Self, and Helene Cixous speaks of the wild self as “the rhythm that laughs you” and the “force that will not be cut off but will knock the wind out of the codes” (1986, p.308). In Showalter’s words, it is a place for the revolutionary women’s writing in ‘white ink.’ It is the hiding place where “Cixous’s laughing Medusa” lives; it is a place where, through a journey to it female writers can write out of the “cramped confines of patriarchal space”. As we see in *The Awakening*, Edna’s wild zone becomes “the place for the revolutionary women’s language, the language of everything that is repressed” (Showalter, 2000, p. 201). She discovers that powerful mode of expression through her “moments of being”. Her “moments of being” ignites her desire to reach the maturity of self. Edna’s “moments of being” dismantles patriarchal repression, erodes its structure enough for women to be able to fully imagine their old “wild” beings and symbols (Toth, 2014).

For Woolf, “‘moments of being’ are moments in which an individual experiences a sense of reality, in contrast to the states of ‘non-being’ that dominate most of an individual’s conscious life, in which they are separated from reality by a protective covering (1985). In her essay “A Sketch of the Past”, Virginia Woolf reflects that a great part of life is lived unconsciously “embedded in a kind of nondescript cotton wool” (1985, p.72). Women in their constant

effort to be something they are not, they almost forget their individual worth. But voluntarily or involuntarily when they get the chance to delve deep into their identity outside social boundaries, they sometimes confront some revelatory moments followed by a passionate and intense feeling of independence. For Woolf (1985) these are the only moments of “ecstasy” in which one really lives and finds one’s greatest satisfaction (p.98). Woolf (1985) refers such intense revelatory moments as “moments of being” (p.73) and contrasts it with “the cotton wool of non-being that defines most of our living” (1985, p. 70). In *The Awakening*, Edna is awakened to her sexuality as well as to the sense of being through her intense ‘moments of being’. The sensation, the satisfaction, the despair, the sadness and the happiness that she lived in those moments “produce a distinct awareness of the self, usually vis-à-vis life and the surrounding world” (Palls, 2012, p. 64). In the midst of the bustling social world of Grand Isle, Edna reaches that “heightened moments of self-consciousness” (Deveaux, 1994, p.234) through her sense of erotic pleasure. In the very beginning of the novella, Edna has a vague sensation about her own desire. Her true feeling seems to be repressed by and hidden in her “obfuscating cotton wool of daily experience” (Woolf, 1985, p.72). Her regular life that is her ‘non-being’ state drives her to indulge in sensual groping and blundering until her revelatory moments kindles her sexual drive. She first confronts her soul’s desire in the company of Robert followed by the thrilling moment of baptismal swim and emboldened by the charm of music in that magical night of Grand Isle. The “moments of silence” that she shared with Robert in that night introduced her to “the first-felt throbbings of [her] desire”. Likewise, the sense of freedom she experiences in those powerful moments of that night coming in touch with the sea are like flashes of awareness, which reveals a pattern hidden behind the “cotton wool” of her daily life. She gets a taste of freedom and the power she has within herself when Edna finally learns how to swim. In those moments she gets “not only aware of herself but she also catches a glimpse of her connection to a larger pattern hidden behind the opaque surface of daily life” (Urquhart, 1998). Thus Chopin illustrates Edna’s moments of reflection:

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (Chopin, 2006, p.34). In that solitude and vastness of sea, Chopin makes Edna to undergo “moments of being” which redeems her soul from the quotidian life of insignificance and guides her through the journey of self-discovery and sensual exploration of her female space. Since Olson (2003) posits, moments of being “magnify an awareness of the self, a coming into being of the individual, and an opening up of interior states of knowing”. Edna recalls that “memory of importance” as the source of her strength and power throughout the novel. What evokes the “moment of being” here is the feeling of breaking from conventions and binding duties. While being alone in the sea, in that boundless “space and solitude”, Edna is able to get as close as possible to herself, to the essence of her being. Edna’s overwhelming erotic encounter with sea unveils the power of erotic in her life and gradually leads her towards the maturity of self. Sandra M. Gilbert suggests in her essay, “Edna’s intimate connection with the sea is part of Chopin’s intent to depict in her a modern Venus who would vindicate and celebrate the power

of female sexuality” (1983). In those moments of ecstasy, she not only gets a meaningful vision of the world itself, but her feelings of rapture also grant her intensified knowledge about her state of being in the world. She begins “to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her” (Chopin, 2006, p.16). She realizes her real worth as an individual and identifies her inner being as the source of immense power and strength.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin vindicates and celebrates the power of autonomous sexuality in liberating female self through Edna’s sensual quest. Kate Chopin belongs to a time when women did not have any “sexual voice”. Centuries of patriarchal domination forces women to live a life incongruent to her internal desires. Hence Luce Irigaray argues, “since Plato, women have been defined and sexualized according to a male model, as reflective of man’s desires and as substitutes onto which male sexual functioning is displaced” (1985). Women are believed not to possess any sexual desires of their own. For eons patriarchy defines female sexuality in terms of “marriage and motherhood” only. Female sexuality is solely meant to serve their husband as a wife and the community as the source of propagation. Chopin reexamines and rejects this myth of “woman’s anemic sexuality” in her writings and valorizes Edna’s vigorous and diverse sexuality as “an assertion of the lifeforce of women” (Lorde, 2006, p.55). She demonstrates “sexuality as a powerful force that brings consciousness to body, mind and soul.” Consequently, Edna’s growing sensuality appears as the source of her “incandescence”. It generates that creative energy which Edna finds powerful and illuminating. This erotic as a force “inspires joy, instills confidence, and demands satisfaction in [her]life pursuits (Lorde, 2006, p.55). It awakens new sensations that allow her to realize who she truly is. Sexuality guides her to recognize her innermost power so long latent in desire and thus to connect sexual articulation with the assertion of female self and liberation of female mind. Naomi Wolf (2013) lucidly explains in her book “Vagina”:

Female sexual pleasure, rightly understood, is not just about sexuality, or just about pleasure. It serves, also, as a medium of female self-knowledge and hopefulness; female creativity and courage; female focus and initiative; female bliss and transcendence; and as medium of a sensibility that feels very much like freedom. (as cited in Popova, 2013)

After being awakened to her bodily wisdom in the Grand Isle, Edna further reaches to a deeper understanding of her own body, mind and soul through her suggested intercourse with Arobin. The more he gets close to her, the more she is drawn to her awakening sensuousness. In Chopin’s words “It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire” (1986, p.104). She experiences the true intensity of life in that physical communion. As the author said, “Above all, there was understanding. She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to look upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality” (p.104). Though Edna’s body responds spontaneously to Arobin’s touch, rest of her being remains indifferent. She realizes “Alcee Arobin was absolutely nothing to her” (p. 97) because she feels “it was not the

kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips.” (p.104). She perceives it is something else that drives her soul’s desire. In her erotic search she is craving to contemplate that and unraveling the social knots to find “the nuggets of truth”. Thus Lorde’s (2006) finding shows, “the erotic is a resource within each of us that lies in a deeply female and spiritual plane, firmly rooted in the power of our unexpressed or unrecognized feeling” (p. 53).

Edna’s most intense moments and interactions with the self and the other are represented not only through her heterosexuality but through her potential lesbian identity too. Chopin’s stout resistance against patriarchal enforced heterosexuality upon woman is suggested through Edna, a “metaphorical lesbian” as in Bonnie Zimmerman’s words—a provocative controlling concept to describe a character who is not “really” a lesbian but could be” (as cited in LeBlanc, 1999). As we see in the beginning of the story, Edna is awakened to her bodily wisdom by the touch of Adele, her “sensuous Madonna” first rather than any man. Chopin thus recounts Edna’s feelings:

She had put her head down on Madame Ratignolle’s shoulder. She was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom. (Chopin, 2006, p. 23)

Edna’s artistic self also finds in Adele “a faultless Madonna” (2006, p.11) who appears as a tempting subject for her painting. Even the sea as “a metaphorical female lover” moves her towards the force of the erotic and drives her desire for self-knowledge “wielding substantial power over Edna as a catalyst for her psychological, emotional, erotic, and spiritual awakening” (<http://people.loyno.edu>). Showalter asserts too on women-identified symbolism of the sea by addressing it as a “feminine organic element” that corresponds to the “female body [...] prone to wetness, blood, milk, tears, and amniotic fluid.” Sea’s irresistible eroticism is evident in this refrain that beckons Edna throughout her journey:

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.” (Chopin, 2006, p. 14)

Edna’s wondering into the personal realm of desire eventually leads her to the real self. The moments Edna discovers her sexuality as a source of her knowledge and power, she finds the way to voice her thoughts and desire. Sexuality becomes the language of her body and soul. Defying patriarchal notion of keeping “female passion under rein”, she learns to value her distinct sexual voice. It gives rise to a sense of discrete self in her to articulate her unique female experience. Since Irigaray suggests a continuity between the multiplicity of female desire and the possibilities of women’s language – ‘in what she says, too, at least when she dares, woman is constantly touching herself’ (1985, p.29). Edna realizes her sexuality is not meant to submit to other’s power and choice only, rather a powerful mode of asserting her personal autonomy. She

realizes repression of sexual energy imposed by the old patriarchal order, traumatizes female body & mind. The moment Edna feels the power of the erotic she starts her journey towards subjectivity. She decides “to step outside the confines of her marriage, where sexuality should be unreserved, in order to experience true freedom in the expression of her sexuality”. Lorde asserts, the erotic allows us to engage with “our deepest and nonrational knowledge” (p.53) to live a meaningful and fulfilled life suffused with satisfaction (2006).

After recognizing that immense power latent in her body and soul, Edna shows her first act of resistance in her rejection to respond to her husband’s call. She determines not to submit herself to her husband’s authority anymore. Chopin (2006) thus unfolds Edna’s subversion, “She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done resistance other than denied and resisted” (p. 38). Since then “She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.” (2006, p. 70). Henceforth, Edna is increasingly guided by a body that, as we are told, leads her to “blindly follow whatever impulse moved her, as if she had and placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility” (Chopin, 2006, p. 79). She decides to be honest to her self and live life authentically. So, Chopin confirms her determination, “whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself (p.100). Her awakened female body cast aside her earlier submissive self and revolts against all kinds of social or religious constraints. As we see during the church service on the island “a feeling of oppression and drowsiness” (Chopin, 2006, p.79) overcame her; so she quits the church and fell asleep. Listening to the wisdom of the body, she begins to sleep on her own time which exhibits her control and free choice.

The moment Edna aspires to live in alignment with her erotic authenticity, she rises as an empowered woman. She develops confidence and sexual self-esteem too. Hence Lorde (2006) describes:

The erotic is a measure between the beginnings of our sense of self and the chaos of our strongest feelings. It is an internal sense of satisfaction to which, once we have experienced it, we know we can aspire. For having experienced the fullness of this depth of feeling and recognizing its power, in honor and self-respect we can require no less of ourselves. (p.88)

She comprehends that her autonomous self is integrated to her sexual self. So, she no longer wants to be defined by patriarchal eroticization of her body. She gives an effort to transform the role of her submissive desires into the driving force of her life. So, she communicates her desires without any blame or shame. Subsequently, Edna declares “I have got into a habit of expressing myself. It doesn’t matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like” (Chopin, 2006, p.132). As soon as she is orientated to her sexuality, she rejects to hide that identity for the sake of just feeling comfortable and safe in her life. She realizes the futility of living a life of hypocrisy and inauthenticity. In her own words, “it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one’s life.” (Chopin, 2006, p. 138)

Chopin, a rebel woman herself, depicts a rebel woman for her readers, a woman who sees nothing “but an appalling and hopeless ennui” (2006, p. 54) in domestic harmony and so turns to her own creativity and passions. Edna’s search for erotic gives her a sense of power to overcome patriarchal culture and its expectations regarding women’s role. Her role as a discontented wife and mother is an open assault to the contemporary society that recognizes women’s social identification with marriage and motherhood only. Her sensuous experience makes her aware of her desires to be creative, independent and thereby asserts the new woman belief of envisioning sexual emancipation as a platform for personal empowerment. She prioritizes impulse over propriety and creates a new vision of female power. Christ (1980) rightly says, “Edna, in rejecting conventions of marriage and motherhood, seeks an expressive space to access her own creativity and discover her own sense of power, which has been thus far erased by male primacy” (p.33). After recognizing her own desires, she resists against all those values that govern her role in society by making her own choice of living. Edna’s dislike of the pre-determined role of her sex and irresistible desires to stray from the norm and to become her own person provokes her to find an alternative role of a self-reliant person as an artist. Lorde (2006) thus propounds: “[r]ecognizing the power of the erotic within our lives can give us the energy to pursue genuine change within our world, rather than merely settling for a shift of characters in the same weary drama” (p.59).

In *The Awakening*, Chopin illustrates the connection between female eros and imaginative creativity which leads woman towards a more fulfilling and self-actualized lives and brings a social change. Like other feminist critics Chopin believes too “what represses women’s bodies also represses women’s mind and creativity, it would have to celebrate the female body.” The moment Edna owns her sexuality as her inner fire, it brings passion into all areas of her life including her creative faculty. Erogenous zone of her sexuality influences her power of imagination. She experiences her deep creative feeling after encountering her erotic zone.

Being driven by that sexual energy Edna aspires to establish an alternative social identity of an artist over her so-called female identity. Sensuality offers her a sense of “greater freedom, vitality and creativity”. Her overwhelming erotic encounter with sea, entices her creative mind to illustrate what “she can neither articulate, actualize, or abandon” before. Edna’s creative energy is ignited not only by the erotic challenge of the sea, but also kindled and tended by the erotic influence of Mademoiselle Reisz’s music and powerful words. After returning from the Grand isle, Edna engages herself more in painting with “great energy and interest”. Her paintings become that powerful language for her which she needs to voice her long dormant desire.

As an artist, Edna finds an alternative social identity to express her desire and define herself anew as an autonomous, empowered woman in a public sphere. Edna as an artist denies that ‘mother-woman’ identity of Adele that considered “procreation as the sole legitimate, satisfactory creative experience for women; mental, artistic, and intellectual creativity was instead the stuff of men” (Friedman, 1987). It is “through artistic expression, [Edna] comes to see [herself] as a subject and expand [her] self-understanding while coping with legacies of domination that threaten to

silence and render [her] invisible” (Schaefer, 2017, p.12). The emancipatory force of art helps Edna to transform her silence into expression as it “allows women to access the power of the erotic and thereby destabilize systems of oppression” (Lorde, 2006). This even motivates her to remain indifferent to her husband’s admonishment that she “not let the family go to the devil” while she paints. She then feels the need to have an individual space both literally and metaphorically. Like Virginia Woolf, Chopin recognizes too that women cannot gain freedom to create the world from their own experience until they are freed from emotional and financial dependence on men and from the constant interruptions of household duties and children (Christ, 1980, p. 33). Since Woolf asks in *A Room of One’s Own*, how can a woman devote herself to her creative passions, if she cannot count on some personal space for autonomous, free thought and expression? If she is invariably relegated to a role that imprisons her in the home, or rather, only in some rooms of the home— the kitchen, the bedroom, the nursery—immersed in taking care of her loved ones and building the physical and emotional bonds that connect human beings and family generations (1998)? Edna’s emerging selfhood compels her to move to the ‘pigeon house’ which is fully independent from the influence and control of male domination. Her self-dignity no longer allows her to depend on her husband anymore. Edna’s need for discreet personhood demands a house completely of her own and thus she replies to Adele, “The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn’t that enough reason [to leave this house]?” (Chopin, 2006, p.99). So, her little house becomes the symbol of her maturity, self-dignity, growing mental, sexual and financial independence. In the solitude of that private space, her art “grows in force and individuality” uniting her creativity and sexuality. She now paints through her “knowing body” and conflates her body with her deeply felt female consciousness through her art. She follows her ways of life in that little house of her own not as Mrs. Pontellier but as Edna, an independent artist who discovers art as the source of her autonomous self.

Edna’s mental, physical and financial autonomy gives birth to a woman of self-actualization who could not be understood, managed, mastered and ruled by patriarchy anymore. In her quest for the power of erotic, Edna finally understands the insignificance of her male love interests to give her that incomprehensible feeling of self-fulfillment. In fact, eventually she realizes this impotent patriarchy can never give her what she is craving for: “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn’t matter about Leonce Pontellier. She even realized that the day would come when [Robert], too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone” (Chopin, 2006, p.108). She gradually learns to trust her feelings, emotions and her sense of power and eventually takes control of her desire, body and life. This is evident from her dignified proclamation to Robert:

I am no longer 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. (Chopin, 2006, p.134)

So, she finally conflates her empowered self with the powerful force of nature. Edna’s ultimate surrender to the sensual call of the sea reveals the strength of her sexuality. Her autonomous

sexuality governs her to embrace the wilderness of sea as an epitome of vast, wild zone of female experience and to reject the limited space provided by patriarchy. As she learns to value the richness of conscious life, she decides to liberate her true self from corporeal confinements symbolized by her outer garments. Thus, eventually she resists disempowerment by making her choice of living and non-living.

The trajectory of her individuality and vibrant, wild and dynamic female interiority highlights the power of female sexuality that empowers women. Her sexual maturity develops her as a complex but matured woman who learns, grows and changes to challenge female stereotypes, false ideas and cultural myths that hinder, impair, squash or dim woman's magnificent sexual self. Through her sexual freedom she reaches that maturity to recognize the insignificance of her lovers, husband, friends and children to give her utter sense of contentment as a woman. Her continuous discontentment has been masterfully revealed by her relation with Robert, Mrs. Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz, Arobin. Her awakening to her own thoughts, feelings, needs, and womanhood, increasingly alienates her from earlier acquiescence to the expectations of society and eventually enables her to assert her individuality against an orthodox society unorthodoxically. Edna's uneven, sonorous journey to challenge conventions and to make decisions about her own life reveals her urge for a new definition of femininity. Edna's determination to be a self-reliant person accentuates her belief to carry the power to make her own choice and be solely responsible for her own destiny. Out of her female experience, Edna finally acquires her own autonomous being which she determines not to sacrifice at any cost. Her immense desire to liberate herself from the socio-cultural imprisonment and to achieve greater freedom as a human being finally turns Edna into a real artist, who painted a courageous picture of a woman who "dares and defies" (Chopin, 2006, p.61).

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