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**KATE CHOPIN AND PROBLEMS OF WOMEN IN HER
WORKS**

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Content

Introduction.....	3
Chapter I Feminism and problems of women in American Literature.....	6
§1. Feminism and the waves of feminism.....	6
§2. Kate Chopin's life and its impact on her literary work.....	26
§3. Kate Chopin's contribution to the feministic literature.....	31
Conclusion.....	42
Chapter II Kate Chopin and the reflection of women's status in her works.....	45
§1. Women characters in Kate Chopin's works.....	45
§2. Historical and Cultural Background of <i>The Awakening</i>	59
§3. Women problems for identity in Kate Chopin's novel <i>The Awakening</i>	66
Conclusion.....	88
Final Conclusion.....	92
List of Literature used.....	99

Introduction

In our dissertation paper we are going to analyze the problems of women in Kate Chopin's works. Therefore we decided to analyze feminism and feministic issues in our paper. Our government pays great attention to the education. Learning foreign languages is very important in our country nowadays. As president Islam Karimov said: "At present great importance is attached to the study and teaching of foreign languages. No doubt, it happens not without purpose. Today the importance of our people's perfect knowledge of foreign languages can scarcely be exaggerated as our country aspires to win a descent place in the world community, because our people see their great future as a life in mutual accord and cooperation with their foreign partners."¹ Thus the learning of foreign languages is accompanied by a deep study of history and culture of those countries the language it which we study. And it is impossible to do without literature, which enables the leaders to penetrate deeply to the "mood" of the nation, its custom and traditions and the style of life in general. We hope this dissertation paper will contribute to literary studies in its depth and make clear on feministic literature.

There were a lot of feminists like Kate Chopin who contributed feministic literature however some of them were useless. **The topicality of our theme** is to analyze Kate Chopin's works which really reflect the status of women in her time and their involvement in the world feminist movement.

The aim of our work is to study and analyze the status of women in the XIX century America and its impact on the world feminism through Kate Chopin's works.

In order to achieve the aim of our project we set up several **tasks**:

- 1) To study feminism and history of feminism
- 2) To study about Kate Chopin's biography and its impact on her works

I.Karimov. Harmoniously developed generation is the basis of progress of Uzbekistan. Tashkent 1997. The chief editing office of the "sharq" publishing concern 1997 p. 9

- 3) To analyze Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* and her short stories as *The Story of an Hour*, *Her Letters*, *The Storm*, *A Pair of Silk Stockings*, *Desire's Baby* and *Regret*.
- 4) To analyze the relation of women problem in Kate Chopin's above mentioned works.

The novelty of this work is representing the most important information about Kate Chopin and her works. Crucial researches of women's problem in them which has not been so far thoroughly analyzed in our country.

The object of the given researches is Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* and her short stories.

The subject of this work is that we've given a lot of information about feminism and analyzed *The Awakening*.

Theoretical value of the research. The results of the work can be applied during the lectures on history of feminism, history of feministic criticism and history of feministic movements.

The practical value of this dissertation paper can be seen in the defined, peculiarities of Kate Chopin's works and feministic literature. This work can be used as one of the themes in teaching literature to students and also it is good practice to understand feminism and Kate Chopin's themes in her works.

Methodology of the research. Analytical and comparative structures have been used in this dissertation paper.

The structure of the work. The dissertation paper consists of Introduction, two chapters with three paragraphs in each one, conclusions to the chapters, final conclusion and the list of literature.

Introduction states the topicality, aim and task novelty, methods, theoretical and practical importance of the work.

Chapter I is entitled **Feminism and problems of women in American Literature**.

In the first paragraph of this chapter we analyzed the Feminism and the waves of feminism. Kate Chopin was also a feminist writer who depicted women's grief and status at that time.

In the second paragraph we did researches on Kate Chopin's life which could open us clear explanation why Kate Chopin wrote about women and their problems.

In the third paragraph of the first chapter we analyzed Kate Chopin's contribution to the feministic literature through her novel *The Awakening* and some short stories.

The second chapter is entitled **Kate Chopin and the importance of women status in her works**. In the first paragraph of this chapter we tried to analyze women characters in Kate Chopin's works. In this paragraph we analyzed on Kate Chopin's heroines, their life and environment. In the second and third paragraphs we concentrated on analysis of Kate Chopin's masterpiece *The Awakening*. In the third paragraph we analyzed women problems for identity in her novel *The Awakening*. Moreover we did researches on other main characters' positions at that time.

Every chapter contains conclusions. In the **final conclusion** we gave the results of our research in the dissertation paper, summarizing the main points of the and gave our opinion about it.

The List of Literature presents the books, articles, essays, the sources, internet sites which we used for writing this work.

Chapter I. Feminism and problems of women in American Literature.

§1. Feminism and the waves of feminism

Feminism is the movement which meant actions for establishing and defending equal political, economic and social rights for women. This includes trying to establish equal opportunities for women in education and employment.

Women's rights, such as contract law, property, and voting – while also promoting bodily integrity, autonomy, and reproductive rights were limited for women. Feminist campaigns have changed societies, particularly in the West, by achieving women's suffrage, gender equality, equal pay for women, reproductive rights for women (including access to contraceptives and abortion), and the right to enter into contracts and own property. Feminists have worked to protect women and girls from domestic violence, sexual harassment, and sexual assault. They have also advocated for workplace rights, including maternity leave, and against forms of discrimination against women.

When we look back to the history, we can see that the French philosopher, Charles Fourier, firstly used the word "feminism" in 1837.¹ The words "feminism" and "feminist" first appeared in [France](#) and the [Netherlands](#) in 1872,² Great Britain in 1890s, and the United States in 1910³, and the [Oxford English Dictionary](#) lists 1894 as the year of the first appearance of "feminist" and 1895 for "feminism".⁴ Today the Oxford English Dictionary defines a feminist as "an advocate or supporter of the rights and equality of women".⁵

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1. [Goldstein 1982](#), p.92. Goldstein, L (1982). "Early Feminist Themes in French Utopian Socialism: The St.-Simonians and Fourier", *Journal of the History of Ideas*, vol.43, No. 1.
 2. Dutch feminist pioneer Mina Kruseman in a letter to Alexandre Dumas – in: Maria Grever, *Strijd tegen de stilte*. Johanna Naber (1859-1941) en de vrouwenstem in geschiedenis (Hilversum 1994) ISBN 065503951, page 31
 3. Offen, Karen. "Les origines des mots 'feminisme' et 'feministe'". *Revue d'histoire moderne et contemporaine*. July–September 1987 34: 492
 4. *Oxford English Dictionary* (2nd ed.). Clarendon Press. 1989.
 5. *Oxford English Dictionary* (online ed.). [Oxford University Press](#). June 2012. (Definition is of noun.)

However there were many movements or ideas which tried to obtain women's rights from early history. People and activists who discussed or advanced women's issues prior to the existence of the feminist movement are sometimes called protofeminists. But some scholars criticize the usage of this term. Other scholars believe that this term expresses the importance of earlier contributions.

Christine de Pizan , the Italian writer of the fifteenth century was the first woman to write about the relation of the sexes and the author of *Epître au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love). She was the first who wrote about women and women's defense. Her works were recognized by famous feminist writers and she was accepted as protofeminist. Christine de Pizan (also seen as de Pisan) (1364 – c. 1430) was an Italian- French author who challenged stereotypes prevalent in the late medieval culture. As a poet, she was famous in her own day; she completed 41 works during her 30 year career (1399–1429), and can be regarded as Europe's first professional woman-writer.

When we look through her early poetry, we can see that it is marked by her knowledge of aristocratic custom and fashion of the day, particularly involving women and the practice of chivalry. Certain scholars have argued that she should be seen as an early feminist who efficiently used language to convey that women could play an important role within society. This characterization has been challenged by other critics who claim either that it is an anachronistic use of the word, or that her beliefs were not progressive enough to give such a designation.

Depending on history, culture and country, feminists around the world have had different motive and goals. Most western feminist historians believe that all movements that work to obtain women's rights should be considered feminist movements, even when they did not (or do not) apply the term to themselves. In the history of the modern western feminist movement there are three "waves" of

feminism, according to the investigation of the scholars involved in the research. Each wave discusses different aspects of the same feminist issues. The three main waves have their roots in periods of organized agitation for social change - Abolitionism, Progressivism, "the Sixties" -- and each has been shaped by the movements which gave them birth.

The first wave included women's suffrage movements of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, promoting women's right to vote. The second wave was associated with the ideas and actions of the [women's liberation movement](#) beginning in the 1960s. The second wave discussed legal and social equality for women. The [third wave](#) is a continuation of, and a reaction to, the failures of second-wave feminism, beginning in the 1990s. First-wave feminism involved a period of feminist activity during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, especially in Europe and in the English speaking countries; it focused primarily on gaining the right of women's [suffrage](#), the right to be educated, better working conditions and double sexual standards. The term, *first-wave*, was coined retrospectively after the term [second-wave feminism](#) began to be used to describe a newer feminist movement that focused as much on fighting social and cultural inequalities as further political inequalities.

The leaders of the feminist movement campaigned for the [abolition of slavery](#) prior to championing women's rights in the [U.S.](#) American first-wave feminism involved a wide range of women, some belonging to conservative Christian groups such as the [Woman's Christian Temperance Union](#) organization which aimed to make pure life and to educate and encourage communities and governments to make wise decisions in order to protect society from the dangers associated with alcohol, tobacco, drugs, prostitution and slavery. This organization was organized on December 23, 1873 in Hillsboro, Ohio. It was one of the most important organizations by women which showed women's action in the nineteenth century.

The role women would play in the society began to change completely in the nineteenth century in America. This was the beginning of a whole new world for women, and America in general. Women began to understand that there were opportunities for them outside of the home, and that they could have a place in the world as well as men. It was a time when the feministic view was being born and traditional views of women were changing. First, women would play a part in working to help slaves gain their freedom in the anti-slavery movement. They felt they could identify with the way slaves were being treated, therefore wanted to help them. Middle class women then would begin to realize that they were just the same as men, and wanted to be treated that way, and take part in the same activities. This included getting an education, working and being able to support themselves without the help of men. This changed not only the traditional roles of women in society, but also their role in the family. With women wanting the right to vote, work and go to school, middle class life as they knew it would be drastically changed. Women would no longer be in the home with the children cooking and cleaning; they wanted to get out into the world. There was still an extremely long way to go before women were to be accepted in society, and this was just the beginning.

When we look through the history of abolitionism in America, we can see that there were active women who contributed to the freedom of slaves. The American abolitionists and women-writers such as Angelina Grimke (1805 – 1879), Sarah Grimke (1792 –1873), and Abbey Kelley (1811 – 1887) were a few of the major feminists during this time. These women became the first women in America to do lecture tours before audiences that included men, about anti-slavery. They believed that women should be grateful to slaves because giving them freedom would lead to society's granting of women's freedom. In the United States first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the [Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution](#).

Organizing the antislavery campaign of this time helped a perfect cause for women to take up, identify with and learn political skills from. Trying not to give access to women only fuelled their attempts further. The American abolitionists and women-writers Sarah and Angelina Grimké moved rapidly from the liberation of slaves to the liberation of women.

The most influential primary feminist writer of the time was the colourful journalist editor, and [women's rights](#) advocate Margaret Fuller whose *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* was published in 1845 and accepted as the first major feminist work in the United States. Her death encouraged Europe for the *New York Tribune* to create a universality in the women's rights movement. There are some important figures which are urgent to be mentioned when we talk about feminism in America. An American [social activist](#), abolitionist [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) (1815 –1902) organized the first U.S. women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss women's civil rights. The organizers of this event considered themselves patriots and viewed women's rights as part of the American Revolution's ideals of equality and justice for all. Elizabeth Stanton wrote a *Declaration of Sentiments* to demand political equality and voting rights for women. She used language similar to make comprehensive to all women. At the meeting in Seneca Falls, more than 300 men and women discussed the Declaration and debated 12 resolutions that proclaimed women's rights and equality. Over the course of discussion, each resolution was agreed except for the resolution that called for women's suffrage. Even for some people who strongly supported women's rights, the idea of women voting in elections was unthinkable. However women never gave up. E. C. Stanton was also editor of the first journal devoted to women, *The Revolution*. It firstly published on January 8, 1868 in New York City. The motto of the journal was: "*The true republic – men, their rights and nothing more; women, their rights and nothing less.*" The publisher and business manager of this journal was [American civil](#)

rights leader [Susan B. Anthony](#) (1820 – 1906). She was one of the most important figures who fought for women's rights.

The women-teachers also suffered by discrimination at that time because women-teachers were not paid the same as men-teachers and they were not accepted as smart as men. Women-teachers also shouldn't be married. Susan Brownell Anthony was the first who asked equality to the women-teachers as the men-teachers. Moreover, Anthony played a prominent role in the anti-slavery and temperance movements in New York. Susan Anthony and Elizabeth Stanton then organized the first women's state temperance society in America during 1852. The next year Anthony attended her first women's rights convention in Syracuse, New York and soon after began devoting herself to advancing women's rights. Stanton was a close friend and colleague of Anthony's throughout their lives. The two women traveled the United States together, giving speeches and urging equal treatment of women in the law and in society. From 1853 to 1860, Anthony campaigned in New York State for the Married Women's Property Bill, which became law, allowing married women to own property, keep their wages and have custody of their children. Anthony gained recognition as one of the most capable and zealous advocates of complete legal equality, as well as renown as a public speaker and writer. Elizabeth Stanton met [Lucretia Mott](#) (1793 –1880) in London in 1840, who was an [American Quaker](#), [abolitionist](#), a women's rights activist, and a [social reformer](#). She was against slavery and considered an evil who supported it. Even she refused to use cotton cloth, cane sugar and other slavery-produced goods as other Quakers. In 1821 Lucretia Mott became a Quaker minister then she travelled to give lectures around the world. Mott continued her work for the abolitionist cause. She managed their household budget to extend hospitality to guests, including fugitive slaves, and donate to charities. Mott was praised for her ability to maintain her household while contributing to the cause. Mott attended the General Anti-Slavery Convention, better known as the World's

Anti-Slavery Convention, in London, England. In spite of Mott's status as one of six women delegates, before conference began, the men voted to exclude the American women from participating, and the female delegates were required to sit in a segregated area. Moreover important social men of the time generally prohibited women's participation in public political life. However some important men figures protested women's exclusion. These unfair attitudes toward women fuelled up and developed women's movements. In 1848, Mott and Stanton held [a woman's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York](#), where a [declaration of independence for women](#) was drafted.

When we analyze the main figures who had great contribution to feminism we can read Susan B. Anthony's quotes and her agitation to future generation. As Susan B. Anthony said: *"I never saw that great woman, Mary Wollstanecraft, but I have read her eloquent and unanswerable arguments in behalf of liberty of womankind. I have met and known most of the progressive women who came after her – Lucretia Mott, the Grimke sisters, Elizabeth Candy Stanton, Lucy Stone – a long galaxy of great women... Those older women have gone on, and most of those who worked with me in the early years have gone. I am here for a little time only and then my place will be filled as theirs was filled. The fight must not cease; you must see that it does not stop."*¹ Here we can see that Susan Anthony mentioned great feminists and we also mentioned them but not Lucy Stone. A prominent American [abolitionist](#) and [suffragist](#), and a vocal advocate [Lucy Stone](#) (1818 –1893) helped to organize the first [National Women's Rights Convention](#) in 1850. She was the first who retained her own last name after marriage. Furthermore, she was the first woman who earned a college degree. Lucy Stone spoke out for women's rights and against slavery at a time when women were discouraged and prevented from public speaking.

1. http://quotes.dictionary.com/I_never_saw_that_great_woman_Mary_Wollstonecraft

She was also one of the teachers who suffered by discrimination of female teachers. She replaced a male teacher but got less than half part of his wage. When Lucy Stone made her first speech, which was given at the invitation of local anti-slavery in celebration of the anniversary of West Indian emancipation, she was boasted by her clear full tone. She contributed to feminism not only with her speeches but also publishing lectures about women's rights and convention proceedings in weekly and long-running *Women's Journal*.

An [Native American](#) activist [Matilda Joslyn Gage](#) (1826 –1898) who was a [suffragist](#), an [abolitionist](#), a [freethinker](#), and a prolific author saw E. C. Stanton at the church as a major obstacle to women's rights.¹ They therefore welcomed the emerging literature on matriarchy, and both Gage and Stanton produced works on this topic: one of them is [The Woman's Bible](#) which is a two-part book, written by [E. C. Stanton](#) and a committee of 26 women, and published in 1895 and 1898 to challenge the traditional position of religious accepted theory that a [woman have to obey to a man](#). E.C. Stanton wished to promote a radical [liberating theology](#), one that stressed self-development by producing this book. E.C. Stanton wrote also "[The Matriarchate or Mother-Age](#), related to social issues as religion, marriage, and race. M.J. Gage wrote "[Woman, Church and State](#)" which was one of the first books to draw the conclusion that Christianity was making primary difficulties to the progress of women, as well as civilization.

Related to the women at that time, E.C. Stanton made a witty observation regarding assumptions of female being lower in status "[The worst feature of these assumptions is that women themselves believe them](#)".² Feminism became widely known in the U.S by 1913. Major issues in the 1910s and 1920s included [suffrage](#), economics and employment, sexualities and families, war and peace,

1. Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *The Matriarchate or Mother-Age*, in Avery, Rachel Foster (ed.), Transactions of the National Council of Women of the United States. Philadelphia 1891

2. Murphy, Cullen. *The Word According to Eve*, First Mariner Books, 1999, pp. 21–23. [ISBN 0-395-70113-9](#)

and a [Constitutional amendment for equality](#).

Both equality and difference were seen as highways to women's empowerment. These movements helped to establish a lot of organizations which we think it is important to be mentioned.

Organizations at the time included the [National Woman's Party](#) that was a [women's](#) organization founded by [Alice Paul](#) in 1913, particularly for the right to vote on the same terms as [men](#), suffrage advocacy groups such as the [National American Woman Suffrage Association](#) which was formed in May 1890. It was the largest and most important suffrage organization in the United States, and was the primary promoter of women's right to vote and the [National League of Women Voters](#) that was founded on February 14, 1920, in Chicago, Illinois by [Carrie Chapman Catt](#). Related to career associations such as the [American Association of University Women](#) which was founded in 1882, their aim was to advance equity for [women](#) and girls through [advocacy](#), and education, the [National Federation of Business and Professional Women's Clubs](#) is an organization focused on creating successful workplaces by focusing on issues that impact women, families and employers, which began their action in 1919, and the [National Women's Trade Union League](#) which was formed in 1903 to support the efforts of women to organize [labor unions](#) and to eliminate [sweatshop](#) conditions. It is urgent to mention the importance of the war and peace groups such as the [Women's International League for Peace and Freedom](#) which was formed in 1915 to study and make known the causes of war and work for a permanent peace by women with different political views and religious background, and the [International Council of Women](#), which brought women to one main aim to work across national boundaries for the common cause of advocating human rights for women. By analyzing these organizations we can see that the women were active to establish their rights and they struggled not only for their equal rights, also they wanted to set up their importance in society.

The fight for [women's suffrage](#) represents one of the most fundamental struggles of women, because denying their representation in public governmental bodies gave an unambiguous message of second-class citizenship. However it took a long time to work its way up the list of the most important matters to gradually become the dominant issue. The French Revolution moved quickly on this, with the assertions of Condorcet and de Gouges, and it was women who led the [march on Versailles](#) in 1789. This reached its climax with the founding of the women Political club – [Society of Revolutionary Republican Women](#), formed in 1793, which included suffrage on its agenda, before being suppressed at the end of that year. However, this ensured that the issue was on the European political agenda.

Analyzing the feminism in Britain, we see that the women's suffrage began in 1872 as a national movement and it arose in the writings of Anna Doyle Wheeler (1785-1848). A writer and advocate Doyle Ann had been closely associated with feminist movement, and is best known for her writing on behalf of women's liberty and education. She was the most important single builder of cross-national women's connection during the early nineteenth century. As a strong feminist, she was one of the first women to speak in the rostrum in England. She called for the creation of an organization which would work to improve the status of women and remove the disabilities women endure. Anna could show each argument that men used and encouraged women to work together. Her feminist works include *The Rights of Women* (1830) and *Letter from Vlasta* (1833). Apart from her works, she had become a means of spreading political and feminist ideas. Her close friend William Thompson (1775-1833) who was an Irish political and philosophical writer, his ideas at women's suffrage was influenced by Ann Wheeler. His book *An Inquiry into the Principles of the Distribution of Wealth* (1824) became a seminal study of social inequality. William Thompson is also celebrated for his championship of women's rights. With his companion, Anna Doyle Wheeler, he authored *The Appeal of One Half of the Human Race: Women against the Pretensions of the*

Other (1825). It was the first major statement on women's right to political equality written in the English language. William Thompson was also committed to the co-operative ideal, which he advocated in *Practical Directions for the Establishment of Communities* (1830). He passionately believed in the right to an education for every citizen. One of the important feminists in the U.K. is [Barbara Leigh Smith](#) (1827–1891) who was an English educationalist, artist, and activist. She showed a force of character and catholicity of sympathy that later won her a prominent place among philanthropists and social workers. She and a group of friends began to meet regularly during the 1850s in Langham Place in London to discuss women's rights, and became known as "*The Ladies of Langham Place*". This became one of the first organised women's movements in Britain. They pursued many causes vigorously, including their Married Women's Property Committee. In 1854 she published her *Brief Summary of the Laws of England concerning Women*, which had a useful effect in helping forward the passage of the [Married Women's Property Act 1882](#), which allowed married women to own and control their own property. She met with L. Mott in 1858¹ and reported on Mott's pleasure at learning about women's rights in England. This meeting strengthened the link between the feminist movements on each side of the Atlantic.

In 1858, she set up the [English Women's Journal](#) as an organ for discussing employment and equality issues directly concerning women, in particular manual or intellectual industrial employment, expansion of employment opportunities, and the reform of laws pertaining to the sexes. When we analyze British feminism we can see a lot of important women who were active and contributed deal of to feminism in nineteenth century.

The Langham Place ladies also played one of the central roles in women's

1. Stanton, Elizabeth Cady. *The Matriarchate or Mother-Age*, in Avery, Rachel Foster (ed.), Transactions of the National Council of Women of the United States. Philadelphia 1891

suffrage, and set up a suffrage committee in 1866 at a meeting at Elizabeth Garrett's home, renamed the London Society for Women's Suffrage in 1867. Soon similar committees had spread across the country, raising formal requests, and worked closely with John Stuart Mill (1806-1873), a British philosopher, political economist and civil servant. Denied outlets by establishment of periodicals, [Lydia Becker](#) (1827-1890), was an amateur scientist and feminist leader, who started the [Women's Suffrage Journal](#) between 1870 and 1890.

However the political pressure continued, the other publications of the movement's journals were problematic issue. Despite this, women benefited from their increasing political experience, which translated into slow progress at the level of local government and public bodies. However, the years of frustration took their toll, and many women became increasingly radicalised. Some refused to pay taxes, and Emmeline [Pankhurst](#) (1858-1928), [who was a British political activist and leader and her husband](#) emerged as the dominant influence of the movement, having also founded the [Women's Franchise League](#), which advocated suffrage for women in 1889. The organisation's main achievement was to secure the vote for women in local elections after the campaigning of its members. Emmeline Pankhurst helped women to get right to vote. As I mentioned above, a lot of strong feminists tried to get women's right, however the members of parliament promised to give right to women to vote but they always postponed. By 1903 Pankhurst believed that years of moderate speeches and promises about women's suffrage from [members of parliament](#) had yielded no progress. Although suffrage bills in 1870, 1886, and 1897 had shown promise, each was defeated. She doubted that political parties, with their many agenda items, would ever make women's suffrage a priority. She even broke with the *Independent Labour Party* (ILP) when it refused to focus on [votes for women](#). It was necessary to abandon the patient tactics of existing advocacy groups, she believed, in favour of more militant actions. Thus on 10 October 1903 Pankhurst and several colleagues founded the [Women's Social and Political Union](#) (WSPU), an organisation open only to women and focused

on [direct action](#) to win the vote.¹ "*Deeds*," she wrote later, "*not words, was to be our permanent motto.*"² [Pankhursts](#) took the political initiative, forming the [Women's Social and Political Union](#). As Emmeline Pankhurst put it, votes for women were seen then as no longer "a right, but as a desperate necessity". At the state level, Australia and the United States had already given the vote to some women, and American feminists such as [Susan B Anthony](#) (1820-1906) a prominent American civil rights leader visited Britain in 1902. While the WSPU (*The Women's Social and Political Union*) is the best known suffrage group, it was only one of many, such as the [Women's Freedom League](#) and the [National Union of Women's Suffrage Societies](#) (NUWSS) led by [Millicent Garrett Fawcett](#) (1847-1929) was an English suffragist.

WSPU was largely a family affair, although externally financed. [Christabel Pankhurst](#) (1880-1958) who was a suffragette became the dominant figure and gathered friends and active suffragettes such as [Annie Kenney](#) (1879-1953), [Flora Drummond](#) (1878-1949), [Teresa Billington](#) (1877-1964), [Ethel Smythe](#) (1858-1944), and Norah Dacre Fox (1878-1961) later known as [Norah Elam](#). Veterans such as Elizabeth Garrett (1836-1917) also joined.

Looking back from the XXI century, we may say that western women's rights movements seem to be ruled by the increasing clamour for political reform and votes for women. Books, articles, speeches, pictures and papers from the period however, show a various range of theme's being discussed in the public speeches. In The Netherlands for instance, rights to medical care, educational rights, better working conditions, and peace were main feminist issues at the time. And feminists called themselves feminists without a lot of troubles and difficulties.

In 1906 the [Daily Mail](#) first labeled these women "[suffragettes](#)" as a form of

1. E. Pankhurst, *My own story* (London, Eveleigh Nash, 1984) p.38

ridicule, but the term was quickly embraced in Britain to describe a more militant form of suffragist, which were becoming increasingly visible with their marches and distinctive Green, Purple and White emblems, while the [Artists' Suffrage League](#) created dramatic graphics. Even underwear in WPSU colours appeared in stores. They quickly learned new ways of exploiting the media and photography. As the movement became more active, deep divisions appeared with older leaders of the movement parting company with the radicals. Sometimes the splits were ideological, and others tactical. Even Christabel's sister, [Sylvia](#), was expelled.

Slowly but surely the protests became more vigorous and included heckling, banging on doors, smashing shop windows. In 1913, one member of the group, [Emily Davison](#) (1872-1913) who was a militant activist, sacrificed herself on Derby Day, dying under the King's horse. These tactics produced mixed results of sympathy and alienation and many protesters were imprisoned, creating an increasingly embarrassing situation for the government.

Matters progressively worsened, with hunger strikes, then risky force feeding, and eventually the notorious *Prisoners (Temporary Discharge for Ill Health) Act 1913*, nicknamed the “[Cat and Mouse Act](#)” was an Act of Parliament which made legal the hunger strikes that Suffragettes were undertaking at the time and stated that they would be released from prison as soon as they become ill. It could be argued, however, as did [Reginald McKenna](#), the Home Secretary, that this was relatively humane, since a number of these women appeared ready to die for their cause.

If the aims were to reveal institutional sexism in British society, women's suffragists certainly created publicity around the issue. They also inadvertently drew attention to the brutality of the legal system at the time. Women were not prohibited from voting in the [United Kingdom](#) until the [1832 Reform Act](#) which was an [Act of Parliament \(2 & 3 Will. IV\)](#) that introduced wide-ranging changes to the electoral system of England and [Wales](#) and also the [1835 Municipal](#)

Corporations Act was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom that reformed local government in the incorporated boroughs of England and Wales.

After hardworking and never giving up, women's demand for the vote was achieved in the *Representation of the People Act 1918* which was an Act of Parliament. This act was the first to include practically all men in the political system and began the inclusion of women. It enacted in February of that year and gave men near-universal suffrage and the vote to women over 30 years of age. The terms of this act were:¹”

- 1. All adult males gain the vote, as long as they are 21 years old or over and are resident in the constituency*
- 2. Women over 30 years old receive the vote but they have to be either a member or married to a member of the Local Government Register, or a graduate voting in a University constituency...”*

The *Representation of the People Act 1918* was expanded to *Representation of the People Act 1928* which was an Act of the Parliament of the United Kingdom. This Act finally had given some women the vote in Parliamentary election for the first time after World War I.

It also shifted the socioeconomic make up of the electorate towards the working class, favouring the *Labour Party* who were more sympathetic to women's issues. The first election was held in December, and gave Labour the most seats in the house to date. The electoral reforms also allowed women to run for parliament. Although *Christabel Pankhurst* narrowly failed to win a seat in 1918, in 1919 and 1920 both *Lady Astor* and *Margaret Wintringham* won seats for the Conservatives and Liberals respectively, by succeeding their husband's seats. When we look through at twentieth century feminism we can see, *feminist science fiction*

1. Fraser, Sir Hugh. “The Representation of the People Act, 1918 with explanatory notes” Internet Archive.

emerged as a sub-genre of [science fiction](#) which tends to deal with women's roles in society at the beginning of the twentieth century. Women writers in the [utopian](#) literature movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, at the time of [first wave feminism](#), often addressed sexism. [Charlotte Perkins Gilman](#) (1860-1935), who was a prominent American sociologist, novelist, writer and lecturer, did so in *Herland* (1915), for example. *The Sultana's Dream* (1905) by [Bengali Muslim feminist, Roquia Sakhawat Hussain](#), depicts a gender-reversed [purdah](#) in a futuristic world.

During the 1920s writers such as [Clare Winger Harris](#) and [Gertrude Barrows Bennett](#) published science fiction stories written from female perspectives and occasionally dealt with gender and sexuality-based topics.

During the First World War women were active in society however it entered the labour market in unprecedented numbers, often in new sectors. They discovered that their works outside their homes were now valued, but also left large numbers of women bereaved and with a net loss of household income. Meanwhile the large numbers of men killed and wounded created a major shift in demographic composition. War also split the feminist groups. *Women's Support Roles in the World Wars Right* up to the outbreak of World War I, feminists on both sides pledged themselves to peace, in transnational women's solidarity. Within months of the war's outbreak, however, "*all the major feminist groups of the belligerents had given a new pledge – to support their respective governments.*" Women did a lot to help their country in their difficult situation and they did it bravely. So women organizers changed to support organizations to the war effort. Many of these feminists hoped that patriotic support of the war would develop the prospects for women's suffrage after the war, and this came true in a number of countries. After changing their decision they hoped for future rights and they showed themselves as brave as men.

The more than 25,000 US women, who served in Europe in World War, so on an

entrepreneurial basis, especially before 1917. They helped nurse the wounded, provide food and other supplies to the military, serve as telephone operators, entertain troops, and work as journalists. Many of *these “self-selected adventurous women ... found their own work, improvised their own tools ... argued, persuaded, and scrounged for supplies. They created new organizations where none had existed.”* Despite hardships, the women had “*fun*” and “*were glad they went.*” Women sent out to “canteen” for the US Army – providing entertainment, sewing on buttons, handing out cigarettes and sweets – were “virtuous women” sent to “keep the boys straight.” Army efforts to keep women to the rear proved difficult. “*Women kept ignoring orders to leave the troops they were looking after, and bobbing up again after they had been sent to the rear.*” Some of the US women became “horribly bloodthirsty” in response to atrocity stories and exposure to the effects of combat. Looking back, the American women exhibited “*contradictory feelings*” of sadness about the war, horror at what they had seen, and pride in their own work. Mary Borden, a Baltimore millionaire who set up a hospital unit at the front from 1914 to 1918, wrote: “*Just as you send your clothes to the laundry and mend them when they come back, so we send our men to the trenches and mend them when they come back again. You send your socks ... again and again just as many times as they will stand it. And then you throw them away. And we send our men to the war again and again ... just until they are dead.*”¹

Certain recent feminist scholars, such as [Francoise Thebaud](#) and Nancy Cott, also point out World War I's conservativizing effect in some countries, noting the reinforcement of traditional imagery as well as literature directed towards motherhood. These phenomena during World War I and between the two wars have been called the “nationalization of women”.

In the years between the wars, women continued to fight discrimination and opposition to women's rights from the establishment and the media.

1. Schneider, Dorothy and Carl J. Schneider. 1991. *Into the Breach: American Women Overseas in World War I*. New York: Viking.

An English modernist writer [Virginia Woolf](#) (1882-1941) wrote an extended essay *A Room of One's Own* which was published in 1929. The title of the essay comes from Woolf's motto that "*a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction.*"¹ In this essay Woolf describes the extent of the backlash and her frustration at the waste of so much talent. Important writers of the time also included [Rebecca West](#). Although the word "feminism" was now in use, the media and others gave it such a negative image, that women were afraid to embrace it. In 1938, Woolf published a book-length essay *Three Guineas*, "*an old word...that has much harm in its day and is now obsolete*". On another occasion she had to defend West, who had been attacked as a "feminist".

In the 1920s, the non-traditional styles and attitudes of [flappers](#) gained popularity among women in the U.S. and U.K.

Women received the vote in [Denmark](#) and [Iceland](#) in 1915 (full in 1919), the [USSR](#) in 1917, [Austria](#), [Germany](#) and [Canada](#) in 1918, and many countries including the [Netherlands](#) in 1919, and Turkey and [South Africa](#) in 1930. [French](#) women did not receive the vote till 1945.

As with many movements, women soon discovered that political change does not necessarily translate into a noticeable change in circumstances, and with economic recession they were the most vulnerable sector of the workforce. Some women who had held jobs prior to the war were obliged to give them up to returning soldiers, and many had been made redundant. With limited rights to vote, the Suffragists needed to change its role. The new organisation called the [National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship](#) (NUSEC)¹ still advocated equality in voting but extended its purpose to examine equality in the social and economic area. Legislative reform was sought for those laws that were discriminatory, including family law and [prostitution](#). One area of division which is significant in

1. Woolf, Virginia. *A Room of One's Own*. New York: Harcourt Brace & Co., 1989. 4.

the light of later developments was between *equality* and *equity*, which addressed accommodation to allow women to overcome barriers to fulfillment. An independent British Member of Parliament [Eleanor Rathbone](#) succeeded [Millicent Garrett](#), who was an English suffragist, as president in 1919. She expressed the critical need for consideration of *difference* in gender relationships as "what women need to fulfill the potentialities of their own natures". A more formal split appeared with the 1924 Labour government's social reforms, with a splinter group of strict egalitarians forming the [Open Door Council](#) organization in May 1926.²

The Second World War made to do double duty for many American women—they retained their domestic chores and often added a paid job, especially one related to a war industry. After the World War II, it began new period in feminism.

Much more so than in the previous war, large numbers of women were hired for unskilled or semi-skilled jobs in munitions, and barriers against married women taking jobs were eased.

Second-wave feminism refers to a period of [feminist](#) activity beginning in the early 1960s and through the late 1980s. Second Wave Feminism has existed continuously since then, and continues to coexist with what some people call Third Wave Feminism. Second wave feminism saw cultural and political inequalities as inextricably linked. The movement encouraged women to understand aspects of their personal lives as deeply politicized, and reflective of a [sexist](#) structure of power.

In 1963, [Betty Friedan](#) published her exposé [The Feminine Mystique](#), giving a voice to the discontent and disorientation many women felt in being shunted into homemaking positions after graduating from college. In the book, Friedan explored

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1. Records of the National Union of Societies for Equal Citizenship. London Metropolitan University, Women's Library. Archives in London
 2. Records of the Open Door Council. London Metropolitan University, Women's Library. Archives in London

the roots of the change in women's roles from essential workforce during World War II to homebound housewife and mother after the war, and assessed the forces that drove this change in perception of women's roles. Over the following decade, the phrase and concept "*Women's Liberation*" began to be discussed.

1960s' feminism — and its theory and activism — was informed and fueled by the social, cultural, and political climate of that decade. This was a time when there was an increasing entry of women into higher education, the establishment of academic women's studies courses and feminist thinking in many other related fields such as politics, sociology, history and literature, and a time when there was increasing questioning of accepted standards.

It also became increasingly evident, almost from the beginning that the Women's Liberation movement consisted of multiple "feminisms" — due to the diverse origins from which groups had coalesced and intersected, and the complexity and contentiousness of the issues involved. Starting in the 1980s, one of the most vocal critics of the whole movement has been called bell hooks, who comments on lack of voice by the most oppressed women, glossing over of race and class as inequalities, and failure to address the issues that divided women.

Third Wave Feminism resisted the perceived essentialist ideologies and a white, heterosexual, middle class focus of second wave feminism, third wave feminism borrows from post-structural and contemporary gender and race theories to expand on marginalized populations' experiences. Third-wave feminism began in the early 1990s, arising as a response to perceived failures of the second wave and to address the backlash against initiatives and movements created by the second wave. However, the fundamental rights and programs gained by feminist activists of the second wave — including the creation of domestic-abuse shelters for women and children and the acknowledgment of abuse and rape of women on a public level, access to contraception and other reproductive services (including the

legalization of abortion), the creation and enforcement of sexual-harassment policies for women in the workplace, child-care services, equal or greater educational and extracurricular funding for young women, [women's studies](#) programs, and much more — have also served as a foundation and a tool for third-wave feminists.

Throughout its history, Third Wave Feminism has been led by a number of courageous and important women who have made substantial contributions to feminist thought and theory. Of particular note, of course, is Rebecca Walker, whose seminal article gave a name to the burgeoning movement and brought some of its central issues to light. Third Wave Feminism continues to be a substantial voice in culture as a whole, and it continues to seek for the betterment of women across class, and race.

§2. Kate Chopin's life and its impact on her literary work.

When we analyzed Kate Chopin's life and works, we may say that she also contributed to Feminism in the 19th century and was celebrated with her novel *The Awakening* which expresses the frustrations and the triumphs in a woman's life.

Kate Chopin was born on February 8, 1850, in St. Louis, the eastern border of Missouri, USA. Her father, Thomas O'Flaherty was a successful businessman who had emigrated from Galway, Ireland. Her mother, Eliza Faris, was a well-connected member of the French community in St. Louis. Her maternal grandmother, Athénaïse Charleville, was of French Canadian descent. Some of her ancestors were among the first European inhabitants of Dauphin Island, Alabama. She was the third of five children, but her sisters died in infancy and her brothers (from her father's first marriage) in their early twenties. She was thus the only child to live past the age of twenty-five. The O'Flahertys were members of the Creole social elite and fairly well-off. When Kate was very young, her father Thomas

O'Flaherty died in a work-related accident. He left behind a family of four generations of women all living in the same house. After her father's death in 1855, Chopin developed a close relationship with her mother, grandmother, and her great-grandmother. Kate was very close to her maternal great-grandmother, Madame Charleville, who first introduced her to the world of storytelling. Madame Charleville spoke only French to Kate and told her elaborate, somewhat risqué stories. She taught Kate not only music, history, and speaking French; she also stressed the need to live life "clearly and fearlessly." Through vivid French stories, she gave Kate a taste of the culture and freedom allowed by the French that many Americans during that time disapproved of. Many of the common themes in her grandmother's stories consisted of women struggling with morality, freedom, convention, and desire. The spirit of these stories endures in Kate's own works.

Kate was blessed by having many female mentors throughout her childhood; either the strong and independent widows in her family or the intellectual nuns of her school, who taught Kate to live a *"life of the mind as well as the life of the home."* Kate was a young age of five and a half when her parents sent her to the Academy of the Sacred Heart.

Two years after her father's death, Kate returned to the Academy of the Sacred Heart. Kate met a girl named Kitty Garesche. The two girls both loved to write and read together, but in May of 1861 the Civil War broke out in St. Louis, and Kitty's family was banished for their Confederate "sympathies." Not only did Kate lose her best friend, but also her half brother, George, who died of typhoid fever and her grandmother passed away at the age of 83. Kate lost all of her brothers and sisters, so that by the time Kate was 24 years old, she was the only child. When she graduated from the Academy of the Sacred Heart, she was known as a brilliant storyteller, an honors student, a youthful cynic, and an accomplished pianist. After the war, Kate almost had a depressed manner and one of the nuns of the Academy recognized the creativity in this lonely child. The nun assigned her to write a

Commonplace Book, which is the first document of Kate's writings. This Commonplace Book became a diary of her intellectual and social life.

One of Kate's teachers, a Sacred Nun named Madam (Mary Philomena) O'Meara, first encouraged her to write. Writing helped Kate express her sense of humor and resolve her painful feelings of war and death. Teachers and classmates soon recognized her talent of being a gifted storyteller.

At age 18, Kate graduated from the academy and made her social debut. Although she preferred to spend time alone reading instead of attending socials all night, Kate was a natural conversationalist. She followed the traditional custom of debuting, but she wanted to escape from the parties and the social expectations. She wrote in her diary: *"I dance with people I despise ... return home at day break with my brain in a state which was never intended for it I am diametrically opposed to parties and balls; and yet when I broach the subject - they either laugh at me – imagining that I wish to perpetrate a joke; or look very serious, shake their heads and tell me not to encourage such silly notions."*

Her diary entries also show a very moody woman exhausted of that her privacy and freedom were taken away from her. During this time, she wrote her first story, *Emancipation: A Life Fable*, a short story about freedom and limitation.

Kate married Oscar Chopin and moved to New Orleans on June 9, 1870. Her marriage to Oscar was not antithesis of what she demanded out of life. She did not sacrifice her spiritual freedom by marrying him and continued to violate all the rules of expected female behavior. She rolled and smoked Cuban cigars. Her clothes were flashy and stylish, yet always memorable and pretty. After moving to Cloutierville, Louisiana in 1879, she rode horses in addition to taking walks, but if she was in a hurry, she had a reputation of jumping on her horse and galloping away through the middle of town. She did what she wanted to do and refused to conform to tradition for tradition's sake.

Kate and Oscar had all six of their children within the first ten years of marriage.

Kate allowed their children as much freedom as possible and permitted them to enjoy their youth with playing, music, and dancing. Although Kate loved her children, motherhood often consumed her so she traveled to familiar places such as St. Louis and the Grand Isle as much as possible. Her children came with her since family and friends would be available to watch them.

When Oscar could no longer work at a cotton factory in New Orleans, Kate, Oscar, and the children moved to Natchitoches Parish. They settled in Cloutierville, Louisiana where Oscar opened a general store and managed nearby land. A few months before his death, Oscar suffered from fever attacks. The country doctor misdiagnosed the illness and without the proper treatment, Oscar died on December 10, 1882.

Oscar had left Kate with a failing business and six small children to raise. He left Kate with \$12,000 in debt (approximately \$250,000 in 2009 money). According to American critic Emily Toth, "*for a while the widow Kate ran her husband's business and flirted outrageously with local men; (she even engaged in a relationship with a married farmer.)*"¹. Chopin made an honest effort to keep her late husband's plantation and general store alive, two years later she sold her Louisiana business. She ran the store, paid off the debt, and managed the property for two years before moving back to St. Louis to live closer to her mother and to provide better educational opportunities for her children. Some theorists say that Kate also wanted to leave Albert Sampite, a married man whom many believe she had a romantic affair with after Oscar's death. Her mother died a year after Kate returned to St. Louis. Her mother's death affected her the most. She had barely recovered from Oscar's sudden death only to face her mother's sudden death. As a result, she was reintroduced to one of her favorite childhood activities: writing. After the death of her mother, Dr. Frederick Kolbenheyer, her obstetrician and family doctor, recognized that her writing was fluent or persuasive and encouraged

1. Toth, Emily. *Kate Chopin's Private Paper*, Bloomington, Indiana 47404-3797USA

her to write short stories as a form of therapy. Much like Madam O'Meara at the academy, Dr. Kolbenheyer recognized Kate's literary style of writing in the letters she wrote to him and her friends. He believed women should not be discouraged from having careers and advised Kate to write as a means of emotional therapy and financial support. She later models Dr. Mandelet in *The Awakening* after him.

By the early 1890s, Kate Chopin was writing short stories, articles, and translations which appeared in periodicals, including the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch*. She was quite successful and placed many of her publications in literary magazines. But she became known only as a regional local color writer and her literary qualities were overlooked.

She published her first short story, *A Point at Issue!* in the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* on October 27, 1889 and a few months later, "*Philadelphia Musical Journal*" published "*Wiser Than God*." Her first novel, "*At Fault*" is published in September 1890 at her own expense. Around this same time, she became a charter member of the Wednesday Club, which was founded by Charlotte Stearns Eliot, T.S Eliot's mother. She eventually resigned from the club and satirized it in her later works. She continued writing and publishing more stories in magazines and newspapers such as "*Vogue*," "*Youth's Companion*," and "*Harper's Young People*," but it wasn't until March 1894 when Houghton Mifflin published "*Bayou Folk*" that Kate became nationally known as a short story writer. She published the second volume of short stories, "*A Night in Acadie*," in November 1897.

Herbert S. Stone & Company published her most famous work, "*The Awakening*," in 1899. Many believed that her book was banned due to its "controversial" topics dealing with women, marriage, sexual desire, and suicide. According to Emily Toth, the book was never banned, but it did receive negative reviews. The following year, Herbert S. Stone and Company reversed its decision to publish the third collection of short stories. Kate did not write much afterwards because no one would buy her stories. Her last published story was "*Polly*" in 1902. Two years later, Kate collapses at the St. Louis World's Fair and dies two

days later from complications of a stroke.

After her death, her writings were ignored until 1932 when Daniel Rankin published "*Kate Chopin and Her Creole Stories*," the first biography on Kate, but his text presents a very limited view and showed her only as a local colorist. It wasn't until 1969 when Per Seyersted published "*Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*," which sparked a new age of Chopin readers. Ten years later, he and Emily Toth publish a collection of Kate's letters and journal entries called A "*Kate Chopin Miscellany*". Both Seyersted and Toth have taken a great interest in the writer and have provided the world more access to Chopin's life and work. In 1990, Toth published one of the most comprehensive biographies on Chopin and a year later, she published Kate's third volume of short stories, "*A Vocation and A Voice*," the volume Herbert S. Stone and Company refused to publish. In the past two years, Toth has released another text titled "*Kate Chopin's Private Papers*" and Toth published another biography, "*Unveiling Kate Chopin*". Both books include journal entries, manuscripts, and other information discovered in the past 10 years.

§3. Kate Chopin's contribution to the feminist literature

Analyzing Kate Chopin's life in the previous paragraph, we can say that Kate Chopin contributed to feminism with her works. "Love and passion, marriage and independence, freedom and restraint." These are the themes that are represented and worked with throughout Kate Chopin's works. As we know, Kate Chopin followed the similar path of a woman of her era and lived like other women at that time. She married at the age of twenty. Becoming a mother soon after, having six children, nothing out of the ordinary woman she had to follow made her write about women's feelings and grief of that time. Her husband's death and her children's supporting made her be strong and look for the job. Seeking professional help, Kate decided to enter the writing industry as it was a potentially profitable outlet for her feelings. Said feelings led her to pen social commentary which effectively laid the groundwork for first wave feminism. Kate Chopin wrote many

different things during her career which helped make her a famous author. She uses the French Creole and Acadian (early French-speaking settlers in Acadia) cultures of Louisiana as both setting and symbol throughout her stories. Chopin's stories contain much psychological insight that draws attention to her characters and plots. While Chopin also shows recurring themes of feminism, she is also well known in American literature for her use of southern regionalism. Kate Chopin is able to use the physical setting in her stories to emphasize important themes, affect the psychology of the characters, and add to the ambiance of her stories.

Her best known short story, published in 1894 suitably titled *The Story of an Hour*, is about a wife who confronts her inner demons and finds that, despite society wanting her to, she does not fully love her husband and is relieved to hear of his demise. Succeeding this was her indisputably most controversial work, an 1899 novel called *The Awakening*, which reached into the sticky subjects of adultery and non-marital cohabitation. This novel is considered by many critics “as the first aesthetically successful novel to have been written by an American woman.”¹

The Awakening is highly controversial in its time; *The Awakening* deals with the condition of the nineteenth century woman in marriage, and has been more recently rediscovered and recognized as an overtly feminist text for these same reasons. This novel, however, represents only the climax of a literary career spent almost exclusively in the composition of short fiction. It was the absorbing of the short story genre that allowed Chopin to complete her final work, to develop a style best suited to her thematic concerns.

From literary point of view we may say that all writers have their predecessors or another writer whom they appreciate, in Chopin's case it appears that one man in

1. Elaine Showalter, *Sister's Choice: Tradition and Change in American Women's Writing* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1991), 65.

particular was highly influential, French writer Guy de Maupassant (1850-1893) who was considered one of the fathers of the modern short story, took the literary world by storm in 1880 with pieces. When we look through American Professor Helen Taylor's *Gender, Race and Region in the Writing of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin* we can see a lot of certain examples and Helen Taylor said: *Kate Chopin in some way 'brought into' the French male literary tradition which presented itself to her in the form of Maupassant's short fiction is undeniable. It is a fact alluded to repeatedly in the criticism surrounding her work, in that of recent years and also in the words of her contemporary reviewers. Maupassant has indeed been identified by one critic as Chopin's greatest literary "mentor"*¹. However, the most direct assertion of his impact comes from Chopin herself in an unpublished essay entitled "*Confidences*" (1896). Here she expresses obvious admiration for the French 'master' as she recalls her reaction to "stumbling upon" a volume of his tales eight years earlier:

*"...I read his stories and marveled at them. Here was life, not fiction; for where were the plots, the old fashioned mechanism and stage trapping that in a vague, unthinking way I had fancied were essential to the art of story making. Here was a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw..."*²

When we read another critic John Raymon's ideas on the form of Kate Chopin's short story, we can reassure that Kate Chopin used Maupassantian's short stories form. "*Chopin's fictional writing in the short story form can be seen to stand as further testimony to this high regard, albeit more implicitly. Perhaps most obvious*

1. Taylor, Helen. *Gender, Race and Region in the Writing of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1989

2. Chopin, Kate. "*Confidences*" *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin* Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. pp700-702

is her adoption of Maupassantian form, the very aspect of writing which is seen to have most concerned the French man himself."¹

This very 'gendered' originality is best seen in Chopin's treatment of male-female relationships. Her innovation lies not so much in the theme itself, because in these terms Chopin's work can indeed be seen as a response to European works in general - works which focused predominantly on gender and which, as Helen Taylor proposes, "*...shared her concerns with questions of sexuality, bourgeois marriage and woman's role.*"²

And Maupassant, as one of the leading creators of such works, explored these issues at length, not only acknowledging the existence of Eros, but also helping extend the limits of literary treatment of sex. As literate and critic Mary Donaldson-Evans reveals in her *A Woman's Revenge*, Maupassant treats his heroines as objects:

"...women are objects of erotic delight, intended for the pleasure and adornment of the male, and their physical beauty is paramount...The pleasure that the possession of a beautiful woman affords is entirely physical and is coupled by an absolute disdain for her 'being'"³

Kate Chopin writes described women with their feelings and grief around her. She explores and articulates what she saw in life for women.

Chopin's feminism certainly is a major theme, but an instructor must be careful not to overstate it. Chopin seems to have believed that men and women alike have great difficulty reconciling their need to live as discrete individuals with their need to live in close relationship with a mate; these conflicting needs lie at the center of

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1. Dugan, John Raymon. *Illusion and Reality: A study of the Descriptive Techniques on the Works of Guy de Maupassant*. Paris: Mouton, 1973
 2. Taylor, Helen. *Gender, Race and Region in the Writing of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1989 p 157
 3. Donaldson-Evans, Mary. *A Woman's Revenge: The Chronology of Dispossession in Maupassant's Fiction*. Lexington, Kentucky: French Forum, 1986

her work. However, Chopin said herself that she was neither a feminist nor a suffragist; she was simply a woman who took other women intensely seriously. Chopin believed women had the ability to be strong, individual, and free-spirited. She herself reached out, in hopes for freedom, and the freedom to explore and express ideas. Therefore she described the women at that time.

Chopin's simultaneous, and seemingly paradoxical, adherence to and subversion of the andocentric French influence is clearly apparent in a story which appears to have suffered much neglect from critics on the whole, a 1894 piece entitled *Her Letters*. The story was written at a time during which Maupassant's influence on Chopin was reaching new heights – the time of her translation of several of the French man's works into English.

“*Her Letters*” deals with the most heavy of human topics including love, death, grief, doubt and memory. Chopin translated eight Maupassant stories in all between 1894 and 1898 and the process of doing so greatly influenced her own writing, in terms of both structure and subject matter. It was at this time that Chopin made a move away from the local colour tradition which had previously shaped her work, shifting her interest from regional Southern issues and experimenting with more complex forms, as charted by scientist Richard Fusco who wrote about short story writers. Ultimately, the 'flavour' of Chopin's writing was becoming increasingly Maupassantian. It would seem that she was, as Taylor propounds, “...through the discipline and challenge of translation... rethinking her mentor in terms of her own work”¹.

But at the same time Chopin was becoming more deeply involved in a subject which placed her in direct opposition to her French mentor – the subject of woman and her struggle to assert an individual identity beyond the bounds of that inscribed

1. Taylor, Helen. *Gender, Race and Region in the Writing of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1989 p160

by the dictators of patriarchy. This subject is central to *Her Letters*, and serves to make this story an excellent example of the way in which Chopin uses a male form and conforms to male convention only to subvert it, and cleverly so, from within its own bounds, exposing and, further, exploiting the patriarchal domain.

If *Her Letters* shows clear elements of Chopin's Maupassantian imitation, this imitation was undoubtedly coloured by her parallel practice of translation. Chopin intended to bring together in publication the first six of her Maupassant translations and the proposed title for this collection is very telling in terms of where her interests lay at the time. They were to be labeled "*Mad Stories*", dealing as they do with man's insanity and the descent into madness and Chopin carries this theme quite definitely over into her own work with *Her Letters* focusing on a male protagonist falling victim to this sad decline. The way in which Chopin charts this decline is similarly drawn directly from Maupassant's tales of madness, specifically in terms of form, a subject on which Richard Fusco has much to say. He identifies Chopin's translations as sharing not only thematic concerns but also a structural element, all being examples of what he names the 'descending helical', a chronologically structured form which traces, step by step, the protagonist's descent into insanity, "*...each successive sentence portray a situation more desperate, a narrator acting more frenzied, a mind one step farther removed from normality*"¹.

Through the process of completing these translations Chopin apparently gained insight into this form as an alternative way of shaping a story, eventually absorbing it into her own work.

A case can be made then – in writing *Her Letters* Chopin undoubtedly borrowed a great deal from the French 'master', engaging herself in a degree of imitation.

1. Fusco, Richard. *Maupassant and the American Short Story: The Influence of Form at the Turn of the Century*. Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State UP, 1994 p 50

Even the opening of the story, which centers not on the male protagonist but on his wife, is also similar of Maupassantian's technique.

The story opens with a reader being introduced to a woman who has obviously been engaged in a passionate love affair and is reliving precious moments shared with her lover through all that remains of their relationship, the woman has another man in her life, a husband in fact. And so it is revealed that the affair so dear to her still was an adulterous one. The woman fully acknowledges what discovery of these words of unfaithfulness would do to her partner in marriage, but, facing death, she makes a startling decision that seems to deny this acknowledgement; she decides that she will not destroy the evidence of her love leaving the letters instead to her husband's care that he will himself destroy them. This seems a cruel request to make of the man whom she has betrayed, the man, and thus, a typically patriarchal base is laid for the story. It is with the man, with the male protagonist, that our sympathy lies. Chopin, it seems, is conforming to male convention – here is the very portrayal of woman as monster established by her literary forefather: a woman as a killer of a man, the key to his demise.

In turning back to this opening 'frame' after reading the remainder of the story, however – after registering the meaning of her husband's reaction to the letters after her death – we gain a strikingly different perspective and our own initial reactions to the woman are reversed. It is with her that we find Chopin's true sympathies to lie rather than confirming patriarchal notions of womanhood, Chopin's story, and more specifically the letters that lie there in, actually subvert these constructions. It is through these letters that Chopin speaks out against the condition of the nineteenth century woman. Through the letters the woman is able to speak out from within the paradigms of patriarchy; she is given a voice, an autonomous identity; she is made subject, even in death. And at the same time, in creating this subversive voice, Chopin too undermines patriarchy from within its

own form – that which mimics Maupassant. She speaks out from within this form with a voice that is truly her own.

The husband's initial reaction to the letters is one of disbelief. Their existence suggests that his wife has kept something from him, and this, in his mind, is impossibility: *"...She had never seemed in her lifetime to have had a secret from him. He knew her to be cold and passionless, but true, and watchful of his comfort and happiness..."*.¹

Immediately we are aware that this is a man who, it seems, did not know his wife as well as he thought. Her own reaction to the letters in the story's opening 'frame' suggests that she is far from "cold and passionless" in nature. It is in no way an emotionally restrained woman that devours their contents with such animalistic fervor: *" . . . it stirred her still to-day, as it had done a hundred times before when she had thought of it. She crushed it between her palms when she found it. She kissed it again and again. With her sharp white teeth she tore the far corner from the letter, where the name was written; she bit the torn scrap and tasted it between her lips and upon her tongue like some god-given morsel "*.²

Yet this sensual side to her nature is one that her husband has clearly not seen, or has chosen not to see. He has seen her only in the roles which she is expected to fulfill in marriage, roles of service to him, roles true to nineteenth century ideals of womanhood. He has inscribed this identity upon her. Here enters the subversive power of the letters - through them her patriarchal identity is shattered.

The woman's husband becomes hounded by questions: if his wife was not what he supposed her to be, not the ideal of womanhood, then what was she? What secret did she hold? He can see only one possible answer, an answer which reveals

1. *"Her Letters"* Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. pp3 401

2. *Ibid* p 309

his absolute immersion in the conventions of patriarchy. If not the ideal woman he thought her to be, his wife must have been unfaithful. Any suggestion of having a positive autonomous being **is denied her**. His wife is to him an object, something to be possessed, both physically and mentally. Her secret stands in the way of this possession.

Chopin's male protagonist has exposed himself, or rather, has exposed the workings of patriarchy. For it is the workings of this society which Chopin sets out to critique, not the individual; the workings of a world in which, as Simone de Beauvoir suggests in *The Second Sex*, "...humanity is male and man defines woman not in herself but as relative to him; she is not regarded as an autonomous being", a world in which man is subject and the absolute - Woman is but "Other".¹

But at no point in her work does Chopin show, some critics claim, any direct antagonism toward men. They refuse to simply reverse Maupassant's view, to make men the central target of her heroines' despair in direct opposition to his image of woman as man-killer. As Professor Helen Taylor suggests, Chopin's interests lie rather in the institutions and social frameworks within which both man and woman are trapped.² It is this "man-instinct of possession", a term that in itself suggests the trait as being in no way unique to him as an individual, that has created the situation in which the male protagonist finds himself. A rereading of the apparent opening 'frame' is thus required, further exploration of alternative meanings it may hold.

In this undertaking it becomes clearly apparent that the woman of the story is unhappy in her marriage, a fact reflected in the elements of the outside world. In such a world she is destined to become cold and passionless. Marriage comes to

1. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The second Sex* Trans. H. M. Parshley. London: Picador, 1988 p19

2. Taylor, Helen. *Gender, Race and Region in the Writing of Grace King, Ruth McEnery Stuart and Kate Chopin*. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1989 p161

represent death, a death of the true independent self. Through marriage, woman's erotic life is suppressed; she becomes nothing but her husband's "Other" half.¹ This woman has been sustained only by the letters, for it is only through these that she can reach her true self – her passionate inner being. The death of marriage has forced this woman to find herself, and autonomous fulfillment, outside of its bounds.

Perhaps more startling than this situation itself, however, is this woman's reaction against it, a reaction which is embodied in her decision not to destroy the letters. In making this decision, the woman takes control of her destiny, or, at least, the destiny of her identity, and ultimately becomes subject, subverting the patriarchal world which attempts to objectify her. To destroy the letters would be to destroy the only remaining portion of her inner being, to give into the self constructed for her by her husband, the patriarchal agent. Instead, in keeping them alive she allows for escape into the world of her true self, escape from the oppressive world of marriage: *"It was not sealed; only a bit of string held the wrapper, which she could remove and replace at will whenever the humor came to her to pass an hour in some intoxicating dream of the days when she felt she had lived"*²

Living on even after her death, the letters become truly subversive. The woman's husband claims knowledge of their meaning, but out of "his loyalty and his love" he casts them into the river without truly knowing, and in doing so destroys all possibility of ever truly knowing. The letters live on in his mind and uncertainty feeds on them. His wife becomes a mystery to him, becomes the unidentifiable and the unknown. He cannot possess her – male ownership of women is destroyed.

1. Beauvoir, Simone de. *The second Sex Trans.* H. M. Parshley. London: Picador, 1988 p 451 48

2. *"Her Letters"* Ed. Per Seyersted. Baton Rouge and London: Louisiana State UP, 1969. Pp3 400

We can see woman's mystery at the same time woman's grief on holding lies from *Her Letters*. It is one of Kate Chopin's absorbing short stories which described inner side of women.

As we know, most of Chopin's major characters in her stories are married women. Through a woman's point of view, Chopin tries to capture the women's struggles and presents reality to her reader. From her writing, one can learn a lot about marriage as well as women's position and condition in her time. In her story, Kate Chopin is believed to attempt to deconstruct the ideas of a wife and a mother, which are previously constructed and assigned by the patriarchal world.

When we analyze Kate Chopin's short stories, we can separate some of them which have feminist issues. Not only married woman, but also a mother suffered by difficulties of life at that time. *A Pair of Silk Stocking* is portrayed as a good and dedicated mother. In this story Kate Chopin depicted Mrs. Sommer in two sides' positive and negative images. We suppose that Chopin just wanted to imply that a mother is only a human being who also desires. According to French feminist Simone de Beauvoir, a mother is defined as a sign of her existence in the world and society. Unfortunately, the role has trapped women into the image of a good mother, who believes that a mother's priority focuses only on her family (husband, children, and household). Often a woman's desire and individuality are oppressed by her role as a mother and by a high standard of a good mother, which is set by society. A woman as a mother often forgets about herself as an individual and turns to be immanence in the family interest. Kate Chopin could open the sorrow of mothers who forget themselves.

From analyzing Kate Chopin's contribution to the feminism we can call Kate Chopin one of the important feminist writers although she didn't call herself a feminist, because she could depict a woman at her time as a married woman and as a mother.

Conclusion

In the first chapter of our dissertation paper, we analyzed the feminism and the history of feminism in the USA and the UK. As we know from history, women were discriminated and accepted as low status people by men. They had various limitations in society and at home. The role of women and their political, economic, and social rights were not shifted till early twentieth century. They were expected to get married, have children, raise families and perform the duties of hardworking wives and mothers. These attitudes toward women brought to usage the word “feminism”. This word first appeared in France. Italian writer Christine de Pizan was the first woman to write about woman’s problem in the fifteenth century. She was accepted as a primary feminist or pro-feminist writer. Even though there are a lot of debatable arguments to call Christine de Pizan a feminist or not, we believe that she was the first who discussed women’s issues and regarded as Europe’s first professional woman-writer.

In the history of the modern western feminist movement there are three “waves” of feminism, according to the goals and endures of the scholars involved in the research. As we discussed in the first chapter, each wave refers to different aspects of the same feminist issues. *First-wave feminism* term came after coming the *second-wave feminism* term. First wave feminism focused on gaining the right of women’s suffrage, the right to be educated, better working conditions and double sexual standards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States and Europe. The first wave ended with the introduction of the women's right to vote. Second wave was more concerned with the restoration of all the rights that women had been denied in the past. This was extended by the fact that a large share of women had entered into the working environment after the second world war. Consequently, this wave was more broadly based because its primary concern was the restoration of women's economic, political and social rights so as to place them in the same category as their male. The *third-wave* feminism continued the

second-wave feminism and was a response to the perceived failures. Moreover we analyzed the history of feminism in the U.S. and U.K.

Our main aim in dissertation paper is Kate Chopin and her works which depicted women's problems. Therefore we did researches of Kate Chopin's biography to know the influences on the writer, why she wrote feminist issues in her works. Kate could see the problems of these women and she also felt sorrow as their grief during her life. However she was able to write women's problem in contrast to the women around her. Chopin said herself that she was neither a feminist nor a suffragist; she was simply a woman had the ability to be strong, individual, and free-spirited. She was also a strong woman because she herself reached out, in hope for freedom, and the freedom to explore and express ideas.

The third paragraph of this chapter is devoted to the analysis of Kate Chopin's contribution to the feministic literature. Kate Chopin contributed to feminism a great deal with her novel *The Awakening* and some of her short stories are about women and their problems. As we know, Kate Chopin followed the similar path of a woman of her era and lived like other women at that time. Seeking professional help, Kate decided to enter the writing industry as it was a potentially profitable outlet for her feelings. Kate Chopin is able to use the physical setting in her stories to emphasize important themes, affect the psychology of the characters, and add to the ambiance of her stories.

The Awakening is Kate Chopin's second novel which is highly controversial in its time. *The Awakening* deals with the condition of the nineteenth century woman in marriage, and recognized as feminist text for these same reasons. "*Her Letters*" deals with the most heavy of human topics including love, death, grief, doubt and memory. It is one of Kate Chopin's absorbing short stories which described inner side of women.

As a conclusion we say that Kate Chopin contributed a lot to feminism with her works about women. Through a woman's point of view, Chopin tries to capture the women's struggles and presents reality to her reader. From her writing, one can learn a lot about marriage as well as women's position and conditions in her time.

Chapter II. Kate Chopin and the reflection of women's status in her works.

§1. Women characters in Kate Chopin's works

Analyzing critical works about Kate Chopin and her biography, we came to conclusion that Kate Chopin had different lifestyles throughout her life. These lifestyles provided her with insights, understanding and allowed her an analysis of late nineteenth century American society. At that time the status of women was discriminated and there were movements we mentioned above. Kate Chopin endured to open the life of women in most of her works. Kate Chopin's writing career includes a variety of forms, like novels, with dozens of short stories as well as some poetry. Kate Chopin had two novels *At Fault* and *The Awakening* which describe women trying to obtain freedom. Moreover she published two collections of short stories: *Bayou Folk*, *Night in Arcadia* and a lot of uncollected short stories. In most of her works women were the main protagonists and women problems and issues were discussed. In the second chapter , we are going to analyze her novels: *At Fault* and *The Awakening* and her short stories: *The Story of an Hour*, *The Storm*, *Madame Célestin's Divorce*, *Athénaïse*, *Regret*, and *A Pair of Silk Stockings*.

The female characters portrayed in Kate Chopin's literary works are insecure, unsatisfied, unsettled, and searching for a personal identity free from societal pressures and influences. Chopin's works, *The Storm*, *The Story of an Hour*, and *The Awakening*, express the women protagonists' quests for individuality and their equal desires to overcome societal pressures. Kate Chopin acknowledges sexuality in women and women's rights in a time period where these issues were unspoken and unacceptable.

At Fault was Kate Chopin's first novel but it was not her first literary work, she had completed at least four short stories and some poetry in two years before the novel was published. However it was her first attempt at longer fiction. When the novel first published in 1890, many critics have been less approving. For

example Critic Seyersted says “*the novel as a whole shows that she was not ready for longer forms of fiction*”¹. We don’t want to say that the novel is perfect. However it centers the freedom and we can say it depicts women status at that time. *At Fault* is both romantic and filled with stark realism it is a love story that expands to address the complex problem of balancing personal happiness and social duty, set in the post-Reconstruction South against a backdrop of economic devastation and simmering racial tensions. Written at the beginning of her career, *At Fault* parallels Chopin's own life and introduces characters and themes that appear in her later works, including *The Awakening*. The action is set in a place and period of American history – French speaking Creole Louisiana – that has been abandoned by mainstream media but Chopin only has time to sketch the distinctive culture here. Two features stand out, the casual old fashioned racism (with ‘Darkies’, ‘Niggers’ and similar on every page) and the placing of a Catholic Creole woman – Therese Lafirme – at the heart of the action. Therese has inherited and manages a substantial plantation and she is treated as an equal or more so by everyone regardless of sex or social position. Whether this reflects the reality of Creole Louisiana or wishful thinking by Chopin we cannot say, but it creates the backbone for a potentially fascinating story as Therese tries to use this power and her influence for good. The upshot is the old road to Hell being paved with good intentions, and Therese creates an ocean of wretchedness in her saintly attempts to do the right thing. She persuades her new lover, David Hosmet, to remarry his viscous drunk ex-wife, with predictable results, she murderously indulges her tenant Marie Louise in allowing her to live too close to the river, and fatally messes up the life of her nephew, Gregoire. She is indeed *At Fault*.

At Fault is the story of a love triangle complicated by the constraints of social mores and values in the rural post-reconstruction South. Chopin examines the constraints on the interior lives of women, their disillusionment, and their attempts

1. Seyersted, Per. *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*. Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP, 1969.

to achieve fulfillment in pre feminist times.

The Awakening first published, in 1899, in [New Orleans](#) and the Southern [Louisiana](#) coast at the end of the nineteenth century. Kate Chopin firstly titled this novel *A Solitary Soul* but then after unknown reasons she changed it to *The Awakening*. The plot centers around Edna Pontellier, the novel's main protagonist – the wife of Léonce and the mother of two boys – she is presented as a complex and emotionally dynamic character and her struggle to reconcile her increasingly unorthodox views on femininity and motherhood with the prevailing social attitudes of the turn-of-the-century [South](#). It is one of the earliest American novels that focus on women's issues without condescension. It is also widely seen as a landmark work of early [feminism](#).

The novel's blend of realistic narrative, incisive social commentary, and psychological complexity makes *The Awakening* a precursor of [American modernism](#). By studying other female characters in *The Awakening*, students will see how Chopin carefully provided many examples of a socially acceptable "role" that Edna could adopt a perfect mother and wife, like Madame Ratignolle (who represents, in part), an independent but somewhat ostracized "old maid" like Mademoiselle Reisz (who represents, in part, the artist), the "flirt" like Mariequita, one of the "young lovers" (they are never seen apart, and never described as independent of the other), a pious, almost single-mindedly religious, woman like the "lady in black," a servant to her children like the quadroon nurse, and so on. The novella, then, both portrays regional stereotypes while also criticizing cultural attachment to those stereotypes. Kate Chopin's narrative style in *The Awakening* can be categorized as [naturalism](#).

The men, likewise, operate as changeable for these choices. Edna's husband, a stern patriarch Léonce Pontellier, and her children create the space for Edna to be

like Madame Ratignolle. Alcée's presence allows her to be in a somewhat thrilling, but ultimately empty extra-marital relationship.

The Story of an Hour is a short story centering on a young married woman of the late nineteenth century as she reacts to a report that her husband has died in a train accident. It was first published in *Vogue* magazine December 6, 1894, under the title "*The Dream of an Hour*." On January 5, 1895, Sue V. Moore, a journalist friend of Chopin, reprinted the story in *St. Louis Life*, a newspaper of which Sue V. Moore was editor. Over the years, it was republished again and again in literature anthologies under the title *The Story of an Hour*. Kate Chopin is description realistically confronts the possibilities that life gives individual consciousness and individual choice in this story. Kate Chopin tackles complex issues involved in the interplay of female independence, love, and marriage through her brief but effective characterization of the supposedly widowed Louise Mallard in her last hour of life. After discovering that her husband has died in a train accident, Mrs. Mallard faces conflicting emotions of grief at her husband's death and exultation at the prospects for freedom in the remainder of her life. The latter emotion eventually takes precedence in her thoughts. As with many successful short stories, however, the story does not end peacefully at this point but instead creates a climactic twist. The reversal – the revelation that her husband did not die after all – shatters Louise's vision of her new life and ironically creates a tragic ending out of what initially appeared to be a accidental turn of events. As a result, it is Mr. Mallard who is free of Mrs. Mallard, although we do not learn whether the same interplay of conflicting emotions occurs for him. Chopin presents Mrs. Mallard as a sympathetic character with strength and insight. As Louise understands the world, to lose her strongest familial relationship is not a great loss so much as an opportunity to move beyond the "blind persistence" of the bondage of personal relationships. In particular, American wives in the late nineteenth century were legally bound to their husbands' power and status, but because widows did not bear the responsibility of finding or following a husband, they gained more legal

recognition and often had more control over their lives. Although Chopin does not specifically cite the contemporary second-class situation of women in the text, Mrs. Mallard's exclamations of "Free! Body and soul free!" are highly suggestive of the historical context. Society in late nineteenth century expected women to keep house, cook, bear and rear children—but little more. Despite efforts of women's-rights activists such as Lucretia Mott, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony, women still had not received the right to vote in national elections by the century's end. Moreover, employers generally discriminated against women by hiring them for menial jobs only and paying them less than men for the same work. *The Story of an Hour* hints that Mrs. Mallard's husband—perhaps a typical husband of his day—dominated his wife.

The Story of an Hour takes on a very specific style and structure which is perfect in the way in the story is written. The structure and style heightens the drama and plot line of the story. The story follows a third-person narrative in which Mrs. Mallard is the center of action. The non-participant narrator provides access to Mrs. Mallard's life: her medical condition or state, her strict marriage, her lack-luster relationship with her husband, her perspective on "love" she has for her husband, and her perspective on her newly awakened ideas on her personal freedom—which she associates with the death of her husband. In other words, the narrator describes Mrs. Mallard's thoughts, feelings, perceptions, and emotions, worries and decisions with reference to her past, present and hopes for a future in which she becomes a free, independent individual setting the scene for the feminist change in the 20th century. Therefore, the whole story can be seen as a deictic field in which Mrs. Mallard is its proving by direct argument center. The use of an omniscient third-person narrator enables Chopin to tell a complete story that's not limited to the protagonist's point of view, but creates a sense of division in the individual as opposed to the ideas of society.

There are two symbols in this short story which opens the main idea in this story. They are *Spring* and *Heart*. Mrs. Mallard welcomes the new spring life. This symbolizes a new beginning for her. Spring represents life and that is what Mrs. Mallard gains as a widow. It also helps to note that spring comes after winter. Winter can be seen as Louise while she was married to her husband. Winter is symbolically a depressing, cold and isolated season. Contrasting that to Louise's new-found spirit and life in the story's "Spring" setting. *"She could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life."*¹

The next symbol in the story is Mrs. Mallard's Heart. In the beginning of the story, the reader is already aware of Louise's failing heart. It was her sister Josephine who breaks the news to her cautiously, being mindful of her sister's delicate condition. *"Knowing that Mrs. Mallard was afflicted with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death."* By the end of the story, renewed with energy and a sense of enthusiasm for the future, Louise is struck with the news that Mr. Mallard returned home safe and sound - he didn't die from a train accident (a common cause of death during that time period with increasing use of newer technology) as originally thought. From the reader's point-of-view, when Mrs. Mallard dies - the doctor claims *"...she had died of heart disease--of the joy that kills."*² Ironically, she actually dies when her dreams of living without any one to answer to vanishes. The doctor believes she died of overjoyed upon learning that her husband is alive. But Mrs. Mallard's outward behavior stays true to the normal response her family expected. She dies of heart failure triggered by overwhelming emotional stress. No one will ever know that the overwhelming emotional stress was due to her loss of hope for the future.

1. <http://www.vcu.edu/engweb/webtexts/hour/>

2. Ibid

The Story of an Hour has been strongly linked with the ideals of the [Women's liberation movement](#) of the 1960s when feminists took a stand to fight to give women more freedom in America. The reason "The Story of an Hour" was an important piece of literary work at this time was because of its radical story. In the story, this housewife who has been confined to the social norms of the obedient wife, has an unorthodox reaction to the death of her husband. She anticipates her newfound freedom from the suppression of her husband, of men, and becomes invigorated by it. This idea is one of the key values of the feminist movement, and thus *The Story of an Hour* was an important literary work to show a woman breaking from the norm of society.

The denouement isn't less unexpected than Mrs. Mallard's reaction. The crucial moment came when Mr. Mallard, which was said to be dead, safe and sound opened the front door. Mrs. Mallard was shocked and died of heart disease. The doctors said that it was joy that killed her. But it wasn't joy, it was despair. All her dreams about free life were broken by her husband and she couldn't live with him any more. She hoped that she had got rid of him, that the destiny made her a present and all her dull life was very far. And when her husband ruined all this she couldn't forgive him. For just an hour she was born again, lived in the world of her dreams and died. She wanted freedom and reached it, but was dead.

Beyond the question of female independence, Louise seems to suggest that although Brently Mallard has always treated their relationship with the best of intentions, any human connection with such an effect of permanence and intensity, despite its advantages, must also be a limiting factor in some respects. Even some critics' descriptions seem to hint at her personality, as Chopin associates her youthful countenance with her potential for the future while mentioning lines that "bespoke repression and even a certain strength." Although neither her sister nor Brently's friend Richards would be likely to understand her point of view, Louise Mallard embraces solitude as the purest prerequisite for free choice. In *The Story of*

an Hour the marriage is an important theme which described an obedient woman's grief to the marriage. In *The Storm*, Kate Chopin's next short story which describes women's problem, the woman suffered by sex is a crucial part of the story. To be more specific, adultery. Chopin uses the theme of forbidden love to tell a story that is used to further the author's opinion. Chopin also uses symbols and clear descriptions of her characters to her advantage. The themes of *The Storm* tie in with the characters and symbols to allow Chopin to express her opinion on sexuality and marriage. *The Storm* is about Calixta loosening up, but it is also about humans' natural tendency towards being sexually active, and how they express it. Chopin used it to express some of her disdain about the sexual standards of her time. She thought we should be able to express these feelings without feeling guilty or receiving flack from everyone else. She was very tuned in to her sexuality during her life, and tried to express her feelings through some of her writings.

The Storm explores a plethora of stormy emotions of the protagonists in the backdrop of an unexpected storm. Though named a sequel to her earlier work "*At the Cadian Ball*" (1892) it shares little resemblance to Calixta's daring. All through, there is an undercurrent of pro feminism. The tale is more of a reflection of sexually oppressed women of the 19th century under male control, woman rediscovering their feminine urge, the right over their bodies and relations they choose to have.

Every literary work is a statement by the author and a statement about the author at the same time. An analysis of the short story cannot be separated from an analysis of the author's social, temporal and political circumstances. The fact that she lost her father early in life and her mother soon after, played a significant role to play in her development into an introverted, reclusive individual. But as social animals, human beings need to communicate. The only way she found fit was through writing, which allowed her to create. One of the turning points in her life

were the meeting of a German woman in New Orleans who sort of became an idealistic woman to her as she succeeded in reconciling her celebrity status as an artist with a respectable place in society and a healthy conjugal life.

Kate Chopin used the title *The Storm* to illustrate this sexual restraint of this time period. When we look this word culturally, we can say that this word is associated with conflict, uneasiness, and confusion. Therefore Chopin used the image of the storm to represent the sexual tension that builds throughout the story between Alcee and Calixta.

In one point in this story Calixta betrayed to her husband and had sexual relationship with another man during the storm when her husband was away with her son. However some critics believe that this story has feministic issues. In spite of this we analyzed that Kate Chopin depicted another woman's character and her problems in this short story.

In Chopin's next interesting stories *A Pair of Silk Stocking* and *Desiree's Baby* the negative influence of maternity because the women in these stories suffer by the condition of being married and being mothers Mrs. Sommers, in *A Pair of Silk Stocking*, devotes all her life to her children to such a degree that nothing is left to her. She faces a minor dilemma that eventually becomes a conscious expression of her desire to return to a past that she can no longer have, reflecting her subconscious craving for the autonomy and independence that she does not have while under the pressures of poverty. The nostalgic desire to reclaim past grandeur recalls the dilemma of Ma'ame Pélagie in Chopin's eponymous short story, although Ma'ame Pélagie lives in the past and sacrifices it for the present whereas Mrs. Sommers lives in the present and temporarily leaves her reality in order to recall her past. Mrs. Sommers does not merely aspire to wealth in the manner of

those who have never had money; instead, as Mrs. Sommers's neighbors note, she has in fact seen better days and intuitively equates her youth with simple luxuries such as silk stockings and kid gloves.

The second element of Mrs. Sommers's motivation for her impulse purchases relates to her need to assert personal autonomy. As Chopin establishes at the beginning of the story, Mrs. Sommers has several children to feed and clothe, and her first thoughts for spending her money come directly from the need to scrimp and save every scrap of her money. Although fifteen dollars had a great deal of purchasing power in the 1890s, much more than it would have today, it was not a significant amount of money for the long term. The indication that Mrs. Sommers cannot truly afford to spend it on luxury items suggests that she is greatly constricted in her actions by the requirements of minimum subsistence to which she is now reduced. Thus, Mrs. Sommers's purchase of silk stockings, a plain symbol of relatively luxurious abundance, may be interpreted as her attempt to deny the limits characterizing her worldly situation.

If Mrs. Sommers's excesses are a refutation of the powerlessness caused by her lack of wealth, then the manner in which she succumbs to temptation is ironic because Chopin's narration suggests that her decision to make her purchases is not made entirely by choice. Whereas she actively plans to buy hats and clothes for her children, Chopin describes her as "*not thinking at all*" after putting on her stockings. The tone of the narration is distant and dreamy, with a simple description of Mrs. Sommers's actions and limited discussion of her motivations. As a result, the protagonist seems to hold even less control over her behavior when indulging herself than when the lack of money is the deciding factor.

The readiness with which Mrs. Sommers gives in to temptation might seem at first glance to be a sign of succumbing or exhaustion in the face of suppressed consumerism. Certainly, Mrs. Sommers lack of food and subsequent fatigue provide the impetus for her initial acquisition of the silk stockings. Chopin's

narration, however, does not leave the impression of a woman who is weak and easily swayed. Instead, Mrs. Sommers is not condemned and does not condemn herself for indulging herself and providing a day of respite from her difficult life. Even when she returns by cable car to her home, she shows no regret for her lack of fiscal control and exhibits only a wish to continue her borrowed life. It seems that her dominant motivation for giving in is not the crass joy of shopping but, as in so many of Chopin's stories, a deeply held urge toward freedom, indulged here by releasing herself, however briefly, from the bonds of relative poverty.

Although the end of *A Pair of Silk Stockings* does not end with Mrs. Sommers in a position that is significantly worse than that in which she commenced the story, it still bears an element of tragedy and loss. Fifteen dollars have been enough to bring Mrs. Sommers back to her past and to give her an evanescent feeling of control, but it does not suffice to change her basic situation. Although the purchases made by Mrs. Sommers will remain with her until they wear out, almost all of the freedom that she enjoyed will disappear once she leaves the cable car, and she will be left again with nothing but memories and unfulfilled desires.

Desiree's Baby by Kate Chopin is a powerful story that is intriguing and compelling. *Desiree's Baby* tells about racial problem at that time. This time-period considered being black as socially devastating and the end of the world. The intent was to keep the white race as pure as possible. Nevertheless, it is not easy to recognize black blood by the appearance of skin. Both Desiree and Armand knew being black or a lover of blacks was social suicide among the elite of society.

Others warned Armand about Desiree's unknown background and origin before he married her. At that time, this did not matter to Armand. His eyes told him she was white and her name did not matter for she was going to receive his proud name.

Armand and Desiree were married and had a child. When Madame Valmonde came to visit, she knew the child was not "pure" white but did not say anything to

Desiree. She asked about Armand reactions but offered no motherly advice. Desiree was so naive in her happiness that she could not see the non-white features of her son. However, everyone else knew something was not quite right.

Desiree realized that Armand was distant and avoiding her and became saddened. In her unhappiness, she opened her eyes to the subtle realization that her son was not completely white. Frantically, she began to seek answers. After Armand rejected her, she turned to her mother. In her letter to her mother, she tells how she would rather be dead than have the burden of being something other than white. Her mother's letter was brief and supplied no satisfactory comfort.

Desiree turns to Armand hoping he could still love her. He told her he wanted her to leave, then she concluded her life, and her son's was not worth living. Moreover, the burden of not being white was too much to cast upon a child so she took him away rather than have one of the slaves raise him.

Armand's selfishness became increasingly evident. He could only think of his tarnished family name rather than love his wife and his own flesh. After Desiree left, he began burning everything that connected him to her. Here, Armand found a letter from his mother to his father. The letter provided some light or darkness to Armand's past. He was angry and hurt that Desiree had tarnished his proud family name only to discover that through his mother, he was the tarnished one.

This is a great story that leaves the reader with unanswered questions. Chopin leaves the reader to imagine and wonder about what an epilogue might contain.

The themes of race and racism are integral to *Désirée's Baby*, for prevailing ideas of Chopin's time that African Americans were inferior to whites leads to the destruction of Désirée and her baby. Desiree suffered by racism that her baby was black and at the same time her baby's birth gave her unhappiness. However in the

short stories like *Athenaise* and *Regret* Kate Chopin underlines that the maternity is a source of happiness.

In *Regret* the main character, Mamzelle Aurelie, is a strong, independent woman who has never found the need for a relationship or marriage in the short story. She is still single at the age of 50. She has never regretted being single since her neighbor Odile has to leave her four children. She has never experienced taking care of even one child. She struggles and complains in watching over them. Her character is one that embraces both masculine and feminine characteristics. Aurelie's manner of dress is masculine in nature, but as far as she's concerned, comfortable.

She is described as wearing a "*man's hat about the farm, and an old blue army overcoat when it was cold, and sometimes top boots.*" For her time, this type of dress was very unconventional. Of course, at that time to be a female land owner and successful farmer was also avant-garde.

Aurelie's masculine characteristics eclipse her appearance and influence her life's path. She isn't exactly the epitome of a female in touch with her feminine side and maternal instincts. If anything, those are areas that she has ignored and allowed to remain dormant. The arrival of Odile's children, which is "so unexpected and bewildering" to Aurelie, slowly works a change over in the woman. Left with Odile's children so that Odile can visit her ailing mother, Aurelie first treats the children like she was their superior officer and they were soldiers. When she is first left with the children, Aurelie determines "upon a line of action which should be identical with a line of duty". She is rational, collected, and deals with the situation in a practical way, all typical male characteristics. It does not take long, however, before Aurelie is "unearth white aprons that she had not worn in years" and getting "down her sewing-basket, which she seldom used". The fact that Aurelie has to unearth her aprons implies that she had buried that part of herself, putting it behind her. Now she must face these more feminine aspects of herself as she transforms from a military officer to a mother.

Her interaction with the children leaves Mazmelle Aurelie changed, but not transformed. The impact of their visit can be seen in the setting of the story. When the children first arrive, they huddle in a “narrow strip of shade”, a foreshadowing to the effect they will have on the house. The darkness, however, is limited in the beginning. The “white sunlight was beating in”, there was the “pleasant odor of pinks in the air,” and the farm was filled with “the sound of negroes’ laughter”. Aurelie was a solitary figure, but she was not an unhappy one. She was surrounded by light, fresh aromas, and laughter. When the children leave, however, “the evening shadows” started “creeping and deepening around her solitary figure”. Aurelie had experienced a part of life that she had shut herself out from and would never be able to have. Until she experienced the life and vibrancy children could bring to a household, she had not realized what she was missing. This revelation does not completely change Aurelie, indeed, when she cries she does so “like a man, with sobs that seemed to tear her very soul”, but she does begin to regret the choices she has made. “Regret” begins with Aurelie, a 50 year old, unmarried woman who runs an entire farm and manages her workforce without any desire or need for outside assistance or even contact. When she is tasked with watching her neighbor’s children, a change begins to occur in Aurelie. She is forced to take on a more feminine role, breaking out her aprons, sewing, and telling the children stories so they can fall asleep. Aurelie is softened to the point where she cries when the children leave because she has realized what she has missed by remaining unmarried, but she still retains enough of her original character to cry “like a man”. Regret is the best story which shows the importance of being and feeling as a mother. When we analyzed this story we came conclusion that being women is not obeying man, it is being kind wife and mother. It is the happiest thing to be mother. Kate Chopin described another woman who regretted about that when she was already late to be mother.

§2. Historical and Cultural Background of *The Awakening*

Analyzing Kate Chopin's feminist works, we decided to analyze the historical and cultural background of *The Awakening* which helps us show women's status at that time in our research.

It was a difficult time for the United States in the late nineteenth century. The social, scientific, and cultural sight of the country was undergoing radical changes. Perhaps the most importantly, the women's rights movement had been gathering momentum since 1848, when the first women's rights conference was held in Seneca Fall, New York.

Thus for almost 50 years before Chopin published *The Awakening*, society had been engaged in a struggle over social ideologies and equal rights issues.

As a result of this struggle, women as a whole had to a certain extent, already experienced mobilization and emancipation from their socioeconomic fetters. For the first time in America, women began to bring the formerly private issues of home and family into the public arena.

American celebrating cultural and women's gender historian Mari Jo Buhle notes that women during the post-civil war era: “... *regularly participated in the market-place, gained their own sources of support, and broke once and for all with humiliating forms of financial dependency on men.*¹

In mid-1899, nearly half a century after the women's movement officially had begun, the cultural and social soil seemed fertile for the literary introduction of Kate Chopin's fictional character, Edna Pontellier.

Choked by the cloistering moralistic garb of the Victorian era, yet willing to give up everything, even her own life, for the freedom of unencumbered individuality, Edna Pontllier was a perfect example of the superb New Woman

1. Mari Jo. Buhle, *Women and American Socialism, 1870-1920* (Urbana; U of Illinois p,1981),p.51.

of the late nineteenth century. She embodied the social ideals for which women of that era were striving. She was individualistic, independent-minded, passionate, courageous and brave. Edna was the definitive persona which thousands of women during the late nineteenth century praised as a role model. This, combined with the fact that Chopin was already an established author, seemed an indicator that *The Awakening* was destined for success. One month before Chopin's novel was published, an independent woman and critic named Lucy Monroe from Chicago reviewed *The Awakening* for the March 1899 issue of Book News. Monroe's review praises Chopin's work as a "*remarkable novel*" and applauds it as "*subtle and brilliant kind of art*".¹ Monroe further depicts the novel as "*so keen in its analysis of character so subtle in its presentation of emotional effects that it seems to reveal life as well as represent it*".²

After Herbert S. Stone and company published *The Awakening* on April 22, 1899, Chopin anxiously awaited the response of critics; unfortunately, while Chopin anticipated a warm reception in the days following the novel's release, critics were already sharpening their literary knives with which they would dissect both the moral disposition of Edna Pontellier and the prurient theme of the novel.³

That Chopin was already a successful and popular writer further fueled the awkward consternation with which critics viewed *The Awakening*. In fact, because of Chopin's success with her earlier works critics expected more of what Chopin was known for as a regionalist writer. They expected to read a novel rich in descriptive language, colorful characters, and the sights and sounds of Louisiana Creole life. Instead of local color, however, critics were shocked and dismayed at Edna Pontellier's behavior and considered Chopin's novel morbid and lacking literary value. A lot of critics considered it immoral and dissolute. In the *St. Louis*

1. Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin* (New York: Morrow, 1990), p. 329.

2. Ibid., p. 328.

3. Crystal Epps, "Kate Chopin's *Liberated Women*" (<http://www.gradesaver.com/classicnotes/titles/awakening/essay1.html>) 20-5-2007, p. 4.

Globe Democrat daily newspaper was published the article on *The Awakening*, “It is not a healthy book; if it points any particular moral or teaches any lesson, the fact is not apparent. But there is no denying the fact that it deals with existent conditions, and without attempting a solution, handles a problem that obtrudes itself only too frequently in the social life of people with whom the question of food and clothing is not the all absorbing one.”¹ In the St. Louis Post-Dispatch city-wide newspaper there were insulting words by journalist C. L. Deyo in 20 May 1899, “*The Awakening* is not for the young person; not because the young person would be harmed by reading it, but because the young person wouldn't understand it, and everybody knows that the young person's understanding should be scrupulously respected. It is for seasoned souls, for those who have lived, who have ripened under the gracious or ungracious sun of experience and learned that realities do not show themselves on the outside of things where they can be seen and heard, weighed, measured and valued like the sugar of commerce, but treasured within the heart, hidden away, never to be known perhaps save when exposed by temptation or called out by occasions of great pith and moment. No, the book is not for the young person, nor, indeed, for the old person who has no relish for unpleasant truths. For such there is much that is very improper in it, not to say positively unseemly. A fact, no matter how essential, which we have all agreed shall not be acknowledged, is as good as no fact at all. And it is disturbing--even indelicate--to mention it as something which, perhaps, does play an important part in the life behind the mask.”² *The Dial* magazine called *The Awakening* a “poignant spiritual tragedy” with the caveat that the novel was “not altogether wholesome in its tendencies.”³ However Chopin did not pay attention to unqualifiedly negative reviews.

The strongest critics couched their enmity towards the novel within a religious

1. <http://people.virginia.edu/>

2. Ibid

3. Ibid

and Biblical framework. Using words like "sin", "grace", "temptation", "unholy" and "repent" to describe Edna's plight, critics stood united and inflexible in their devotion to religious and moral conservatism.

For example, the May 13, 1899 edition of the *St. Louis Globe Democrat* daily newspaper calls Edna's suicide "*a prayer for deliverance from the evils that beset her, all of her own creating*".¹ The June 4, 1899 edition of *Literature* says that Edna "*is one who has drifted from all right moorings, and has not the grace to repent*".² Perhaps the most vehement objection to the novel's anti-religious implications comes from the June 18, 1899 issue of the *New Orleans Time Democrat*. Glaringly apparent in this review is the adamant and religious code which prevailed during the late nineteenth century and the fastidiousness with which critics strove to uphold it: "...*The assumption that such a course as that pursued by Edna has any sort of divine sanction cannot be too strongly protested against. In a civilized society the right of the individual to indulge all his caprices is, and must be, subject to many restrictive clauses, and it cannot for a moment be admitted that a woman who has willingly accepted the love and devotion of a man, even without equal love on her part who, has become his wife and the mother of his children, has not incurred a moral obligation which peremptorily forbids her from wantonly serving her relations with him, and entering openly upon the independent existence of an unmarried woman.*"³

As is apparent through the tone of this reviewer, puritan morality was, to a large degree, responsible for much of the resistance against Chopin's novel. It was the plumb line against which the value of Edna Pontellier, *The Awakening*, and Chopin herself were evaluated.

The critic Lois K. Holland notes that in response to the religious and social turbulence of the late nineteenth century: "*Puritan morality became a rigid*

1. Margaret Cully, ed. "*The Awakening*"; *An Authoritative Text Context Criticism* (New York; Norton, (1976), 146.

2. Ibid., pp.151-152.

3. Ibid., p.150

*stronghold ...imposing its repressive influence on artistic endeavors as well as on practical aspects of life.*¹

In addition to religion, Puritan morality in the late nineteenth century also showed itself in other ways. According to a professor of English at [Louisiana State University](#), Emily Toth, other novels of the time were successful because: “...all were considered "healthy", with "kindly sentiment", suitable for a young person to read; and all promote the traditional values that Kate Chopin, in *The Awakening* had questioned.”²

In other words, literature in the late nineteenth century was deemed valuable if it proved beneficial or appropriate for young people or if it contained a moral lesson of some sort. What distressed critics was not that Chopin published a steamy and controversial novel which was inappropriate for young people, for that type of literature was available in plenty. Rather, what sparked their fury was that Chopin was an established author and a respected member of the higher echelons of society. Critics took offence that Chopin condoned (or at least did not condemn) Edna's immoral behaviour. Holland notes that, “*The awakening of a respectable woman to her sensual nature might have been acceptable in 1899 if the author had condemned her*”.³

Although Chopin appears to condemn Edna by selecting a method popular in the nineteenth century literature to "punish" Edna, that of drowning, neither Edna nor Chopin demonstrate any outward signs of remorse or shame at Edna's infidelity and social deviance. A review in the June 25, 1899 edition of the Los Angeles Sunday Times says the following: “*It is true that the woman in the book who wanted her own way comes to an untimely end in the effort to get what she wants, or rather, in the effort to gratify every whim that moves her capricious soul,*” Lois K.

1. Holland 'The Awakening'(http://landofdystopia.com / 2006/12/Kate- Chopin-and her critics.html) 5-4-2007,p.7.

2. Emily Toth, *Kate Chopin*(New York: Morrow,1990),p.329.

3. Holland 'The Awakening'(http://landofdystopia.com / 2006/12/Kate- Chopin-and her critics.html) 5-4-2007,p.8.

but there are sentences here and there throughout the book that indicate the author's desire to hint her belief that her heroine had the right of the matter and that if the woman had only been able to make other people "understand" things as she did, she would not have had to drown herself in the blue waters of the Mexican Gulf.¹

Despite the difficult and changeable social atmosphere surrounding the reception of Chopin's novel, many people in the United States, and especially the media, were not ready in 1899 to face the social, religious, and moral implications of *The Awakening*. However, if Chopin's novel were to have been published just 20 years later, when the women's movement experienced became active and popular again in its the developments of a process, *The Awakening* might have been met with overwhelming acceptance. But, as history notes, Chopin's novel fell into relative obscurity after only a few short years.²

Ironically, the first to give life and popularity again to Chopin's work following its banishment into obscurity was Daniel S. Rankin, a Roman Catholic priest. In 1932 he published *Kate Chopin and her Creole stories*, the first book – length work on Chopin.³ Although editor Dorothy Anne Dandore praised Chopin two years earlier saying that she "*unveiled the tumults of a woman's soul*", Rankin is credited as the first serious revivalist of Chopin's work.⁴

After Rankin briefly brought back to popularity to the novel, *The Awakening* in the 1930s, however it didn't became so famous. The spotlight of literary interest wouldn't shine again on Chopin's work until 1953, when well-known translator Cyrille Arnavon wrote a serious essay *Les Debuts du Roman Realiste Ameicaine et l'Influence Franscaise* to introduce his translation of *The Awakening* into

1. Margaret Cully, ed. *"The Awakening"*; An Authoritative Text Context Criticism (New York; Norton, (1976), 146.

2. Crystal Epps, "*Kate Chopin's Liberated Women*" (<http://www.gradesaver.com/classicnotes/titles/awakening/essay1.html>)20-5-2007,p.4.

3. Peggy Skaggs, *Kate Chopin* (Boston : Twayne Publishers,1985), p.5.

4. Ibid.

French. This again ignited a spark of interest in Chopin's work, but it was extinguished almost immediately.¹

In 1969, however, almost three-quarters of a century after *The Awakening* was published in 1899 (and Chopin's subsequent death in 1904), Chopin's novel began its hearty ascent into literary distinction. Per Seyersted one of Chopin's biographers, published: *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography and The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*. Seyersted's books helped land the work of the late novelist on the literary map. The literary community was ready, even hungry, to embrace the theme that Chopin had so well expressed and effective in persuading articulated seventy years earlier. What was held in the field of literature as amoral and without value in 1899 was considered artistic and noble in 1969.²

As Chopin's popularity spread like wildfire, her novel also served as ammunition in the fight to bring insight and awareness to women's issues. Over the past few decades the study of women writers has been characterized by:

*“scholarship devoted to the discovery, republication, and reappraisal of "lost" or undervalued writers and their work. From Rebecca Harding Davis and Kate Chopin through Zora Neal Hurston and Mina Loy ... reputations have been reborn or remade and a female countercanon has come into being, out of components that were large unavailable even a dozen years ago”*³

Since the resurrection of Chopin's novel in 1969, countless classrooms across the United States have found in *The Awakening* a superb example of the transcendent New Woman. A professor emeritus of English at Mansfield University in Pennsylvania Bernard Koloski, in the preface of his anthology, notes that *The Awakening* has become *"one of the most often taught of all American novels"*.⁴

1. Peggy Skaggs, *Kate Chopin* (Boston : Twayne Publishers, 1985),. p.6.

2. David H. Richter, ed. *Falling int Theory; Conflicting Views on Reading Literature* (Boston :Bedford, 1994), p.16.

3. Lillian Robinson, " *Feminist Challenges to the Literary Canon*"([http:// www.dreamessays.com/Kate % Chopin /2240.htm](http://www.dreamessays.com/Kate%20Chopin/2240.htm)) 5-2-2007,p.15.

4. Ibid.

A compilation of teaching approaches to Chopin's novel, Koloski's anthology reflects the versatility of the novel in terms of literary study. He notes that Kate Chopin and the recent re-emergence of *The Awakening* have helped: “*satisfy Americans' suddenly discovered hunger for a classic woman writer who addresses some of contemporary women's concerns.*”¹

From analyzing historical and cultural background of *The Awakening* we can say that Kate Chopin was one of primary feminist writers who dared to write about women's problem. At first this novel wasn't accepted by critics, readers and media however the beginning feminist movements revived this novel and made it as an example of New Woman.

§3. Women problems for identity in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*.

When we analyzed the historical and cultural backgrounds of *The Awakening* we did researches on the history of this novel and now we are going to analyze this novel as women problem's for identity.

The Awakening is the story of one woman's struggle for self-identity. Edna Pontellier is a twenty eight year old wife and mother of two children. Her husband, Leonce, is a successful New Orleans businessman with conventional expectations of his wife. The family summers at Grand Isle, a vacation resort on the Gulf. It is here that Edna begins her awakening. In addition to Edna, the novel centers on two other female characters. Mme. Ratignolle represents the quintessential mother – woman figure that society recognizes and applauds. Her world centers on her husband and children and outwardly she sacrifices everything for them. However, she uses her children to call attention to herself, possibly trying to define her existence through them. Edna pointedly turns away from this picture of woman

1. Bernard Koloski, ed. "Preface", *Approaches to Teaching Chopin's "The Awakening"* (New York: MLA, 1988), p. ix.

and sees another side. Mlle. Reisz is a female artist, a musician who is quite talented, although no one but Edna can see this. She is not beautiful and is despised by all that know her reputation. Her personality insures solitude. Edna finds this picture frightening also as she sees what society can do to those who are seeking a life outside the norm.¹

Edna's search for self-identity begins at Grand Isle where she is first attracted to Robert Lebrun. The two of them go swimming and she is both afraid and exhilarated by her feelings and not quite ready for the consciousness this swim initiates. As time passes, she is more aware of her physical body and her desires. She puts aside her obligations one by one, letting everyday responsibilities drop from her shoulders as she seeks an independence and freedom usually reserved for men. She is now able to see herself more clearly as an individual. She can no longer conform to an empty role or half-hearted attempt at life. When Robert goes away, she eventually has an affair with Alcee, an attractive young man of questionable character. Edna finds, in the end, that she wants to be possessed by no man but is able to give herself freely when and to whom she pleases.² She realizes society's denial of this course of action and her attachment to her children. Therefore, in an attempt to exert her free will and independence, she goes back to Grand Isle, takes off her clothes, and swims out into the Gulf.³

Edna Pontellier rebels against the social constructs that confine her, especially the notion of "*true womanhood*", in which women were supposed to be docile, domestic creatures, whose main concerns in life were to be the raising of their children and submissiveness to their husbands.⁴ Edna tells Robert: "*I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into the habit of expressing my – self. It doesn't matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if*

1. Harold Bloom, *Kate Chopin* (New York: Chelsea House Publishers, 1987), p.11.

2. Ibid

3. Lynda S. Boron and Sara Desaussure Davis, *Kate Chopin Reconsidered: Beyond the Bayou* (Baton Rouge : Louisiana State UP, 1992), p.194.

4. Joyce Dyer, "*The Awakening*": *A Novel of Beginning* (New York : Twayne, 1993), p.32.

*you like.”*¹

This outburst tells us how Edna predicts the society around her will react to her ability, and need to express her feelings, and relate her thoughts to others. The opinions of others are of little concern to Edna. She refuses to change herself in order to fit into the restrictive mould that society has created for her. The novel is an account of Edna's rite de passage, her movement out of ignorance into knowledge, the account of her quest to discover self; the moment when she begins to loosen and unfetter all her repressed desires.²

Edna, even, neglects her children throughout the novel. She sees them as an obstacle to her freedom, feels "relief" when they are away and irresponsibly leaves them in the care of the pregnant Madam Ratignolle so that she can be with Robert. She almost seems to have an "*out of sight, out of mind*" attitude when it comes to her children. In a significant conversation with her friend Adele Ratignolle, Edna declares: “ *I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself .I can't make it more clear; it is only something which I'm beginning to comprehend , which is revealing itself to me.*”

Edna is unwilling to give up her individuality for her children, although she would give her life for them.³she finds it difficult to express how she feels about this; she seems unable to put her finger on it.⁴

Emma Jones believes that the figure of Edna Pontellier marks a departure from the female characters of earlier nineteenth-century American novels , such as the character of Hester Prynne, of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* ,Cora

1. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972),P.117.

2. Unregistered,"*The Development of Edna Pontellier's Character*" (<http://www.gradsaver.com/classicnotes/titles/awakening/essay3.html>) 4-5-2007, p.5.

3. Unregistered,"*The Development of Edna Pontellier's Character*" (<http://www.gradsaver.com/classicnotes/titles/awakening/essay3.html>) 4-5-2007, p.7.

Munro from James Fenimore Cooper's *The Last of the Mohicans* , and the unnamed protagonist (and narrator) of Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *The Yellow Wallpaper*.¹

It is interesting to compare the character of Edna with that of Cora Munro, from *The Last of the Mohicans*. Cora is the elder sister of Alice, and the voice of reason and strength. She is one of the most admirable characters, with a mothering, selfless nature that cares only to keep her sister safe. Cora's relationship with Alice demonstrates a distinct mother-daughter pattern that manifests itself in every interaction between the two women. When Alice shows doubt and fear, Cora immediately rushes to protect and soothe her.²

Cooper writes: “for many moments the elder sister looked upon the younger, with a countenance that wavered with powerful and contending emotions. At length she spoke, though her tones had lost their rich and calm fullness, in an expression of tenderness that seemed maternal.”³

Her motherly feelings towards Alice verge on the saintly; Cora often rises above common human sensibility that takes on the role of a martyr in the manner that a mother would for her child. Edna, on the other hand, is not satisfied with devoting her life to her husband and children. She cares more for her needs to be her own person, Edna, a woman, instead of merely a mother or wife.

Somewhere in between these two extremes lies the character of Hester Prynne, the protagonist of Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*. Hester, an adulterous woman who is punished for her "crime" by being made to wear a scarlet letter 'A' on her bosom, harboured an intense love for her child Pearl although the child's mischievous and imp-like qualities brought nothing but pain to her mother.

1. Emma Jones, “A Study of Edna’s charecter”?([www.dreamessays.com/Kate %20 Chopin /2330.htm](http://www.dreamessays.com/Kate%20Chopin/2330.htm))7-6-2007,p.4.)

2. Emma Jones, “A Study of Edna's Character” ([http://www.dreamessays.com/Kate %20 Chopin /2330.htm](http://www.dreamessays.com/Kate%20Chopin/2330.htm))7-6-2007,p.5.

3. James Fenimore Cooper, *The Last of the Mohicans*(Oxford Word's Classics,1988),p.124.

She wanted only the absolute best for Pearl. Also Hester was simply astounded and horrified at the idea of Pearl being taken away from her when this question was brought to the governor.¹ This is demonstrated in the lines: "Speak thou for me" cried she. *"Thou wast my pastor, and hadst charge of my soul, and knowest me better than these men can. I will not lose the child! Speak for me! Thou knowest, for thou hast sympathies which these men lack!, thou knowest what is in my heart, and what are a mother's rights, and how much the stronger they are, when the mother has put her child and the scarlet letter, look thou to it ! I will not lose the child! Look to it!"*²

Hester, like Edna, believed that society needed to change its attitude towards women, and their role in that society. The difference between the two women was that Hester felt that she had something to lose, and if she voiced these ideas, her precious child, Pearl, would be taken away from her. Edna, however, felt so strongly about the injustices within her society that it became a stronger force than her love for her children.³

In the early chapters, Edna is referred to only as Mrs. Pontellier, as a subset of Mr. Pontellier. At this point, Edna's sense of self is still defined in terms of her connection with her husband, Leonce. At the time, but at another level, Edna as a fictional character has not yet materialized from the text. A few pages after making her entrance, Mrs. Pontellier fights with Mr. Pontellier and finds what Chopin describes as: ... an indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, and filled her whole being with a vague anguish.⁴

On account of her still undelineated character and primordial sense of self, Mrs. Pontellier's suffering is appropriately "indescribable", "unfamiliar", and "vague".

1. Emma Jones, "A Study of Edna's charecter" (www.dreamessays\)

2. Nathaniel Hawthorne, *The Scarlet Letter* (New York:Chelsea House Publisher, 1982),p.113

3. Emma Jones, "A Study of Edna's charecter" (www.dreamessays\)

4. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972), (A:p.49)

But in this unformed self, Edna is beginning to: “ *realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her.*¹

In perceiving the world around her, Mrs.Pontellier's self is emerging from her non-self. Symbolically, Edna's sense of self is accompanied by the voice of sea, which is: seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring inviting to soul to wonder for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.²

And it is by the sea that Kate Chopin first pulls Edna out from the narrative and gives her an ego by referring to her by her given name and, after walking through a sea of grass, recounts Edna's previous love interests — the cavalry officer, a young gentleman, and the tragedian. In other words, Edna's self is born here by "inward contemplation", with the aid of the "seductive odor" and "sonorous murmur" of the sea and its "*loving but imperative entreaty*"³. The objects of her previous attachments were men, or perhaps her desire for the men of her past. In Edna's present lifetime on Grand Isle, her attachment is to Robert Lebrun, who draws Edna's ego to its fullest from Chopin's narrative and makes Edna's suffering more intense and tangible.⁴

Shortly after the reader meets Robert Lebrun and realizes that Edna is strangely drawn to the young man, the seed of Edna's attachment is thus planted, Chopin prepares a series of events that expands Edna's senses and makes her fully aware of herself. Edna begins to feel things more intensely. In listening to Mademoiselle Reisz's music, Edna no longer simply detachedly sees pictures

1. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972)(A:p.57)

2. Ibid (A:p.57)

3. Ibid (A:Ibid.)

4. Ibid (A: p.50)

5. Andrew Delbanco , "*The Half Life of Edna Pontellier*", *New Essays on "The Awakening"*, ed. Wendy Martin,(Cambridge:Cambridge UP,1988),p.89.

of feelings but experiences them intensely. The very waves daily beat upon her splendid body ... perhaps it was not the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth.¹

While Mademoiselle Reisz's music is still playing, the voice of the sea can be heard and its shore is within easy reach. In this second key event, under a moonlight night, with the moon's " *mystic shimmer... casting a million lights across the distant, restless water* ²", takes Edna for a swim in the ocean, baptizing her selfhood. It is somehow appropriate that Robert, the object of Edna's attachment, should propose "*a bath at that mystic hour and under that mystic moon* ³". In this pivotal chapter Edna has a physical, a bodily epiphany; she suddenly knows how to swim. However, the epiphany carries little weight in Edna's inner mental working. Chopin does not spend time telling the reader what Edna realizes about her position in society or in universe.⁴ This mastery over her physical self gives Edna: " a sense of exultation ..., as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and soul .She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out , where no woman had swum before." ⁵

As Edna's fortified ego emerges ashore, her attachment to Robert is strengthened. The intimate moment they share at the end of the chapter bespeaks an "*acme of bliss*", where: no multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire.⁶

After Edna's rebirth from the sea, her sense of self blossoms. She pulls away

1. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:pp.71-72)

2. Ibid(A: p.70)

3. Andrew Delbanco ,"*The Half Life of Edna Pontellier*", *New Essays on "The Awakening"*, ed. Wendy Martin,(Cambridge:Cambridge UP,1988), p.90..

4. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:pp.73-74)

5. Ibid (A:p.77)

6. Andrew Delbanco ,"*The Half Life of Edna Pontellier*", *New Essays on "The Awakening"*, ed. Wendy Martin,(Cambridge:Cambridge UP,1988),p.89.

from the crowd and begins to do as she pleases. Leonce Pontellier's stern command to her to come inside after the swim goes unheeded. Edna realizes that her will has "*blazed up, stubborn and resistant*". Edna's recognition of her will is fully formed.¹ Chopin further describes Edna as: "... *blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction and freed her soul of responsibility.*"² The otherness of the people on Grand Isle becomes sharply defined against Edna's new vigor. Even Robert, the object of her attachment, becomes an other. When Robert claims to understand her fatigue, Edna lashes out: " *You don't know anything about it. Why should you know? I never was so exhausted in my life.*"³

Othering Robert, therefore objectifying him, gives rise to Edna's desire to possess him, creating suffering when the inevitable truth comes that one can not ever possess another, because there is nothing to possess.⁴

In the subsequent chapter, Edna and Robert spend some quality time on Cheniere Caminada. This is an ego affirming experience for Edna, setting her up for her fall. The chapter is sensually written, continuing Edna's discovery of her sensual self in the ocean. Edna notices that "*fine, firm quality and texture of her flash*"⁵ and eats her lunch with a healthy appetite, tearing into a piece of bread with her "*strong, white teeth*"⁶. The fact that the couple travel by boat to the shore of Cheniere Caminada suggests a dream — like journey in which Edna is transported to a distant shore, another life where she and Robert can experience another "*acme of bliss*".⁷

1. Andrew Delbanco, "*The Half Life of Edna Pontellier*", *New Essays on "The Awakening"*, ed. Wendy Martin, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), *Ibid.*, p. 82.

2. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University : Baton Rouge, 1972) (A: p. 79)

3. *Ibid.* (A: p. 75)

4. Andrew Delbanco, "*The Half Life of Edna Pontellier*", *New Essays on "The Awakening"*, ed. Wendy Martin, (Cambridge: Cambridge UP, 1988), *Ibid.*, p. 85.

5. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University : Baton Rouge, 1972) (A: p. 84)

6. *Ibid.* (A: p. 85)

7. *Ibid.*

But something happens when Edna awakens from the Cheniere Caminada dream. Chopin tells us that Edna realizes that "*she herself, her present life, was in some way different from the other self*".¹ Here is a hint of recognition of the transient nature of the self. Chopin goes on to say that: "*Edna was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect.*"² Although Edna herself does not see it clearly, Chopin is pointing out that Edna's sense of self is changing again. Edna's subtle realization in this chapter is presented quickly, almost carelessly, but it has planted a seed. The movement of the novel from this point on is toward Edna's fuller realization of the impermanence of the self.³

The catalyst that accelerates the flowering of the seed is Robert's physical departure from Edna's life. At this point in the novel, Edna's sense of self is so bound up with Robert's presence that once he leaves, she has to build her ego back up again. At the dinner when Edna learns about Robert's impending trip to Mexico, Robert's voice reminds her "*of some gentleman on the stage*"⁴, a recognition of a previous life. Here Edna begins to recognize "*the symptoms of [her] infatuation*". However, the "*recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability*"⁵. Chopin goes on to describe Edna's Pontellier's revelation: "*The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.*"⁶

1. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.88).

2. Ibid(A:p.89)

3. Erin E. MacDonald ,"*Kate Chopin's Gender- Awakening*" (<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.htm>) 6-3-2007,p.2.

4. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:p.90)

5. Ibid (A: p.94)

6. Ibid (A:p.94)

After some stagnation in the sensual realms, the shock of Robert's going away is too great for Edna to move ahead. Her problem is that she can not recapture the sense of self she felt when Robert's physical presence was there to motivate her. Consequently, Edna becomes obsessive about the memory of Robert. She looks at pictures of Robert, as a baby, at age five, as a teen, etc., but which one is the real Robert? Edna can not find a "*recent picture of Robert, none which suggested the Robert who had gone away ..., leaving a void and wilderness behind him*"¹. Because the physical form changes, Edna can never find the "essential "Robert. While this illustrates the impermanence of self, Edna does not see the futility of her quest.²

Nevertheless, this is still an awakening of sorts for Edna. It differs from the swimming awakening in that the latter was achieved through an exploration of Edna's physical self. The second awakening, which never fully materializes, is a result of an agitation of Edna's mental self. The focus of her attachment is still Robert, though now it becomes a mental process.³

The mental exploration of Edna's self is to be conducted on land, with Edna traversing New Orleans's landscape. Spatially, Chopin moves Edna inland, away from Grand Isle. After Edna moves back into the city, it is difficult to say what is sustaining her sense of self. "*She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked*"⁴. Occasionally she thinks about Robert and "*could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail*"⁵. She is sometimes happy, sometimes unhappy. She is described by the other characters as suddenly capricious and apt to act on fancy.

1. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:p.95)

2. Erin E. MacDonald ,"*Kate Chopin's Gender- Awakening*" ([http://w ww.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.htm](http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.htm))6-3-2007,p.3.

3. Ibid.,p.5.

4. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.109)

5. Ibid (A:p.109)

She is prone to days of depression, *"when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly towards inevitable annihilation"*¹.

It seems that Edna is in limbo. On her unhappy days, Edna's sense of self seems to shrink into a kind of basic animal nature. But sometimes there are echoes of Edna's knowledge of the self she knew in the Grand Isle days. We see one of these flashes when Edna goes to visit Robert's mother, Madam Lebrun, whose house *"from the outside looked like a prison"*.² Edna refuses to enter the prison – like house, refusing to imprison herself in memories of Robert and the walls in which he grew into the Robert she knew.³ But she realizes that she is still : *"under the spell of her infatuation...[T]he thought of him was like an obsession, everpressing itself upon her...[I]t was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought , fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing."*⁴

Her tie with Robert is maintained by her association with the community from Grand Isle: Madame Ratignolle and her soirees, musicales, Mademoiselle Reiz and her music, and most immediately, Robert's letters. These people help her keep thoughts of Robert alive. Her sense of self is still largely defined by her sensual self and reinforced by her contacts with Grand Isle community, but it is no longer opulently sensuous. Robert isn't there to provide the lushness to her ego and her existence, but her memories of him signal a melancholy reminder of impermanence that she is not yet consciously acknowledging.

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1. Erin E. MacDonald ,*"Kate Chopin's Gender- Awakening"* (<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.htm>)6-3-2007,
 2. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.110).
 3. Erin E. MacDonald ,*"Kate Chopin's Gender- Awakening"*(<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.htm>)6-3-2007,p.3.
 4. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.105)

Here sadness is another defining emotion that solidifies attachment and reinforces herself. Through this sadness Edna begins to transcend her attachment to Robert.

The more Edna indulges in her sensual self, the more she feels Robert's absence. However, often her longing for Robert's absence is coupled with feeling of emptiness.¹ This can be seen at the last party she gives at the Pontellier's house:

*“There came over her the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of the beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable.”*²

Edna's sexual need for Robert undermines her autonomy because it only furthers the teachings of her upbringing, which have told her that woman is dependent on man and can not be happy without him. *"We shall be everything to each other"*, she tells him. Although the heroine attempts to use her self — proclaimed sexual independence in order to achieve mental independence, she fails. Letting her freed sensibility run wild, she *"becomes ensared by romantic love"*.³ Neither the romantic nor the domestic traditions work for the New Woman, and she fails to find a middle ground that would give her the strength she needs. Instead she falls into an aimless depression, caught between cultural and emotional limitations. Edna not yet prepared to risk a romantic

attachment in favour of autonomy, represents the bridge between the passive, dutiful wife and the more aggressive, independent woman.⁴

She mistakenly associates her growing sexual awareness with a new — found

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1. Erin E. MacDonald, "Kate Chopin's Gender- Awakening" (<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.htm>)6-3-2007,p.7.
 2. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:p.145)
 3. Wendy Martin ed., *New Essays on "The Awakening"* (Cambridge: Cambridge UP,1988) p.23.
 4. Ibid.,p.24

personal liberation. Although her desire leads her to separate from her controlling husband, it misses the point. Chopin's story implies that Edna needs to become more significantly independent of men and to adjust to being self – reliant, before she can have a successful and fulfilling love relationship. Her senses are awakened by Robert, and she begins to break with some society conventions, but she is still consumed by a romantic need for a bond with a man. Life with Robert would be passionate, at least, but still domestic. At Madame Antoine's house on the Island, Robert 'was childishly gratified to discover her appetite, and to see the relish with which she ate the food which he had procured for her"¹. The food that Edna eats with such vigour has not been obtained by her own hands; she is still passive, acting only in blind obedience to her sensual impulses. After learning of Robert's imminent trip to Mexico, she "*laid her spoon down and looked about her bewildered*"². At the first sign of his leaving, all her new confidence is gone. In Robert's absence, she becomes despondent and depressed, not self – sufficient and independently content: “ *What dominates her imagination during this period*

is not so much a feminist revolt as the idea of transcendent passion for Robert of the kind suggested by romantic literature ; and not seeking help from any source , external or internal, to check it, she dreams about such a love, leading herself to any impulse as if freed of all responsibility”.³

With the purpose of her own life determined solely by her relationship to a man, her rebellion against traditional gender roles becomes less positive action toward women's emancipation than a passive backward fall into the arms of romantic sensibility.⁴

After Robert's departure, Edna makes another relationship with another man,

¹. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening* (Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.60)

². Ibid (A: p.83)

³. Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP ,1969),p.141.

⁴. Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Baton Rouge: Louisiana State UP ,1969),p.148.

Alcee Arobin. Her sexual relationship with Alcee Arobin also throws her back into the role of object. Overtaken by the fever of physical passion, Edna is in danger once again of losing her independence. She gives herself to Alcee with careless disregard, not having taken the time to think of any possible consequences to herself: “ *Alcee Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her.* ”¹

She is too "drugged" to fully take control of her life, and seems to be giving it over instead to a different, yet parallel, form of entrapment, since her thoughts and reactions are too unclear to provide any positive direction for her future. She tells Arobin: “ *one of these days ...I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think ...try to determine what character of woman I am, for, candidly, I don't know.* ”²

An American critic and Professor Andrew Dalbanco writes: “*Alcee Arobin (who becomes Edna's lover), Edna knows, is nothing more than a measure of her desperation to find an antidote to numbness.*”³

After her first sexual encounter with Arobin, she can not truly accept what she professes to believe, that she can handle sex without love. Although Chopin tells us Edna feels no shame: “ *There was a dull pang of regret because 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.* ” ⁴

She seems to be choosing solitary freedom, but it is bound to her romantic desire for oneness with a man. An American critic and feminist Elaine Showalter agrees: “*Although her affair with Arobin shocks her into awareness*

1. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:p.98)

2. Ibid (A:P.102)

3. Andrew Delbanco , "*The Half Life of Edna Pontellier*", *New Essays on "The Awakening"*, ed. Wendy Martin,(Cambridge:Cambridge UP,1988), Ibid.,p.85.

4. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:p.108)

*of her own sexual passions, it leaves her illusions about love intact.”*¹

A well-known critic and essayist Stephanie Trunzo believes that: “*Edna does not really fall in love with anyone and in the end she realizes that she never will. Edna, miserable, with her awakening, repeats to herself, "To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else"*.”

Trunzo examines the striking similarities between Schopenhauer's philosophy in "The World as Will and Representation" and Chopin's study of Edna Pontillier in *The Awakening*, looking particularly at the cycle of desire and salvation in the arts, he thinks that: “ *Chopin, a well-educated and well-read woman, wrote her novel in 1899 so it would be not unlikely to imagine that she might have read or been influenced by Schopenhauer's work published decades before; however, Schopenhauer's philosophy would be lent more credibility had Chopin created Edna without previous knowledge of his work because Edna could then stand as an example of how life really is and still fit perfectly with Schopenhauer's descriptions*”.²

Schopenhauer believes that all love is sexual love. There is yet another desire, this time for another person, that cries to be fulfilled. Edna's entire relationship with Arobin is physical and even the relationship she creates in her mind with Robert is based on desire.³

The love that Schopenhauer describes as truest comes from a mutual recognition of each other's plight as humans. There is a certain perceived unity in the combining of two wills through love. Schopenhauer believes it is also through the creation of children that two people in love can physically see their two wills

1. Elaine Showalter ed., *The New Feminist Criticism: Essays on Women ,Literature and Theory*.(New York: Pantheon,1985),p.33

2. StephanieTrunzo, "Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007,p.1.

3. Ibid., p.5.

combined into one.¹ Madame Ratignolle loves her children with all her heart and includes them in the domestic happiness she feels. Edna, though the mother of two children, relates to them oddly.² Edna would "*sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them*"³. Adelle Ratignolle, attempts to bring Edna back, "*think of the children, Edna .Oh think of the children! Remember them!*"⁴ Madame Ratignolle, whose mundane existence demands that she places children as woman's ultimate earthly attachment, does not realize that Edna has moved beyond this point. But Edna would not give up herself for them: "*I would give up the unessential, my money, I would give my life for my children ; but I wouldn't give myself.*"⁵

Madame Ratignolle had replied: "*I don't know what you call essential, or what you mean by the unessential...but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that.*"⁶

For Adele, "life" and "self" are synonymous, therefore both essential. Edna, on the other hand, clearly separates "life" and "self"; Edna considers her life and her money unessential, but it is not clear whether she considers her children essential.⁷

In order to break the monotony of her life, Edna turns to the art which is the only thing Schopenhauer lists as above the cycle of desire. Art and music alleviate the pain of life and remove the personal pain from the senses. The arts provide an unbiased vehicle for the senses.⁸ The arts answer in some sense the question which

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1. StephanieTrunzo,"*Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies*" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007,p.2.
 2. Susan J. Rosowski,"*The Awakening as a Prototype of the Novel of Awakening in Women's Experience*"(<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/lv.html>)20-5-2007,p.3.
 3. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.37)
 4. Ibid (A: p.40)
 5. Ibid (A: p.70)
 6. Ibid (A: p.71)
 7. Susan J. Rosowski,"*The Awakening as a Prototype of the Novel of Awakening in Women's Experience*"(<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/lv.html>)20-5-2007,p.3.
 8. StephanieTrunzo,"*Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies*" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007

humans do not allow themselves to look at directly, "what is life?" As a human, it is natural to seek truth: “ *For in every mind that which once gives itself up to the purely objective contemplation of the world, a desire has been awakened, however concealed and unconscious, to comprehend the true nature of things, of life, and of existence ...the result of every purely objective, and so every artistic, apprehension of things is an expression more of the true nature life and of existence*”.¹

This is the truth that Edna finds herself seeking in Madame Reisz's musical talent. When Edna is in a mood that life is not worth living, she ventures to Reisz's home where "*new voices woke in her*"² during Reisz's playing. She then becomes a regular visitor. Each time "*the music penetrated her whole being like effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul*"³.

Music is not the only art form with which Edna is involved; Edna also draws comfort from her own drawing and painting. In fact, Edna eventually abandons everything else in order to keep up her paintings. she feels in her sketching "*a satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her*"⁴. She begins by tracing her friend, Madame Ratignoll; however, she finds her work imperfect and destroys it. Every one thinks it a fine piece of work coming "*from a natural aptitude*"⁵. In the midst of her awakening, she returns to her artwork and goes over her old sketches; "*she could see their shortcomings and defects, which were glaring in her eyes*"⁶. This amount of reflection upon one's own work is a mistake according to Schopenhauer.⁷ The truest pieces of art are those created out of : “ *the pure work of the rapture of the moment, of the inspiration, of the free impulse of*

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York : Dover Publications,1958),p.406.

2. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p44)

3. Ibid (A: p.101)

4. Ibid (A:p.30)

5. Ibid.

6. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.75)

7. StephanieTrunzo,"Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007,p.2.

the genius, without any admixture of deliberation and reflection."¹

When Edna does finally turn to her painting and abandons all else, she sets at it with a fever and a decisiveness that Schopenhauer would frown upon. Although she does gain a certain amount of respect for inspiration and explains her behavior to her husband by saying, *"I feel like painting... Perhaps I shan't always feel like it,"*² she remains caught up in her capricious search for happiness. Edna tells her musical friend, Madame Reisz, *"I am becoming an artist" to which Madame Reisz laughs and replies "... the artist must possess the courageous soul ... the soul that dares and defies"*³. Schopenhauer would surely agree as he feels that *"an arbitrary playing with the means of art without proper knowledge of the end is in every art the fundamental characteristic of bungling"*.⁴ Perhaps this is the reason that Edna can only derive so much comfort from her art, yet it is still not enough.

Edna was observed to have a talent for art; however, it is in genius and not talent that truth is found.⁵ Schopenhauer makes the distinction between talent and genius by saying: *"Talent is a merit to be found in the greater versatility and acuteness of discursive rather than of intuitive knowledge. The person endowed with talent thinks more rapidly and accurately than do the rest; on the other hand, the genius perceives a world different from them all, though only by looking more deeply into the world that lies before them also, since it represents itself in his mind more objectively, consequently more purely and distinctly."*⁶

Because Edna possessed talent and not genius, she could never be satisfied or find the whole truth in her art. As it is art only that provides a fleeting moment of truth and never the whole picture.⁷

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York : Dover Publications,1958),p.409.

2. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A: p.77)

3. Ibid (A:p.88)

4. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York : Dover Publications,1958),p.408.

5. StephanieTrunzo,"Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007,p.2.

6. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York : Dover Publications,1958), p.376.

7. StephanieTrunzo,"Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007,p.2.p.5.

Edna then still sees her life as the never — ending chain of desires that Schopenhauer describes despite the brief reprieves art offers. According to Schopenhauer, happiness is like an illusion matched with distance.¹ Things look brighter with promise and hope and are remembered more fondly with the passing of time; "*consequently, the present is always inadequate, but the future is uncertain, and the past is irrecoverable*".² Edna matches this pattern by recalling her cycle of infatuations as time of happiness that are impossible to bring back. Edna also refers to a memory of running through tall grass several times, remembering it with the fondness reserved for a happy past. Edna counts on happiness in her future too, by constantly daydreaming and creating visions of alternative realities in mind that will never come true. As soon as her love affairs with Arobin and Robert come close to becoming realities, Edna realizes that they do not bring the happiness she thinks they will.³

Due to Edna's increasingly strange habits, her husband begins to wonder at her sanity. Schopenhauer defines madness as an abnormality of memory. People become muddled with recollections, unsure of whether the things in their mind or memory actually occurred. Edna dwells in her memories and at times is confused by what she recounts. At one point, Edna tells her company a story with an air of fact; however, every word is fictitious. Though it could have been a dream Edna once had and now related, the champagne's "*subtle fumes played fantastic tricks with Edna's memory that night*"⁴ and "*every glowing word seemed real to those who listened*"⁵.

Another symptom Schopenhauer ascribes to madness is obsessive longing to which Edna surely is party.⁶

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation* (New York : Dover Publications,1958),p.376.

2. Ibid. p.6.

3. Ibid. p.57

4. StephanieTrunzo,"Chopin and Schopenhauer:similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>)3-2-2007,p.2., p.7.

5. Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*(Louisiana State University :Baton Rouge,1972) (A:p.91)

6. (Ibid.)

This casting out of mind occurs when a person keeps constantly present to his mind, and can not rid off, the cause of his insanity ... in the case of many who have gone mad from love ...where the cause is constantly longed for.¹

Edna, all the while that Robert is gone, can not keep him from her mind. Although she later realizes that she does not really love Robert, she believes she does at the time and becomes obsessed with it.²

Being in a state of boredom quite often, Edna has much time to ponder the things that trouble her. The lack of genuine love in Edna's life contributes to her uncertain madness. Schopenhauer believes that longing for love can reach such intensity of this desire that nothing in the world or even life itself matters next to that desire.³ The intensity of this desire and constant longing for love can: “ make a person ready for any sacrifice, and, if its fulfillment remains for ever denied, can lead to madness or suicide ... when a human is in a state of extreme physical pain, nothing else matters except alleviation of the pain—even if that means death... In cases of great spiritual pain, in fact, physical pain is even a temporary, welcome distraction.”⁴

Would suicide not then be the ultimate distraction? Edna pieces together the connection between physical pain and the interval in her spiritual suffering. She, then, is forced by her emotions and swims out beyond the point where she is physically able to return.⁵

George Spangler addresses the issue from a different perspective, not why she killed herself but would she have? He thinks that the action was inconsistent and inappropriate. He believes that after Edna overcame so much, demonstrated such strength of will and determination, she would not let something like Robert's

1. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms* (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), essay 78.

2. Stephanie Trunzo, "Chopin and Schopenhauer: similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>), p.6.

3. Ibid.

4. Arthur Schopenhauer, *Essays and Aphorisms*, (New York: Penguin Books, 1983), essay 79.

5. Stephanie Trunzo, "Chopin and Schopenhauer: similar philosophies" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>) p.7.

incomprehension of her advances push her into a state of suicidal despair.¹ Portals takes issue with Spangler and points out the very undetermined nature of Edna's personality. He maintains that the suicide is not surprising and is in keeping with Edna's desire not to think of the consequences of her actions or about her future. Portals contends that Edna's suicide is a result of her desire not to think of the consequences because those consequences are so unattractive.

*"Edna chooses to live self-forgetfully in the moment. In following this unexpressed creed, Edna knowingly places herself in a position where the consequences of her swimming out are inescapable; her final act simply cannot be obviated."*² Professor Helen Emmitt approaches Edna's death from a male-female point of view. She believes that women commit suicide, especially by drowning, because the world lacks a proper *"reflection of woman's needs and desires"*. She contends that Edna's suicide was the *"ultimate act of the novel, and as a culmination, solves her problems and fulfills her needs"*.³

She does not view Edna's death as a real suicide, because suicide has as a prerequisite the taking of one's life into one's hand and Edna never does this. She never makes a conscious choice. So why does Edna swim out to her death according to Emmitt? Because she was in search of that proper reflection and found it in the sea. Emmitt believes that for men, water is self-reflecting, giving back a narcissistic image, but for women, who have no proper reflections, the sea is an embrace of self-fulfillment. Emmitt reads *The Awakening* as a parable of *"female development and liberation"*.⁴

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1. George M. Spangler, "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>) 3-4-2007, p.4.
 2. Marco A. Portals, "The Characterization of Edna Pontellier and the Conclusion of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" (<http://www.Womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/macdonald.html>) 8-5-2007, p.7.
 3. Helen V. Emmitt, "Drowning in a Willing Sea : Freedom and Drowning in Eliot, Chopin and Drabble" (<http://feminism.eserver.org/discourse/Chopin.html>) 3-4-2007, p.7.
 4. Ibid., p.9.

A critic and freelance writer Sarah Klein believes that Chopin's protagonist is clearly symbolic: “Like her name, “Pontellier”...means “one who bridges”, Edna herself is one whose mission is to begin the painful process of bridging two centuries, two worlds, two visions of gender. So appropriate as a turn - of the century piece, *The Awakening* is about the beginning of selfhood, not its completion. Chopin's novel portrays this process within Edna just as it takes part in a similar transition as a work of literary art. The novel is proven to be transitional and revolutionary by the defensive uproar it produces at the time of publication, even among the ranks of literary peers such as Willa Cather ... Chopin as an author, like Edna as a character, is a woman caught in the borderlands between the literary traditions assigned to her as a nineteenth century female writer and the mores of a new era.”¹

As a writer, Chopin grapples with the old models and looks for her possible place among the new. As a woman and a hopeful artist, Chopin's questions about her position in literary history are not unlike those more naively confronted by her protagonist; should we discard the old models? And if so, how? If we discard the old models, what will replace them, and why? Will the new models work for us? Is there a place, a voice for woman, and Artist, and woman — Artist, in this new territory? If we as women want to embrace a new world, will it welcome us with open arms? The novel offers few, if any, comforting answers to these questions.²

Chopin gives us a protagonist who chooses suicide because she is unable to find a place for her newly conscious, fully recognized self within the constraints of the present social system. Edna's suicide is completely

1. Sarah Klein, “Anticipation of Modernism and Negotiations of Gender in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*”, (<http://www.womenwriters.net/domesticgoddess/klein.html>) 3-4-2007, p.9.76

2. Ibid., p.10

"valid" within the context of her time, when her act of self - recognition is condemned. Seyersted recognizes that her awakening "... is accompanied by a growing sense of isolation and aloneness, and also anguish... If the process of existential individuation is taxing on a man and freedom a lonely and threatening thing to him, it is doubly so for a woman who attempts to emancipate herself."¹

An American famous critic and Professor Emeritus of English Michael T. Gilmore rightly concludes that " *Her quest for self-fulfillment, though it ends in death, is an insurrectionary act because it calls a civilization into question; it has to end in death because there is no way for the world she inhabits to accommodate the change in her...her disaffection proves so total that she takes her life instead of allowing herself to be reintegrated into the existing order.*"²

As Gilmore recognizes, although Edna and Chopin ultimately do not reach full transcendence of 19th century constructs and ideals, they nonetheless "*strive to go beyond it and to achieve something approximating the modernist escape...*" Both women wish to find a way out of the "*fettering tradition of nature*" and both aspire to speak, like the brightly colored parrot introduced on the novel's first page, "*a language which nobody understands*".³

1. Per Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* (Louisiana State University Press, 1969), p. 148.

2. Michael T. Gilmore, "Revolt Against Nature: The Problematic Modernism of *The Awakening*" *New Essays on "The Awakening"* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988), p. 62.

3. *Ibid.*, p. 65.

Conclusion

In our second chapter we analyzed Kate Chopin and women status in her works. As we know, women were discriminated and had no rights to vote. Their roles in political, economic and social lives were not equal to men's. The men thought that women had to get married, have children, look after children and fulfill the duties of hardworking wives and mothers. These attitudes made the intelligent women think and write about them. We can say that those intelligent women were brave and they could fight against the society at that time. One of them was Kate Chopin who dared to write the feministic issues even though she didn't accept her feminism. In our second chapter we decided to analyze Kate Chopin's works which were related to the women's problem at that time. Therefore in our first paragraph of the second chapter we analyzed women characters in Kate Chopin's works. As we know Kate Chopin had two novels *At Fault* and *The Awakening* which depicted women's endeavor to obtain freedom. Moreover she published two collections of short stories: *Bayou Folk*, *Night in Arcadia* and a lot of uncollected short stories. As for her short stories, we have chosen five of them which describe a woman as a wife, mother and her problems. They are *The Story of an Hour*, *The Storm*, *Madame Célestin's Divorce*, *Athénaïse*, *Regret*, and *A Pair of Silk Stockings*.

Kate Chopin's first novel *At Fault* was the author's primary work which depicted the life of Therese Lafirme. Therese was one of the women who faced women's problems and wanted to be free. Kate Chopin tried to reveal the constraints of the interior lives of women, their disillusionment, and their attempts to achieve fulfillment in pre feminist times. *At Fault* is Kate Chopin's novel which vividly shows women's characters although it was not a masterpiece. However there is another novel which is the best one. This novel has been discussed by a lot of critics and the critics have analyzed importance of this novel. However it was not accepted as a good novel when Kate Chopin was alive. This novel is *The*

Awakening. It is one of the earliest American novels that focus on women's issues without condescension. It is also widely seen as a landmark work of early feminism.

There are some important Kate Chopin's feministic short stories which portrayed women of that time. *The Story of an Hour* highlights complex issues involved in the interplay of female independence, love, and freedom. This story is famous in feministic literature because the writer managed to show the psychology of her main character who felt her lack-luster relationship with her husband. Chopin uses the theme of forbidden love to tell a story. *The Storm* depicts a woman's problems related to sex and relations. To be more specific, adultery. Chopin also uses symbols to characterize to her personage in *A Pair of Silk Stocking* which shows woman's burden of being a mother. The woman and the main character in this story, Mrs. Sommers dared to use fifteen dollars to herself instead of spending this amount of money to her children. This situation presents the difficulties of the protagonist after marriage; Mrs. Sommers suffered being a mother and didn't let herself spend even a cent for her own needs. Analyzing this story we feel the bitter woes of the women of that time. *Desiree's Baby* also indicates the sorrow of being a mother. In this story feministic issues are intermingled with the problem of abolitionism. At that time black people were considered to be in a low status and they were treated as slaves. Desiree's baby was born black skinned and this made her feel grief as a mother. Her husband's selfishness became increasingly evident. He could only think of his valuable family name rather than love to his wife and his own flesh. But at the end of the story it turned out her husband, Armand was guilty because of his mother's secret who was black-blooded. On the contrary, in *Regret* the protagonist is an old woman who regretted not being a mother after spending her time with her neighbor's children.

The next paragraph of this chapter we analyzed historical and cultural backgrounds of Kate Chopin's masterpiece *The Awakening*. The critics were shocked by the main protagonist, Edna Pontellier's behavior and considered Chopin's novel to be immoral and lacking literary value. Moreover this novel was supposed to be anti-religious therefore there were a lot of disapproving and approving attitudes toward this novel. Even though there was the difficult and changeable social atmosphere, many people in the United States, and especially the media, were not ready to receive Kate Chopin's novel at that time. Daniel S. Rankin published "Kate Chopin and her Creole stories" in 1932 and brought life and popularity to this novel. Moreover, the well-known translator Cyrille Arnavon wrote a serious essay on *The Awakening* and translated this novel into French. After coming back to life *The Awakening* in 1969, countless classrooms across the United States have found in *The Awakening* a superb example of the transcendent New Woman.

In the next paragraph we analyzed this novel completely. *The Awakening* was very much ahead of its time and it was a feminist masterpiece which the readers didn't notice. *The Awakening* is the story of one woman's struggle for self – identity. In addition to Edna, the novel centers on two other female characters. Mme. Ratignolle represents the quintessential mother – woman figure that society recognizes and applauds. Her world centers on her husband and children and outwardly she sacrifices everything for them. However, she uses her children to call attention to herself, possibly trying to define her existence through them. Edna pointedly turns away from this picture of a woman and sees another side. As time passes, she is more aware of her physical body and her desires. She puts aside her obligations one by one, letting everyday responsibilities drop from her shoulders as she seeks an independence and freedom usually reserved for men. She is now able to see herself more clearly as an individual. The main character in *The Awakening* Edna could find her identity and Kate Chopin could open women's feelings and grief by Edna's action.

Final Conclusion

In our dissertation paper we analyzed Kate Chopin, an American writer of the XV century, and problems of women in her works. As we know Kate Chopin was a feminist writer and foresaw *The New Woman* fifty years before even though she acclaimed this. Therefore we decided to do researches on feminism and problems of women in American literature in our first chapter. From history, we can see that women were discriminated and accepted as low status people by men. Women had no any rights to vote, to own property, to take the same amount of salary like men and they had various restrictions in society and at home. Women should only get married, give birth to children, take after children and fulfill the duties of hardworking wives and mothers in men's meditations. These attitudes toward women had just been accepted as cultural heritage. Bad position in society brought women to fight for their rights and to appear the word "feminism".

When we analyzed the history of feminism we decided to do researches on the waves of feminism which gave us clear conclusion about feminism. There were three waves of feminism and all waves had their aim and intention. First-wave feminism term came after coming the second-wave feminism term. First wave feminism focused on gaining the right of voting, the right to be educated, better working conditions and double sexual standards in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century in the United States and Europe. The first wave ended with the introduction of the women's right to vote. Second wave was more concerned with the restoration of all the rights that women had been denied in the past. This was extended by the fact that a large share of women had entered into the working environment after the second world war. Consequently, this wave was more broadly based because its primary concern was the restoration of women's economic, political and social rights so as to place them in the same category as their male. Therefore, it can be argued that the major concern during the first wave was political but in the second more concern was given to cultural aspects. The

third-wave feminism has been the continuation of the second-wave feminism and a response to the perceived failures. Moreover we analyzed the history of feminism in the U.S. and U.K.

However the writers who discussed feministic problems and difficulties or advanced women's issues prior to the existence of the feminist movement are called protofeminists. However some scholars criticize the usage of this term. Others believe it is important to use this term to express the value of earlier contributions. We also believe it is crucial to use this term because Kate Chopin also wrote feministic issues fifty years before feministic movements began.

The first protofeminist writer who wrote about women and women's defense was the Italian writer, Christian de Pizan. She was a famous poet who used her knowledge of aristocratic custom and fashion of the day, particularly involving women and the practice of chivalry in her poems. A lot of scholars have argued that she should be seen as an early feminist who efficiently used language to convey that women could play an important role within society.

In nineteenth century in America women began to understand that there were opportunities for them outside of the home, and that they could have a place in the world as well as men. It was a time when the feministic view was being born and traditional views of women were changing. First, women would play a part in working to help slaves gain their freedom in the anti-slavery movement. They felt they could identify with the way slaves were being treated, therefore wanted to help them. Middle class women then would begin to realize that they were just the same as men, and wanted to be treated that way, and take part in the same activities. This included getting an education, working and being able to support themselves without the help of men. This changed not only the traditional roles of women in society, but also their role in the family. With women wanting the right to vote, work and go to school, middle class life as they knew it would be drastically changed. Women would no longer be of home with the children

cooking and cleaning; they wanted to get out into the world. There was still an extremely long way to go before women were to be accepted in society, and this was just the beginning.

Margaret Fuller was the most influential primary feminist writer, the colourful journalist, editor and [women's rights](#) advocate. She wrote *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* which was published in 1845 and accepted as the first major feminist work in the United States. *Woman in the Nineteenth Century* is best understood as a work in progress, one of many provisional texts needed to widen the Enlightenment concept of liberation in the aftermath of the American and French Revolutions. The Constitution of the United States is perhaps the primary political document of this sort, emerging as it did from a narrow understanding of the "universal" citizen (like as white and male) and slowly made better over time in an effort to give support to this abstract political subject with social justice.

There are also some important figures which are urgent to be mentioned when we talk about feminism in America. An American [social activist](#), abolitionist [Elizabeth Cady Stanton](#) (1815 –1902) organized the first U.S. women's rights convention in Seneca Falls, New York, to discuss women's civil rights. Elizabeth Stanton wrote a *Declaration of Sentiments* to demand political equality and voting rights for women. She is the most productive writer in feministic literature. The publisher and business manager of this journal was [American civil rights](#) leader [Susan B. Anthony](#) (1820 – 1906). She was one of the most important figures who fought for women's rights. The women-teachers also suffered by discrimination at that time because women-teachers were not paid the same as men-teachers and they were not accepted as smart as men. An [Native American](#) activist [Matilda Joselyn Gage](#) (1826 –1898) was a [suffragist](#), an [abolitionist](#), a [freethinker](#), and a prolific author. These figures are the most important in feministic literature.

Regarding our main aim of the dissertation paper, we did researches in Kate Chopin's biography to know the influences on the writer, why she wrote feminist

issues in her works in our second paragraph of the first chapter. Kate Chopin was an American prominent writer of short stories and novels, a poet, essayist, and a memoirist. Chopin grew up among intellectual women. Kate was lucky by having many female teachers throughout her childhood; either the strong and independent widows in her family or the intellectual nuns of her school, who taught Kate to live a "*life of the mind as well as the life of the home.*" Kate could see the problems of these women and she also felt sorrow as their grief during her life. However she was able to write women's problem in contrast to the women around her. Chopin said to herself that she was neither a feminist nor a suffragist; she was simply a woman who had the ability to be strong, individual, and free-spirited.

In the third paragraph we analyzed Kate Chopin's contribution to the feminist literature. Kate Chopin could foresee *the New Woman* before fifty years in her novels and some short stories. Her best short story in feministic issue is *The Story of an Hour* which is about the woman who was unhappy and was compelled to be married by tradition and custom of that time. She tried to be free and thus she became glad by her husband's death. *The Awakening* is Kate Chopin's second novel which became famous after fifty years even though it was highly controversial in its time. The next prominent short story is *Her Letters* which presents both female, male characters. This story deals with the heaviest of human topics including love, death, grief, doubt and memory. It is one of Kate Chopin's absorbing short stories which described inner world of women.

In the second chapter of our dissertation we analyzed the importance of women status in Kate Chopin's works. We did researches on women's character in Kate Chopin's works. If we know our author's heroines then we can analyze their status at that time. Kate Chopin succeeded in giving a woman's voice to realism. This seems to be a higher order of feminism than repeating the story of a woman as victim. She gives her female protagonist the central role, normally reserved for the man. Most stories being written at the time were about male characters and their

stories, not the women. Kate Chopin changed that. Her themes are a much more controversial matter; it was the repression of women in the nineteenth century America. This theme was presented in her famous novel *The Awakening* and most of her short stories.

Her short stories, *The Story of an Hour*, *Her Letters*, *The Storm*, *A Pair of Silk Stockings*, *Desiree's Baby* and *Regret* examine the grief of women in society, the society that set up standards and ideals to which women were expected to conform. *The Story of an Hour* highlights complex issues involved in the interplay of female independence, love, and freedom. This story is famous in feminist literature because the writer managed to show the psychology of her main character who felt her lack-luster relationship with her husband. Chopin uses the theme of forbidden love to tell a story. Louise Mallard obviously feels trapped in her marriage and her image as *True Woman*. Believing that her husband's death releases her from the obligations society assigned her, she allows herself to dream of freedom, only to have that freedom suddenly revoked. The unnamed woman in *Her Letters* has the most success of finding her place in between the two ideals, living the deceptive role of a faithful wife, while having a secret love affair. However, her destruction of the norms has devastating effects on her husband who cannot fathom a woman, especially his wife, challenging the authority of society in such a manner. In *A Pair of Silk Stocking* Kate Chopin shows her heroine as a suffered woman who became poor and came to grief after her marriage. This story also shows woman's burden of being a mother. The woman and the main character in this story, Mrs. Sommers dared to use fifteen dollars to her instead of spending this amount of money for her children. This situation presents the difficulties of the protagonist after marriage; Mrs. Sommers suffered being a mother and didn't let her spend even a cent for her own needs. Analyzing this story we feel the bitter woes of the women of that time. *Desiree's Baby* also indicates the sorrow of being a mother. In this story feminist issues are intermingled with the problem of abolitionism. At that time black people were considered to be in a low status and

they were treated as slaves. Desiree's baby was born black skinned and this made her feel grief as a mother. Her husband's selfishness became increasingly evident. He could only think of his valuable family name rather than love to his wife and his own flesh. But at the end of the story it turned out her husband, Armand, was guilty because of his mother's secret that was black-blooded. On the contrary, in *Regret* the protagonist is an old woman who regretted not being a mother after spending her time with her neighbor's children.

The best disputable work of Kate Chopin is *The Awakening* which definitely shows feministic issues so in our next paragraph of the second chapter we analyzed the historical background of this novel. *The Awakening* is meaningful title testifies the author's revolutionizing intentions, she, for the first time, openly acknowledged the wish of being free in women. So this novel was failure to a successful regionalist writer. The critics were shocked by the main protagonist, Edna Pontellier's behavior and considered Chopin's novel to be immoral and lacking literary value. Also in this novel were seen as anti-religious therefore there were a lot of disapproving and approving attitudes toward this novel. Even though there was the difficult and changeable social atmosphere, many people in the United States, and especially the media, were not ready to receive Kate Chopin's novel at that time. Daniel S. Rankin published "*Kate Chopin and her Creole stories*" in 1932 and brought life and popularity to this novel. Moreover, the well-known translator Cyrille Arnavon wrote a serious essay on *The Awakening* and translated this novel into French. After coming back to life *The Awakening* in 1969, countless classrooms across the United States have found in *The Awakening* a superb example of the transcendent *New Woman*. This novel has been read and analyzed with great interest since 1932.

In the next paragraph of our second chapter we analyzed *The Awakening* and women problems for identity in this novel. Unlike the nineteenth century fictional heroines before her, Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* protests against artificial

definitions of femininity and journeys to discover not "life" but "self". When midway through the novel, Edna announces, "I would give my life for my children, but I wouldn't give myself,". In Chopin's portrayal of Edna, that aspect, which brings to American fiction, a wholly original conception of the female hero is the gradual revelation of a woman's inner life, an area of consciousness so universally disregarded by earlier writers as to deny the fact of its existence. It is in defining the precise nature of that self, in revealing the rich, inner life of a woman who defies tradition that Chopin's unique and incontestable artistry lies. Indeed, Chopin brings to literature a woman who chooses to sacrifice "life" in the insistence on and celebration of "self". If, in the creation of this woman, Chopin utters a cry of anguish at the plight of being female in a patriarchal world, she expresses as well, in the story of Edna Pontellier, a sign at the terrible loss to all of humanity whenever the attempt to find and to be true to the self is defeated.

As a final conclusion we can say that Kate Chopin is a feminist writer and she opened women's problem in her most works.

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