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**Kate Chopin as Feminist in  
*The Story of an Hour* (1894)  
& *The Awakening* (1899)**

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## **Dedication**

I dedicate this work

To my dearest husband, who gave me the inspiration to fulfill this dream with his support,  
help, patience and encouragement.

To my two mothers.

To my lovely son.

To my big family, my sisters, and brothers, and all the children of the family.

To my cheerful and dearest friends.

To all whom I love and respect.

## *Acknowledements*

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## Abstract

The feminist movement is defined to have been the support in all aspects of life of most western women. By the late 18<sup>th</sup> century and in the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> century, feminism emerged to affect positively the status of women, by granting them the right of being equal to men in different aspects of life as well as the right of voting and working. Kate Chopin, as one of the brilliant writers at that time in America opted for a pre-emptive feminist inclination in her works to be concerned as a precursor of feminism in America. In *The story of An Hour* (1894), *The Awakening* (1899), the selected works under study, she contextualized her ideas of women self-expression, social and sexual freedom in face of women's suffering under the authoritative husbands and the unhappy marriages of the 19<sup>th</sup> century America. The female protagonists in Chopin's selected works strived to gain freedom, social and sexual, and to express themselves freely via art. Those freedoms were not easily realizable at that time in America, but Chopin made it easy for her female characters to swim against the tide and paint a new portrait for American women.

**Keywords:** feminism, Kate Chopin, The Awakening, The Story of an Hour, self-expression, freedom.

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## General Introduction

Centuries ago women were defined as properties of their fathers and husbands, late 18<sup>th</sup> century and the beginning of the 19<sup>th</sup> one, western society knew a very huge emergence of women consciousness where they became aware for their social existent and independent members in. consequently they took various ways of rebellion, fighting for different rights they needed. The women's awakening was transformed by numerous faces for instance, suffragettes and suffragists, constructing women's organizations...etc. Moreover, women's voiceless in their societies led a lot of writers of the decade to pick out the very sensitive issues they suffered from, and write about their needs and wants by using artistic ways, in order to voice them and represent all women of their societies, the active women in the different sectors belonged to the feminist movements. Feminism worked as a support for women to be equal to men. and to fight to gain their rights.

History of American's women literature argued that, the American writers tackled various issues of the decade, among the famous feminist writers at that time, Mary Wollstoncraft, she was one of the earliest feminist writers her works were basically philosophical. She defended the fundamental rights of women, where she argued in her works that the two sexes deserve equal access especially education which means that her focus was in the social side of women's side. As another leader of feminism at that time Audre Lorde, she was a poet, well known by her few lines where she defined her disagreement about the social injustice around her. She wrote about feminism and racism, where she declared that because of racism many black women outside of the feminist movement, but Kate Chopin works were wholehearted and exclusive, her style brevity and her haunting messages have built an impression and have always triggered readers to wonder how differently her female protagonists could have acted in order not to experience what they lived. Notwithstanding the distant dilemmas, questioning the case of women at that time is not resting contemporary

researchers easily. Interestingly, it become necessary to figure out how Chopin adopted and extrapolated her feminist state of mind via her female characters.

This dissertation aims at looking into the exploration and reflection of the Chopin's feminist attributes on her female characters in *The Story of an Hour* (1894) and *The Awakening* (1899). It intends to show how Chopin had been an essential and precursor feminist writer in America "Avant l'age". In order to achieve these ends, the study raises following question: What are the aspects of feminism in *The Story of an Hour* and *The Awakening* that put Kate Chopin as pioneer of the movement in America?

As an attempt to answer, via the character Louise in *The Story of an Hour*, and Edna in *The Awakening* as feminist views, Kate Chopin defended their social and sexual freedoms.

The present study is divided into three chapters. The first one deals with feminism. It introduces the concept, provides a background and explains its development. The second chapter includes summaries and analysis of Chopin's the story of An Hour and the Awakening in term of feminism reflecting the author's views. The last chapter tackles the aspects of feminism in Chopin's two works through identifying the main themes and how the writer presents them.

# **Chapter One**

Overview about

Feminism

## Introduction

This chapter is devoted to explore feminism during the 19<sup>th</sup> century in the American Literature; this period is one of the most significant periods of American history, as it was a century of changes for women. The topic of feminism is a wide phenomenon can't be explained in a page or two, though we will highlight the main point concerning this subject.

First, the different definitions of the wave will be explored, and how it helped women during the nineteenth century to gain their rights in the different aspects of life. Then we will move on the waves of Feminism that was separated into three waves (first, second and third) where each one of the waves dealt with specific goals.

### 1. Definition of Feminism

The word feminism comes from French word *féminisme* and according to the Cambridge online dictionary feminism is “the belief that women should be allowed the same rights, power, and opportunities as men and be treated in the same way, or the set of activities intended to achieve this state.”<sup>1</sup> The term ‘feminism’ itself is used to describe a cultural, political or economic movement aiming for equal rights for both women and men. Nonetheless, the terms ‘feminism’ and ‘feminist’ did not gain widespread meaning use until the 1970s when they started to be used in the public parlance more frequently.

Feminism is a support of women and men equality, all feminists strive gender equality, feminist movement took various ways to applied it theories which may be classified as basic feminist ideas as long as working, having freedom in order to have gender interest, claiming gender satisfaction. While feminists oppose laws and cultural norms that limit income, education and jobs opportunities for women and ending sexual violence and promoting sexual freedom that women's control over their sexuality and reproduction.

Feminist movement have complained for women's political, social... rights as the right to vote and to hold public office, to perceive education. in addition to the other rights such as marriage and having maternity leave. feminists insist about the bodily

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<sup>1</sup> “feminism,” Cambridge Dictionaries Online, accessed on May 20, 2018, <http://dictionary.cambridge.org/dictionary/english/feminism>.

autonomy and integrity that pushed them to work on order to gain the right of protecting women's and female in general from raps,sexual harassment and domestic violence.

According to Diana Scully <sup>2</sup>"given the ore valance of rape and given the socio-cultural support for sexual aggression and violence against women in this society, perhaps we should be asking what factors prevent men from abusing women in rape-supportive societies (Sommers 44). The view of Diana argue that men generally take every opportunity to exploit women and that was the humiliating physically and mentally, which was the thing that pushed them to rebel against the men authority and work hard to obtain their rights.

Rebecca West <sup>2</sup> argued that the western women's situation changed and they started to be treated equal as men because they started too conscious and aware about their vital right in society. She confirmed her view when she said "I only know that people call me a feminist whenever I express sentiments that differentiate me from or a prostitute "(1).

The term feminism can be used to describe a political, cultural or economic movement aimed at establishing equal rights and legal protection for women. Feminism involves political and sociological theories and philosophies concerned with issues of gender difference, as well as a movement that advocates gender equality for women and campaigns for women's rights and interests.

## 2. A Brief Historical Background

The European countries like Britain as well as France were among the first countries where women started fighting for their own rights in education, and above all respect. Simone de Beauvoir<sup>3</sup> wrote that the first time we see a woman take up her pen in defense of her sex was when Christine de Pizan wrote *Epitre au Dieu d'Amour* (Epistle to the God of Love) in the 15th century

However, until the early 19th century women began to achieve changes in society under the leadership of the suffragist Mary Wollstonecraft; who is considered as consider the founding mother of British feminism and her *Vindication of the Rights of Woman* can be considered as a first unambiguous feminist work.

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<sup>2</sup> Dame Rebecca West: a British journalist, novelist, and critic. Who was perhaps best known for her reports (Britannia).

<sup>3</sup> Simon de Beauvoir: a French writer and feminist,(1908-1986)

Throughout the nineteenth century feminism across the European society aimed to gain the women's rights in all aspects of life political, social, cultural and economic. Moreover, it defends other aspects including the right of equality in marriage the majority of historians occur that all movements that work to have or to get the women's rights should be considered as feminists movements.

There have been two different sectors when it comes to the aims of feminism; some feminists focused on gaining political power through suffrage movement, while others defend their sexual right and identity. So, feminism gathered various social and political aspects that aimed to characterize and realize equality for women in society, due to the fact that it started by fighting for vote and continued to fight for true equality which is the sexual one.

However, some gender feminists claimed that because women have been oppressed they are better knowers feeling more deeply, they see more clearly and understand reality better (74). In other words, the quote claimed by special feminists may be used as an argument about the women's fighting and show to what extent they were strong and believe on their strength and their existence in society.

## **2.1 Feminism in USA**

America similar to other European countries knew a vast change from 1865 to 1912, while during the nineteenth century the nation saw increasingly wide spread of an articulate statement of women's claims perhaps in reaction to the emergence of feminism in Europe.

The history of America thought a chronological narrative ways after the rebuilding of the state started, after the civil war the different sides were touched starting by the economic which transformed from the agricultural to the industrial one, it was a period named by the industrial age. Also, the science and education knew a vast advancement that affected the nation.

The flourish that the nation knew the participation of women indifferent domains this led them to feel that their presence in were not for their own needs, so they decided to rebel. As a consequence a strong global feminism emerged where a huge number of women fight for their rights including social, political, and economical (Crow, 30).

## **2.2 Waves of Feminism**

Feminist's movement spread and appeared to declare the women's rights and to demand their equality and their consideration as human being in their societies. It emerged through three waves each one dealt with different aspect of the same feminist goals. First wave included the women's suffrage who rebel to get the right to vote, second one defended for legal and social equality it was associated with the women's liberation movement and the third one is a complementation of what the second wave failed in.

### **2.2.1 The First Wave**

First-wave feminism refers to an extended period of feminist activity during the nineteenth century and early twentieth century in the United Kingdom and the United States. Mainly it focused on the promotion of equal contract and property rights for women and the ownership of married women (and their children) by their husbands.

However, by the end of the century the movements focused on women's suffrage in this period of time as women were considered as their husband's property; this was demanded by the well-educated middle class white women.

In Britain, this wave succeeded to get the voting right where all women over the age twenty could vote, this great achievement was realized by the passing of the people act in 1918.

In the United States, leaders of this movement like Lucretia Mott, Lucy Stone, Elizabeth Cady Stanton, and Susan B. Anthony asked for the abolition of slavery; all were strongly influenced by Quaker thought.

American first-wave feminism involved a wide range of women. Some, such as Frances Willard, belonged to conservative Christian groups such as the Woman's Christian Temperance Union. Others, such as Matilda Joslyn Gage, were more radical, and expressed themselves within the National Woman Suffrage Association or individually. American first-wave feminism is considered to have ended with the passage of the Nineteenth Amendment to the United States Constitution (1919) granting women the right to vote in all states.

### 2.2.2 The Second Wave

The second wave of feminism began after the world war two (1960-1980). It focused mainly on sexuality, the work places, and reductive rights. The majority of women who participate in this movement were already involved in the civil rights movement; they were motivated by the voiceless of their gender inequality, which increased the need of having the gender equality and having a sex power and deep personal lives in women's brains.

The French author and philosopher Simone de Beauvoir wrote novels; monographs on philosophy, politics, and social issues; essays; biographies; and an autobiography. She is now best known for her metaphysical book *The Second Sex*, a detailed analysis of contemporary feminism in which prescribes a moral revolution. De Beauvoir argues that for feminism to move forward, this attitude must be set aside.

In 1964 in the United States, the phrase "Women's Liberation" was first used and first appeared in print in 1966. By 1968, although the term Women's Liberation First appeared in the magazine *Ramparts*, it was starting to refer to the whole women's movement.

The American novelist Betty Friedan<sup>4</sup> in her work *The Feminine Mystique* (1963) criticized the idea that women are identified through childrearing and homemaking. According to Friedan's obituary in the *New York Times*, *The Feminine Mystique* "ignited the contemporary women's movement in 1963 and as a result permanently transformed the social fabric of the United States and countries around the world" and "is widely regarded as one of the most influential nonfiction books of the 20th century." In the book Friedan hypothesizes that women are victims of a false belief system that requires them to find identity and meaning in their lives through their husbands and children.

### 2.2.3 The Third Wave

The third wave feminism began in the early of 1990's, it built its goals on what the second wave failed to gain as it only emphasis on the middle class white women and neglected the black one; that made the third wave a backlash against racism it depict

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<sup>4</sup> Betty Friedan was an American writer, activist, and feminist. A leading figure in the women's mystique.

political gender and sexuality, in order to achieve the equality without taking race, class or nationality into consideration.

Gloria Anzaldua and Bell Hooks were examples of black feminists leaders who negotiate for consideration of racism, it provokes a big debate between the ones who believe that there are different differences between sexes and those who argue that there are not.

It is clearly mentioned and it could be easy to depict that the third wave is a gathering movement and a mixture of what the second wave neglected from race to gender and religion.

Third-wave feminism also contains internal debates between difference feminists such as the psychologist Carol Gilligan<sup>5</sup> (who believes that there are important differences between the sexes) and those who believe that there are no inherent differences between the sexes and contend that gender roles are due to social conditioning.

### **3. Feminist Literature Versus Kate Chopin Writings**

Feminism was a great movement taken by women to prove themselves by their fighting for equality; it was a successful movement all over eras thanks to the union of women at that time, and the power of some feminist pen.

Feminism is a movement that touched different aspects of life, including literature because words could inspire numerous brains and raise women's awareness thanks to the feminist's pens and paper.

Virginia Woolf the English writer, philosopher, critic and foremost modernist of the 20th century. She pioneered a new style of writing – the stream of consciousness, which she applied in most of her novels. In her writings, she explores problems of personal identity and relationships, love, isolation and change. Woolf's highly acclaimed novels are *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925), *To the Lighthouse* (1927) and *Orlando* (1928).

Literature during the nineteenth century shifted the feminist movement that affected positively in women's personality which helped them to represent the strong reliant,

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<sup>5</sup> Carol Gilligan, an American feminist, ethicist, and psychological he was best known by his work on ethical community.

intelligent and their voice to express themselves loudly. However, women's literature spread vastly by the end of nineteenth century, the feminists cause and the advancement of education of women gave the right to many female writers to express their opinion more freely than preceding centuries (Bomarito and Hunter 2005)

Among the famous and brilliant female authors of the period was Louisa May Alcott<sup>6</sup>, one of the writers with strong female characters, she wrote famous fiction stories such as "Little woman" in addition to the other works which are considered as profiler and that the violent tales with a very strong self-reliant female characters(Encyclopedia Britannica 2013).

Alcott's stories dealt with the different sides of women's dreams, ambitious, thoughts and spirituality of her own as another artist, Charlotte Perkins was a famous writer a commentator of women's evaluation and status in America (Elbert) Most of her stories represent the authoritative husbands and their miss psychological treatment; together with the strong thematic and symbolic pieces that have been chosen by Charlotte herself in order to represent the issue that faced women in America at that time.

Whenever feminism in America is mentioned, it is necessary to mention Kate Chopin. The latter had contributed to shaping that movement in America. In this respect, before dealing with her writings, it is a case in point to introduce the writer.

Kate Chopin was born Catherine O'Flaherty was born in February 8<sup>th</sup> 1850 in St Louise, Missouri to Eliza and Thomas. She was the third of five children, her mother was from French origins and her father was an Irish. Her father died when she had only five years old. She grew up with her mother, grandmother, and great grandmother. The later taught her French, music, and some stories on the St Louise women of the past, such as her great-grand mother. Kate Chopin grew up in a matriarchy surrounded by smart, independent, single women were an example of strength when she was sixteen. Her early source that inspired her to write is her great-grandmother in addition to her captivation by the French writer Guy De Maupassant, she said" I read his stories and marveled at them there wa life, not fiction, for where were the plots, old fashioned mechanism and stage, trapping that in a vague, unthinkable way I had fancied were essential to the art of the story making. Here was a man who had escaped from tradition

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<sup>6</sup> Louisa May Alcott was an American novelist and poet.

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 simply way told us what he saw...(Zea 20-21). The quote clarifies that Kate writing started from her influent by many sources. In January 1889, she published her first literary work was a poem *If It Might Be*, her second short story she wrote *Wiser than a god* to Philadelphia musical journal. After these two works Kate became considered as a professional writer even she had her own studio for writing.

Kate Chopin's novels and books were often a description of her past difficulties such as her husband and her father's death; she used these events as main theme in her short story an *hour*. Chopin's need to be preferable writer in eyes of readers and society at that time she decided to deviate from the usual topics and issues that were known during her time. She had the occasion to contextualize her influence by Guy De Maupassant, who wrote about topics that interested her such as adultery, suicide, insanity...etc.

Although, this sort of topics was rejected and unaccepted in the American society at that time, she refused to change her stories and continued in her branch without thinking about the general view; she was a writer who depicted her ideas with all details and clear prose.

Despite the critiques that face Kate Chopin's writing, she continued her works and she kept writing in addition, she kept her efforts under the idea that she had an effect on women in their real life. As an argument about her idea she received a lot of letters from women thanks to her, she affected their lives also she was invited to speak at a women's club luncheon in St .Louis.

### **Conclusion**

The nineteenth century witnessed the emergence of feminism in throughout Europe and America; this movement was a way for women to raise their voice and ask for their own rights both political and social, as well as to reflect their personalities and cut their profiles that was linked to man, children and homework. The American feminists were namely inspired by the European once especially in the domain of literature, as it was their way to express their thoughts and ideas, Kate Chopin was one of these writers who sought change through their pens.

# Chapter Two

The Analysis of Kate Chopin's  
*The Story of an Hour*  
and *The Awakening*

## Introduction

This part of the thesis deals with two influential works in the American literature, story of *An Hour* (1894) and the novel of *the Awakening* (1899), the two works are written by the great feminist writer Kate Chopin, which includes numerous themes and symbols which allude to the idea of freedom and self-expression throughout the two written works the chapter include the whole summary of the stories and their major themes and motifs.

In the mid- to late 1890s, *Vogue* was the place where Chopin published her most daring and surprising stories [‘The Story of an Hour’ and eighteen others]. . . . Because she had *Vogue* as a market—and a well-paying one—Kate Chopin wrote the critical, ironic, brilliant stories about women for which she is known today. Alone among magazines of the 1890s, *Vogue* published fearless and truthful portrayals of women’s lives ( Emily Toth <sup>1</sup>)

### 1. Analysis of *The Story of an Hour*

Chopin’s *The Story of an Hour* is a short story that took place in the Mallard residence during the late nineteenth century, Chopin investigates through the story many tragic events that the characters endured , she dealt with the thoughts of a woman who witnesses the death of her husband in accident and when she discovered that he is still alive. she died from the shock that is why, the reader noticed the irony in the story.

The story characterizes the feelings and emotions of Louisa Mallard when she received her husband’s news, this husband who was reported to have a train accident and died. The first sentence in the story mentioned that Madam Mallard had a heart trouble which stated to inform her the bad news in quiet and gentle way in order not to shock her. Louise received the news by her sister and her husband friend’s Richard which broke her heart when she became uncontrol by weeping into her sister’s arms , after a while she leaved the stage silently to her room in the upstairs. She took a set in front of the window suddenly she felt a strange feeling she had never felt before, she tried to escape from it but it was very strong feeling. It was feeling of freedom, despite she knew that when she will see him in his chest will be very sad she started to see the nature, but when she thought about the future years that she will pass without him and what she would enjoy, she felt happy and vital. She wished for herself the

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<sup>1</sup> Emily toth is a professor of English Women’s studies and a writer including as a columnist and several books and papers of the American writer, Kate Chopin.

freedom she search “free! body and soul free”. At that time, of relax she felt a new feeling, mixture between the social and physical freedom.

She peeped through the open window the tops of the trees which were out of her house, there were a delicious breath from the rain which was come from the peddle. She looked at the sky it showed some patches of sky which were concentrated on one place and they had piled on top of each other the western side of her house. She was leaning on the cushion of chair quietly but time to time she come up to her throat. Her behaviors were childish she was as a little child who has been crying before he goes to sleep because he continue to sob even in his dreams. She was younger, her face was calm and fair and her strength was shown over her face. Her stare was fixed at one of the patches on the sky. Her eyes showed that she is not reflecting something but she thought about something she waited for. She was confused about what was coming to her but she could distinct that there was a power moving from the sky to her. Her bosom was rise and fall and now she became aware of what was posses her, even she had a powerless hand she tried to fight. There was a little whisper for her lips Free Free.

It seemed that she relaxed from her heart beating faster. She was too happy, she imagined the coming time she would have without her husband who she thought that she had never loved him, by these moment she knew that the life and the time she was eagerly waiting for comes, and she will be finally in a position to feel freedom and enjoy herself, she wished that that time comes now and she welcomed it is a time where she will not be for somebody but she will be for herself, she will be free and far from any rule could impose her.

Because of the health problem, her sister set out of her room begging her to open the door, she was afraid that something bad will happen to her. After that, she opened the door and she was too calm. The two sisters descended to the staircase, they were there, when the husband entre the house, he was in a journey, he was alive because he was far from the scene of the accident By his arriving to the home Mrs. Mallard faced a difficult heart attack and she died, when doctors come told him that she died because of the heart disease, while in reality it was her shock because the unreal death of her husband.

The story represents the negative image of marriage as it is ironic in the same time, Kate Chopin’s themes and way of writing make the story very strong, also through the symbolism Kate shows what does marriage mean to women at that time , it was as limitation for them rather than a love relationship between them and their husbands. This seems clearly when the

protagonist was very happy when she received the news of her husband's death, she felt such feeling because he left her with a total freedom to enjoy her life and live it as she wanted. Also, the unloved relationship between them. Their marriage was not based on love so the story portrays the idea of the negative marriage. At the end of the story, it is mentioned that the protagonist died because of the heart disease which symbolizes a disease of marriage, in other words she could never been free till he died, also the disease which affected her heart shows the idea that she had difficulties in her life.

Throughout the story, it is clearly reveals that Mrs. Mallard is a well man, relating this fact by the description given by the author about his house which includes upstairs and the comfortable furnishing, also his coming from a journey contextualizes the idea that he travel to different l places, these images particularly it refers to a wealthy person. In the story, it is used the foreshadowing, by which Kate started her story by describing the protagonist in a weak image which led the end to be seems that something bad will happen to her. Moreover, every event during the story deals with the same idea, till the end of the story Kate gave an end that make the reader surprises. Then, the title of the story characterizes the fact that the hour which the protagonist lived was the last hour in her life. In addition, the death of the husband affects a lot all the life of Mrs. Mallard and what gave her the opportunity to have the freedom she had not before.

According to the protagonist her being no longer a wife of an alive husband permits her to live the way she wants. In addition, her looking from the open window the blue sky, the birds...etc. During a spring time gives her a rebirth and a new beginning. Also, the open window she drew her freedom where she was comforted by the blue sky that inspired her as it is a symbol of GOD, for her sky represent God who was soothing her. As another effect of the blue sky on Mrs. Mallard is her forgetfulness the feelings of guilt for her husband's death there would be no one to live for her during those coming years she would live for herself. There would be no powerful will bending her in that blind persistence with which men and woman believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature". Finally, her descend with her sister symbolizes her transformation from her imaginary world where she was the leader of her own body and soul and herself with her new freedom to the reality that she escaped from and facing the reality of her husband's return (Bartley).

## 2. Analysis of *The Awakening*

*The Awakening* is a novel written by Kate Chopin at the end of the nineteenth century. It was published in 1899. «noted as one of the first feminist works in American literature». The story centered around a housewife and mother who searches for independence and freedom. At the first time the novel was published, it created a big debate because it explored gender norms and spoke freely about female sexuality. *The Awakening* was Chopin's last novel after her death; the work became very influential. It was rediscovered in the twentieth century and gave her the name of a precursor feminist writer.

As in many works, *The Awakening* is set in two Louisiana localities: Grand Isle and New Orleans. The novel deals with the protagonist's journey of discovery. Edna Pontellier is the main character of the novel; she is 28 years old, a married woman with two children, and her husband Léonce, who is a good and successful businessman, is vacationing at the cottage of Madame Lerbun, who is the owner of the resort at Grand Isle where the Pontellier family spends their summers. It is clear that Edna and Léonce are paired by an unhappy marriage. As the story advances, it becomes clear that Léonce is not satisfied with his role toward his family, especially his two boys. Léonce saw her as a different version of mothers at that time.

Léonce is preoccupied with his work; he must leave his wife and sons in Grand Isle for a weeklong business trip, which made the situation affected negatively between him and his wife. During the time of his absence, Robert Lerbun, a 26-year-old man, the son of Madame Lerbun, who is handsome and a gentle person, and Edna spend time together. At the beginning, the relationship between them was pure, but as the summer advanced, the two became closer and Edna became more affected by Robert and she fell in love with him. Far from her unhappy relation with Léonce, she felt different. Edna started to feel the difference with the new kind of life that she had; she felt the independence and self-reliance also she felt better and vital than before as she devoted her awareness to her sexuality.

Being Edna a married woman pushed Robert to feel that the relationship between them would be impossible and pointless, so he decided to leave Grand Isle under the excuse of having a business venture. Edna and her family returned to their home in New Orleans but she behaved differently. She started painting and neglected all her social responsibilities, by replacing her role as a housewife by practicing art and works that she enjoyed, the thing that made Léonce upset about her change and decided to consult a doctor to help him to

reorganize his family. Dr Mardetele proposed and believed that if she left alone she will be fine and better. Léonce had a voyage to New York so he left his wife alone with the two sons, while the children went to their grandmother to spend some time with her, Edna was alone at home she thought about Robert every second she passed lonely. She felt freedom and independence for the first time in her life. she had another relationship with Alcee « the town seducer » who was able to fulfill her sexual needs, there was no emotional link between them she used her affair with him just to fulfill her animalistic needs, by the time Edna decided to leave her husband's home to live in a small cottage.

After period, she heard about Robert returning to the town from Mexico she met him in their friend's house, Robert declared to Edna his love and he thought about her all time but their speech was interrupted by her went to help a friend. After her return back to the cottage she found a note from Robert where he said good bye to her and that he loves her in addition, he tried to explain her that their love is forbidden and they cannot be together since she is a married woman. At a last scene Edna preferred to return to Grand Isle the place where she met Robert the first time, where she felt her first emotional and sexual awakening, her life ends up by embracing water remembering her freedom from her husband and children, she walked and considered all people who did not understand her or what her feelings were. Edna offered herself to the waves and let the water under take her.

The story ends by the opening question if Edna's suicide is a victory freedom or a passivity to the reality. The believable answer for a reader of Chopin's story is that she committed the suicide to complete her freedom and not to return to her past life that she was forced to live.

Chopin is a good example of American writers who reflected the review popularity of the American fiction and it widespread over all the world. As many people review her glamorous novel *The Awakening*. Meanwhile one cannot analyze without it knowing the main themes that were treated and represented in the author's work, Chopin throughout the story deposits the women's potential claim of their right to what the feminist Elizabeth Cady called « possessive individualism »(247). The writer suggests Edna's through owning something in particular, that is herself(stange126). Owning oneself, for Edna, is through the soul refusal of becoming a mother. That is confirmed by Stange who summarized the view of Edna as « the self exists in the presumption of the right to withhold oneself as a mother » (127).

For that, the withheld motherhood is self-expressed by the protagonist in other sub acts of the withholding. Instances like refusing oneself sexually and emotionally appears in the narrative. Edna expressed the former with her husband and the latter with her children, However, self –support occurs after Edna’s first swim, and that she is a motive for her self-expression. In addition, Edna’s experience of close death triggers her solitude and, hence, her confrontations with Léonce (Arnautu 602)

After her first successful swim, Edna experiences a moment of self-support and, due to the solitude of the near –death experience, Edna starts confronting her husband and decided to withhold herself self sexually in her relationship with him.

As another instance of freedom the protagonist insist that she has a self and freedom so she had the authority over herself and her body and to whom to offer them (Robert) and whom she refuses (her husband). her choice was under her will and self-expression planned by her.

Moreover, the symbols of the caged bird-the parrot- and the soaring birds above the beach represent freedom. As the Victorian New Orleans woman is characterized by physical attributes and entertaining, she has less freedom than the caged birds has. Metzger describes that by stating:

« Edna is an outsider, a woman who interests on family and social obligation. Edna is not creole, is not from the old New Orleans family. And that is not accustomed to the rules that govern this society » (28)

Depending on what Metzger mentioned, freedom is presented as illusive in Edna’s view of Grand Isle for that she does quite belongs to such paradise. Her view ,thus, has been due to the rigid confines of New Orleans community that bound her .

Suicide in *The Awakening* means Edna’s longing for freedom, the social one by which she has been bound condemn. Solitude have spaced the protagonist from her husband and children as well as friends. The different social and cultural perspectives that readers have can create different interpretations of the acts of suicide. Some readers may condemn that Edna spaced herself from her family, even the whole community. However, the author did not go for condemnation. The idea behind is that she searches for her freedom and the way to complete it.

As it seems a final way of escaping from her children. Edna developed the fact that she is not able to return to the ordinary life she had before. Therefore, the sole recourse for her, was suicide. Edna sought an evolving sense of self as spiritual rebirth, yet she was socially defeated, after she lost everything in her life her husband, Children and her lover as long as she committed adultery that was unacceptable at that time for a woman to love another person, she was expected to devote her life to obey her husband and give birth to children and take care of them, which was the thing refused by Edna and in the same time which led her to suicide, she preferred to complete her dream with herself in the sea which characterized for her the destiny of the total freedom. by the end, the novel was realistic for its time, where the author narrates what she saw and live in the real life. and death as a resolution may be logical or accepted especially in case of Kate Chopin's character. (Chrit 39).

Different roles have been pursued by the awakened protagonist. Particularly Edna performed many roles in the story. At an early stage in narrative, the unacceptable live which the protagonist forced to live. While in the last scene she mentioned that the protagonist in order to isolate herself and suicide better than reliving the difficult life she had the writer mentions instead of returning to the community where she cannot re-create herself. Edna commits suicide by swimming far out. Where no woman swum before (chopin46).

In her adulthood, Edna was not equipped psychologically for the life. Edna's interest in her own awakening of her sexuality shaped her search (Showalater77). That means when she had the affair with Robert and Alcée helped her to wake up and rebel to satisfied her animalistic needs even if she did not love the person. Where the idea characterized in the story which is argued by the author when she said that there was no emotional relationship between Edna and Alcée she used him only to satisfy her needs.

The example leads to one fact that is her awakening was not only over her freedom as human being but also it was over her sexuality as a young woman. Moreover, the narrative portrayed the sea as a seducer of Edna that can respond to her and fulfill her body and soul's longings, the sea was the only place chosen by Edna to fulfill her needs, it was where she felt the total freedom she searched for long time ago. For Edna, the sea was the starting point of her journey of freedom and self-reliance, that's why she chose it to end her dreams and gain what the thing that she sacrificed for « freedom ».

**Conclusion**

As a conclusion, Kate Chopin's works are a realistic works dealt with very sensitive issues that faced women's life during the nineteenth century, throughout *The Story of an Hour* and *The Awakening* analysis it seems clearly, to what extent women were suffering which led them to sacrificed their lives and prefer to died better the reliving under ruled and authoritative society.

# **Chapter Three**

Feminist Aspects in  
Kate Chopin's Two Works

## Introduction

This part of the dissertation deals with the major feminist aspects throughout a deep analysis of the main themes of the short story and the novel that the study is concerned with. The present chapter tackles the implicit meanings Kate Chopin wanted to deliver in both narratives, *The Story of an Hour* and *The Awakening*.

### 1. Feminist Aspects in *The Story of an Hour*

*The Story of an Hour* is a tale of women's situation during the nineteenth century in America, Mrs. Mallard is a weak person who had a heart problem that pushed people around her to pay attention to her and inform her about her husband's death carefully, her situation led the reader or the hearer to feel that she is a weak person the view above comes at the very beginning of Kate Chopin's story « knowing that Mrs. Mallard affected with a heart trouble, great care was taken to break to her as gently as possible the news of her husband's death ». Mrs. Mallard is an exquisite example of the conflicting emotions that must have led to many Victorian women immediately following the death of their husbands. Moreover, the weakness of Mrs. Mallard is shown in her solitude in her room and her paralyzed reaction when she heard the sad news of losing her own husband as the author said, she did not hear the story as many women have heard the same news, she behaved with a paralyzed inability to accept its significance « she swept at once, with sudden wild abandonment in her sister's arms. When the storm of grief had spent itself she went away to her room alone. She would no one follow her ».

according to Kate, Mrs. Mallard's sadness is artificial because there were other feelings behind her sadness that she react against the bad news, when she said that even she loved him and he was a good person with her but she feel better and more free now, because women married young, and their husbands became masters of not only their wives but also all her possessions and decisions as a consequence, her reaction changed from the powerless and the sad women reaction to another one full of happiness and strength that helped her to see life and things with different eyes as Kate implied that strength is repressed when she described Mrs. Mallard as having a face « whose lines bespoke repression and even a certain strength ». Mrs. Mallard is an exceptional woman who immediately began her decisions and plans for her future, by taking all her time in relaxing, the idea can be illustrated by Chopin when she wrote « there stood, facing the open window, a comfortable, roomy armchair. Into

this sank, pressed down by a physical exhaustion that haunted her body and seemed to reach into her soul ».

By the advance of the story's events Mrs. MALLARD became a strong person and her weakness started to disappear. She started to define her own by herself, when she set on the armchair and started looking from the open window « she could see in the open square before her house the tops of trees that were all aquiver with the new spring life ». The strength of the protagonist of being a free person and having her responsibility over herself contextualizes the idea of her changing from a weak woman rely on her husband to a woman who looks for everything new.

However, her ideas and emotions were not limited but they were an example of the open opportunities available to her at the moment that granted her the freedom, she always searched which she did not had during her husband's life, the author exemplified the idea when she said «but now there was a dull stare in her eyes, whose gaze was fixed away off yonder on one of those patches of blue sky. It was not a glance of reflection but rather indicated a suspension of intelligent thought ». Which means that the protagonist's thoughts were not about her husband's death but they were confined to her new way of living without limits. Louise acknowledges the joyous feeling of independence that Brantley's death has given her.

According to Chopin as a feminist and because she was influenced by her society where women were expected to be properties of their husbands, she illustrated her view by the scene when she spoke about her detachment from her husband is when her sister called her by her own name, after she lost her husband who defined her, she is no longer bearing the role of a wife and might follow the husband even though in the identity.

Besides, during the feminist movement marriage was not happy and successful as a lot of women wished, for them it was the barrier that limited their thoughts. In the story is shown to what extent the marriage could limit thoughts of women during the nineteenth century. The idea can be justified by Mrs. Mallard's thoughts that changed after her husband's death; Kate Chopin wrote «she berated a quick prayer that life might be long. It was only yesterday she had thought with a shudder that life might be long». Which means that, the death of her husband and her liberation from the limits of being a married woman gave her the capacity to look a new view with different eyes to a new life in future. Which pushed her to wish that her life time will be longer than before in order to have enough time of living to enjoy it.

By contrast, when she was expected as a house wife obey to her husband she did not see a value of her life and she would rather die than live all her life obeying to him. The freedom and thoughts of Mrs. Mallard made the irony of the story.

At the end of the story Mrs. Mallard died, doctors said that she died because of her happiness of seeing her husband alive. As a hearer of the declaration of doctors could be available and believable but as readers of Chopin's story we know that her death was a result of her chock and disappointment, Kate Chopin as a feminist define in her work the strength that women could have far from the social boundaries that oppressed to what sense they could sacrificed in order to gain their freedom, they could spend their life and prefer death than living under their husband's authority. Kate used the ironic drama which made the story a clear definition to the women's situation during the century which was the main goal of many feminist writers at that time. The story is an interesting piece; it describes a young married woman reaction when she heard her husband's death, and her happiness toward the new life.

## **2. Feminist Aspects in *The Awakening***

As another significant work by the great writer *The Awakening* is a novel includes a lot of themes and meaning near to *The Story of an Hour*. Kate in her works spoke about the way of living that women lived during the nineteenth century as she characterized their way of thinking and to what extent they used to embrace their dreams, her works also symbolize the strength of their emotions of being free till they could spend their lives.

To start with, the nineteenth century remembered as time of struggle and fighting especially the social side including the women's rights and demands to be equal to men and their need to be a free member in society. *The Awakening* is a novel that embodies the struggle of women in society. Where women supposed to be under their father's control before marriage, after that they used to be a property of their husbands and live their life for him and their children, which means that there was no meaning to their lives. It was the case of Edna Pontellier, the main character of *The Awakening* she was transformed in many ways by Kate Chopin, the author focuses her description of the protagonist on showing the reader the main feminist aspects she wanted to discuss in her novel.

First of all, the self-expression, her first thoughts about freedom was when she met the Creoles in Grand Isle, when they spoke about sex and childbirth freely and openly, these persons represent to her the ability to speak and express herself freely. After her connection

with them Edna became an open-minded woman and she got out from her timidity to start her first act of self-expression, the idea above could be justified by the author when she wrote a characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable (Chopin 13).

As consequence of her setting with Creole persons Edna changed her thoughts and image about the creoles because she taught that they defy the traditional role of the Victorian women, also when she read the book of « *rounds of pension* » she reacted the opposite they reacted, they discussed it openly. What emphasized to her the idea that being a Creole woman open to her all the boundaries to express herself freely. we can illustrate that by the feminist's passage never would Edna Pontellier forgot the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the frowning story of one of her accouchements without holding no intimate detail (Chopin 13).

Moreover, music and art were a way followed by Edna to express herself. She describes listening to music as a way of evoking pictures to her mind it is claimed by Kate Chopin when she said that she had away of evolving pictures in her mind by connecting people of art Edna became aware that art could be expressive and it allowed her to express herself because art dominate on her mind and feeling she went far away while listening Mdlle Reize's playing piano. as Kate declared the very passions theme selves were aroused with in her soul, sawing it, as the wave's daily beat upon the splendid body ( Chopin 29). During her listening moments Edna's emotions and feelings started to develop and change from one stage to another, that she had never felt before what make her able to express her emotions publicly by using her talent of art.

Edna learns how to express herself sexually after her relationship either with Robert or with Alcee. The reality that pushed her to create other relations is that she had a loveless marriage relation with her husband for her when she felt in love it was her emotions awakening, for her it was for the first time she had a successful sexual relationship far from the one with Léonce , Also it was the thing that pushed her to wish to pass more and more time with Robert . these emotions increased on Edna's brain and heart every time she walks with Robert on the beach, the writer argue the idea by writing throbbing of desire (Chopin 34). For Edna being in love is a good and new experience and step in her life that she

transferred her feeling and expressed herself especially her spiritual side which led her to refuse living in a loveless relation and search again a new love after Robert's travel.

Edna's transformation of her self-expression continued when she returned her family home, she started painting and organizing meetings with her friends instead of having a day in waiting to receive persons who want to visit her, the idea comes in Chopin's novel, she completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her (Chopin 63). Her use of her talent gave her the power and the opportunity to make the decision of leaving her husband's house to live alone and manage her life by her own.

Second, as another feminist aspect treated by Kate Chopin in her work is freedom, it is a highlighted theme in the novel, the author dealt with Edna's needs to escape and liberate herself from her husband's and children's obligations, Also her performance such reaction is to interpret her feelings and her disagreement to the kind of life that she was forced to live it. It was the point that pushed her to rebel and demand her freedom in many ways. The desire for radical freedom is what is behind her obsession with the sea, that she complete her gaps according to her and gave her what she wanted freedom and being free. There are various faces of Edna's desire which are depicted artistically by the feminist writer. As a point of departure had taken by the protagonist is swimming, when she started to swim she felt that she had a power to control her body and soul for her using her body and soul by the way and the case she wanted symbolized her the freedom she searched about, Kate Chopin illustration to her idea comes in the chapter ten when she said :

a feeling of exultation overtook her, as if exultation of significant importance had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. she wanted to swim far out, Were no woman had swam before (Chopin31).

The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, Gave her no regret no longing it was not a condition of life which fitted her, and moved by a kind of commiseration for Madam Rattingole, a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish she would never have taste of life's delirium (Chopin 62).

The quote above contextualizes the idea that ever thing surround Edna claim for her that she will have a different and new life, first she will advance over the freedom scene. Especially after analyzing the speech it is clearly depicted that the harmony offered her and gave her more and more taste of life that she did not knew because she was unhappy in her marriage which is a reality told by Kate in there were days when she was unhappy, she did not knew why (Chopin64).

By analyzing her speaking about marriage, we can remark that in her relationship with her husband was not too satisfied and she wanted to escape from it.

The conclusion drawn when she said wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth (Chopin73). All these elements characterized the Edna's desire and searching of freedom.

Moreover, the protagonist's freedom defined in her feeling of having a place and a voice in the social scale, she felt that she get what she wanted which gave her more strength and expansion as an individual to live and continue her life without needing any help of any one which pushed her to see the decision of leaving her husband's house offer her freedom and the ability to take her responsibility by her own.

Finally, the freedom that Edna was search about, ended with the decision to offer herself to the waves of the sea, in other words Edna's freedom ended as a total and open-ended one, when she felt that no one thing in the world that she desired and expected. In addition to the reality of committing adultery with both Robert and Alcee. Also, she knew that the freedom she had led her to lose every person around her she decided to draw the end of her life either the old or the new one with all desires she had. she gave herself to the sea while she embraced the waves she felt finally that she lives herself for her own. Which is mentioned clearly by the end of the story

« Edna found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

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

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky !how delicious ! she felt like some new –born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace (Chopin125).

The quote above argues the idea that Edna finally get the freedom she demanded during all her marriage life, by the lonely solution she saw it suitable, in the large sea where the waves invited and called her, by her entering the sea she felt as someone rebirth, which means that she started her life from the beginning.

According to Edna the sea symbolized her the large place where she could have what she ever wanted, also it was the place where she thinks for the last time in her life, her husband, children, lover, and friends, as long as her father and her sister Margaret's.

After the literary analysis of Kate Chopin works, it is clearly mentioned that Kate Chopin was feminist to a far extent and her ideas were flying over all the difficulties that faced women during the nineteenth century, by her role she wrote *The Story of an Hour* and focused on the female oppression at that time and more specifically marriage of the time where women were owned by their husbands. Chopin reveals the tragedy of this situation through an intimate exploration of the protagonist as well as the descriptive details of the story. The feminist perspectives expressed in the story is freedom, which is the main goal demanded by all women at that time. Freedom is the initial aim through the beginning of the feminist movement by all the activists and the famous members. Also, marriage could be defined as a feminist perspective, because the married women at that time were suffering from the inequality and the authority of their husbands. Which was the reality that make Kate Chopin depict it loudly in her series of novels and short stories.

Moreover, *The Awakening* also is another significant work where Chopin treated the same issues depicted in *The Story of an Hour*, she dealt with the perspective of freedom which every woman needed as a consequence of the social and life boundaries. Also, the self-expression, is a present perspective in the novel, where it seems clearly throughout the analysis that the protagonist performed various roles under the idea of the self-expression, she

moved from one stage to another searching and fighting for gaining a suitable life she wished. Finally, in the two stories Kate declared the same end, but in a different way the first one the protagonist died because of the shock and the disappointment of being free after her husband's death, her imaginary and real life ended by the entering of the husband. While, in the novel of *The Awakening* the protagonist chooses by her own her end, she preferred to suicide and not to return her previous life, for Kate as a feminist the death of Edna is a victory step taken by the protagonist to fulfill her dreams and realize the victory freedom.

### **Conclusion**

Chopin has employed some aspects of feminism in her narratives. Those aspects have been extracted from and discussed throughout the short story and the novel that the study is concerned with. To conclude, Kate Chopin's stories were a reflection to the reality, they considered as the window from a lot of women knew their existence and their lives' value, as Kate's pieces contextualized the idea of women's strive to get their rights in different aspects of life.

## General Conclusion

Feminism was a successful activity taken by women, centuries ago they used to be feminists and applied all the rules that led them to realize their wants, feminist flourishing started through Europe to America, highlighted nearly the same aims. As a consequence, a lot of women influenced by its emergence and their status in life ameliorated from the bad to the best.

It was the case in Kate Chopin's works, her female protagonists get whatever they wanted even if it was imagination, Kate's style of writing and the way she followed to depict out the women's issues at that time, make her works very influential and attractive. Through her stories the very highlighted themes were really essential to a human being, in particular for a woman. She often defined their unhappy marriage lives, their suffering and the authority of their husbands, etc. Her works to advocate instead of liberate them from the chains that they forced to be under them.

After reading and analyzing the two works of the American writer, Kate Chopin *The Story of an Hour* and *The Awakening*, it is clear that Kate was feminist granting much focus to the spiritual side of life of her female protagonists, she mentioned their search for freedom in order to liberate themselves and escape from the chains of marriage, to give them the brevity to live their lives the way they wanted under the idea of living themselves for themselves non for some body's else.

She also mentioned another issue in her novel, which is the sexual freedom. Women at that age were not allowed to have extra sexual relationships, they used to obey and devote their life and youth for their husbands, where they did not have the right of using their bodies or their souls the way they wanted, this led Kate Chopin to allow them vent their sexual needs far from their marriage boundaries.

Kate Chopin was a precursor feminist, throughout an analysis of her social, literary life. She appears as a female defending females and advocating a new wave of thinking in the America world, that of feminism.

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