



**A STUDY OF EDNA'S REBELLION REFLECTING
FEMINISM IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING***

A thesis presented to the English Department,
Faculty of Letters, University of Jember
as one of the requirements to get
the Award of Sarjana Sastra Degree
In English Studies

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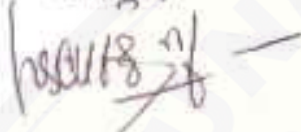
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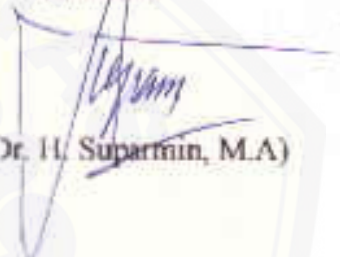
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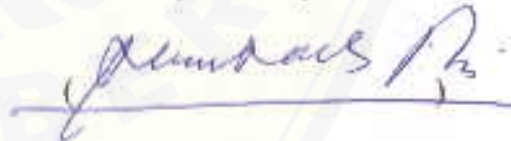
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**With the deepest love and respect,
This thesis is profoundly dedicated to:**

My Beloved Parents:

Juari and Isnacni

My Beloved sisters:

Akris Dwi yanti and Hesti Tri retnosari

My Beloved friend:

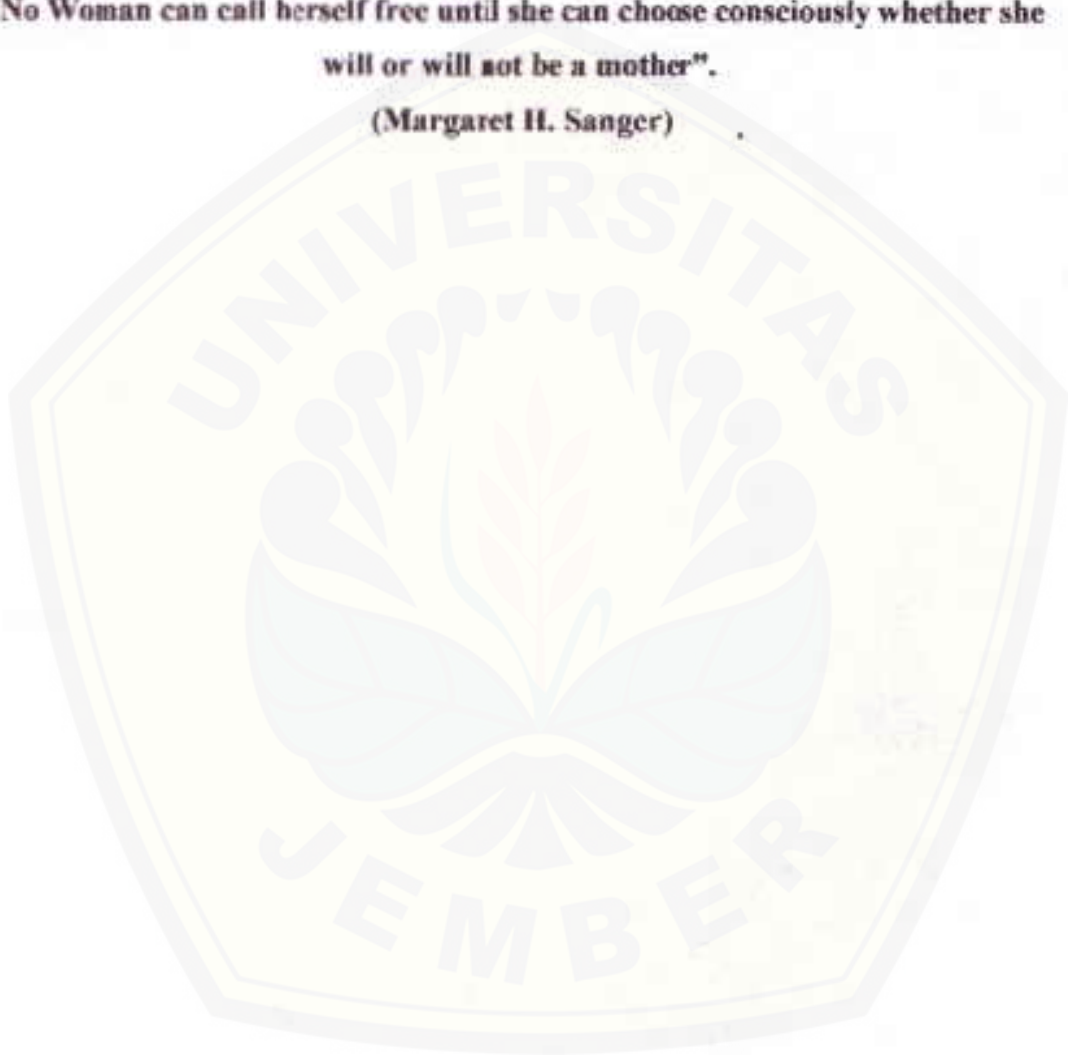
Leonard Budyanto

My Beloved Almamater

MOTTO:

**“No Woman can call herself free who does not own and control her body.
No Woman can call herself free until she can choose consciously whether she
will or will not be a mother”.**

(Margaret H. Sanger)



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CHAPTER I INTRODUCTION

1.1 The Rationale

Literature related to the life. Therefore, literature is a medium to express imagination, experience and knowledge of human's life. Besides, it is also the product of human creation that includes in it the values or the element of culture of people living in a certain place and in certain era. As a member of society, an author records the changing of the society itself in literary works. Cleanth Brook states, "Literature, in one sense is a product of, and commentary on, the life process, and we can only get sense of the meaning of experience by living through it" (1964: 1).

From the definition of literature above, it can be said that through literature we can learn about a certain society as De Bonald says in *Theory of Literature*, "literature is expression of society" (In Wellek, 1956: 95). Thus, those who read literary works will find the knowledge about the condition of society at the particular time expressed by the author.

There are three forms of literary works namely, poetry, drama and prose. Novel as part of prose usually presents the development of a character, the social situation and the relationship among the characters. Novel as one of literary forms portraying real life. It also describes the condition of life and society in a particular time. Reading a novel can bring the readers to the realities of human life and situation surround it. Clara Reeve says in *An Introduction to Fiction* that "The novel is a picture of real life and manner, and of time in which it was written" (Kennedy, 1983: 182).

Moreover, as a reflection of human life, novel conveys various problems of life such as love, friendship and society. When reading a novel, we often find some problems, which resemble or even look exactly the same as people's problems. Through the characters of the novel, the writer tries to solve the

problems according to the way he feels and his view into the problem. It is stated by Hudson in *An Introduction to the Study of Literature* that:

"Every novel must necessarily present a certain view of life and of some of the problems; that is, it must so exhibit incidents, characters, passions, motives, as to reveal more or less distinctly the way in which the author looks out upon the world and his general attitude towards it" (1965: 131)

By reading a novel, we can understand many sides of life and we can learn from others' mistakes to increase our understanding from their failures. Novel gives us some messages in failures and in facing life, whether it is happy or sad, up or down, in order to make a better personality and a better life.

Kate Chopin is a novelist. She began to write, novel in 1889. In 1899, she finally became an author and she wrote her masterpiece, *The Awakening*. The novel is about love between people of radically different backgrounds and the possibility of more than one relationship in a lifetime. It is also about the power of a woman to live by her own principles to get the freedom of life. *The Awakening* is Kate Chopin's fourth novel, which was published in St. Louis. In this novel, Kate Chopin tells us about Edna Pontellier who features the idea of feminism that woman is an independent individual who is in control of her own destiny and freedom.

Edna Pontellier becomes increasingly estranged from her husband. The latter regards her as his property. After a period of her duties as a wife and a mother, she leaves her husband and her family as a single woman who loves another man.

The Awakening is interesting to analyse. Firstly, because the novel tells about Edna Pontellier who becomes a wife of successful Creole Stockbroker who is full of passion and she has her own mind of independence. Edna embarks on path of emotional, intellectual, and sexual awakening after spending a very pleasant summer with her young admirer in trying to gain a sense of herself as a complete, autonomous human being. She flouts convention by moving out of her husband's house, having an adulterous affair and becoming an artist. Secondly,

this is a fascinating novel because it tells about a possibility that may happen in real life. What is experienced by the characters in the novel can be found in our real lives. The love, hatred, jealousy, depression, failure, success, and happiness can happen in this life. Human being as a person who lives in society can experience these all.

Actually, *The Awakening* is one of the greatest novels of Kate Chopin that is considered to be one of the first feminist books that conveys many messages about life besides presents amusement for its readers.

1.2 The Problem to Discuss

Characters are the important element in a novel. They behave and act such as the people in society do. They also experience and undergo events as what people do in their real lives. A novel deals with events and action and the things experienced by a human, may also be experienced by the characters in a novel. In Kate Chopin's work, *The Awakening*, there is an awakening of the main female character, Edna Pontellier who is against the system of Creole community, especially about wives' domestic role that is very much interesting to discuss further. In the discussion, the main character's rebellions will be presented, but it will be limited on some rebellions that convey the essence of feminism. These are about the journey of the main female character to find freedom and independence to determine her own life.

This thesis discusses the woman's rebellion against the pressure of the community system in *The Awakening* as the reflection of New Orleans' Creole culture. The Creole husbands ownership over their wives is similar to enslavement. Like a slave, a Creole wife who completely depends on her husband for her life security, has to reserve her own will and mind to please and not to oppose her husband. The rebellion of Edna Pontellier as a Creole wife that conveys feminism against the pressure in her community system is chosen to be the object of the discussion.

1.3 The Scope of the Study

The scope of the study is needed to frame up the problem and to prevent a complicated discussion of the thesis. It is used in order to achieve the proper understanding of the study. There will be the limitation on the discussion to focus on the problems. The discussion in this thesis is only focused on the rebellion of the main female character under the pressure of Creole's community system. The rebellion itself conveys the essence of feminism. Edna Pontellier as the main female character in the novel shows up her attitudes and decision, which encourage her rebellions. She leaves her family, makes affairs with another man, and goes away from her husband, to be an artist not a good wife or a good mother. Finally, she is getting her real freedom when she decides to commit suicide.

The main subject that will be discussed in this thesis is determined by the problems described above. The thesis explains in detail the facts in the novel that are related to the problems through the data analysis.

1.4 The Approach to Use

A certain approach is required to make easier in analysing scientific study. The approach that is used in this thesis is a pragmatic approach applying feminism theory. This approach is used to facilitate the understanding on Edna Pontellier as one of the fictitious characters in the novel, by comparing the main character's deeds, actions and attitudes with a feminism theory. Besides the pragmatic approach, it is used to examine the main character's rebellion reflecting feminism.

1.5 The Method of Analysis

In writing a thesis, a method of analysis is needed to determine the composition of the thesis. The method used to find out the fact whether or not Edna's rebellion reflects feminism is inductive method. Shew states that, "Introduction tries to establish a general truth from the observation of specific facts, or particulars, the inductive process of reasoning reaches a principle or conclusion" (1972: 201).



The inductive method is applied to search the specific deeds, actions, events, or attitudes of the main character in the novel. Then, the particular facts of the main character that leads to her rebellions are used to prove that her rebellions reflect of feminism. This thesis is composed through library research. It is used to gain information that is useful and suitable to sustain the discussion. The data and information are taken from some books and references that are appropriate for the subject of the discussion.

1.6 The Goals of the Study

The first goal of composing this thesis is to make clear understanding and detail analysis of what the rebellion of the main character in the novel undergoes and how the rebellion reflecting feminism. Besides, it is also aimed to find the correct definition of the feminism and rebellion. The other purposes of the study are to apply the theory of literature that we get in class during the period of my study in Faculty of Letters, especially on feminism. The second is to find some moral messages about the same position, rights and opportunity between man and woman, both in the family and society.

1.7 The Organization of the Thesis

The thesis is written systematically in order to gain effectiveness in the discussion of the topic. The thesis will be divided into five chapters: the first chapter is introduction which is divided into the rationale, the problem to discuss, the scope of the study, the approach to use, the method of analysis, the organization of the thesis, and the goals of the study. The second chapter is the biography of the author and the synopsis of the novel, which is divided into the biography of Kate Chopin as the author of the novel and the synopsis of *The Awakening*.

In the third chapter the writer will discuss the meaning of the terms: the meaning of feminism and the meaning of rebellion. The fourth chapter will discuss the feminism of the main character's rebellion. It is divided into the reason of the main character's rebellion and Edna as an autonomous individual. Edna

Pontellier, the main character of the novel who is trying to live a life of freedom until she dies. The last chapter of the thesis will be the conclusion of the discussion above.



CHAPTER II

THE BIOGRAPHY AND THE SYNOPSIS

2.1 The Biography of Kate Chopin

Kate Chopin was born as Katherine O' Flaherty on February 8th, 1850 in St. Louis. She was a daughter of a prosperous Irish merchant father and French descent mother. Unfortunately, her father died when she was merely four years old. So, her great-grandmother, Madame Victoire Verdèn Charvile brought her out since her father had died. Madame Victoire, an aristocratic Creole, independent and freethinker, tutored young Chopin speaking and writing French. Thus, Kate Chopin grew up well being acquainted with French language and culture that later influenced her fiction, specifically *The Awakening*. After being tutored by her great grandmother, Kate entered the Academy of Sacred Heart, from which she was graduated in 1868.

During the same years the popular New York Ledger columnist, Fanny Fern, argued for political, economic and even clothing reforms for women, Kate's education at the hands of the Sacred Heart nuns in St. Louis was designed to inculcate modesty and submissiveness. Although academic standards at the Academy were rigorous, marriage and motherhood were the only futures anyone envisioned for the young women.

However, writing was encouraged in Kate's social class. Like musical ability, writing essays and poetry was considered appropriately to womanly grace in South. When Kate was a teenager, she read Susan Warner's *The Wide, Wide Word and Queechy*, that underscored woman's natural aptitude for the domestic sphere. Although a teenager, she might well have accepted this value uncritically. When she wrote *The Awakening* in 1890s, Kate created a heroine who rejected domesticity in favour of her own fulfilment.

Following her graduation from the academy of the Sacred Heart, Kate O'Flaherty followed the path, expected of upper-middle-class young women. She entered St. Louis society, aimed to acquaint her with marriageable young men.

Yet, to her diary Kate confessed that all the parties wearied her. She wrote that the social ritual only practiced her to control her face so that to look pleased, interested and entertained.

Despite her negative comment on the party, Kate met a man with whom she would marry, Oscar Chopin. In 1870, Chopin family moved and took residence at Magazine Street in New Orleans. Claiming more freedom than would have come naturally to a woman of her social position, and a mother, Kate Chopin took long walks alone and observed the people and the activities of the city. Edna also spent the summer months at Grand Isle. In addition, New Orleans and Grand Isle becomes the setting of *The Awakening*.

Nevertheless, the Chopin had to leave New Orleans and moved to Cloutiersville, where Oscar died three years later and Kate Chopin was suspected to have an affair that had a profound effect on her life and her fiction. As a matter of fact, before Oscar died, Kate Chopin was known for being flirtatious and independent. She liked to take solitary horseback rides and she smoked cigarettes. The object of her desire was Albert Sampite, a local landowner known as a womanizer. One of the male characters in *The Awakening*, who inspired sexual response from Edna, was darkly handsome just like Albert Sampite and named Alcee, which could represent a shortening name of Albert Sampite's name.

After her husband's death owing to malaria Kate Chopin capably carried on her husband's business, the plantation, single-handed for more than two years. But then, she returned to St. Louis where she made friends with people who were more famous for their intellectual interest and liberal thought, than their adherence to the rituals of social class and religions. Although Kate Chopin herself never became a reformer, her association with these people undoubtedly had an effect on her fiction, in which her female character devised convention.

In 1899, Kate Chopin finally took up her vacation as an author and her first novel is *At Fault*. Yet, Edna's first nationally published book is *Bayou Folk* and in 1897 she wrote *A Night in Acadie*. In 1899, Kate Chopin wrote her masterpiece, *The Awakening*, about a wife who leaves her family for her love to

another man. *The Awakening* led such a harsh plea that Kate Chopin became both the publishers and editors.

Some rumours said that Kate Chopin was so devastated by the negative reaction to *The Awakening*, that Kate Chopin decided to quit writing. The fact that she did not publish another novel or collection of short stories had more to do with her death in 1904 than with her reaction to the critics of her masterpiece. In 1900, *The Youth Companion* still accepted several of Kate Chopin's stories for children and *Vogue* published, "*The White Eagle*" in July of that year. The local newspapers also still sought Kate Chopin's opinion as well. By 1902, Kate Chopin's poor health required her to curtail her social activities and in August 22 1904, Kate Chopin died because of a brain haemorrhage.

2.2 The Synopsis of *The Awakening*

The main female character of the story, Edna Pontellier, married to a Creole businessman, Leonce Pontellier, with whom she has two children. At the beginning, she is quite unable to voice her dissatisfactions. Yet she is persistently uncomfortable with her life as a mother and she learns to think of herself as an autonomous human being. In fact, her dull marriage that seems to be acceptable now is becoming irritating and constricting. So, she rebels against social norms by leaving her husband Leonce and having an affair. The first half of the novel takes place in Grand Isle, an island off the coast of Louisiana. In Grand Isle, the Creole families from New Orleans spend their summer time to escape from the heat and to relax by the ocean.

During the summer, Edna Pontellier meets a young gallant named Robert Lebrun, whose mother rents out the cottages on the island. They spend almost all their time together, and Edna enjoys her company, especially since her husband returns to the city to work. Due to Robert's constant presence, Edna starts to experience a change within herself as a unique person, with unique interests and desires. She realizes that she is not content to be simply a wife and a mother, and she begins to assert herself to her husband.

Edna and Robert also spend a lot of time in and near the ocean. Edna's moment of self-discovery is tied up to the ocean. One day they take a spontaneous day trip to another island in a boat, and Edna undergoes her great moment of awakening. She suddenly learns how to swim, after being frustrated in her efforts before. When Robert realizes that he and Edna are becoming very close, he suddenly departs from the island and goes to Vera Cruz for business prospects. Edna is upset and she becomes depressed after he leaves her. That summer, Edna also makes friends with Madame Ratignolle, who is happily married and in her fourth pregnancy. She is the epitome of maternity. Mademoiselle Reisz, an eccentric, unmarried old woman who can make Edna weep by playing the piano is also her epitome.

The Pontelliers return to the city, where Leonce occupied himself with his business purchasing extravagant possessions for their home on Esplanade Street. At first Edna settles into her usual routine and then she begins to take up painting and starts behaving in what her husband considers an uncharacteristic manner. This makes Leonce confused with Edna's condition and he decides to go to Doctor Mandelet to ask for advice. The Doctor advises him to leave his wife alone and even though he suspects that Edna probably is in love with another man, he has to say nothing to Leonce.

Edna simply decides to do what she wants, regardless of what her husband or society may think. For example, Edna's father, the Colonel, comes to visit the Pontelliers for inviting Edna to attend her sister's wedding in Kentucky but she refuses the invitation. After the Colonel's departure, Leonce and the children also leave Edna be alone. Leonce has extended business in New York, and the children go to stay with their grandmother in the country. She continuously thinks about Robert, while sometimes she is happy and sometimes she is sad. Edna discovers that Robert has been writing letters to Madamemoiselle Reisz about her, and she starts to visit her frequently to read the letters and to listen to her friend to play the piano. She enjoys her newfound freedom. She eats in solitary, peaceful dinners, visits her friends and takes up painting everyday. She also goes to racetracks to bet on horses and begins spending a lot of time with Alcee Arobin, a charming

young man who has the reputation of being a philanthropist. She wins a great deal of money gambling and her relationship with Arbia starts to come very close, especially on Edna's sexual life. Edna starts to realize her position as a free individual, and her role as mother and wife does not fit her individual being. She abandons her domestic responsibilities, eventually she decides that she is going to move out of the Pontellier house and Esplanade Street with her gambling wins and the sale of her paintings, she has enough fund to support herself and she intends to move to a smaller house. In a few days she holds a small dinner party to celebrate her birthday and her moving out of the house. The event is very pleasant and elaborate, and all the guests have a good time. Edna enjoys her new abode. It makes her feel free from the common social constraints and she continues her affair with Alcee Arbin. That same day she gets the news that Robert is returning to New Orleans, and she admits for the first time that she is in love with him. She runs into Robert at Mademoiselle Reisz' apartment. They profess their love to each other, and Robert expresses his desire to marry her. Suddenly, a message from Madame Ratignolle arrives, saying that she is in labor. Edna has promised to go to her and she leaves Robert, who promises to await her return. Madame Ratignolle warns her that she must always consider her children in whatever she does. Edna is depressed at her friend's words, but she is excited to rejoin Robert. She finds Robert have gone forever.

In the end of the story, Edna returns to Grand Isle. She realizes that the society will not understand her individual being, and then she walks down to the beach and stand naked. Without thinking, she begins to swim out into the ocean. She thinks about the way she has to escape from her children and she continues to swim until she is exhausted. While she swims the memories of her childhood flash before her eyes as she slowly drowns. Finally, She engulfed by the sensuous water, since she determines to live by her own way.

CHAPTER III

THE MEANING OF THE TERMS

Literary works are interesting to read and criticize, because literary works are related to our lives. To analyze literary works people have to understand the literary terms. This chapter explains the meaning of the terms, which have close relation with the main discussion of the following chapters. It is necessary to understand the meaning of the terms before coming to the most important chapter of the thesis. The title is divided into two important terms, they are rebellion and feminism.

3.1 The Meaning of Rebellion

There are some definitions of rebellion. These definitions are mostly taken from dictionaries and websites of the Internet. According to "*Webster's Third E.W International Dictionary of The English Language*", the meaning of rebellion is an open opposition to a person or thing in a position of authority or dominance (1966: 1892). According to "*Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*", the word rebellion is being unwilling or does not like to obey rules or accept normal standard of behaviour (2000: 1057). This means that rebellion happens to a person who opposes or does not like to obey the rules or to accept the normal standard of community system or behaviour. It is like the main character that undergoes life in the community system based on a domestic role of Creole's wife and mother, so women have no opportunity to develop their personalities. This novel's content is a study on the attempts of Edna Pontellier to end the pressure of Creole's community system by doing everything, which depends on her own freedom and choice.

The meaning of rebellion is an opposition to one who is in authority or dominance over them. In this novel, its society is comparable to people in real society. Finally, one can get the meaning of rebellion by summarizing all the definitions above. The meaning of rebellion is the power to struggle against the

dominant rules over the community system by opposing the rules of the normal standard of community system or the behaviour of the society. Related with the novel, Edna Pontellier is the main character that has great desire to struggle against all rules around her. She does anything which is suitable with her own principles as an independent woman. Even the society is not comfort with her attitudes, especially her husband and her friends.

3.2 The Meaning of Feminism

In *Webster's Third E.W International Dictionary of The English Language*, Philip Batcock Cove explains that there are two meanings of feminism.

"The presence of female characteristics in male, and organized activity on behalf of women's right and interests: the 19th and 20th century movement seeking to remove restrictions that discriminate against women or the theory of the political, economic, and social equality of the sexes." (1966:837)

This means that women are equal with men in all aspects of life, including in: politics, economy, social life. Women have the same rights to develop their personalities.

According to *Oxford Advanced Learner's Dictionary*, feminism is the belief and aimed that women should have the same rights and opportunities as men: the struggle to achieve this aim (2000: 466). This definition is almost same as the definition of Webster dictionary. So, these two definitions have the similar opinion in determining the meaning of feminism, especially the quality of rights between men and women.

In addition, Hunter College Women's Studies Collective in *Women's Realities Women's Choice: An Introduction to Women's Studies*, states that:

"Generally feminism is a set of beliefs, values and attitudes centered on the high evaluation of women as human beings. Further, feminism argues that woman has to value her autonomy and works for condition that favour her independent control of her destiny." (1983: 4)

As a free individual, a woman should not accept her life in passive manner and determines her way of life by her own self. However, Edna Pontellier is a

representation of a woman who rejects the domestic role of wives and mother, being an independent individual who controls her own destiny.

According to Warhol (in www.amazoncastle.com), the other meaning of feminism is a doctrine that advocates equal rights for women or the movement aimed at equal rights for women. It means that feminists often argued that women had been somewhat under pressured in the society and they often argued that male fears are portrayed through female characters. A feminist believes that because of their sex, race, class, education, age, and physical power, women are always under pressure. Unfortunately, women have no opportunity to come out from the pressure.

In the early 19th century, Charles Fourier, a French socialist invented the word feminist. According to him, "a new woman both change and be changed by society based on association and mutuality". At the first time, the word feminist appeared in English. Later, the word was used to describe the people who had known women's oppression in all aspect of life, and people who recognized women's differences and equality" (1989: 75). Simone de Beauvoir, in *The Second Sex* (1949), established:

"With great clarity the fundamental questions of modern feminism, when a woman tries to define herself, she starts by saying I am a woman. No man would do so. This fact reveals the basic imbalance between the terms men and women. Being dispersed among men, women have no separate history, no natural solidarity, they have no combined as other oppressed groups have" (Raman Selden, 1986: 129).

Before the 19th century, it was very common that women's place was in the house. The most ideal women's role and position were women as a wife and a mother. People expected that women function on natural female, which based on women's ability to give birth. In addition, women had to have the qualities or appearance considered to be typical of women and women had to fulfil their duties, especially in their domestic role.

In *Wanita dan Kesetaraan Gender*, Sita Aripurnami states that feminism means women must have an ability to show her femininity, so every woman is able to do anything which man can do. This idea is the result of the struggle to

make a better fate for women (Wanita dan Media, 1998: 389-390). Actually, it is hard to imagine the equality between men and women in many aspects of life. This means that it is the value which gives the same chance for men and women in politics, social, culture, education and economic.

A feminist attempts to bring a new definition of the women's sense of themselves. They have a purpose to change their status as a second class to achieve true equality, to desire recognition as independent people and to value their being women. In *Analisis Gender dan Transformasi Sosial*, Mansour Fakhri states that the women are basically oppressed and exploited. There must be any attempt to end that oppressions and exploitations (1996: 79). The rebellion or struggle that conveys the essence of feminism is for the equality of status and freedom to control their lives, either inside or outside the house.



CHAPTER V CONCLUSION

In 1899, Kate Chopin wrote her masterpiece, *The Awakening*, about a wife who leaves her family for her love to another man. "The Awakening" is considered to be one of the first feminist books and one of the greatest novels of Kate Chopin. The novel tells about Edna Pontellier, the main female heroine of *The Awakening*, she is a housewife of a successful Creole stockbroker, Leonce Pontellier with two children.

According to the study of Edna's rebellion in Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, there is a proof that Edna's rebellion reflects the idea and the principles of feminism. In this novel, the actions, utterances and expression of the main character, Edna Pontellier shows that she is a feminist. The feminism performs all the qualities of an autonomous individual, independent, private possession, authority over the woman's body and freedom to choose her own identity. There are two reasons, which prove Edna as a feminist. Firstly, Edna rebels against the Creole community system that bounds her freedom and independence. She does not only reject to be regarded as a property owned by Leonce, but she also refuses as a mother of her children. Based on the voluntary motherhood, it is found that Edna also has the right to choose whether she wants to be a mother or not and she wants to get pregnant or not. Leading to radical feminist theory, a woman is an autonomous being that owns and authorizes herself and points out that the community system takes advantage of woman physique to exploit. Secondly, Edna has proved that she is an autonomous being who is independent on her life. She does not let her husband or the community control her destiny and she decides to leave her marriage to gain for the unity of her love with Robert Lebrun.

It is noticeable that Edna manages to achieve freedom and independence until she decides to commit suicide. Edna's death in the end of the story is her own choice and resolution. Her autonomous being authorizes her freedom to give

up from her life. So, the society cannot restrain her and by her death, nobody owns her anymore. Edna has done many kinds of attitudes that show her refusal to the community system, for examples: she withholds from her husband especially about the financial and sex, she moves out from her house and leaves her husband and the children, she has more than one relationship besides her husband, she refuses the invitation of her sister's wedding, she does not want to accompany Adele till the baby is born when Adele is giving birth and she decides to commit suicide. Finally, there is a conclusion that Edna's rebellion reflects feminism and creates her to be a feminist who succeeds to be an autonomous being with freedom and independence to determine her own life.

Finally, the moral teaching in this novel is that men and women have the same position, opportunities and rights. They can reach their own independence but they must take their responsibilities to their independence. There is no more women's thought about man's domination if woman is treated respectfully. Besides that, men must give women a chance to develop themselves in their family or in the society.

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