

## Chapter 3

### Analysis of the Protagonists

This chapter focuses on the analysis of the female protagonists, Edna and Ros, beginning with the study of their relationships with supporting characters in order to provide background information for their social and inner conflicts. The protagonists' general characterization, origins as well as impacts and outcomes of their alienation, suicide will be discussed in detail. The exploration will focus on Edna and Ros respectively and conclude with the comparative analysis of the protagonists.

#### Edna

The analysis of Edna is divided into three parts: firstly, the relationship between Edna and others: her parents, her children, the three main male characters (her husband, Robert and Arobin), and the minor female characters (Adèle Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz). Then, Edna's characterization, her feeling of alienation and eventual suicide will be delineated.

#### 1. Edna's Relationship with her Parents and her Children

The relationship between Edna and her father is evidence of female subjection to men in the patriarchal society at that time. A man was considered a commander while a woman was believed to be his obedient follower. Moreover, because of his position as a Colonel, Edna's father is used to being in command. He also convinces Léonce, Edna's husband, that a husband must be a decision-maker, as seen when Edna refuses to join her sister's wedding; he suggests to Léonce, that he should command his wife, as he always did:

“You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce,” asserted the Colonel. “Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it.” (71)

Probably the Colonel does not realize that his action causes the death of Edna’s mother, as observed by Léonce: “He had coerced his own wife into her grave” (71).

With a leading position in the Confederate army, the Colonel is very proud of himself. He is proud that he has “bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capacity, which only depended upon their own efforts to be directed toward successful achievement” (68). This is why he has high expectations of Edna as evidenced in his serious attention to Edna’s sketch of him during his visit. To him, his daughter must have artistic talent.

The relationship between Edna and her father can be seen more clearly when the Colonel visits his daughter after her marriage. Although Edna and her father “had certain tastes in common, and when together they were companionable” (67), his arrival for Edna is just “in the nature of a welcome disturbance; it seemed to furnish a new direction for her emotions” (67). She is delighted but somewhat anxious. Sometimes she seems to feel some distance as “she had not much of anything to say to her father...” (69). She is relieved when he leaves.

Edna’s mother is rarely mentioned in the novel and does not have any role in Edna’s life, for she died when Edna was very young. Edna, therefore, neither experiences love from her mother nor knows how to express her love for the children and to nurture them. As a mother, Edna loves her two sons, but she cannot be the typically good or responsible mother-woman she sees at Grand Isle. Being a mother is not easy for her and it is quite difficult for her to fit this expectation.

Edna cares for her children, but in her own way, which is different from those of other creole women. She often neglects them, leaving them on their own, sometimes with a quadroon and sometimes with Léonce’s mother. She believes that

hers is an appropriate way to nurture children, probably to make them strong and independent, as she used to be during her childhood.

If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing. ...  
(9)

This unconventional treatment of her children demonstrates that she does not conform to the social norm. However, to her husband, who presumes that a mother should be with her children all the time, Edna is an irresponsible and inefficient mother. He reproaches Edna as negligent when he believes one of their children has a fever. To Edna, it is not because she does not love her child, but because “she was quite sure Raoul had no fever. He had gone to bed perfectly well – and nothing had ailed him all day” (7).

The mother's role is not pleasant to Edna. She considers her children only “a part of her life” (114). Edna feels free while they are away. However, it is just relief from her responsibility, not from her sense of motherhood.

She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her. (20)

Being conscious of her identity as an independent woman, Edna realizes that the children are not important in her life, but her selfhood is. She appreciates the genuine solitude and enjoys being herself. She expresses such realization to Adèle as follows:

“I would give up the unessential; I would give up my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn’t give myself. I can’t make it more clear; it’s only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me.”  
(48)

However, her awareness of the real priority develops further as the story moves toward the end and she goes to the difficult birth of Adèle’s new child. Adèle’s call for motherly conscience, “Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!” (109), reminds Edna of her deep concern for her children. The thought of them continually troubles her mind. Edna loves her children, but it is difficult for her to place herself in this mother’s role. Her love for them is a natural love and not part of social obligation. After the birth of Adèle’s new child and Robert’s final departure, Edna understands what she has said to Adèle about her “essence”:

She had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning.  
She had said over and over to herself: “To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn’t matter about Léonce Pontellier - but Raoul and Etienne!”...  
(113)

At this moment, Edna realizes that her wish for independence and her sexual desire will affect her children’s lives, which she doesn’t “want to trample upon” (110). However, near the end of the story, when Edna returns to Grand Isle with despondency, she recovers that her responsibility toward her children is not what she considers her dignity. Although she loves them, it is unbearable to return to the devoted mother-woman’s role which has stolen her independence. Her children “appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered her and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days” (113). To

choose them means to give up her selfhood which, is impossible for Edna. That is why she prefers death.

Edna's relationships with her father and her sons reflect her unavoidable attachment to unpleasant creole roles. Being with her father means to follow patriarchal expectations, while staying with her sons means her selfhood is supplanted by a mother's duty.

## 2. Edna's Relationship with her Husband

The relationship between Edna and her husband, Mr. Léonce Pontellier, provides a picture of her failure in family life and of the relationship between husband and wife in the late nineteenth century, especially in New Orleans creole society, where women were considered the 'subordinate sex'. The wife was the property of her husband, who looked at and treated her as an object, not a person who could lead her own life independently. Her husband's remark about her look after she has long been in the sun as well as his view toward her illustrates this point.

"You are burnt beyond recognition," Mr. Pontellier added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered from some damage. ... (4)

He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him and valued so little his conversation. (7)

Beside reflecting the contemporary views of a woman, this also points to a woman's condition. She had no independent source of income and had to depend on her husband. What a woman did was to sell her image in order to show off how much money her husband had.

Mr. Pontellier was an obvious example of the typical materialistic man of his time. He regards money as the most important factor in his life. During the vacation at Grand Isle, Mr. Pontellier still works hard to earn money. He “was returning to the city to his business and they would not see him again at the island till the coming Sunday” (8), unlike other men having a good time with their families. To Léonce, money brings everything, including dignity, pride, and happiness:

Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain – no matter what – after he had bought it and placed it among his household gods. (50)

To his contemporary creoles, Léonce is a good husband, possibly an ideal one, but not to the present-day reader who regards this character an insensitive commander with an overly-controlled way of life. He asserts his authority and expects full obedience from his wife whom he considers incapable of her own thinking.

“What folly<sup>1</sup>! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!” (4)

“Do you know it is past one o’ clock! Come on,”... (31)

“This is more than folly,” he blurted out. “I can’t permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly.” (32).

Léonce’s attitude toward his wife tells the reader that he is a very assertive and commanding man – a real conformist who still believes in a women’s submissive position, as illustrated in the underlined words expressing superiority. He cannot change his way of life, nor his attitude towards women. Edna’s growth of

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<sup>1</sup> The underlines in all the quotations in this thesis are mine.

independence, therefore, is unacceptable for him. He cares more about his image and money than he does about Edna's happiness. For example, when he receives Edna's letter, informing him of her decision to move out, he, without any words of concern or questions, writes her back a letter of disapproval and instruction not because of his love for Edna but for fear of the "incalculable mischief to his business prospect" (92) that would follow if he and Edna separated.

For Edna, money is not so important. She feels that the house and the money are not hers but her husband's. There is an irony here: her outward life seems abundant, for she has more than she needs, whereas her inward life is wanting, for she has nothing, not even her own identity. The social conformity pushes Edna to search for a new independent life.

In the early part of the story, Edna lives functionally with her husband and her children. She knows that her society wants her to be a good wife. However, this sense of duty collapses when she begins to realize that she is a person with her own identity and freedom after her tearful night at Grand Isle because of her husband's complaint about "her habitual neglect of her children" (7) and her first experience in the sea, where a certain light within her arouses her to realize "her position in the universe as a human being" (14-15). After the quarrel with her husband, Edna discovers that Mr. Pontellier is the opposite to the man of her fancy when they first met.

He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. ...

...As the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her, she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams. (19)

Edna's marriage with Léonce Pontellier is her mistake. Her married life becomes funny and ugly. Ironically, she married Mr. Pontellier to escape the

patriarch of her family, her father, only to share her life with a new commander. Mr. Pontellier does not worship her. Worst of all, she does not “take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality.”

Edna’s emergence as an independent woman in her own right comes about after her return to New Orleans. She breaks the conventional norm and protests against social tradition by neglecting her duty:

She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household *en bonne ménagère*, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.  
(57)

She then gives up the security of her husband’s house and money and moves into “a little four-room house” which “looks so cozy, so inviting and restful”, and supports herself by selling her painting to assert “the feeling of freedom and independence” (79). With this decision, Edna indirectly indicates that Léonce Pontellier is finally only her meaningless partner in a loveless marriage.

### 3. Edna’s Relationship with Robert

Robert enters Edna’s world as a man who awakens her process of self-discovery. Edna meets this man at Grand Isle, where her family spends a summer vacation. There, Edna and Robert are always together, talking, sharing their experiences and listening to the same type of music. They are interested in “what the other said” (6). Robert can be a friend to Edna while her husband cannot. He teaches Edna to swim, “furthering her autonomy, and...encourages her self-expression” (Stone, 1986 : 25).

Within his society, Robert’s intimacy with Edna is just a conventional flirtation, because at that time it was a fashion for a man to be in love with a married



woman. That is why Mr. Pontellier is never jealous of his wife, for it was a love game.

Since the age of fifteen, which was eleven years before, Robert each summer at Grand Isle had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman. (12)

However, he later finds that his relationship with Edna is not just a common love game. Everything about this woman interests him. On the other hand, Robert makes Edna gradually become accustomed to his appearance:

She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from her, just as one misses the sun on a cloudy day without having thought much about the sun when it was shining. (28)

He becomes part of Edna's life. She does not realize his importance when he is close, but when he is away, she learns how necessary he is for her.

This is clear when he leaves for Mexico. His abrupt departure shocks Edna. She does not understand his reason, and Robert does not tell her.

Robert's going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dull, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing. She sought him everywhere in others whom she induced to talk about him. ... (46)

Her life without Robert is meaningless. Her husband notices his wife's change. Edna does not want to have any social contact except with Mademoiselle Reisz, the pianist Edna knows at Grand Isle and with whom she is so intimate that she can trust and learn news about Robert. She tries to forget this man.

But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing. (54)

Edna has only Robert on her mind, even while she is with Arobin, another man who comes into her life here. It is not her husband's feelings that Edna is concerned about but those of Robert:

The thought was passing vaguely through her mind, "What would he think?"

She did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse. (77)

Robert eventually feels he must go for fear that his conventional flirtation will develop into an affair. As he once tells Adèle, "there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking me seriously. You should have warned me against taking myself seriously" (22).

Robert realizes that he loves Edna. It is not just the sort of romantic game he used to play with other women. He has to leave Edna, as he later confesses, because "you were not free; you were Léonce Pontellier's wife. I couldn't help loving you if you were ten times his wife" (106). Robert admits when he comes back that he has been fighting against his feelings since last summer at Grand Isle. He loves Edna, but can do nothing because she belongs to her husband. The only thing he can do is leave her so that he may finally forget her.

Edna realizes herself as an independent individual whose selfhood becomes clearly defined. But Robert "remains trapped by the conventional norms of the highly traditional society from which Edna has broken free" (Hook, 1983 : 174). He does not understand Edna's revolution. He loves Edna and wants her to be his wife, "to

hold her and keep her” (107), but Edna does not think about marriage which, after her self-discovery, “is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth” (66).

“You have been a very very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, ‘Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,’ I should laugh at you both.” (106-107)

Thinking that love must end with possession and marriage, Robert leaves Edna with a farewell note ☞ “Good-by—because, I love you” (114) ☞ because he wants to protect Edna as well as himself from doing wrong. This reflects how Edna and Robert differ regarding love. To Edna, love includes individual independence while for Robert it must conform to social conventions.

It can be said that Edna’s life is destroyed by the departure of Robert, whom she wishes to be with eventually. Robert’s return brings light back to Edna’s life. But Robert’s indifferent response upon his return hurts her. Edna does not understand his changes. Neither does Robert understand what Edna means when she says that she is free. His ignorance has a great impact upon Edna, who tries to keep her life-dignity. Robert’s immediate leave causes Edna’s sense of unbearable loss.

#### 4. Edna’s Relationship with Arobin

Edna’s relationship with this man directly relates to sexual instinct. Although Arobin means nothing to Edna, “his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her” (77). Arobin admires Edna extravagantly after their first meeting at the horse racing, to which Edna goes with her father.

Arobin is a fashionable and charming man with a “perpetual smile in his eyes” and a “good-humored voice” (74). He possesses a “good figure, a pleasing face and his dress was that of the conventional man of fashion” (75), but he has a “dreadful reputation,” which is known far and wide among the men, so that “his attentions are considered enough to ruin a woman’s name” (95). Although realizing this, Edna gets involved with this man as this act would proclaim her freedom. Their relationship “grows familiar and confidential” (76) and develops into an affair:

They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees, and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at last, appealing her to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her. (78)

Arobin draws out “all her awakening sensuousness” (76) and increases her passion and desire that she longs for from Robert. Edna cannot control herself while with Arobin as she feels “the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire” (83). After the event, Edna feels “as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to look upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality” (83). She does not feel “shame nor remorse. There was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips” (83).

Arobin is just a lover Edna finally takes without love. It is clear toward the end of the story that this man is meaningless to her as she says over and over to herself, “To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me,…” (113). It seems that Edna cannot stop herself at Arobin. If she is still alive without Robert, the only man she loves, she cannot stop seeking another man to release her from loneliness, but no one can replace Robert.

## 5. Edna's Relationship with Adèle Ratignolle

Adèle Ratignolle plays an important role as a contrast to Edna. She is presented as the archetype of the good wife and mother, which Mr. Pontellier expects from his wife. The narrator of *The Awakening* describes the mother-women as follows.

They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. Many of them were delicious in the role; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm. If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. ... (10)

Adèle is physically attractive with charm and beauty like “some sensuous Madonna” (13). She possesses a “more feminine and matronly figure” (16) than Edna. The roles of wife and mother are her real concerns.

Although both women are living in the same community, their lives are completely different. Hook (1983 : 168) explains the reason for this difference by pointing out that Adèle “is a creole, outgoing and communicative, while Edna, an American of Anglo-Saxon descent from Kentucky, is reserved and withdrawn.” Adèle has a sense of belonging, while Edna does not. Adèle chooses the ‘proper’ way by paying attention to her husband and children. She feels no difficulty living in creole society, whereas Edna is an alien. There is domestic harmony in Adèle’s family.

The Ratignolles understood each other perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union.

His wife was keenly interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen, chiming in, taking the words out of his mouth. (56)

In contrast, this atmosphere does not exist among the Pontelliers. Edna does not want her husband to stay home because his presence causes tension. They “wouldn’t have anything to say to each other” (69). At the end, Adèle is seen in her home, expressing a sense of warmth and love, and we may interpret this to mean that she is happy with what she chooses – her family. However, the Ratignolles’ domestic harmony is a “colorless existence” for Edna because “it was not a condition of life which fitted her.” (56)

Stone (1986 : 23) notes that Adèle Ratignolle encourages Edna to express thoughts and feelings she has kept hidden, as well as her artistic bent. Adèle’s warmth and contact impress Edna because since her mother died, she has not received the “gentle caress” that Adèle gives to her. She “was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others” (18) until she meets Adèle, whose beauty attracts and inspires her to paint.

Although Adèle is Edna’s inspiration, she feels more alienated being close to this character, who near the end of the story, strongly evokes Edna’s sense of motherhood again when she asks Edna to be with her at the difficult birth of the new child. Adèle’s words, “Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!” (109), have a great impact on Edna’s mind, for it reminds her of her motherhood, which conflicts with her attempt to realize her personal freedom. Ironically, this character seems to understand Edna and her well-intended invitation to Edna to witness her child’s birth is partially, if indirectly, responsible for pushing Edna towards suicide. Adèle’s scene of torture heightens Edna’s sense of guilt. She “recognizes that she cannot rebel against nature.” She “is bound to children, house and social duty” (Stone, 1986 : 30). This reality is unbearable for Edna because it steals her selfhood.

## 6. Edna's Relationship with Mademoiselle Reisz

An interesting, atypical character who represents the type of real artist Edna wishes to become is Mademoiselle Reisz, an asocial pianist who also contrasts with Adèle. There are some similarities between Edna and Mlle Reisz. Both are social aliens who love living alone in their own artistic worlds: Mlle Reisz enjoys playing the piano, while Edna is fond of painting. They have their own identity and direction, and their behavior estranges them from other people. Mlle Reisz is an aggressive, spirited loner. She knows what she wants and dares to reach toward her aim. She is not welcomed in the society because of her unique way of living. She is “a disagreeable little woman, no longer young” who quarrels “with almost everyone; owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others” (26).

Edna admires this working artist, upon whom she seems to model herself. This intention is carried out when she moves out of her husband's house and sells her sketches for a living in order to experience “the feeling of freedom and independence” (79). Mlle Reisz witnesses Edna's awakening and seems to be the only one who understands what Edna might be. She “seemed to echo the thought which was ever in Edna's mind; or, better, the feeling which constantly possessed her” (46). She is also the first person to learn of Edna's decision to move away. Without Mlle Reisz's probing questions and hints, Edna would not realize her love for Robert and his reciprocal love. Above all, it is Mlle Reisz who adds power to Edna, stirs Edna's potentiality and helps her discover her dignity by showing sympathy and encouraging Edna to pursue her artistic talent by warning her she must be brave and strong if she wants to be a real artist defying social conventions (63).

An interesting point about Edna and Mlle Reisz is that while both are aliens, the pianist can stay alive while Edna chooses suicide. A possible answer is their

different social statuses. Mlle Reisz is single and free from marital obligations. Most importantly, she is not a mother; therefore, the social expectations of a wife and mother do not affect her. With less restrictions and a life of artistic expression, she can freely assert her selfhood. But, Edna's independence is limited by the social conventions regarding a wife-mother and household concerns. For her, to be free requires self-awareness, courage to be different, as well as an exceptional and lonely effort to search for independence. And even with all these characteristics, her search comes to a tragic end.

## 7. Edna's Character

Edna Pontellier's psyche gradually evolves through the story. She is presented as a young woman struggling for selfhood.

Edna is a rather reserved woman. Her mother died when she was very young, and she is not close to her father and two sisters. Edna does not know how to express affection. Coming from Kentucky, a non-creole background, probably helps to make her distinct from the creole women. While feminine beauty makes those women charming, Edna is described as "rather handsome than beautiful" (5). She is attractive but different from the crowd because of her "graceful severity of poise and movement" (16). Edna is bewitching for men. At the beginning of the story, Robert is presented as Edna's escort and as enjoying her company. Later, at the racing, Edna seems "like a magnet" with "the contagion of excitement" (74) for Arobin. While watching the race, she expresses her personality and desire. She is herself and acts openly and naturally. Creole women are not expected to behave this way. But the more important point is that she is "not a mother-woman" as described earlier.

Edna is a sensitive and lonely character. She seems happy with her married life because she has a wealthy husband and lovely children. However, the reader can



feel there is something in her mind when she bursts out crying without reason during the night at Grand Isle after her husband reproaches her for neglecting the children:

She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood.

An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. She was just having a good cry all to herself. ... (8)

Edna is unhappy with what she is. She has questions within herself, but she does not know what the problems are, as she says to Adèle: “sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided” (18) and “Let me see. I was really not conscious of thinking of anything; but perhaps I can retrace my thoughts” (17). Edna cannot convey her thinking because she is used to keeping what she thinks in her mind. She is not a communicative woman. But at Grand Isle, Robert, Adèle and Mlle Reisz expose Edna to new and mysterious experiences. Robert is the first person who urges Edna to swim and experience something new.

After her first awakening, we feel Edna's psychological development. She begins to realize what she wants as she finally tells Doctor Mandélet that “It is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life” (110). Edna chooses to wake up to reality. She is ready to accept what will happen to her. Although realizing that “there are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession” of her, Edna does not want anything but her “own way” (110), which is freedom.

Is Edna really awake or is she still trapped in her dream? This question becomes a debatable issue as she seems to go back to her childhood memory at the end of the story. To some critics, this return proves that she is not really awake, but still clings to her world of fantasy. However, a close examination of the last paragraph of the book reveals that it is actually her acute consciousness of the bondage of the woman's condition under the patriarchal rule suggested by the male images. Such realization is definitely not a romantic dream, but an awakening to a painful reality. Her vivid perception of her position as a human being denotes her wisdom. Yet, Edna still needs strength or some support on this lonely path to fulfill her selfhood as an independent woman with love according to her own meaning, true love without ownership. She believes that Robert, her first awakener to the real meaning of her being, could give her that support. But with his departure, boldness and confidence disappear from her. Edna's realization of unpleasant reality is intensified, especially with "her father's voice" which is oppressive and refers to social chains, her unbearable reality.

#### 8. Edna's Alienation and Suicide

Throughout the story, Edna Pontellier is a lonely character whose inward life is full of questions. Her relationships with the people around her do not give her a definition of her own identity, but the feeling of alienation. She shares little affection with her father. She cannot communicate with her husband. She does not fit the expected role as a creole mother, and there is a certain distance between her and the children. Even with Robert, her love cannot be fulfilled because of their different ways of thinking. Arobin, of course, cannot give Edna a meaningful relationship. As for Adèle, even though Edna admires this mother-woman, the closer she is to Adèle, the more alienated she feels. At the same time, while Edna realizes that Mlle Reisz

and herself share some affinity, she knows she lacks “the courageous soul that dares and defies” (114), which Mlle Reisz has.

Edna’s loneliness can be sensed even when she is among others. Even for the creoles, Edna is not considered one of them or like them (21). Edna finds that she prefers solitude, as especially seen when she is alone after the departures of her father, husband, and children.

When Edna was at last alone, she breathed a big, genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her. She walked all through the house, from one room to another, as if inspecting it for the first time. She tried the various chairs and lounges, as if she had never sat and reclined upon them before. ... (72)

Solitude represents Edna’s position in this fixed society. It is a cause for both happiness and gloom. Edna is alone because she is one of the few women who dare challenge and break away from the tradition. As seen in the underlined sentence, being alone brings her a happy and ‘delicious’ moment of ‘relief’ she has never felt being among others. This relief comes from the disappearance of those social obligations symbolized by the existence of her husband, father and children.

Edna’s thoughts, emotions and actions reveal her inner conflicts and gradual growth of self-awareness as the story progresses. She has been longing for something (or possibly someone), but she does not know what (or who) it is until she finds Robert. It seems love provokes Edna’s awakening. She realizes “her position in the universe as a human being” (14-15), which is a great insight for a young woman such as Edna. However, such comprehension, which is like the beginning of things, is at first still unclear to her. She questions whether she will succeed as a beginner or kill herself in turmoil. Yet, with her self-discovery, Edna becomes more confident. She is trying to examine what type of woman she is, as she tells Arobin:

“One of these days,” she said. “I’m going to pull myself together for a while and think - try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don’t know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can’t convince myself that I am. I must think about it.” (82)

As “the codes” refers to social conventions or expectations regarding a woman here, Edna questions the validity of the social standard, according to which she finds herself a “wicked” woman.

Edna is estranged from others because of her new self-definition as an independent woman who feels “some power of significant import had been given her soul...” (28). Her self-concept changes. It is a spiritual rebirth in her own way.

During her growth of self-awareness, Edna suffers both emotional and moral conflicts. She turns against conventional values of home, husband, and family, all of which do not provide her freedom and the desired new identity. However, it is impossible to escape motherhood because of her love for the children. Living without them, she can free herself physically, but spiritually she is still their mother. Edna cares about her children’s feelings. However, to be in her husband’s possession is most unacceptable as it would destroy her selfhood. She does not want to limit herself within social conventions which, for her, make life meaningless.

With her self-realization, Edna longs for freedom from social limitations, to live for her self. This lonely path brings her to the unsurmountable social conflict, partially represented by Robert, who finally leaves her because he is not aware of the freedom she values. Edna eventually realizes the stark reality of her failure to be independent. This is the tragic end of a woman who gains wisdom.

Undeniably, Edna’s freedom causes loneliness. As Feuerlicht (1978 : 45) points out, when a person is free from any chain, loneliness will follow. He /She will have less social communication, and this can lead to a loss of the sense of belonging. One may find life utterly meaningless when he/she does not know his/her position in

the world. After discovering her independence, Edna feels life is meaningful because Robert's attention makes her feel loved and valued. But after his final departure, her life seems meaningless and lost. The resulting loneliness without love or hope is unbearable. Her will to live is gone.

Critics view Edna's sudden death differently. For Spangler (1976 : 180-184), this final decision is an unexpected ending which does not suit the brave heroine who has struggled almost all the story. However, Yonoki (1989) argues that considering her attempt to maintain self-dignity, this ending is reasonable.

A close analysis of Edna's crisis reveals that her suicide is inevitable. This character is defeated by two important events. First, the difficult birth of Adèle's new child reminds Edna that she cannot rebel against nature. The mother's role seems a contrast to absolute freedom. Right after that, Robert leaves her without further hope. This awakens Edna to her utmost loneliness.

The price of her freedom is isolation and alienation. In the final moment of her life, Edna goes to Grand Isle, where her awakening, her initiation into self-awareness, and her emergence as a woman in her own right begin. She realizes that there is no place where she can be free.

Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when, he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach. (113)

Edna keeps walking without thinking of returning. She does not want to go back to the earth – to a life of submissive conformity. At this moment, various feelings come

to her mind. She feels strange, awful, warm and excited. Moreover, being naked makes her feel like an innocent child reborn to regain freedom. Edna finds no peace until she feels the sensuous touch of the sea. Its soft touch reminds her of her mother. The voice of the sea motivates her to go deeper. She does not think about the distance. What she wants is to be one with the welcoming sea.

Edna's egoistic suicide seems motivated by loneliness resulting from the breakdown of interpersonal relationships and the lack of a sense of belonging. According to Durkheim (quoted in DeFleur et al., 1973 : 8), this kind of suicide occurs among those who lack social engagement. Edna fails in communication with people around her, in meaningfully relating to others, and in meeting social expectations. She has connections with neither people nor places.

An interesting point regarding this crisis is that Edna is a Protestant in a predominantly Catholic society. Durkheim (quoted in DeFleur et al., 1973 : 8) states that the rate of American Protestants' suicide is higher than that among Catholics because the former have less religious attachment. Unlike the Catholics, who give primary importance to their religion and religious groups, the Protestants consider themselves most precious. They are taught to be so self-important that they pay little attention to their religious group. Therefore, a Protestant tends to live a solitary and individualistic life. While in frustration, he/she receives no support from the group and, therefore, lacks encouragement to encounter problems. A common immediate social group, of course, is the family. A strong family attachment is usually an antidote to egoistic suicide. A person will probably not commit suicide if he/she considers the family essential and has a genuine concern about family members. This is an important social force overriding thoughts of self-destruction. But Edna does not feel this because she considers her selfhood most important.

The study of Edna reveals the alienated character of a late nineteenth century American novel. Her loneliness and alienation, together with her final decision, are

comparable to those of Ros, the female protagonist of the late twentieth century Thai novel *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*. These significant points will be discussed and compared respectively.

## **Ros**

Paralleling the above discussion, the analysis of Ros, the principal character in *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, is divided into three parts: firstly, her relationships with her parents and children, her former husband, her lovers (Chitchua and Pat), Pat's sister and his friend; secondly, her character; and finally, her alienation and suicide.

### 1. Ros's Relationship with her Parents and her Children

Ros's father is mentioned only once in the story, when Ros hears a Thai classical song and thinks of him: "...that's my father's favorite song. Whenever I hear it, I'll think of him. My father loves Thai classical music" (94). He does not have any role in the story, and it is not mentioned whether he is dead or separated from Ros's mother.

Ros is close to her loving mother who represents country people with affectionate love for family members. For her mother, Ros "is still a child" (162). However, as a rural woman who does not understand the life style of people in a big city, she gives her daughter freedom to manage her life, and seems to believe in Ros's capability because Ros left home to study when she was young. This makes Ros a rather independent woman who is confident in making decisions. There is no evidence that her mother criticizes Ros over her divorce; she seems sympathetic to her daughter. When requested, she takes very good care of Ros's children.

Ros herself is a loving and delicate mother probably because she has experienced this feeling from her mother. She remembers what her children like or dislike. For example, when she sends them a letter, she selects a very beautiful stamp to stick on the envelope because her oldest daughter loves collecting stamps. Their faces can even soothe her heartache: “Being with her children, she completely forgot her pain, or even a person who caused the pain” (118).

Her three children are the only precious people Ros can get hold of and the reason for her struggle and existence. After divorce, Ros quits her job as a government official to work freelance and becomes the lone supporter of the three children she takes to be only hers. Without her husband, Ros tries to be both their mother and father by giving them as much warmth and love as she can. Her love for the children is delicately described. An example is her reflection on a hot summer night in Bangkok:

Her children might feel much warmer than she felt...She sent her heart to her far-away children. She was hurrying days and nights in order to meet them soon. One month or one month and a half seemed to pass slowly. The sun in Bangkok rose and set so slowly.

If she slept with them, she would fan them, bathe them, and then powder them. She often told herself while kissing their cheeks that this was the real happiness and that she wanted nothing more. (17)

Freedom and responsibility come together after her divorce. Ros intends to live independently with dignity. However, she cannot help feeling lonely. Although Pat suggests that she marry someone, she has reservations about marriage and is concerned about the kindness her children will receive from their prospective step-father (61). Nevertheless, Ros becomes involved with two men nearly at the same time. Ironically, the man she chooses for her children’s security leaves her because he cannot accept Ros’s children.



Her three children's sudden deaths are the greatest loss in her life. She is heart-broken when learning this news:

She fainted when learning the news. After that her words were grief-stricken. She felt like the world had collapsed and gone into darkness.

Their funeral was managed by Pat and Ros's mother. What she could do was just sitting still. It was hard to believe that all had left her at the same time, leaving her to face up with infinite grief.

She condemned herself. That was probably God's punishment for her decision to leave them. Now it was not necessary for her to worry about them. But the fact was that she was becoming insane because of grief. (512-513)

Without the children, her life is completely meaningless. She loses the desire to live, for after their deaths, her suffering and loneliness increase. This situation leads to her fatal decision.

## 2. Ros's Relationship with her Former Husband

Although the author does not often mention Ros's former husband, nor depicts her married life in detail, we can see that Ros's marriage is a poor decision.

She had never had a boyfriend, so she thought that she loved him. At that time, two men came into her life and she chose him because the other had fewer chances to be close to her. Ros got married not long after knowing him. (424)

The man Ros marries is very far from an ideal man. Her bridal house is the opposite of what she dreams. It is just a rented house in a far-away orchard without water or electricity. Yet, this is not a problem since her heart was full of love (24).

Ros and her husband are not compatible at all. Ros is an artist while her husband is an accountant. Ros appreciates art while her husband regards it worthless

(87). Her husband is a kind of materialistic and selfish man who thinks only about basic need and sex. He considers a woman only his sexual object.

He never stopped for a while to see the beauty of flowers. He was insensitive. He did not know what beauty was. His life was that of a two-legged animal which needed only a dwelling place, food and procreating. He knew only the four fundamental necessities. ...  
(87)

For Ros, the four fundamental necessities (food, clothing, lodging and medicine) are important, especially for her children. She does not deny that sex is an important part of married life, yet she needs both psychological and physical care. With artistic delicacy, sensitivity is an additional need, which her husband lacks and ignores.

The reader also perceives how vulgar her husband is through his dialogue with Chitchua, a stranger whom he has just met, which can prove that this man had been neither a loving husband nor fitted a father's role.

“Do you know that woman? She was my former wife!  
...  
“A slut. You see, it's very late, but she doesn't go back home!”  
...  
...“She is the most lustful woman!”  
...  
“You probably won't believe. She was my wife, really. I worked here and was her boyfriend since she was a student.”...  
...  
“She was mine even before graduation”... “I was so fond of her that I married her and had children with her.” (56)

Ros can be a good housewife, but housework in her view is merely a repetitive and boring daily routine. Her memories of her ten years of married life consists mostly of managing dull house chores. She feels funny seeing herself hurrying to dress, waking her children and going to work in the morning, and yet sitting idly at the office some days without anything to do. She recalls that “being at work was the

time to rest, but being at home was the time to work” (23-24). The routine drudgery had bored Ros. It is unbearable for her to manage the household with a small income that even together with that of her husband is not enough. Ros’s emotional and immature decision has disappointed her. The ending of her married life is caused by conflicts when the couple can no longer stand each other (33).

### 3. Ros’s Relationship with Pat

From the beginning of the story, the only man who is always on Ros’s mind is Pat, the man she really loves. After her divorce, Ros and Pat become intimate. For Ros, Pat is a good-humored man who makes her laugh and happy (21). While with him, her sorrow seems to disappear (29).

Ros has to keep her love for Pat within herself because she believes she is not a suitable match for him, being older, and, most importantly, a divorcee with three children. Ros loves Pat so much that she does not want him to be involved with her (145). Yet, she cannot help being hurt seeing him with a more ‘suitable’ woman, Matthanin, who is wealthier, younger and more beautiful. Comparing herself to this younger woman, she feels inferior in every way. This is why Ros turns to Chitchua, accepting his advances in an attempt to overcome her real feeling.

Pat himself is concerned about the insuitability of his relationship with Ros, however, with a difference:

If she married Chitchua, certainly, her life would be better than that marrying such a man like [Pat] who never worked, nor even thought about it. How would her future be? Even the most stupid person could answer. (146)

Many times Pat thinks about his carefree life, which prevents him from declaring his love for Ros. To him, it seems that “Chitchua was more suitable. [Pat] was unsteady, not having any permanent job, just enjoying his life day by day” (226).

Pat is uncertain whether he loves Ros or not. Moreover, he suspects that “Ros probably has another man apart from him” (230) because it seems that his encounter with Ros at the waterfall is probably driven solely by sexual instinct. They do not declare their love. Pat wonders whether Ros wants him just to serve her sexual desire. He feels guilty after the event. He “dares not meet her” (221), thinking that he does not have any right to keep her for himself. Toward the end of the story, Pat admits that he loves Ros, but does not tell her because he keeps thinking and finally says to Ros, “Am I suitable to you? I don’t want to work. When there is a more suitable man loving you, of course, I have to go away and give him way” (509).

Although Pat is rather well off, it seems he is leading an aimless life. Pat is content with what he is. He is not ambitious, but easy-going. He wants only to live happily. Ros, on the other hand, wants to be rich so that she can live on her own and bring up her children, while Kamphol, Pat’s friend, wants to have a high salary, and Chitchua wants to be a famous artist. But Pat wants nothing:

...he wanted only food for survival, and drink whenever he wanted. He did not want to be a government official with a high position. It was not because he wanted to differ from others. Even he himself did not know why he thought so. (239)

For Pat, working as a government official probably gives him no dignity for he would seem like a dishonest person, who does very little but regularly receives a salary (249-250).

Pat and Ros become intimate because they have many things in common, such as listening to the same type of music. Most importantly, Pat is able to get along very well with Ros’s children. Being with Pat, Ros can talk openly to him about her

children. She cannot do so with Chitchua for fear that he will be annoyed. With Chitchua, Ros has to “be careful of all her words and manners in order to please him” (423). Ros feels that Pat is kind to her children and herself, and this is what Ros really wants.

Ros’s affair with Pat at the waterfall is full of love, unlike the one with Chitchua at Phukradung. She does not feel guilty, for she does not commit adultery. Yet, as soon as she thinks of her children, she is unhappy, thinking that this could bring disgrace to them (157).

After this event, however, the relationship does not progress. They try to be so reasonable that they cannot understand each other’s feelings. Because Ros and Pat never mention their love to each other, Pat becomes close to Matthanin while Ros gets involved with Chitchua. Comparing Pat to Chitchua, Ros feels that Chitchua gives her more certainty than Pat:

If a man like Chitchua loved a woman, he would ensure her  
that he wouldn’t change his mind.

Unlike Pat, he never gave her certainty, but brought only  
suspicion and uncertainty to her heart. (258)

Ironically, it is Chitchua who finally destroys that certainty, while Pat seems to be more emotionally steady. Near the end of the story, Pat and Matthanin separate after she goes abroad and has a new boyfriend there. It seems that Matthanin does not really love Pat enough to marry him; she is only infatuated with him for a while. Pat himself does not really love her either.

Pat’s kindness is proved to Ros when all her children die and when she receives Chitchua’s farewell letter. His gentleness warms her heart and helps her feel better and continue to live. When he has to go abroad, Ros decides to commit suicide to protect her heart from the great pain of losing him. At this point, loneliness is unbearably painful.

#### 4. Ros's Relationship with Chitchua

Chitchua is a typical man working as an artist and a university lecturer whose ambition is to be richer and more successful. He is about the same age as Ros and is still single. Although an artist who does not produce commercial art, Chitchua is not as sensitive as Ros, but a somewhat materialistic man who regards money, fame and honor important factors in his life.

Chitchua is especially interested in Ros after learning of her divorce. To him, her most important good point is that "she was able to make money" (43). This reflects a modern view on Thai women (Sirirat Thaveelertnithi, 1995 : 166-168), the notion that "a wife has to be able to support herself and preferably to support the family as well" (43). This is a reason why he chooses Ros, although he has another choice, Cha-um, a fisherman's daughter younger and more beautiful than Ros. More importantly, Cha-um is not a divorcee. However, his relationship with this woman does not progress because Cha-um is uneducated. She probably cannot understand him and his work, unlike Ros, who "studied art and could understand him" (209).


From the beginning of the story, "Ros was not willing to be close to this man" (34). Presumably, it is because she loves Pat. Although Chitchua tries to approach her, Ros never gives him a chance until Matthanin comes into Pat's life, and Pat seems to treat Matthanin as his girlfriend despite his profound relationship with Ros. Ros then turns to Chitchua, who "probably could help her forget Pat" (121), after she unintentionally has an affair with the former at Phukradung. Ros does not love Chitchua. He is only "the first old stick floating nearby, and she has to grab it for survival before drowning in loneliness after realizing that she is losing Pat" (327-328). Ros chooses Chitchua because he is probably her last hope to re-establish a new family. Ros does not want to be a lonely loser, thinking that Pat will be Matthanin's. Although at first, Ros does not love Chitchua, she believes that she can

do so one day because after her disappointment in marriage, love between a man and a woman for Ros is “possibly an invented feeling” (33). She thinks that love does not last. It is not a major factor in binding two people together as proved with her unsuccessful married life. However, she is wrong, because she finally finds that she is still attached to a love which is beyond her control, her whole-hearted love for Pat.

Chitchua does not really love Ros either. His interest in this divorcee merely comes from his sexual instinct. He is attracted by her physical appearance, especially her full lips, which seem very inviting to him. As Ros is an affectionate woman, Chitchua feels his loneliness is gone when he is with her. He, therefore, cannot help thinking that the children will lessen Ros’s love for him. It seems Chitchua is trying to find answers in his life.

He told her that he never had his own property. He did not have even a warm family. He lacked everything since childhood.

So when Ros took care of him, he was really happy because so far no one cared about him. Even his mother could not give him the warm feeling. (392)

Before living with Ros, Chitchua “did not know what he wanted. Sometimes he did not know the reason to live, to create works of art as he liked? Or only to live day by day, working, having family as a human being created to eat, sleep, breed and die?” (190). He thinks he can find meaning in life  success, dignity and honor – by starting his own family with Ros. His ambition is to pull himself away from nothingness.

Although both he and Ros are artists, the contents of their works are different. Chitchua produces works of art, while that of Ros’s work is commercial. Ros is jealous of Chitchua, for he can create what can really be called “art” not some kind of work only to make money as she has to engage herself in, just to bring up her children (255).

Ros's life with this man seems potentially happy. At first, Ros seems to keep a distance, especially concerning money, as she remarks that Chitchua's money is his while her money belongs to her only. But after staying together, they share. Ros uses that of Chitchua for a piece of land, while Chitchua spends Ros's money on his travel insurance. This implies Ros's confidence in sharing her life with Chitchua. However, she begins to have doubts when she learns that the benefit from the insurance goes to Chitchua's mother.

Although Chitchua is first introduced as a decent man who seems warm and generous, as the story develops, he proves irresponsible and selfish. We notice that he is not a devoted man, as Kamphol says, "Chitchua will not live with Ros if she does not have money" (385). He is really concerned about his image. As he tells Ros, he wants to study abroad to improve his status.

Through Pat, we learn that Ros's decision to follow Chitchua and leave her children behind is a great sacrifice.

[Pat] knew that it was not sexuality which Ros wanted from Chitchua, but a life-partner. And her lonely heart caused by her extreme sensitivity assumed that she loved [Chitchua] and tried to hold on to him. That was why she could sacrifice everything for Chitchua so as to have him as her own. (501)

However, Ros receives disappointment as a reward. At the end, Chitchua leaves Ros, using her children as his main objection:

You know well that I'm a very selfish man in some respects. Sometimes, when I read your letter about your children. I could not help being jealous or thinking negatively. Reading your last letter about your children, I realize that I don't like them...I cannot help thinking that they are only your children. Realizing that I have to share your responsibility, my own thoughts about you have changed. Now I'm not sure whether to discontinue our relationship or to keep promise. I cannot tell you what I choose. My feeling for you is holding my selfishness back all the times, which means that I've chosen to ask for separation. (535-536)



Chitchua does not care about Ros's divorcee status. However, realizing that Ros is too much concerned with her children, Chitchua discovers that he cannot accept Ros's children. Finally, this is his excuse for separation. Going abroad for him means the path to success. It is pointless to come back to a divorcee with three children to support.

Ros is deeply disappointed. It means that the man of her choice is unkind. When her children are all accidentally killed, and Pat suggests that she should renew her relationship with Chitchua, Ros decides not to because as she told Pat "the children are always in her mind" (539).

##### 5. Ros's Relationship with Pat's Sister and Pat's Friend

The traditional attitude toward a divorcee is expressed by Pat's sister, Orachorn, and his friend Kamphol, who are presented as representatives of Thai middle-class conservatism. Because of his negative attitude toward a divorcee, Kamphol opposes Ros although he barely knows her. He believes in the stereotype of a woman, especially a divorcee who, according to Kamphol, is a flirt who cannot control her sexual desire (384).

Personally, Orachorn thinks that Ros is admirable, for she is able to live on her own and take care of her children without her husband's support. However, she cannot accept Ros as Pat's prospective wife because of Ros's age and divorcee status. Concerned that Pat will be in financial difficulty, she wants him to marry a rich woman as Matthanin for his future.

The person who influences Orachorn regarding Pat's relationship with Ros is Kamphol. He convinces Orachorn that Ros does not really love Pat. To Kamphol, Ros is just a lonely divorcee who wants a man for her sexual desire (470). Besides,

for such a conservative, “a bride has to be a virgin. [Kamphol] did not want to be involved with a divorcee, an ugly match for a young man” (248).

## 6. Ros’s Character

Ros is portrayed as an artistic and very sensitive woman with a charming appearance. The thirty-year-old divorcee with a bright face, shoulder-length silky black hair, full lips and rather high forehead (10) is a mother of three children. Although seemingly strong in single-handedly bringing up her children, deep down, Ros is very vulnerable. Her life is troubled by many concerns in various situations and conditions: her struggle in Bangkok, her artistic career, her relationship with Chitchua and her love for Pat, all of which are related to her love for the children. Ros’s sensitivity and vulnerability alienate her from others and intensify her loneliness. Actually, this novel reveals loneliness of almost all of the characters. Pat is lonely despite his wealth and love from many. Chitchua’s single life often leads to loneliness. Even Matthanin, the character who seems to have a happy life, faces this feeling (79). However, because of Ros’s sensitivity, her degree of loneliness is greater than that of others. Pat observes that “...It is true that everyone is sometimes lonely, but no one always has this feeling on his/her eyes as Ros” (15). Many times Ros’s loneliness is mentioned, especially when she thinks of Pat:

Loneliness pierced her heart. She really needed someone to talk to. (65)

It was unbearable to be alone in the room which warmed her heart last night.

But when she was without him, everything returned to the same. It always declared loneliness. (86)

In fact, she wanted to go home but was afraid of loneliness she had to come across. At this moment, she feared loneliness most, worrying that she would be fond of her thoughts when she had to

face her own feeling and reality. She did not want to be alone, to be with her own thoughts. (275)

Why was loneliness so painful? Especially, while being alone with blank mind, her lonely feeling increased. Finally, she cried. She did not know where the tears flowing like a broken dam was from.

While she was thinking that she would lose him from now on, her heart nearly broke with anguish. (293)

Ros's sensitivity has been her outstanding attribute since childhood. Nature and people make a deep and strong impression on her feelings and thoughts. When she was young, she looked at the petals of the flamboyant flowers and wondered who created them. She was heart-broken when they were being cut as for Ros, these flowers, especially the orange and dark yellow colors bring liveliness and happiness to her life. The cutting of them refers to the destruction of her life.

The sound of the axe deeply struck her heart. She remembered that tears came, but she still painfully gazed at the axe which deepened through the delicate white wood of the tree. (19)

On one occasion, the strong smell of *Champee (michelia alba)* at Ros's country house stimulates her sexually when Pat follows her there: "In the darkness, *Champee* smelt strong...At the moment, Ros could not control herself with Pat's kiss..." (129).

Ros's love of nature probably comes from her childhood life in the countryside. She tells Chitchua that if she were rich, she would buy a piece of land on the outskirts of the city (48). Sometimes, Ros drives outside Bangkok to the fields to see the sun rising. However, this is rather strange for the people passing there (92). She loves a symphony by Beethoven, which reminds her of a field, wind and sunshine, all of which cannot be found in Bangkok.

Ros's delicacy and sensitivity are shown as well through her career as an illustrator. She "didn't work apathetically, but carefully considered words in

manuscripts. She did not just get pictures done, but attempted to express the characters' feelings via her illustrations" (68).

Ros's sensitivity seems to be her advantage because she can appreciate the beauty of nature, and the most important thing is that she can see another's feelings through their eyes. However, regarding her relationship with Pat, this may be a disadvantage, because with this man, Ros is unable to know how he really feels.

Probably thanks to her study of art, she could easily notice all the feelings on one's face without mistake...except...except when her heart was blinded. She therefore, could not see the sincerity he had for her. (104)

Ros sometimes views life negatively. Once, staying in her room at night, Ros observes the gloomy and complex side of life on the street. She sympathizes with a prostitute walking by as if she was selling things without getting anyone's interest. Ros thinks of and compares herself to the prostitute: both have to struggle for money in their different ways. Life depends on the stiff competition of the social system (355).

Concerning love, Ros often thinks of three main issues – love, freedom, and compatibility – all of which constantly trouble her. At the beginning of the story, we learn that Ros feels free after her divorce; however, living alone brings loneliness. She asks herself whether she is pleased to get freedom when she has to face up to this terrible feeling (23). Ros knows that loneliness will disappear if she establishes a new family, but this may lead to the loss of her freedom. It seems that the only solution for Ros is to love someone, for this can relieve her loneliness, while a certain freedom will still be hers. However, it is difficult for Ros to be sure that a new life-partner will be a suitable match.

Ros is a woman with strong emotions, which suddenly rise and fall. While in love, she will give all her heart, but in hatred, she is very determined to leave, as when

she divorces her husband. Throughout the story, Ros faces a struggle between reason and emotion. She loves Pat, but has to choose Chitchua, who finally leaves her. She loves her children, but they are suddenly lost to her. She almost has Pat, her love and consolation, but they are finally separated. Life proves meaningless to Ros. At the end, when “there is no one left, this emotional woman decides her own fate by committing suicide” (Sirirat Thaveelertnithi, 1995 : 168).

## 7. Ros’s Alienation and Suicide

Throughout the story, we notice Ros’s psychological conflicts, which gradually rise to a peak and lead her to feelings of alienation. Ros’s heightened sensitivity makes her vulnerable to strong feelings. Although she seems confident, concerning love, Ros is very fragile. She inevitably considers love, which can relieve her loneliness, as essential to life.

From the beginning of the story, we learn that the children are the most important people in her life. Her letter to them on the first page of the novel is one of the best pieces of evidence. But as the story develops, we discover that love for the children cannot alone fulfill her. As a lonely woman who struggles for a decent life for herself and her children, Ros convinces herself that she should live with a suitable man although Chitchua does not make her certain that he is a person who can help her reconstruct a new family. Ros tries to hide her loneliness and frustration because she does not want anyone to take pity on her. Yet, she finds that her love for Pat, which she has attempted to deny, is too powerful for her.

Ros’s psychological conflicts are apparent, especially when she realizes that she loves Pat. Although her affair with him is full of love, this does not ensure the success of their relationship. Ros’s concern about compatibility troubles her and estranges her from Pat, especially when she realizes that her love cannot be fulfilled.

Moreover, her frustration increases when she feels condemned by those who consider her an older divorcee intent on catching a younger man. Such criticism shakes her self-confidence.

Alienation is a constant disturbance for this lonely divorcee throughout the novel. As a sensitive, nature-loving artist, Ros is miserably estranged from the busy life of Bangkok, where she has to live.

This was how Bangkok was...crowded buildings, hurried people, noisy horns and car engines. All these sounds were unpleasant. ...

In April, summer flowers were blossoming. But in the area where she lived, it was difficult to look for greenery. There was only dust-dry brown grasses. (18)

Her lonely struggle in a big city is frustrating and tiring. She is not even content with her work as an illustrator although she gives her heart to it, because it gives her no pride. As Pat tells her, Ros's way of life is different from that of others in the city (22). Ros is a loner. She is not a social person. She cannot identify herself with those who have negative opinions toward her. Ros is aware of the gossip about her divorcee status and her relationship with Pat. Although she seems to have many friends, she has no one who really understands her; no one is her friend in times of need. Many times Ros is alone and introspective in an unfriendly world. However, as repeatedly revealed in the story, she can bear all these unpleasant things for her children, for whom she struggles for financial stability. Her children's unexpected deaths, therefore, plunge her into an empty world, devoid of any meaning. Her thoughts of death ominously loom again after frequent contemplations:

“Pat, I want to die.”... “I can see no reason to live and work.”

...  
... “My selfhood is not so important. I will die one day. I don't know why I should get money...Pat, I cannot live any longer.” (514)

Near the end of the story, it is clear that her love for Pat is less important than that for her children. After her first disappointment with Pat, Ros is able to lead a normal life because at that time she still has her children. But, after their deaths, the thought of losing Pat leaves her utterly hopeless, for she has no one to live for. Being with Pat after losing her children helps her to recover. Loneliness seems to disappear, at least for a while, but it fatally strikes her with Pat's departure. It is too painful for her to live alone and wait for Pat, who cannot give her any certainty.

Ros goes to Hua-Hin after Pat's departure. Being alone gives her time to think of a way to escape distress. Ros thinks of her children and Pat and wishes to meet them after death, which Ros believes can bring her a new life without troubles, anxiety and loneliness, a life she cannot find while she is alive. Ros decides to commit suicide, taking an overdose of sleeping pills, lying on the seashore and waiting for the hands of the sea to gradually take her to the eternally happy realm she has sought almost all her life.

The wind blew so strongly that she felt cold. Was death cold and lonely? She often thought of death and could not stop thinking of it. When and where would it reach her? Would it come as fast as those of her children?

Tears came while thinking of them. A few moments before death, they might feel utmost suffering. Did they think of their mother at that moment?

And now where were they waiting for her? Would they look at their grief-stricken mother if they were waiting for her in heaven? (539)

How beautiful death was!

It was better than living under pressure...

Pat would be saddened, missing her, but he would forget it one day, forget even that once he loved a woman named Ros.

And he would later have a suitable woman. Everything would be better if she did not exist in the world.

...

She was smiling while sleeping. Happiness would belong to her forever after her long waiting. (566)

Ros is going to die happily. She is leaving all pain in this life. She is not dying alone; at least she has the moan of the sea and the friendly tenderness of the moonlight. This affirms the unity between the soul and nature.

Facing mental isolation and feeling alienated from others, her final decision seems to be the best solution for Ros, as life is extremely meaningless at the last lonely moment.

### **Comparison**

While societies expect women to be devoted wives and mothers, for Edna and Ros, dignity and personal freedom are most essential. These two protagonists share some parallel characteristics and difficulties in living. They are limited by the social expectations of their times. They become outsiders because of their unique ways of thinking. This comparative section will explore the origin and results of the heroines' alienation.

Edna's and Ros's married lives are similar in that both are motivated by their teenage fancies and finally end in failure. Edna marries her husband because she wishes to go beyond the world of romance and dreams. Mr. Pontellier appears when Edna is in a great passion, having fallen in love with a renowned Shakespearean actor and realizes that "a marriage with the tragedian was not for her in this world" (19). Léonce is her choice because Edna wants to free herself from her family, dominated by her father, where intimate parental relationships has been missing after her mother died. But what she later realizes, as her real needs are discovered, is that her marriage to her husband is "purely an accident" (19), and it is only a "mismatch of two people who have no sympathy of thought and taste." (DeKevon, 1989 : 26).

One obvious difference is their ages. Edna is twenty-eight years old when her husband is forty. Also, the couple is separated a lot. Her husband often leaves home



on business and sometimes gambles at a club, while Edna is expected to be at home, taking care of her children. She never feels true happiness in her marriage.

Like Edna's marriage, Ros's is also "a mismatch" of two very different people. Ros's family collapses because she mistakes her husband for a loving person. She believes that he will bring her a happy married life. After marriage, Ros discovers that compatibility, sensitivity and sympathy are missing. Ros needs gentleness from her partner, but this is not found in her husband. As a result, she finds it better to separate. This is why after divorce she longs for a kind-hearted and understanding man.

Edna's and Ros's unsuccessful family lives are partially related to the view of a woman as an object. Mr. Pontellier is an obvious materialist who regards his wife as only an object for show, not an individual with her own rights or a woman with self-importance, as Edna expects. Similarly, Ros is a mere sexual object for her ex-husband. This is seen especially in his crude words when talking about her.

With problems in their married life, however, Ros is able to end her trouble with divorce, whereas Edna cannot because divorce is prohibited for Catholics. Nevertheless, Ros has to face two consequent problems, loneliness and unfair social judgments. Ros is reproached as a highly sexed divorcee, whose sincere relationship with her loved person can hardly go smoothly. Social expectations play important roles in Edna's and Ros's lives. Both are not happy with what they are because what they want is beyond the social expectations of women.

Marrying a creole, Edna is expected to be a conventionally good wife and mother of the late nineteenth century society. But for her, these roles are too hard to conform to. The obligations of the patriarchal society limit the power of a woman who is assumed to have neither feeling nor freedom. But after "the awakening", Edna regards herself as an independent woman who can feel and lead her own life, not only as a man's useful object. Yet, in reality, it is impossible to be free because social

convention compels her to be in this marital “jail.” This new awareness, therefore, leads to a conflicted life as an alien in her own society.

Although divorce is possible in Thai society, it does not mean that a divorcee is a completely acceptable woman. This is a source of the protagonist’s conflict, which is portrayed in this novel not only via Ros herself but also in the criticism by others, Kamphol and Pat’s sister, who cannot accept Ros as her brother’s future wife because of her divorcee status. Although independent and hard-working, Ros is far from being an ideal wife according to general social expectations. A contrast to Ros is Matthanin, who besides being rich, is a young and attractive virgin, and therefore, a more suitable match for a man of a good family like Pat.

Edna and Ros can be considered more or less revolutionary women. Edna shows her strength in challenges to the social mores: the neglect of her children, her rejection of Reception Day, and her adultery with Arobin. Her last daring act, which is beyond the thinking of people in her society, is to move out of her husband’s house with a plan to support herself. For Ros, her divorce and her quitting her secure but dull official work are also relatively brave acts. Ros sees no reason to prolong her troubled marriage, or the job, which gives her little return in terms of self-worth, satisfaction or payment. Like Edna, she decides to be independent. In her case, this means not only supporting herself, but also her children, whom Ros fights over with her former husband. Such a decision is daring because it is probably not an alternative for many women, for it involves a lonely, independent and insecure life as well as hard work. Moreover, her decision to be with Chitchua without marriage is also a breach of social tradition.

An important common theme of these two female novelists is the protagonists’ sexual affairs, which are considered unacceptable for “good” women in their societies. Edna’s playful flirtation is not a grave matter among creoles if it does not develop into a serious relationship. For Ros, due to her divorcee status, others regard

her as a desperately lonely woman with a strong sexual desire. What others do not care to know is that her loneliness stems from the longing for psychological warmth no less than the need for physical contact.

Yet, sexual desire seems so powerful a feeling for Edna and Ros that they cannot deny it. This is quite clear, especially in the relationships between Edna and Arobin, and between Ros and Chitchua. Edna's sexual instinct is aroused when she meets Arobin. She admits that his talk and action appeal "to the animalism stirring impatiently within her" (78). After her self-realization, Edna finds that responsibility forces her to take unpleasant routes. She changes her life-philosophy. Importantly, she begins to learn what a real life is. Having been a woman welcomed in society because of her husband's social status, Edna wants to prove her dignity. Money and her husband's business success are not as important as her meaningful self. She changes from a woman in a submissive position to a new woman who can determine the course of her own life. Edna can earn money on her own by selling her painting, which symbolizes the emotional expression of a human soul. With this enlightenment, Edna becomes lively. Thus, Dr. Mandelet observes, "a subtle change...her speech was warm and energetic...She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun" (70). While watching the race, she is so appealing that "people turned their heads to look at her..." and "Arobin caught the contagion of excitement which drew him to Edna like a magnet" (74). From then on, Arobin, even though he at first feels Edna is unapproachable, tries to approach Edna physically, and finally achieves sexual satisfaction.

This gradual intimacy is similar to that between Ros and Chitchua, who is charmed by Ros's sexual attractiveness, her passionate character and her inviting and sensual lips. Her physical charm drives him to a passionate involvement with Ros at Phukradung.

These physical relationships illustrate the power of human instinct. We can see that Edna at first tries not to lose herself in passion, but it is too hard to fight against. Her affair with Arobin seems to be the declaration of her independence. She is free to have a love affair with anyone. For Ros, her affair with Chitchua seems merely accidental because she cannot resist Chitchua's stimulating action; however, it is more important that she cannot control herself and is finally overwhelmed by sexual desire and her pain from Pat's negligence.

Although both affairs are without love, Chitchua becomes more meaningful to Ros, while Arobin remains meaningless to Edna because she never loves him. Ros tries to love Chitchua because she hopes that this man can be her life partner and provide her a secure family. Similarly, Chitchua, a man from a broken home, also longs for a warm family. He wants an understanding wife, and Ros seems to fit this requirement. Here suitability is their main concern. Both are working people struggling for money and better lives. Ros works hard for her children, while Chitchua is an ambitious university lecturer who hopes for greater success. Moreover, they are both artists and should speak the same language. Yet, the author shows that Ros's hope would be difficult to realize. Their relationship does not go smoothly even though they are together. Near the end of their relationship, Ros is forced to leave her children only to be finally jilted by Chitchua.

The only men who are the protagonists' beloved are Robert and Pat. Robert's warmth and sympathy provide what Edna misses in her marriage, while for Ros, Pat is a kind-hearted man with the tenderness she longs for. Being with their loved ones brings Edna's and Ros's happy moment. Edna is a quiet person, but with Robert, she talks; she is happy and can be herself while sharing her experiences with Robert. She cannot do so with her husband, nor with Arobin. Similarly, Ros can talk openly to Pat, while she has to be careful of her words and actions when with Chitchua.

A similar point between Robert and Pat is that they are younger than the female protagonists. However, the age difference does not affect Edna because in the creole society at that time it was fashionable for a young man to flirt or play a love game with a lady; nobody expects that their relationship will develop into a real love. But for Ros, this is a great problem because in Thai society, it is expected that a man will be older than his wife whom he has to protect and support. Throughout the story, we can see that Ros is really concerned about her age and especially the age difference between Pat and herself (11,20,21,28,40,70,91,100,128,200). It is Ros's crucial conflict but does not seem to be Edna's major concern.

Robert and Pat are awakened to passion and warm-hearted love through their relationships with Edna and Ros respectively; however, both men's final decisions are different. Robert chooses the traditional way of life and will not stand by Edna's side, while Pat, once he is sure of his tender feeling for Ros, feels free to live with this older divorcee. Here, Robert seems more conservative. His love for Edna means getting married, but it is impossible because Edna cannot obtain a divorce from her husband. On the other hand, social factors do not affect Pat. Ros is legally free. Moreover, being an independent artist living in a more modern and open society with fewer conventional beliefs, he can choose to marry Ros when he is ready. To a certain extent, his relationship with Ros is associated with sympathy. It is a kind of companionship that goes beyond love, as clearly seen when Ros's children all die. It is only Pat who is by her side.

Owing to social expectations and religion, Robert realizes that it is difficult to fulfill his love with Edna, whose idea of independence seems alien to him, as seen near the end of the story; Robert admits that he does not understand Edna when she tells him that she gives herself where she chooses (106-107) because for Robert love means to "hold her and keep her" (107). He loves Edna and wants her to be his

possession, but for Edna love does not mean ownership. She loves Robert and dreams to be with this man, but does not want to be chained.

A significant similarity between Edna and Ros which estranges them from others is their oversensitivity, probably resulting from their artistic natures. Both enjoy being with painting, listening to music, reading and appreciating natural beauty. Edna has her atelier as her imaginary realm and expresses her individuality and potential with painting. Ros studies art and works as an illustrator to support herself and her children. While working on a manuscript to create pictures, she seems to forget everything.

Artistic sensitivity causes deep feelings others may not sense. An example is Mlle Reisz's song which Edna names "Solitude" and which moves her to tears. Similarly, Ros cannot help crying while listening to a romantic song, "The Starry Night," on a moonlit night at Samet Island. Once, she says that she does not like jazz because to her it is devoid of emotion. Edna's favorite music seems to be "Si tu savais," the special song Robert sings while they are crossing the bay. Robert's voice, the song's notes and "the whole refrain haunted her memory" (41). Ros loves listening to music, especially while working and driving. Many times she mentions various kinds of songs and singers; however, the most meaningful song for her is the one that Pat sings and she records.

For Edna, art means freedom and self-expression, especially after her self-realization. While other women seem happy and proud of their duties, Edna feels that the role of a wife and mother should not be the most important in a woman's life. She decides to move out of her husband's house and support herself by selling her paintings. While art is a means of liberty for Edna, it is unusual for others. The artistic career is Ros's choice. However, being an artist could be a partial cause of her alienation. Her pictures sometimes seem unsatisfactory to her employer, since they do not fit commercial requirements as an editor once remarked about one of her

illustrations (100). Unable to freely express her artistic talent, she feels no pride in her work, for if she could choose, she would rather be a true artist, not living on commercial art (126) which she does not identify with. Realizing she is a socially misfit, she sometimes ponders death (62, 147, 354, 345). But in reality, she has to survive in a money-oriented society. Her strong discontent with the struggle of life can be seen in her comparing herself to a prostitute who has to struggle for a living.

Edna's and Ros's oversensitivity can be felt, especially in relation to their lovers Robert and Pat. As seen in the earlier description, everything about their men interests them. For example, while Robert is away, even his pictures as a baby with his mother and letters to his mother garner Edna's greatest interest and attraction. When Edna accidentally meets him after his return from Mexico, she is hurt to learn that she is not the first person Robert wants to see. For Ros, Pat's talk and actions have a great effect. From the very beginning, Pat's dance with Matthanin hurts her. On coming home after an encounter with Pat at the waterfall, Ros is reluctant to take a bath because she wants to keep Pat's touch on her body as long as she can. For Ros, it is "the smell of her beloved. Why would one let it disappear?" (168). As a result, she cannot help feeling hurt when Pat acts as if he does not care about their love-making, saying "I'd rather take a bath. I feel very sweaty" (168).

Although both of the protagonists are often on their own, Edna and Ros have friends. Yet, due to their unique ways of thinking, none can really understand them. *The Awakening* gives clearer roles of the protagonist's friends than *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*. Edna has "friends" – Adèle, Mlle Reisz and Robert. However, it seems she does not want to talk to them or ask them for help. She keeps her trouble in her mind and thinks on her own. Toward the end of *The Awakening*, Dr. Mandelet realizes that Edna has problems which, although understandable for him, are not understood by others (110). Finally, Edna admits that she does not feel "moved to speak of things that trouble" her (110), and she accepts that "there are periods of

despondency and suffering which take possession of her (110). Even when she realizes this, Edna does not want anything but her own way.

Ros has very few understanding people around her. Besides Pat, she has her mother, who, however, is far removed in terms of distance and age, as well as way of life. Ros can talk about only a few topics with her loving mother. Her children can relieve her loneliness, but they are too young to understand her. She has some artistic acquaintances, but they are only her casual companions. Men come close to her with more or less selfish purposes. The only person who seems to be Ros's close friend is Pat. Yet, she is still lonely, feeling that Pat has a certain reserve. There is no word to affirm his tender feelings for her. Moreover, his playfulness lessens Ros's confidence.

The female protagonists' feelings for their men partially lead them to their peaks of conflict. Robert's departure greatly affects Edna. On the way home from Adèle's house, Edna anticipates Robert's waiting for her: "...she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy" (110). She is sure of what she wants. She prefers "to be alone with her own way" (109-110). With Robert, she thinks that her loneliness will be gone because there is "no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one" (110). However, Robert is eventually "nowhere at hand" (111). But, even if Robert waited for Edna, it would be unlikely that she could find life fulfillment, for they may finally have to lead a traditional life which means she would become a man's possession again. To the last line of the novel, we are certain that Edna will reject this idea to protect her identity.

Similarly, Pat's going abroad has a strong impact on Ros. Pat's promises to return and his statements of lifelong love guarantee nothing. All she can do is keep waiting without hope, dwelling in endless loneliness which leads to despair. Ros is uncertain whether she will lose this love again. As she asks herself, "How can she stand it if [Pat] leaves her forever?" (256).





However this love is not as important as that between a mother and a child. This is especially seen throughout *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, while Edna's sense of motherhood is revealed clearly only at the end. We can see that the children have crucial impacts on both heroines. Edna and Ros view their motherhood differently. A significant contrast is that Edna seems alienated from her children, to whom she does not want to be close, while Ros, living away from her children, keeps thinking of them and hurrying herself to complete her work to see them. Her children's deaths leave her life empty. This difference suggests the distant parental relationship between Edna and her father and the warm-hearted one between Ros and her mother respectively.

Both heroines have distinctive ways of expressing their love for their children. Edna does not seem a loving mother. She rarely accompanies her children, mostly leaving them with the quadroon or their grandmother. *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, however, delicately and explicitly outlines Ros's love for her children. Ros considers her children her most precious possession although she cherishes her selfhood. Ros tries to be with them and take care of them on her own because she believes that the children need her and this motherly responsibility is her self-fulfillment.

Freedom entails loneliness. This is clear in Edna's case. Independence is what she seeks. At first, being under the control of social expectations, Edna feels imprisoned. She cannot think for herself, but is expected to be a traditional good wife and mother. After her self-discovery, she realizes that she needs freedom. But, the consequence of her decision to be free is loneliness because her subsequent acts are not accepted in her social realm. Ros after her divorce feels free, but is lonely (23), and repeatedly admits this throughout the story (15,16,17,65, 86, 92, 127, 145, 153, 216, 256, 275).

Both heroines' suicides are caused by social and psychological factors, but they are somewhat dissimilar. Sociologically, their final decisions are egoistic

suicides – a destructive act committed by an individual failing to socialize (DeFleur et al., 1973 : 8) – for both heroines lack a will for social integration. They do not feel they belong to their societies, nor do they conform to social expectations. The loss of love is clearly seen in both cases. For Edna, this loss pushes her to infinite emptiness. As for Ros, after the great loss of all her children, her only loved one, Pat is also so far away. For both protagonists, self-destruction seems the most suitable choice because they cannot accept reality nor find any solution.

Women's alienation is expressed via both Edna and Ros. They feel that they are lonely aliens in their societies mainly because the natural human feeling  to love and to be loved, as well as human instinct  clash with social rules. As human instinct and dignity are very powerful for those who are exceptionally sensitive, the clash is fatal and ends in suicide.