

Chapter 4

Analysis of the Literary Elements

The discussion in this chapter will be on major literary elements in *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* which portray women's alienation: theme, plot, setting, characterization, imagery and point of view. Each novel will be discussed under these headings individually, then a comparative study will be conducted.

The Awakening

1. Theme

The Awakening focuses on the tragedy of a married woman's struggle for her dignity. The novel shows that in her social context, it is impossible to achieve freedom from the convention which restricts her to household responsibilities, and denies her natural lust for life. The protagonist fights to maintain her genuine inner life, especially the human desire for independence. This struggle alienates her from others, including those most valuable to her. Her choice of death instead of becoming a slave to the social values which ruin her dignity signals a social protest.

2. Plot

This version of *The Awakening* is divided into thirty-nine chapters. The growth of the protagonist's ideas about independence covers nine chapters. Chapters ten up to the last, chapter thirty-nine, are Edna's awakening and its outcome. The critical turning-points are in chapters fifteen ☞ Robert's abrupt departure to Mexico ☞ and thirty-three ☞ Edna's unexpected meeting with Robert. The story's climax, Edna's witnessing of Adèle's childbirthing, is in chapter thirty-seven, and the rest of

the novel constitutes resolution. This plot structure suggests the speed motion of the protagonist's awakening, which exhausts her with two sudden events and finally leads to the destructive conclusion.

The Awakening is presented chronologically following a traditional plot which, as Thanya Sangkhapanthanon (1999 : 164) notes, mainly focuses on the sequence of events and conflicts (usually the longest portion of the novel) which the protagonist encounters up to the climax and resolution. The narrative flow of this story, however, is sometimes interrupted by five flashbacks of earlier scenes which are employed to explain the protagonist's behavior and probably to direct the reader's attitude toward certain characters and sometimes call for sympathy. Flashbacks to Edna's childhood and events leading to her marriage give the protagonist's background and reveal certain crucial traits relating to her later revolutionary behavior. Examples are her running away from Sunday prayer and her stubborn decision to marry her husband, both of which show Edna's non-conformity and clarify her profound consciousness of her independence.

A distinctive point of the plot is the contribution of the major conflicts. The protagonist's contentment with ideas of independence gives rise to emotional and social conflicts with traditional norms. Resenting what she considers social enslavement, the protagonist alienates herself from her "dehumanizing" society. Her behavior underscores the novel's theme: to achieve individual independence requires struggle and the courage to face loneliness.

The Awakening indicates Chopin's refusal of the idea of "the pure woman" which lays behind so many portrayals of Victorian heroines whose weddings conclude in a happy ending (Cunningham, 1978 : 50). In *The Awakening*, marriage becomes merely the beginning and Chopin uses this incident to illustrate unhappiness and the position of women in the society of the late nineteenth century. She creates her heroine, Edna, as a representative of a "New Woman" who desires freedom in a "New Woman" novel. To Cunningham (1978 : 49-51), a common pattern of such a novel is to show the heroine arriving at her ideals of freedom  with an emphasis on

sexual freedom rather than femininity and having to experience misery in order to achieve success.

As the story reaches its climax, Edna witnesses Adèle's childbirthing and Robert departs, Edna is placed in a dilemma. The two powerful events drive her to the final solution death which is one of the common punishments a "New Woman" must encounter for her emancipation.

The Awakening carries an unhappy ending for its reader. Edna cannot solve her problem. She becomes isolated spiritually and emotionally as well as physically, and finally faces doom and gloom alone. In relation to the narrative pattern of tragedy, McNulty (1977 : 50-54) points out that death becomes the final act of principal tragic figures. They finally understand their circumstances and realize the unbearable reality of life. This issue is apparent in the case of Edna, whose discovery of the impossibility of achieving her genuine needs leads to inevitable disaster. Perrine and Arp (1993 : 45-46) view this kind of ending as an illumination in real life ending with both defeat and triumph. Moreover, this unpleasant conclusion stirs the readers to find out more from the story, which, as in *The Awakening*, leaves some readers with unanswered questions: Is Edna's suicide an intentional destruction of her self or a result of her exhaustion after "swimming too far out to return"? The first interpretation seems a reasonable answer for this determined and revolutionary "New Woman."

3. Setting

The story's major settings are a fashionable resort on Grand Isle, where Edna and her family spend their summer vacation and New Orleans, Edna's residence. The two places are in Louisiana, Chopin's familiar creole community where she lived with her husband.

The detailed description of late 19th century creole society is given as a social background of the story which depicts life of a woman in such a patriarchal society.

The beach where the creoles are taking summer vacation is the place where Edna is first introduced. The nearby resort ruled by a woman reflects the notion of a “women’s realm” (Phanthipha Buranamart, 2000 : 33-36). The women’s roles as a mother and wife are so limited that they become invisible (or only living furniture) in the man’s society (Ua Unchalee, 2001 a : 75).

Mr. Pontellier’s house is a noteworthy example of this male-dominated society. The domestic interior is an extension of himself.

The Pontelliers possessed a very charming home on Esplanade Street in New Orleans. It was a large, double cottage, with a broad front veranda, whose round, fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green. In the yard, which was kept scrupulously neat, were flowers and plants of every description which flourishes in South Louisiana. Within doors the appointments were perfect after the conventional type. The softest carpets and rugs covered the floors; rich and tasteful draperies hung at doors and windows. There were paintings, selected with judgement and discrimination, upon the walls. The cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which daily appeared upon the table were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr. Pontellier.

...He greatly valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, ... (50)

The underlined words point to Mr. Pontellier’s materialism and how strict and stern he is. “His possessions” in the last sentence undoubtedly include his wife. The decoration expresses its owner’s materialism with its grandeur and luxury (splendid furniture). Despite such comfort, a cool and distant relationship between Edna and her husband is felt, especially after Edna’s self-realization. Having been a pleasant place for six years of marriage, this magnificent house becomes her luxurious prison.

A contrast with this gorgeous residence is Edna’s pigeon house, the size and decoration of which are completely different.

The “pigeon-house” stood behind a locked gate, and a shallow parterre that had been somewhat neglected. There was a small front porch, upon which a long window and the front

door opened. The door opened directly into the parlor; there was no side entry. ...

...There were some books on the table and a lounge near at hand. On the floor was a fresh matting, covered with a rug or two; and on the walls hung a few tasteful pictures...Her bedroom was adjoining, and across a small passage were the dining-room and kitchen. (91)

The dining-room was very small. Edna's round mahogany would have almost filled it. As it was there was but a step or two from the little table to the kitchen, to the mantel, the small buffet, and the side door that opened out on the narrow brick-paved yard. (99)

This peaceful realm is not marvelous but provides coziness, comfort, security and privacy. Above all, it allows the feeling of home: "She had succeeded in making the room look habitual and homelike." (91)

The pigeon-house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to "feed upon opinion" when her own soul had invited her. (93)

In this house, Edna feels herself an individual who does not tie herself to any social norms. She has personal freedom, both physical and spiritual, to act and to think independently in a place where she can wholeheartedly calls "home."

While an artificial setting "bespeaks" the character of a person building and living in it (Roberts, 1969 : 41), a natural setting is powerful in controlling characters and allowing final decisions or solutions (Thanya Sangkhapanthanon, 1999 : 191). The sea is the most powerful setting in *The Awakening*. It influences Edna and her expression of a human (woman's) will.

Grand Isle is the first place triggering Edna's awakening. By describing Edna's awakening, then showing her difficulty with her husband, the author

effectively illustrates how much the sea affects the heroine's psyche. This striking description appears when Edna begins to realize her position:

The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. (15)

The sensuality of the gulf as well as the "voice" of the sea arouse her "to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her..." (15).

Dickinson (1959 : 24) asks, "Does man determine his own destiny from within himself, or is his destiny determined for him by forces lying outside himself – that is, by his environment?" The sea is a determining force in *The Awakening*. It is inviting and motivating for Edna, and is described through vivid words: "seductive," "whispering," "clamoring," "murmuring," "sensuous," "enfolding," "soft" and "close" (embrace). This water-world is appealing from the very first time she swims "alone, boldly and with over-confidence" (28) out (seemingly) for "the unlimited" (29). This attraction relates to her final decision to end her life in the sea, where she feels she belongs.

The water of the gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.

...
...when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

...She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it has never known.

The foamy wavelets curled up to the white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her

white body and reached out with a long, sweeping, stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. (113)

The repetition of the underlined parts in this quotation which are mentioned on page eighty-six demonstrates the effect of environment on the character. In this last scene, Edna is alone with powerful nature. Her failure in the struggle is suggested by a broken-winged bird which is trying to survive but finally fails. Standing naked, Edna breathes the genuine freedom she has been longing for. She is free from those social conventions symbolized by the clothing which has tightly bound her almost all her life.

The sea is similar to the blue-grass meadow in Edna's childhood. They both define Edna's feeling of freedom. She is filled with joy in both places. The meadow is as big as the ocean, stretching so far away without beginning and end. Walking through the grass is like swimming in the sea. To beat the tall grass is to "strike out in the water" (17-19). Both wide places provide a sense of liberty solitude and eternity. However, the difference is that while very young, Edna had no power and bravery to go far. She returned to reality after breathing the air of freedom. But at the end, self-realization makes her strong, brave and determined to be an independent individual.

While the physical vastness of the sea gives a sense of infinite freedom, the land represents limitation in this novel. Here, a person has to join others and conform to social norms. In Edna's case, even though the pigeon house and the blue-grass meadow are liberating spaces for her, they are only temporary escapes, unlike the sea which provides her genuine feeling of independence. However, only death offers that ultimate, unlimited freedom which does not exist in reality.

4. Characterization

"Human life began, we are told, when God breathed life into a handful of dust and created them. Fictional life begins when an author breathes life into characters

and convinces us of their reality” (Perrine and Arp, 1993 : 70). This is done through an author’s characterization as his task is “to explain what is going on in the world he creates” (Dickinson, 1959 : 15) via the presentation of characters.

The revelation of Edna Pontellier’s character is shown rather than directly describing. Although the author introduces the protagonist by mentioning her appearance first, as the story develops, we can see the sort of person Edna is through dialogues and actions, effective methods of characterization. As Hawthorn (1985 : 49) suggests, “showing” has been preferred for critics to “telling”, for the first method “unlocks the life in characters rather than treating them as inanimate objects.” We can think about and decide upon the nature of characters when we follow them. We witness Edna’s awakening and understand her alienation, but above all, we sympathize with her misery.

Edna is created against the stereotype of Victorian women in the American South in the late nineteenth century. She is portrayed differently, behaving and thinking independently. This protagonist as well as Robert Lebrun may be considered dynamic character types, while the rest are static or rather undeveloped. Edna’s and Robert’s conflicts are carefully depicted. Edna’s behavior is consistent with her character. What she does and her behavioral changes are reasonably motivated. This tragic and realistic figure is a revolutionary woman distinguished from her female creole contemporaries and is “the principal victim of tragic action” (McNulty, 1977 : 54). As for Robert, although his inner conflict between reason and emotion troubles him, his character does not develop, as seen in his behavior and final decision. However, according to McNulty’s definition of the characters in the tragedy (1977 : 54), Robert Lebrun can be considered a tragic figure because he “is defeated in conflict with opposing power” (55), so-called social norms, and experiences a sense of loss.

5. Imagery

In *The Awakening*, the author makes use of images and symbols effectively to express Edna's psychological state, her growth of self-awareness, her freedom and her struggle for it. Birds, the sea, houses, for example, are symbolically used to add meaning to the story and to underscore the novel's theme.

Throughout *The Awakening*, birds seem to symbolize women. The parrot and the mocking-bird in their cages mentioned at the beginning of the story can refer to creole women who are trapped in their roles as wives and mothers by the social traditions.

A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

"Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!"

He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence. (3)

The caged parrot repeating a little French and Spanish, and some other incomprehensible language, serves as a prophet of Edna's life: no one except the mocking-bird, another caged bird, will understand her language, which expresses her alien thoughts.

The symbolic use of the bird appears again in the middle of the story as Edna struggles to transcend social conventions. Mlle. Reisz puts her arms around Edna and feels her shoulder blades to see if Edna's wings are strong, and says,

"The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth." (82)

A message behind Mlle. Reisz's warning is that if Edna is determined to loosen herself from her submissive position, she must have strong wings to fly to freedom; otherwise, she will fall down and hurt herself.

All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water. (113)

Mlle. Reisz's advice is echoed at the tragic conclusion. The image of the broken-winged bird symbolizes Edna's failure. The words "reeling", "fluttering" and "circling" used to describe this disabled bird give the feeling of struggle for survival. Despite flying disability, the wounded bird attempts to preserve its life, as Edna does to maintain her individuality although she is aware it is impossible. As the injured bird is too exhausted to keep flying, Edna's strength to struggle for independence falters when she realizes that it is useless to strive. She can neither escape the limitations of her woman's role nor achieve independence.

Edna's desire for flight is again symbolically suggested in her naming her own place "the pigeon house" which is "a little four-room house...so cozy, so inviting and restful" (79) that represents a small but private realm of her own. Here she feels free from any social limitations and tells Mlle Reisz that she will "like the feeling of freedom and independence" (79). Here, she can enjoy her own life, doing things of her own choice. She does not have to depend on her husband and is not forced by social obligations. Like the pigeon, the free-spirited protagonist longs for a place which allows her both physical and spiritual freedom.

By contrast, her husband's house on Esplanade Street is a cage. Although it is comfortable and luxurious, with splendid furniture, it steals Edna's freedom and individuality. Life here is taken up with required social activities, the reception day and Sunday prayer, the pressures of being an ideal creole woman.

Like flying, swimming implies a source of self-awareness. Edna has tried to swim almost all summer, and finally succeeds. This achievement is a significant step

in her self-realization. The parallel of her swimming in the beginning and the end is notable.

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (28)

She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end. (113-114)

Recognizing possibilities, Edna is over-confident, feeling “daring, reckless and overestimating her strength.” Her wishful thought to “swim far out, where no woman had swum before” signifies her revolutionary bent to go beyond limits set for a woman in the patriarchal society. It is an awakening from an unconscious state dominated by conventional rules to a new life, realizing her needs and rights. At the end, with neither love nor hope for self-fulfillment, Edna returns to the sea, her only place of freedom. While swimming out, she again recalls her childhood experience in the meadow which had no beginning and no end, the image of freedom. The appearance of her husband and her children in her mental picture in her last moments of life, suggests that while she is still alive, she will never escape from them.

Of all the symbols, the sea is most significant. It represents the realm of freedom Edna enjoys because it seems boundless and infinite and this refers to life without restrictions. The personification of the sea makes it vivid, powerful and friendly to Edna. Representing the grandeur of nature, it is the opposite of the human society which restricts her selfhood.

The sea becomes a companion to Edna. Its voice and touch arouse and welcome her soul, as shown near the end of the story as quoted on pages eighty-seven and eighty-eight. At this moment, the sea is significantly appealing to Edna. During her first swim, Edna has her clothes on, suggesting her conventional ties to society,

but this time, there is nothing between her body and the sea. Her nakedness suggests absolute freedom from any social constraints, and that she is a creature within nature. Removing the “unpleasant, pricking garments” symbolizes Edna’s total emancipation, discarding the suffocating social codes that have exceedingly troubled her. Edna at that moment can be compared to the Greek Goddess of love and beauty, Aphrodite (Hamilton, 1969 : 32-33), as both have been born of water which they use to renew their sense of perpetual life. Edna achieves naïve freedom as a new-born creature who has no connection with age-old traditions. It is a rebirth to independence and dignity.

Being despondent, Edna becomes powerless in the struggle. At the moment, the sea seems the only place providing consolation. She keeps walking, following its magical call to the depth of loneliness. Edna seems unconscious, as if she were controlled by the powerful sea, not being afraid of the cold water and the waves which hold her tight as serpents, for she feels warm and secure in its “soft, close embrace,” probably like the embrace of her lover.

In the story, the narrator relates the sea to the meadow twice. Both places suggest her idealized realms of freedom. Genuine independence seems to exist as she walks through “the ocean of waving grass,” “following a misleading impulse” where the limitations imposed by society on her real life fades out.

“...The hot wind beating in my face made me think--without any connection that I can trace--of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. ...” (17)

“...
“I don’t remember now. I was just walking diagonally across a big field. My sun-bonnet obstructed the view. I could see only the stretch of green before me, and I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. ...” (17-18)

Enjoying herself on the beach with Adele and looking at the sea, Edna makes a connection between the sight of the sea and the expanse of the blue-grass meadow in her childhood. Both images imply vastness and limitlessness with no “end” or

destination. Such infiniteness means both utter freedom as well as infinite loneliness, emphasized through the words “abysses” and “universe” (15). Surrounded by large natural places, a person may feel isolated, as he/she is in a seeming disconnected place. To get freedom means to boldly face loneliness. Edna keeps walking although she is not certain whether it is worth doing or will lead to emptiness. “Walking diagonally across a big field” or the choosing of the uncommon path signals Edna’s intention to challenge social conventions, to break creole traditions, by behaving differently from other women, who would presumably walk on the path fixed for ordinary use. Her stubborn single-mindedness is suggested by the limited vision she has as the sun-bonnet obstructs her side views. The sentence “I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it” foreshadows the futility in seeking independence.

6. Point of View

The Awakening is narrated through a limited-omniscient point of view in which the narrator “has access to the thoughts and feelings of only some of the characters” (Hurt, 1994 : 27) reporting what is going on in the mind of particular characters as observers. For example, the narrator knows how Léonce feels about his wife’s change:

...her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. ... (57)

When he goes to New York, we learn how he feels about Edna, concerning her decision to move out, which again is observed by the narrator. Similarly, near the end of the story, although Robert is beyond our perception after his going to Mexico, the narrator tells us about Robert’s feeling for Edna.

Through Léonce's point of view, the reader can observe the non-human condition of the contemporary women who were seemingly invisible, as well as their submissive position in the patriarchal society.

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

He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? ... (7)

With a limited-omniscient point of view, the author centers our attention on the narration around Edna since the theme of the story is Edna's awakening. We know how she looks, what she sees, feels, thinks, and does, as well as why. The reader knows Edna better than other characters, and in following her closely, sees her development, sometimes presented through flashbacks of her memories. An example is her romantic passions with a cavalry officer, a young man and a great tragedian, along with her teenage motivation to marry her husband and the memories of the meadow.

As Edna's outer and inner worlds are both consistently put in focus, her self-discovery is not difficult to understand, nor is her tragic end beyond speculation, although Edna's thoughts and acts are revolutionary.

Khwanrak Khrang Sutthai

1. Theme

This novel portrays the failure in life of a lonely and sensitive divorcee whose quest for fulfillment in love becomes hopeless longing. Her society gives her little room to live fully with dignity and brings her only alienation and despair. The female protagonist's conflicts come from the exploitative middle-class outlook and unfair

judgement of her unconventional lifestyle. She is a modern working mother who strives for her children's security as well as for love, but achieves neither after a long lone struggle. To escape an unjust and unfriendly world in hope of a better life hereafter, she chooses death.

2. Plot

Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai in many respects portrays the life of the author herself, whose first marriage ended with divorce, requiring her to work to support her children. Like Suwannee, Ros, the female protagonist, has great love for her children, and this is an essential part of the story. According to Chintana Dittayam (1984 : 43), Suwannee's stories are mostly depictions of the life experiences of herself and of those around her. Bangkok, including Silapakorn University (or the area called "Na Phralan"), Phitsanulok and in fact all of the places she knew well often appear as settings in her works.

This novel is presented in chronological order, with incidents placed in logical sequence and linked in a chain of cause and effect. The plot unfolds through events which intensify the characters' inner conflicts and lead to their decisions. The story includes thirty-three chapters. Chapter one to chapter eight elaborate Ros's relationship with Pat, which becomes distanced after the affair at the waterfall in chapter nine. Later, Ros's intimacy with Chitchua develops after their physical relations at Phukradung and finally ends after the deaths of Ros's children in chapter 29, the turning point that brings disaster to her life and partially determines her tragic end in the last chapter. Some flashbacks are used in the novel to give characters' backgrounds and the origin of inner conflicts, especially those of the protagonist. An example is Ros's letter to her children in the exposition, giving them reason for her struggle and relating to her difficult decision to leave them during the complication of the story. Moreover, her attempt to be her children's only protector shows her love for them.

The plot of *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* is designed to achieve a tragic effect through a narration that shows the “overwhelming power of fate; in that, the central figures find themselves in unbearable situations and go down with the weights of the problems” (McNulty, 1977 : 50). The protagonist’s greatest disaster is her children’s accidental deaths, an act of fate, and there are two areas of major conflict, external and internal. The external conflicts derive from social beliefs about a woman and traditional attitudes toward a divorcee, while the internal ones are loneliness and her wish for understanding and love. Both drive her to a glimpse of unbearable truth and finally lead to the inevitable end, the death of this tragic figure.

3. Setting

Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai is probably set in the 1970s when it was published. The major settings are Bangkok, Ros’s place of work and Phitsanulok, her hometown, allowing a contrast between the turbulent city life and peaceful country life respectively. Other natural places used as settings of crucial events include the waterfall in Phitsanulok, Phukradung, a hill-top national park, and the sea at Hua-Hin.

Suwannee’s settings are realistic (Plunpit Tiankarahd, 1985 : 87) and contribute to atmospheric effects created through sensuous artistic description. As this is a story about a sensitive woman, all the sense perception of the protagonist receives special emphasis in many settings, especially the senses of sight, smell, and touch. A distinct example is the author’s repeated references to the sweet scent of *Champee*, a fragrant flower at Ros’s country house. This sensuous description, besides giving the beautiful natural atmosphere, helps to lead us toward the human natural instinct for life, the longing for love and other related feelings.

Champees sent out a strong odor when she got off the three-wheeled vehicle. ... (118)

The emission of *Champees*’ sweet fragrance evoked her thinking of Pat. ... (119)

Champees' smell spread around her house...Its odor became intensifying when the wind blew. (124)

[Ros thought about life and how to control her passion], while breathing the scent of *Champees*. (125)

[Ros and Pat] were in darkness. The fragrance of *Champees* was really strong...At the moment, Ros could not control herself from Pat's kiss. ... (129)

[Coming back home after her physically intimate relation with Pat at the waterfall] Ros sensed the scent of *Champees*. (161)

These quotations demonstrate the impact of the fragrance of this flower. It arouses her passion and thoughts of her lover.

The setting not only affects the characters' feelings, but sometimes also illustrates the contemporary people's lifestyle. As Dickinson (1959 : 23) notes, the creation of a well-drawn setting makes a story plausible. An example is the view of Bangkok in the morning from Ros's room: "...crowded buildings, hurried people, noisy horns and car engines. All these sounds were unpleasant...There was only dust-dry brown grasses" (18). This unpleasant atmosphere suggests the barrenness and boredom of city life while realistically portraying how Bangkok really is. By contrast, the beautiful nature around her home in Phitsanulok during Ros's retreat from the misery of her city life provides a peaceful interlude; the flamboyant blooming flowers along the road signify bright spots of happiness in her life as well as the natural color of human passion that the female protagonist seems to represent.

The appearance of Ros's room in Bangkok characterizes her isolation and loneliness. Ros lives in a small room (indicating her financial status) on the top floor of a five-storey downtown building. The inside is crowded with the necessary objects for her daily life. Her bookshelf looks weird, for it is adapted from two wooden boxes covered with a piece of brightly colored cloth, revealing her characteristic uniqueness. The atmosphere in the room invites feelings of loneliness, and sometimes thoughts of death, as at the back of the building is a crematorium with occasional smoke from the base of a funeral pyre sending a "familiar smell".

The only happy place in the city for Ros is Na Phralan, the artists' quarter around the campus of Ros's College of Art. She enjoys being with her "friends" and is happily herself, although pedestrians may find a woman surrounded by many men a peculiar sight. The atmosphere is full of joy and warmth with a background of fresh and fragrant yellow *Lanthoms* (frangipani). Besides introducing a main character, the scene gives a glimpse into some artists' lives, especially their leisure activities: They enjoy talking usually about art with no thought of time (50-52). Ros often joins them to relieve her loneliness.

As a sensitive woman from the countryside, Ros is often presented as being in harmony with nature which affects and reflects her feelings. Two powerful examples are the scenes at the waterfall and Phukradung. Both places are related to Ros's sexual affairs.

With its wild and secluded beauty, the waterfall seems conducive to the sexual instinct. This scene inspires tender and romantic feelings in the reader. The sunset produces soft light; the sweet scent of flowers is diffused all over the area (144-8). In this episode, Ros and Pat try to control their passion. Ros is trying to avoid being alone with Pat in such a private place because she is afraid of her feelings. This passion is also stirring within Pat. Neither want to be overcome by sexual desire, yet they cannot resist it when they have to stay close to each other during the falling rain which separates them from the outer world (150).

The natural background of Phukradung is associated with assorted feelings. It heightens Ros's sadness and deeply hurts her as well as stimulates her instinct. This setting impresses the reader with the author's artistic description.

Dewdrops sparkled among slender green leaves of grass.
Lines of flowers were beautiful beyond comparison. At a
glance, they looked like the milky way in the moonless night. ...
(316)

Unlike the time she went to the waterfall with Pat, Ros later comes to Phukradung with a broken heart. She wishes to escape Pat, but has to witness his

intimacy with Matthanin here. The setting plays its role effectively in heightening the sense of Ros's despondency and loneliness, especially in chapters eighteen and nineteen. We can feel Ros's weakness through the setting.

"Chilly wind froze her heart..." (324). She "wanted to cry as loneliness assailed her and cruelly shook her heart." (327). Being alone in such a solitary place, the love-sick Ros, neglected by Pat, cannot help plunging herself into lamentation. Ros becomes emotionally and physically vulnerable.

Ros's love scenes at Phukradung and the waterfall involve different feelings. Tenderness is felt in the waterfall scene, while wild instinct is shown in the mountain episode. Ros and Chitchua are in a hidden place. Ros can control herself at first, but passion finally wins as she is physically stirred by Chitchua. Here it is physical intimacy rather than the heart-felt warmth she longs for from Pat.

"Does nature seem to be an enemy or friend?" (Roberts, 1969 : 47). For Ros, it is the latter. The most friendly natural place is the sea at Hua-Hin, which she first visited when she was a student. Its beauty greatly impresses her because there is no such scenery in her hometown, which has only mountains, streams and fields. The sea, for Ros, is wonderfully vast (424). Ros goes to Hua-Hin twice, once with all her loved ones, Pat and her children, and again after Pat has gone abroad. The descriptions of the same place completely differ as they represent Ros's contrasting feelings: those associated with the presence of love and those attending the loss of love.

With Pat and her children, Ros enjoys familial feelings:

In the next morning...she was busy preparing food and going to the market. Pat and her children were in beds. When she came back, all of them were enjoying themselves in the sea.

...

Ros sat at the dike waving to them. All were happily laughing. (442)

In complete contrast, toward the end of the story, the familiar sea becomes different. Ros is in utter loneliness, which is heightened by a dark, quiet and

unpleasant atmosphere which has been foreshadowed in her earlier dream of the black sea (454). Then, Ros had dreamt of a seagull, which is, in a way, herself at the end, alone among nature.

The sea was under strong wind. The atmosphere was gloomy and dark.

...
 ...Although the moon was there, its light could not shine through the thick overcast clouds. The surrounding area was dark and quiet. Only the sound of the blowing wind was heard. It heightened the loneliness in her heart to the point of extreme sadness.

At this house, Ros used to be with her children and Pat. But now, she was alone and so lonely...

...The wind was strong...

...
 ...The large bed looked desolated...Here, she used to sleep with her children and embraced them. The picture of her children appeared in her tearful eyes. (560-561)

There is interaction between the setting and the protagonist. The picturesque and detailed description of the sea and the atmosphere at the beach reflect Ros's loneliness. It seems as if she were the only one in the world. Only trees, waves and the cloudy sky accompany her. Vivid verbal pictures make this part exceptionally moving.

The scene is shifted to the cold foreign land where Pat is staying to add the further feeling of loneliness.

From the postcard shop near the street, Pat bought a picture of purple flowers, Ros's favorite.

Maple leaves were falling...The cool wind was blowing. He sent his heart to her while writing.

...
He walked along the river...An old man was sitting alone on a bench as if waiting for something which would never come [Pat] stopped in the middle of the bridge and sent his heart to Thailand. ...

He really missed her, missing her tender lips and soft touch. He remembered all her moves. But what he always saw was her sad eyes, which seemed to foretell that moaning would be Ros's companion.

One day he would go back to see her...He was absent-mindedly crossing a road. A crowd waiting for a bus looked mysterious with dark clothes in gloomy atmosphere.

He felt a little flake of ice on his face. Its frosty touch cut into his feeling and went deep into his heart.

...Nothing around him was similar to that of his hometown, where he had just left: the place full of sunlight, heat and dust.

Finally, he could not help thinking of Ros. It seemed she followed him everywhere

...He had just realized the weight of isolation. Only a temporary separation caused so much strong loneliness already.

What would he feel if she left him forever? (558-560)

The gloomy atmosphere: “falling maples,” “cool blowing wind,” a “lonely old man,” a “waiting crowd with dark clothes,” even a “flake of ice,” all combine to give a picture of a lonely man, alien and melancholy. He does not belong here and misses Ros. His thought in the last two sentences serves as a prediction of what is to happen to Ros.

At the end, personification is used to suggest empathy between nature and the heroine.

The moaning of the sea echoed Ros’s mournful heart. The sea was as distressed as she...

...The water would softly and gently take her body...

...

The moon beheld her and tenderly smiled to her. The sea lulled her to sleep. And in a while the emerald-green water would embrace her.

...

She heard the whispering of the sea...

...

The moon befriended her with gentle light. ... (565-7)

Nature is Ros’s only friend at this gloomy moment. The sea is inviting and welcoming her. She thinks of the warmth she will receive from the sea. The moon and the water will comfort her. Ros’s last hope, expressed in “her smiling face” (566), is eternal happiness. Death for her is “fascinating.”

4. Characterization

Ros's revelation is both directly described and indirectly suggested. Ros's physical appearance, and even her feelings and thoughts, are often given by the author through explicit descriptions. However, sometimes the author tells us about her characters through the use of dialogues, monologues and the delineation of setting, (as analyzed in the preceding section). As an artist, Suwannee makes particularly effective use of the setting to present her characters.

Ros is also characterized by the reactions of other characters, as seen in her former husband's words and Kamphol's distinctly biased verdicts. However, they supply important attractive views of the protagonist, and in fact help to make her portrait whole.

The three major characters in *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* are Ros, Pat, and Chitchua, all of whom can be grouped as round or dynamic characters whose conflicts are fully elaborated. Each of them is unfolded through descriptions, dialogues, letters, flashbacks and interior monologues. However, with full development, Ros is considered the most three-dimensional character, while Pat and Chitchua are less so.

5. Imagery

Images with symbolic meanings can be found in *Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai* to underline significant points, especially the female protagonist's feeling of alienation. Major symbols are the name of the heroine and the details about places.

The heroine's name suggests her outstanding characteristic trait, sensitivity. In Thai, the word "ros," a loan word from "Rasa" in Sanskrit, means taste or flavor as well as feeling. This is an appropriate name for a sensitive woman acutely vulnerable in all senses. Most of her sufferings have their roots in her susceptible nature and she tastes bitterness more than happiness in life.

The protagonist's lonely life in the city of Bangkok suggests alienation and conflict. City life encompasses most of Ros's difficulty both during her marriage with her former husband as well as in her lonely struggles after separation. The small square room in the five-floor building in Bangkok is like a prison. Although she is free from her failed marriage, Ros is jailed by her struggle to live the decent life of a responsible mother while remaining a woman with flesh and blood. The atmosphere around the building reflects desolation and loneliness. Her small room looks out on buildings with scarcely any surrounding trees. Apart from that there are a wasteland, a crematorium and smoky smell from the base of the funeral pyre. While her room is so high up and strong that it seems secure, no one can climb up and reach her except a person who really cares, that is, Pat, who once mentions about the building's fifty steps, "they are not high enough (for me) to climb up" (28). Pat's playful remark hints at his fearlessness regarding any obstacles encountered in his relationship with Ros. Ironically, his feeling for Ros is still not strong enough to move him to any commitment, and he thus engenders pain rather than bliss for Ros until near the end of the story. The tall building seems to be Ros's secure refuge to protect herself from her own sensitivity. She chooses "to open the doors" to admit only people she finds meaningful. Pat once says, "One day, it would be you who opened the doors. You would open them yourself when you loved someone" (229), as she wholeheartedly welcomes him.

A remarkable contrast to Bangkok is Phitsanulok, Ros's hometown, where she belongs. Her hometown symbolizes the family warmth Ros never finds in Bangkok. It is a kind of perfect life, being with her loved ones: her mother and her children.

While the city life is associated with Ros's predicament, nature has dual associations: joy, peace and love, on one hand; noble death on the other. We find flowers, fields and the mountain suggesting the invigorating power of life, while the waterfall and the sea evoke love and freedom. However, Ros also compares the water falling down and attacking the cliff to "a person who is committing suicide" (143) and even thinks of committing suicide at the waterfall.

The sea is the most powerful natural symbol in the novel. The beach at Hua-Hin is a friendly place for Ros and seems to bring her utmost happiness. She had first seen the sea here in her happy teenage years, and sees it again, almost like a dream of a fulfilled life, when she spends a day and a night with Pat and her children. Finally it is the sea once again that she returns to when at the end when all her dreams shatter.

Toward the end, Ros's despondency and feeling of meaninglessness are expressed through the use of an interior monologue in which she compares human life to a speck of dust. It is so meaningless that it does not matter to the world whether one is dead or alive (562).

The last scene of the novel emphasizes the sense of alienation by juxtaposing a lonely and heartbroken woman with grand and powerful nature ☞ the sea in turmoil at the coming of a storm (560-3). With no purpose in life, nor any loved ones to live for, one is lost in the world. Nature alone is a gentle and caring friend of the lonely. This is possibly why we find extensive use of personifications in this scene. The moon befriends her with gentle lights. The sea is as distressed as she, and it will softly and gently take her body. The moon beholds and tenderly smiles at her. The sea lulls her to sleep. The emerald-green water embraces her. And she hears the whispering of the sea and feels the companionship of the moonlight (565-7).

These literary descriptions give a beautiful picture of the heroine's death. Ros's lonely struggle will soon end. She feels secure and peaceful with the warmth of her natural companions. She is not alone and lonely anymore, the sea embracing her as her loved ones had.

6. Point of View

Khvamrak Khrang Sutthai is told from an omniscient third person point of view, through which the narrator knows everything occurring in the story and freely moves from one character to another to peer inside the mind and heart of each and tell us his/her thoughts and feelings.

With the narrator's revelation often through interior monologues of the thoughts of each major character, (Ros, Pat and even Chitchua), we get access to their inner world. In this way, we learn characters' motives. In some cases, we may share his/her feelings, while in other cases we are privileged with a double vision, a glimpse of irony. For example,

[Ros] would try to be close to Chitchua after returning to Bangkok. He probably could help her forget Pat.

[Ros] would go wherever he asked her to. It would be better than being home alone and feeling lonely. Life was hers. It did not matter how she would live. To enjoy it was possible. Why did she have to be lifeless only because of a young man? (121)

Through the description of her thought, we are foretold of Ros's action as well as its motive. Ironically, the closer Ros is to Chitchua, the more painful she feels about Pat.

Focusing on Pat, the narrator also utilizes monologues to reflect Pat's confusion about his feeling for Ros.

Did [Pat] love [Ros] or not? Even he himself was uncertain. He simply knew that he was filled with passion.

Did he love her?

Otherwise, why did he hurriedly follow her?

Or, was it just his habit to see her almost every evening?

Or, did he realize that he was guilty about something that he knew well what it was? He wanted her to feel jealous when he was close to another woman. But, Ros said or acted nothing.

He urged her to speak. But, she acted as if she did not understand.

He wanted her to feel jealous of him because it would indicate that she loved him. Didn't she?

Or, did she think that she didn't have any right to do that?

Or, was it because she only wanted his manhood as he did her womanhood? It was obvious that she was lonely and wanted someone, no matter who it was...or...did it have to be him. (129-130)

The repeated use of “or” as well as the question form signifies Pat’s uncertainty. We learn of his mental confusion, that he is unsure of both his own feelings and those of Ros, via this stream of consciousness.

Ros remains the primary focus of the narrator, as the story’s central point of interest is a woman’s loneliness and alienation. With the selected point of view, we know Ros in depth and follow her as witnesses of her action; we comprehend and sympathize with this heroine, especially when we are told by the narrator and interior monologues that Ros and Pat love each other

Various attitudes toward a divorcee in Thai society are presented through the omniscient point of view applied to other characters. Kamphol’s negative remarks are most insulting and offensive.

“[Ros] was lustful,...craving for a husband!”

...
 “Why don’t you [Chitchua] try? It’s free...You don’t have to waste money on a prostitute.” (178-179)

Through Kamphol’s words, a dehumanizing view concerning divorcees is given to demonstrate the degree of social prejudice. Ros’s personal strengths and goodness ☞ for example, her ability to work to support herself and her children ☞ are often overlooked. However, this new image of a woman is recognized by Chitchua, who thinks that a woman should be both a provider and a home-manager. Unfortunately, his view has certain exploitative overtones which become clear at the end.

...[Ros] seemed capable of making money. With this qualification, no man would refuse her.

Old social beliefs were going out of date; gone was a period when the father worked, while the mother was only his home-servant. [Chitchua] admitted that if he wanted a wife, he would look for a woman who could support herself, or even better, if she could support the family. (43)

Orachorn, Pat's older sister, admires this capacity in Ros, even though she cannot accept Ros as Pat's wife. Ros's lonely struggle with her work which is less than her ideal for her children's sake demonstrates her unyielding spirit and dignity.

Comparison

The Awakening and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* focus on a similar point, women's alienation, clarified via the portrayals of the female protagonists, whose conflicts, both social and psychological, originate from love and their unique ways of thinking and living. To others, their love is at odds with social norms. This leads to Edna's tragic struggle for independence and dignity and to Ros's futile search for a loving family. Their feelings and moves against the current of social views are doomed to cause loneliness, alienation and self-destruction.

The Awakening and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* differ in several respects. At a glance, we can see that *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* is much lengthier than *The Awakening*. This difference provides dissimilar quantity of details. The Thai novel offers more detailed description and probably because of this, we see and understand the story as well as the protagonist more clearly than that of *The Awakening*. On the other hand, *The Awakening* is more compact and structured; every detail or image is carefully sketched to focus on the major development of the protagonist.

The main point of interest of the two stories are somewhat different. *The Awakening* allows us to closely follow Edna step-by-step, observing and comprehending this protagonist and pursue the events. *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai*, on the other hand, does not focus solely on Ros but also on her two lovers Chitchua and Pat. However, the storyline as well as each character's action and decision progress orderly according to the incidents and conflicts. Characters' psychological conditions are portrayed and explained for us. Yet, the main focus is still on Ros, the protagonist.

The expositions of the novels are similar: they point to the key issues of each story. The author uses Ros's letter to her children to inform the reader of Ros's love for them, her prime concern, and indirectly tells us about Ros's character; *The*

Awakening begins with two birds symbolizing women's position and introduces Edna's husband, the bird's (Edna's) owner, and the way he treats Edna. This opening is a clue to Edna's social position.

Edna's and Ros's major conflicts, their alienation, are mentioned in the exposition of the novels and elaborated in the rising action. However, this part of *The Awakening* is more summarily treated. Edna's growth through self-discovery emerges a little after the beginning of the story to show Edna's state of mind, the abrupt desire for freedom, and its unpleasant outcome. *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai's* rising action, on the other hand, is of some length, covering several analyses and events effecting Ros and revealing her psyche, crucial to the resolution of the novel. The most significant event is her children's death, occurring near the end of the story.

The circumstances leading to the novels' climaxes are also alike: the protagonists' hopes vanish. This is quite clear cut in *The Awakening*. Edna's wish for Robert's return becomes true, but her need for his love is not fulfilled. This causes a great despair. Similarly, Pat's final departure brings despondency to the lonely Ros. This adds to the loneliness which is her great conflict throughout the story and leads to an ending that is similar in these two novels: the female protagonists' suicides in the sea to finish their lonely struggles.

The settings also develop the stories and influences the heroines in similar way. The sea is the most crucial and powerful setting in both novels and is the location of the end of the stories. Chopin and Suwannee utilize this natural place to delineate their protagonists and to underscore the theme of alienation. It is used to emphasize human feelings, for the nature of the sea is close to human nature in its fluctuations, depth and apparently infinite expanse. The sea's wave, storm and calmness are compared to women's unpredictable emotions; its grandeur relates to loneliness and meaninglessness of a being in the face of nature. Throughout *The Awakening*, Edna is presented as closely related to the sea symbolizing her genuine but lonely independence. Meanwhile, Ros's fascination with the sea is elaborated in detail, especially near the end of the story, as a special realm of peace.

The authors' hometowns, Chopin's Louisiana and Suwannee's Pitsanulok as well as their familiar places such as Grand Isle in *The Awakening* and Na Phralan in *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* are other common points of interest. These settings provide the reader with vivid and realistic descriptions, especially the natural places; the sketches of light, color, sound, and smell are masterly elaborated to present visual beauty like paintings.

There were acres of yellow camomile reaching out on either hand. Further away still, vegetable gardens abounded, with frequent small plantations of orange or lemon trees intervening. The dark green clusters glistened from afar in the sun. (Chopin, 1976 : 15)

The waterfall was clamorous. Its spray moistened tall trees around. ...Long bouquet of purple orchids swung in the blowing wind. (Suwannee Sukhontha, 1973 : 143)

The sun lowered to the far away forest. Soft light shading part of [Ros]'s face gave unusual, but soft and gentle shadow. ... (144)

In the area of characterization, *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* both have few. *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* has more round characters – Ros, Pat and Chitchua – than *The Awakening*, in which only Edna and Robert are dynamic characters with inner conflicts. The revelation of characters, especially the heroines are dissimilar. Dialogues and actions are often used in *The Awakening* as the author gives characterization by showing rather than telling. We are told of events, but are shown how Edna is/feels as we follow her. Meanwhile, the methods of telling and showing are both used by Suwannee in order to present Ros. Interior monologues are regularly employed to present the characters' inner conflicts. This method invites the reader to become more involved in identifying with the feeling of the characters.

Imagery suggesting women's alienation is abundant in both novels. Nature and places are described to symbolically identify the psychological states of Edna and Ros with some differences. *The Awakening* could be called a novel of symbols, for many details can be considered symbolic: birds, houses, clothes, swimming in the sea

and walking through the blue grass meadow, for instance, carry hidden messages we have to find. *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* has fewer symbolic images. One obvious symbol is the sea, while others – such as the waterfall, Ros’s small room and her neighborhood in Bangkok – are less important. Nevertheless, they are crucial in portraying Ros’s psyche, especially her thinking about death which is symbolized by the crematorium and the waterfall. It can be said that death is seemingly prepared in *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* as we notice that Ros often ponders it, while this issue is rarely mentioned in *The Awakening*. This is probably the reason why suicide of Edna becomes unreasonable act for some critics.

Natural places are effectively used in both novels. The sea, the most important symbol, refers to feeling, particularly a woman’s emotion as especially seen in *The Awakening*, which begins and ends at this scene, symbolizing both the life and the death of the heroine. Similarly, the sea is employed to signify Ros’s special realm of peace and the place in which she ends her struggle.

Both *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* are presented through third person points of view, though, differently. *The Awakening*’s third person point of view is limited, for the focus is mainly on Edna, while *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* is related through an omniscient third person point of view, which covers Ros as well as her two lovers. The reader is thus permitted to follow Ros, Pat and Chitchua, while in *The Awakening* we seem limited to only the heroine. This selected point of view highlights the self-discovery of Edna and the psychological conflicts not only of Ros but also of Pat and Chitchua.

The analysis of literary elements of *The Awakening* and *Khwamrak Khrang Sutthai* allows us to see how the theme of women’s alienation are presented. Both authors’ commands of literary techniques bring these two female protagonists’ situations to the public’s serious consideration.

