

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

After analyzing the portrayal of the female protagonists in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and relating it with feminism theory in Simone De Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, I am going to draw some conclusions in this chapter. Both the protagonists of the novels are women who experience changes in their characteristics. Thus, they are dynamic characters.

Isabel Archer, the protagonist in Henry James' *The Portrait of a Lady* is an American bachelorette. As her father lets her live by herself, she grows to be an independent, free-spirited, expressive, and intelligent woman. However, she enters the patriarchal system after she marries a man who controls her life totally. She experiences a change in her characteristics and becomes compliant and unassertive. From her characteristics before she gets married, it is shown that Isabel is free from man's authority, she is also independent financially by the great fortune she gets from her uncle, on top of that, she is intelligent. Thus, it is obvious that she is an ideal woman De Beauvoir mentions in her theory. From the analysis, Isabel's change in her characteristics before and after she gets married proves De Beauvoir's

theory that in a marriage, a woman is subjugated by a man and defined as “the Other”.

Edna Pontellier, the protagonist in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening* is an American wife of a successful businessman and a mother of two children. At first, Edna is portrayed as compliant, reserved, and dutiful. However, she experiences a change in her characteristics when she is aware of her position as her husband’s possession. Feeling oppressed by her husband, who forces her to be a mother-woman, she tries to escape from her roles as a mother-woman by losing her womanly characteristics. Edna changes into an in compliant, expressive, and undutiful woman. In accordance with De Beauvoir’s theory, Edna’s changes represent her effort to escape from her being labelled as “the Other” by her husband. However, it is still hard for the society to accept her new self, which leads her committing suicide to get the freedom she yearns.

There are some similarities in both *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Awakening*. First, both stories have similar setting of time which is the late 19th century. Second, both novels are about a woman who undergoes the oppression from a man in a marriage. Last, both authors depict the negative view of marriage institution in the late 19th Century, which suits the depiction of marriage institution in De Beauvoir’s book *The Second Sex*. It is said that in a marriage, a woman is defined as “the Other”.

Besides the similarities, these novels also have some differences. First, *The Portrait of a Lady* tells a story about a bachelorette until she gets married, while *The Awakening* tells a story about a wife who tries to escape from the oppression she gets in her marriage. Second, the setting of place where the protagonists live is

also different. Both are American women, but they live in different places. Isabel moves to Europe and lives there after she gets married, while Edna lives in America. Third, the ending of the story is different. Isabel in *The Portrait of a Lady* prefers to stay in her dreadful marriage, while Edna in *The Awakening* decides to commit suicide by drowning herself in the sea instead of going back to her family.

The decisions that the protagonists make describe that a woman does not have a choice except to accept their role as a woman. Isabel who is once a free woman becomes “the Other” in a marriage and cannot escape from it, while for Edna, the only way to escape from her role as “the Other” is by committing suicide. Thus, I conclude that marriage institution in the 19th Century is an unfair institution for women as it provides unequal roles between men and women, the roles which make women not to have freedom.

In my opinion there is a connection between where the protagonists live and the decision that they take in the end of the story. America is known as a land of freedom while Europe is very conventional. The conventional society in Europe changes Isabel’s American idealism. Thus, at the end of the story, she decides to conform the social rules to go back to her husband and sacrifices her freedom. On the Other hand, Edna lives in America. Furthermore, it is known that although she marries a Creole, she is not involved in the Creole society. As an American, she feels different from them and feels unfamiliar with their culture. Therefore, it is obvious that she still has her American idealism. Thus, after she is aware of the oppression she gets from her husband, she does not want to sacrifice herself to go back to her family and prefers to die to get the freedom she wants.

I am of the opinion that these novels are worth-reading and interesting to be analyzed. I find it surprising that both authors make a contrastive change in the protagonists' characteristics. James, as a realist, creates a character more lifelike than Chopin, who portrays her woman character frontally. She creates in different kind of woman, which causes the novel to receive a lot of criticism and to be banned due to the taboo issue of women. However, through feminism approach, I can get a better understanding of what both authors want to deliver. Concerning the writing style, I find out that James uses more details in describing things than Chopin, who writes the story simpler and not long-winded. Therefore, James makes the readers easier to imagine the situation of every events that happen in the story.

After reading the novels and doing my profound analysis, I learn a lot about women's existence and the gender inequality between men and women, especially in marriage institution. In the novels, both of the authors describe that women do not have an equal position as men in the patriarchal society and how they can be subjugated by men in the patriarchal society. The position of men and women is constructed by the society, which leads to the perception that women are inferior to men. However, I find it wrong for the system in society to make a woman as the inferior because I believe that women, as human being, have the same rights as men.