PUSHING BACK AT THE PATRIARCHY: EXPLORING NINETEENTH CENTURY MARRIAGE RESISTANCE LITERATURE

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ABSTRACT

PUSHING BACK AT THE PATRIARCHY: EXPLORING NINETEENTH CENTURY MARRIAGE RESISTANCE LITERATURE

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The following thesis sets out to show the ways in which fiction was able to push back, yet also reflect nineteenth century marriage law. By examining the texts, *A Doll's House, The Awakening*, and *The Woman Who Did*, one can see the connections between fictional characters and the culture of nineteenth-century marriages. Due to societal norms, many women were married, although they had fewer rights than unmarried women. It is the goal of my thesis to zoom in on moments in history where these fictional works of literature reflected real life scenarios. The female protagonists in each of the texts show how cultural expectations from laws and society have influenced the ways in which their authors portray their decision-making.

I have come to the following conclusions based upon my research: Each of the authors made an intentional decision to go against societal norms by allowing their main characters to make a move that showed the uneven movement of the laws and culture of the nineteenth century. I not only believe that there was a goal in mind for social change, but due to my research, I also believe that each author was reflecting a moment that was occurring in his or her own life. I believe that the laws in the nineteenth century changed simultaneously with the cultural expectations for women. My thesis shows how the role

of author intentionality affected the works of literature that were produced as well as explained the importance that female autonomy had on the reviews of the novels and plays. In the final chapters and scenes of these plays and novels, each protagonist goes against cultural expectations by ultimately pushing back at the patriarchy.

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CHAPTER

PREFACE

Since the age of seven it was my dream to become a lawyer. From the moment I saw my first episode of Judge Judy, I knew I belonged in the courtroom. That Halloween I dressed up as a judge and realized that my costume wasn't just a costume; it was an outfit that I would wear after becoming a lawyer. When I was a child, I told my family that it was my goal to become a lawyer one day; they often didn't take it seriously and considered my goal just a "phase." However, after years of this so-called "phase," which lasted throughout my teenage years, my family began acknowledging my dream to be a lawyer. When my friend's parents divorced in middle school, I watched the horrors of their separation unfold. At the time, I did not know much about the lawyer's role and what thoughts he was putting in her parent's heads, if any, but I knew the divorce was going to get messy very quickly. I had always wished that I could help them resolve their issues before things got worse. I think of the term resolve very differently when describing divorce. In the case of my friend's parents' divorce, resolve did not mean getting back together; it meant putting aside their differences in order to do what was best for their children. Unfortunately, because of the amount of hate they expressed for each other, this seemed nearly impossible. About two years later, after the divorce was finalized, I knew I was destined to be a lawyer. Not only because I wanted to provide justice for the wronged party, but because I was so intrigued at how two people could be "in love" and suddenly want to do everything in their power to ruin the other person's

life. Not every divorce is messy, but I want to do my best to make the divorce process as painless as possible.

I want to be the unheard voice of the victims of divorce, but first it is important to identify who the victims are. Whether it is the husband, wife, kids, employees, or even pets, I want to help those who can't find the strength to help themselves. I want to understand how divorce works in literature in order to see if there are any correlations to reality. Finding my place within this topic proved to be a tremendous challenge. I originally was going to write my thesis about the ways in which the educational system differs in America and other countries. However, after much trial and error, I found a topic that not only matches my career goals but also my interests. Choosing a topic for my thesis wasn't easy. At first, I let my ideas guide my research. Originally, I wanted to write about the role of authors' genders and how this impacted their writing. My project started out big and bold. As I began to examine six authors (three female and three male) it was quite evident that the gender biased theme was shared by both genders. However, I didn't want to prove an already proved gender bias. As I read more, I began to allow the research to guide my ideas. The more I read, the more I became interested in marriage law and how it placed restraints on women.

I think the more knowledge a person has about any situation, regardless of whether he or she ever experienced it personally, the more he or she can empathize with the topic. Examining how authors use divorce and marriage law as underlying themes in their literature will truly be applicable to my life regardless if I am in the situation or not. Unfortunately, divorce is not going away, so it is my hope to find my place in society as a divorce attorney. Throughout my thesis, I will use the literature to help me explore the

ways people tell the stories of divorce. I believe that people can empathize with characters in literature, and in turn, allows them to empathize with real life court cases. Changing one's attitude toward literature can help change their attitudes towards marriage laws and divorce.

I have watched my parent's marriage unfold into the most beautiful love story. Their love for one another is unconditional, and they prove this through not only their words but also their actions. In the novels that I have explored, none of their characters put their spouse before themselves. I feel fortunate and blessed to have grown up in a household in which love laid the foundation for the success for my parent's marriage. The perfection of my parent's marriage has inspired me to investigate why marriages fail and how authors portray this in their literature. But why do some partners decide that being apart is better than being together? Some love stories in literature may give readers an idealized version of marriage that seems impossible to attain in real life.

As stated previously, one of the main reasons I chose this topic for my thesis is because I want to be a family and divorce-court lawyer in order to help people through one of their most difficult and challenging moments in life. I have been given so much in my life and I truly believe that I was put on this earth to give back. I cannot imagine myself following any other career path and my honors thesis is the first step in the direction towards achieving my dreams. Being an English major has opened up so many opportunities for me to see the world much differently. Through reading and writing in various genres, my exploration of social issues has allowed me to apply my skills to the real world. The more I read within this genre, the more I understand how the role of divorce functions in today's society. In Leo Tolstoy's, *Anna Karenina*, he writes, "All

happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way" (Tolstoy xxiv). Throughout my thesis, I will examine the way in which authors represent divorce and how they convey the ways in which unhappy marriages lead to divorce for difference reasons. As Oprah says, "Doubt means don't every time" (Winfrey) and while I see a reoccurring theme of doubt throughout literature, I fail to see a theme of "don'ts."

INTRODUCTION TO THE HISTORY AND CULTURE OF MARRIAGE LAW IN NINETEENTH CENTURY AMERICA

Why are women's rights important? The answer seems simple. Women and men should have equal rights, but for centuries the battle for women's rights remained the hands of men. In order to women to obtain rights, they had to go to the patriarchy. In a sense, it is rather ironic then men get to decide upon the rights that women had. Women must ask the patriarchy to fight against the patriarchy. As I will expand upon in my thesis, events such as the Seneca Falls Convention called upon men to stand up for women's rights just as the literature I examine seems to do the same. The historical background of women's rights in the nineteenth century works with the novels and plays I have chosen to show the progression, and also the setbacks, that women faced. Women's rights matter because I believe that equality matters. I chose novels and plays with male authors who used their female authors as mouthpieces to make their point: women's rights are tricky, and explaining them through fictional tales makes the argument even more complex.

At the end of each text, the female protagonist pushes back against societal norms and nineteenth century laws in order to leave readers asking, what's next? What's next for women's right? What's next for the characters in the novels and plays? While my thesis attempts to provide insights into theses questions directly, it more directly gives insight as to why these novels and plays were written and how they work in their time period. I do believe that there was a goal of social change from the authors and a push

towards women's rights because of the many correlations these fictional novels have with their author's lives, which I examine in each chapter.

Imagine if these authors would have made their protagonists males. How would this impact the texts? If male authors used male protagonists to push back against women's rights the texts would not make powerful impacts. For example, in A Doll's House, Nora Helmer leaves her husband Torvald because she believes that she is being treated unfairly. If Torvald left Nora his rights would remain the same. As you will see as you read historical background of the nineteenth century, single women had more rights than married women. However, after leaving behind a marriage without divorcing, women must eventually return to their husbands or be forced to presumably leave impoverished because they could not get jobs. What happens next for Nora? Ibsen forces readers to think about this question and to more broadly, think about women's rights. My thesis will explore this complication by examining women's rights in the nineteenth century by not only reflecting them, but also by pushing back at them.

Who are Ibsen, Chopin, and Allen using as their audience? After a first read, I thought they wanted to address women readers. However, we must put their fiction into context with their time period. Women could not make any changes when it came to their rights. Therefore, these authors had to address women and men, and somehow encourage men to want to give rights to women. These male readers have the power to change women's rights. As I will describe in more detail later in that chapter, the Seneca Falls Convention serves as a parallel work to these novels and plays. The Seneca Falls Convention last two days and rallied for women's rights. On the first day of the convention only women could attend, but the second day was open to men. On this day

they would be able to vote for women's rights. Because women could not vote, men had to be invited. Just like the fiction I examine, male readers are encouraged to read these texts and act in favor of women's rights.

In *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening*, and *The Woman Who Did*, I will examine how these texts push back at nineteenth century laws and culture as well as provide readers a new outlook into the lives of the characters in the plays and novel. Each of the female protagonists in the texts search for their independence despite restrictions from societal norms. Opposing forces, such as their husbands, friends, and children, that do not agree with their decisions to be autonomous, try to prohibit these females from being independent. However, each author pushed back against marriage resistance laws in the nineteenth century by allowing their fictional characters to represent the challenges that nineteenth century women were facing. These novels and plays further demonstrate how important autonomy was to them and how they refused to live in a society ruled by the patriarchy.

Before examining the impacts of female autonomy in *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening*, and *The Woman Who Did*, it is important to put these novels and plays into their historical context. In doing so, we will be able to see how the culture in the nineteenth century affected its laws and vise versa. I am examining a period of time in which women had no rights. They had no access to economic opportunities or education. They could not vote, had little access to public life and while marriage stabilized society, single women had more rights than married women. Rights in the United States, rights in Britain, divide the following chapter. Lastly, I examine New Woman fiction. It makes sense to look at women's rights in Britain because the US was a British colony until the

late eighteenth century. New Woman fiction is important to examine because this genre of literature emerged out of the debates about female autonomy and married. Those debates about married and marriage resistance continue to be explored in the texts I examine.

In order to explore what marriage law is, Sara L. Zeigler, author of, "Wifely Duties: Marriage, Labor, and the Common Law in Nineteenth-Century America," remarked, "Marriage law provides ground rules to govern the specific relationship characterized by a lifetime sexual and economic partnership between a man and a woman and endorses that relationship by giving it legal force" (Zeigler 64). Men were far more privileged than women in that once a woman married a man she essentially became his property.

Women's Rights in the United States

Once women got married, their rights began to disappear. According to Nancy F. Cott's article, "Marriage and Women's Citizenship in the United States, 1830-1934," "Women...lost their property rights upon marriage" (Cott 1446). Furthermore, "the wife had no right to demand a say in family decision making and no right to enforce her husband's agreement to treat her as his partner rather than as his servant" (Zeigler 70). They could not make decisions for the family without having approval from their husbands. Their opinion alone was invalid. Ironically, while unmarried women had more rights than married women, an emphasis was placed on the importance of marriage. "Single women," according to Zeigler,

> had rights unavailable to their married sisters: They could own, manage, mortgage, and sell property; they could enter into contracts; they could run

> businesses; and they could engage in wage labor and use their earnings as they pleased...Nonetheless, single women enjoyed many rights that they would lose immediately upon marriage...It was the marriage contract that curtailed liberty, that restricted the liberty of men and women to conduct their lives according to their own preferences (Zeigler 71-72).

So why would women get married if they had fewer rights as a result? According to Norman Murdoch, author of "Marriage in the Law," "the idea of marriage held that the goal was to protect society rather than to foster the happiness of the two individuals" (Murdoch 94). It was more important for a society as a whole to appear stable than for two individuals to experience happiness.

Marriage Rights

Not to mention, when married, women appeared to be slaves to their husbands. The labor contract, which was an "exchange of services for wages" (Zeigler 87), created tension in the household. According to Kimberely Reilly's 2013 article, "Wronged in Her Dearest Rights: Plaintiff Wives and the Transformation of Marital Consortium, 1870–1920,"

> If an engaged couple agreed that, as husband and wife, 'the woman should be the master and the man should obey her,' this arrangement would become invalid upon their marriage, and 'the law would settle the question of rule' in favor of the man. Similarly, a husband's promise to pay his wife money for her household services or sexual intercourse, confirmed fellow treatise writer Walter Tiffany, would be 'void for want of consideration,' as the wife would be 'doing...something which she is already bound in the law to do' (Reilly 68).

Overall, laws treated women as less human than men. Reilly continues on to say that, "a wife's domestic labor, solicitude, and sexual companionship were the valuable property of her husband, to which she had no reciprocal claim" (Reilly 69). Reilly's point further asserts that women were not respected by their husbands or by the law. Even as more

married women entered the workforce, their rights had not drastically changed. Chused expands upon the role of married and unmarried women between the years of 1830 and 1850 in order to show how the role of women affected their want to marry:

> During the late eighteenth century subsistence farming was giving way to commercial production and home industry, particularly spinning, needlework, and weaving...It became possible for some women, and necessary for others, to undertake chores in addition to those crucial for the operation of a subsistence farm...Although home industry diminished in importance during the first decades of the nineteenth century, teaching, domestic service, and mill work by unmarried women became commonplace by the 1830's. Wages for single women rose rapidly between 1820 and 1850 when they reached fifty percent of the male level, a plateau that has remained almost unchanged to this day (Chused 3).

Clearly, the patriarchy was in control. In *Between Women: Friendship, Desire, and Marriage in Victorian England*, author Sharon Marcus furthers Chused's argument by noting, "as part of their [women's] training in pleasing men, women learned to appreciate female beauty, dress sense, grace, and talent, while female friendships were encouraged because society perceived that they 'develop[ed] in women the loyalty, selflessness, empathy, and self-effacement that they were required to exercise in relation to men'" (Marcus 62). It seemed like whatever was socially expected for women, was what they felt obligated to do.

Moving in the 1870's and 1880's, the earnings act "provided the first real opportunity for an increase in the independence for married women. These acts gave to the wife legal ownership of her labor performed outside the home and permitted her to retain and manage the wages of that labor" (Zeigler 66). Being able to work outside of the home allowed women to obtain more freedom as they emancipated themselves from the shackles that kept them in the house. The earnings acts along with the property act

made impacts on women's rights that changed the views of women's role in the home, however they did not have the power to "emancipate married women" (Zeigler 68).

Cases such as *Stewart v. Stewart* (1887), *Segelbaum v. Segelbaum* (1888), and *Bailey v. Bailey* (1881) are examples where husbands successfully divorced their wives because they were not having enough sexual intercourse with them, as well as the fact that wives were "neglect[ing] other duties as well" (Zeigler 82). Despite this, Murdoch argues, "Marriages were permanent, for life. Divorce was a rare remedy for a limited list of public wrongs, not a private right" (Murdoch 96). It was challenging for women to obtain a divorce, but in the case of *Melvin v. Melvin*, "a New Hampshire woman was granted a divorce on the grounds of cruelty because her husband subjected her to 'excessive sexual intercourse,' along with other, unspecified abuses (Zeigler 82). Women had a difficult time obtaining a divorce while men seemed to obtain a divorce much more easy. Ruddick expands on this when he notes,

> Many husbands continued to visit prostitutes after marriage because they felt that their sexual demands degraded their wives. Prostitutes--usually from the lower classes--were by definition 'fallen women' whose trade was often explained away, not by poverty or social inequity, but by their unwomanly failure to control their sexual desires (Ruddick 30).

Basically, the law told married women that it was acceptable for their husbands to cheat, but if they committed adultery their husband could leave them. It was a man's right to have sex and a woman's duty to stay committed to him.

As women obtained more rights, their autonomy became evident. According to Lawrence Friedman and Robert Percival, authors of, "Who sues for divorce? From fault through fiction to freedom," in their 1976 study, women were filing for divorce more frequently than men (Friedman and Percival 61). This shows how far women and their

rights have come. While in the household, Zeigler and Reilly have differing views about the relationship between master and servant, and husband and wife. Zeigler argues that "...the rights and obligations of masters and servants were strikingly similar, although the services performed sometimes differed. The term servant might include house servants, farm workers, and apprentices, as well as employees in a business. The relation of master and servant was created by a contract and terminated by the expiration of the term of service or by discharge" (Zeigler 86). Whereas Zeigler contends that the relationship between husband and wife was similar to that of a master and servant, Reilly believes otherwise. She notes, "husbands and wives were bound by intimacy and mutual regard" (Reilly 64). I believe that Reilly would argue that Zeigler fails to see that the relationship between husband and wife includes an emotional bond, while that of a master and slave dismisses it.

Britain Laws that Move to the United States

Beginning in the 17060's in Britain, the law of coverture, which was dismantled in the United States by the 1880s, stated that men had complete control over their wives. This law deemed married and unmarried women as two different classes (Murdoch 93-94). While still intact, judges saw bigamy less of a threat to the marriage contract than a divorce (Murdoch 87). According to Annis Pratt, author of "The New Feminist Criticism," "A woman as soon as she is married, is called *covert*, in Latin, *nupta*, that is *veiled*, as it were, clouded and overshadowed, she has lost her streame...To a married woman, her new self is her superior, her companion, her master" (Pratt 872). It seems as though the emotions of the wife were completely taken out of the equation when it came to the law.

Doing what was "right" was more important than doing what the wife wanted. For example, Zeigler writes, "although wives 'owned' half the marital property under the community-property system, the husband's exclusive right to control the couple's income and holdings rendered her as dependent as she would have been under the common law, at least during the course of the marriage" (Zeigler 71). During this time, equality seemed very far off for women, especially for married women. While culturally it was more acceptable to be married than to be single, women had to give up their rights in order to be accepted by society.

As we move into the nineteenth century, "states (and international treaties) moved unevenly but unmistakably to remove these handicaps" (Cott 1446). Zeigler notes,

> Marriage was governed by the common law, which was adopted by most states along with their constitutions, insofar as it did not conflict with the basic and statutory law of the state. Under the common law, the wife ceded control of her person and property to her husband; she was also obliged to take care of his home, provide him with exclusive access to her body, bear and rear their children…(Zeigler 65).

The movement between women obtaining some rights but still having restrictions was seen throughout this century. For example, in 1838, "Iowa was the first state to allow sole custody of a child to its mother in the event of a divorce" (Doepke, Tertilt, and Voena 348). Women having custody over their child after a divorce had an impact on divorce because women knew that there was an opportunity to gain custody of their child. Women no longer had to live in fear of their husband obtaining full custody. Knowing that their child was not definitely going to their spouse could have been a motivator towards divorcing. Zeigler tells readers that "Divorced mothers were increasingly able to retain custody of their children, particularly when the father was at fault in the divorce" (Zeigler 83). However, women did not have the right to make all decisions regarding the

child after divorcing. For example, if the child's parents could not come to an agreement as to what to do about a child's education, the father's opinion would prevail (Zeigler 84). Here, we still see the patriarchy in control. In "1840 many women considered marriage to be a large step from relative freedom into an important, but confining, social role" (Chused 4). As novelists examine how women and men dealt with divorce, and as marriage laws were being created, female attitudes were rapidly changing. Female autonomy became a recurring theme in the fiction that I have observed.

As the timeline of women's rights continues, according to Richard Chused, author of "Married Women's Property Law: 1800-1850," "1848 is commonly thought of as the year the women's rights movement began" (Chused 2). This is because the Seneca Falls Convention, the first women's rights convention and "the adoption of the well-known New York married women's act" had both occurred (Chused 2). The Seneca Falls Convention lasted two days and allowed women to address issues of their lack of rights. The first day, only women were invited to attend, but the second day, about forty men attended. The Declaration of Sentiments and Grievances, which specified women's injustices, was adopted. The 1850's were equally an important decade for women's rights. In 1855, Congress passed a statute which declared "that any woman who married or would marry an American man gained American citizenship in doing do" (Cott 1456). Previously, women did not automatically obtain this right. Getting married no longer seemed like a push from society's norms to get married, as it turned into more of a choice for women as their rights were expanding.

While is it important to look at what the Married Women's Property Law provided, it is also imperative to look at what the act left out. Although it was a big step

for women, the act did not allow women to file for divorce by the same standards as men and it did not give women the right to own property (Poovey 468). Men could file for adultery while women could not file for adultery alone. They had to file for adultery as well as another serious reason (Poovey 479). When a woman married, according to common law, her property became her husband's. Zeigler furthers this by saying, "the husband, in essence, hired a woman to care for himself and his household. Most students of American marriage law do not choose to focus on the labor contract within marriage, preferring to emphasize the common-law rules under which the husband gained control of his wife's real property" (Zeigler 65). This uneven trend of women's rights was unfair but nevertheless, in existence.

New Woman Fiction

Furthermore, during the 1850s, a new genre of literature began to emerge, that of the New Woman. Ibsen, Chopin, and Allen added to the success of the genre by allowing their characters in their plays and novels to enforce female independence. According to Edward Clodd, author of *Grant Allen; A Memoir*, Allen struggled as a male author in the New Woman fiction genre because it was mostly dominated by female writers (Warne and Colligan 23). However, this did not worry Allen, "as he believes he is one of the 'few exceptional men' able to lead the movement, Allen portrays himself as a male version of the New Woman" (Warne and Colligan 24). Nonetheless, some argued that male authors did not "have a place in New Women's writing" (Warne and Colligan 31). This was clearly untrue because *The Woman Who Did* gained much success. According to Nancy Walker, "The 'new woman' herself was the product of several decades of agitation for

women's political rights, increased educational opportunities, and the admission of women into intellectual circles…" (Walker 20). The female protagonists in the texts I am focusing on possess a passion for education, women's rights, and complete autonomy from the laws that restrict their individualism and freedom. They embody what a New Woman stands for by pushing back against society's restrictions. Overall, these authors were able to capture the New Woman genre and represent it in their female characters.

What characteristics does the New Woman fiction entail? According to Ainslie Meares, the New Woman is "the product of the social evolution which is going on around us… [but] above all she is striving for equality of opportunity with man to enjoy full life, and she seeks the right to make decisions for herself, the right to determine her own destiny" (Meares). As seen throughout *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening*, and *The Woman Who Did*, all of the main characters in the novels and plays are a reflection of the New Woman. Each female disobeys cultural norms by going against the patriarchy in different ways. They all strive for full autonomy but reach that destination by following very different paths. According to Michelle Elizabeth Tusan, author of, "Inventing the New Woman: Print Culture and Identity Politics during the Fin-de-Siecle: 1997 VanArsdel Prize," The New Woman was introduced in 1894 to *The Daily Telegraph*, *The Daily Chronicle*, and *The Pall Mall Gazette* and in 1895 the New Woman "peaked" (Tuscan 175). Allen's novel, *The Woman Who Did*, was published in the United States in 1896, right after the New Woman fiction hit its peak.

Much of the New Woman fiction focuses on women's search for autonomy. According to Sally Ledger, author of, *The New Woman: Fiction and Feminism at the fin de siècle*, men feared that the New Woman "could manage quite well without them"

(Ledger 5), and they were right. However, despite be able to function in society without men, they had to endure various obstacles. For example, Walker asserts, "On the level of the plot, these novels frequently emphasize women's struggles to overcome obstacles to their freedom, rather than their success in doing so" (Walker 20). In the New Woman fiction I have examined, readers are exposed to the challenges that the protagonists face in order to search for their freedom. Not only were readers able to see the struggles that New Woman faced, but they also were able to emphasize with them, allowing the culture in America to change. According to Heilmann,

> As the concepts of femininity and feminism moved closer together, the younger generation of middle-class women were increasingly attracted to the lifestyle issues associated with the New Woman: her demand to be treated as a reasonable adult able to determine her own destiny without undue parental intervention or supervision, her wish for greater freedom of movement, her desire for increased educational opportunities, her expectation of professional fulfillment (Heilmann 34).

As New Woman fiction became more popular, American women began adopting similar New Woman actions. They wanted autonomy and became more reluctant to marry. Heilmann goes on to say, "New Woman fiction and journalism played a major part in contributing to the complex social changes which led to a redefinition of gender roles and a consolidation of the notion of women's rights at the turn of the century…[which] paved the way for the success of the suffragettes in the first two decades of the twentieth century" (Heilmann 41). It is interesting to look at how New Woman fiction impacted society and vise versa. These anti-marriage and anti-patriarchy novels and plays push back at nineteenth-century laws and culture through their protagonists.

Conclusion

Overall, marriage law in America took time, effort, and uneven movement to finally allow for women's rights to expand. Even when the Nineteenth Amendment (1920) was passed allowing women to vote, "many states still refused to allow or require women to serve on juries, and no women were called to the armed services" (Cott 1450). The fiction from the nineteenth century that I have examined regarding marriage law and divorce expose how fiction was a representation of reality. A year after *The Woman Who Did* was published in the United States, "In 1898 Charlotte Perkins Gilman...published *Women and Economics*, which advocates women becoming more economically independent, thereby improving their marriages and increasing their own humanity" (Dyer 6). Through Herminia Barton's actions, the protagonist of *The Woman Who Did*, readers clearly see her independence throughout the entirety of the novel, emphasizing Gilman's ideologies. Reading these novels and plays in the context of their time period will allow for a comprehensive understanding of what the authors were trying to communicate to their readers: that the nineteenth century was filled with change, progression, and an exploration of women and their rights.

CHAPTER 1

SHE JUST WANTED A LOAN! NORA'S RESISTANCE TO MARITAL EXPECTATIONS

By exploring *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen, I will argue that the play is a crucial catalyst for discussions about marriage in America. In doing so, I will show not only how Ibsen had an impact on America (despite his Norwegian descent) but also how his play pushed back at nineteenth-century marriage laws. In order to do so, I will take a feminist New Historicist approach and also engage with critics to show how the play influenced America. Although the play was not originally produced in America, it was still able to resonate with many Americans. *A Doll's House* challenges traditional nineteenth-century marriage fiction through a form of marriage resistance literature, which was, after much scrutiny, eventually accepted in the United States. According to H.H. Boyesen, an author who gained credibility for his insights into *A Doll's House*, argues that the play sets out to answer the question, "why is marriage a failure?" (Boyesen 199). American's did not want to hear the answer to this because in the nineteenth-century marriages should not be failing, because it was a social norm to be married. *A Doll's House* ultimately pushed back at nineteenth-century marriage in America because of Ibsen's ability to argue for female independence over marriage.

A Doll's House exposes the issues of inequality amongst men and women and the reviews of the play further support issues of inequality as male critics harshly scrutinized

the play. While problems with culture and translation were brewing, issues with the content of the play were also a large problem for critics. Because nineteenth-century reviewers argued that women's rights in America were far more advanced than those of European countries, according to Orm Øverland author of "The Reception of Ibsen in the United States: A Mirror of Cultural and Political Concerns, 1889-1910," they also argued that "the play was 'simply a satire aimed at men who treat their wives like dolls...a story hinting at the emancipation of women, who in Norway must be at least a thousand years behind the time'" (Øverland 459-460). However, Boyesen argues that men are much more naive than females, and that equality in the in 1890's seemed impossible (Boyesen 200). The play explores marriage resistance, which, during the nineteenth century, was an extremely controversial topic. By examining *A Doll's House*, one can see how reviews that shunned the play were resulting from a lack of marriage rights for women.

Ibsen's Reception in America

It is important to examine Ibsen's rise to success in order to understand how truly influential his play was. Henrik Johan Ibsen was born in Skein, Norway on March 20th, 1828. During the 1870's Ibsen spent his time traveling throughout Europe and he published *A Doll's House* in 1879. Ibsen was influenced mostly from his own experiences. For example, *A Doll's House* was based on true events in Ibsen's life. According to Siddall, in 1872 Ibsen formed a strong bond with a woman named Laura Petersen, whom he often called 'skylark' because for him, she represented the daughter that he never had. In 1873 she married Victor Kieler, who was diagnosed with tuberculosis. When Kieler's doctor recommended that he travel to Switzerland and Italy,

Laura secretly took out a loan to pay for the trips. Unfortunately, Laura could not afford to pay back the loan and therefore began writing as a way to make money. She asked Ibsen to endorse her new book but because she rushed it, he refused to help her. Instead, he told her to tell her husband about her financial struggles: "'In a family in which the husband is alive it can never be necessary for the wife to—as you are doing—drain her own spiritual blood'" (Ibsen qtd. in Siddall 10). However, Laura did not take his advice and instead forged a check to pay back the loan.

Unfortunately, the problem worsened and she ended up confessing to her husband. Her husband was furious and wanted a separation, but Laura's reaction caused Victor to send her to a psychiatric ward for four weeks. Two years later, Laura went back to Victor. This real-life experience helped Ibsen write *A Doll's House*, which proves that it made Ibsen think about the construction of the nineteenth-century marriage laws. I believe that Ibsen's intentionality was to portray events that occurred in his life. Ibsen reflected an imperative moment in his life where social change occurred. While he encouraged Laura to tell her husband about her financial struggles, Laura went against his suggestion. I do believe that Ibsen had a goal of reflecting a form of social change due to his representation of his fictional characters.

Analysis of A Doll's House- Language of the Condescending Nineteenth-Century Male

A Doll's House was originally performed in the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen, Denmark on December 21st, 1879. It then moved to Italy (1879), Louisville, Kentucky (1883), Broadway (1889), and France (1894) (Ibsen and Worrall). It was originally published in Norwegian and it was set in the late 1870s in Norway. *A Doll's House*

reflects the struggle for women's rights that were occurring during the nineteenth century. While many women remained married to their husbands, Ibsen allowed his protagonist, Nora Helmer, to make a move that would be forever remembered in history.

The play is bursting with language that indicates male supremacy. According to Abdul Baseer, Sofia Dildar, and Alvi Fareha Zafran, authors of, "The Use of Symbolic Language in Ibsen's A Doll's House: A Feministic Perspective":

> From the earliest times the women are kept under male suppression. Women's yearning to equal social status, access to equal opportunities, and right to expression have encountered stiff resistance over the ages. Regrettably, gender discrimination is rampant in several cultures and societies...(Baseer, Dildar, and Zafran 624).

At the start of first act, readers are introduced to Nora's fondness for macaroons and Torvald's underlying disdain toward Nora eating them. He asks, "has the little sweet-tooth been breaking rules to-day?" (Ibsen 34). This question, more of statement, reflects how Nora must obey Torvald's command of his home no matter her location. Nora responds, "I shouldn't think of doing what you disapprove of" (Ibsen 34). During the start of the play readers can tell that Nora is so engrossed in pleasing her husband that she loses her self-worth.

In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen argues that wives can set themselves free from their husbands despite how society perceives them as one unit, especially during the nineteenth century. According to Baseer, Dildar, and Zafran's essay, the authors examine the language used in the play in order to show the ways in which Torvald Helmer humiliates his wife, Nora. These authors write that the "patriarchy establishes the ideas of man's ascendancy and women's relegation on the basis of symbolic concepts associated with male-dominated linguistic code, and not on the basis of semiotic use of language"

(Baseer, Dildar, and Zafran 622). They ultimately set out to examine the condescending ways in which Torvald communicates with Nora. For example, Torvald refers to Nora as "my little squirrel" (Ibsen 30), "my little skylark" (Ibsen 30), and "my little songbird" (Ibsen 30). The word "little," according to Merriam Webster, means "small in importance or interest" (Little). "Little" can also represent someone who is often dependent on others. Torvald calls Nora "squirrel," "skylark," and "songbird," none of which are humans, or express human-like qualities.

The ways in which Torvald acknowledges Nora provides readers with insight into his lack of respect for her. Baseer, Dildar, and Zafran write, "the society is a male-dominated society where language is a tool in the hands of the dominating gender, and is utilized fully to create an impression of ruler and be ruled; possessor and possessed, supervisor and subservient" (Baseer, Dildar, and Zafran 626). Nora was more of a puppet to Torvald instead of a wife. However, even Nora calls herself a squirrel, but it seems more sarcastic than sincere: "The squirrel would run about and do all her tricks if you would be nice, and do what she wants" (Ibsen 74). In this quote, Nora takes Torvald's nickname for her and turns it around as an insult. Despite this, Torvald appears rather unaware that Nora is offended by his nicknames for her. Not to mention, even Ibsen tried giving Nora pet names. For example, in Branislav Jakovljevic's article, "Shattered Back Wall: Performative Utterance of A Doll's House," Ibsen wanted readers to know that Nora's real name was Elenora, but at home, her family would refer to her as Nora, "because she was such a little pet" (Jakovljevic 441). Why did Ibsen do this? Was Ibsen trying to attract male audiences by giving Nora a nickname, somewhat similar to the

ways in which Torvald gives her them? Was Ibsen aware that these nicknames were offensive or was he actually trying to sound endearing?

Due to my research, I argue that Ibsen knew exactly what he was doing when giving Nora the nicknames. According to Evert Sprinchorn, editor of *Ibsen. Letters and Speeches*, Luigi Capuana, realist writer who translated the play to Italian wanted the ending to be changed. Ibsen responded, "I might honestly say that it was for the sake of the last scene that the whole play was written…At any rate the experiment ought to be tried. If it fails, then let Mr. Capuana, on his own responsibility, use your own adaptation of the closing scene, but without any formal approval or authorization on my part" (Sprinchorn 300). In regards to the play itself, Ibsen notes, "It is a serious play, really a domestic family drama, dealing with contemporary problems in regard to marriage" (Sprinchorn 176). Therefore, it can be duly noted that one of Ibsen's purposes in writing the play was to draw attention to the dynamic in the household between husbands and wives.

Nora might not be to blame for her willingness to abide by Torvald's every rule. For example, Jakovljevic states:

> Ignorance is not the lack of learning, but the lack of experience, the lack of empirical knowledge. In this bourgeois home, inexperience amounts to uselessness not only in work but also in dealing with the 'facts of life,' which are incorrigible and fundamental. Nora's question about the possibility of woman's use of knowledge... sets her on a journey out of ignorance (Jakovljevic 440).

The only way Nora can escape this ignorance is by leaving the prison-like environment that Torvald has set for her. Jakovljevic explains there must be premeditated decision that Nora makes because the kind of ignorance Nora possesses "cannot be achieved through learning, or through unlearning and forgetting of the already existing knowledge"

(Jakovljevic 440). By leaving her family, Nora had the ability to create her own path and, in turn, her own knowledge. Nora went against the typical nineteenth-century female when she realized her lack of authority and identity. In doing so, Ibsen also allowed Nora to leave such an unhealthy marriage, sparking a change in common beliefs about the limitations of nineteenth-century marriage laws.

Within the social structure of the nineteenth century, the constricted and conservative ideologies seem to be permanently cemented within male and female human psyches. Although Nora was married to Torvald, because she left him during a time when women were "supposed to be married," it was shocking and at first and not adorned in American theaters. Nora tells Mrs. Linde about a prior job she got copying and that she worked at night while her family was asleep. She confesses to Mrs. Linde, "I almost felt as if I was a man" (Ibsen 46). Instead of telling Torvald the truth, Nora convinces him that she was making Christmas decorations at night but a cat ruined them.

When Torvald becomes ill and the family cannot afford to pay for his doctor visits, Nora forages her father's signature on a loan. Nora did not tell Torvald that she forged her father's signature on the loan she received from a lawyer named Krogstad. Nora disregarded the traditional values of the typical wife of the nineteenth century by not only lying to Torvald, but her thoughts about wanting freedom shocked Mrs. Linde, who seemed to be content with living her rather restricted lifestyle. Mrs. Linde tells Nora, "a wife cannot borrow without her husband's consent" (Ibsen 43). Mrs. Linde also says, "you're a mere child, Nora" (Ibsen 46). Nora, who is rightfully offended by Mrs. Linde's comments, replies, "you're like the rest of them. You all think I'm fit for nothing really serious--" (Ibsen 46). Nora was not like many women during her time. Nora's actions,

therefore, served as a catalyst for the discussion surrounding nineteenth-century marriage laws.

Nora's obsession to satisfy Torvald stems from one of the play's main conflicts, that of the Helmer's poor economic situation. According to Ross Shideler, author of "Ibsen and the Name-of-the-Father," Torvald's authority comes from his belief that he has economic dominance. However, "Torvald's self-righteous vision of a structured, organized, and fair world, in which he is the master of his house, conflicts with the reality around him" (Shideler 283). Nora continues to do everything in her power to please Torvald, which is clearly seen throughout the entire first act. She hides her own desires and needs. Nora is cunning and deceitful and she does not neglect her own desires, rather she hides them from Torvald. The authoritative role of a wife was non-existent because their main responsibility was merely to cater to her partner's needs. However, Ibsen did not leave readers with this. Instead, he lefts readers with a play that pushed back against these ideas.

As the play progresses readers learn more about the differences between Torvald and Krogstad. The first interaction between the two occurs at the beginning of the play. Readers learn that both of the men are lawyers, but come from very different backgrounds. While they both attended the same law school, Torvald was a civil servant until "he met his wife Nora while investigating her father's dubious business ventures. He left his low paying job at a ministry and toiled to support his family as a free-lance lawyer until he lost his health and almost died" (Jakovljevic 438). Krogstad, on the other hand, lacks moral principles, which is reflected in his business negotiations. He does whatever it takes to support his wife and two children. While the two men have very

different ethical obligations, they both have a passion for writing. As revealed in Act Two, Nora tells Torvald that she fears Krogstad because he has the power to do a lot of harm. It is noteworthy, however, that both men are lawyers, because while Nora may defy nineteenth-century norms, the men do not. While the men appear to have a good sense of knowledge about writing, Nora lacks the ability to write successfully, a skill that was not uncommon for women for lack in the nineteenth century. Ultimately, the discussion surrounding the men in the play seemed quite positive during the nineteenth century because they followed social norms.

In the final act of the play, readers start to really see Nora rebel, which was rare from nineteenth-century women. Nora brings the play full circle when she confesses to Torvald that she's finally taking off her dolls dress (Ibsen 114) because she's tired of being his "doll-wife" (Ibsen 118). Despite this, Torvald still believes he control over Nora when he says, "You are mad. I shall not allow it. I forbid it" (Ibsen 118). Furthermore, during a conversation with Torvald, she asks: "What do you call my holliest duties?" and he responds, "Your duties to your husband and your children" (Ibsen 119). Women felt like they had to obey their husbands and their first, and seemingly only, priority was their family. While most nineteenth-century women would have understood his response to be justified, Nora defies her time by saying: "I have other duties equally sacred. […] Duties toward myself" (Ibsen 118). According to Joan Templeton's article, "Nora on the American Stage, 1894-1975: Acting The Integral Text," "for a hundred years, it has been argued that Nora Helmer is a difficult if not impossible par to play because there are two of her" (Templeton 121). Not only was Nora relatable to females, but also to males. Readers see Nora as both the masculine and feminine woman (Shideler

283). That complexity is one of the many reasons as to why the play was ultimately such a success. Ibsen created Nora in order to represent a scandalous victory for women by pushing back against nineteenth-century marriage law. By allowing Nora to leave her home, Ibsen gave her "the right to find her own language, to sign her own name" (Shideler 289).

By the end of the play, Nora convinces herself to leave her family, old life, and old self behind. Interestingly enough, even at the end of the play, Torvald "invokes his male strength and authority by returning to his masculine" vocabulary such as referring to Nora as his "songbird" and "hunted dove" (Shideler 289). Despite this, Nora gave her wedding ring back to Torvald and walks down the stairs. In the play, Jakovljevic writes, "another door slams shut. She is outside, on the street. Nora's final exit is not seen or reported. It comes as a noise" (Jakovljevic 443). But what happens next? Ibsen leaves readers with a rather unfinished ending. Jakovljevic writes:

> Nora's exit, however, is also an entrance. She leaves the home and enters into dangerous, unpredictable reality. She exits the stage and enters the ambiguous offstage world. Before she leaves, Nora makes sure to prevent Torvald from writing to her. No more letters. Her departure is the end of writing. And then what? The writing stops but the story continues. *A Doll's House* needs an epilogue, it asks for a continuation of some kind. She slams the door. What happens next? She steps on the street. And? (Jakovljevic 443).

Anyone who has read or seen a performance of *A Doll's House* probably remembers Nora's famous door slam at the end of the play. When Nora leaves the home, she also leaves behind a life "filled with dying [Torvald] or dead [her father] patriarchal figures, a house in which the 'father' as an image of strength and of salvation has already died" (Shideler 284). Nora finally had the courage to leave behind a life in which she was not really living. She lived for Torvald and for her children, not for herself.

Ibsen's intended audience for *A Doll's House* was middle class citizens, which makes sense as to why directors develop the sets with such intention. Jakovljevic writes, "Ibsen's family drama is set within the space of perspectival constraints. The entire play takes place in this single set that represents the living room in a middle class family flat" (Jakovljevic 432). The play did not jump from room to room because that would imply that the home was bigger than it actually was. This would also suggest that the family had more money than Ibsen intended them to have. The play was thought provoking, caught the audience and critics off guard, but ultimately paved the way for novels and plays to push back at nineteenth-century marriage law. Because *A Doll's House* and its reviews tie into the nineteenth-century debates, this shows how much Ibsen was aware of his surroundings. It is clear that *A Doll's House* will be forever remembered for its impact to the theater.

While Ibsen left readers wanting more, writers and poets were inspired to create an additional ending. The poem "Nora on the Pavement," by Arthur Symons was published on April 22, 1893 in his poetry book "London Nights." In the poem, Nora dances about the streets of London and Symons writes, "It is the soul of Nora, / Living at last, and giving forth to the night, / Bird-like, the burden of its own delight, / All its desire, and all the joy of living, / In that blithe madness of the soul of Nora" (Symons 30-35). Symons poem was a response to George Bernard Shaw's review of the play in which Jakovljevic notes that he writes:

> 'The end of a chapter in human history. For Shaw, the slam of the door is 'more momentous' than battle cannons because it marks the crumbling down of "an institution upon which so much human affection and suffering have been lavished'...the outcome of Nora's exit was repeatedly imagined and reimagined, corrected, reversed, and questioned" (Jakovljevic 443).

It is interesting that Symons still allows Nora to be free during a time when women did not have much freedom. Ibsen clearly made an impact on Symons because while he could have placed Nora back in her constraints, this male poet allowed Nora to continue on with her new life.

Symons was not the only writer that wanted to create a sequel to the play. After just six months post the release of *A Doll's House* at Novelty Theater, Walter Besant wrote, "The Doll's House—And After." In the short story, Besant writes of Torvald becoming "desperate drunk, and Krogstad the chairman of the bank's board and a mayor" (Jakovljevic 444). Besant argues that Nora finds herself by becoming a writer and a women's rights leader. However, in Besant's story, while Nora, spelled Norah in his book ("apparently to make it closer to his English readers") (Jakovljevic 444), returns home, she does not visit her children or Torvald. Besant also allowed Nora to live a free life, and even after entering her hometown, he still allowed her to resist temptation of going back to her home. Nora valued herself over her husband and family, and Ibsen's play made an impact not only in fiction, but also across the world.

Nineteenth-Century Reviews

Reviews of *A Doll's House* during the nineteenth century were far from positive. Many critics were shocked by the idea of a woman wanting independence from her husband and children. However, many of the reviews from women were nothing short of applause for the play while most of the reviews written by men were mixed. In J. Chris Westgate's review on *A Doll's House*, he notes, "when *A Doll's House* debuted, its ending—perhaps the most celebrated in modern drama—shook the foundations of fin-de-

siècle domesticity" (A Doll's House (Review) 502). Westgate's review was rather contradictory, as he started off his review by arguing that the ending caused him a bit of "uneasiness about the drive for female personhood" (A Doll's House (Review) 500). However, as quoted above, he finally came to terms with the ending because he believed it was a reflection of women's independence during a time when they lacked rights. Nora's ability to leave a relationship simply because she was unhappy was shocking during the nineteenth century. Women's emotions seemed rather disregarded as men were in control of their households. Ibsen's ability to let Nora leave her marriage turned critics and audience members' heads as Nora took control during a time when married women thought they had none.

Nonetheless, not all of the reviewers were able to understand the importance of *A Doll's House*. For example, according to Robert A. Schanke, author of, *Ibsen in America: A Century of Change*, the first production of *A Doll's House* ran for just one night because a reviewer argued that the play would "'never become very popular with American audiences'" (Reviewer qtd. in Schanke vii). The problem may not have been with Ibsen, rather, the problem with the reception of Ibsen was that American's were too narrow-minded to see that Ibsen's *A Doll's House* would help change in the opinions of marriage law. The way the play was perceived at the grand opening at the Royal Theater in 1879 was far from positive. Betty Hennings, the first actress who played Nora, was criticized for taking off part of her costume on stage. Many audience members also sided with Torvald because "his wife would not have left him because she made no sense" (Templeton 121). Poor opinions of actresses who played Nora lasted for decades.

While *A Doll's House* defied the attitudes of its time Ibsen's reception in America

was not, at first, welcoming. Nora was a challenging lead to play because she was not like the typical female that people were used to seeing. For example, Templeton writes:

> What is hard to act is the earlier Nora of Acts One and Two, gayley paying the 'spendthrift bird' but secretly vaunting the truth: 'I was the one who raised the money' (Ibsen 135); looking up to her husband for guidance in everything, including what to wear at masquerade parties, but, in spite of herself, laughing at him when he speaks of the respect due him from social inferiors: 'Torvald, you can't be serious about all this….such petty consideration'" (Ibsen 160 qtd. in Templeton 123).

Despite the harsh reactions Nora's character received, reviewers admitted that many of the actresses who played Nora were mostly successful in in Act Three. It is rather ironic that many of the harshest criticisms of Nora came from men. Was it because Nora made a radical move, one that men had never seen before? As America was dealing with the aftermath of the Civil War, instead of expanding, citizen's minds became even narrower (Schanke 4). For example, George Jean Nathan noted that Nora was portrayed as a "'vastly irritating moron' on whom Torvald would have slammed the door at the end of the first act" (Templeton 123-125). Being a man in the nineteenth century meant living under laws that gave women barely any rights. If male opinions stemmed from the vast laws they were granted, America was far from preaching equality in the nineteenth century.

Was there a right way to play Nora or did Ibsen create her in a way that was too challenging for actresses to play? According to Øverland, in 1894 Nora was played by Minnie Maddern Fiske, a very popular actress, and the producer Richard Mansfield, was just as well liked. While Ibsen did have a select group of followers, part of the reason why his plays (*Ghosts* and *A Doll's House*) might not have originally been successful in America was because there was a "resistance to his 'foreign' plays [due to

the]...resentment of the expanding 'foreign element' in the streets outside the theater" (Øverland 454). Other issues with Ibsen's play included that most of his plays were somewhat relatable yet also contradictory and they were a bit scandalous. Critics William Winter and Norman Hapgood agreed that the 1889 *A Doll's House* was "obscure" and that "...it is writ in Greek or some equally incomprehensible language. It is Norwegian and will stay Norwegian...It is pure pedantry to know what it all means" (Øverland 456). Saying that they believed that Ibsen's plays were simply not meant for the theater sums up many of critic's arguments.

When Ibsen's plays were first released in America, a problem of cultural differences arose. What may be suitable for Norway was not necessarily well regarded in America. According to Edwin Emery Slosson, author of "Ibsen As An Interpreter Of American Life":

> An American Ibsen would starve. The Norwegian Ibsen came near it. But, as he says, thru the mouth of Dr. Stockmann, 'the strongest man in the world is he who stands most alone.' Ibsen, single handed and under the ban, conquered a place in the world's esteem which he could never have obtained if he had been hampered by a train of friends, allies and disciplines (Slosson 1253).

It took a while for Ibsen to receive recognition as a playwright who made a positive impact on women's marriage rights in America. Slosson's argument reflected an accurate viewpoint of many nineteenth-century reviewers of the play. For example, John Lingard writes:

> Commentators on *A Doll's House* tend to agree in their focus on Nora Helmer and to disagree over whether she is: (1) a feminist heroine (2) a courageous, possibly tragic, human being (Henrik Ibsen and Sandra Saari); (3) a spoiled brat whose decision to leave her home and family is just playacting (Torvald Helmer and Hennann Weigand) (Lingard 363).

When Ibsen first began his playwriting in America he did not have much support from reviewers. However, in time, people saw the great virtues, such as individualism, independence, and women's freedom, his plays brought to the American theater. Ibsen's success was because of his ability to function independently. He did not let the poor reviews cost him his career. He continued to write and was eventually successful.

Contemporary Reviews

Despite these negative attitudes and impressions of Ibsen in the nineteenth century, by the turn of the century audience members and critics began to look at Ibsen's work differently. In the 1890's, Ibsen was "found irrelevant for a healthy society," but by the 1900's, "he was often viewed as addressing social ills in the United States" (Øverland 455). There were four primary people who came to Ibsen's defense: feminist Annie Nathan Meyer; actress Catherine Mary Reignolds-Winslow; George Bernard Shaw, author of *The Quintessence of Ibsenism*, and Hamlin Garland, author of *Crumbling Idols* (Schanke 11-12). These individuals supported Ibsen and sparked a change in others as well. Critics finally agreed that Ibsen's play "gave accurate descriptions and criticisms of wrongs that were as prevalent in the United States as in Europe" (Øverland 460). Øverland was not the only author to agree with this as Slosson notes, "Ibsen describes our small towns better than our own writers" (Slosson 1255). Soon, relating Ibsen to the American lifestyle became a "rule rather than the exception" (Øverland 461).

Women were angered with their social roles in the household, and, according to critic R.H. Hervey, "'Ibsen has made himself the mouthpiece'" for women who dreamed of their independence in the nineteenth century (Schanke 10). Ibsen's influence was

outstanding. The dramatic change in attitudes towards Ibsen and his plays from 1890 to 1910 were astonishing. Ibsen introduced a "new concept of the theater" and in doing so, was able to expand upon the "topics that would be openly and critically addressed in public…" (Øverland 462). Critic Walter Eaton claimed that "Ibsen had a significant impact on the American theater," while another critic concluded "the drama [in general] will never be the same it was before Ibsen appeared" (Øverland 462). In 1975, actress Liv Ullmann played Nora in New York. Reviewers exclaimed that Ullmann's on stage performance was a "revelation" and that finally an actress was able to "make Ibsen's heroine believable." Ullmann was thrilled with the feedback and noted that "her aim was to act all of Nora, the 'complexity', she revealed, 'that makes Ibsen such a genius'" (Templeton 125-126). As America began to welcome the ideas in *A Doll's House*, their reviews of the play changed.

It is interesting to note that as women's attitudes towards independence changed, so did their acting, as well as the reviews of their acting. Actresses who played Nora after Ullmann, such as Alla Nazimova and Minnie Maddern Fiske, were also well praised. "Nazimova's Nora was a triumph of realistic acting" (Templeton 126), one reviewer commented. Another added that Fiske's acting was, "the most important Nora in American stage history...She did not quite introduce Ibsen to America, but it was her triumphant success in his plays that gained him a place in the American repertory" (Templeton 127). Fiske had played Nora in 1894 as well as 1902 and the differences were remarkable. While her 1894 performance was nearly laughable, as the audience saw Nora as quite comical because she danced about the stage. Her performance in 1902 was taken much more seriously as Fiske took her part much more seriously as well.

Overall, Ibsen's impact on the American theater did not start off positive, however, as people began to see Ibsen's work as revolutionary and progressive, his plays were thought to have changed the face of American theater forever. Slosson remarks that Ibsen's main characteristics of playwriting were that of "modernity and universality" and that his plays were able to discover "the greatest common factors of all humanity" (Slosson 1253). Slosson argues that Ibsen's ability to open his writing to "middle class men and women" allowed him to become a "world dramatist" (Slosson 1253). Reviews of *A Doll's House* furthered Ibsen's imminent popularity because of his ability to address the issues surrounding the debate of women's rights in an interesting and new way.

Conclusion

Nora was used at a catalyst in the nineteenth century that fought back against marriage laws. According to Templeton, "*A Doll's House* is not about a doll who turns into a woman, but about a woman who renounces being a doll. Playing Nora means playing a woman catching up with herself" (Templeton 122). Even though Ibsen was not the only author to spark a change, he is able to reveal the impact of nineteenth-century marriage laws on women trapped by them. In order to further examine the ways in which nineteenth-century marriage laws were being reflection in literature, I will provide readers with a comprehensive understanding of how Edna Pontellier, the protagonist in Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, escapes the trap of the patriarchy in a much different way than Nora Helmer. Nora's "awakening" stems from the fact that she went on a mission to find herself, but not all characters in nineteenth-century fiction made it out alive.

CHAPTER 2

"YOU ARE THE EMBODIMENT OF SELFISHNESS": EDNA'S ADULTEROUS AWAKENING FOR AUTONOMY

Kate Chopin's novel, *The Awakening*, is similar *A Doll's House* in that both of the main characters made radical moves. Chopin's novel, much like Ibsen's, was at first not well perceived. Despite this, by the close of the twentieth century the reviews for *The Awakening* were improving. The novel not only reflected nineteenth-century marriage laws but also pushed back at them through the characters in the novel. The novel was based off of real-life events that occurred in Chopin's life (as outlined in the following chapter), which prove that the novel was a reflection of society's restrictions placed on women. *The Awakening* allowed for people to think about nineteenth-century laws in a new way. These laws were more restrictive and negative than actually useful for society. Overall, I argue that the novel made readers take a second look at society's restrictions on women because of the novel's radical ending.

Kate Chopin's Life and Legacy

Catherine (Kate) O'Flaherty was born on February 8th, 1850 in St. Louis, Missouri. In 1855, Chopin was sent to boarding school at the St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart. According to Joyce Dyer, author of, *The Awakening: A Novel of*

Beginnings, during Chopin's time at the academy she met Kitty Garesché, presumably the model for Adele Ratignolle in *The Awakening* (Dyer xii). Chopin lived with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother (all three women were widows). She did have two younger brothers, but ultimately did not see "a powerful patriarch, and she never saw any kind of marital money fights, alcoholism, or domestic violence" (Toth 113). Chopin had always thought of herself as being independent. According to Seyersted:

> The problem of independence, so typical of adolescence, was one which she debated intensely with herself as this time…In her social circle and in her home full of women, it was largely taken for granted that she should submit to authority and that she should become a devoted wife and mother in the traditional manner (Seyersted 29).

However, Chopin continued her search for independence despite the harsh criticism she received.

During Chopin's time in New Orleans, Chopin went on long walks and smoked cigarettes (a hobby uncommon for women). She met a man named Edgar Degas, who was a painter, and inspired her to write *The Awakening*. Edgar would tell Chopin stories of one of his close friends from France. He had a "frustrated wife" named Edna Pontillon. "A neighbor of Degas's, a perfect and very boring husband, was in real life named Leonce. But it wasn't until Oscar's business as a cotton factor failed that Chopin got to spend a lot of time watching other people" (Toth 114). While in New Orleans, the Chopin's had a summer home along the Gulf of Mexico. Chopin loved spending time at their summer house because it was often an escape from reality. According to Parmiter, the Chopin's fit into the "category of rising middle-class vacationers, as do the fictional Pontelliers," (Parmiter 4) in *The Awakening*. In Oscar and Chopin's first ten years of marriage, Chopin was pregnant a total of six times. "In Chopin's era childbirth was

considered a woman's noblest act; to write of it otherwise was unacceptable" (Stone 23). Despite this, Chopin writes about childbirth in *The Awakening* and shows its importance. Chopin, like Ibsen's *A Doll's House*, based *The Awakening* off of events that occurred in her life. For example, "the resort run by the Lebrun's in *The Awakening* is based on one that had been a favorite summer haunt for the Chopin's during the 1870s..." (Parmiter 3-4). Chopin's fiction was noticeably a reflection of events that were occurring during her life.

Chopin had an affair with a married man named Albert Sampite (Toth 116-117). Kate wrote about Albert's wife as well, and based Alcee Arobin in *The Awakening* off of Albert. Chopin not only left the affair she was having with Albert, but she also left Louisiana and took off for St. Louis. During this time, "Dr. Kolbenheyer, the model for Dr. Mandelet in *The Awakening*, begins to visit Chopin and to encourage her reading and writing" (Dyer xiii). Louisiana represented Chopin's youth, but Chopin, much like Edna from *The Awakening,* was aware that she was an outsider. "Edna, though, seems reasonably well liked as an outsider on Grand Isle-whereas Kate Chopin, in Cloutierville [Louisiana], would always be an étranger-the term for a foreigner" (Toth 118). The women in Louisiana inspired Chopin in her writing. For example:

> The Creole women of Louisiana, though seemingly less constrained than other women, were actually among the most conservative members of their sex in the nineteenth century. Like Adele, they were frank and physical…[and] Edna, not a Catholic but a Presbyterian, not a Creole but a southerner, adopts the candor and sensual manner of her Creole friends yet leaves their traditional notions of wifehood and motherhood behind (Dyer 11).

While Chopin was influenced by what was happening around her, it was not until 1888 when she began taking her writing seriously (Walker ix). In the nineteenth century "women were constrained to hide their true motivations behind a mask of innocence"

(Walker 3). Men did not want them to write, to free themselves, to become educated. Women were supposed to remain the homes while men were supposed to control what they saw, heard, and listened to. Chopin defied these standards.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin writes about Edna's own demands. According to Dyer, "As Larzer Ziff points out in The American 1980s (1966), 'To be a serious female author in the nineties was to be a writer of stories about women and their demands'" (Dyer 6). By the end of the novel, readers can see that Edna's demands outweigh the needs of her husband and children and even the restrictions that society puts on women. Chopin challenges common ideologies surrounding literature written by female authors because in order to fully understand *The Awakening*, one must not take the novel at face value. According to Parmiter, Chopin's main accomplishment in *The Awakening* is not only that of the search for health that Grand Isle provides to Edna, but also how her summer place enforces limits of the domestic sphere yet also helps cure her discomfort with it (Parmiter 2). *The Awakening* is a text that explores traditions of nineteenth-century women but also pushes back against them. While a fictional text, this novel reflects many aspects of Chopin's life.

The Awakening Analysis

According to Dyer, *The Awakening* was published on April 22, 1899 (Dyer xiv). However, its success did not come until the twentieth century. In the 1970's and 1980's when "feminist and new historicist scholarship focused on works and authors not canonized – or even completely forgotten – in the preceding decades, many scholars assumed that authorship for virtually all nineteenth-century women was fraught with

difficulty and self-doubt…" (Walker 6). Chopin took this idea of self-doubt and used it nearly a century earlier, when American's were not prepared. Chopin's writing focused on the "tension between the old and the new, between the nineteenth century, the traditional and the modern...and she wrote about it in story after story, including *The Awakening*...[and] in *The Awakening* women's role were a top priority of Chopin's" (Dyer 5). Readers see this theme throughout the entirety of the novel. According to Marie Fletcher's article, "The Southern Woman in the Fiction of Kate Chopin," Chopin's most purposeful work of literature is *The Awakening*.

> A novel which tells of the awakening of Edna Pontellier from the easy comfort of a marriage of convenience to a realization of what she considers to be the deeper needs of her soul. Edna, a Kentucky Presbyterian, has...married the Louisiana Creole, Leonce Pontellier. It is suggested that the marriage was purely an accident, a decree of Fate, for its 'his absolute devotion' and 'the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic' that led Edna to accept Leonce (Chopin qtd. in Fletcher 123).

As the novel unfolds, as does the marriage between Edna and Leonce. By the end of the novel, Edna fully puts her own happiness first. "Mrs. Pontellier is sharply contrasted with the other New Orleans matrons so that the qualities of Creole wives and mothers are emphasized. She is definitely not one of the 'mother women' who prevail on the island" (Fletcher 123). Readers watch as Edna opposes the role of the typical nineteenth-century "mother women," throughout the novel. Chopin, much like Ibsen, pushes back at society's norms by creating an independent female character who chooses her own happiness over her family's.

The Awakening begins at Grand Isle, a vacation spot located near New Orleans. According to Parmiter, the idea of a summer home is very significant in nineteenth-century literature because these homes "offer alternatives to the domestic realm,

affording new freedoms to women writers to reevaluate the social restrictions of the homes left behind for the summer...Grand Isle instead opens Edna's eyes to her dissatisfaction with her home life, an emotional and intellectual problem that is far more difficult to cure" (Parmiter 1-2). For Chopin, it seems like a summer home appeared like the perfect place for an awakening to occur. Cindy Sondik Aron, author of *Working at play: A history of vacations in the United States*, agrees with Parmiter when she asserts, "summer resorts seemed to allow, even encourage, more relaxed rules of conduct...Women both discovered and helped to create a resort culture that freed them from some traditional middle-class constraints and allowed them to exercise new forms of personal autonomy" (Aron 70). A summer home was not only an escape but it was also a time for Edna to focus on who was important: herself. Grand Isle is much more than a place for relaxation; it is a place that allows Edna to escape reality and enter into a new mindset, one that excludes society's norms.

Edna spends a lot of her time with her friend, Madame Adele Ratignolle, and a young man, Robert Lebrun. "On Grand Isle, she [Adele] always has her sewing with her, whereas Edna is 'idle'; she dresses in 'pure white' as befits her feminine nature, while Edna is described as having a 'graceful severity'; most importantly, Madame Ratignolle is a 'mother-woman', while Edna is 'fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way'" (Chopin qtd. in Walker 21). Adele's identity lies within that of her family. She lacks independence and is overall quite the opposite of Edna. She spends her time taking care of her children and enjoys music, mostly because of how it makes her home appear. On the other hand, "Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman" (Chopin 529). Robert, unlike Leonce, was a young and attractive man who often catches Edna's attention. Robert and

his mother spend each summer at Grand Isle, their cottage attached to the Pontellier's (Chopin 521).

Readers watch Edna change from an obedient wife to one who changes her focus from social norms in order to create her own, unique identity. In one of the first scenes in the novel, Edna examines her hands: "Looking at them [her hands] reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped them upon her fingers" (Chopin 522). Edna shows pride in being a wife, and is happy to wear her wedding ring. However, this Edna does not last very long. According to Chopin, "Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman" (Chopin 529). Readers watch Edna develop into an independent woman who typically goes against the common mother woman.

Leonce proves his dominance throughout the novel, while Edna begins to create a distance between the two. When Leonce returns from Klein's hotel at 11pm in chapter three, Edna awakes to Leonce trying to tell her stories about his night. "He [Leonce] 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" (Chopin 525). Leonce is demanding and becomes frustrated with Edna despite the fact that he awoke her from her sleep. Edna often gets frustrated with Leonce's lack of attentiveness and appears rather bored with her children. Chopin writes that Edna even forgot "the bonbons and peanuts for the boys" (Chopin 526). Leonce becomes frustrated and Chopin writes, "He [Leonce] 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?" (Chopin 326). Leonce expects Edna to conform to society's view of married women. Leonce adds, "'You are burnt beyond recognition,'…looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (Chopin 522). Here, readers notice that Leonce views his wife as property instead of as a human being.

While Leonce seems to represent nineteenth-century males, Edna fails to act like a common nineteenth-century female. There seems to be a disconnect between Edna's inner self and her outer self. Fletcher furthers this point when she writes:

> Edna is not concerned about winter garments for her sons, in order not to appear unamiable, she cuts a pattern for their drawers. Unlike the French ladies, she cannot devote herself exclusively to her husband and children. She hugs her sons passionately one moment and then forgets them the next; she is even gratified by their occasional absence. Edna is willing to give her time and her money but not her inner self to her family (Fletcher 124).

Even as a child she had lived in her own small life, all within herself. Chopin writes, "At a very early period she [Edna] had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions" (Chopin 535). Edna is torn between feeling like she needs to conform to how society expects women to act and how she wants to act: like a free woman. "They [mother-woman] were woman who idolized their children, [and] worshiped their husbands…" (Chopin 529). Edna proved to be the opposite of this. We see that Edna represses many of her desires to escape the role of the typical nineteenth-century married woman. "Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles…" (Chopin 530). Edna felt different and wanted to be different. She read books in secret in fear of Leonce finding out. Edna wanted to educate herself, wanted to free herself, and wanted to escape society's restriction but could not.

In chapter nine, Chopin introduces readers to Mademoiselle Reisz; Edna's other best friend. She is quite the opposite of Adele, and helps Edna to identify with her true self. Mademoiselle Reisz is described as a skilled pianist- but also:

> A disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others...She was a homely woman…[who] had absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a batch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair (Chopin 548).

Mademoiselle Reisz helps awaken Edna's passion for music by being quite the opposite of a mother-woman. Mademoiselle Reisz is not well liked because she is not married and does not have child. Chopin contrasts Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele in order to show the opposing forces Edna has in her life. Edna wants to escape her marriage and her two best friends help her do so in different ways. Mademoiselle Reisz is the woman Edna strives to be, while Adele is the woman society approves of.

Unlike Adele's marriage, one in which Adele's happiness stems from her ability to fulfill her husband and child's needs, Edna's marriage is quite the opposite. However, it is hard to Edna to come to terms with this because the women whom she spends her time with on the island think Leonce is a great husband. For example, Chopin writes that Leonce sent Edna package while he was away ay work:

> It was filled with friandises, with luscious and toothsome bits—the finest of fruits, pates, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bonbons in abundance….The ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily, all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better (Chopin 538).

Despite this, Edna still wanted to escape her marriage. For Edna, money could not and did not buy happiness. Edna wanted to unlock her own happiness from within, and despite living a life most women could only dream of, Edna wanted no part of it. Readers

see one of Edna's first disobediences toward Leonce in chapter eleven. Edna is outside lying on a hammock and Leonce wants her to come inside:

> "Edna, dear, are you not coming in soon?" he asked again, this time fondly, with a note of entreaty.
> "No; I am going to stay out here."
> "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."
> With a writhing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived hat her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted (Chopin 555-56).

When Edna finally gets off of the hammock, she asks Leonce when he'd be coming inside and he responds: "'Yes, dear,' he answered, with a glance following a misty puff of smoke. 'Just as soon as I have finished my cigar'" (Chopin 557). Leonce, like many other married men from the nineteenth century, did what he wanted on his terms. It did not matter if Edna wanted him to come inside; he was going to stay outside for as long as he wanted to. Moments like this one, where readers see Edna rebelling, support the case for marriage resistance. Edna no longer wanted to be Leonce's puppet, and therefore, she rebels.

To fill the missing void in her marriage, Edna hangs out with Robert, in a less-friendly, more romantic way. They enjoy spending time together and readers see their relationship progress throughout the novel. According to Walker, Chopin created Edna as a character whom stands out from her culture, region, and social class, which, in turn, made Chopin a remarkable influence on women's fiction towards the end of the nineteenth century (Walker 21). Edna is unlike other nineteenth-century married women, because Edna is not against cheating and, it seems as though she falls in love with Robert. He teaches her how to swim, furthering her autonomy. When Edna first swims alone, "a feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given

her to control the working of her body and her soul…[and] as she swam she seemed to be to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself" (Chopin 551-52). However, soon after this, "a quick vision of death [smites] her soul," and according to Ringe, "she hurries back to her waiting husband and friends" (Ringe 583). Edna's feeling of autonomy did not last long. According to Ringe, "the fear of death…clearly reveals the intensification of self-awareness that the experience has given her-an awakening of the self as important, perhaps, as any other in the novel. For from this point on, Edna develops a growing self-awareness from which there is no turning back" (Ringe 583). This moment appears to be one of the turning points in the novel. When Robert teaches Edna how to swim, it is much more than a learning moment for Edna: he also teaches her how to complete an act on her own, something most nineteenth-century women were unfamiliar with.

However, in chapter fifteen, Robert tells Edna he is leaving for Mexico in order to earn money (Chopin 567). Edna is displeased and while he is away he only writes letters to his mother and Mademoiselle Reisz in hopes of falling out of love with Edna. When Edna returns to New Orleans, she becomes more rebellious towards Leonce. Leonce becomes angry that Edna is having guests at the home because he is afraid that it will hurt his business. He is also mad that Edna burnt their dinner and he takes off to go to the club (Chopin 580). However, during this scene, Edna realizes that she wants her independence. According to Parmiter, "Leonce…seem[s] to be afraid that feminist ideas have infected Edna's mind, when in fact she figures out these ideas on her own through her physical experience of the summer place; nevertheless, the men in her life still consider her an invalid, attempting to invalidate her newfound independence by labeling it madness"

(Parmiter 11). However, Edna is not surprised by Leonce's response (leaving the home), and she takes action, proving her independence. She tries to break her wedding ring and when it does not break, she smashes a vase instead (Chopin 581). The next morning, Leonce asks Edna to go with him to get "some new fixtures for the library" (Chopin 581), but Edna refuses to go. Instead, she decides to go to Adele's house for dinner. By leaving Leonce and choosing to go to Adele's, Edna pushes back against the patriarchy.

Edna's father comes to visit and introduces Edna to a man named Alcee Arobin, whom, later in the novel, Edna has an affair with. Alcee and Edna attend horse races by themselves and soon Alcee spends time at Edna's home. After speaking with Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna decides is it time for her to move out of her home. After this decision to be nearly completely independent from her family, Edna's affair with Alcee begins. Edna tells Mademoiselle Reisz, "'I am going to move away from my house on Esplanade Street'" (Chopin 612). Another turning point in the novel, Edna seems as though she has finally reached the autonomy she had always wanted.

Edna's affair with Alcee is one that Edna does not seem to feel guilty for. According to Chopin, "Alcee Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet 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" (Chopin 610). However, while she does not feel guilty for betraying Leonce, she does feel guilty for not having genuine feelings for Alcee. Alcee's role in the novel is to push Edna even further outside of the domestic sphere. Chopin writes that Alcee touches Edna's shoulder, and he

> 'could feel the response of her flesh to his touch', but the scene concludes with general language that draws a curtain between the reader and the textual moment: '[Alcee] did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties.' Despite such caution, Chopin was aware that in Edna she

> had created a woman who 'sinned' - not only in terms of sexual infidelity, but also in withdrawing from her responsibilities as a wife and mother (Walker 118).

While Edna lacks an emotional connection with Alcee, he awakens her sexually, yet Edna feels "neither shame nor remorse" (Chopin 618) for the affair. During this time readers also see a connection between Edna's sexual awakening and her search for her own independence. Edna starts her own journey by painting. Edna paints often, furthering her autonomy. Edna's artistic abilities allow her to further free herself from the patriarchy as Walker adds, "Edna Pontellier, has talent as a painter, but her family and friends assume this to be an avocation, a pleasant adjunct to her real role as wife, mother, and hostess" (Walker 2). Edna also defies the typical female role by no longer depending on her husband for financial support. "Edna relies on the inheritance from her mother, as well as the money she makes from gambling at the races and her own painting, to purchase spiritual freedom" (Dyer 15). This was rare from nineteenth-century women as they survived financially because of their husbands.

When Robert returns from Mexico, they both profess their love for each other. Unfortunately, at that exact moment when Edna and Robert tell each other how much they love one another, Adele goes into labor (Chopin 647). By Edna choosing to be with Adele instead of Robert, this furthers puts her outside of society's norms of typically choosing a husband and family over a friend. While Adele is in labor, she experiences a lot of pain and Edna feels "uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered" (Chopin 648). Edna wished she did not go see Adele because she could barely remember her children's birth, putting her even further outside of the nineteenth-century woman. Childbirth is

something you are always supposed to remember and Edna felt guilty for not remembering the pain she endured.

Edna tells Robert to wait at her home until she comes back, however, upon her arrival home, there is a note from Robert that says, "I love. Good-by – because I love you" (Chopin 651). Edna "grew faint" and did not sleep that night (Chopin 651). In the morning, Edna undresses and walks out to sea, finally gaining a sense of freedom: "She [Edna] felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (Chopin 654). Edna does not rush out into the sea. She walks and "the touch of the sea [was] sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace" (Chopin 654). Edna was not alarmed. Edna was ready. She thought of Leonce and her children and how they no longer "could posses her body, body and soul" (Chopin 654-55). She pictured Mademoiselle Reisz's response, probably questioning Edna's decision to call herself an artist. Lastly, Edna thought about Robert and how he "would never understand" Edna's decision (Chopin 655). Fletcher expands on this when he writes:

> It is unfaithfulness that leads to Edna's awakening and then to her death just as it was another type of unfaithfulness or rebellion that led to her marriage. First, she is unfaithful to her father, next to her husband by falling in love with Robert Lebrun; then she is unfaithful to that love by an act of infidelity with the debonair young Frenchman Alcee Arobin (Fletcher 126).

It seems as though the men in Edna's life greatly impact her awakening. No matter what actions she takes to defy men, nothing was enough for her to escape the patriarchy. Her love affair with Robert did not allow her to escape Leonce. Even moving out of her home did not create enough space between her old life and her autonomy. Lastly, her affair with Alcee still did not give Edna the freedom she wanted. Edna needed to commit suicide in order to finally be free.

There has been much controversy as to whether the ending is a suicide or not. Is there a chance that when Edna swims back to sea? Yes. But is that likely? No, and we know this based off of from her actions throughout the novel. Edna knows how to swim because Robert had taught her. However, Edna did not want to use her skills as a swimmer. According to Parmiter, "by staging the death scene at Grand Isle, Chopin challenges the assumption that the summer place is concerned only with diversions and amusements; sending Edna to the bottom of the sea literally adds more profound depth to our understanding of the fashionable resort" (Parmiter 17). While we usually view a summer place as an escape from reality, Edna wanted an escape from life and the sea seemed like the perfect way to get away from the restraints from nineteenth-century laws and culture.

It is interesting to examine the language Chopin uses to describe Edna's walk into the sea. Chopin writes, "The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (Chopin 654). The sea has all of the qualities that Edna needs. It encapsulates Edna's desire for autonomy. For example, Parmiter writes:

> When Chopin writes so seductively about the embrace of the sea, then, she was capturing a relatively new and controversial experience for middle-class American women. Edna's freedom to move her body to the rhythm of the tide, to learn how to coordinate her arms and legs to move within a new medium: these were thrills only recently embraced as leisure activities for vacationing American women (Parmiter 6).

Edna's actions required a new way of thinking, one that was new more feminine, and less reliant on how males expected females to think and act. Edna's decision to swim out into the sea seems necessary in order for Edna's awakening to be complete. "She refuses to take seriously the social forms through which the community functions, but instead

determines to go her own way, independent of both her family and the society in which they live (Ringe 583-584). Despite what any critic says, Edna needed to walk into the sea in order to free herself from society.

Nineteenth-Century Reviews

Much like *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening* was not popular amongst critics when first published. Because Chopin chose to write about the "passion of a woman" and that a "woman's sexual growth does not end with her marriage," critics were not welcoming of the novel (Dyer 15). Many critics had strong opinions about Edna and how she was portrayed. Eble writes that because Edna did what she wanted, critics argued that the consequences of such a move were disastrous (Eble 263). According to Dyer, "boldness...led her [Chopin] to compose *The Awakening* at the wrong time: when reviewers were ready for neither the questions she asked nor the study of females in transition that she eloquently and painfully undertook" (Dyer 12). Stone agrees with Dyer in that critics were not prepared for such a radical novel.

Edna suffered rejection from many critics, mostly because of the way Chopin expressed Edna's sexuality. According to Walker, "not only does she [Edna] have an extra-marital affair with a man to whom she feels little emotional connection [Alcee], but throughout the novel she increasingly delights in the sensuality of the Gulf waters, in food and drink, and in the solitary pleasures of music, walking, and sleeping" (Walker 21). Edna overall defies women in the nineteenth century. If her affair is not enough to shock readers, her enjoyment of less domesticated activities, such as listening to music, were criticized. Moreover, Patricia Hopkins Lattin argues that in Chopin's works,

motherhood "generally proves disastrous, causing insanity, death, and—of more significance to Chopin—a woman's loss of self" (Lattin qtd. in Dyer 27). Ironically, despite this critic, throughout the novel readers see Edna trying to find herself. Stone notes, "critics attacked its depiction of a heroine who sought sexual pleasure outside of marriage…" (Stone 23). In the nineteenth-century, women depended on men and cheating seemed like a secure way to ruin a relationship. Dyer argues, "the sexual candor of *The Awakening* was strikingly different from that of other novels written at the century's close" (Dyer 14). This could be why critics attacked Edna, because cheating was almost unheard of from women. Critics were not used to reading novels in which women committed adultery.

Out of all of the characters in the novel, Edna received the most amount of criticism. For example, Frances Porcher noted that Edna's passion was "an ugly, cruel, loathsome, monster" (Porcher 145), while Father Daniel S. Rankin claimed that *The Awakening* was "morbid" (Seyersted 9). Walker notes that many reviews considered the novel as "'not healthy', 'morbid', and 'poison'" (Walker 22). Edna's awakening at the end of the novel was also harshly criticized. Stone writes that critic, Suzanne Wolkenfeld "considers that Edna's 'experience of rebirth is not directed toward new life, but backward to the womb'" (Stone 24). While Edna received most of the criticism, Walker finds it surprising that Madame Ratignolle did not received much critical backlash. Madame Ratignolle was pregnant during a time when "pregnant women did not appear in public" (Walker 120). Despite this, critics focused on Edna, perhaps because, as the novel's protagonist, Chopin places the most amount of emphasis on her. Seyersted writes that critics "were horrified by the heroine's self-indulgence and the author's objective

treatment of it, and they admonished her to go back to the description of 'sweet and lovable characters'" (Seyersted 9). Readers were not used to seeing a character that defied the odds of society's pressures for women to conform. The typical "sweet and lovable character" was completed rejected, as Edna did not care about what others thought. She was going to be her own, independent woman, even if that meant that no one would support her.

There were also many mixed reviews about the publication date of *The Awakening*. According to Walker, Dorothy Anne Dondore argued that the novel was written two decades ahead of its time, while Van Wyck Brooks thought that if one book from the nineties should be remembered, it should be *The Awakening* (Walker 23). However, according to Dyer,

> Chopin refuses to shy away from the difficulties and complications of making the transition from one century to another, from Victorian code of womanhood to a more modern version. The publication date of 1899 could not be more appropriate: it keeps Edna poised on the brink of twentieth century but reminds us that she has not yet joined it (Dyer 16).

Because the novel was poorly reviewed, it is understandable why there would be a discussion of whether or not the time period was appropriate. According to Walker, the Providence Sunday Journal noted that Chopin "'has put her cleverness to a very bad use in writing *The Awakening*. The purport of the story can hardly be described in language fit for publication…'" (Walker 121). However, I think the novel pushed back at nineteenth-century women's rights, which, while a radical move, was one that needed to be made. It reflected women's struggles in a way that women may not have been comfortable expressing due to the constraints that nineteenth-century laws placed on them.

Contemporary Reviews

Towards the end of the twentieth century, reviews of *The Awakening* started to change. One of Chopin's friends, one of the first known people to come out publicly praising the novel, (as summarized by Walker) noted, "Chopin's portrayal of Leonce Pontellier as a man who believes he 'possesses his wife, and also Edna's desire to be free of such ownership'" (Walker 123). Critics began to change their opinions regarding the novel. According to Dyer,

> "Not an American but a French critic was largely responsible for the revival of *The Awakening*. In 1946 Cyrille Arnavon wrote an article about Chopin's novel for *Romanciers américains contemporians*, and in 1953 he published a translation of *The Awakening*…[and] "American critics of the 1950s finally began to recognize how deserving *The Awakening* was of serious attention (Dyer 21).

Readers began to understand that the novel addressed topics that needed to be explored. The common view that women readers were swayed into "dangerous" thinking because of the novel began to diminish in the twentieth century (Walker 10). These opinions needed to occur for the novel's success to be noticed. However, according to Seyersted, Chopin was "deeply hurt by the reviews and by the fact that she was ostracized and her novel banned in her own city, St. Louis" (Seyersted 9), Chopin did not write much after *The Awakening*.

Despite Chopin's lack of writing after the novel, the reviews in the twentieth century proved the novel's success. Poet R. E. Lee Gibson said he became "'so completely engrossed, so absorbed that I could not put the book by until I had finished it'" (Lee qtd. in Walker 123). According to Dyer, "books, and collections of Chopin criticism, appeared in rapid succession throughout the 1980s and into the 1990s" (Dyer 24). These

criticisms turned from negative opinions to positive ones. Lady Janet Scammon Young and a London physician, Dunrobin Thompson, wrote Chopin long letters confessing their love for the novel (Walker 124). Moreover, Dyer argues that high schools across the nation began requiring students to read the novel and that it is ironic that the "truthfulness" of the novel, which was once criticized, has also allowed it to become "a prominent and permanent place in American fiction" (Dyer 17). People began recognizing the importance of the novel, something that Chopin seemed to have already known. Much like Chopin, Edna was not a character designed to follow the rules. Chopin smoked cigarettes, resigned from the very prestigious Wednesday Club in St. Louis after just two years of membership, and Chopin pushed boundaries (Dyer 33). Her ability to push boundaries was evident in her writing, especially in *The Awakening*.

While the success of *The Awakening* did not occur until the twentieth century, it seemed to prevail and leave ever-lasting effects on society and readers. According to Dyer, "During the last half of the twentieth century, Chopin's novel has become one of the most popular and talked about books in American literature" and because of the novel's ability to remain "remarkably relevant, overwhelmingly vague and mysterious, beautiful in form and style" it seems to never become redundant (Dyer 29). Dyer urges readers to remember the context of *The Awakening* when forming opinions about the novel. Because most of the novel takes place in New Orleans, it was not only American, but it was also southern and Creole (Dyer 10). Edna pushed back at society's norms and what it meant to be a woman in the nineteenth century. If readers look at Edna's actions as radical and not harmful, then we can see why there was a change in the reviews. Walker argues that Chopin's fiction is now appreciated for the "themes, sensitive study of

characters in a variety of social settings and stylistic versatility" (Walker 26). *The Awakening* was able to change society's views about women and their rights by allowing Edna to free herself and to engage with thoughts about freedom that were uncommon from women in the nineteenth century. Dyers write that the novel "matures as we mature and speaks greater and greater truths to us each time we open its pages" (Dyer 29). While *The Awakening* at first received much negative criticism, by the close of the twentieth century, the novel was able to make positive impacts on viewer's opinions. While we cannot read the minds of the women from the nineteenth century, we have enough evidence to note that Edna's actions could have represented what many women were thinking. Edna's desire to free herself may have been uncommon for women, but it helped pave the way for other authors to allow their female characters to find freedom by escaping society's strict laws.

Conclusion

The Awakening, much like *A Doll's House*, is a text that challenges nineteenth-century marriage laws and the society that was created because of them. The actions that Edna takes throughout the course of the novel defy what many nineteenth-century women were expected to do. Edna refused to live under society's standards and her final decision to swim out into the sea and commit suicide proves Edna's autonomy. She was not afraid to push back at society's pressure to conform. Edna wanted to put herself first and her family behind. The only way Edna could fully do this was to escape the life she did not want to live. Moving out of her house was simply not enough. While Ibsen leaves readers with Nora leaving her home as a way to express her autonomy, Chopin argues otherwise.

In order for Edna to fully experience the freedom she wanted, she could no longer live. Edna's freedom could not be found even when she was alone. Edna needed to be free from society.

In *The Woman Who Did* by Grant Allen, he, much like Chopin and Ibsen, explore the ways in which society's pressure on women to conform affects his main character, Herminia Barton. Herminia, much like Edna, makes a radical decision at the end of the novel in order to not only prove her autonomy but also to show the other characters that she was going to stand up for what she believed in. Herminia's decision impacts the other characters in the novel, but it is clear that was going to do whatever it took to get her point across to readers that she refused to conform with the cultural norms of society.

CHAPTER 3

CULTURAL EXPECTATIONS AND THE WOMAN WHO DID WHO FELT LIKE SHE SHOULDN'T

The Woman Who Did by Grant Allen challenges nineteenth-century marriage literature by showing readers how one woman with an anti-patriarchy viewpoint and a need to defy social norms is able to help change marriage resistance literature ideologies. According to Nicholas Ruddick, the editor of *The Woman Who Did* whose version I will be using, writes, "It was not until 1894--after the composition of *The Woman Who Did*--that the New Woman was so named" (Ruddick 19). Allen allowed his novel to push back at nineteenth-century marriage laws by creating a female character who embodied a New Woman. Herminia Barton, much like Nora Helmer and Edna Pontellier, believes in her own independence. *The Woman Who Did* is an iconic representation of the New Woman genre as it explores the ways in which Herminia pushed back at her society's restraints against female autonomy. According to Ruddick, the main theme of *The Woman Who Did* is to challenge "traditional relationships, marriage in particular, posed by women's growing autonomy" (Ruddick 11). In order to properly examine *The Woman Who Did*, it is important to put it into context with the New Woman genre, as described in my introduction.

Grant Allen and Herminia Barton

An insight into Allen's life helps readers make connections between Allen and Herminia, revealing her purpose in the novel. According to Clodd, Charles Grant

Blairfindie Allen, now know as Grant Allen, was born in 1848 at Alwington near Kingston, Ontario (Clodd 1). Unlike many men from the nineteenth century, Allen obtained an education from his father, and when he was thirteen he was tutored from a student at Yale University (Ruddick 14). Most men obtained an education from school, but Allen was unique. Herminia and Allen are similar in a way because of their educational path. Herminia "goes to Cambridge as one of the earliest cohorts of women at the ancient university. Yet she drops out, not because she is intellectually incapable of coping with a curriculum hitherto reserved for men, but because she comes to believe that a Girton education is potentially harmful to her as a woman" (Ruddick 24). In the novel, when Alan asks Herminia about her experience at Girton, she that she did not take her degree: "I didn't care for the life. I thought it was cramping. You see, if we women are ever to be free in the world, we must have in the end a freeman's education" (Allen 57). Allen, much like Herminia, did not conform to society's norms.

When Allen was twenty-two he almost lost his scholarship at Oxford because he married a "labourer's daughter, Caroline Ann Bootheway. This marriage to a woman of a social class so much lower than his own is likely to have been a deliberately radical gesture by a young man who already saw himself at loggerheads with rigidly stratified, sexually hypocritical mid-Victorian society" (Ruddick 15). He received his Bachelor's degree in 1871, taught at Brighton College, and at Government College at Spanish Town in Jamaica until returning to England in 1876 (Richard 263). After Allen's wife Caroline died in 1872, shortly after, he married Ellen ("Nellie") Jerard in 1873, a "daughter of a prosperous butcher," which was much more socially acceptable (Ruddick 15). While Allen makes more socially acceptable decisions throughout his life, Herminia does not:

> Herminia is a woman worthy to bear and nurture children who will improve the 'race'...From a eugenic point of view, even the best of the 'weaker sex' seemed dangerously vulnerable to being neutered or even masculinized-- for example, by a university education intended for men--with serious consequences for the future of humanity. To protect herself from such a fate, Herminia must drop out of Girton and find a fit counterpart, a 'manly man,' so that she can fulfill her biological destiny (Ruddick 25).

Herminia's biological density seems like that of independence, yet also a fulfillment of her needs. Allen, on the other hand, being in that of the 'male sphere' seemed very dedicated to his marriage. He even dedicated his novel to his wife. "Allen, later notorious as a public advocate of the 'free union,' remained contentedly and devotedly married to Nellie, and would wryly dedicate his scandalous anti-marriage novel *The Woman Who Did* 'To my dear wife, to whom I have dedicated my twenty happiest years'" (Ruddick 15).

There are also many notable similarities between Allen and Herminia, and Allen and Alan Merrick, Herminia's lover in the novel. Allen used "a sympathetic New Woman protagonist...as an embodiment of his feminine ideal and as a mouthpiece for his...position on the Sex Problem" (Ruddick 23). This occurs especially in chapter thirteen where Herminia writes her own book. According to Warne and Colligan, "Allen uses Herminia as a mouthpiece for his own meditations on authorship and publication. His cross-gendered identification with his protagonist not only suggests his empathy with the woman writer but also feminizes authorial identity" (Warne and Colligan 25-26). For example, in chapter four, Alan asks, "Is it not for that in part that nature makes us virile"? (Allen 78). Here, Allen conflates himself with Alan (Warne and Colligan 26). However, this is not the only spot where we see this conflation. For example, Alan and Allen are

similar names and Warne and Colligan go on to address the other similarities between the two:

> These include the author's and the male protagonist's common experience of the city of Perugia as a site of creative productivity. In his epigraph, Allen identifies the novel as having been 'written at Perugia/Spring 1893'. Merrick similarly 'loved' Perugia and sketches the city, describing it as 'such a capital place for sketching' (Chapter 9). Of course, Allen and Merrick's shared support for moral reform and their commitment to the cause of female emancipation are the most significant links between them" (Warne and Colligan 34).

Alan and Allen have some similarities but ultimately, the novel reflected nineteenth-century ideologies. "The detailed descriptions of the specific geographical setting--rural Surrey, Perugia, and London--evoke the real world of the late nineteenth century" (Ruddick 23). Despite this, the novel caused much controversy. Herminia Barton is a difficult character to understand because Allen creates her to have a diverse set of beliefs. For example, Herminia is against marriage but convinces her lover, Alan Merrick, to move in with her. While she appears to crave independence, she challenges this by falling in love with Alan. According to Kennelly, New Woman fiction was "inspired by contemporary debates about women's education, family life and sexual independence" (Kennelly 139). Allen is able to portray these themes in novel by using Herminia as his mouthpiece. Kennelly further notes,

> The heroine, Herminia Barton, enters into relationships outside of marriage which made the novel controversial when it was first published, but it can now best be appreciated as an historical document. It 'is not only one of the most notorious of the New Woman novels, but also one of the most conservative,' writes editor Sarah Wintle to anyone still expecting to be intrigued (Kennelly 139).

Herminia represented a New Woman because she refused to succumb to society's norms. According to Warne and Colligan, "The Woman Who Did...featured a New Woman and became the most notorious book of the series" (Warne and Colligan 21). Herminia's

strong belief in independence and autonomy was seen throughout the novel, especially the very last pages. New Woman fiction, including *The Woman Who Did*, remains relevant due to its incredible impact on society.

The Woman Who Did Analysis

The Woman Who Did was originally published in 1895 in London and in 1896 in the United States. Allen's novel tells the story of Herminia Barton, a mother, a lover, but nonetheless, an independent woman. The novel takes place in London and in Italy and addresses the marriage debates of the 1880's and 1890's. Martha Vicinus writes that Grant Allen "achieved fame and large sales during the mid-nineties for advocating a new model of sexual purity [and Allen's] 'woman who did' refuses to marry on principle, though she remains intensely faithful to her chosen lover; she bears a lifetime of social ostracism for her fidelity….Death, nervous disorders and unhappiness dogged these idealist women" (Vicinus 91). Herminia refused to conform to restrictions placed on women, no matter the consequences. According to Dyer, "Female passion was thought to be immoral and unhealthy by even some of the most aggressive proponents of realism and feminism in the last decades of the nineteenth century" (Dyer 8). During the novel, Allen does not mention Herminia's mother "in order to highlight Herminia's relationship with her father, for this is a novel dramatizing a New Woman's struggle against an inflexible 'patriarchate'" (Ruddick 24). Meanwhile, Herminia's father, "is an Anglican dean, a senior cleric in the established church" (Ruddick 24).

In the novel, when Herminia falls in love with a man named Alan Merrick but does not want to marry him, she defies social norms for women. According to Brooke

Cameron, author of, “Grant Allen's The Woman Who Did: Spencerian Individualism and Teaching New Women to Be Mothers,” “Herminia Barton, characterizes her quest for free love—sexual relations without marriage—as part of a larger, progressive social project. For example, when her lover, Alan Merrick, proposes to her, she declines and instead explains how free love can set a new and revolutionary example for future generations” (Cameron 281). The novel ultimately succeeds at pushing back at nineteenth-century marriage laws because of Allen’s ability to allow Herminia to fight for what she believes in despite society’s viewpointHerminia is first described as a woman who has the face of a “free woman” (Allen 56), while Alan is described as “kind,” “very free and advanced” (Allen 56). During Alan and Herminia’s discussion of Girton, she tells him that she left Girton because she “felt that if women are ever to be free, they must first of all be independent. It is the dependence of women that has allowed men to make laws for them, socially and ethically” (Allen 59). Herminia’s independence and need for further autonomy is seen at the start of the novel. She is not like the typical nineteenth-century female. She tells Alan, “I wouldn’t be dependent on any man, not even my own father” (Allen 60). Despite Herminia’s evident independence, Alan claims that she is his dream woman (Allen 61). Alan appears to admire Herminia’s sense of freethinking, something most nineteenth-century men would be appalled of.

While Herminia does not doubt that she will fall in love, she does doubt that she will marry (Allen 63). Herminia’s friend, Mrs. Dewsberry is shocked by Herminia’s beliefs about marriage. Mrs. Dewsberry, is much like Adele Ratignolle from *The Awakening*. Adele and Mrs. Dewsberry seem to serve as the common nineteenth-century females, while Herminia and Edna serve as the contrary. After Herminia tells Mrs.

Dewsberry that she has no interest in marrying, Allen writes, “Mrs. Dewsberry gave a start of a surprise and horror. She really didn’t know what girls were coming to nowadays--which, considering her first principles, was certainly natural” (Allen 63). Mrs. Dewsberry, much like Adele, lacked independence and conformed to society’s norms.

Much like Herminia, Alan too defies nineteenth-century cultural norms. According to Allen, “Alan Merrick, however, was thirty and still unmarried. More than that, he was heart-free--a very evil record. And like most other unmarried men of thirty, he was a trifle fastidious...he was waiting to find some woman who suited him” (Allen 68). Most nineteenth-century men were married at this point in their lives, but Alan fought against the stereotypes. When Alan asks Herminia when they will be getting married, Herminia is shocked. She responds, “Never! O Alan, what can you mean by it? Don’t tell me, after all I’ve tried to make you feel and understand, you thought I could possibly consent to *marry* you!” (Allen 71). Herminia suggests that the two live together as friends. After a long deliberation, Alan agreed to live with Herminia, unmarried, despite the fact that his beliefs were “framed on the old model of marriage” (Allen 86-87). When it came to the topic of sexual intercourse, Herminia, unlike many nineteenth-century unmarried women, was open to the idea. Allen writes, “Deep down in the very roots of the idea of sex we come on that prime antithesis--the male, active and aggressive; the female, sedentary, passive, and receptive” (Allen 93). Herminia, not wanting to get married, however, did want children. When discussing Herminia’s sexuality, Ruddick writes, “That Herminia, a lady, might actually welcome and enjoy sexual activity unsanctified by marriage so contravened the Victoria conception of respectable femininity that it was almost impossible in 1895 for female critics, regardless of political

affiliation, to endorse the novel" (Ruddick 26). Not only did Herminia approve of sexual intercourse before marriage, but she also had no problem moving in with Alan unmarried. Herminia, understanding that sex before marriage was frowned upon, rebelled against nineteenth-century social norms. According to Ruddick, "After marriage, sex was something that she [nineteenth-century women] suffered her husband to do to her--she has sworn a vow to obey him in everything--only so that the race might endure and her true functions begin" (Ruddick 30). It is interesting that Herminia's "true functions" occurred without marrying Alan.

Alan and Herminia go to Italy to see Alan's father, Dr. Merrick, and to tell him the news about Herminia. His father disapproves and says, "She [Herminia] preferred, in fact, to be, not your wife, but your mistress" (Allen 99). Alan was disappointed in his father's responds and Allen writes, "He [Alan] never again saw the face of his father" (Allen 101). During their time in Italy, the two traveled frequently and Alan had gotten the deadly typhoid fever (Allen 114). Herminia sent out a telegram to find a doctor, and Alan's father responded by saying, "Am on my way out by through train to attend you. But as a matter of duty, marry the girl at once, and legitimise your child while the chance remains to you" (Allen 114). Unfortunately, but the time Alan's father arrived, he had already passed away. Upon finding out that the two did not get married, Dr. Merrick tells Herminia that she can no longer live in Alan's apartment (Allen 116). The day after Alan's funeral, Dr. Merrick found a note from Alan that stated that all of his possessions go "to my beloved friend, Herminia Barton" (Allen 118). Unfortunately, because the note lacked Alan's signature, Dr. Merrick would possess all of Alan's estate. He offered

Herminia fifty pounds (just over $62 US dollars) but, frustrated, Herminia demanded that Dr. Merrick leave.

Herminia was forced to live on her own. However, soon after Alan's death their child was born. Herminia named her daughter Dolores and the two returned to London but when they returned, Herminia was "homeless, penniless, friendless. Above all, she was *déclassé*" (Allen 121). According to Dowling, it is not uncommon for heroines of New Woman fiction to be in a lower class (Dowling 443). While Herminia had some journalistic connections from Perugia she found it challenging to find stable work. She began writing a novel in her spare time, something rare for nineteenth-century women to do. Reviews called the book, "a work of genius," however, the success did not last long. It was only reviews by two outlets, one of which claimed that the novel was "poisonous…[and] morbid" (Allen 125). Allen creates less distance between him and Herminia when he allows her to write a book:

> By conflating himself with Herminia, Allen not only identifies himself as sympathetic to the New Woman cause but also subsequently feminizes himself. Nowhere is this alignment between author and protagonist more apparent than in chapter 13, when Herminia writes her first novel. The correspondences between Herminia's career path and Allen's are numerous.. This novel, entitled *A Woman's World*, is a "blankly pessimistic" account of "the experiences and beliefs and sentiments of a martyred woman" (Warne and Colligan 24-25).

This conflation is interesting because it shows that Allen made have sided with Herminia at one point. However, after the book does not succeed, Herminia looks for new work. Herminia defies the odds of the common nineteenth-century women by not only working, but also by living independently. Instead of searching for a man, Herminia searches for a job. When Dolores became ill, Herminia had completed a manuscript during her free time

and finally turned it into the paper and “it was the beginning of Herminia’s most valuable collection” (Allen 133).

When Dolores had turned ten years old, a man named Harvey Kynaston walked into Herminia’s life. They had met at a Fabian Society meeting. Ironically, Allen himself was a part of the society. The society was a “political organization founded in 1884 with the aim of directing society toward democratic socialism gradually” (Allen 134, note 2). Harvey ends up proposing to Herminia and while she says no, the two remain friends by Harvey promises her that he will “never marry any other woman” (Allen 138). However, three years later Harvey tells Herminia he is going to get married, and while Herminia is jealous, she promises to “never let Harvey Kynaston or his wife suspect it” (Allen 143). Herminia sticks to her independence despite her feelings for Harvey. Herminia places her autonomy over her emotions.

Herminia soon becomes disappointed in Dolores’ (Dolly’s) development. “Dolly had no spontaneous care of regard for righteousness” and overall, most of her ideas were more commonplace and conformed to society’s stereotypes (Allen 145). One day, Dolly asks Herminia if she married her cousin because her last name is Barton and not the same as her grandfather’s (Allen 147). Herminia simply told her that she did not marry her cousin, and with that, the conversation came to close. When Dolly was seventeen, her friends and school introduced her to a new way of thinking. She began forming her own ideas about independence, ideas much different from her mother’s. She met a young man named Walter Brydges who ultimately changed the way Dolly thought about marriage. They moved to Combe Neville and Dolly and Walter got engaged. However, after Walter

finds out about Herminia's path he tells Dolores. Dolores calls off the wedding and flies back to London to see her mother.

Herminia admits to never having married Alan, and Dolores is furious. She says to her mother, "what have you done? A cruel, cruel mother you have been to me. How can I ever forgive you?" (Allen 158). According to Dowling, Herminia "immolates the present upon the pyre of the future, fervently believing that if she can sacrifice her own 'respectability,' her daughters and granddaughters will live free" (Dowling 453). However, Dolores would rather marry than live free like her mother. According to Cameron, Allen's goal of making sure Herminia stayed firm in her decision not to marry was a sign of maternal individualism. Cameron writes,

> Women, or more specifically mothers, achieve individualism only after they willingly shoulder the burden of reproduction and thus enable the evolution of the social organism. When Allen shifts his attention to literature, he devises his own variation of the New Woman novel meant to stimulate this ideal maternal individualism (Cameron 283).

Herminia begs for Dolores' forgiveness but Dolores refuses. Dolores went to visit her grandfather and tells him that she "hates her [Herminia's] ideas, and her friends, and her faction" (Allen 162). She wrote a letter to Walter stating, "while my [Dolores'] mother lives, dear Walter, I feel I can never marry you" (Allen 162). When Dolores tells her mother that she is going to live with her grandfather, Herminia says that it will kill her (Allen 163), but Dolores does so anyway.

Herminia, extremely upset with Dolores' actions, drinks potion and dies. Herminia's suicide caused much controversy. Herminia undoubtedly pushed back at the common women from the nineteenth century by putting her beliefs in front of cultural norms. Ruddick writes, "Indeed, to many readers, only Herminia's sad end made the

novel morally acceptable--even though Allen tried to make it clear that her failure was the result of the twisted values of Victorian society, not of her own deficiens, and that society, not he, was punishing her for transgressing sexual taboos" (Ruddick 27).

Nineteenth-Century Reviews

Many of the reviews of *The Woman Who Did* seemed to reflect ideas surrounding New Woman fiction. For example, Tuscan shares with readers both sides of the debates surrounding New Woman fiction. Tuscan notes that some saw New Woman fiction as "a superior breed of liberal-minded women," while others viewed New Woman heroines as "'unmitigated' and 'important' bore[s] who [were] convinced that upon [their] shoulders 'hangs future of the world.' It was these two competing images that fueled New Woman debate during the fin-de-siecle" (Tuscan 171). While debates surrounding New Woman fiction were occurring, as were those of Herminia Barton. According to Ruddick, "Thanks to Herminia Barton, by October 1895 many knew that 'women had to be courageous almost to the point of martyrdom if they were to exercise the same rights as men in law and in social usage' (Rubinstein 62 qtd. in Ruddick 41). Once such women had been recognized as courageous, it was no longer easy to claim they were without virtue" (Ruddick 41). Some argued that Herminia helped women's desire to become more autonomous, while other, early reviewers thought differently. Tuscan writes about these two arguments when she notes, "Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* harmed the cause of women by portraying women as acting on their sexual drives. Others wrote in defense of the so-called Modern Woman Novels, claiming that promoting the ideal of sex equality would only help the woman's cause by arguing for more freedom for women"

(Tuscan 172). Just as there were two sides to the debate about New Woman fiction, these opposing sides also surrounded Herminia Barton's role.

The lines between male and female behavior began to blur thanks to the New Woman fiction authors. Tuscan notes, "According to the mainstream press, the New Woman did not symbolize the hope for a totally reformed womanly utopia, but a dreadful place where the line between masculine and feminine behavior was almost indistinguishable" (Tuscan 175-176). This is seen in *The Woman Who Did* because Herminia refused to marry. The novel's mixed reviews could have been attributed to the controversial attitudes surrounding Allen's main character, Herminia. "Herminia Barton is a two-dimensional embodiment of Allen's ideal of womanliness. Still, Herminia remains the archetypal fictional representation of a figure that is 'utterly central to the literary culture of the fin-de-siècle year' (Ruddick 11). Herminia, much like Edna in *The Awakening*, decided to end her life instead of living in a world in which she felt trapped. Are readers invited to side with Herminia or dislike her? Warne and Colligan attempt to convey Allen's point of view on the issue:

> On the one hand, he encourages the reader to identify him with his protagonist, Herminia, a New Woman who like him also happens to be a novelist. On the other hand, although he appears to align himself with his New Woman protagonist, he simultaneously distances himself from her, introducing inconsistencies in his feminism that have perplexed and infuriated readers of all types (Warne and Colligan 24).

Whether or not readers are supposed to like Herminia is up their own perspectives. However, according to Cameron, "For Allen, literature is merely a means to readers' sympathetic identification with the besieged heroine" (Cameron 483). Cameron also argues that readers are not supposed to like Dolly but he believes that we are supposed to like Herminia. "As if anxious about reader's sympathies, the narrator takes great pains to

ensure they reject Dolly...By contrast, as the narrator claims, Herminia subscribes to the right ideals. Readers are encouraged to sympathize with Herminia and thus to mourn her tragic suicide" (Cameron 295-296). Many authors have different viewpoints about whether not readers should side with Herminia or not, but ultimately it is up to the reader to make that decision.

Ruddick asks, "Did *The Woman Who Did* help or hinder the cause of women's struggle for equality?" (Ruddick 12). Some reviewers argued that the novel was inappropriate because it promotes "'free love'" (Ruddick 38). Because there was a lot of controversy surrounding the novel, it is not surprising that this question arose. According to Warne and Colligan, "W. T. Stead, in an early review of the novel in Review of Reviews (1895), called it "the book of a lifetime" (Stead qtd. in Warne and Colligan 28). Was *The Woman Who Did* an anti-feminist novel or feminist novel? "In 1895 *The Woman Who Did* unsettled and displeased both conservative and progressive readers" (Ruddick 11). The controversy surrounding the novel left many readers wondering whether or not they should support or disapprove of the novel.

While the New Woman novels typically did end with a suicide (Warne and Colligan 21), it is not surprising that the reviews were mixed. Is it better to die or to live trapped within society's restrictions? It seems as though in the nineteenth century, many reviewers argued that the suicide should not have occurred. According to Warne and Colligan:

> Combining a free-love, anti-marriage message with a tragic plot, Allen's novel focuses on a clergyman's daughter, Herminia Barton, who refuses to marry the father of her child, Alan Merrick, on feminist principles. Unwilling to enter an institution that she compares to 'vile slavery' (43), she chooses to live unmarried with her lover and daughter until his death. She withstands the calumny of family and friends and years of grieving and penury only to discover in the end that her

> daughter rejects her feminism and views her illegitimacy not as the 'supreme privilege' her mother believed it to be, but rather as a 'curse' (132). In a way typical of New Woman novels, the story ends with the heroine's suicide" (Warne and Colligan 21).

Herminia was not the only heroine in literature to commit suicide, and as the turn of the century approached, reviews were noticing this trend. According to Ruddick, "*The Woman Who Did* is often referred to as 'the most notorious New Woman novel'" (Ruddick 11). Questions surrounding whether or not the novel created positive change or put negative ideas in women's mind brewed right after the novel's release. According to Morton, "*The Woman Who Did* is of course Allen's most famous, or infamous, novel...No more polemical novel was ever written, yet it is a mass of contradictions. It denounces marriage, but substitutes no happy gospel of free love" (Morton 421). Not only were feminists annoyed in 1895, but so were traditionalists: "any woman who considered herself to be a lady was outraged--or felt that she ought to be" (Ruddick 42-43). Early reviews as well as later reviews continued to be mixed. Ruddick writes, "A recent critic is no doubt: Allen was an anti-feminist and *The Woman Who Did* is a 'stridently misogynistic' novel which postulates 'female sexual submission' to a 'eugenically sound' man" (Heilmann 53 qtd. in Ruddick 41). While Allen's contribution to literature sparked a change in New Woman fiction, not everyone agreed that the change was positive. Wells argues, "*The Woman Who Did* has some serious aesthetic and moral failings. The heroine and central figure in the novel 'is not a human being': her portrait lacks 'observation and insight" (Wells 176). Many reviewers were wrong about the success of the novel. Ruddick reminds readers, "Though many of the major reviews were negative, *The Woman Who Did* by no means fell as flat as the New York Times prematurely adjudged it to have done" (Ruddick 39).

Contemporary Reviews

Allen, along with Ibsen, were just two of the male authors writing about feminism in the nineteenth century. Ruddick notes, "*The Woman Who Did* is one of a group of novels by male authors published in the 1890s in which the sexual lives of female protagonists are depicted with a new frankness" (Ruddick 11). However, not all male authors were praised for their work in New Woman fiction. According to Warne and Colligan, "Allen rescued the male New Woman author from attacks of effeminacy and infirmity and also carved out a place for the male author in the New Woman literary market. In a sense, the New Woman is not the subject of Allen's work, but rather its instrument" (Warne and Colligan 29-30). Allen's purpose for writing the novel "was to raise the consciousness of his readership on certain central aspects of the Sex Problem. He had younger middle-class female readers in mind: they were both the likeliest readers of novels and, as members of a generation of girls educated to an unprecedented degree, more receptive than their mothers to his radical views" (Ruddick 22-23). According to Vanessa Warne and Colette Colligan, authors of, "The Man who Wrote a New Woman Novel: Grant Allen's *The Woman Who Did* and the Gendering of New Woman Authorship," New Woman fiction typically addressed issues with "marriage and female sexuality" (Warne and Colligan 21). Allen was able to address these issues by using Herminia as a mouthpiece.

By the turn of the century many reviews of the novel were positive. This could be because Allen's goal was not to please the public, but to write for a greater purpose. Morton writes, "'My line,' he told an interviewer in 1893, 'is to write what I think the

public wish to buy, and not what I wish to say, or what I really think or feel; and to please the public, for a man of my temperament and opinion, is not so easy as an outsider might be inclined to imagine'" (Morton 424). According to Ruddick, "On the positive side, several reviewers recognized that, even if no literary masterpiece, the novel was highly significant as a cultural document; that Allen was perfectly sincere his antipathy to marriage; and that there was little that was offensive or obscene in the novel even if it did glorify 'the mere brute instinct of mating'" (Ruddick 37). These positive reviews are not surprising because we also see a change in the reviews of *The Awakening* and *A Doll's House* during this time. In Louise Kennelly's review of *The Woman Who Did*, she writes, "The heroine, Herminia Barton, enters into relationships outside of marriage which made the novel controversial when it was first published, but it can now best be appreciated as an historical document" (Kennelly 139). According to Ruddick, "It would be too much of a stretch to claim that Herminia Barton died so that later generations of women could live freer and fuller lives" (Ruddick 43).

Why did Allen allow Herminia Barton to commit suicide? Some argue that he may have hated Herminia, but there is a lack of evidence surrounding that theory. According to Ruddick,

> Allen was a crude essentialist, eugenicist, and sexist who wanted to roll back any gains women had made in the struggle for educational and economic equality with men. The second is that, consciously or otherwise, Allen hated what Herminia stood for and ultimately killed her off to warn how rebel women who flouted the patriarchal order would be punished. The novel was read in both these ways in 1895 and may still be so read today (Ruddick 41).

We may never know the answer to this question, but what we do is that Herminia fought for her autonomy and beliefs despite society's norms.

Conclusion

Overall, while *A Doll's House* and *The Awakening* can both be considered a part of New Woman fiction, *The Woman Who Did* encompasses this genre best. According to Ruddick, "As he [Allen] wrote no masterpiece, this short novel-with-a-purpose that provoked so many of his contemporaries is the work likeliest to stimulate the curiosity of the reader today about an author whose important contribution to one of the most remarkable periods in literary history is now starting to be acknowledged" (Ruddick 13). Allen allowed Herminia Barton to push back at nineteenth-century marriage laws by making her autonomous from the start of the novel. Nora and Edna both take journeys throughout their texts in order to find their independence while Herminia has already discovered hers. Morton adds, "His [Allen's] work will surely survive, therefore, as a quarry of raw materials for the social and cultural Historian" (Morton 436). Allen created a controversial novel, however, it was ultimately successful because of the Allen's ability to write with a purpose. It seems as though that purpose was to change the way society viewed women and their rights and his New Woman novel will forever be remembered.

CONCLUSION

By examining nineteenth-century marriage resistance literature, one can see how this literature not only reflected nineteenth-century laws but also pushed back at them. *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening*, and *The Woman Who Did* all possess strong and independent female protagonists who fight for their beliefs despite society's laws and norms. Each author ultimately highlights a problem with nineteenth-century laws for women. These texts show the ways in which women suffered in the nineteenth century when social expectations were trapping them. For example, in *A Doll's House*, Torvald belittles Nora and treats her like a "doll" and a child throughout the play. In *The Awakening,* Edna struggles until she realizes that she does have the freedom she wants to leave her marriage. In *The Woman Who Did*, Herminia was left with the social expectations to marry despite her individual viewpoint. Ibsen, Chopin, and Allen focus on nineteenth-century laws in order to give readers greater insights into the limitations of social expectations, allowing us as readers to rebel through the female protagonists.

As readers, we can learn a lot about relationships, marriage, and the consequences of the lack of equality when we examine each protagonist's opposing force. Throughout these texts, not only do we see female protagonists who fight for their freedom, but also another character, one who reflects society's typical nineteenth-century norms. Torvald, Adele, and Mrs. Dewsberry, in *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening*, and *A Woman Who Did,* respectively, seem to represent individuals who conform to nineteenth-century cultural

norms. Through these characters, we see the reflection of nineteenth-century social and cultural norms. These works of literature intervene in the conversation about marriage and women's right by introducing characters who oppose women's rights and ones who fight for them.

Another trope throughout these fictional works is that of children. When it comes to the debate of children, we see how these female protagonists handle the difficulty of being independent mothers. In *The Awakening*, Chopin tells readers, "She [Edna] understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adele Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children" (Chopin 653). Edna's own happiness is more important to her than her children's happiness. In *The Woman Who Did*, Herminia does not put her daughter's wants and beliefs before hers. Even when her daughter becomes utterly disgusted by Herminia's life choice to remain unmarried, Herminia would rather no longer live than support her daughter's beliefs. According to Cameron,

> Unable to win Dolly's [Herminia's daughter] forgiveness, Herminia kills herself and thus 'easily relieve[s] [her] own dear little girl of one trouble in life, and make[s] her course lie henceforth through smoother waters' (Allen 63). In her suicide note, Herminia tries one last time to justify herself and her ideals: 'I set out in life with the earnest determination to be a martyr to the cause of truth and righteousness, as I myself understood them. But I didn't foresee this last pang of martyrdom' (Allen qtd in Cameron 294).

We see here that Herminia would rather justify her own beliefs than live to agree with her daughter's. In *A Doll's House*, Ibsen allows Nora to leave her children behind. Nora, Edna, and Herminia put their own happiness before their children's, something uncommon of nineteenth-century women.

It is important to point out the similarities and differences in these novels in order to examine how they work together and apart to foster a similar goal. Comparing and contrasting each protagonist gives us greater insight into a possible goal of each author for writing their text. Nora, Edna, and Herminia are trapped by the patriarchy; however, despite this similarity, they differ in many ways. Nora is a very likeable character whereas Edna is sometimes harder to like. Nora does not have an affair; rather, she tries to help pay for her husband's medical expenses. Nora is also more of a dreamer, whereas Edna shows her rebellion through her various actions. Edna disobeys Leonce throughout the novel, while Nora does not act against Torvald until the end of the play. Herminia and Edna's awakening about marriage occurs at the beginning of their novels, whereas Nora's does not occur until the end. Herminia knows that she does not want to marry Alan and Edna starts to distance herself from Leonce through her affairs with Robert and Alcee. Nora, however, does not leave Torvald until the end of the play.

How do these differences allow their authors to foster one common goal? While each protagonist evokes different feelings from readers, it is imperative to note that these texts were chosen purposively for my thesis. In *A Doll's House*, it is my hope that readers felt bad for Nora. While she wanted to disobey Torvald, she did not have the courage to do so until the end of the novel. Edna, on the other hand, may anger some readers. She had an affair, and seemed unappreciative of Leonce, but her actions were a result of society's norms and laws that oppressed her. Herminia, however, seems to be the one character to whom we often experience both sadness and anger. After Alan dies and she is forced to make her own money despite the challenges associated with females obtaining a job, readers are invited to sympathize with her.

All three authors ultimately achieve a unified goal: the nineteenth century oppressed women, but these authors were determined to push back. In *The Awakening* and *The Woman Who Did*, we see this push back throughout the entirety of these novels; however, in *A Doll's House*, we do not see this push back clearly until the final scene. In *The Awakening*, the sea represents Edna's ability and strength to be independent. According to Stone, by "beginning and ending *The Awakening* with the sea Chopin gives the book a wholeness that Edna cannot find in her life" (Stone 30). Her escape, therefore, should be seen as something positive, radical, and momentous. Edna's decision to swim out into the sea was not easy and we see her completing her responsibilities throughout the novel. Parmiter argues, "The splashing in the water, the flirting with handsome young Robert Lebrun, and the impromptu performances of renowned pianist Mademoiselle Reisz lead Edna to question the tight routines and expectations of her social set in New Orleans and ultimately send her back to the ocean to seek answers" (Parmiter 2). Edna was left with no other choice but to swim out into the sea. Edna needed to make this break from her life in order to prove her independence. Her leaving her home was not enough. She still felt trapped because of the laws that restricted her freedom. In order to fully feel free, it is clear that her last resort was suicide.

Nora, on the other hand, did not commit suicide. She wanted to live freely and thought she could do so in society. However, unlike Nora, many real-life cases of wives leaving their husbands did not end in the same way. For example, according to Zeigler, in the real-life cases of *Bevier v. Galloway*, *Ross v. Ross*, and *Pierpont v. Wilson*:

> If she [the wife] did not live with him, the court assumed that she was not providing him with the services to which he was entitled. A wife who left her husband had to show good cause: If his cruelty required her to abandon her duties, the court would insist that the husband continue to provide support (Zeigler 86).

Because, according to the law, Nora would have had no justifiable reason to leave Torvald, if this happened outside of Ibsen's fictional play, she would still be indebted to Torvald. Ziegler writes:

> As an employee who abandoned her duties and ceased to work, a deserting wife certainly could not expect to continue to receive wages. Her right to necessaries was founded on her obligation to do housework, take care of the children, and share her husband's bed. If she refused to do her job, her wages were withheld (Zeigler 86).

Luckily for Nora, her new life supposedly began when she walked out of her house. Nora not only slammed the door to her home, but also to her past life. Unfortunately, in real life cases, when the wives left, their lives did not change in the ways that they had hoped. This is the push back that Ibsen created: the push back on marriage laws and women's rights.

Whereas Ibsen explained what happens when you do not give women autonomy, Allen explained what happened when a woman chooses not to marry. In *The Woman Who Did*, on the last night the two lived together, Herminia wrote Dolores a note saying that she would no longer get in the way of Dolores' life and Herminia drank poison to kill herself (Allen 165). According to Heilmann, Dolores' actions were not uncommon of a daughter whose mother refused to marry: "Daughters expressed their bitter resentment of being kept in a cage of conventions, which made them liable to rush into marriage" (Heilmann 39). Dolores did not agree with Herminia's decision to remain unmarried and therefore she chose a life in which the patriarchy remained in control.

Each author was able to show how their protagonists suffered under the patriarchal behavior rampant in their society and social expectations. While their protagonists suffered, they also found ways to push away. According to Cameron, "*The*

Woman Who Did suggests that, when it comes to gender and particularly women's sexual reproduction, individualism cannot entirely be severed from social or cultural forces. In fact, educational intervention appears necessary to the formation of maternal individualism" (Cameron 284). This is true for all of the texts that I have examined. For example, each of the female protagonists found a way to read or write in secret despite the legal restrictions. In order for women to become completely autonomous, it seems as though the ability to read or write, or to have access to some form of education, is necessary. Nora, Edna, and Herminia, were all part of some form of rebirthing. According to Stone, "On the symbolic level birthing is a metaphor for the rebirth of the book's protagonist, Edna Pontellier, an artist" (Stone 23). Herminia was a writer, and Nora engaged in reading. According to Cameron:

> Herminia is well suited to work as both a teacher and later as a professional writer, but the community's overwhelmingly conservative values present an insurmountable obstacle. She is driven away from her work as a schoolmistress, not because she isn't capable of performing in this role, but because Smith-Waters and the other conservative citizens can't tolerate a teacher who is pregnant and unmarried (Cameron 296).

All of these activities, while uncommon for nineteenth-century women, were focused on during the course of these texts. Each author placed an emphasis on the importance of stepping outside of the domestic sphere in order to discover a new self. While each of these women discovered a new self, readers saw their struggle in doing so. Going against the domestic sphere was not an easy task because of the lack of rights for women in the nineteenth century. However, each of these authors allowed their protagonists to fight back against society in order to allow women to see the benefits of autonomy. While *The Awakening* and *The Woman Who Did* ended in the protagonist's

suicide, their suicides shows that their freedom was more important to them than living with restrictions.

Overall, *A Doll's House*, *The Awakening*, and *A Woman Who Did* succeed at showing readers how the lack of rights for women affected women during this time period. These texts fought for female independence over marriage. While reviews of these texts were mixed because of the messages they were addressing, they were all deemed as successful. Ibsen, Chopin, and Allen fought back against society's stereotypes, against the domestic sphere, and against the patriarchy by creating characters who not only disagreed with female suppression but also fought back against it. Each author created masterpieces seemingly not only for their own success, but also for the future success of women's rights. Many readers may side with Nora and are angered for her as she did whatever she could to protect her husband who treated her much more like an animal than a human being. In *The Awakening*, while Edna committed adultery, she ended up committing suicide because it was the only real way out of her marriage. Lastly, in *The Woman Who Did*, Herminia committed suicide because she could not face her daughter's harsh criticism, which ultimately stemmed from cultural norms. Each novel successfully pushed back against the patriarchy by defying nineteenth-century laws and cultural norms.

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