

***Mrs Dalloway and The Awakening: Tracing a Relation between the Growing Feminist
Movements and Modern Fictions from Late 19th to 20th Century American and English
Literary Landscape***

Ummay Habiba

12103016

Department of English and Humanities

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Inspiring Excellence

BRAC University, Dhaka, Bangladesh

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Literary Landscape***

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By

Ummay Habiba

Student ID: 12103016

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Abstract

Mrs Dalloway and *The Awakening* are two very widely read English novels known for their feminist stance. In both of the novels, the central characters Clarissa Dalloway and Edna Pontellier undergo an essential moment of self analysis which triggers self- discovery. Their individual journeys are presented as the parallel to the changing social atmospheres. Written in the late Ninetieth and mid Twentieth century, these novels subvert reader's expectations with their unconventional characters and the unconventional choices they make. Therefore, in the first portion of this paper I will look at the changing social scenario as an important milieu, taking place on the advent of Modernism. The later portions will discuss about the existing social position of women in society in the light of *The Awakening* and *Mrs Dalloway* as well as how the feminist fictions responded to the social reality on the emerge of the feminist movements of that era. Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin's narratives and characterizations emerge as the metaphor for the 'new woman' who comes out breaking all the social standards of the time and search for a free soul. I will also concentrate on how the existing feminist movements influenced these two writers in their personal lives and helped them to come up with such radical works.

Chapter 1 Introduction

In the 21st century, feminism has become a very extensive area of research. In present days women have become more conscious about their rights than they had ever been. Different rules are passed in most of the countries to make sure the equal rights for women. Now we get to protest if there is any violence of the rights of women although the scenario is not the same in everywhere. Women empowerment has started taking place in most of the countries although its development is not the same in everywhere. In many countries women are now becoming the head of the business and also the president. A special care has been taken to ensure education for women. We can see many organizations are now formed to ensure that women do not get deprived from their rights.

Despite of women's coming out of the house and attending in the workplace with men, equal rights for women has yet to be established globally on an equal measure. Besides, this development did not happen within a day. It is an ongoing process and by the course of time, new perspectives came in and new problems were identified. As a student of literature I also observed that English fictions went through a radical change in the hands of the female writers, especially at the turn of Twentieth century, a practice which was not much nurtured in our literature. My interest and readings made me perceive a connection between Western feminist movements, changing social perspectives and feminist writers of the Western tradition, hence my interest in Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin. Being a student of literature major, I have read many novels by female writers and I felt that most of them always had the tendency to show the female suppression through their writing. Therefore, I wanted to look more into history of what led the feminist movement and how Woolf and Chopin responded to it.

According to Oxford dictionary, the word feminism defines "the advocacy of women's rights on the ground of the equality of the sexes" (292). Along with establishing the rights of women,

feminism also confirms that those rights are equal to men. It is the belief that men and women should have equal rights and opportunities in every sector and there should be organized activity in support of women's rights and interests. Having differences about how this equal distribution of rights should be made, one common ground that everyone came into is that feminism always addresses the contested gender relationships and the difficulty of attaining autonomy and a safe space for women. Regarding how this equal distribution of rights can be established in societies, there are many opinions and theories by expertise and researchers. Several feminist movements took place and its priorities always varied among nations and communities.

As I am working on the growing feminist movements from late nineteenth to mid twentieth century, I will be discussing the First-wave feminism and its relation to the English fiction. First- wave feminism is the first feminist movement held at nineteenth century. It was not always a physical protest to show how women are being suppressed in the patriarchal society rather it was very much an intellectual movement where literature has been one of the major mediums to carry out this task. Writings from female authors on their experience of life as a woman from different social backgrounds have opened our eyes towards the plight of the life of women and has generated awareness on it. Many writers in different times wrote various extraordinary pieces to illustrate the social obstacles in women's independence and existence. Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin are two important figures who contributed in the development of womanhood of their time from two different countries.

My thesis focuses mainly on the journey of Western feminism in Twentieth century literature and I would also explore how fiction brings up the reality of women's miserable position in society as well as the influence of the growing feminist movements in the lives of the female novelists. For my paper I have chosen Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. I have found many controversies about these novelists which generated interest in me to make further research on them.

When I read *Mrs Dalloway* I loved the stream of consciousness technique because that is also my writing style. Besides, it is also unrestrictive writing just like that of the character of Mrs Clarissa Dalloway. The stream of consciousness writing style is a break from the traditional form of writing which reflects how Mrs Dalloway was untraditional. Also Woolf's style of storytelling like- fragmented, flashbacks, several narrators, mid thoughts; all reflect not just Clarissa but also the author herself. Not so surprisingly this is how Woolf felt about the era she was in and also the prominent form of structured narration, as we will see in the later chapter. While the story and the writing style is undoubtedly the best even today, there is a particular part of the story that had made me ponder for a while as to this book was an indicator or explanation to Woolf's suicide attempts. Septimus Warren Smith as we know commits suicide at the end of the novel, only so because he cannot think of living in one of Sir William Bradshaw's psychiatric homes. This again is also reflective of how Woolf may have consciously or unconsciously at one point translated her emotions into her writing.

What I love about *The Awakening* is that it is not only portrays a feminist standing of the protagonist Edna Pontellier, but also exhibits each of the woman in their utmost glory. One such example would be of Mademoiselle Reisz. She is the embodiment of feminism [independent, free from responsibilities, carefree] and is also perhaps a portrayal of what Edna's Future could have been if she had not drowned herself. We know that Edna's committing suicide was because Robert Lebrun left her heart broken, but a true feminist would never be dependent on any other person. The fact that Edna allowed her existence to be revolved around that of another man, or other entity for that matter is what might have resulted in her demise. Has she truly been a 'true spirit' as she has been dubbed like most critics, then she would have lived to be a strong, old independent lady like Reisz.

1.0 Meet the Authors

1.1 Kate Chopin

American novelist and short-story writer Kate O'Flaherty Chopin was born in 8 February of 1850 in the prominent St. Louis family (Toth 3). Although her exact birth date has not yet been confirmed, 1850 is considered to be the proximate year. In her book *Unveiling Kate Chopin*, Emily Toth gave a vivid description of Chopin's personal life. Chopin was sent to boarding school at the age of five and was unaware of the reason behind it although a prediction was made in Toth's book that since Chopin's father used to keep several slaves and many of them became pregnant after coming to their place, this might have made Chopin's father unsecured. Perhaps, he did not want little Chopin to get to know anything which he was uncomfortable with.

When Chopin was sent to boarding school, there she learned about "quite times, curtsying, and making the sign of the cross" (Toth 8). These were the very forms of education for women and girls of that time. After a few years staying in the boarding school, Chopin wrote about a mixed race girl who was rejected both by her own community and also by the Whites and afterward, she also wrote about a white girl. Both the girls were sent to boarding school because they were unwanted in their families and society. These started to develop doubt about the social system in young Chopin's mind. Ingo, in his essay "Kate Chopin", says that from an early age Chopin started losing people who were close to her. Her father died of a road accident in November 1 of 1855 (Ingo 5). Her siblings died at an early age too and she was the only child who could manage to survive for a long time. This can be considered as a strong reason of Chopin's loneliness. Also in her writings like "The Story of an Hour" and *The Awakening*, we see that the protagonists always find it difficult to make real connection with others and therefore remain alone. After the death of her husband, Eliza Faris, [Chopin's mother] took over her responsibility and thus Chopin made to spend most of

her childhood period with her mother, grandmother, and great-grandmother, who were descendants of French Creole¹ pioneers (Ingo 1). This clearly explains Chopin's influence of Francophone in her works. In many of her writings we find a French background or a connection with French culture. She also spent time with her family's Creole and mulatto slaves, whose dialects she mastered with no time.

Chopin got married in 1870. Oscar Chopin, her husband was a wealthy Creole cotton industrialist (Ingo 2). After her marriage she had to move to New Orleans with him and "for the next decade, Chopin pursued the demanding social and domestic schedule of a wealthy New Orleans wife, the recollection of which would serve as material for *The Awakening*. This novel shows some direct connections with the places of Chopin's life. She is considered as an "interpreter of New Orleans culture" as she had a good grasp on this culture (3). Right after the death of her husband in 1882, Chopin was at a loss since her husband left her with a huge debt and it became hard for Chopin to repay and as Emily Toth says, "for a while the widow Kate ran his [Oscar's] business and flirted outrageously with local men; (she even engaged in a relationship with a married farmer)" (Toth 22). The impact of these events in Chopin's life was so heavy that she brings out her emotions through the characters of her fiction.

When her husband died, Chopin got a great help from her mother. Therefore, she went into a great depression when her mother also died. Chopin then had to take the responsibility of the family and choose writing as the source of income (Toth 29). Along with earning money this gave Chopin the freedom to express herself. Her experience of different culture and different lifestyle helped her to analyze the late nineteenth century American society. She started writing about Creole and Cajun² people she had observed in the South. When her family and friends found her writings interesting, they encouraged her to write

¹ French Creole- refers to the different race of the descendent of the French Louisiana settlers in US. See also *Creole: the history and legacy of Louisiana's free people of color* by Sybil Kein

² Creole and Cajun- French descendent living in US state of Louisiana

more. Her short stories collected in "Bayou Folk" and "A Night in Acadie" established Chopin as an important writer of local-color fiction³ (Ingo 4). Her stories attempted to examine the sexual repression, freedom, and responsibility of women and began to question the benefits of certain moral and ethical constraints imposed by society. Like other writers Chopin's own experiences of life has a major influence in her work.

Chopin began to publish her short stories in the most popular American periodicals. One of her best novels, *The Awakening* got published in 1899. It was received with hostility by critics despite general acknowledgement of "Chopin's mature writing skills" (Ingo 8). *The Awakening* had to face difficulties and Chopin's reputation as a writer was severely damaged by the negative reception of the novel. Later in 1950s, when the novel was rediscovered, *The Awakening* [1899] was granted as a realistic novel which shows the sexual and artistic awakening of a young wife and mother. The plot was very advanced from the understanding of the people of her time. A mother abandoning her family is something beyond people's imagination. However, after the rediscovery, critics marvelled at the beauty of its writing and its modern sensibility and also appreciated as one of the best feminist works. Scholars consider *The Awakening* to be Chopin's best-known work because of its morally uncompromising climate of 1890s America.

Through her writings Chopin talked about her observation of her surroundings since she had the chance to visit places and coming close to different people there. Marquand says about Chopin in her article that she "undermines patriarchy by endowing the 'Other', the woman, with an individual identity and a sense of self, a sense of self to which the letters she leaves behind give voice" (6). Chopin's strong voice was heard in her short stories and novels. In *The Awakening* we see Edna trying undoing the social norms and traditions. Going against to the society she ignores her duty as a wife and a mother and tries to make a life of

³ Mostly known as an American style of writing derived from the presentation of the features and peculiarities of a particular locality and its inhabitants

her own and when she realized that it would not be possible, she committed suicide instead of compromising with her freedom. In the same way, “The Story of an Hour”, the wife Louise Mallard feels relieved to the news of her husband’s death. It shows that the wife or woman was going through in such a relationship which the society bestowed her with instead of letting her to choose. Mrs Mallard also tries to undo the social standards and becomes happy at husband’s death and feels free although at the end the husband’s presence gives her an attack and thus their changes remain silent. Chopin died in 22 August, 1904 at the age of 54 in America (Toth 51). Although during her lifetime Chopin could not see the kind of change she wanted to happen, but her works indeed influenced the society towards the openness to change.

1.2 Virginia Woolf

Virginia Woolf is one of the prominent figures in British intellectual society of 19th-20th century. She is mostly known for her radical writing against the patriarchal society of her time and also as a foremost modernist writer. In a book review, titled as *Virginia Woolf: An Inner Life* by Julia Briggs, Curtis Sittenfeld talked about Woolf’s life. Virginia Woolf was born in 25th January, 1882 in an aristocratic English family. Woolf was educated at home by her parents. Her father, Sir Leslie Stephen was a historian and founding editor of *Dictionary of National Biography* made a pathway for Woolf to enter into the literary society. Woolf’s life cycle has a great impact in all her work and helped her to write against the dominant masculine society to a great extent.

As we look into her life we see that she was always struggling against the societal view of women. Margaret Blanchard in her article “Socialization in Mrs Dalloway”, talks a great deal about Woolf’s personal motivations behind her feminist writing. From her childhood Woolf experienced gender discrimination in her family. Virginia Woolf always resented the “double standard of her father” that he would never judged his girls the way he

used to judge Woolf's brother's and "deeply resented anyone pampering her because she was a woman" (Blanchard 288). Unlike the girls in the family, Woolf's brothers were sent to Cambridge for higher education whereas Woolf was taught at home. We can connect this fact of her life with *Mrs Dalloway* as we see that although Mr Dalloway was a member of the parliament, he was never seen to encourage her wife to work outside or with him. Instead, Clarissa was arranging for the party which was the only way she could show her ingenuity. In the same way, in her life being an intellectual person, Woolf's father always counted on his sons.

Father's presence had a great impact in Woolf's life and one of the major effects was her form of duality. This dual personality was also created in the characters of her writing which we will see in the discussion chapter. In his book *Who Killed Virginia Woolf? : A Psychobiography*, Alma Halbert Bond claims Woolf's relationship with her father as a "blueprint" of her way of life (62). Her father never liked to be weak and always maintained high expectations, Woolf also seem to be the same. Many of her well known work could not meet her anticipation and at times appreciation would make her worried. Sometimes Woolf would take her father as an inspiration, while the other times he was a mental torture for her. Woolf wrote in "A Writer's Diary" expressed that she was happy that her father died because she believed that his father's life could end her existence.

Woolf lived most of her life in London and it acquired an important place in her writing. In *Virginia Woolf's London*, Jean Moorcroft Wilson talked about the significant role of London in Woolf's writing. He says, "London is for Virginia quite simply 'the centre of things' ... not merely a commercial or social centre but the centre of life itself" (9). She finds London very lively as she also described in *Mrs Dalloway*. London was a great inspirational source to write on her subject matters as she [Woolf] describes, "London itself perpetually attracts, stimulates, gives me a play and a story and a poem" (as cited in Wilson 10).

Although the noise here makes her annoyed sometimes, the very form of life she tried to identify and capture in her books was this London city. Here, she comes in touch with the Bloomsbury group in the Bloomsbury Street. She first comes to Bloomsbury with her sisters and brothers after the death of their father. Coming here, she got to know many intellectual figures who were dedicated to the development of art. Her connection with the Bloomsbury group got interrupted when she got married though after marriage she continued here with Leonardo accompanied with the corresponding increase in creativity.

Virginia Woolf and Leonard Woolf got married in 1912 and shared a good bonding. As Bond discusses her relationship with her husband, he says that Woolf and her husband together started the Hogarth Press in 1917 and they used to publish Woolf's novels along with works by T. S. Eliot, Laurens van de Post, and others (69). The reflection of her experience of her married life was explicitly presented in her book *Mrs Dalloway*. Clarissa also used to share a good bonding with her husband. Although Mr Dalloway was richer than Leonard and Clarissa was supposed to have a very happy life, the scenario was not the same. Both Woolf and Clarissa were going through mental stress and duality. Although Clarissa made to choose one over the other, Woolf failed and committed suicide.

Woolf's committing suicide on 28 March 1941 by putting stones in her coat pocket and then drowned in the lake, calls everything into reconsideration. There are many factors in Woolf's life which might have led to her death. Her mental depression was the ultimate reason which actually caused her to commit suicide. Being unable to compromise with her soul she committed suicide. By the character Mrs Dalloway, Woolf showed that if she had to live, she had to compromise with everything which was impossible for her.

Woolf has shown her supremacy in many genre of English literature. She wrote many novels, short stories, biographies and dramas as well. Her best known works are *To the Lighthouse*, *Mrs Dalloway*, *Orlando: A Biography*, *A Room of One's Own* and many more. In

her lifetime, Woolf went in depression for several times and one of the major reasons behind her mental depression is the World War. The massive destruction caused by the war made her unable to work. Woolf always wanted to be a free spirit. In "A Writer's Diary" [consists of extracts of her personal diary she kept from 1918-41] she wrote, "I will not be "famous," "great." And would go on "adventuring, changing, opening my mind and my eyes, refusing to be stamped and stereotyped. The thing is to free one's self: to let it find its dimensions, not be impeded" (140). This statement is an indication of her refusal to be the kind of girl or woman society wants her to be. She wants to be open in her own way.

Chapter 2 Modernism in America and England: Changing Society and Literature

Towards the end of the nineteenth century a completely different phase emerged in the Western literary ground; especially in Europe and North America. Writers consciously broke off the tradition and started writing from their individual views and styles. However, this change was not limited to the literary atmosphere but it was also seen in the society. This departure from the tradition in term of arts and Literature, lifestyle and values, economic system, human psychology and society at large is known as modernism. In her essay “Modernism and Virginia Woolf’s Novel *Mrs Dalloway*” Minodora Otilia Simion says, “By extending the relationship between artists and the representation of reality, modernism implied a break with the past artistic conventions which created a literature of crisis and dislocation, desperately trying to shape the new world” (120). A modernist writer should always think beyond the social boundaries and thus modernism was a complex web of changes in society.

In their book *Modernism* Bradbury and McFarlane describe modernism as “an art of a rapidly modernizing world, a world of rapid industrial development, advanced technology, urbanization, secularization and mass forms of social life” (as cited in Simion 121). Modernism generated a break from the traditional treatment of life. It was also the time of radical social changes marked by the disintegration of the individual from the society. The world wars showed how traditional values and the comfort of the old order of things cannot save the individual from moral and spiritual decay, nor can it stop genocides and mass killing. This great gloom felt by the Western societies asserted the need for the society to find a new order as its people started questioning the existing social practices. T.S. Eliot’s *The Waste Land* is emblematic of this world.

The novels and poems and plays of the twentieth century bear remarkable narratives of this change. Writers were more focused on writing what inspires them most rather than

following any particular method. Virginia Woolf's essay "Modern Fiction" is considered as a milestone in this subdivision. In this essay Woolf endeavours to encourage the writers to write modern fiction where they need not to follow any traditional form and says, "of modern fiction, it is difficult not to take it for granted that the modern practice of the art is somehow an improvement upon the old" (157). Woolf believes that it is the duty of a writer to write on the complexities of life and making people aware of it. In this essay she questions the conventional form of fictional writing. According to her, a fiction must depict the odd humans face in their lives.

The German philosopher and cultural critic Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche had almost the same view about modernism. In his book *Beyond Good and Evil* he describes the traits of a modern man as madness. According to him, madness is something which is rare in individuals and whenever it becomes common in society, it becomes norms. In *The Awakening* we see that Roberts's flirting with other woman was very much of a social trebut the moment Edna devotedly falls in love with him and wants to leave the Pontellier's house behind, it becomes her madness. In *Mrs Dalloway* Clarissa's madness was not as evident as Edna's since Clarissa's struggle was entirely in her mind. Like others Clarissa also communicates with people but has lack of meaningful language. Bringing out these crisis is what a modernist writer should do

1. Importance of the philosophy of and Sigmund Freud in the thoughts of modernists.

Specially on individual's self awareness in relation to the universe and world around them, the growth of extreme individualism in Western societies, disillusionment felt by humans because of war and depression and ultimate separation of the self from the society.

This is why modernist novels and fictions prioritize the interior of the self rather than the exterior.

2. Louis Althusser notion on ideology

3. **Friedrich Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*:** Selected aphorism of **Friedrich Nietzsche**.

1. Good" is no longer good when one's neighbor mouths it. And how should there be a "common good"! The term contradicts itself: whatever can be common always has little value.

Moments of doubt and existential anguish faced by Edna and Clarissa

“It is the business of the very few to be independent; it is a privilege of the strong...**He enters into a labyrinth, he multiplies a thousandfold the dangers which life in itself already brings with it; not the least of which is that no one can see how and where he loses his way, becomes isolated, and is torn piecemeal by some minotaur of conscience.** Supposing such a one comes to grief, it is so far from the comprehension of men that they neither feel it, nor sympathize with it. And he cannot any longer go back! He cannot even go back again to the sympathy of men!”

: In Edna: Leaving husband and family and before death.

In Clarissa regarding her thoughts on Sally Saton and alternate life she never explored.

During the battle felt by these characters as their free will and conscience the pressure to conformity to traditional roles collide.

3. “One loves ultimately one's desires, not the thing desired.” : Romantic irony in Edna.

Her idealizing Robert and their utopian relationship based on conjugal understanding, love and mutual adoration which the Leonce – Edna relationship lacked

Writing from a modernist perspective in *Mrs Dalloway* Woolf shows the duality Clarissa goes through. Overtly we find Clarissa a perfect fit for the society since she never seem to grief neither did she complain about anything. Instead we see her as a dutiful wife who arranges party for her husband and is very conscious about her position in society. Nevertheless the moment we recognize her interior monologue; going back and forth of her memories, we understand the climax of the novel. This is how Woolf portrays the modern aspects in her writing. **The eyes of others our prisons; their thoughts our cages.**

VIRGINIA WOOLF, *Monday or Tuesday*

Outwardly, what is simpler than to write books? Outwardly, what obstacles are there for a woman rather than for a man? Inwardly, I think, the case is very different; she has still many ghosts to fight, many prejudices to overcome. Indeed it will be a long time still, I think, before a woman can sit down to write a book without finding a phantom to be slain, a rock to be dashed against. And if this is so in literature, the freest of all professions for women, how is it in the new professions which you are now for the first time entering?

VIRGINIA WOOLF, "Professions for Women," *The Death of the Moth and Other Essays*

"Yet if the only form of tradition, of handing down, consisted in following the ways of the immediate generation before us in a blind or timid adherence to its successes, "tradition" should positively be discouraged. We have seen many such simple currents soon lost in the sand; and novelty is better than repetition. Tradition is a matter of much wider significance. It cannot be inherited, and if you want it you must obtain it by great labour...the historical sense involves a perception, not only of the pastness of the past, but of its presence; the historical sense compels a man to write not merely with his own generation in his bones, but with a feeling that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country has a simultaneous existence and composes a simultaneous order.

T S Eliot's "Tradition and Individual Talent"

Different literary works came out as a shock to the readers since those were not meeting the reader's expectations, rather did upset the traditional modes of representation. *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Awakening* are the results of such changes of that time. In this section, I will show how successfully Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin illustrated the social reformations that were taking place in that era in *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Awakening* respectively.

2.1 Mrs Dalloway: Death and Duality

Mrs Dalloway itself is well known as a modernist text for its narrative style as well as the subject matter. The novel offers a new way of understanding the world where people were disillusioned by the destructive war. The First World War was centred mainly in Europe. It started between England and Russia in 1914 and lasted for four long years in exchange of

millions of lives (Marshall 7). The war had its effect on every sphere of life and literature is one of them. One striking incident about the post war literary field is that many female writers came on the focus as they started writing about the war.

War was one of the major themes in *Mrs Dalloway*. The novel was set in a society where war had just finished and so the effect of war was very vivid in people's lives. "He [Septimus] sang. Evans answered from behind the tree. The dead were in Thessaly, Evans sang, among the orchids. There they waited till the War was over, and now the dead, now Evans himself" (Woolf 48). Here, Septimus Warren Smith who was a war survivor lost one of his friends in the war and many times he got the feeling that the friend is nearby. Coming back from the war, he found it very difficult to fit himself in the society. Unfortunately, he could not find a single character with whom he could relate. Although the massacre of the war came to an end, people like Smith was still getting the nightmare of the vicious war. Septimus was going through some medical treatment even though his Doctor, Mr. Holmes believes that there is nothing wrong in Septimus. We see that the shock caused by the war and not being understood by anyone led him to commit suicide.

"The War was over, except for someone like Mrs. Foxcroft at the Embassy last night eating her heart out because that nice boy was killed and now the old Manor House must go to a cousin; or Lady Bexborough who opened a bazaar, they said, with the telegram in her hand, John, her favourite, killed; but it was over; thank Heaven – over" (Woolf 26). When the thought that war was no more was so relieving, at the same time people who lost their dear one get broken down thinking of the war. All these represent the grand impact of war in people's mind. Of course the war is not the only feature which makes *Mrs Dalloway* a modernist novel. Minodora Otilia Simion, in her article "Modernism and Virginia Woolf's Novel *Mrs Dalloway*" talks about the modernist background of *Mrs Dalloway*. The drastic change in peoples' understanding of psyche and the nature of self occurs because of Sigmund

Freud's theory on psychoanalytic criticism. He says, "The concepts he [Freud] used were memory, interior time, exterior time and intuition, memory providing the link of the past to the present" (120). Counting on these points we can easily claim *Mrs Dalloway* a modern novel.

Mrs Clarissa Dalloway's stream of consciousness takes us back and forth of her memories. As the novel starts with Clarissa's going out to buy flowers for the party, she goes on the flashback of her childhood times in Bourton and then Peter Walsh comes in her memory. There was no restriction in her ways of thinking. This very feature of modernism, extending the relationship between artists and the representation of reality, breaks the past artistic conventions which created a literature of crisis and displacement. Keeping the time is also a big factor. In the novel we see the Big Ben draw an intervention between the past and present. Several times when Clarissa was lost in her own free thoughts, this Big Ben stroke and made her conscious of her social life.

In her mind Clarissa is always free and can think of anything whereas in the real life she is trying to make social connection although she fails to make any real one. Instead of making direct modes of representation in the novel, Woolf as a modernist made a greater abstraction and aesthetic impersonality and self-reflexivity (Simion 122). Clarissa's struggle between past and present shows a duality in her personality. In one level she becomes the free spirit; can think of her ex-boyfriend or Sally Seton, with whom she felt a sexual connection. These are the dreadfully things which she could never possibly think of in her real world. Therefore, extreme psychologism and the non-linear thoughts become a crucial point for modernist novels to explore and reveal the inner struggle of the characters and the alternate reality they create through the powerful impression of their minds. As Woolf says, the modernists "...has to have the courage to say that what interests him is no longer 'this' but 'that': out

of 'that' alone must he construct his work. For the moderns 'that', the point of interest, lies very likely in the dark places of psychology" (Modern fiction page?)

2.2 *The Awakening*: A failed attempt for autonomy or a triumph?

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* anticipates the features of a modern novel. In this novel Chopin depicted the character of Edna Pontellier, who was trying to assert her free soul in the existing society. Edna's revealing new sense of independence and freedom were paralleled by her corresponding sense of conflict and despair. The novel registers Edna's journey towards her new "self" at the turn of the early twentieth century, consequently explores and challenges the social boundaries. The complexity of the novel lies in how it alternately embraces the traditions of realism and naturalism as well as diminishes the tradition of each within the text. In doing so, Chopin represented a vital expression of literary consciousness at the beginning of the nineteenth century America. Edna's revolutionary response to the expectations of gender and period leads the text as a modern piece of work.

Being a wife and mother of two children, Edna Pontellier, the protagonist falls in love with Robert Lebrun devotedly. By putting such contradictory interest Chopin gave the essence of modernism in her character. The underlined purpose of modernism is going reverse to the traditional form and looking for individual identity. As a modern character, Edna goes for self exploration. Instead of being happy with her husband and family [as everyone says that she got the best husband] Edna feels mental displeasure as she was greatly attracted by Robert. In that time a women having extra marital affair or any sexual freedom [as we see she got physically involved with Alcee Arobin] was something beyond imagination. The title of the novel itself, gives a modernist essence since it signifies a process of evolution, of change and transition. It was transition between Edna's full consciousness and sleep. As Dyer says that, "Like her name ("Pontellier" . . . means "one who bridges")

Edna herself is one whose mission is to begin the painful process of bridging two centuries, two worlds, and two visions of gender... "*The Awakening* is about the beginning of selfhood, not its completion" (as cited in Klein 1). Although Edna could not make her journey a success, it made the novel to be transitional and revolutionary by its defensive uproar.

According to Faulkner, *The Awakening* timidly explores from a gendered point of view to be sure, the uncharted waters of Modernism, foreshadowing the ". . . world of 1910 that was much more complex than the world as it had been known before, and especially more complex than the orderly world that had been presented to the reader in Victorian literature" (as cited in Klein 1). America in the turn of twentieth century could not possibly accept the social changes it was going through. Everything was shaken up at the free thinking of the writers and also at the idea of self exploration which distinguishes modern literature from its predecessors. As Faulkner notes that, "accepting one's place, loyalty to authority, unquestioning obedience, began to break down; Patriotism, doing one's duty, even Christianity, seemed questionable ideals. Man's understanding of himself was changing" (as cited in Klein). In *The Awakening* we see such disobedience through Reisz and Edna. They were very much unwilling to follow the conventional way of life.

Edna's search for her true soul made her to explore different levels of life. Like a modern woman she at one point became the income source for herself. Her artistic mind almost opened the path of her freedom. Her leaving family behind to be united with the lover was the ultimate obstacle of her free spirit. Edna's committing suicide after getting rejected from Robert was a barrier in giving the ultimate success to her free spirit. Like any modern man, Edna was also going through the perplexity of her awakening. She could not choose to compromise with her soul and therefore committed suicide. This choosing one persona over the other is also a trait of modernist characters.

Chapter 3 Women's position in societies in the light of *The Awakening* and *Mrs*

Dalloway

In this part of my research I will be presenting the different social position of women in English and American societies in the light of *The Awakening* and *Mrs Dalloway*. In both the novels the two female protagonists Edna Pontellier and Mrs Clarissa Dalloway were depicted with unconventional characteristics and the choices they made threatened the existing social circumstances. As we have already learnt about the social changes those were taking place in the Late Nineteenth America and Europe [different perspectives on the understanding of life and not going with the flow of tradition], were revealed through the characters in the novels.

3.1 Women under the patriarchal gaze:

In *The Awakening*, the protagonist Edna Pontellier seems to be a controversial character of her time. She shows the distinctiveness in her characters which upset many of the nineteenth century expectations from women and their supposed roles. After having a close reading of the novel, we see that the society Edna lived in was not very welcoming to the inspiration of woman's individuality. In the very beginning of the novel, the way the setting was being introduced was very symbolic. The birds, "a green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door" introduces us to something or someone who has a chance to fly or to be free [as it was kept in outside] but has been shackled with something even stronger (Chopin 1). Here, the line resembles that although Edna seems to have the chances to be free, she could not possibly run away from the reality she was exposed in.

In the very next page of the novel we see the interval of a "lady in black". It appears in a colourful background and makes a contrast. Throughout the whole novel this "lady in black" appears only a few times and no further description was provided about her. In

societies, 'dark' is the symbol of evil and comes to haunt the comfort of the society. Eventually, we can find similarities between this lady and Edna since, Edna happened to disobey the social norms. Her relationship with Robert was very unwelcoming in that time. Back then, women almost had no rights over their life. Before getting married father was supposed to have full control over their life and after marriage the responsibility had to handover to the husband. Women's happiness was supposed to be laid in having a good husband therefore everyone assumed Edna to be the happiest woman in the community as she got the best husband.

Wedding was considered as the most important event in a woman's life. It was unlikely to pay attention on how a woman feels about her marriage, instead if anyone [woman] wanted to leave her married life behind to look for her own happiness it was considered as a disgraceful act. Edna's going for swimming with Robert in this case is very symbolic. Before going for swimming, Edna had to take off her wedding ring [a symbol of her marriage] which symbolizes that she was becoming free from the responsibilities of the family and afterward swimming with Robert gave her an ultimate pleasure. Another way to look down at women was restricting their job at home; taking care of children when they fall sick and when a woman denies she becomes reckless- "he [Mr. Pontellier] 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?" (6). However, when Edna's negligence towards her supposed role as a wife and mother becomes severe to her husband, he consults a doctor for her treatment since, anything out of tradition seemed madness to him and the society. All these incidents show the conformist way of thinking of the society.

Talking about the women's position in society of nineteenth century in the light of *The Awakening*, Peter Ramos in his article "Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in 'The Awakening'" says that the severe social pressure of a patriarchal of nineteenth century

made no difference to Edna even though she was one of "the most privileged woman" (147). Here, he explains that Edna was clearly trying to break the conventional means- escaping from her responsibility as a wife and a mother, devoted love for Robert, physical intimacy with Alcee Arobin and also her independent career as an artist; all these characteristics made the character more appealing.

Ramos claims Edna's suicide as a failure but this is not the same for all the female characters. He makes a contrast by bringing in the character analysis of Mademoiselle Reisz and Madame Adele Ratignolle. According to him, these two characters got inhabited with the society. Although they represent two very different trait of woman and are well acquainted with the society, they face limitations- "economic, social, political because of their gender; each has a limited set of socially acceptable identities to choose from: mother-woman, artist ... these two women create their identities for themselves precisely because they have learned to use and modify these social identities" (148). At this point Edna fails to accept the limitations and commits suicide. Since Madame Reisz is an artist and recognized as such in society, she does not expect to get married. Such realization is a big factor which Edna fails to understand and therefore, could not accept Robert's rejection to live with (148).Edna could not choose between Adele and Reisz, rather she wanted both. She thought she could have a happy social life even after getting married with Robert. Edna failure to accept the reality and misunderstanding of her freedom leads to her suicide.

Coming to Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* we would see many similarities with *The Awakening* in a different context. *Mrs Dalloway* is an early twentieth century novel which highlights to the patriarchal ways of ruling woman's choice of life as happen in *The Awakening*. *Mrs Dalloway* portrays the activities of Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway. Here, she was making arrangements for a party at her place. The party in the novel works as a major symbolic event which brings everyone together in one place. Clarissa, a middle aged woman

keeps wondering over her memories. She has been positioned in a very upper class in the society and seems to have no problem with her family. She has been married with Richard Dalloway, a conservative member in the parliament and they live in West-minister which is a very rich and fashionable locality of London.

Before her marriage, Clarissa was in a relationship with Peter Walsh, who eventually was invited to the party. Although Clarissa used to adore him a lot and "he was unselfish, and as for saying as Peter did, that he had no heart, no brain, nothing but manners of breeding of an English gentleman" he refused marry him (Woolf 7). One of the major reasons behind this is the submissive nature of him- "with Peter everything had to be shared"(8). The freedom and independence which Clarissa was searching for from her childhood kept missing even in her married life, yet she believes that "for in marriage a little license, a little independence there must be between people living together day in day out in the same house; which Richard gave her, and she him" (8). This is the very thing which the social customs had taught Clarissa and a way of her escaping from getting a free life. Knowing that she does not have the kind of life she always wanted to have, Clarissa always tries to make a line in between which makes her to sacrifice her individuality most of the times.

3.2 Women and autonomy:

One similarity about women's position in the economic ground in both *The Awakening* and *Mrs Dalloway*, the society never took it as a positive change. In *The Awakening* we see that Mademoiselle Reisz was the only carefree woman who was not dependent on anyone. But she was a social pariah whom none adored her. In the novel, she is described as "a disagreeable little woman, no longer young" and "had quarrelled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self- assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (31). This passage shows her relationship with others around her and at the same time shows her distinctiveness from any traditional woman. But if she is what we

identity the 'new woman' then it does not promise us of a pleasant life. Rather it scares us of having been isolated and rejected by the social conscience. Would Edna, a beautiful woman with such invigorating spirit dream of a life like this?

In the novella we sense Edna's adoration and respect for Mademoiselle Reisz, a secret inclination even to be like her. But we also cannot miss but sense Edna's rejection of Mademoiselle Reisz's secluded life simultaneously. Edna wants to have a socially accepted life too. She too wants a romantic relationship with her desired one; two different paths which can never be reconciled. Mademoiselle Reisz warns Edna saying that, "to be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts— absolute gifts— which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul" (Chopin 79). Mademoiselle Reisz sensed that Edna's expectation of having a romantic life with Robert and also making her career as an artist was far away from reality. Therefore she wanted Edna to be prepared and be brave enough to face the desolation and went on in life.

Although Mademoiselle Reisz was not welcomed in the community, she was found to be the only woman who gained a title of her own and this shows that in spite of social obstacles, women were becoming the source of income; their economic position was developing. She is a pianist and lived alone in her apartment. She lacked social acquaintance and skills and did not have the sense of dressing. We also see carelessness in her attitude which was not very appreciable for a woman of that time. We would also see that except Mademoiselle Reisz, none seem to be interested to think of their life and trying to make their own identity. This verily suggests that woman started to think and act like a man.

Pigeon House on the other hand is a metaphor for Edna's growing self awareness as "the pigeon house pleased her" (Chopin 117). It was a revival of "feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual" (117). She leaves the Pontellier house and comes to live in this small house but interestingly

she is seen to feel more free and happy in this otherwise ordinary house compared to the luxurious mansion of her husband. The tone of the narrative changes from the suppressed and resigned to a more free, placid and vigorous. Edna is seen to be happy as the claustrophobic narratives ends.

Now looking at *Mrs Dalloway* Sally Seton resembles a personality what Clarissa always wanted to be. Getting divorced, Sally Seton becomes independent. She starts to live on her own. Sally Seton was very much unlike Clarissa Dalloway; poor, open-minded, rebellious, and free-spirited. Clarissa at one point of her life felt a sexual connection with Seton. They also had a plan to change the world which ultimately comes true and they did. The changes that came with their hands, making reformations, living free and abandoning marriage [although Clarissa was not divorced, she did not share any real connection with her marriage either] actually changed the way of thinking and understanding of the world. At the end we see Sally as Lady Rosseter having five sons, yet her carefree expression was still there.

Chapter 4 Facts and Fictions: Women writers' response

Mrs Dalloway and *The Awakening* did not come out of the time for no reason. There were number of incidents which influenced Woolf and Chopin to write against the patriarchal voice and showed the picture of women's suppression. In this particular section of my paper I will be looking into the feminist movement that emerged in the late nineteenth to mid twentieth century in America and England and will trace a parallel relationship with the development of fiction. I will also give an idea about the personal motivations of Kate Chopin and Virginia Woolf had behind writing such pieces.

Long before the 1960's feminist movement, the issue of the equality of gender came in discourse especially through literature. Literature was such a media where a group of literary people used to portray women as weak and ineffective while the others could show women's problems explicitly. Literature was considered to be the most convenient way to show women's suppression and the domination of men as a society. In some pieces of literature the solution of this suppression was also given. Feminist theory and criticism did not develop within a day. Firstly it "became much more eclectic" and then "switched its focus from attacking male versions of the world to exploring the nature of the female world and

Comment [n1]: Quotation for validation

outlook, and reconstructing the lost or suppressed records of female experience” and finally the view driven into constructing a new social perspective (122). Barry mentions some of the famous books which discusses about feminist theories and those are Mary Wollstonecraft’s *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Virginia Woolf’s “A Room of One’s Own”, Kate Millet’s *Sexual Politics* and Simone de Beauvoir’s *The second Sex* which I will be looking into for my discussion purpose.

In her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women*, Mary Wollstonecraft mostly emphasizes on women education. She believed that education is such a powerful tool which alone can lead women to their freedom and become a companion to their husbands. She also criticizes some of the famous male writers like Pope, Milton and Rousseau for objectifying women in their work. Referring to Milton’s *Paradise Lost* Wollstonecraft says that Milton describes women as soft and “sweet attractive grace” and she claims that by this Milton “meant to deprive us [women] of souls, and insinuate that beings only designed by sweet attractive grace, and docile blind obedience, to gratify the senses of man when he can no longer soar on the wing of contemplation” (Wollstonecraft 170). Attacking Milton she also says that men are always busy in influencing young women to focus more on their beauty rather than any form of education and thus men try to “secure the good conduct of women by attempting to keep them always in a state of childhood” (171). For her “children should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness” (171). Here, she shows how women were culturally cultivated to be weak and inferior to men.

During the nineteenth century, the struggle for equal rights of women under the law was spread all over in North America and Europe. Women were very much confined at home; expected to live their lives largely homebound, taking care of the cooking, cleaning, and child rearing while men were expected to live a public life, whether it was working in a

factory or socializing with like-minded men in public places or bars. These were the social constraints which did not let women to have the same opportunities for education as men. Instead of taking it as a positive initiative, educating women was often seen as subversive and a possible perversion of the social order. “Women were also entirely shut out of political activity... were not allowed to vote and were so bound to their husbands that under 19th-century British common law, they were barely considered people at all” (Paletschek 4). In *Mrs Dalloway* we see such practices where being the wife of a member of the parliament Clarissa had no involvement in politics and all she could do was arranging parties and taking care of home.

Comment [n2]: Quotations from the novel.

Women’s emancipation movement⁴ started taking place in Europe and America towards the end of the nineteenth century and covers the period of enlightenment to First World War (Paletschek 3). Different organizations were formed for the development of lives of women. In the turning of the twentieth century women’s suffrage movement⁵ broke out in Europe. As women started becoming the source of income during and after the war, they were considered as eligible citizens to vote. Ever since the war was over, many influential political parties started taking women’s demand for the suffrage and therefore the First World War was a turning point of the first wave feminist⁶ movement.

Comment [n3]: More from Suffrage, emancipation, and First Wave Feminism.

New Woman.

If we look at the women writers whose lives intersect these movements we can trace interesting associations, if not direct but of subtle intellectual affinity. We also find them to be well aware of the society around them. Having a feminist perspective and attitude, Virginia Woolf did not want to be addressed as a ‘feminist’, (Black 2). She preferred to be addressed in a different way which would ensure the equal distribution of the rights of women. *Three Guineas* is a piece from Woolf where she traces the relation between social

4

5

6

environment and individual and the woman individual. Woolf wanted to show that women were not only capable of writing on feminist issues but they could also write on some serious affairs like war as good as men. Many wrote on the woman issues and how important it is for the society, nevertheless Woolf had her own way to say it.

Comment [n4]: Textual reference from three Guneass. Quotation.

In her book *Virginia Woolf as Feminist*, Naomi Black discusses one of Woolf's conversations with her male friend where "a woman friend is offered some honour where usually reversed for men" (3). She says so because on that time women were not given the respect they deserved and the male dominated society used to think that women are not capable of doing corporate works, yet Woolf received an offer. Coming out from a well-off family Woolf had some privileges which she never would have gotten if her father was not so well known in the society. Later we also come to know that being supportive towards woman Leslie Stephen, the father recruited many women worker which was eventually considered as a mischievous act.

Comment [n5]: Loosen it. Not clear.

Woolf, the unconventional genius received sharp reproach for her radical writings and stands on the issues of emancipation of women. Woolf's desire to contribute to the women's liberation was always evident in her writings. Towards the mid of twentieth century her views which were condemned of being feminist was "attacked or championed according to the political exigencies of the moment (Cited in Zwerdling 210- 211). In the 1950s Monique Nathan dismissed it as 'a quaint relic of the Victorian era, as a misfit and unbecoming as a last year's dress'" (Cited in Zwerdling 210- 211). It is clear from the article of Monic Nathan that the political condition of the time was demanding to have a feminist uprising although some of the critics decline such notion and think of it as a redundant approach. By the end of 1960's Woolf's publication of "A Room of One's Own" played a strong role in the woman's movement. Commenting on the impersonal experience of reading "A Room of One's Own"

Comment [n6]: Her relationship with her father, brother.

Leslie Stephen was progressive and backdated simultaneously.

Read meet the authors.

Margaret Drabble says, "I read it with amounting excitement and enthusiasm... A more

Comment [n7]: Which one?

militant, firm, concerned attack on women's subjugation would be hard to find. I could hardly believe that a woman from her background could speak so relevantly to my own condition" (as cited in Zwerdling 211).

Woolf's writing as a feminist was broadly influenced by Mary Wollstonecraft. Her book *A Vindication of the Rights of Women* which was published a century before Woolf questioned many of the problems women were facing and contributed greatly to the woman movement (Zwerdling 211). Woolf had read the major texts of that movement with deep interest and engagement. Being an active reader Woolf never hesitated to criticise the ideas which contradicted with others. Her writings on these issues were more of response. Woolf's interest in women's movement was not a sudden decision of her. It started from a very early age. Zwerdling mentions that, "Woolf reflects on the changing legal status of women since the eighteenth century and lists some of the major works and events associated with that history" (213). Although Woolf did not take part to these movements physically she expressed her stand against the conventional social attitude towards women. Many writers made numbers of manuscript on the concerns that came up in the movement.

Zwerdling bring up John Stuart Mill's *The Subjection of Women* [1869] which is barely political and focuses on the campaigning of the suffrage movement and also had created and the wide range of issues the movement raised from its beginning. One of the major events of the woman's movement is the suffrage movement which had a great impact in the young mind of Woolf [1903- 1914]. The suffrage movement had narrowed down the issues of "woman's nature and status- legal, educational, psychological, economic, professional, psychological and political had been turned into a much narrower cause deliberately centred on a single issue: the vote" (214). During that time, it had been believed that by doing so women would easily get access of an independent life. However, Woolf could sense that it is not as naive as it seems to be and eventually she showed in her novels

that “men and women should live separate; we [they] cannot understand each other; we [they] only bring out what’s worst” (216). Whatever freedom the masculine society promised to give to women seemed to be a dream that **would** never come true.

1920 seemed to be very important for Woolf as “a sex war going on when women was abandoning or trying to abandon the familiar role assigned to them and move into preserves traditionally held by men” (216). **O**f course, most of the men did not like or accept it at the beginning; they were very uncomfortable with the coming change. Nevertheless, these uneasy males reappear in Woolf’s fictions like William Rodney in *Night and Day*, Charles Tansley in *To the Lighthouse*, Giles Oliver in *Between the Acts* (220). In *Mrs Dalloway* though we do not see Mr Richard Dalloway as a villain who personally haunts Clarissa’s freedom, he is a firm believer in British tradition as he works for the government.

On the other hand, Kate Chopin’s personal experiences from her family and her society also had a great influence over her writings as a feminist. In Toth’s book *Unveiling Kate Chopin* she discusses a great deal about Chopin’s coming out as a feminist writer. **Toth** says, “Kate’s coming of age was also bound up with the woes of war. She had lived a cozy and secured world of women, with spirited widows and nuns... was being raised under the ‘Victorian Umbrella’ of women who cherished and protected young girls” (34). Chopin lost all her comfort after losing her grandmother whom she would idolize. This death caused her to get done with schooling.

All these readings made a space in Chopin’s life and slowly these came out in her writing. After some three decades later in *The Awakening*, we see Madame Ratignolle resembling Scott’s golden Rowena [a character from *Ivanhoe*]. However, keeping some differences, Ratignolle being a mother- woman understands Edna’s troubled soul. After the war, Chopin took initiative to work for the betterment of women and built two female schools to cure the young women’s voice which was lost for a long time (36). She saw women doing

Comment [n8]: In Edna?

everything and not shying from expressing herself as we see in Edna Ponteliev in *The Awakening*.

Both *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Awakening* were published during the days of first wave feminism / Pamela L. Caughie in her book *Introduction: Theorizing the 'The first Wave' Globally* says that “the western periodization of the feminist movement into first, second and third wave is not directly applicable to post colonial locations, yet as scholars and teachers of women studies, we wondered if the wave model might be a convenient means of analysing the shift in concerns articulated by women in non western nations” (5). Here she makes a parallel relation to the understanding of first, second and third wave of feminism in Western tradition. Mentioning the time period from the late nineteenth century to 1930, she says that between this time in West, women mainly demanded for “electoral, educational and employment rights adapted to an indigenous program of social reform in the public sphere as well as a reassessment of gender and sexual mores in the private sphere” (5). These all clear the point that uprising for the equality between genders started with the first wave of feminism. Cott says, “the women's movement of the nineteenth century, was part of a

broader rebellious spirit of the early twentieth century that included, for example, the birth control movement and internationalism, as represented by the League of Nations and the International Workers of the World” (as cited in Caughie 5). Simone de Beauvoir in *The Second Sex* writes about the problem for feminist politics is that “women do not say ‘we’ as workers or blacks do” (5). However, it has been always very important that women come to a consensus which eventually gave the rise of the second wave. “The 'paradox of feminism' is rooted not in theoretical differences but 'in the actual situation of women’”, which actually signifies the critical differences between the feminist ideas in the Western and non-Western regions. As William Spurlin writes in his article, “The term ‘feminism’ itself is already full of contradictions and sites of contestation which become even more heightened as feminist

Comment [n9]: Connection?

thinking travels across borders” (13) shows that even though feminism in everywhere deals almost with the same pattern, yet contradictions are quite frequent between them.

Mrs Dalloway is considered to be one of the best works by Virginia Woolf in the study of feminism. After doing a close reading of the novel, we can see the multifaceted identity of Mrs. Clarissa Dalloway. In the novel we can see Clarissa’s identity to be developed by the ideologies of gender and other social constructs. The major important factor here is keeping the language and gender in one hand and feminist theory on the other. Here we will see that the essentialist notion of those identities in general and specially the gender identities are inevitable, natural and fixed. In both the novels, *Mrs Dalloway* and *The Awakening*, we can see the struggle the two protagonists go thorough in developing their own identity even though Clarissa’s struggle was not as evident as Edna’s.

As a feminist piece of work, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* is said to be a masterpiece. Here, Clarissa is seen to be a very upper class woman who needs to maintain a code of language which is developed by the patriarchal society and thus it marginalizes feminine identity. Maintaining the class, sometimes Clarissa gets lost in her thoughts. As a woman her free thoughts does not really fit to the society. She almost fails to make a stable and unified position as a subject and her struggles are frustrated and ultimately lead to defeat of constructing a unified subjectivity. Another character from the novel is Sally Seton, who appears to be completely different from Clarissa. Sally Seton is poor, liberal, and rebellious one and we can see such personality in Clarissa’s thought. Therefore, these two characters seem to be very similar. “There they sat, hour after hour... talking about life, how they were to reform the world. They meant to found a society to abolish private property” (Woolf 86). This fragmented part from Woolf’s novel says that these women, Clarissa and Sally Seton are trying to change the social structure and we find Clarissa to be happy having a conversation with Seton.

As we are discussing women suppression in the light of these two novels, we see many evidences that women were not treated equally in society. From a description we find Whitbread being very critical towards women, “She accused Hugh Whitbread, of all people, of kissing her in the smoking-room to punish her for saying that women should have votes. Vulgar men did, she said” (56). Then again, even though Septimus’s wife Reize was not having a happy married life, she could not just leave Septimus due to her social obligation and in a way Septimus’s suicide made her free from those unhappy relationship.

Chapter 5 Conclusion

“It is the sense that there is no answer, that if honestly examined life presents question after question which must be left to sound on and on after the story is over in hopeless interrogation that fills us with a deep, and finally it may be with a resentful, despair.”

<http://xroads.virginia.edu/~class/workshop97/gribbin/modern.html>

-Virginia Woolf

The *Awakening* and *Mrs Dalloway* are two novels which survey the social changes taking place at the end of nineteenth century. It was a time when the traditional belief in religion, life and the way to understand the world had begun to change. New theories and beliefs came in and the conventional system was dazed. People started questioning the legitimacy of the existing social norms. The amount of destruction caused by the two wars puzzled everyone’s mind. Stability was almost lost and there was chaos everywhere. In such social circumstances, Kate Chopin and Virginia Woolf sketch characters like Edna Pontellier and Clarissa Dalloway, characters who struggle to change the society to fit their changing attitudes towards life. Chopin boldly explores the feminist themes of the inequity of the

Comment [n10]: Modern fictions raise questions. They do not answer them. Inconclusiveness.

traditional marriage and female desire of autonomy in *The Awakening*. The Edna's' unconventional treatment to marriage, parenting and the social customs subverted readers expectations to a great extent. As her understanding of freedom was very much related with having Robert in her life, she had to face the ultimate annihilation as a feminist.

On the other hand, Clarissa Dalloway was in a constant battle between her conscious and unconscious self, the overt satisfaction and the covert emptiness. Clarissa seems to be more of a character who always forces herself to maintain the social standards. Her arranging party and socializing with others are efforts to make a balance between her internal and external life. However, in her mind as she is free from any restrictions, she could think of anything and this represents Clarissa's free soul. Her stream of consciousness is the only way of her independence, as she chooses it. In her sophisticated life, Clarissa is very conscious about her activities. Both Clarissa and Edna find themselves as misfits to this world. The war shook the social paradigm and then there were people who could not accept the social changes [Septimus Smith] and others were always looking for continuous changing [Clarissa]. In both of novels the self exploration and search for freedom of the inner self is thwarted and incomplete. But yet the endings are intensely emotional and thought provoking. Feminism or equal right for women is an ongoing process, even today. *Mrs. Dalloway* and *The Awakening* depict societies which were not ready for women like Edna and Clarissa. We see one to offer her to the endless sea and the other ne dissolves in existential crisis.

Comment [n11]: Ends in inconclusiveness leaving scoper for readers to make their own reading of what had happened to Edna Pnteiller?

Comment [n12]: Also inconclusive.

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