ABSTRACT: This study describes and compares the portrayal of the 19th century women through the female characters in Flaubert’s Madame Bovary and Chopin’s The Awakening the analysis focuses on the gendered depiction of each novel’s main female characters and the influence of contemporary Victorian gender roles on their characterization. It is found that both novels present comparable gender portrayals – that women are mostly bound to domestic sphere and are hardly granted liberty even in matters regarding their own happiness. Yet the novels differ in presenting “ending” for their respective rebellious main female character: agony and awakening.

Keywords: Victorian, female characters, women portrayal, gender role

Women’s social conditions change from time to time. It is generally followed by the changing of women’s role in society. The 19th century witnessed changes in the perception of women’s nature. Women in this era faced difficult and confusing problems from the fallacy of what society proposed as their identity and social roles (Koscher, 2006:2). They were restricted to domestic sphere. They were expected to devote their selves to marriage and motherhood. This situation provided them with only two options; living as the society prearranged them or choosing to be free of this oppression (Arnold, 2005:1).

The life of women in 19th century is worth a study since it will provide us with knowledge as to the social condition of women at that particular time. Such can be learned from the then contemporary literature which might provide us with information of the sort through their intrinsic aspects, such as characters, plot, setting, point of view, etc. in this study, Flaubert’s Madame Bovary and Chopin’s The Awakening are picked to be objects of study as they are contemporaries of 19th century and have been widely acclaimed as the classics of the era. The different domains, France and America, being presented should enrich the study and enable the writers to make comparison on how the contemporary Victorian gender roles have profound effect to the characterization of the main female characters in both novels.

The study particularly questions how both authors represent women in their stories and to what extent the contemporary Victorian gender roles influence the characterization of their main female characters.

METHOD

The literary study being pursued in this study is a comparative literature. It compares the above mentioned novels, Madame Bovary and The Awakening, in terms of their respective representations of women and the extent to which contemporary Victorian gender roles influence their character make up.

Between the schools of comparative literature, this study drew methods from the American school and the two novels were approached using Aldridge’s
analogy which sees two or more works of literature from their similarities. Furthermore, as the American school of comparative literature is more interdisciplinary, it allows comparatists to draw necessary methodologies and/or approach from other disciplines such as sociology, critical theory, cultural studies, religious studies, history, etc, to produce more thorough analysis. This thesis employs comparative literature method with feminist approach.

In doing the comparative study, this study elaborated four points of comparisons. The first point was elaborating and analyzing the ways being employed by Gustave Flaubert in depicting his main female character, Emma Bovary. The second point was elaborating and analyzing the ways Kate Chopin depict her female character, Edna Pontellier. Since the novels are written by male and female author respectively. This is aimed at discovering the similarities and/or differences in the ways the authors portray women through their main female characters. Afterwards, the similarities and/or differences were further analyzed as to find the underlying reasons that might inspire the similarities and/or differences between them. Finally, analysis was made to explore the extent to which contemporary Victorian gender roles influence the character make-up of the novel’s main female characters. This includes their gender identity construction and negotiation.

RESULT AND DISCUSSION
As previously mentioned that the analysis of this study focuses on the gendered depiction of each novel’s main female characters, it is important to firstly define the key word: gendered depiction. The term gender refers to the social, cultural, and psychological traits linked to males and females through particular social contexts (Lindsey, 2005:4). Gender is very much closely related to sex yet non interchangeable. Sex refers to the biological characteristics distinguishing male and female based on chromosomes, anatomy, hormones, reproductive systems, and other psychological components (Lindsey, 2005:4). In short sex can be the point departure of gender. Thus if we try to define what it is to be a man or a woman, it is necessary to differentiate what are biologically ‘natural’ characteristics of each sex and what is socially and culturally expected behavior of each gender (Hytonen, 2004:12).

Furthermore, gender is more a social rather than biological construct. It deals with particular social position and roles an individual hold and perform rather than biological attributes. To be more specific, a role is the expected behavior, performed according to social norms, shared rules that guide people’s behavior in specific situations (Lindsey, 2004:2). The concept of role is based on the society’s construction, is a socio-historical construction, thus it is never fixed and influenced by the historical periods of the society itself.

As for depiction itself, it is a portrayal. According to Blumson (2006:1) depiction is a kind of symbol system, yet not all depictions do. Based on Longman Dictionary of contemporary English to depict is to describe something or someone in writing or speech. From those two definitions, it can be said that depiction is a kind of symbol which describe or represent something or someone in writing or speech. In short, depiction is the way someone or something is described or shown in a book, film, plat, etc.
Considering the above terms: gender and depiction, here gendered depiction means the portrayal of becoming a man or a woman in a particular time and cultural setting. Specifically, this article explores the portrayal of women of the 19th Century France and America by critically reading the two aforementioned novels in feminist perspective.

Moving on to the results and analysis, an ideal 19th century French woman according to McMillan (2000:44) is concern to domesticity because the domesticity become the major roles of women at that moment. Family, marriage and motherhood become the main role that woman must hold at that time. For most of the women in 19th century France believed that the ideal of woman as wife and mother represented not only a moral ideal but an important social reality. Thus, it is a must for 19th century French women to devote their selves to marriage and motherhood. They had to summit to their husband’s command and take care of the children in order to be considered as an ideal woman.

Considering such rigid conception on 19th century France womanhood, Emma Bovary is depicted quite the opposite by Flaubert. Emma Bovary as the main female characters of Gustave Flaubert’s Madame Bovary is portrayed as morally corrupted. In the novel, she is depicted as a woman who is dissatisfied by her marriage. While she might give her consent to the marriage, she does not think that her marriage goes as she has initially expected – that being married will give her better access to romantic experience. As it is told earlier in the novel, Emma always expects that her marriage life will be like the one she often reads in the romance stories, such as the one in Paul et Virginia a novel by Bernadin de saint Pierre (1787), which according to Chadwick (1942;4) was highly ‘sentimental and saccharine sweet’. As it is further argued by Chadwick, St. Pierre’s novel is a fairy tale of romantic love that predictably ends with happily married heroine. With all the lacks in her own marriage, this book appeals to Emma tremendously.

The highly romantic love story of the heroine in that book inspires Emma in her romantic pursuit; she develops expectations that she would somehow lead the kind of life this heroine lives upon her marriage. To the extent of how far the romantic and sentimental novels affected Emma’s life is that Emma is unable to separate fiction from reality. It stimulates Emma to spend her whole life searching for perfection in love. However, in Emma’s time, the notably Victorian period, marriage was not as romantic or ‘fairytaile-like’ as depicted in many novels of the time; on the contrary, love actually played a very minor role in the majority of ‘matrimonies’ that took place at that time (Ziegenfuss, 2012). Finding her marital life is away from her imagination, Emma begins to see marriage as boring and too strictly binding that she wants to escape.

Having tried a few times without success to ignite a spark of passion in her heart, and being, moreover, incapable of understanding what she did not experience, or of believing anything that did not manifest itself in conventional form, she soon came to the conclusion that there was no longer anything extraordinary about Charles’s love for her. His transports had become routine; he embraced her at certain times. It was a habit like any other, a dessert to look forward to after a humdrum dinner. (p.40)

Emma’s dissatisfaction with her marital life causes her to pursue happiness outside the institution of marriage. Vorlová (2007:5) mentions that home and
marriage were the sources of nineteenth century women’s despair that sometimes they needed to escape from them. Emma’s pursuit of happiness outside the institution of marriage is the way she escapes from her unhappy marriage. She finds the happiness outside the marriage by being engaged in extramarital affairs. Ladd (2004:2) states that the extramarital affairs Emma commits become the momentary escape from her mediocre daily existence and into the life she feels she deserves.

The mediocrity of her home provoked her to sumptuous fantasies, the caresses of her husband to adulterous desires. (p.97)

The story moves on with Emma dating Rodolphe Boulanger, a thirty-four-year-old country squire, whom she considers understanding and romantic. She finds that Boulanger can fill the empty space in her heart. Again and again she told herself: ‘I’ve a lover! I’ve a lover!’ revealing in the idea as though she were beginning a second puberty. At last she was to experience those joys of love, that delirium of happiness that she had despaired of ever knowing. She was entering a magical realm where life would be all passion, ecstasy, rapture; a bluish immensity surrounded her, lofty heights of emotion glittered brightly in her imagination, while ordinary existence still continued only far, far away, down below, in the shadowy emptiness between those peaks (p.144).

In the above quote, it is all clear that this momentary escape from the dull marriage has provided her with romantic joy she has never found in her home. The narrator even illustrates her being over-the-moon leaving her empty heart behind. At this stage, Emma’s happiness becomes the center of the story the writer would like to explore. Yet, the happiness is told to be shortlived. Emma-Rodolphe relationship does not work as she has first expected. Emma thinks that she can take the relationship one stage further as she, who becomes dreadfully sentimental and begins to demand a great deal from him, mentions her willingness to abandon her marriage and live with Rodolphe. Surprisingly to Emma, her offer is rejected as Rodolphe considers the relationship a mere escapism.

I¹ shall never forget you, I beg you to believe this, and I shall always remain deeply devoted to you; but one day, sooner or later, this passion of ours would inevitably begin to cool, for such is the fate of all this human. (p.180)

Rodolphe’s statement implies the contemporary perception that extramarital affairs are never meant to last and romantic love is never eternal as the passion will eventually die down with time. Such is in line with the previously mentioned fact that mostly to survive marriage in the era is not based on love per se.

At this stage, the writer seems to mock his main female character, Emma, by granting her what she wants – romantic love outside her dull marriage despite her abandoning her gender roles as a woman and a wife of a respectable gentleman. He allows Emma enjoy the secret love and trespass the boundaries of marriage. Nevertheless, he does not allow Emma enjoy those happiness for a long time, Emma has to feel the despair and the disappointment again. She cannot

¹ Rodolphe
chase Rodolphe and makes him to always stay beside her. It is like bringing her to the earth again after launching her off to the moon. She needs to return to real life of the contemporary 19th Century France society which does not favour such relationship.

Not for long, Emma’s faith to her marriage is again tested. She meets Léon. They have mutual feeling yet he decides to leave her after knowing that she is married.

Léon is much bolder and braver; he declares his love to Emma and asks her to be his lover. It is obviously a moment which Emma has been waiting. They are then engaged in an extramarital affair and Emma.

The next day was terrible, and the following days even more intolerable because of Emma’s impatience to repossess her happiness. Hers was a raw craving, inflamed to fever pitch by familiar images, and to which, on the seventh day, she could surrender without restraint Léon caressing hands. His raptures were cloaked in effusions of amazement and gratitude. Emma took a judicious, concentrated delight in this love of his, nurturing it with every amorous resource at her disposal, always a little fearful that, in time, it might die away (p.238).

However, this later relationship is also doomed to be short lived. At first their relationship is very romantic and intimate, yet since Emma is too much demanding; Léon slowly feels bored with their relationship and decides to leave Emma.

She wanted him to dress entirely in black and grow a tiny pointed beard, after the style of Louis XII portraits. She demanded to see his rooms, and pronounced them dull; this comment made him blush, but she paid no attention, advising him to buy curtains like her own; when he objected because of the expense: ‘Aha! You do like to watch your pennies, don’t you?’ she said laughing. At each meeting, Léon had to tell her exactly what he had done since the last time. She demanded poetry, poetry composed for her, a ‘love poem’ written in her honour; he could never come up with rhymes for the second stanza, and was reduced to copying a sonnet in a keepsake album. (p.246)

At this point, once again we are able to see that extra marital affairs are not meant to last. For the second time, Emma is portrayed to be too impulsive and deadly romantic in her love affairs and she should suffer for that as a woman of the era she is not supposed to act that way. She once again experiences the despair and the disappointment of love while she already sacrifices a great deal for her relationship.

Moreover, Emma is considered as morally corrupted woman from the scene Flaubert elaborated when Emma is engaged in extramarital affairs with Rodolphe and Léon. Her thirst for romance makes her yield totally to Léon which makes him despise her; her desire for passion is so strong that the narrator reveals that Emma is ‘unaware that she was about to prostitute herself’ (Ng Yee Ling, 2008:19).
He had no notion of what fundamental urge was impelling her to hurl herself ever more recklessly into the pleasures of the flesh. Increasingly irritable, greedy, and sensual, she would walk beside him in the street with her head held high, unafraid, she claimed, of being compromised. (p.245)

Emma is willing to give everything she has, her body, her love, her soul, her money, to a man who is able to give her happiness she has been wishing for. Emma is desperately in need of love and sexual satisfaction and she is always afraid of losing her lover; thus she is willing to provide her lovers with love and luxurious goods to make them stay beside her. However, this does not seem to work well. Her love affairs are doomed.

Her failure in marital and extra marital love affairs causes Emma to disrespect the institution of marriage and relationship. She even disregards Charles as the head of the family. She has far trespassed the cultural boundary set for women in the 19th century France, who are to dedicate themselves to household management, child rearing, and devotion to husbands (Abrams, 2001:4). However, Emma does not perform her gender roles as the society expected. She neglects her duties as a wife and being ignorant to her only daughter.

As identity is never singular, as stated by Hall (1996:4-5), gender identity always intersects with other identity, for example class.

...identities are constructed through, not outside, difference. This entails the radically disturbing recognition that is only through the relation of the Other, the relation to what it is not, to precisely what is lacks, to what has been called its constitutive outside that the ‘positive’ meaning of any term – and thus identity – can be constructed.

In the novel, the contemporary 19th century middle class France forbids its women to be too ambitious for upward social mobility (Polansky, 2012). However, this does not seem to be true for Emma Bovary. She is a representation of the 19th century France women who is not satisfied with her class. As a middle-class society, Flaubert portrays Emma as a discontented woman. She desires upward social mobility; she wants to escape the middle-class life and aspire to become a part of the upper community.

Everything in her immediate surroundings, the boring countryside, the stupid petits bourgeois, the mediocrity of life, seemed to her the exception, a freak accident that had befallen her alone, whereas somewhere else, beyond all this, the vast realm of joy and passion stretched on and on forever. In her longing she confused the sensual pleasures of luxury with the rapture of love, and elegance manners with sensitivity of feeling. (p.53)

Flaubert provides his point of view of Emma’s dissatisfaction through the response of the narrator which describes Emma’s dissatisfaction as a sailor in distress.

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2 Léon
But deep in her soul she\(^3\) was waiting for something to happen. Like a sailor in distress, she cast her eyes in desperation over the solitude of her life, searching the mists of the horizon for some distant white sail. She did not know what this chance event would be, what wind would blow it towards her, to what shores it would bear her, whether it was a small boat or a great three-decker, laden with affliction or crammed to the gunwales with joy. But each morning on waking she expected it that day, and she would listen to every sound, leaping to her feet, astonished that it did not come; then, as each day ended, she felt still sadder, and longed for tomorrow. (p.56)

To satisfy her desire, Emma often buys herself and her lovers’ luxurious goods which bolsters up her desire to live as an upper-class woman. As she can no longer support her high-spending lifestyle, she becomes badly indebted even her husband is unable to help her pay it back. It is not only Emma who is suffered the consequences of her indebted; her family also faced the consequences of Emma’s deed.

The house was such a dismal place, now! Tradesmen were seen emerge from it in a fury. Scarves lay around forgotten on top of stoves, and little Berthe, to the shocked disapproval of Madame Homais, went about with holes in her stockings. (p.256)

The life track of Emma as told in the novel Madame Bovary to some extent share similarities to that of Edna Pontellier, the main female character in Kate Chopin’s The Awakening. Not only that both novels were written in the 19\(^{th}\) century but they also represent the life of women in the era, yet in different geographical setting.

Kate Chopin, who was French by blood, depicts Edna as a rebellious woman. Chopin portrays her as opposing the contemporary American customs and manners of gender roles. Edna believes the mainstream gender discourses of 19\(^{th}\) century America is quite unfair to women. Like in France, the American 19\(^{th}\) century gender roles were strongly influenced by the idea of separate sphere for men and women. Based on the ideology of separate sphere, women were bound to the domestic sphere, while men were free to move between spaces: the domestic and the public spheres (Morgan, 2007:1). The domestic sphere bound women to engage in household management and caring for the children. The main role of every nineteenth century woman was the role of a mother and a home-maker, in which those roles were believed to be congenital to them (Danielová, 2009:8).

Edna firstly, finds herself tired of the monotony of marital life which mainly demands her to devote herself to her husband and family. She feels that there must be something else she deserves to get and she realizes that life is not merely associated to marriage and motherhood. Thus she decides to struggle for her personal freedom and a life of her own in which she can do as she pleases. Edna’s life is more widely used to dedicate herself to her husband but it is not a life of her own. It seems that Edna is only a valuable possession for her husband collection and not an individual human being. “In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her (p.25).”

\(^3\) Emma
For this reason, she trespass the boundaries of women gender roles. She refuses her husband’s command and she no longer thinks that her husband’s command is a must for her to do.

What are you doing out here, Edna? I thought I should find you in bed,” said her husband, when he discovered her lying there. He had walked up with Madame Lebrun and left her at the house. His wife did not reply.

“Are you asleep?” he asked, bending down close to look at her.

“No.” Her eyes gleamed bright and intense, with no sleepy shadows, as they looked into his.

“Do you know it is past one o’clock? Come on,” and he mounted the steps and went into their room.

“Edna!” called Mr. Pontellier from within, after a few moments had gone by.

“Don’t wait for me,” she answered. (p.59)

Mr. Pontellier, Edna’s husband, repeatedly calls Edna to come to the house, yet Edna still rejects and prefers to stay outside.

‘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 into the house instantly.’(p.60)

Even though Mr. Pontellier uses high intonation, Edna still does not just go in and adhere to the command of her husband.

‘Leonce, to bed,’ she said. ‘I mean to stay out here. I don’t wish to go in, and I don’t intend to. Don’t speak to me like this again; I shall not answer you.’ (p.60)

The above quote shows how Edna does not like to be instructed, including by her husband. Her persistence has made Mr. Pontellier exercise his power to forbid her from staying outside and order her to get into the house. This incident might be trivial but the triviality and the power being exercised emphasize the unequal power relation between the contemporary husband and wife. This kind of rejection continues to take place in many occasions, such as when Mr. Pontellier just coming from working, he asks Edna to see one of their boys in his room because he is quite sure that their boy has fever. However, Edna rejects her husband command and says that their boy is perfectly well when he goes to bed.

Mr. Pontellier returned to his wife with the information that Raoul had a high fever and needed looking after. Then he lit a cigar and went and sat near the open door to smoke it.

“Mrs. Pontellier was quite sure Raoul had no fever. He had gone to bed perfectly well, she said, and nothing had ailed him all day. (p.10)

With this confinement, Edna begins to feel that her becoming a woman and a wife is too binding.

She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if

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4 porch hammock
she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should yield, feeling as she then did. (p.60)

The quotation above shows that Edna just realizes that so far up to now, she always obeys her husband’s command unthinkingly, out of habit. She then confused fails to understand how she could always submit to her husband’s order before. It indicates that Emma’s life, her becoming a woman and a wife is too binding. She binds to her husband and she has to always conform to him.

Furthermore, when she is vacationing at Grand Isle with her family, she develops a close relationship to Robert Lebrun, a younger single man, whose mother owns the resorts at Grand Isle. Robert prefers staying at the resorts with Edna than accepting Edna’s husband to play billiards. Edna and Robert spend their time together; they walk together and exchange long and pleasurable conversations. Edna enjoys their togetherness and begins to develop romantic feeling to Robert.

Edna’s decision to struggle for her personal freedom influences her attitude towards her children. She is no longer showing her attention to their children; she becomes ignorant.

If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arm for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing. (p.14)

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels. (p.14-15).

In addition to Edna’s resistance, the most unacceptable for the society is when she finally decides to be engaged in a relationship with other men, Robert Lebrun and Arobin. One of Edna’s friends Mademoiselle Reisz questioning why Edna falls in love with someone whom she is not allowed to do it.

‘Are you in love with Robert?’
‘Yes,’ said Edna. It was the first time she had admitted it, and a glow overspread her face, blotching it with red spots.
‘Why?’ asked her companion. ‘Why do you love him when you ought not to?’ (p.155)

Edna’s awareness of her becoming a woman, who has restrictions in her life, has leaded her to find a way to escape from it. Therefore, through the ways Edna escapes from her limitations as a nineteenth century American woman, Edna is depicted as a rebel.

Furthermore, Edna’s becoming woman intersects with her becoming a part of Creole community, which she assumes upon marrying Mr. Pontellier, who is originally a Creole. Coming from a non-Creole family, caused Edna feels little bit strange with this community. She is not able to adapt and blend into this community; hence it leads her to feel unhappy with her current social position.
“Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them (p.17).” Edna’s discomfort with the values as well as the activities of Creole society makes her dissatisfied and inspires her to skip the gathering of Creole society frequently.

In comparison, both novels represent women who are discontented with their life, especially their marital life. Both main female characters, as previously elaborated, are married and dissatisfied with their lives after marriage although the primary causes of this dissatisfaction is different in each. Similarly, both act against the common social prescription of gender. They both nearly abandon their marriage and current family to pursue their self determination. The escape route being taken is also similar — that they are engaged in extramarital love affairs. These similarities cannot be simply taken for granted.

While this study will not go as far as arguing that Chopin as a writer is highly influenced by Flaubert, it can be argued that in the 19th century, both in America and France, the norms applied in regards to marriage and womanhood are more or less similar as they are represented in both novels under study. Both women are main characters, who are the centers of the story. This signifies that their deeds are the spring of plot development. The world in the story revolves around them. When a story is considered as an echo of life and a means of didactic method to the contemporary society, it can mean that this case of women dissatisfaction with contemporary 19th idea of womanhood and class is real and people have to learn from the lives of these characters.

Yet, while Flaubert dooms the romantic love pursuit of Emma, Chopin tends to portray the liberty of Edna in her pursuit of freedom despite the social pressure. Emma is willing to do anything to get what she desires without considering the feeling of the people around her, especially her husband and her daughter. It seems that Emma is already blinded by her own romantic pursuit. She is more or less looking for sexual satisfaction from her lovers. Edna Pontellier moreover, she is still able to control herself than Emma. Initially, when Edna is engaged in affairs, she is aiming to find the figure of man who understands her individual rights. In building the relationship she is not only looking for sexual desire. Blažková (2009:47),

Her true love for Robert is not touched by the adultery, for Edna the purely sexual relation to Arobin does not mean anything in comparison with her romantic love to Robert Lebrun. It is a very unusual attitude to love and sex, it can be said a masculine one, because women usually connect tightly the relationship and sex, while men are able to detach these two. Edna never oversteps the boundaries of their purely sexual relationship, although Alcée Arobin starts to be more involved in it.

Another difference is that Emma’s social discontentment revolves around her class and financial situation, while Edna is depicted as more frustrated by the people in her adopted community, the Creole. She feels she does not fit them, in terms of the ways of thinking and the lifestyle.

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5 Edna
They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable. (p.17)

Badly frustrated by their life problems, both characters, Emma and Edna are to end their life with suicide. However, the ways being chosen by each author in ending the lives of these characters are different. Feeling doomed, Emma decides to ingest arsenic, Flaubert describes Emma’s death quite long, torturing and very painful.

Next she began to moan, feebly at first. A violent attack of shivering made her shoulders shake, and she has turned whiter than the sheet at which her rigid fingers kept clawing. Her erratic pulse was now almost imperceptible. Sweat was dripping from her blue-tinged face, which looked as if it had been glazed in the fumes of some metallic vapour. Her teeth were chattering, her dilated eyes stares vaguely round her, and her sole reply to every question was a mere nod; she even smiled a few times. Gradually, her moaning grew louder. A muffled howl broke from her: then she declared she was feeling better and would soon get up. But she was seized with convulsions, and cried out, ‘Oh God, what agony!’ (p. 282).

In contrast to Emma, Chopin describes Edna’s death beautifully as walking to heaven. She does not feel any pain and agony while drowning herself into the sea. Edna goes to the beach, strips her clothes from her body, and stands as a newborn creature under the sky. She swims quite far, not realizing until it is too late that she has no strength to return to the shore. She drowns in the gulf, remembering every moments of her life.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but when on and on, thinking of the bluegrass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end (p. 220-221).

The above quote shows that the choices of words made by each author in depicting the end of their characters’ lives are strikingly different. While both are tragically ended – by committing suicide, Emma’s death is an agony to her as if emphasizing the bad fate of a bad woman, while Edna’s is a liberation – that she can eternally escapes the binding life.

Gustave Falubert does not make Emma end her life happily as the characters in romantic novels she often reads, yet he gives Emma’s pain and

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6 Creole community
suffers during her process of death. It can be interpreted that Gustave Flaubert intends to punish Emma for what she has done. He punishes Emma for her being morally corrupted. To this Martin (1992:64-65) claims that Emma’s ingestion of poison symbolizes male retribution.

As for her conscious motivation for choosing arsenic, however, Flaubert would have known its etymology is in this regard, Emma’s ingestion of poison symbolizes male retribution for her “immoral” transgressions against the patriarchy, its cultural ideals for women, and religious and social law. Yet though Flaubert might have intended Emma’s punishment to derive from arsenic/ the masculine, ironically, her ingestion of poison suggest a repetition of poisonous milk/ maternal strife. In any event, her treatment reflects moral example and, in Flaubert’s words, “the punishment incurred by immoral behavior.”

While Gustave Flaubert intends to punish Emma by her agonizing suicidal act, Kate Chopin wants to free Edna by her drowning into the sea. Chopin ends Edna’s life because she wants to free Edna from the oppression she suffers both form her family and society. Edna’s action can be considered as symbolizing her awakening. The suicide in this case does not mean a defeat; it is Edna’s final rebellion against the society instead because only in death she can achieve the peace and freedom that she desires (Blažková, 2009:55).

Finally, it is clear that the contemporary 19th century gender construction which favors separate spheres for men and women has highly influenced the characterization of Emma and Edna as female characters of nineteenth century fictions, albeit in different areas and is treated with different

CONCLUSION AND SUGGESTION

Comparatively, both Gustave Flaubert and Kate Chopin, who both have French background, take up similar issue in the novel – women dissatisfaction against marriage and society. Both characters are married to well-to-do men but are not satisfied with their lives upon marriage. Both seek to resort to extramarital love affairs. Furthermore, both extramarital relationships are short lived and rejected by their societies. Moreover, both main female characters are not at peace with their community, albeit for different reasons – Emma for financial reason and Edna for more social reason. This dissatisfaction is both portrayed to be difficult to be managed – Emma is involved in debt and Edna is consistently escaping. Considering the similar time setting of the two novels, it can be concluded that this particular issue was not a strange case in the contemporary 19th century both in France and America.

Yet, interestingly each author chooses different approach in ending the life of the main female character. Both of them end their lives with suicide, yet the way the author depicts the last moment of the character is different – Emma’s as an agony and Edna as an awakening. This could be an inspiration for doing comparative study further on these novels.

For further studies, it is also suggested that comparatists could dwell on the geographical difference, education background of the authors, the women activities in France and America.
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