



IRAQI  
Academic Scientific Journals



العراقية  
المجلات الأكاديمية العلمية



ISSN: 2663-9033 (Online) | ISSN: 2616-6224 (Print)

**Journal of Language Studies**

Contents available at: <https://jls.tu.edu.iq/index.php/JLS>

## The Quest for Independence in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* a Feminist Comparative Study

Layth Taher Tawfeeq\*

English Department, College of Arts, Tikrit University, Tikrit, Iraq

[LaythTawfeeq@tu.edu.iq](mailto:LaythTawfeeq@tu.edu.iq)

Mohanad Ahmed Jasim

College of Science, Tikrit University, Tikrit, Iraq

[Wandawy.m@tu.edu.iq](mailto:Wandawy.m@tu.edu.iq)

Received: 13/10/2025, Accepted: 28/01/2026, Online Published: 30/06/2026

### Abstract

At the core of feminist text, Henry James and Kate Chopin's works always stands out to portray women seeking freedom. The paper will discuss James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Chopin's *The Awakening*, represented by Isabel Archer and Edna Pontellier as the main characters in these novels. The discussion will be based on comparative analysis that include women status, the conflict between their needs to be recognized as human beings and what the society expect from them as wives, and mothers. James presented those issues

\* Corresponding Author: Layth Taher Tawfeeq, Email: [laythtawfeeq@tu.edu.iq](mailto:laythtawfeeq@tu.edu.iq)

Affiliation: Tikrit University – Iraq.

© This is an open access article under the CC by licenses <http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>



in *The Portrait of a Lady* by laying out different events to confront the obstacles set by the institution of marriage and society during the nineteenth century. Chopin's in *The Awakening* approaches these issues differently, as she questions the whole institution of marriage through Edna's awakening as she follows her romantic and artistic desires which lead to her unfortunate end. Edna and Isabel deal with multiple issues both psychological and societal which can be approached to pinpoint the impact of these issues and women fight for recognition. The best obvious way to discuss these works by implementing feminist discourse, the discussion highlights the enduring correlation of both works to debates of gender equality, identity and the fight for recognition.

**Keywords:** autonomy, feminism, gender rules, identity, social norms

## السعي إلى الاستقلال في رواية "صورة سيده" لهنري جيمس ورواية "الصحوة" لكيت شوبان: دراسة نسوية مقارنة

ليث طاهر توفيق

قسم اللغة الإنكليزية، كلية الآداب، جامعة تكريت، تكريت، العراق

و

مهند أحمد جاسم

كلية العلوم، جامعة تكريت، تكريت، العراق

المستخلص

تناقش هذه الورقة البحثية وتكشف سعي النساء للحرية في رواية "Portrait of a Lady" لهنري جيمس ورواية "The Awakening" لكيت شوبان، مسلطة الضوء على الشخصيتين الرئيسيتين إيزابيل آرتشر وإيدنا بونتيلير. باستخدام التحليل المقارن، ستدرس هذه الورقة كيف تصور الكاتبة الصراع بين الاحتياجات الشخصية وتوقعات المجتمع للنساء في المجتمع الفيكتوري في القرن التاسع عشر. يصور جيمس صراع إيزابيل سعياً وراء حريتها من الأدوار الاجتماعية، مواجهاً العقبات التي تضعها مؤسسة الزواج والمجتمع. من ناحية أخرى، تسلك إدنا مساراً مختلفاً من خلال الرغبات الفنية والرومانسية، والتي تنتهي بتأكيد مدمر على الاستقلالية في مواجهة واجبات الزوجة والأم الخائفة. تسلط الورقة الضوء على المسارات السردية المتميزة ونتائجها لكلا الشخصيتين، موضحةً التكاليف النفسية والحدود المجتمعية التي تواجه النساء في سعيهن للاستقلالية. من خلال وضع هذه الروائع

ضمن خطاب نسوي شامل، تؤكد المناقشة على الارتباط الدائم بين كلا العاملين ونقاشات النوع الاجتماعي والهوية والنضال من أجل الاعتراف بالذات.

**الكلمات المفتاحية:** الاستقلال، النسوية، الأدوار الجندرية، الهوية، المعايير الاجتماعية.

## **1-1 Introduction**

### **Background on Henry James and Kate Chopin**

James and Chopin address marriage and the role of women in *The Portrait of a Lady* & *The Awakening*, which treat the subjects of love and marriage and the struggle of women for freedom and independence. They epitomized women's roles and their quest for equality. Our objective is to illustrate how James articulated these difficulties by identifying several characters and portraying them as archetypes that embody their culture in *The Portrait of a Lady* and how women challenged the obstacles they confronted in a deteriorating world. Regardless of the obvious difference Edna's detachment from her family to look for passion and dreams that interfered with her marital life and her household become useless and diminishing, Chopin addresses these concerns distinctively by scrutinizing the institution of marriage through Edna's awakening. Edna and Isabel functioned as an incentive, fervently attempting to dismantle those foundations characterized by Victorian society. We anticipate gaining a clear insight into how Isabel, the bookish young woman, became trapped in an unpleasant marriage of her choice, maintaining her social status as a lady and preserved her identity. The reckless actions against human superiority and malevolence translated through Edna's terrible demise. We examined the characters of Isabel and Edna through their actions and the consequences, how their decisions influenced and shaped their futures.

### **The Concept of Female Independence in Feminist Criticism**

Earlier works have always been sensitive to the role of women, how they behaved to avoid predetermined future designed by society to improve their lives, Louise Rennemo

thesis (2015) went in depth examining these issues from different perspectives looking for women identity, also others who are not guided by domesticity especially in relation to marriage. Abdedaim's thesis used Gynocriticism concept in his analysis highlighting women's autonomy Infront of dominant patriarchal ideas, he goes through the works of Chopin and others portraying marriage unfulfilled desires, insecurity, depreciation, and exclusion of women. Priority articulated the rights of women, gender hegemony, and the fact that men representing the public sphere while women reclined to the private domestic life. Other sources are also used to cover psychological issues and identity. Building on these studies, the following Liberal Feminist framework clarifies how autonomy and institutional constraints shape Isabel's and Edna's choices.

### **Feminist Approach**

#### **Female Selfhood**

Based on liberal feminist point of view, both works disclose the unfairness measures by institutions not the physical differences, limited females capability for self-determination, the argument clearly reveals the demand for autonomy, equal educational opportunities. Isabel share the concern of young women access to early marriage and negative liberty when she repel this socially constructed rule around her: "I don't wish to begin life by marrying" (p. 225) and "I like my liberty" (p. 242). Isabel's rejection of Warburton and Goodwood are not considered the denial of love but a declaration of reason and a decision by choice not coercion, a decision made between equals not social inevitability. Chopin's Edna voices the same liberal boundary between care and selfhood: Edna's articulated similar liberal confines between care and self-hood: "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (p.52). in both cases there is a determination that concession as human beings demanding a preservation of personal judgment, education, work, which gives women freedom to decide their own future.

#### **Marriage as an Institution of Control**

Both novels put the limits of liberal reform under examination: to what level does personal autonomy bloom under a law and custom chained women to roles as wives and

mothers? James impersonated the liberal incongruity using Isabel marriage to Osmond, a domination masked by marriage; the beautiful ideas of choosing for herself piece by piece evaporated under socially constructed rules and sanctions that limited her options while keeping the façade of consent. Chopin's sets Edna to a more extreme test: her voluptuous and artistic awakening "She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before" (p.32) which gives her false impression of control to expand her agency, so far, the general atmosphere is not suitable to make this type of freedom sustainable.

### **How Feminist Criticism Is Applied Comparatively**

This comparative study is applied by analyzing how both writers depicted women's thirst for freedom within identical male oriented structure, yet the outcomes are different. The analysis used a liberal feminist lens and focused on selfhood, marriage and psychological independence as the main sites of impediment in both works. Isabel and Edna are analyzed side by side whose will for freedom stand against traditional gender roles, while how they interact with these limitations differ remarkably. By bringing both characters side by side, the contrast highlights how social institutions, especially marriage, put a restraint on women's ability to choose regardless of cultural context. This comparative feminist approach consequently exposes the shared structural oppression of women and how they differently dealt with it and the outcomes formed by personal agency and societal rigidity.

### **Research Question**

This study examines how Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* and Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* represent women's struggle for autonomy within the restrictive framework of Victorian marriage and social expectations. Drawing on a liberal feminist perspective, it argues that while both Isabel Archer and Edna Pontellier seek independence through personal choice and selfhood, their experiences expose the restrictions of liberal autonomy in the absence of institutional support. Through a comparative analysis, the study demonstrates that marriage functions as an instrument of domination and control rather than consensus, resulting in a fragile autonomy in Isabel's status and a tragic end in Edna's.

## Literature Review

Previous scholarship on *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Awakening* has dealt with women's autonomy, identity, and their marriage life and its restrictions in nineteenth-century society. Feminist critics such as Rennemo (2015) and Abdedaim emphasize women's struggle to find their autonomy fighting patriarchal control, viewing marriage as a place of unfulfilled desire and limitation. Priority and Bendjeddou highlight gender hegemony and psychological domination, particularly in Isabel Archer's marriage. Studies on Chopin by Kim (2015) and Jung (2015) interpret Edna Pontellier's awakening as a conflict between individual autonomy and social conformity, culminating in existential sacrifice.

### 1-2 Discussion

#### Textual analysis and comparison

Isabel deals with and accepts her mistakes as a result of her marriage, she is weakened, stressed and limited by Osmond wickedness Isabel is convinced, cautious and carefully steps into her relationship with Osmond as he is the most sensitive and unlikely to intervene with her freedom, which is the same reason that she rejected Casper Goodwood and Lord Warburton for. The established social norms and search for autonomy do not come along. Her marriage to Osmond comes through the idea that how strongly independent Isabel is, constructing an image of her to project his desires, ultimately reconfiguring this image of Isabel into that being.

Terzi (2025), in her paper explores Isabel's struggle to find conformity between her personal desires and what does the society expects from her. The marriage from Osmond marks these conflicts, although she received what looks like a better choice from other suitors, but it certainly shows Isabel's inner struggle between her individual fulfillment and conformity to society norms Her marriage to Osmond comes with certain duties, she has to face her own fears and her choices as she blunged into realities of life, defiantly "She was living under the oppression of a reality which had never yet been revealed to her."(chap. 42) marriage become a cage forced on her which is the result of her goodwill that she failed to grasp. Throughout the novel the writer never leaves space, and he

meticulously portrays Isabel's gradual perception of her limited circumstances. Patmore's poem, *The Angel in the House*, written in 1854, perfectly captures the struggles brewing in women's minds during this time period. "Man must be pleased; but him to please / Is woman's pleasure; down the gulf / Of his condoled necessities / She casts her best, she flings herself." (p. 53) This idea is underpinned with the assumption that most women prioritized the well-being of their families over pursuing their own ambitions. James simplifies the complex issue to reveal how the fights take a visible toll on their minds and how trapped women genuinely feel in their own home.

Additionally, Isabel's relationships are a metonymy for the Victorian culture that imminently permits gender injustice and male authority. Masculine characters like Osmond undermine Isabel's wish for independence, and her skill to grow with patriarchal practices. Her identity becomes closer with her husband's requirements, and with time, she is more forced to suppress her own commitment and self-perception. This phenomenon can be interpreted as the severe contradiction between women's commitments and expectations from life.

Isabel Archer represents women in relationships in the Victorian era and yet, women struggle to be free. Since relationships and obligation were critical, Archer gave insights into how hard it was to be subordinate within social standards. Archer goes through different periods in the search for independence: she has to resist and submit to the same thing, which necessitates a long struggle. Her realization that "She saw herself shut up with an odious figure and yet she had made her bargain" (Chap. 42) revealing the unwanted outcome of freewill that entrapped her. Edna Pontellier and Isabel Archer navigate through difficult terrain impacted by family priorities, social expectations, and individual proclivities. Edna's awakening is perceived when Chopin writes, "She was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (p. 62). Thus, Edna faces death in her relationships and society overcome what we have long known in her fight for independence. According to Primanty (2022), modern literary works often depict the challenges that women encounter, which is especially pertinent when analyzing Edna's experiences and the decisions that influence her course of her life.

Edna experienced different romantic endeavors to find some sort of independence from her marriage and from her expected social responsibilities. In order to demonstrate how marriage keeps her in a subordinate position, consume their power, and crushes their aspirations, Edna engages in unfaithful relationships and does what she wants throughout the book, disregarding her responsibilities as a wife. However, this carelessness reveals the fragility of her quest; occasionally, she finds herself hesitant between her harsh rules of behavior and her miserable reality. She alternates between the two lovers, but her adventures are not aimed at romantic ideas; rather, they are a sign of her liberation through extramarital affairs, which leaves her lost and confused as she attempts to rediscover who she is. Right now, it seems like everything is working against her desire for autonomy.

Isabel Archer's path to independence, on the other hand, is a far more delicate quest. But she is no longer tough, secure, and clever. Isabel actuality gradually and fiercely strolls her path to realization with determination. As James composed, "She had an infinite hope, and an infinite curiosity; she had a desire to see, to know, to understand". (chap. 3) Unlike Edna, who forcefully escaped all categorical identities, dropping the title of a lady or a mother, Archer's fights are regularly of an intellectual and moral-electoral kind. Isabel as a character inspired by standards, and what a reader should know is that even though she possesses power over her fate, she follows the path that appears extreme to us, but influential for her to handle the harsh reality. Isabel's choice to turn down Caspar Goodwood's proposal and the probable marriage that restricts its thematic comparable sharing to Edna's turbulent linkages. However, while Edna goes through her unmeasured adventures of awakening that leads her to despair, Isabel follows a completely different path seeking freedom through a lens of moral and social conscience, leading to partial acceptance of her situation as a wife to Osmond as the outcome of her ideals of sacrifice for the greatest good.

Both characters, Edna and Isabel, follow different paths to gain their freedom and independence and it is significantly affected by how they approach it. It is clear that Edna inclination towards beauty and arts act as temporary source of escape, but it does not fulfil her ultimate autonomy. Her artistic gift as a painter is not completely professional but the imagery is clear: "Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it

satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.” (p. 15) This gives her a partial or limited space to express her personality and an outlet for her limited being. Conversely, Isabel’s artistic sensibility does not exceed her ethical boundaries, it is part of her identity and reality, presenting an outstanding anatomy of how to be a woman in a certain period of time, a modern representation of women issues of that period.

Edna and Isabel come face to face with the restraints of Victorian society, both characters perceived these restrictions and dealt with them accordingly. Edna tried to face those difficulties by becoming a different person, as Elaine Showalter argues “Edna’s rebellion against the social and sexual roles assigned to women in the late nineteenth century marks her as a precursor of feminist heroines.” (p.13) or pretending to be something deliberately trying to find a space to fit in within a society that she does not belong to. Isabel is not in a better state, her struggle comes from a moral perspective, she somehow kept her sanity by attaching those challenges outside her identity, but this led to a complex form of acceptance for the greater good. Showalter notes that “The Victorian woman novelist was caught between conflicting demands of art and duty, self-expression and self-sacrifice” (p. 22) which reflects Isabel’s intellectual and moral struggle.

Within a male-dominated environment, the depictions of women in the novel for a place in this world could be deemed as representative of the search for identity, and the following routes of escape, that women have to choose to achieve their independence in these literary works. The reaction of society, which undoubtedly plays a significant role in this setting, as the impact of their quest to break the norms resonates strongly across Victorian society. As they stumble upon the superstructure of male domination, inequality, and society’s expectations, their autonomy ambitions are met with the rock wall whom relentlessly trying to go through seeking their autonomy.

As the journey of Isabel moves on it comes against some reactions from society which clearly uncover a range of misogyny and the underlying structural boundaries of the time. As Isabel advances to her new established world of wealth and freedom, she is being scrutinized by her social peers, endorsing culture as a figure which protects compliance with individuality. Bendjeddou (2010) points out that “Her personality ‘Isabel’ crumbles under the mean actions of her husband. She becomes dependent on him and submits to his principles” (p. 42). James and Chopin depicted women struggle during the 19<sup>th</sup> century

from a different perspective, but in general women in these works are minimized and objectified based on their sex not mentality or personality within a rigid framework and it is very clear as James depicted this image not to state that Ralph is on the opposite side of the spectrum but it suggests this notion “Her cousin used, as the phrase is, to chaff her; he very soon established with her a reputation for treating everything as a joke, and he was not a man to neglect the privileges such a reputation conferred.” (p. 85) which only used as a statement of commonness, at that time. Her rejection of traditional roles, in particular in her resistance to the marriage of Gilbert Osmond, encourages the ire and disappointment among his circle, by making it gray in a deep existential crisis. Isabel Initial rejection of marriage proposals from different suitors as Bendjeddou noted “Although Isabel Archer shows reservations towards marriage precisely because of its restricting effects on women's ambitions” (p. 41). Which creates a sense of dissatisfaction among people or to be accurate society, a behavior that can jeopardize her situation and inspire doubts. This rejection forms a state of isolation which can be devastating, explicating the society's inclinations or how things should be which are unfortunately against her plans. This defiance and societal pressure can lead to uncalculated outcomes represented by alienation which is a death sentence for a person like Isabel.

The reaction to Edna realization of her struggle for autonomy underscores the stringent conservative principle of the Victorian era. Edna's journey, in contrast to Isabel's, is markedly by an increasing dissatisfaction with the traditional domestic role prescribed for women. From the beginning her unsatisfied inclination is very clear:

The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier's eyes that the damp sleeve of her peignoir no longer served to dry them. She was holding the back of her chair with one hand; her loose sleeve had slipped almost to the shoulder of her uplifted arm. Turning, she thrust her face, steaming and wet, into the bend of her arm, and she went on crying there, not caring any longer to dry her face (p. 10-11)

a bewildered creature like Edna who cannot blame her husband, but it's the dissatisfaction of her being, leading to become more disenchanting and bolder as she asserts her sexual and

personal independence. Chopin demonstrated a keen awareness of social constraint by the response of community to Edna who does not condemn her for renouncing the duties of motherhood and domesticity. Almost literally, Chopin draws an unconditionally worthy portrait of a woman who is tormented, arousing contempt from her entire environment, especially for the surrounding disgust. It is no coincidence that, according to Bendjeeddou, statement “first gesture of self-liberation is marked by her refusal to join Mr. Pontelier who summons her to bed.” (p. 42) The battle is complete, multifaceted, and unyielding in her mission to show the enslavement that one accepts while living in a rigid society that can lead to these tragic resolutions.

The two women’s fates, in this regard, are sharply different and might be considered as a powerful symbol of the gender inter-relationships balance during that period. Most likely, Isabel’s desires are limited by her external circumstances, although she sees a certain scope for interpretation within them. As Bsharat and Nabhan explain, “The novel explores the intricacies of personal aspirations and societal expectations... capturing the struggles its characters face, notably the main heroine, Isabel Archer” (p. 45) She always has been under the microscope of victorian norms. On the other hand, Edna’s story tragically ends, and this could serve as an additional argument that freedom is unimaginable inside those rigid interrelations. Therefore, Bendjeeddou’s position is so relevant “the voyage of Isabel and Edna describe an arch of individual will, which is up against the external will and cannot go any further without social approval” (p. 67) the victorian society’s collective judgment, and an individual desire. In James’s *The Portrait of a Lady* and Chopin’s *The Awakening* women fight is not only a personal tendency but it serves as microcosms of wider discourse and its impact on an important segment of the society by deliberately endorsing restrictive cultural environment. Gilbert and Gubar argue that “The Victorian woman novelist was caught between conflicting demands of art and duty, self-expression and self-sacrifice” (p. 22), which reflects how marriage during the victorian period depicted as unfortunate deal for women at that time, the theme of marriage seems the best approach where women actually feels and experience societal barriers that limit her agency and Identity. The rich experience of both characters in the novels plays a great role in illuminating the rigid victorian discourse imposed on women, explicating how marriage become more of a controlling mechanism rather romance and family oriented institution.

Isabel and Edna dealt with their marriages differently revealing how suffocating it can be under societal obligation, their characters and personality affect their decisions. Isabel choice to stay in her marriage comes with consequences, a choice might be brave but enervated, while Edna's rejection takes a completely different turn which ends tragically revealing how the result of defying conventional victorian boundaries. As Bsharat and Nabhan notes "The novel explores the intricacies of personal aspirations and societal expectations... capturing the struggles its characters face, notably the main heroine, Isabel Archer" (p. 45), Isabel's unique state of mind reflects her ethical and intellectual struggle within restrictive societal environment. Edna trip to self-deficiency culminates in a tragic outcome that underlines the limitations of her social environment. Edna's endeavor to define her individuality and independence is that they are thwarted, not from without, but from within. The more she reaches toward her artistic and carnal desires, the more she notices the confinement of her maternal and marital, Jung (2015) expands that her sacrifice is aesthetic as well as existential, for it dramatizes the cost of female autonomy in a patriarchal culture. Her struggle to liberate herself had failed radically and permanently. It is conceivable that when Edna acted on her plan, it was an act of resistance and an acknowledgment of the despair that characterized her conflict. Kim (2015) notes that "critics have generally acknowledged the importance of *The Awakening* as an effectively crafted narrative of Edna Pontellier's conflict between individual autonomy and social conformity" (p. 7), emphasizing the unpleasant aspects of her fate. Jung (2015), further notes that this reflects the aesthetics of being sacrificed, where the search for individuality leads to existential despair. Instead of achieving a revealing release, the end of Edna highlights the suffocating control of social norms, leaving it not released but trapped within the limits of a patriarchal order that cannot accommodate its yearning for autonomy.

In contrast, the destiny of Isabel Archer in *The Portrait of a Lady* is characterized by partial autonomy, or more accurately, autonomy of commitment. Isabel's extinguished awareness of her plight against society's pressure and what she is expected to present in a uncomfortable family environment. Her marriage to Gilbert Osmond, a marriage option that symbolizes a politically fraught negotiation between autonomy and desire, embodies the conflict she faces. Although Isabel's stands between her refusal and acceptance to the

victorian discourse and its rigid roles, she does not have an escape or way out which compromised her autonomy. Wang (2022) argues that Isabel's marriage to Osmond "represents a compromise between her ideal of independence and the cultural pressures of Victorian society" (p. 9), showing how her free will is questioned rather than accomplished. Her choice can reveal the level of control marriage has on her personality represented by Osmond, intentionally depicted to affirm how rooted this society is by patriarchal determinants. Cargill (1957) supports James's notion around Isabel "to make his heroine focal rather than contributory, and to center everything in her consciousness, particularly emphasizing her view of herself" (p. 112), emphasizing how important self-awareness to the novel's critique of patriarchal norms.

Both Edna and Isabel symbolize the delicate and conflicting capacity of women seeking their autonomy in the victorian society. While Edna forced to make the most extremist choice that reflects impact of oppressive structure, Isabel relay on her ethical dimension, asserting her autonomy which reveals the challenge women have to deal with facing social boundaries. Both Edna and Isabel sacrificed part of their identity and independence which encapsulated the thematic research, marking a huge crack between personal desire and social expectations. How deep both characters are and what they give up for, as Jung explained, it's better to accept critical frames of women struggle brought up by James and Chopin. Now, it is very explicit that they uncover these deep ideas about the desire of women to became independent in the extremely brutal society.

Isabel's wit and her readiness to think independently have blossomed, yet she has met many challenges. Isabel is the author's picture of rebellion, by being herself. Osmond is Isabel's antagonist or a golden cell that Isabel makes house with. Isabel is compelled to stifle her beliefs and values, everything for which she stands to continue functioning. The same situation is visible in the example of relation to Gilbert Osmond as a mask of cleverness and manipulation. The event suggests the problem of perception and consideration, while the burden of marriage and its institution is mentioned by Isabel as the loss of freedom. The text leaves a space for choice, but whatever the case, it is not without traps and compromise the alternative would be failure, barely alive, and frequently forced to life that is never fulfilled.

Likewise, Chopin's hero is marked by performing the highest level of radical behavior as a reaction against social norms. She unlocks Edna's buried desires stimulating her refusal of women roles, being a wife or mother. Her fights for freedom on multiple fronts against her marriage, society and even against herself refusing the temptations of motherhood, Chopin's set the narrative to release Edna from her surroundings only to be seen and recognized as human. Her marriage to Leonce does not provide only what she supposes to do as a wife, Chopin's depicted these issues very clearly setting Edna to seek her autonomy passionately and without a campus. The writer in fact harshly pinpoints the most extreme measures which serves as moving comment on the consequence that women have to face to get their autonomy.

### **Conclusion**

In conclusion, the difficulties that arise from the polarity between women's aspirations and societal standards, both inside and outside. They clearly state the psychological cost of these adventures, suggesting that women who seeks autonomy have to sacrifice which is often leads to unpleasant painful ending. The key analyses presented by researchers like Von Cannon and Pflueger have been analyzed more deeply by these interpretations and show how both authors advanced women's principal problems of autonomy and identity that still inspire modern discussions. Cannon demonstrates the identity of these early feminist writings, particularly these from such a special period, and refers to the rigid patriarchal roles shown by James and Chopin, who represented a social problem. The behavior analysis of Pflueger draws similar aspects and notes, in both Isabel's and Edna's stories, what stands out to me is that they represent efforts by women to construct a self in a cruel culture that tries hardly to define women in terms of men. Therefore, Cannon and Pflueger delivered important commentaries on the importance of works by James and Chopin in the framework of liberal feminism. It is critical to acknowledge the historical meanings of these works to discover the evolution of women's attempts to become autonomous, which is perfectly depicted in the modern critical and analytical studies about women's identity, image, and their roles in society. The works of James and Chopin's and their intricate characters represent a cornerstone to the discourse on women autonomy,

shedding the light on deep-rooted social structure that has impact on the lives of women today.

## References

- ABDEDAIM, K. (2022). Marriage and female Autonomy as Depicted in the American Female Short Stories from 1870s to 1930s in Selected Works of Kate Chopin, Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Edith Wharton (Doctoral dissertation, MINISTRY OF HIGHER EDUCATION).  
<https://bu.umc.edu.dz/theses/anglais/ABD1631.pdf>
- Bsharat, T. R. K., & Nabhan, F. H. (2024). Navigating autonomy: Unraveling Isabel Archer's complexities in Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. *GAS Journal of Multidisciplinary Studies*, 3(1), 40–55. <https://gaspublishers.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/Navigating-Autonomy-Unraveling-Isabel-Archers-Complexities-in-Henry-Jamess-The-Portrait-of-a-Lady.pdf>
- Bendjeddou, M. Y. (2010). Images of Women in Nineteenth-Century American Fiction. *Revue CAMPUS*, (18), 40-45.  
<https://revue.ummt0.dz/index.php/campus/article/viewFile/179/120>
- CARGILL, O. (1957). "THE PORTRAIT OF A LADY": A Critical Reappraisal. *Modern Fiction Studies*, 3(1), 11–32. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/26276873>
- DSpace. (n.d.). Retrieved from <https://kuscholarworks.ku.edu/entities/publication/ef15bd54-fbe9-4f81-9de9-6c1267a0b407>
- Gilbert, S., & Gubar, S. (1979). *The madwoman in the attic: The woman writer and the nineteenth-century literary imagination*. Yale University Press.  
<https://ia803202.us.archive.org/32/items/TheMadwomanInTheAttic/The%20Madwoman%20in%20the%20Attic.pdf>

- Kim, K. (2011). EDNA'S PSYCHOLOGICAL DILEMMA: LACANIAN READING OF KATE CHOPIN'S "THE AWAKENING." *CLA Journal*, 55(1), 70–85. <http://www.jstor.org/stable/44394385>
- Hytönen, H. (2004). Representations of Love and Female Gender Identities in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. <https://trepo.tuni.fi/bitstream/handle/10024/91836/gradu00339.pdf>
- Jung, A. S. (2015). Threads of truth: aesthetics of a sacrificed self in the nineteenth-century American romance of Susanna Rowson, Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry James and Kate Chopin. <https://scholarsarchive.library.albany.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2413&context=legacy-etd>
- Pflueger, P. (2015). The Piano and Female Subjectivity: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) and Jane Campion's *The Piano* (1993). *Women's Studies*, 44(4), 468-498. <https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/00497878.2015.1013213>
- Potočková, K. (2010). The depiction of the changing consciousness of women in three novels of the turn of the century. <https://dspace.cuni.cz/handle/20.500.11956/21701>
- Prionty, A. Z. (2022). *Fallen" to new women: reflection on the social condition of women in light of modernist expression in the novels of Virginia Woolf and Kate Chopin* (Doctoral dissertation, Brac University). [16103001\\_ENH.pdf](https://search.proquest.com/openview/cc4c537ca7fdac6dc35d54e22d7ad726/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750)
- Rennemo, L. (2015). *Exploring the female self in the works of Kate Chopin: a study in nineteenth century literature, science and ideology* (Master's thesis, NTNU). [master thesis louise rennemo.pdf](https://search.proquest.com/openview/cc4c537ca7fdac6dc35d54e22d7ad726/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750)
- Smith, L. M. (2010). *An archetypal study of "The Portrait of a Lady" and "The Awakening"*. California State University, Dominguez Hills. <https://search.proquest.com/openview/cc4c537ca7fdac6dc35d54e22d7ad726/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=18750>

- Showalter, E. (1977). *A literature of their own: British women novelists from Brontë to Lessing*. Princeton University Press.
- Terzi, G. (2024, December). Navigating the complexities of marriage and romantic relationships in Henry James' "The Portrait of a Lady." Retrieved October 27, 2025, from [https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386371966\\_Navigating\\_the\\_Complexities\\_of\\_Marriage\\_and\\_Romantic\\_Relationships\\_in\\_Henry\\_James\\_'The\\_Portrait\\_of\\_a\\_Lady"](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/386371966_Navigating_the_Complexities_of_Marriage_and_Romantic_Relationships_in_Henry_James_'The_Portrait_of_a_Lady)
- Wang, X. (2022). *On Isabel Archer's growth in The Portrait of a Lady from the perspective of European and American cultural integration. Advances in Social Science, Education and Humanities Research*, 645, 7–12. [On-Isabel-Archers-Growth-in-The-Portrait-of-a-Lady-from-the-Perspective-of-European-and-American-Cultural-Integration.pdf](#)