

CHAPTER FIVE

THE CONCEPT OF FREEDOM FOUND IN THE STORY

In her childhood and in other stage of her age, Mrs. Edna Pontellier had experienced emotional flared-ups and infatuation for several times, meeting men and adoring youth she was in love with, but always failed to be fully absorbed in real world of love. She could only dream and contemplate in imagination, wondering what the taste would like and how wonderful her life would be if they were real. At early age she had ever fallen in love; she was at that time still the child who supposed to live in the world far from such adult thing. She already experienced such thing when she was still a little girl loving an adult officer who came to visit her father in Kentucky. At another time her affection once again broke the rule of loving young gentleman who was already engaged to be married to a young lady. She was always in the wrong position to love someone that it created bitter afflictions. She was a grown young woman when she was overtaken by what she supposed to be the climax of her fate. It was when "the face and figure of a great tragedian began to haunt her imagination and stir her sense" (p.8). It was the strongest affection influenced her emotion to

flame. At this moment, Mr. Pontellier came offering love that she failed several times to gain. Even though she could not deceive herself of not having passion or genuine affection to Mr. Pontellier, she thought that as the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her she could have place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dream. She did not know that this dream remained in her subconscious awaiting for another chance to revive .

This dream gave her abundant pleasure. No wonder wherever the dream of love came to her mind, she would feel the joy like intoxicating amenities, which made her forget and alienated from the reality. She enjoyed the feeling of it, while the reality gave her nothing but the burden of responsibility. Her marriage with Mr. Pontellier was kind of this. Since the beginning of her marriage she had made a decision to be a devoted wife giving all of her life for caring the family. She put herself in the world of reality leaving the dream behind. She let herself be the possession of other and gave up her own life for the interests of others. After her marriage , she also let herself be absorbed in religion. It was all the reality she thought at first could be convenient to live on. She even arranged regular reception

day¹ she had religiously followed since her marriage, as a sign of respect to her marriage's years with Mr. Pontellier before their coming in Grand Isle at summer time. It was the periode where she suppressed her-id to grow. She thought that it only provided a promising wonderful dream while she was always in wrong position to bring them into reality. And it always hurt to know that the dream she had was out of reach. This was that made her presumed marriage and devotion to family and social convention as the best solution for her suffering. In this period her characters were described as old-fashioned, full of clumsiness, lack of freedom, obedient and submissive to husband. She was so faithful that Mr. Pontellier never thought of illicit affairs that Mrs. Edna really did when she began to show her rebellious act and her intention to leave him away. It was in Grand Isle where they spent summer time that Mrs. Edna began to be aware that her marriage with Mr. Pontellier, her submission and obedience, to her family and social convention, including religion, were all against her desire.

After moving to a smaller house and being lonely caused by Robert's departure for Mexico, Mrs. Edna Pontellier let

². "Reception day": a day once a week when a woman was expected to be "at home" to receive visitors.

herself again to be dragged into another passionate affair, this time with Alc e Arobin, the youngman she met in horse race. She never regretted what she had done with Arobin nor afraid of breaking her love relationship with Robert because her ego said that everything in it was not based on love, but merely on kindling desire and passion. It was her passion that drew her to this socially prohibited deed.

Her id was unquestionably empowered when Robert came back from Mexico to New Orleans of being incapable to admit to the fact that he loved Mrs.Edna and he could not bury it for the rest of his life. Her id was blind, it could not see the fact that her position alone as the society and law-acknowledged wife of Mr.Pontellier was already a chain for her not to make any affair with other men. Her ego always said that she did not have a love feeling so far to Mr. Pontellier.

Instead of the lawlessness and indifference to social value characterizing her freedom, the contrary is obtained by using humanistic concept justifying the significance of freedom for each individual.

One of psychological humanistic concept's goals is to make common standards from which judgement can be derived of what should be meant as a true human being, on what extent certain people are appropriately assumed as true human

beings. It gets along with the words of Bugental (1967, p. 85) that the main goal of humanistic concept is to describe in a complete manner of standards or criteria from which people can be grouped as one who successfully leads their lives to the nature of so-called human being and another who fails. This concept is used by the writer to show that the character of Mrs. Edna Pontellier in the time when she spent summer in Grand Isle accorded to the former. It is important to note that eventhough it is not yet clear whether humanistic concept prescribes unlimited freedom similar to that implied in Mrs. Edna's character, this concept views freedom as important aspect of human being and its criteria justifies Mrs. Edna's awakening, regardless of its violation to social value, in which freedom plays most important role. Her self-development is perceived positive in humanist point of view. All interval developments she achieved, made her in terms of humanistic concept, to be the ideal of human being since she fulfilled all humanistic standards or criteria during herself-development. The writer tries to underline this criteria fulfillment as follows.

Mrs. Edna Pontellier like other common people who has needs required to be fulfilled. Some of them are satisfactorily fulfilled, but some are not. Mrs. Edna knew well about

herself, the dream she wished to have, her desire and needs. She knew what her conscience would tell in line with her reawakened old dream. But the energy from her subconscious caught her whole being when she felt that the panorama of Grand Isle automatically forced her to come into some introspection of old unaccomplished dream. Eventhough she had tried to get away from it by accepting Mr.Pontellier's marital proposal, this dream was still implanted in her subconscious and now reawaken at such a greater extent that enabled her to exert all of her strength and power to accomplish it. Grand Isle was in common to either the sight or experince she was very familiar with in Kentucky in her childhood provided many chance and possibilities for her to reawake. The sea, the wind, the sunlight, the atmosphere, people around her, and the beloved man all were there ready to inspire and reawake her old dream. All conditions in Grand Isle brought the mood she ever had before her marriage with Mr.Pontellier, pushing her awareness to grow to envelope in her whole being. She began to know her unique and distinctive world that none else might understand. The dream was part of her being and thus her self identity for she knew that her existence was not yet completed without this as well as its realization. The dream itself acted as unfulfilled need, but its sole existence already provided

entertaining happiness to Mrs. Edna. She knew that she should be in it persistently or else the dream would get away and the sadness and the burden of life would again come to her just like what she had done to her past dream. In short, she knew well who she was, what kind of world she would like to penetrate, the desire and dream she intended to pursue, the risk and consequence it would take in that course, what she would have to do in realizing her desire and dream and others. This, in humanistic perspective, is termed as the *ideal of authenticity*. This term is made to refer to one who understand her or his own world and voluntarily admits and follows it with all confidence. Authenticity implies being true to a norm discoverable from within the individual person. According to humanistic perspective, human capacity for reflexive awareness is the absolute prerequisite, that is the ability to treat self as an object of experience and knowledge, to evoke the past, to become aware of one's own intrinsic impulses.

But there is also another element in conscience, or, if you like, another kind of conscience, which we all have either weakly or strongly. And this is the "intrinsic conscience". This is based on the

perception of our own nature, of our own destiny or our own capacities, of our own call in life. It insist that we be true to our inner nature and that we do that deny it out of weakness or for advantage or for any other reason. (Tageson, 1968, p.6).

This feature was a lingering part of human being, some have it but do not develop it or press it in some certain reasons. The awareness of self world is very important for the loosing of this sense might means the lack of self understanding, and this means the eroding of being human being. Mrs.Edna has been reawaken from being not human being who denied her own dream and desire who was inseparable part of her being. Since then she was aware that she should not get away from it, but made unison with it, admitted its existence and follow its direction.

Related to this criterium of being the ideal human being is the finding of one's life meaning. It took place when she was aware of the worth of freedom and dream every living person deserved to have. They comprised of herself, the essential part of her being that none she was willing to sacrifice for. It was for herself and it signified the existence of her being. Her choice to follow freedom line rather than a submissive wife was that firstly made her to be

aware of the meaning of her life, that was the inclination that impelled her to follow the direction that was against what she had previously adhered, that is bond and restraint. Mrs. Edna Pontellier's finding of her life's meaning was very important for since then her life would change in a considerable degree; for since then she knew the path she should cross-over, knew of what she could do from life, knew how should be the appropriate human being and the significance of freedom. It relates to description in the novel cited like this:

" 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. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of "young woman of twenty-eight". (P.28)

This awareness was unconsciously lifted by her old experience when she was walking in the Kentucky meadow's grass. Its width as that of wide sea looked upon her as the world where she saw no boundaries of end and start. By relying this impression when she was in isolation, she could relate her existence as well as its meaning to the world.

According to humanistic perspective, this was another element signifies the ideal of being a true human being, and calls this phenomena with the term *self-transcendence*. This is to:

Knowledge of self and knowledge of the world in which we have our existence, to feel that our existence has some meaning (Joseph Nuttin, 1984, p. 110).

Strongly related to this is the situation where an individual feels to have a freedom in making decisions of her or his own life. Mrs. Edna was previously characterized as an obedient and submissive homemaker, drowned to the deep responsibility of family's caring, was very restricted to mere family life, and much committed to Mr. Pontellier. She then saw upon her another more pleasant world which contradicted to the first; she now stood in the nature of choosing between two alternatives one of which had its own consequences. There had been many factors held her to choose freedom to be the path of her life step. Not only the free style the way her closest friends commonly took in conducts that inspired her to suck more freedom, but also of the mood that was reawaken in her by the sight of summer sea that

much influenced her. Mrs. Edna often found that she felt attracted to the atmosphere and panorama of the sea. In isolation she felt her being and its meaning came to surface upon her eyes which its early form was blurred in the process of getting bright when she related this to past similar emotion-awaken sight of meadows's grass she experienced in childhood. To her the width of the two spots which seems to have no boundaries of end and begin served as the world in the middle of which she had a freedom to choose which direction she should take. But most of all, it was Robert who gave her a strongest magnetic power to loosen all restraints and clumsiness that enveloped her so tightly for several previous years. Robert was the replacement of some men she ever loved before she married Mr. Pontellier, thus he represented her dream, her pleasure, and her freedom. This was in Grand Isle that she began to know that the reality whose path she had previously followed naturally did not fit to her. All of these became quite attuned and integrated to her self leading her to the whirl of freedom by means of which she could fulfill her longing desire of true love. Her steps were getting more clearly directed against her husband, social value, and religion. Instead of being restrained, she decisively led to be dragged by wild will, breaking all the rules and awaited the consequences with

indifference. It was her firm choice to be free. She had a freedom to choose to be free and none else could stop or prevent her from doing it.

It is in line with humanistic concept about a real human being which confirms that: "The freedom of decision, so-called freedom of the will, is for the unbiased person a matter of course; he has a direct experience of himself as free" (Frankl, 1965, p.77). This phenomena in humanistic concept is termed as *self-determinism* referring to free decisions and choices one should take pertaining to her or his own life. In this novel Mrs. Edna was characterized as knowing herself in the free will to choose freedom as her life path. She was inclined to it because she knew well what she had desired and wanted to be. Only she who was very intimate to her nature call, and was not misled to this choice.

The final element of humanistic concept is that what is commonly known with the term of *actualizing tendency*. After conforming herself that a true love was her orientation with freedom as a main vehicle to achieve it, she now actualized and developed her identity and existence to that line. She, for example, rejected to be so submissive to Mr. Pontellier; persisted in pursuing her dream, love and desire fulfill-

ments; left her big house and husband just for a new but much smaller home; amused herself in all activities enhanced her mood of pleasure and contentment; let herself to be drown in the wave of this pleasure and contentment while forgetting all constraints, responsibilities, and restraint of reality ; got involved in affair with Alcee Arobin in order to have contentment of sexuality ;and made a love relationship with Robert, all of which were enveloped with freedom. She decisively actualized this freedom in all aspects of her life.

Supporting the former, the usage of conformity concept is again revealing the negative aspect of Mrs. Edna's freedom

The time before she came to Grant Isle, Mrs. Edna was described as a woman she was very obedient and submissive her husband. She gave all of her life for the sake of husband and children as if her existence in the earth was not worth of attention. She look it as the way common wives should be in line with what social values at that time had taught them. She thought that marriage meant surrender of one's life to others. It was that she had done. Several years living with Mr. Pontellier, she had closed all the chances to make herself happy, in preference to serve the

family's interests. Instead of her suffer, she continuously plunged herself into family duties and responsibilities. This suffer most of part, was caused by her firm suppression of desire to be free. She had already made the choice at the very first start, and her coming to Grand Isle had given her a clue that this was a mistake and not suitable to her nature. Till, at least, at this point she had followed the social values shared by all people at that time in her community. It contrasted to the next stage of her life when she began to value the freedom contributed to her awakening. Since this forward, she loosened restraints including her commitment to family. All of which gradually contradicted social value.

In this point of view of conformity concept stating that living in a society should inform and follow the rules of the group in which she or he lives. Mrs. Edna Pontelliers can be characterized as deviant who continuously broke those rules since she put the freedom as the direction she should follow and base of her conducts. Her affair with Robert alone has been a break to social value. It was then followed by a series of conducts that made her to be a deviant. Her status as a wife of Mr. Pontellier was that made her to be deviant in making affairs with other people. But she neglected it and continued to follow the call of her being for

freedom. Both Robert and Mrs. Edna Pontellier are described to be in dilemma choosing two different alternatives while Robert was in deep hesitation between following his passion to Mrs. Edna and his respect to social value, Mrs. Edna dealt with internal self-identification between submission to family as a fulfillment of social values for her status as a married woman and freedom which put her free being as a central. In this case social value was involved as one of two alternatives should whether to choose or not. As a reaction, Robert had tried to comply with social value requirement even though he had a tremendous problem in abating his passion to Mrs. Edna. His departure for and coming back from Mexico signifies this. His last decision to leave Mrs. Edna for good after knowing that Mrs. Edna was free in giving herself to anyone she liked showed that he was inclined to conform social value. In this case by conformity concept, it can be explained that he as part of community had commitment to follow its rules in the form of shared social values. He was aware that if he broke or deviated from this social value which forbade a man to make an illicit relationship with a wife of somebody else he would surely be alienated or hostile by the entire society. In this case he, like other characters in this novel, restrained themselves in the boundary of

social values. Differ with all of these characters, Mrs. Edna after identifying herself as free by nature directed herself to the path of freedom transcended all the existing rules and boundaries. This freedom was rooted in the requirement to fulfill her need of getting true love and in the fact that she was bound by marriage with Mr. Pontellier with whom she was not in love. In terms of conformity concept she was characterized as deviant, even though the condition of society at that time was rather change in the sense that tradition was more loosened than in the previous.

The role of this social value did not directly appear but through Robert's leave-taking; Mrs. Edna could allow herself to be drawn in freedom but could not prevent Robert from leaving her, which meant that she could not subdue social value's power whose existence manifested itself through Robert. His last decision to leave Mrs. Edna was a strike of social value to Mrs. Edna's freedom.

Besides the evident deviation and violent toward social value which serves as negative aspect, Mrs. Edna's fight for freedom also reflects the emerging demand for world recognition of women's right, capabilities, and aspiration as equally as men's. The chances for woman to actively participate in broadening spheres of life was through long and intricate process. There were always a resistance from

society, especially men who had dominated the world for decades and were not really ready to share it with women. Some reacted to the condition of their inferiority and it is represented in Mrs. Edna's fight for freedom. It is related to the fact that women's inferiority is much caused by the reluctance of society to give them freedom. Women must firstly fight for their freedom before the world recognize their position as equal as men, since it is the only means for women to obtain their ideals, dreams, and desires as real human being should have had. In this case, it relates to humanistic concept in explaining positive aspect Mrs. Edna's Awakening clarified above. But in terms of conformity concept, this freedom is not necessarily unrestricted or unlimited. Since human lives together with others as social being, thus one must conform one's conducts and behaviors according to shared values respected by all individuals involved. Everyone deserve and should fight for one's own freedom but this is restrained by other's freedoms. In this case there is always limitation to one own freedom. According to this point of view, Mrs. Edna's freedom was unlimited. She was identified as an evident deviant. It is supported by Freud Concept of id underlying that Mrs. Edna's freedom was forced by her lawless desire implant-

ed deeply in her subconscious. But, in another hand, regardless of its lawlessness, this desire serves as important force continuously motivating her to obtain her dream. This is what the writer tries to imply that there are both positive and negative views in examining Mrs. Edna's freedom.

The collision between Mrs. Edna's freedom and social value sometimes can be referred to the unreadiness of society to give place for women's emancipation. In this kind of society, tradition that holds women in subordinate position still gives a big influence. In this case, Mrs. Edna has made herself as a pioner opposing all established rules. This is the positive view the writer intends to underline. In this context, social value and tradition are viewed negatively insofar they keep women from being freedom.

From the analysis of characterization, it is evident that there is a leap change in Mrs. Edna's characters through which she experienced her awakening. At start she was obedient, self-sacrificed and submissive but by the last part she turned to be independent, strong, self-interest oriented and free. It refers to the change the women at that day should have made. But this effort was not as easily as it seemed. Kate Chopin refers to traditional value and religion as most obvious key factors preventing women from being as such. Mrs. Edna's dream to have true love signifies the fact that

women basically have dreams to obtain as men generally do. These dreams will never be able to realized if they are always suppressed by social condition to which they are belong. This is what Mrs.Edna intends to do. In order to be able to obtain her dream, Mrs.Edna should break the restraints, by continuously getting freedom traditional value and religion historically disapprove. Like common free people, in this overwhelming freedom Mrs.Edna felt joy, and revivid. So far this positively leads her to the right path of human being which her freedom is acceptable in the sense that human being basically need freedom to a certain extent. But in its further development, this goes to be unlimited in nature that will be inappropriate to any social system, even to one which has recognized women's freedom appropriately. It is not surprising, then, that Mrs.Edna fails to have Robert's love. Robert himself in this novel represents social value which does not conform to her unlimited freedom. This is important to note for *additional information* that this *unlimitedness* is a matter of fact Kate Chopin's prescription about the freedom women should have had. It is said that the freedom in Mrs.Edna's character is a kind of subjective thought of Kate Chopin about women's freedom (Gottesman, 1979, p.487). The failure of Mrs.Edna to have

Robert's love refers to rejection of society to Kate Chopin's idea about women's freedom.

Society refusal to Mrs. Edna's freedom, taken from sociological approach and setting analysis, in turn refers to social background when Kate Chopin devised Mrs. Edna's character. People at that time were in the way to modernity which mostly carried by the change in economical pattern into a more progressive and exploitative one, but in another hand they were still strongly holding traditional shared value. This dualism reflected in two contrasting alternatives Mrs. Edna should take between being a very submissive wife and free woman. It also reflects in other characters' behavior, such as Madam Ratignolle and Lady Ratignolle, who were free in their conduct but restrained themselves to be submissive women. This dualism is even more obviously reflected in Robert's character, who in one hand is described to be rather free in making regularly affectionate relationship every summer time with any girl, woman, or married woman he met in Grand Isle and on another hand is described with more propensity to social value than to following Mrs. Edna's freedom and his love to her.

Mrs. Edna's dream of having a true love in this novel, thus, serves as an objective on which she needs freedom to achieve it. But whatever Mrs. Edna's dream is, the main issue

lies on the freedom itself. It applies to the fact that women generally need to achieve their ideals, that under men domination they remain to be subordinate and suppressed. This is to say that women who choose to remain subordinate, in this novel represented through Ratignolles' characters, naturally never achieve what they really want. Their submission to family and husband is forced by social value, and that submission is not their call. In short, they do not follow what their heart say, but what social values determine. In this case they are dehumanized in the sense that they lose freedom, chance for independence, and most for all right to serve their own life and dream.