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DEATH AS WOMAN'S LIBERATION IN *THE AWAKENING* BY K. CHOPIN AND THE CONCEPT DEVELOPMENT IN *THELMA & LOUISE*

Bachelor's Thesis

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Narva 2024

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RESÜMEE

Käesolev diplomitöö „Surm kui naise vabanemine K. Chopini „Ärkamises” ja kontseptsiooni areng „Thelma & Louise'is”” on kahe feministliku teose võrdlev analüüs, milles naised julgesid valida äärmusliku ja radikaalse meetodina surma, et vabaneda sotsiaalsetest piirangutest ja meestepoolsest rõhumisest. K. Chopini romaan „Ärkamine” ja R. Scotti film „Thelma ja Louise” kajastavad ühiseid teemasid, mis ulatuvad isiklikust võitlusest sõltumatuse eest kuni laiemale üleskutseni sotsiaalsete muutuste saavutamiseks rõhutades naiste õigust enesemääramisele ja võitlust soolise vägivalla vastu. Kuigi neid kahte lugu lahutab peaaegu 100 aastat, on surm nii „Ärkamises” kui ka „Thelma ja Louise'is” kujutatud naiste patriarhaadi rõhumisest ja ühiskonna poolt naistele seatud piirangutest vabanemise sümbolina. Mainitud teostes on peategelaste Thelma ja Louise'i surm filmis ja Edna Pontellieri surm romaanis nende sõltumatuse kehtestamise ja patriarhaalsetele ootustele vastamisest keeldumise ülim vahend. See rõhutab ideed, et naised võivad oma individuaalsuse ja vabaduse eest võideldes rakendada radikaalseid meetmeid, kui puudub võimalus oma soovides kuuldavaks saada, toetus peres ja ühiskonnas ning kui seda on võimatu muuta, tekib lootusetuse tunne. Selliseks meetodiks osutub surm.

Edna Pontellier valib surma kui ainsa võimaluse täielikuks vabanemiseks sotsiaalsetest piirangutest, samas kui Thelma ja Louise teevad oma lõpliku kõrvalekalduva otsuse oma saatuse absoluutse kontrolli alla võtmise aktina. Nimetatud teosed rõhutavad naiste vastupanu patriarhaadile ja julgustavad mõtisklema selle üle, millist hinda peavad naised mõnikord oma sõltumatusega seonduvate soovide eest maksma.

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PREFACE

In the past century, feminist themes have increasingly entered the spotlight becoming focal points in various publications and igniting robust discussions in social media. Throughout history, women have contended with persistent misogyny, a struggle that has profoundly influenced their representation in literature. In the Middle Ages, societal norms largely precluded women from being recognized as writers. It wasn't until the 19th century that women began to emerge significantly in the creative sphere, coinciding with the advent of the feminist movement. By the 20th century, feminism had cemented a robust position in the cultural and social fabric of the USA and Great Britain.

This thesis is a comparative analysis of two feminist creative works in which women dared to choose an extreme and radical method – death – to free themselves from social restrictions and male oppression. Comparative analysis of feminist ideas of two eras through the context of death is given: Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* of the Victorian era and R. Scott's film *Thelma & Louise* of the modern period. The feminist idea in the context of death in the film *Thelma & Louise* and in the novel *The Awakening* is expressed through the liberation of female characters from social restrictions. In both works, the death of the main characters symbolizes the final rejection of the social norms that oppress them, emphasizing their desire for freedom and autonomy, even at the cost of their own lives.

The Bachelor's thesis is structured into an introduction, two main chapters, and a conclusion. The introduction provides an overview of the various types of feminism and their impact on literature, sets forth a hypothesis, and outlines the research objectives. Chapter I delves into the feminist literature of the Victorian era featuring a literature analysis of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Chapter II presents a content analysis of *Thelma & Louise* against its historical backdrop, including a comparative analysis of female characters.

The conclusion synthesizes these analyses and addresses the initial hypothesis.

INTRODUCTION

1.1. History of Feminism

Feminism is a movement aimed at eliminating sexism and oppression, striving to achieve absolute gender equality both in law and in everyday life. Throughout history, there have been four key waves of feminism, each of which has left a significant mark on the struggle for women's rights (Encyclopaedia Britannica webpage). The feminist movement has influenced such basic fundamental rights of women as the right to vote (voting rights). In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, the first-wave feminist movement focused its efforts on gaining women the right to vote. Women in different countries, thanks to activists of the movement, gradually gained voting rights, starting in New Zealand in 1893 and ending in other countries in the following decades.

Right to education and work.

Feminists fought for equal educational and professional opportunities. The feminist movement helped change laws that allowed women to enter universities and professional fields that had previously been considered exclusively male (Wikipedia webpage).

Reproductive rights.

An important achievement of feminism was the recognition of women's reproductive rights, including access to contraception and safe and legal abortion. This gave women control over their own bodies and reproductive health.

Protection from violence.

The feminist movement has actively campaigned against domestic violence and sexual harassment, pushing for laws to protect women from physical and sexual violence. Crisis centers and hotlines have been established to support victims.

Rights to equal pay.

Feminism has also raised the issue of the gender pay gap, pushing for legislation aimed at ensuring equal pay for equal work for men and women.

The first wave of feminism, spanning the 19th century and early 20th century, focused on the fight for women's suffrage, becoming the foundation for the further development of feminist demands. The second wave, which erupted in the 1960s, took on the defense of reproductive rights, including access to abortion, highlighting

the need to expand women's rights and freedoms. The third wave, which began in the 1990s, was characterized by a deepening of issues of gender identity and the fight against female heteronormativity. The fourth wave, which emerged in 2014 (Vox webpage), emphasized digital technology as a means of fighting for women's rights, expanding the horizons of the feminist movement.

Feminism has evolved from the early actions of the suffragists, who sought to give women the right to vote and active participation in public life, to large-scale initiatives covering all spheres of life in the pursuit of equal rights with men. According to History.com webpage, the feminist movement got its start in the 20th century through the suffragettes and the Votes for Women campaign, which had a significant impact on unifying women in Britain. By 1920, British women won the right to vote, laying the foundation for later feminism. This wave also included the struggle for women's educational rights, their right to property and participation in public and political life. First-wave leaders such as Susan B. Anthony and Elizabeth Cady Stanton in the US played a key role in achieving women's suffrage.

Following the attainment of voting rights, feminism entered a “second wave” era, emphasizing the need for further political and social reform. Despite advances, traditionally women had to remain confined to household management and social responsibilities. However, World War II was a turning point that proved women's ability to take active roles at all levels of public life, including the military and industrial sectors. However, as the 1963 publication of *The Feminine Mystique* Betty Friedan shows, women are forced into unsatisfactory housekeeping and caregiving (History.com webpage).

Third-wave feminism in literature represents a diversity of voices and perspectives, emphasizing the importance of inclusivity and intersectionality in the fight for gender equality. Third wave feminism began in the early 1990s and continued until the early 2010s. It was characterized by a deepening and broadening of the feminist movement, with an emphasis on individualism, diversity and global issues. The third wave differed from previous waves of feminism in its focus on differences between women, including race, class, sexual orientation, and identity, and in its commitment to challenging gender heteronormativity. The third wave criticized the exclusivity of previous waves and sought a more inclusive and intersectional approach. During this period there was an adoption and expansion of concepts such as “queer” and “intersectionality”.

The fourth wave of feminism, which began around 2012 and continues to the present, is characterized by the use of the Internet and social media to mobilize and spread feminist ideas. The fourth wave uses social media to spread feminist ideas and actively fight discrimination and violence on a global scale. This wave focuses on combating sexual violence, gender inequality in the workplace, and promoting the idea of intersectionality, which considers the intersection of gender with other aspects of identity such as race, class, and sexual orientation.

We Should All Be Feminists (2014) by Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie - the essay is based on Adichie's speech of the same name, in which she examines the importance of feminism in the modern world and calls for gender equality. Her words: "Feminism is not a fight against men. It is a fight to eliminate gender stereotypes" have become iconic and widely quoted.

Girls and Sex (2016) by Peggy Orenstein – exploring attitudes toward sexuality among today's youth, Orenstein discusses how cultural and media images influence perceptions of sexuality and consent, emphasizing the importance of sexuality education and equality.

Fourth-wave feminism, by actively using digital platforms to spread its ideas, has brought attention to a variety of issues related to gender inequality and contributed to a new generation of literature and public discourse aimed at fighting for equality and justice.

1.2. Types of Feminism

Feminism includes many directions, each of which has its own characteristics and goals (Sahodar webpage):

- 1) Liberal feminism strives for gender equality within the existing political and legal structures of liberal democracy. It focuses on equal rights and opportunities for women, including equal pay, education and political representation.
- 2) Radical feminism considers patriarchy to be the root of gender inequality and strives for its radical transformation. Radical feminists particularly focus on issues related to sexual violence, the exploitation of women and the need to rethink personal relationships.

- 3) Cultural feminism celebrates and values the differences between men and women, believing that feminine characteristics such as caring, empathy and tenderness should be highly valued in society.
- 4) Black feminism highlights the unique experiences and struggles of black women, paying attention to the intersections of race, class, and gender. It criticizes traditional feminism for ignoring issues of race and class discrimination.
- 5) I-feminism (individualistic feminism) emphasizes the individuality and personal responsibility of women for their lives. This movement calls for self-determination and autonomy, rejecting the idea of women as victims.
- 6) Difference feminism / postmodern feminism combines the ideas of poststructuralism and postmodernism, emphasizing the plurality of women's voices and experiences. This movement criticizes universal theories and seeks to understand the differences between women as well as analyze the language and cultural narratives that support gender inequality.

Each of these areas contributes in its own way to the fight for gender equality, highlighting the diversity of strategies and approaches within the feminist movement. These different types of feminism are subject to analysis for better understanding their contribution to the overall goal of achieving gender equality. When other means of struggle fail, feminism can influence women to choose death as a symbolic act of liberation from patriarchal restrictions. In literature and movies, it is often portrayed as a radical step towards self-determination in an environment where traditional social structures oppress and limit women's lives.

The idea of death in world literature is a universal theme that permeates through the works of different eras and cultures enriching them with deep philosophical, ethical and aesthetic reflections. Death, as a key element of the human experience, provides a powerful tool for exploring a wide variety of aspects of life, from personal emotions and interpersonal relationships to social structures and cosmic patterns. In literature, the idea of death serves not only as the end point of existence, but also as a means for developing themes of self-knowledge, the meaning of life, love, loss, overcoming and eternity, liberation and the pursuit of complete freedom. It is important to note that in literature the theme of death is often associated with feminism because of its deep symbolic and metaphorical potential for exploring

issues of power, oppression, liberation and transformation. The theme of death is used in literature to reveal the deep experiences of women, their desire for freedom and struggle with social restrictions. Death serves as a kind of liberation from suffering, an act of resistance, emphasizing how difficult it is for women to find their place and gain freedom in a world where they have rights and opportunities limited. Death can be used as a means of criticizing social norms and gender expectations, protesting against a patriarchal society, or as a symbol of transition to a new, liberated state of existence.

Examples from the literature:

- *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin.

In Chopin's novel, the death of the main character, Edna Pontellier, is presented as an act of liberation from social restrictions and the inability to fully express one's individuality within the framework of a patriarchal society. Edna chooses death as a way to avoid returning to overwhelming social and family responsibilities. "In general, the novel is about Edna Pontellier, the woman who was trapped in the figure of a mother and wife. She struggled as a woman in the 19th century to get equal liberty and follow her desires" (Hellystia, 2021, p. 642).

- *The Yellow Wall-Paper* (1892) by Charlotte Perkins Gilman.

Although death is not the final act in this story, the theme of psychological decay and the main character's struggle with social expectations and medical suppression of female will are closely related to feminist themes. This is the story of mental illness - or the liberation of the protagonist. Having gone crazy, the main character feels free, tearing wallpaper off the wall, as if trying to get rid of the past. Finding freedom through the death of the soul. "It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old foul, bad yellow things" (Gilman, 2022, p. 27).

- *Song of Solomon* (1977) by Toni Morrison.

In this novel, Morrison explores themes of family, history, and racial identity with death being one of the key themes. The death of characters often symbolizes social and emotional release from historical and personal traumas as well as a transition to a new form of existence.

Death in literature associated with feminism is often used to highlight criticism of social structures that limit women and express a desire for liberation from them. These works offer insightful analysis of women's struggle for their autonomy and right to self-expression.

1.3. Feminism's Influence on Literature

Until recently, the world of publishing was dominated by men, and these men carried their prejudice: females had to work twice as hard to get published, and even then, they were not as revered as male authors. They were encouraged to suppress their gender in their work. The famous example is J. K. Rowling, the author of the Harry Potter series. She did not use her real name – Joanne Rowling – because it would make it too obvious that she is female, and women cannot sell as many books as men. Feminism has had the biggest influence on the way literary texts are read, taught, and evaluated. Feminist literary theory has deliberately transgressed traditional boundaries between literature, philosophy, and the social sciences in order to understand how gender has been constructed and represented through language. Furthermore, a significant influence on children's literature, as well as our society as a whole, can be seen, too.

The arrival of the 20th century saw feminist authors emerge, using their fiction as a means to protest against the difficult position of women.

The evolution of the feminist movement in literature is as follows:

- First-wave feminism is mainly concerned with the treatment of women in the male-dominated society. The major works that raised the issues of feminism during this phase are Mary Ellmann's *Thinking About Women* (1968), Kate Millett's *Sexual Politics* (1970), and Germaine Greer's *The Female Eunuch* (1970);
- Second-wave feminism addressed the issues of equality and discrimination. It includes such writings as Ellen Moers' *Literary Women* (1976), Elaine Showalter's *A Literature of Their Own* (1977), and Nina Baym's *Woman Fiction* (1978);
- Third-wave feminism was characterized by a deepened interest in individuality and intersectionality, exploring how gender, race, class, and sexual orientation impact women's experiences.

Gender Trouble (1990) by Judith Butler — although an academic text, this work had a significant influence on the third wave, offering a radical new way of thinking about gender identity.

The Beauty Myth: How Images of Beauty Are Used Against Women (1990) by Naomi Wolf. The main idea of the *Beauty Myth* is that as women's social weight has increased, the pressure they feel due to unrealistic social standards of beauty increases due to the commercial influence of the media.

Conversations with Famous Women (1995) by Naomi Wolf is a collection of interviews with women from different fields, highlighting their varied achievements and struggles.

The fourth wave, which actively used digital platforms to spread ideas, focused on the issues of sexual violence, gender inequality in media and the workplace, and continued to develop concepts of intersectionality.

Bad Feminist (2014) by Roxane Gay is a collection of essays that explores the intersection of feminism with race, culture, and identity, a broad and inclusive view of contemporary feminism.

#MeToo: Stories That Must Be Told – several anthologies and collections of essays and social media stories sparked by the *#MeToo* movements, the current influence of the fourth wave in literature, focusing on stories of sexual violence and harassment. In the third and fourth waves, feminism is actively involved in the discussion of feminist issues, producing films that explore and highlight various aspects of women's experience, geographical equality and the struggle for rights.

1.4. Feminism in Cinema

Third wave of feminism in cinema (1990s – early 2000s).

During this period of feminism in cinema, the focus was on the diversity of female characters, their complexity and versatility. Films of this period often deal with issues of gender identity, sexuality, and illustrations of race and class.

Examples of films:

- *Thelma & Louise* (1991) – dir. Ridley Scott. The film became a symbol of women's emancipation and the struggle for freedom, exploring themes of friendship, violence and resistance in a patriarchal society;

- *The First Wives Club* (1996) – dir. Hugh Wilson. A comedy showcasing the empowerment and mutual support between women after divorce, highlighting their desire for independence and self-realization.

Fourth wave (2012 – present) of feminism in film uses platforms to discuss sexual violence, gender inequality and actively incorporates social media to disseminate and discuss feminist ideas. The films often explore themes of intersectionality, minority representation, and activism.

For example, *Hidden Figures* (2016) – dir. Theodore Melfi. The film tells the true story of NASA's African-American women mathematicians, highlighting their contributions to the space program against the backdrop of racial segregation.

Both waves of feminism in film allow for the gradual development of representations of female characters, their roles and experiences, enriching principal mechanisms and diverse stories that provide dialogue about geographic equality and social justice.

1.5. Sociocultural Analysis: What Does It Mean?

Sociocultural analysis involves the study of how social, cultural, economic and political factors influence society and culture (Thpanorama webpage).

According to Vygotsky (Thpanorama webpage), individual development cannot be understood without the sociocultural context in which it is immersed.

This work examines the sociocultural analysis of feminism, how feminist ideas and movements changed social norms and cultural views. This includes changes in legislation regarding gender equality, improving women's access to education and work, and changing ideas about gender roles in the family and society. Feminism has also contributed to the development of media and arts by presenting women's experiences and perspectives, which in turn has influenced cultural discourses and contributed to greater recognition and understanding of gender diversity and equality. Feminism has had a significant impact on the development of films and media, bringing more gender diversity and themes related to women's rights and lives. This has led to the creation of works in which female characters are presented as full, complex individuals rather than simply secondary objects of male attention. Feminism has also contributed to the emergence of stories that highlight issues important to women, such as equality, sexual rights and the fight against gender-

based violence, thereby expanding the understanding of women's experience and promoting a more equitable social dialogue. Feminism has influenced the development of films and media through the creation and promotion of films with strong female characters and feminist themes, such as *Thelma & Louise*.

Ridley Scott was inspired by the screenplay by Callie Khouri, who wrote the screenplay for *Thelma & Louise* (Wikipedia webpage) to explore deep themes of female friendship, self-determination and the fight against societal restrictions. She wanted to create a story that reflected the complex issues women face and showed how they can find strength through mutual support and personal rebellion against patriarchal oppression.

This was an unusual view of female independence and friendship for that time. The story of two women who defied the constraints of their everyday existence and embarked on a journey of self-awareness and freedom resonated with Scott. He saw an opportunity to create something epic and meaningful that could change the way female characters are portrayed in cinema.

Thus, feminism influenced the creation of *Thelma & Louise* through its emphasis on self-determination and the fight against gender stereotypes. The film subverts traditional roles by presenting heroines who take their destiny into their own hands and refuse to be victims of circumstance or male violence. This was revolutionary for Hollywood, where women were most often portrayed in subordinate roles. *Thelma & Louise* became a symbol of women's emancipation and inspired further feminist works in the field of cinema and television.

Media platforms and channels have emerged that highlight issues of gender equality and offer alternative perspectives on traditional gender roles. For example, the media channel *an.schläge* is a feminist magazine based in Vienna, Austria, founded in 1983.

An.schläge is a unique project in the German-language media space published eight times a year. As a feminist news magazine, *an.schläge* covers politics, media and the arts, economics and science from a feminist perspective. “We raise issues that are largely ignored by the mainstream media and provide a platform for debate within the women's and LGBTIQ movements. We are convinced: every topic is a feminist

topic! That's why we always combine high journalistic quality with a clear feminist position" (an.schläge webpage).

2. METHODOLOGY

The study of this work, “Death as a woman’s liberation in *The Awakening* by K. Chopin and the concept development in *Thelma & Louise*”, may include several stages of analysis and comparative study of both works:

1) Analysis of the novel *The Awakening* by K. Chopin

Studying the main themes and motifs of the work, which include liberation from social norms, the search for self-identification and personal freedom. Analysis of the plot, characters and thematic motifs related to liberation and analysis of plot and key scenes related to the theme of death and its meaning for the main character.

2) Study of the film *Thelma & Louise*

Analysis of plot, characters, and thematic motifs related to liberation and death. Comparison of the images of the main characters of both works and their relationship with the theme of liberation through death.

3) Sociocultural analysis

Analysis of the influence of social context and sociocultural factors on the perception of death as a means of liberation in both texts. An assessment of the evolution and development of the concept of death as a tool for women's liberation in literature.

4) Comparative analysis

Comparison and contrast of the role of death in the lives of the main characters in both works.

5) Theoretical part

A review of the existing theories and concepts of death in literature and feminist criticism. Identifying key aspects of feminist theory related to liberation and self-determination through death. Application of selected theoretical approaches to the analysis and interpretation of both works.

6) Conclusions

Formulation of the main conclusions regarding the theme of death as liberation for women in *The Awakening* and *Thelma & Louise*. The methodology of the work includes an analytical approach to two literary works that explore the theme of death as liberation for women, as well as their relevance to feminist and literary theories. Comparing different types of

creative and feminist works, such as the film and the novel, and analyzing them over different periods of time, this thesis can be useful for several reasons. It allows to consider the topic of death and women's liberation in a broader context helping understand how this topic has been perceived and interpreted in different artificial forms and genres. Also, works from different periods of time reflect the sociocultural and historical characteristics of their time. Comparing works from different eras reveals changes in views on the topic of death and women's liberation, as well as in the role and representation of women in society. The study of the development of the concept of death as a liberating factor for women over time reveals changes in ideas about women's liberation and self-determination. This helps to understand what factors and events can influence the perception of death and its meaning in society. The novel and film represent different forms of art and means of expression, which can lead to different interpretations of the same theme. Comparison of different types of creative works allows to evaluate the variety of approaches to the topic of death and a woman's gain of freedom through death and their influence on the understanding of this topic. Thus, comparing different types of creative and feminist publications over different periods of time in the work is an important method for gaining a deeper understanding of the topic and its evolution in culture and society. Using these research methods helps achieve the main goal of the research work – to expand the understanding of death as a cultural and literary phenomenon and its role in the context of women's emancipation.

3. CHAPTER I. FEMINIST LITERATURE OF THE 19th CENTURY

Feminist literature in the 19th century played a crucial role in shaping and advancing ideas of gender equality. During this era, women were fighting for their rights, including the right to education, voting, and equal opportunities. Several notable feminists of the time were also engaged in literary creation, expressing their views and analyzing the status of women in society.

Here are some representative examples of 19th-century feminist literature:

- Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797): although her most famous work, *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*, was published in 1792, it is one of the earliest works of feminist philosophy. Wollstonecraft raised issues regarding education, equality, and the social status of women. In this book, she argues that women should have equal opportunities for intellectual development and education to men and should be raised as independent women capable of independent thinking and self-determination rather than being the property of their husbands;
- George Sand (1804–1876): a French writer, she advocated for women's rights and criticized social norms. Her novels, such as *Lélia* and *Indiana*, contain elements of feminist thought. In the novel *Lélia*, Sand explores how social and sexual restrictions suppress female individuality and desire, criticizing traditional roles and expectations placed on women. Lelia, the main character, fights for her right to live independently and love whom she chooses, which challenges the accepted norms of patriarchy;
- Kate Chopin (1818-1895): her most famous work, *The Awakening* (1899), deals with themes of sexuality, marriage and social constraints for women, where death is equated with freedom and is seen by the protagonist as the only escape from these restrictions.

With the development of the film industry in the 20th century, feminist issues became more visible and widely discussed on screen. This process is urged by several key factors:

- Films began to reflect current issues related to feminism, such as gender inequality, violence against women, motherhood, etc. This helps to raise issues that might have been previously ignored;

- The rise of female influence in the industry: more women are becoming part of film production as directors, screenwriters, producers, and actors. This allows them to contribute to the creation of films and raise awareness about the issues women are facing;
- Films became more attentive to various female perspectives. Stories about strong women, their life challenges and the fight for equal rights often become the central theme.

Feminist themes are integrated into various genres, including drama, comedy, science fiction, and even superhero films. This makes feminist ideas accessible to a wider audience. One example is Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*. Based on this work, the analysis of the influence of feminism on the literature of that time was carried out. The novel *The Awakening* (1899) is a significant work in the context of American literature, especially in the field of feminist literature. The theme of the death of the main character – Edna Pontellier – as a form of liberation plays a central role in understanding the meaning and significance of the novel. The sociocultural context in the novel *The Awakening* plays a key role in comprehending the themes and conflicts addressed by the author. The late 19th century in America was characterized by strict social norms, especially regarding women. Women were expected to be devoted wives and mothers focused on home and family. “Edna disapproves the traditional and patriarchal system of family. She was neither a traditional wife, nor a traditional mother (Sharma, 2014, p. 884)”. Edna Pontellier, who defies these expectations, is a complex and innovative character for her time. Over the course of the novel, she goes through a process of self-awareness and self-determination. *The Awakening* was written during a period when women actively fought for their rights and freedoms. However, the society of that time was still greatly restricting them. The novel reflects this struggle through Edna Pontellier's personal experience. The central theme of *The Awakening* is female self-determination, exploring the theme of personal choice and self-determination through the eyes of the main character, Edna Pontellier. Her desire to find her own path and rejection of the traditional roles of wife and mother at the end of the 19th century is a central element of the plot. It is also necessary to take into account where the novel takes place and in what society the main character was born and raised.

3.1. Influence of Creole Culture

Analyzing the internal conflicts and the awakening of the main character in the novel *The Awakening*, one cannot help pointing out the significant role of the influence of Creole culture on the behavior and relationships of the characters; in the context of the novel, Creoles refer to the descendants of French and Spanish colonists living in Louisiana. The author attempts to immerse the reader in the atmosphere of Creole, the society of Louisiana, where Edna was born.

Creole society is characterized by strict social norms, especially regarding gender roles and family relationships. “Marriages were usually business arrangements, not for love, and the men expected their wives to be passive and innocent lovers” (Bauman, 1992, un. 7). This has a direct impact on the behavior of Edna and other characters, especially women, who are expected to follow certain behavior patterns. However, Creole culture allows for more open communication between men and women, including flirting and light romantic relationships, as seen in Edna's interactions with Robert Lebrun and other characters. Creoles in the novel are often portrayed as more emotionally open and free-thinking, which contrasts with the more conservative Anglos – American characters. This affects Edna, who begins to strive for greater emotional honesty and self-expression. In Creole society, women were sometimes given more freedom and educational opportunities than in other cultural contexts of the time. This is also reflected in the novel, where Edna, although experiencing limitations, is also shown to be intellectually and emotionally independent. Edna's internal conflict and feelings of loneliness are further intensified by the social restrictions of Creole society. “But even if she alone of all women found the strength within herself to fight and get out of her situation, she would still be alone” (Chopin, 2006, p. 185). Edna's cultural dualism may also strengthen her perception of death as a path to freedom, since she is part of the American and Creole collective.

3.2. Influence of Key Characters

In Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, key characters play important roles reflecting various aspects of society and the personal struggles of the main character, Edna Pontellier. In order to understand and feel the hurricane of emotions and

sensations of Edna and her internal struggle and the influence of the characters on Edna, each character will be considered separately.

Edna lives in New Orleans in an era when women were required to be modest, caring mothers and devoted wives. “They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (Chopin, 2006, p. 19). At the beginning of the novel, she appears to conform to these standards, but gradually develops her own individuality and desires that transcend her social role. As the story progresses, Kate Chopin openly portrays Edna's sexuality as a means of her emotional and intellectual awakening. She has become aware of her feminine, sensual side and understands her desires. 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 a young woman of twenty-eight—perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman” (Chopin, 2006, p. 27). Women's sexual freedom was a taboo topic in the society of that time. Chopin openly discusses Edna's sexuality, desires and emotional ties, which was quite progressive for the period.

Per Seyersted writing in 1969, near the beginning of the literary revival that propelled *The Awakening* into its present place of importance in American literature, noted that part of what makes the novel feel so modern is Edna Pontellier's realization that “the physical component of love can stand apart from the spiritual one, that sensuous attraction is impersonal and can be satisfied by a partner she does not love” (The Kate Chopin International Society's webpage).

The novel touches on the difficulties faced by women trying to find their individuality within the framework of social and family roles that limit them. In the novel, Edna is a symbol of resistance against social norms, engaging in romantic relationships outside of marriage and pursuing artistic expression. “She produced the roll of sketches and started to unfold them. ‘I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something... I might study for a while with Laidpore’” (Chopin, 2006, p. 97). Her actions can be interpreted as an attempt to find her identity in a world where women were often denied the right to independence.

3.2.1. Robert Lebrun

Robert is a young, charming man who spends the summer with Edna and they become romantically involved.

Robert represents the object of Edna's romantic feelings and desires, but these desires and feelings contradict the role of wife and mother in Edna's understanding, which further aggravates her internal conflict. He is like a mirror for Edna, which reflects her desires and ambitions, as well as restrictions that were imposed on women at that time. "He, apparently, was the only person on earth who understood her and appreciated her" (Chopin, 2006, p. 132). This quote reflects the emotional connection and understanding between Edna and Robert, which is the basis for her romantic feelings and desire for self-expression. Robert is charming and easy-going, but he doesn't have the emotional maturity for a real relationship and doesn't want to take responsibility for the consequences of their relationship. This leads to him suddenly leaving for Mexico, leaving Edna alone with her feelings and questions. The presence and interaction with Robert causes deep emotional excitement in Edna and awakens in her a passion and desire for self-realization and awareness of her needs for personal freedom and independence, which becomes the key moment of her inner awakening. Robert is the catalyst for Edna's awakening. Robert's words "I loved you, Edna, as I could not love more..." (Chopin, 2006, p. 189). It is the expression of his passionate feelings for her that highlights their mutual attraction and influences Edna's decision to defy societal expectations. Thus, Robert Lebrun is an important element in the development of Edna's internal conflicts and in her journey to self-awareness and self-expression. His character highlights the complexity of human relationships and the impact of social norms on personal freedom and choice.

3.2.2. Alcée Arobin

Alcée, unlike Robert, represents more traditional aspects of society and family life. He reminds Edna of her responsibilities as a wife and mother, as well as the social expectations placed on her. "He hasn't forgotten how nice she was in those days" (Chopin, 2006, p. 130). It is Alcée's vision of Edna as a wife and mother, symbolizing the traditional roles and expectations she is expected to fulfill. Edna is disappointed in her marriage and her husband: "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” (Chopin, 2006, p. 84). This reflects her disappointment in her marriage and her desire to find true self-expression and freedom, which she does not experience in her relationship with Alcée. Her relationship with Alcee highlights Edna's internal conflict between her personal desires and societal expectations. Alcée Arobin in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* plays a key role in the development of the story and the inner world of the main character, Edna Pontellier. Arobin is the epitome of a seducer, reflecting the dark and forbidden sides of Edna's desires and her attempts to find personal freedom and self-expression. The Embodiment of Sexual Liberation: Arobin represents an opportunity for Edna to explore her sexuality outside the norms and restrictions of her marriage. Their relationship is less romantic and more physical, allowing Edna to explore her sexual desires. He is not constrained by social norms, which makes him attractive, but at the same time dangerous for Edna. Influence on Edna in *The Awakening*: The relationship with Arobin contributes to the further “awakening” of Edna. She begins to understand more deeply her needs and desires, as well as the limitations that society imposes on her.

3.2.3. Mr. Pontellier

A very important character in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* is Edna's husband – Mr. Pontellier – representing a typical image of a late 19th century man in the society of the American South. “All declare that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world” (Chopin, 2006, p. 9).

“Mr. Pontellier was a great favourite, and ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say good-bye to him” (Chopin, 2006, p. 9). His role in the novel is that of a traditional family man who expects his wife to fulfill her responsibilities as a wife and mother while adhering to the social norms and standards of the Victorian era. He is more preoccupied with his work and social status than with Edna's personal feelings or needs. “He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them” (Chopin, 2006, p. 15).

In his relationship with Edna, Leonce does not fully understand or appreciate the depth of his wife's experiences and internal conflicts. His inattention to her emotional needs and aspirations contributes to her feelings of loneliness and isolation, which ultimately lead to her “awakening” and search for personal freedom. “He could see

plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world” (Chopin, 2006, p. 100). In the novel, Mr. Pontellier symbolizes the patriarchal society of the era, in which women are expected to be seen in the roles of subordinates and caring housewives. His views and behavior reflect the generally accepted views on marriage and gender roles of his time. “She won’t go to the marriage. She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth” (Chopin, 2006, p. 117).

Although Mr. Pontellier is not a cruel or evil character, his failure to understand and support Edna's aspirations serves as one of the early catalysts for her personal “awakening” and subsequent actions aimed at finding her own self and independence. “She’s got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women” (Chopin, 2006, p. 73).

In general, Mr. Pontellier is the main key character who pushes Edna out of the usual way of life of the time due to her lack of understanding of her emotional needs as a woman. Thus, with his help, the author explores the themes of self-identity, female independence and criticism of social norms in the novel *The Awakening*.

3.2.4. Adèle Ratignolle

Adèle Ratignolle plays an important role in Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*. She is a contrast to the main character, Edna Pontellier, and represents the traditional female role in Victorian society. “They were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (Chopin, 2006, p. 10). In the novel, Adele is an example of the “ideal” wife and mother in the context of Victorian society. She fully accepts and fulfills the traditional roles expected of a woman of the time. Her life is focused on caring for her husband, children and running the household. “Madame Ratignolle sewing away, often stopping to relate a story or incident with much expressive gesture of her perfect hands” (Chopin, 2006, p. 25).

Unlike Edna, Adele shows no desire for independence or self-expression outside of her household responsibilities. This contrasting image highlights Edna's inner conflict and her struggle with social expectations. “Mrs. Pontellier, though she had

married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles” (Chopin, 2006, p. 12).

Adele is a symbol of social restrictions. Through the character of Adele Ratignolle, Chopin demonstrates how social norms limit women in their choices and opportunities. Adele serves as a mirror for Edna, showing what she could expect if she fully accepted the roles thrust upon her. “It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family” (Chopin, 2006, p. 63).

The relationship between Adele and Edna is important to the development of the plot. Adele may not realize it, but her complete acceptance of the traditional lifestyle of a woman serves as an incentive for Edna to recognize and reject these restrictions in her life. “The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle, a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life’s delirium” (Chopin, 2006, p. 63). As such, Adele Ratignolle serves as an important element in *The Awakening*, highlighting the themes of gender roles and social pressures, as well as illustrating the different paths that women could take in Victorian society.

3.2.5. Mademoiselle Reisz

She is a minor character in the novel, but nevertheless she can be called one of the key characters who plays an important role in the development of the main character, Edna Pontellier. Mademoiselle Reisz is an unmarried and independent woman who becomes a symbol for Edna of an alternative life, different from the traditional roles prescribed for women in Victorian society. Mademoiselle Reisz embodies the image of a free and independent woman. She lives alone, devoting herself to music, and is not bound by societal expectations of marriage and motherhood. “She was a homely woman, with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed. She had

absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a bunch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair” (Chopin, 2006, p. 46).

This makes her a distinctive figure in the context of a society where women are expected to conform to certain roles. She inspires Edna with her example of independence and self-sufficiency. Her image and musical art help Edna discover her own creativity and desire for personal freedom. Mademoiselle Reisz chooses to live outside traditional social structures, which makes her lifestyle a contrast to the other female characters in the novel. She personifies the possibility of an alternative existence based on self-determination and personal beliefs. She also becomes a mentor and inspiration for Edna. She shows Edna that it is possible to live a life based on one's own desires and interests rather than socially imposed responsibilities. “A thousand emotions have swept through me tonight. I don’t understand half of them... I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz’s playing moved me tonight. I wonder if any night on earth will again be like this one. It is like a night in a dream. The people about me are like some uncanny, half-human beings” (Chopin, 2006, p. 50).

Having been deeply moved by Mademoiselle Reisz's piano playing, and then having swum in the ocean by herself for the first time, Edna attempts to explain her emotions to Robert. She is confused, unable to understand the feelings that have “swept” through her. For years, Edna has moved through life like a sleepwalker. She has kept her behavior correct, and her inner thoughts suppressed. However, the music she has heard, her experience in the ocean, and her growing passion for Robert have awakened her. Unused to such powerful sensations as love and freedom, Edna is unable to even identify what exactly she is feeling. So unreal do her experiences and emotions seem to her that she wonders if she is in a “dream”.

Based on this, Mademoiselle Reisz plays an important role in *The Awakening*, because she represents an alternative path for women - the path of independence and independence. Her character is key to the development of the theme of women's freedom and self-identification in the novel. Mademoiselle Reisz serves as Edna's inspiration and believes that a woman can live contrary to expectations. She supports Edna's desire for self-expression and understanding like no one else.

All of these characters, each in their own way, influence Edna Pontellier's “awakening” pushing her to realize her own individuality and desire to live a life

unconstrained by social restrictions. Chopin's novel is a powerful exploration of female identity and the struggle for personal freedom, illustrating the heroine's difficult journey to self-realization in a world that dictates women's roles and place. Because of its importance for understanding Edna's changes, analysis of the characters in the novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin will be conducted. Through interaction with other characters, her inner world and the process of self-awareness are revealed. Edna communicates with different people who influence her views, desires and decisions in their own way. For example, her friendship with Adèle Ratignolle emphasizes traditional female roles, from which Edna gradually moves away. At the same time, her relationships with Robert Lebrun and Alse Aroben help her realize her need for emotional and physical freedom. Through this relationship, the reader sees Edna transform from a submissive wife and mother to a woman striving for independence and self-expression. Thus, the nature of the other characters serves as mirrors, reflecting both the changes in Edna and reinforcing these changes.

4. CHAPTER II. FEMINISM IN THE SECOND HALF OF THE 20th CENTURY

In the second half of the 20th century, feminism experienced significant development, with events and movements that profoundly influenced society.

This period saw the emergence of the Second Wave of feminism, covering the years from 1960 to 1980. Major issues included equal opportunities in the workforce, reproductive rights, combating violence against women, and changing sociocultural stereotypes.

In the 1960s and 1970s, women actively fought for equal rights, including the right to education and employment without gender discrimination.

The sexual revolution of the 1960s also led to changes in attitudes towards sexuality and reproductive rights. Feminists raised issues of sexual freedom and fought for the liberation of women from societal norms and restrictions in the realm of sexuality. The movement for birth control and legal access to abortion became an important part of the feminist struggle. The introduction of oral contraceptives contributed to birth control.

Feminists, such as Betty Friedan, Gloria Steinem, and Kate Millett, made significant contributions to feminist literature and theory. Their works helped broaden discussions about female identity, social structure, and women's status in society.

Laws aimed at eliminating gender discrimination were adopted in various countries. In the USA, for example, the Equal Opportunity Act (Title IX) was enacted, and other countries conducted reforms to ensure equality.

All these events and phases are important for understanding the evolution of feminism in the second half of the 20th century and its impact on contemporary social and political structures.

During this period of the second wave of feminism, in 1991, the film *Thelma & Louise* directed by Ridley Scott was released. The main themes of the film include freedom, liberation from oppressive restrictions, the power of friendship, and issues of gender inequality. *Thelma & Louise* became a symbol of the struggle for women's dignity and independence in society.

For deeper and more accurate understanding of the feminist issues and the evolution of feminism as a social phenomenon, a comparative analysis of Ridley Scott's film *Thelma & Louise* and the novel *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin will be conducted.

Although these works belong to different genres and were created in different periods, nearly 100 years apart, there are thematic elements that can be explored to establish a connection between them. Here are some points potential of comparison:

- Both works explore the theme of expanding women's rights and liberation. In *The Awakening*, the protagonist Edna Pontellier undergoes a process of self-discovery and rebellion against social norms. Similarly, Thelma and Louise in the film take control of their lives, breaking free from oppressive situations;
- Both works depict social restrictions imposed on women during their respective periods. Edna struggles with the expectations of Victorian society, while Thelma and Louise rebel against the limitations and expectations placed on women in modern society;
- Escape and transformation: Edna's awakening in Chopin's novel and Thelma and Louise's journey in the film can be seen as a journey towards escape and transformation. The characters seek freedom from social expectations and norms, and their journeys lead to a re-evaluation of themselves;
- Both works have somewhat tragic endings: death as freedom. The conclusion of each story reflects the challenges faced by the main heroines and the consequences of their actions.

4.1. “Thelma & Louise”

Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise* (1991) became a landmark in the history of cinema due to its deep exploration of the themes of feminism, freedom and the fight against patriarchal norms of society. This film makes a powerful statement about women's emancipation and resistance to gender stereotypes. The film openly addresses important topics such as sexual violence, self-determination and the fight for personal freedom, contributing to a broader discussion of these issues in society and cinema.

The film tells the story of two women, Thelma (Geena Davis) and Louise (Susan Sarandon), who go on a weekend trip to escape their everyday worries. However, their journey takes an unexpected turn when, at the first country club, they encounter violence and injustice at the hands of a man named Harlan. When he attacks Thelma, Louise uses guns to protect her friend, turning the law in her favor

and verbally defending all women. As Louise holds a gun to Harlan's temple of the head, she defends all women: "And remember for the future! If a woman cries like that, you know she's not joking at all!" (*Thelma & Louise*, 1991, 21m 11s).

At first, it may seem to the viewer that Thelma's too frivolous behavior provoked the man to such actions, but there is a hidden motive in Thelma's behavior. Thelma got married early, her husband limited her desires and personal freedom, and her whole life passed within the perimeter of her home, obeying the wishes of her husband. Thelma, a housewife, is married to disrespectful and controlling carpet salesman Darryl. "Energetic and formerly cheerful Thelma, having married Darryl, discovered that a woman's place was in the kitchen with pots, and a man's place was in a chair in front of the TV" (Cinema *Sōprus* webpage). However, as the story progresses, Thelma goes through significant changes. Thelma's transformation process begins from the moment she decides to travel with Louise, which becomes an escape from her ordinary life and suppressive marriage. Travelling with Louise becomes a path to self-determination and emancipation for Thelma. She gains self-confidence, learns to make independent decisions and defend her rights. Thelma becomes stronger, showing courage and determination, which symbolizes the general feminist theme of self-liberation and the fight against male oppression. Therefore, Thelma's seemingly too frivolous behavior in the bar is only her release and unrealized female sensual emotionality.

At the beginning of the film, sharp-tongued Louise is shown as more determined and independent than Thelma, but no less disappointed in life. "Every morning Louise has to go to the same fast food restaurant – she works there as a waitress. She is in a difficult relationship with a man. She has a "boyfriend" – a musician who, while touring roadside eateries, often forgets about his beloved" (Cinema *Sōprus* webpage). Louise is Thelma's protector and mentor. She is like an older sister who protects Thelma throughout the film. As the story progresses, Louise faces her own fears and fights for her freedom and dignity. Her character demonstrates strength and vulnerability, highlighting the complexity of the female experience in a patriarchal society.

From time to time, women meet a truck driver on the highway, who every time shouts obscene language at them, showing disdain for them and male chauvinism. This further insults and humiliates Thelma and Louise, reminding them of what they are trying to escape from and change their lives.

Having met him on the road in the middle of the prairie for the third time, they invite him to apologize, but having received a refusal, they punish him by shooting through the tank. Their journey becomes a metaphor for the journey to self-determination and rejection of women's traditional roles as obedient wives, housewives, or objects of male desire.

The theme of female friendship and solidarity, understanding each other, touching care and the inextricable bond between Thelma and Louise, which serves as a source of strength for both women, runs through the entire film. Very soft and driven Thelma at the beginning of the film becomes strong and independent, as if changing roles with Louise. Their mutual support and understanding act as a counterbalance to a male-dominated world. In *Thelma & Louise*, death is present as a symbolic and physical element, marking the end point of the path to freedom and self-determination of the main characters. Their decision to take their destiny into their own hands by running away from the law and social norms ultimately leads to a dramatic ending on the edge of a ravine. This moment can be interpreted as an act of final liberation from patriarchal oppression and a refusal to return to a life in which they felt caged, with all other paths to freedom closed.

4.2. Influence of Key Characters

In Ridley Scott's *Thelma & Louise*, key characters play a significant role in the development of the main characters. Male suppression of women runs like a red line throughout the film. Male characters such as Darryl, Jimmy, Harlan and the truck driver have a very strong influence on the heroines, stimulating them to take more decisive actions and strengthening Thelma and Louise's friendship.

4.2.1. Darryl

In the movie *Thelma & Louise*, Darryl, Thelma's husband, is portrayed as a selfish and controlling spouse. He sells carpets. He is always a very busy man who is constantly on the phone for work and does not pay enough attention to his wife. At the very beginning of the film, an episode of his morning dialogue with Thelma, he is very characterizing. When Thelma asks what he would like for dinner, Darryl very irritably replies: "I don't give [] for dinner. I may not even make home" (*Thelma & Louise*, 1991, 4m 36s). In her marriage to him, Thelma feels oppressed and

undervalued. He is often shown as inattentive to Thelma's needs and desires, focusing mainly on his own interests. He has a significant influence on her behavior and decisions. His dominant behavior and failure to provide Thelma with emotional support are key factors in her seeking freedom and independence on the trip with Louise.

4.2.2. Harlan

Harlan is portrayed as a seductive but ultimately aggressive and dangerous man. At the bar, he comes across as a charming man, asking Thelma to dance, but his true intentions soon become apparent when he tries to rape her. This incident is a key point in the plot, prompting Louise to act decisively to protect Thelma by shooting him. These actions lead to further development of their escape and turn their trip into an escape.

4.2.3. Jimmy

In the film, Jimmy is a musician. His profession as a musician adds to his image of freedom and some instability, which affects his relationship with Louise. Jimmy is portrayed as a more sensitive and caring character compared to the other men in their lives. He tries to help Louise when she and Thelma find themselves on the run, lending money and support. Despite his shortcomings and misunderstandings with Louise, Jimmy is shown as a character who sincerely cares about her and tries to be helpful, although he does not always understand what is happening in her life, but he does not give her stability in life and confidence in the future, which makes Louise dissatisfied in her own life, which pushes her to search for herself and freedom.

4.3. Symbolism

The film uses symbolism to reinforce the film's core themes of fighting for freedom, rejecting traditional gender roles, and exploring the boundaries of female friendship and solidarity. The film uses the American landscape as the backdrop for Thelma and Louise's journey, the beautiful landscapes symbolizing both the greatness and dangers of the desire for freedom. The cinematography and visual style of the film enhance the sense of isolation and at the same time independence that the main

characters experience. America's deserted and open landscapes symbolize both endless opportunity and isolation. The road ahead represents the uncertainty of the future and the path to self-discovery, as well as a traditional motif in literature and film denoting journey and transformation. The car, 1966 Ford Thunderbird convertible, is also a symbol of freedom and independence that takes Thelma and Louise from their everyday lives to adventures on the open road. However, it also becomes the instrument of their escape and ultimately the symbol of their final liberation in the final scene. Sunglasses, which the heroines of the film so often wear, can be interpreted as a symbol of protection from the outside world and also a desire not to show anyone their vulnerability and fear of the outside world.

Guns in the film are not only a means of self-defence, but also a symbol of strength and control, which is traditionally associated with masculinity. Thelma and Louise use guns for protection and as a means of asserting their independence.

In the final scene, Thelma and Louise, having made an agreement, drive their car into the abyss of the Grand Canyon, where the abyss symbolizes infinity. The flight into the abyss itself is a powerful symbol of resisting fate and refusing to submit to social restrictions. This action is simultaneously a moment of tragic demise and triumph over the limitations placed on them by society. This is a flight of freedom.

Thelma & Louise had a significant impact on cinema and culture, becoming a symbol of the feminist movement and sparking debate about gender equality, self-determination and women's rights. The film won numerous awards and continues to be an important source of inspiration for discussion of social and gender issues.

5. COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS

The comparative analysis of Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* and Ridley Scott's film *Thelma & Louise* reveals deep similarities in themes of emancipation, personal freedom, and the heroines' opposition to social expectations and gender stereotypes. Despite the time difference, the works were created in different time periods and in different cultural contexts. *The Awakening* was published in 1899 and examines women's issues in late 19th century American society, while *Thelma & Louise* was released in 1991 and presents a modern women's perspective, but still remains relevant in its treatment of issues of discrimination and violence against women. In both works, the heroines experience the process of realizing their own "I" and their desires in the context of the restrictions imposed by society.

The Awakening explores the inner world of Edna Pontellier, a late 19th-century woman who strives for self-fulfillment and liberation from social and familial restrictions. Her journey to self-discovery leads to a tragic end, highlighting the price that comes with deviating from the norm.

Thelma & Louise follows two modern women on the run from the law and their past while exploring their independence and the power of friendship. Their journey culminates in a symbolic refusal to submit to a life in which they feel trapped.

The symbolism in both works emphasizes their themes. In *The Awakening*, the sea serves as a symbol of freedom and Edna's desire for liberation. She feels connected to the sea, which inspires her self-discovery and ultimately becomes the place of her liberation. In *Thelma & Louise*, the car is a means of freedom, allowing the heroines to leave their old lives. The landscapes they pass through reflect their inner experiences and desire for freedom. The final leap into the abyss of the Grand Canyon is the final act of liberation. Both works feature strong female characters striving for independence. Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* challenges the expectations imposed on women of her time by exploring her sexuality and creative aspirations. Her decision to leave her family and ultimately choose death at sea highlights her desperation and desire to control her own destiny.

Edna Pontellier and the heroines of *Thelma & Louise* take radical steps to free themselves from social constraints. Their actions cause conflict not only with the people around them, but also with internal fears and doubts. The differences in their stories highlight the diversity of women's experiences in different social and

historical contexts. *The Awakening* criticizes traditional gender roles and describes how they oppress women and rob them of individuality and freedom. *Thelma & Louise* addresses issues of violence against women and explores how society tends to blame women for what happens, rather than recognizing their right to protection and justice. In both cases, the actions of the heroines lead to catastrophic consequences.

The Awakening and *Thelma & Louise* are powerful works of art. They offer profound reflections on life, freedom and sacrifice, emphasizing the need to fight for individual rights and self-determination, regardless of the time of creation. Both works, in their own way, affirm that the path to self-liberation is often thorny and requires significant sacrifice, but also emphasize the unquenchable desire for freedom and self-expression that is common to all people, regardless of gender.

Both *Thelma & Louise* and *The Awakening* explore themes of female independence and self-fulfillment, but in different contexts. The main differences between *Thelma & Louise* and *The Awakening* include genre, context, and plot definition. It is a drama film with the elements of drama and adventure, focusing on the journey of two women fighting for their freedom. In *The Awakening*, Edna faces internal conflict and organized expectations, her path to liberation ends in personal sacrifice. In *Thelma & Louise*, the characters choose death as a liberating act, while in *The Awakening* Edna's death symbolizes her inability to completely detach herself from the social knots.

In conclusion, the comparison of these two works shows how literature and cinema can serve as a mirror of social change and a catalyst for discussions about women's experiences, rights and self-determination. These are powerful voices in feminist discourse, emphasizing the importance of personal choice, power and liberation.

CONCLUSION

This thesis is a comparative analysis of two feminist creative works in which women dared to choose an extreme and radical method – death – to free themselves from social restrictions and male oppression. K. Chopin's novel *The Awakening* and R. Scott's film *Thelma & Louise* reflect common themes ranging from personal struggles for autonomy to a broader call for social change that emphasizes women's right to self-determination and the fight against gender-based violence. Although these two stories are separated by almost 100 years, in both *The Awakening* and *Thelma & Louise*, death is presented as a symbol of women's liberation from the oppression of patriarchy and the restrictions that society places on women. In these works, the death of the main characters, i.e. Thelma and Louise in the film and Edna Pontellier in the novel, is the ultimate means of asserting their autonomy and refusing to conform to patriarchal expectations. This emphasizes the idea that in the struggle for their individuality and freedom, women can resort to radical methods, when there is no opportunity to be heard in their desires, lack of support within the family and society and when it is impossible to change this, a feeling of hopelessness arises. This method is death.

Edna Pontellier chooses death as the only way to completely free herself from social restrictions, and Thelma and Louise make their final deviant decision as an act of absolute control over their own destiny. These works highlight the importance of women's resistance to patriarchy and encourage reflection on the price women sometimes have to pay for their desire for independence.

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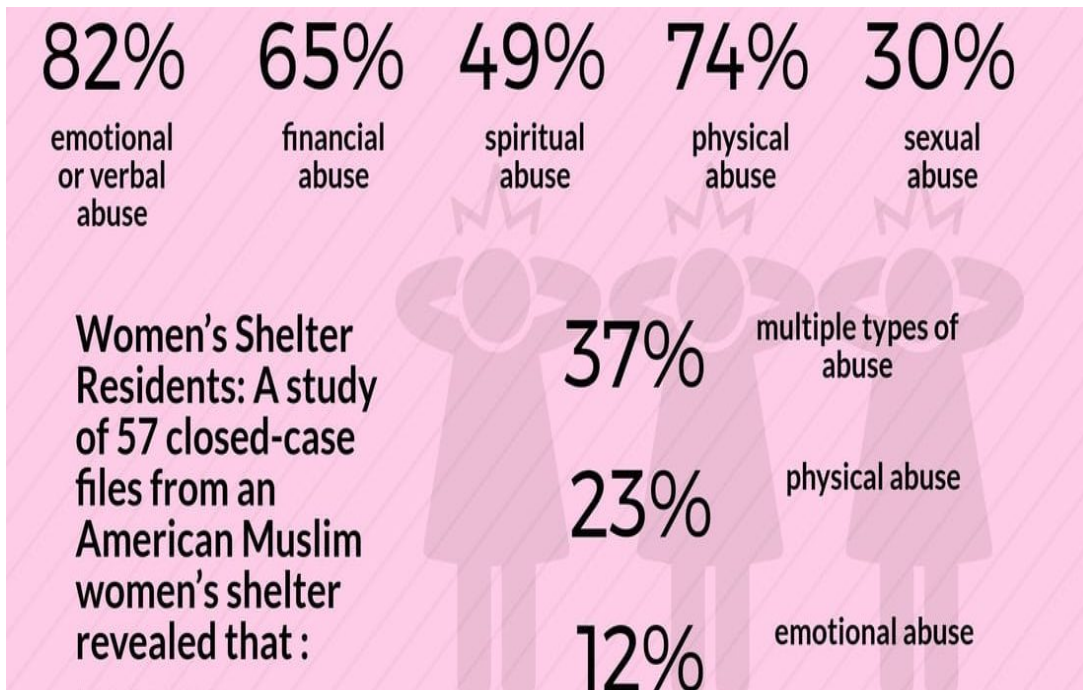
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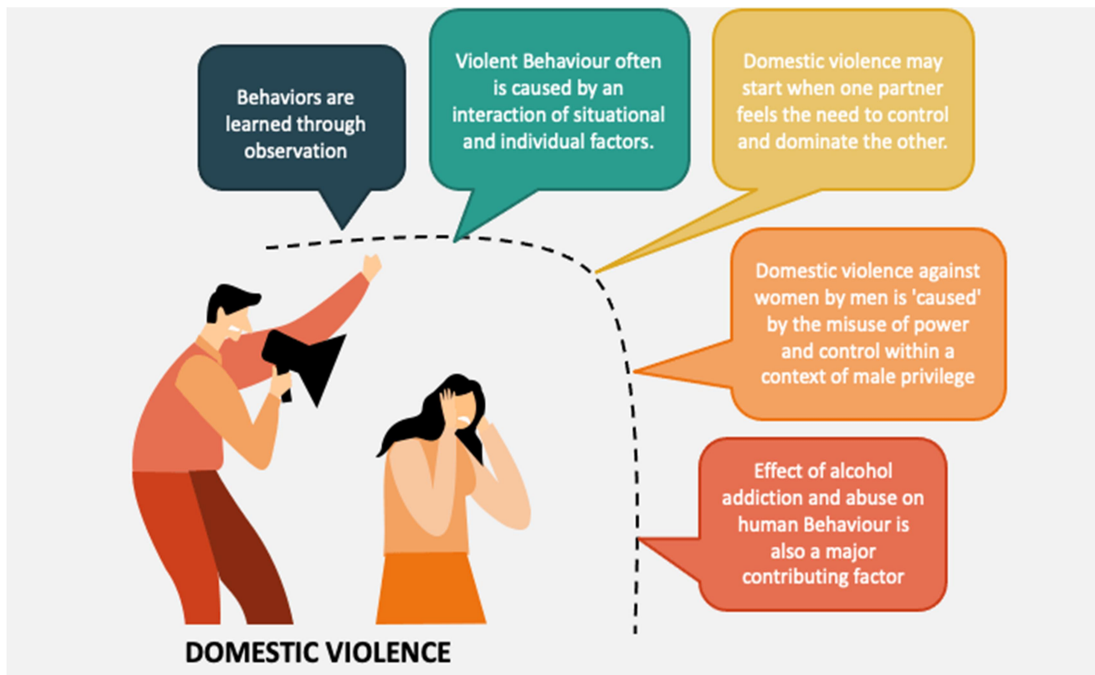
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Appendix 1. Domestic Violence Distribution



Source: <https://techreport.com/statistics/domestic-violence-statistics/>

Appendix 2. Major Elements of Domestic Abuse



Source: <https://techreport.com/statistics/domestic-violence-statistics/>