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## Conflict with Societal Gender Roles: A Comparative Feminist Analysis of Edna Pontellier and Nora Helmer\*

*Toplumsal Cinsiyet Rollerine Uyumsuzluk: Edna Pontellier ile Nora Helmer'in  
Karřılařtırma Feminist Çözümlemesi*

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## Asya Studies

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### Abstract

Kate Chopin, an American novelist and short story writer representing women's revolt against patriarchal rule, positions women in the center of her works. She deals with women's experiences in the context of gender roles, their conflicts with society, their discovery of their own bodies and the following awakening. Henrik Ibsen is one of the most important writers of Norwegian drama. Similarly, Ibsen highlights the individual's conflict with society as a kind of alienation on the axis of individual-society antagonism. Edna Pontellier, the protagonist in Chopin's novel *The Awakening* (1899), and Nora Helmer in Henrik Ibsen's play *A Doll's House* (1879), do not fit into the gender roles imposed on them by their societies. Both characters gain self-awareness through the discovery of their uniqueness. Henrik Ibsen and Kate Chopin wrote realistically about the problems their female characters encountered in the patriarchal social structure and their conflicts with social codes. The lives and choices of Edna and Nora, who both have the duties of pleasing their spouses, meeting the needs of the house and taking care of their children within the encompassing structure of the institution of marriage, are similar to each other. In this article, the lives of Edna and Nora, who are the objects of the patriarchal structure in the triangular relationship of man - child - family, will be examined comparatively in terms of their contradictions with society, their journey to self-discovery, their alienation and choices.

**Keywords:** Nora Helmer, Edna Pontellier, Gender Roles, Social Norms, Discovery of Identity, Self-Awareness

### Öz

Amerikalı roman ve öykü yazarı Kate Chopin yapıtlarında özellikle kadın konusunu ele alır. Kadının toplumsal cinsiyet rolleri bağlamında yaşadıklarını, toplumla çatışmalarını, kendi bedenini keşfetmesini ve cinsiyet açısından uyanışını işler. Henrik Ibsen ise Norveç tiyatrosunun en önemli yazarlarından birisidir. Benzer biçimde Ibsen de bireyin toplumla olan çatışmasını, birey-toplum uzlaşmazlığı ekseninde bir tür yabancılaşma olarak öne çıkarır. Chopin'in *The Awakening* (1899) romanında başkiři Edna Pontellier ve Henrik Ibsen'in *A Doll's House* (1879) adlı oyununda Nora Helmer içinde buldukları toplum tarafından kendilerine dayatılan cinsiyet rolleriyle çatışır. Bu yapıtlar, ataerkil toplumsal düzenin kendini sosyal normlar, değerler, iş alanları ve aile gibi sosyal kurumların içinde belirlenen cinsiyet rollerinin keskin biçimde uygulandığı 19. yüzyılı zaman olarak kurgularının odağına alır. Edna ve Nora, farklı toplumlarda betimlenen iki karakter olmalarına rağmen, benzer rollere sahiptir ve benzer bir yol izleyerek öz farkındalık düzeyine "uyanış" ile ulaşır. Henrik Ibsen ve Kate Chopin eserlerinde kurguladıkları kadın karakterlerin ataerkil toplum yapısında karşılaştıkları sorunları ve toplumsal değerlerle çatışmalarını gerçekçi bir şekilde kaleme almıştır. Her ikisi de evlilik kurumunun kuşatıcı yapısı içinde eşlerini memnun etmek, evin ihtiyaçlarını karşılamak ve çocuklarına bakmak biçiminde belirlenen görevlere sahip Edna ve Nora'nın hayatları ve yaptıkları tercihler birbirine paralellik gösterir. Bu makalede, erkek - çocuk - aile üçgeninde cinsiyet rollerinde ataerkil yapının nesnelere olan Edna ve Nora'nın yaşamları, toplumla çeliřtikleri yönler, kendilerini keşif serüvenleri, yabancılaşmaları ve seçimleri açısından karşılařtırma olarak incelenmiştir.

**Keywords:** Nora Helmer, Edna Pontellier, Cinsiyet Roller, Toplumsal Normlar, Benliğin Keşfi, Öz Farkındalık

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## INTRODUCTION

Towards the end of Enlightenment period, women initiated a new phase of struggle against inequalities of society, concerning many aspects of their lives. Although previously, their main goal was to attain equal status with men, especially some rights like equal pay for equal work, they began to defend the necessity of eliminating gender roles attributed to them by the patriarchal society. For this reason, they fought to do away with the pressure and control they are subjected to in all almost areas of their lives, beginning from the daughter and sister role in their fathers' house to the role of wife and mother in their husbands' houses. Women who live in a social order designed by and according to the perspectives and interests of males in various communities are typically influenced by the prevailing male principles stipulated through some practices, norms, rituals and institutions. Such male-dominant societies sometimes resort to every kind of means and tools to control women, sometimes even by using force. Whereas some women choose to comply with such practices and rules, some others refuse male authority of any kind, and try to emancipate themselves from inhibitory social expectations and stipulative male principles.

Some women attempt to attain a status of freedom in society through actions, while the right means for some is art and literature. Additionally, some male authors also support the wish of women for emancipation through their activities and / or literary works. Kate Chopin and Henrik Ibsen created fiction dealing with gender roles, by positioning their protagonists, who are mostly females trapped in social institutions like marriage. These characters are narrated in pursuit of personal freedom, yearning to attain self-sufficiency amid strict gender conservatism, mostly created, ingrained and maintained through religious discourse. Therefore, the positions of female characters created by both writers have much in common.

Kate Chopin had many children before her husband died in an extremely conservative community. Yet, the death of her husband was a kind of turning point in her life as she began to feel the freedom with no man to direct, teach, force, or look after her. So, she slowly discovered her identity and created a life of her own, rejecting to comply with the roles assigned by her highly religious community. Through her literary works, she was later regarded as a symbol of women's liberation movement. Henrik Ibsen, on the other hand, was claimed as a feminist by nineteenth-century women's activists. Yet, he clearly refuses this: "I am not a member of the Women's Rights League. I have been more poet and less social philosopher than people generally seem inclined to believe. I am not even quite clear as to just what this women's rights movement really is. To me, it has seemed a problem of humanity in general." (Ledger, 2008: 16). Though, his ideas and representations in his plays were quite 'new' for society. According to Ledger (2008), Ibsen believes that a woman cannot be herself in contemporary society as it is an exclusively male society with laws drafted by men, and with counsel and judges who judge feminine conduct from a male point of view.

Both Ibsen and Chopin handle gender roles on the level of individuals, whose positions as fictional characters seem like a representation of all women on a Grand scale. Nora Helmer in *A Doll's House* by Ibsen and Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* by Chopin are the fictional characters created to give voice to oppressed female identity. In this article, first the concepts of gender and sex will be examined and then the two female protagonists in the mentioned works will be analyzed comparatively.

## BODY OR IDENTITY – WH(O/AT) DRAWS “THE PICTURE”?

Throughout human history, almost everyone has been defined according to some general principles such as age, sex, status, economic power, and race. One of such classifications is based on both the physical sex and the social roles assigned in accordance with such a perspective. The former is a kind of biological classification with a view to the superiority of sex over the other and this definition is called “sex”. The latter is “gender”, which is the social, cultural and human made dimension of belonging to either part. In general, the contrasts and comparisons between the male and female sexes are made anatomically and physiologically. The term "sex" will in general identify with natural contrasts/biological identity. On the other hand, gender will in general signify the social part of each sex within a society. Individuals discursively build up their gender in light of their current circumstances, including family communications, the media, friends, and education. Yet, sex is something that one acquires genetically by birth. Therefore, discussions focus on the human identity, constructed discursively through time according to power relations instead of the biologically determined sex.

Gender is not God-given, predetermined, a priori or hereditary, but a totally social and changeable dynamic phenomenon that could be transformed and re-arranged as power relations have shifts. So, gender roles and applications in certain social orders can be more or less flexible than those in others. The variable structure of gender determines the division of labor, position in society, and socio-economic status of women and men. In other words, gender draws attention to social, cultural, professional, legal, religious, familial, institutional and economic differences between men and women determined in the social environment. In the formation of gender, institutions such as the family and school, religious practices and rituals, and information and image transmission mechanisms such as mass media and social media, as well as artistic and literary works have quite an important role. According to Claudia von Werlhof (1988), no present social order first transformed natural sex into a social, artificial gender, made “men” out of men, made “women” out of a woman - in fact, turned man into the “human race” and women into simply sex. In other words, gender is discursive, which was initially created by the humans through human-made institutions at a certain time in history, and has been maintained and rooted in the daily social life. In time, the roles assigned according to the power relations were transmitted as if they were natural, or acquired by birth.

Individuals are categorized as male or female by society from the moment they are born. They begin to absorb and acquire cultural meanings ascribed to their own sex. These cultural roles attributed to the individuals are called gender roles, which in turn shape the expectations of society from each gender differently. Just as today, women and men were not equal in the nineteenth century. The “real” man was expected to be aggressive, competitive, rational, and devote all of his effort to his business. A “real” woman, on the other hand, needed to be virtuous, pious, pure, obedient, and domestic in return for her husband's protection, financial security, and social status, and she was regarded as the creator of peace, order, service, and satisfaction at home. As Welter (1976) suggests, piety, purity, submissiveness, and domesticity were thought to be natural to women. Ironically, as M. Cruea (2005) puts forward, while a “true” woman was assumed to be a pillar of moral strength and virtue, she was also portrayed as delicate and weak, prone to fainting and illness. That kind of approach created a kind of irony. Women were evaluated (and constructed) according to the needs and wishes of the dominant power, namely men, instead of their natural talents and features. They were, ironically, the reflections of men's sexual desires; as objects of sexual satisfaction, they were portrayed as fragile and delicate whereas as workers, they were needed to be strong so that they could fulfill their daily duties successfully.

For women, marriage and family were their predeterminations, their lives were restricted to a little and private circle. They were allowed to work in a limited number of works, but not allowed to vote. They were simply home keepers, child carers and husband servers. According to Almk and Haugen (1991), in the nineteenth century, in Norway what all classes had in common was female responsibility for the making of food and caring for children. Lønna (2019) claims that women did not have the right to control their own finances and there were legally binding agreements, they were dependent on guardians. Firstly, they were dependent on the father, then the husband if they get married. Only widows were considered of legal age if they had a male guardian. For instance, if a man of honor wished to court a woman, it was normal that he would initially look for authorization from her father or guardian. Women were chiefly supposed to be housewives, however, some had to work to support the financial situation of the family. The women's salary was much lower than the men's. It was not equal since people considered their profession as an extra income for the family. Men were the main breadwinners. Getting divorced was allowed legally, yet it was not socially proper. Women's clothing, appearance, compassionate abilities and empathy, men's masculinity, wisdom, and strength were emphasized. The prevailing view was that the women were emotionally driven and fragile, they needed male leadership, guidance, correction, and control over them.

In various parts of the Western civilisation, many women were closely watching the role of women with great concern. Some of them were involved in political or other issues as activists whereas some others chose to deal with gender issues through their writings. Some women writers handled gender issues as a social concern as a mixture of theory and practice, observed directly in the rituals and lifestyles of the society they were part of, by means of linguistic, legal, economic, religious or cultural discourses. Some of them dealt with the same topics through fiction and artistic creativity, which was itself a revolutionary act. One of such women was Betty Friedan, whose book titled *The Feminine Mystique*, for the most part, was viewed as a milestone in the resurrection of contemporary women's liberation. In that book, she reflected her observations that nearly all of the women she interviewed were

married, had children, living in prosperous, upper-working class rural areas. They had the fantasy that opulent common society had made for the women after the war years. Friedan called this "mystique of feminine fulfillment", where those women expressed their lives as amusing and full of happiness about their spouses, children, and homes. Yet, as Friedan questioned further, she found out that essentially all these women had a key feeling of anxiety, disappointment and unclear despondency (DoBois and Dumenil, 2012). As Kaledin (2000) reports, Betty Friedan discovered a deep restlessness among the women and she also found an attitude different from earlier decades that saw having children as limiting the access of other roles: "children or career dilemma".

With *The Feminine Mystique* (1963), Betty Friedan revealed that the dream of middle-class American women is legitimately a nightmare. She asserts that in the feminine mystique, there is no other way for a woman to dream of creation or the future. There is no other way she can even dream about herself, except as her children's mother, her husband's wife (Friedan, 1963). As can be seen in her analyses, the main problem with women is not the legislative factors but social dictations of the male-dominant society, which stipulates the roles of women as mothers, wives and house-carers. This is the main issue handled and questioned in both *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin and *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen through the portrayal of female characters as mothers and devoted wives.

### **EDNA PONTELLIER AND NORA HELMER: FROM SUBMISSIVE OBJECT TO REVOLTING SUBJECT**

*The Awakening* and *A Doll's House* both display the differences between society's perspective on women as spouses and mothers, and women's perspective on themselves as an individual. Both of the characters are the representation of the newly emerging women image, who refuses to act as a submissive object. No matter what they are forced to pay for their choices in return, they decisively pursue their ambitions to become the subjects of their lives until the end. Ibsen and Chopin present the struggles of the female protagonists in such a way that the audience / reader observes the characters' development and their transformation from submissiveness into independence. As they both wish to be emancipated from society's standards, the protagonists of *The Awakening* and *A Doll's House* move to a stage that can be called 'awakening' which is a kind of self-awareness and self-realization.

Self-awareness means knowing one's own personality with its strengths, and weaknesses, values, beliefs, motivations, feelings, and thoughts entirely. In order to attain self-awareness, a state of conscious awareness must first be formed. While Edna begins to awaken at the beginning of the novel through the strict questioning process, Nora awakens at the end of the play, following an almost complete imprisonment at home, being entirely dependent on her husband for her material needs.

Both Edna and Nora are middle-class women and they get married to a businessman. They have kids in a short time. At the beginning, Edna's life seems in harmony with Leonce Pontellier's and society's wishes and expectations; she is occupied with the household, spending time with her children and friends. She is not conscious about what she wants in her life as she has not yet discovered her true wishes and passions. She seems satisfied. However, later with the effect of new people and new atmospheres, Edna's internal fight emerges between sentiment, energy, disarray, and hidden feelings. The unconscious Edna replaces herself with 'awakened' Edna Pontellier. She gradually isolates herself from the realities of the society and her husband. She alienates herself from societal expectations.

Edna's mental transformation can be followed step by step by the reader. She questions herself and roles as a mother and then begins to compare herself with other women, namely Mademoiselle Reisz and Adèle Ratignolle. Mademoiselle Reisz has a vital role in Edna's development. She fills her life with her passions, she is out of social norms with her lifestyle, which becomes an inspiration for Edna. On the other hand, Adele Ratignolle seems as a representation of a 'mother-woman' (Chopin, 1899). While Reisz is the revolutionary type of woman, Adele is the image of conventional women, stuck in the womanhood roles of the patriarchy. Adele, therefore, displays a moral figure in Edna's life, holding a mirror to her identity, not "acquired" on her own, but "granted" to her by men. Chopin (1899) describes Adele and similar women, who "esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels." The mother-women love their children and spouses, devote their own life to their husband and children, and feel happy when they are praised as housewives, or mothers. Adele is depicted as the "embodiment of womanly grace and charm" by Chopin (1899), which makes her an ideal image of a mother-woman. Although Adele extraordinarily appreciates Edna's conversation, Edna and Adele sometimes disagree since Edna does not follow social rules loyally.

Original and genuine qualities attributed to Adele and Reisz influence Edna's development and awakening to a certain extent, but the role of men other than her husband has a greater impact on her as they fill the gap in terms of love and sexual pleasure. An example that could be a complete scandal in terms of moral codes of the Victorian age is Edna's relationship with Arobin and Robert, who, in turn, represent simple sexuality as lust and love as a constructive feeling. All transitions and critical moments in Edna's relationships with these people become reflects the transformation she will achieve throughout the novel. In the scene where Adele and Edna sunbathe and have a conversation, the joyful and carefree appearance of the two lovers in the distance make Edna realize how freedom could be. The feeling of freedom that she experiences while she is swimming in the sea for the first time reaches an extreme point with a kind of dissolution at the end of the novel.

Edna moves to another house in the absence of her husband and she devotes herself to artistic pursuits. These change Edna's life radically. She begins to question her life and the experiences she has had since her early womanhood. She remembers the men that she fell in love with. She senses a similarity between his desperate love for the cavalry officer who was his father's friend, the fiancée of the neighbor, for the painting of a well-known tragedy actor, and her love for Robert as a young girl. Robert is not free from the dictates of the society, but in contrast, he seems a product of the conservativeness he is brought up in. He can no longer have Edna as she has become too conscious to be the property of anyone. Furthermore, he cannot maintain his secret relationship with her since he is afraid of his own gentlemanly image will be damaged. He is also worried about her image as a married woman, flirting with another man.

When she is deserted by Robert, she satisfies her sexual urges with Arobin, with whom she has no emotional ties. This helps her distinguish between her sexual desire for Arobin as well as her love for Robert. Both feelings are, in fact, important in her self-realization. Whereas love is associated with Robert and sexual passion is linked to Arobin. Love is the romantic, idealistic aspect of her ego, while sex gives her physical satisfaction and pleasure. Love forces her to see how she is wasting her life with a man that she has not loved in the real sense. Sexual pleasure sheds light upon the womanhood qualities ingarined in her body. She begins to see that instead of consenting and acting according to the love of a man, she can love, and she can get sexual pleasure rather than giving pleasure to the man. These discoveries are combined with the sense of freedom created by the irresponsibilities of the house, the children and the husband. In return, her entire spiritual world changes, but still she is not powerful enough to change the social bonds, roles and relationships besieging her life. Edna revolts against society. However, she has a confused mindset. She is described having a sense of uncertainty and indiscretion, unable to find a response to her deep feeling in the outside world. What aggravates her perplexion is Robert's inability to courageously respond to Edna's feelings. This inability is a clear indication of the established moral or societal norms of the period. In a more general sense, this shows that there is something which will not change easily, there is an established order and Edna seems to comprehend that deeply. Despite similar, but not the same, experiences in her previous life, the moment when she feels entirely independent for the first (and the last) time is when she swims in the sea totally naked and alone. This has highly symbolic value as it suggests that in the confined world of women, to become really free both mentally, sexually and emotionally is impossible, and the result is not freedom but destruction following self-awareness. Instead of awareness in the pure sense, it is like an awareness of the terrible reality; seeing oneself might be illuminating, yet realizing the prison around yourself is destructive and unbearable. And what follows in the novel is that Edna realizes the harshness surrounding her, and thinking that she can no longer tolerate to live like in the past, she lets herself get swallowed by the waves both giving pleasure to her body and drowning her.

The protagonist of *A Doll's House* by Henrik Ibsen is also a woman, married with children, and assigned similar duties to those carried out by Edna. Whereas Edna's husband is a businessman, Nora's is a lawyer. This is symbolically significant as both jobs reflect the power relationship based on gender roles on two important pillars of the patriarchal system: money and laws. Both Edna and Nora are middle class women, which shows the strictest application of social rules. It must be noted that both the lower and the upper classes have a loose structure of gender roles in comparison to the middle-classes, where normative behaviours create the standard for the whole community.

Like Edna, Nora lacks self-awareness and she is depicted as if playing a childish game with her husband, which serves to mask the problems arising out of their responsibilities as a house wife and breadwinner in sequence. As regards financial matters, both Nora and Edna are dependent on their

husbands, and they lack individual liberty, like the other women aggrieved by social norms. Different from Edna, who has a comparatively better conditions in her father's house, Nora represents the woman who is oppressed by her father when she is single and oppressed by her husband when she gets married. She is treated as a "doll" in a doll's house', which is the depiction of her marital life and her role as a wife and mother.

Right from the beginning of the play, Torvald and Nora are portrayed as a couple acting like married in children's play. Torvald is just similar to a child whose needs and wishes are always to be taken care of by the vulnerable but still strong female, Nora. Nora's childlike personality and behaviours also intensify the idea that Nora lives in a girl's fantasy. Since her childhood, she has been treated like a doll, where she does not have to take care of herself throughout all her life since others think for her invariably. While her father and her husband always make decisions for her, Nora's duty is to cheer people up by performing her feminine skills. For Torvald, Nora is a doll metaphor that he pays attention to in his spare time. He seems to be the only one who can make decisions in the name of all the members of the family, including Nora. For instance, he prohibits her from eating macarons so that her teeth would not rot. While Nora is a mother to her own children, she is also like Torvald's little daughter. She is required to behave as directed by Torvald. He regards her as his own property. Nora seems to be happy in this role with no desire for independence, she behaves perfectly fitting into the standards of the patriarchal culture. She is a child-maker, husband-satisfier, house-keeper and child-carer, dividing her care, energy, body and time to four different roles. Her children and husband create her main identity, she is no more than that by herself. She has nothing to pride herself on as a person except for the almost perfect duties completed in such roles. She lacks the feeling of identity and individuality.

Nora does the house chores, where she is positioned, whereas Torvald works outside the home to hold the family's issues, including finance and maintenance. Despite the great effort she exerts as a woman, she cannot earn money, while Torvald can bring in cash and spend it. For this reason, he has a full authority to oversee and rule his family. Nora is not able to spend any penny of the family money without Torvald's authorization, who frankly expresses his inconvenience when she does so. She is rather a domestic, immature woman who appreciates being disparaged, spoiled, and dealt with like an unprotected entity. She appears to be contented and she does not appear to mind her husband calling her out as a "little featherbrain", "squirrel", "skylark" (Ibsen, 1879: 14) and other humiliating, powerless animal metaphors. It can be seen that she additionally appears to appreciate the treatment her husband treats her. Still, one can sense certain disobedience, resistance, and rashness in her character. Not paying attention to being prohibited by her husband, she eats macaroons without letting her husband know and even misleading him about it: "I wouldn't do anything that you don't like" (Ibsen, 1879: 38).

Despite her passive acceptance of the domination by her husband, she seems a little bit manipulative at the beginning of the play. The artificiality in her speeches shows that she is doing what is expected of her by her social circle. Ironically, she does not have any interactions with the world outside her home, and so she is an inexperienced woman. She has firm confidence and significant love for Torvald and wishes to support him when Torvald is taken ill. Her physical and mental anxiety increases very much when they find themselves at a monetary crisis at that time. Nora takes risks for the sake of saving her husband and for providing better treatment for him. Nora seeks a solution for her husband Helmer's illness, without letting him know about it. She commits forgery to take a loan and she clandestinely pays the loan with the money she received from Torvald. He finds out about her little secret that she took a loan from Krogstad who is the antagonist of the play and co-worker of Torvald. Instead of being appreciated, she encounters an assaulting attitude from Torvald she has never expected. At first, Nora hopes that her husband would act in a way to protect her, yet her husband does not act as Nora wishes, and Torvald prioritizes himself first, as usual. Torvald reacts to Nora's sacrifice as if she destroyed rather than saving his life; "Wretched woman - what have you done! She who was my pride and my joy - a hypocrite, a liar - worse, worse - a criminal... You and your father want of principle... You've inherited - no religion, no morality, no sense of duty... destroyed my whole happiness. You've ruined my future." (Ibsen, 1879: 66). Nora feels extremely astounded to see Torvald's selfishness and his attitude, which makes her question their relationship. She begins to question her role and the value assigned to her in the light of the events and Torvald's reactions.

This questioning leads Nora to 'awaken' and become an independent individual as a woman. After seeing the true identity of her husband, she openly expresses the injustice inflicted upon her all her life; "I have had great injustice done to me, Torvald; first by father, and then by you... When I was at

home my father used to tell all his opinions, and I held the same opinions. If I had others I said nothing... He used to call me his doll-child and played with me as I played with my dolls. Then I came to live in your house ... passed from father's hands into yours." (Ibsen, 1879: 71). Nora, whose beliefs and values are destroyed, leaves her house and her children in order to discover her identity better by abandoning the doll's house she has lived in. So far, Nora has relied on her husband fundamentally because of the absence of instruction and firsthand information on the world. She leaves her husband and children since she feels that her obligation towards herself as an individual is a higher priority than her obligations as a spouse and a mother. She becomes an individual, she teaches herself that her own being is above all the other subjects. It is for building up her way of life as an individual.

The conversation on her position uncovers a natural knowledge that has driven her to plot at her own abuse. Nora confronts the truth of the social, strict, and moral codes that Torvald addresses. She cannot cherish him at this point, for he is not the man she has trusted him to be. In spite of his endeavors to convince her to remain, she no longer has confidence in wonders. She gives back the wedding ring that is the image of their marriage and leaves to make her autonomy completed. As the sound of the slammed door resounds, she leaves to confront the test of the real world, a test which she set up to confront at all costs. She has built up a character and developed into a defiant individual towards the last act of the play. It displays what she should be as an individual and conforms to her own progress.

### **CONCLUSION**

Edna Pontellier is the female protagonist in *The Awakening*, a novel by Kate Chopin. Nora Helmer is also the female main character in *A Doll's House*, a play by Henrik Ibsen. Both characters are depicted in the mentioned literary works with mainly similar backgrounds, social and economic conditions, experiences, and social and gender roles as housewives and mothers. Both are presented as brave characters, who are fearless in their search for identity. In the comparative analysis, such issues as sex, gender, patriarchy, motherhood, marriage, gender roles, questioning, identity crisis, self-awareness and awakening are examined in both works.

Sociologically, both Edna Pontellier and Nora Helmer are portrayed as married middle class women. Both are dependent on their husbands financially. They have children, whom they are expected to take care of. They have almost no social connections at the beginning except for their houses. While Edna has a comparatively happy childhood as a young girl, Nora has always been a "doll", treated like an entity by both her father and husband. Both are directed by the events in the play/novel to question their lives, emotions, positions, roles, bodies, and duties.

Psychologically, both characters come up with a kind of self-realization, leading to their awakening. The questioning of Edna focuses mainly on her sexual roles as well as gender roles, whereas Nora's questioning is about gender roles and even institutional roles represented by the "family". Both Edna and Nora abandon their homes. Although it is not apparent at the beginning, neither Edna nor Nora has felt any kind of pleasure by their husband's attitudes or their marriage.

Both of the characters transform into independent, self-capable women. Nora and Edna boldly break the restrictive positions of women structured, ordered and stipulated strictly by patriarchal culture. Nora and Edna's struggle against patriarchal culture can be defined as a feminist attempt since they desire to discover their own identities and freedom as females and they destroy the patriarchal supposedly ideal woman image quite harshly. Unlike Nora, who has always been forced to live dependent on external sources, Edna is able to survive on her own financially. She earns money by selling her paintings, yet she is in a state of a mental and emotional crisis created by her social structure. She feels desperate, frustrated, and incapable of maintaining her life; so she commits suicide by letting herself get drowned in the sea. Nora, on the other hand, shows a more powerful and persistent reaction to the conditions surrounding her. She defies the economic, social and even intellectual factors, and decides to maintain her life as a completely free woman with no husband, no children, no house or duties.

#### **Yazarlık Katkısı**

Bu araştırma tek yazarlı olarak yürütülmüştür.

#### **Etik Kurul Beyanı**

Bu araştırma için etik kurul onayı gerekmemektedir.

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