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## Feminist Perspective Of Kate Chopin'S 'The Awakening': A Textual Analysis

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### Abstract

The research study's objective is to evaluate and examine the feminism present in Kate Chopin's book, 'The Awakening'. The central themes of the narrative are Edna's troubled marriage and mental suffering. As a feminist, Edna overcomes patriarchy by coming to terms with her identity. Using liberal feminism theory, the current study is non-numerical and descriptive in nature, highlighting patriarchal influences and their impact on women. Using a textual analysis approach, the researcher assesses, examines, and interprets the words, phrases, dialogues, symbols, and events of Kate Chopin's selected work, "The Awakening" (2018) in light of the two most prominent feminist critiques, Simon De Beauvoir (1908–1986) and Mary Wollstonecraft (1759–1797). As the story gets more complicated, Edna, the main character, exhibits bold behavior, confronts patriarchy, and breaks social standards. Edna suffers in her cold, materialistic marriage to a patriarchal husband. She is an advocate for equality and rejects the idea that the soul is shackled. She rebels against patriarchy's restrictions and questions social norms. The study concludes that women's independence and autonomy are restricted by laws and regulations made by men. Women who come into contact with these regulations experience uneasiness and emotional difficulty. When women strive for independence and self-governance, they violate the moral standards of patriarchal cultures.

**Keywords:** Feminism, Awakening, Patriarchy, Freedom, Restrictions

### INTRODUCTION

Feminism is a movement that advocates for equal rights for women on all fronts. It is best described as women's struggle for sex equality in society, the home, and politics. The purpose of feminism, according to Ahmed (2017), is to define, develop, and attain political, economic, personal, and social equality of the sexes. Feminism encompasses a wide spectrum of political movements, philosophies, and social movements.

In 'The Awakening' (2018), Edna is a character who is searching for her identity. During her awakening, she finds that she is only recognized as a mother figure or as someone's wife, and that her own identity has been clouded by the limits of societal relations and norms. She learns new ways to live. She earns her own money and lives independently.

### LITERATURE REVIEW

Mary Wollstonecraft (1797) is an English feminist and a philosopher as well as a writer. 'A Vindication of the Rights of Women' (2010) was an important feminist work written by her. Wollstonecraft's writing is regarded as a feminist manifesto in the West. Wollstonecraft (1797) is considered a liberal feminist. In her work against men, she does not flip the script. She merely raised her voice in support of gender equality. Although, she acknowledges that men are physically stronger than women, she maintains that morality is the same for all sexes.

Another well-known feminist writer is Simone de Beauvoir (1986). She addresses the mistreatment of women in society, how men treat them, and how they are objectified as sexual objects in her book, 'The Second Sex'. "Marrying is the benchmark by which the unmarried woman is identified, regardless of her feelings toward this establishment—whether they are irritated, disgusted, or neutral" (2010).

Sena Bektas (2017) claims that the author contrasts the main character, Edna, with "traditional mother and wives" who are only obligated to the welfare of their children and obedient to their husbands (2017, p. 1).

Mursalin Jahan (2017) provides a detailed portrait of the Creole civilization in his study paper, Expressive Individualism in the Nineteenth Century Patriarchal Creole Civilization. He characterizes her birthplace, the Creole society, as a "patriarchal society"

where women are seen as "sex objects, nurture, and commodities, an object in the hands of others instead of a subject of her own fate" (Jahan, 2017, p. 66).

The idea that Edna's surroundings and the people around her are what intensify her emotional struggle is explored by Savitha (2017) in her article Solitude, and Independence in Kate Chopin's "The Awakening." She was quite obvious that what is leading her toward awakening is her dusty personality complex. As of 2017, she "rebels" against patriarchal social standards.

The research under consideration investigated the moral standards for women established by patriarchal culture, which ultimately contribute to the identity crisis in women, by using textual analysis within the framework of liberal feminism. That said, this has not yet been addressed as far as the researcher is aware. By looking into it within the framework of liberal feminism, intentional inquiry so closes this gap.

## METHODOLOGY AND FRAMEWORK

The qualitative research methodology is used in this study. Cresswell (2003) asserts that qualitative research adheres to studies that take place in a natural setting.

The chosen work, *The Awakening* (2018) by Kate Chopin, is evaluated in the perspective of the liberal feminism sub-type of feminist philosophy. Indeed, it appears that liberal feminism seeks to erase imbalances that have favored boys while harming the interests of girls. According to Enslin (2003), liberal feminism eliminates the disparities that provide men social advantages over women. It gives women the same status as men in terms of education and social standing.

According to Grant and Osanlo (2014), the theoretical framework provides "the structure and support for the problem description, the purpose, the significance, and the research questions" in addition to serving as the reason for the investigation.

## SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The study is remarkable for the issue it addresses. The study's findings will assist society because women are expected to maintain strict moral standards, which eventually leads to personality disruption. The study reveals patriarchal men's attempts to degrade their female partners by stifling their voices and personalities, as well as using stereotypes.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Q1: What, according to Kate Chopin, (2018) are the societal and moral standards that the protagonist, Edna, rejects?

Q2: How does Kate Chopin depict men's patriarchal attitudes toward women in *The Awakening*?

## RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

1. To expose the moral norms that patriarchal society has established in order to subjugate women
2. To identify the patriarchal treatment of women by men in the chosen text

## TEXTUAL ANALYSIS OF THE NOVEL

The first image in the book's opening scene is of screeching caged birds. Several French phrases are being repeated by the caged parrot. Kate Chopin frequently employs French terms and phrases in her other compositions as well. Such French expressions can be found throughout *The Awakening*. Birds in cages represent the captivity of women, although birds' symbolic meaning also includes liberation. Birds are meant to live in freedom and soar through the air. It is closely related to Edna's wish to live without restrictions.

"Allez-vous! Allez-vous! Sapristi! That's OK, thanks. Chopin (2018, p., 1)

'Go Away! Go Away!' is how it is translated. The word has a symbolic connotation that relates to Edna's inner psychological workings, which the reader will see in subsequent chapters. She longs to get away from all of the expectations and pressures placed on her by society that restrict her independence. Her husband has problems reading his newspaper because of the squawking of the birds in their cages. He walks away from the scene "with an expression and exclamation of disgust" (Chopin, 2018, p.1).

Kate Chopin (2018) created the intriguing early feminist heroine Edna, who challenges nineteenth-century norms. Her most defining quality is rejection. She rejects the respectable roles of mother and wife. Mothers who had simply to take care of their children and provide for their husbands were encouraged by the nineteenth-century Creole society.

Edna sees marriage as a cage. Since it anticipates Edna to act and live in a way that is controlled by society.

She rebels against the creature defined by men in an effort to forge her own identity. She does not want her kids or husband to be connected to her identity. Her temperament does not match that of other women who "worship" their spouses and are constantly preoccupied with their kids. (Chopin, 10) Edna rejects several nineteenth-century moral norms. Despite being the affluent businessman's wife, she begins to support herself by selling her paintings. It describes her methodical approach and waking path. Liberal feminism promotes women's ability to work for themselves and own businesses. She understands that she needs to make some important choices for herself in order to escape her current circumstance. Although, no one else in the community finds her decision to take days off from home encouraging, Edna feels that it is essential to protect herself from additional internal harm. She feels as though the institution of marriage and motherhood has imprisoned and confined her. She finds calm in avoiding these natural and societal ties, respectively. Edna feels as though she is taking off into the air of the patriarch. She makes a metaphorical message about the necessity of having powerful wings. Additionally, she laments the sight of "weaklings" falling. (Page 107, Chopin, 2018,)

At the commencement of the novel, she experiences joy and tranquility, relishing life to its utmost. Upon returning from the shore, she adorns herself with her wedding band—a significant emblem embodying the marital connection and the attendant responsibilities. She accedes to and complies with her spouse. Edna encounters a challenging episode in the third chapter, marked by her husband branding her a neglectful mother who overlooks the children. For the first time in the story, she is

said to be suffering from a "indescribable oppression" (Chopin, 2018, p. 8). As the novel progresses, the seeds of "anguish" has already been there in his heart and they will continue to sprout. When the couple disagrees, Edna feels confined and exhausted in their loveless marriage. This incident appears to be the catalyst for all of their subsequent confrontations.

The narrator claims that she is "not a mother-woman" (Chopin, 2018, p. 4). She doesn't seem to share any traits with the other mothers in the area. Despite her affection for her children, she does not constantly worry about them. According to Edna, "Their absence (is) a sort of relief" (Chopin, 2018, p. 22). She draws a distinction between herself and the mothers who are constantly "fluttering about with extended, protecting wings" about their darling children" (Chopin, 2018, p. 10). It is customary for mothers to prioritize their children's needs over their own and to always put their comfort and needs last. Edna does not fit the description of a "mother-woman" (Chopin, 2018, p. 4). Madame Ratignolle, "an embodiment of every womanly grace and charm," asserts that Edna "is not one of (them)" (2018) Chopin, p. 10,25). She is the opposite of Edna. They are really fond of each other and have a reliable relationship. Edna has had several transformations, all of which started when she was living on Grand Isle. She used to uphold her integrity, but now she's beginning to break free from the bonds of her sound character. She is being roused from her profound sleep by influences that are both "subtle and apparent" (Chopin, 2018, p. 17). One illustration of this effect is the character of Mrs. Ratignolle. They do not hate and hate each other. Every woman is different in some certain manner. Ratignolle is a traditional and conservative woman, whereas Edna questions norms and customs.

Edna loves going swimming in the ocean. Swimming is an extremely symbolic sport. It is among the most often utilized symbols in the book. Her dream trip destination is a far-off area of the ocean "where no woman had ever swum before." Chopin (2018), p. 35 Her "daring and reckless" attitude indicates that she is starting to awaken on the mental and physical levels (Chopin, 2018, p. 35). It proves that Edna chooses to differentiate herself from other mothers or wives in her neighbourhood.

There is a lot of music in the book. Edna feels a variety of alluring, sensuous, deadly, and indescribable emotions all at once as she hears Mademoiselle Reisz.

"Her soul was aroused with passions, swaying and lashing it. "She gulped, shook, and became blind from her tears (Chopin (2018, page 33) or

'...passions...were aroused within her soul, swaying and lashing it...She trembled...choking and the tears blinded her.' (Chopin, 2018, p.33)

Furthermore, music has predictive power. Madame Ratignolle plays a piece of music that Edna names "solitude." Edna imagines a 'bare' and 'hopeless' man standing by the sea. It's the same situation as Edna's at the end of the book. Edna has a close, sensuous affinity with music. Beyond its imaginative power, music moves her on a mental, emotional, and even physical level. The author also employs bird imagery in "pigeon house." It demonstrates Edna's longing to be free from the constraints of society. Pigeons and other birds represent freedom and harmony. Edna starts her journey toward freedom and independence when she leaves her husband's house and enters the "pigeon house." She bought herself a new house, which she is happy and comfortable in. She recently bought a little house and feels spiritually emancipated. Her choice to move out of her husband's house also reflects her tendency toward solitude and the independence she has started to pursue in her life."Edna's awakening is reflected in all she does, such as painting, moving into a new house, and making music. Her deeds are what propel her forward. She is independent and disregards the "opinion" of others while making judgments. She is responding to her own instincts. She is stepping away from her expected responsibilities as a wife and mother and beginning to live her life in her own manner. Edna is no longer adhering to conventional rules, despite the fact that her decision to move into a new home diminished her social standing.

Edna has been apathetic and spends "her own small life all within herself" since childhood. (Chopin, 2018, p. 17). She is evolving right now, and she is being guided to unravel the knots she's maintained about her since childhood by a variety of "influences both subtle and apparent" (Chopin, 2018, p. 17). The impact of Adèle Ratignolle was "the most obvious" (Chopin, 2018, p. 17). Edna is significantly impacted by Adèle Ratignolle. She is Edna's counterpoint, despite their apparent character and personality differences. In contrast to Edna, she was a "mother-woman" (Chopin, 2018, p. 10). She has an unfathomable beauty. Edna talks to her about her teenage passions and her secret admiration of many males. However, she did not become married to Léonce out of a preoccupation with love. Her marriage is described as an "accident." Although she assumed they had certain things in common, this is not the case. Her need to be liked is clear in all of the memories of her childhood that she shares with Adele. Edna was not reared in a joyful home. Her mother died while she was a child. Her older sister married young and did not get along with her younger sister. For the first time in her life, Edna opens out about her personal life to someone. Mrs. Ratignolle has most likely made her feel cherished and welcomed.

Women are expected to prioritize their families in a patriarchal society. Edna lacks empathy for her children, in contrast to other mothers. She remains unperturbed when they stumble while running on the beach. Frequently, her children approach her, seeking "bonbon sweets" before departing. She is a stern woman who defies the cultural expectations placed on femininity. Rather than adhering to societal moral standards, she establishes her own rules and staunchly defends her individuality. The protagonist's journey of self-discovery and exploration unfolds as a complex, gradual process, not an instantaneous event. To fully appreciate her newfound self, she initiates a deliberate distancing from her husband.

"I would give up the essential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (Chopin, p. 60).

For Edna, 'herself' is more essential than her life and the realization of 'herself' would not let her disregard it at any cost whether it is her husband, kids or society.

Edna's internal conflict is intensified by those around her and the surroundings. Her dusty personality complex leads her toward waking. She "rebels" against nineteenth-century norms. She doesn't follow the norm that her spouse or the community would expect. Unlike her husband, she is a living individual and not merely a piece of his "personal property." Edna aspires to

find her genuine love and happiness with Robert (Chopin, 2018, p. 3). She feels the warmth and love that her marriage is lacking when she is with Robert. Edna breaks down every one of the imperceptible obstacles that society has built for women. Mr. Pontellier never plays with his wife or spends time together. His interest in business is evident in her choice to read a newspaper only for the "market reports" (Chopin, 2018, p.1). Throughout the entire novel, the couple never seems to be enjoying their time together. As Edna and Robert return from the seashore, he suddenly exclaims, "What a folly!" because the sun is high (Chopin, 2018, p.2). He is more drawn to her physique than to her contentment or exhaustion because, in Chopin's words (2018), she is not a person but rather "personal property which has suffered some damages." Léonce is shown as a patriarchal individual who is focused on his business and career. His view of his wife as his "property" ignores the importance of marriage (Chopin, 2018, p. 3). His business travel increases the distance between them, and Edna's decision to live away from home widens the gap even further while giving her a chance to explore the outside world and, most importantly, her own inner world. In addition to Edna continuing her exploration of the world, Léonce's attention is diverted from his wife by their growing distance and his intense interest in his business.

One evening, before midnight, he arrives home in high spirits and an upbeat frame of mind (Chopin, 2018, p. 6). Edna is also awakened by his entrance, but he does not regard her need for rest and sleep instead lamenting the fact that his wife "valued so little his conversation" (Chopin, 2018, p.6). He enters the space where his children are sleeping. He wakes Edna awake and requests that she take care of the child because he is feverish. He begins smoking a "cigar" (Chopin, 2018, p. 6). Additionally, he blames Edna and criticizes her lack of concern for children's welfare. He places the entire burden of duty on the shoulders of the mother, who is in charge of their kids.

In chapter seventeen, Edna breaks from her husband's pattern of having her stay at home every Tuesday afternoon. She doesn't see or interact with any guests. The guests were prominent and well-known businessmen's wives. When Léonce realizes this, he becomes enraged with Edna and brings up the significance of his business opportunity. He doesn't eat dinner before leaving. Edna "stamp(s) her heel upon the it" and "takes off her wedding ring." (Page 67 of Chopin, 2018). The emblem of the marriage bond and all of the obligations that come with it is the wedding ring. Her act of shattering the ring represents her wish to end this relationship. Her intense and furious reaction expresses her present self which is not anymore submissive. She is clearly defying obligations imposed upon her by her husband, Léonce, and society.

Her existence is solely stifled by his patriarchal behavior, which never sees her as an equal. Although he acknowledges her objectives, he nevertheless bothers and discourages her. He never passes up the chance to discredit her originality. She was driven by all of these incidents to terminate her life by drowning in the ocean's depths, where she would no longer have to protect herself from other people. In chapter 19, Léonce meets a new, uninterested Edna. She is no longer bothered with household duties as a wife and mother. He finds no "submissiveness" in his wife (Chopin, 2018, p. 72). He never encourages her pastimes or interests. He considers her picture to be "folly" (Chopin, 2018, p. 73). Léonce declared it to be a "folly" that women worked so hard at their jobs when they ought to be taking care of their families and themselves. According to Chopin (2018), p. 73, Léonce believes that "his wife (is) growing a little unbalanced mentally". Léonce feels that Edna is "not herself" and that his wife "is becoming herself" (Chopin, 2018, p. 73).

He cannot speak the language of love, thus he cannot tell his wife how much he loves her. He still doesn't know what caused Edna to change into a different person. It appeared like he was the sole cause of her transformation. Being a patriarch, Léonce does not consider women as subjects and never acknowledges their distinctiveness. Rather than talking to Edna about the matter, he accuses her of neglecting the kids. He approaches another man and asks him to relieve him of his weight. Léonce calls the family doctor for help because he believes she needs mental support.

### Conclusion:

The discussion and analysis above demonstrate how patriarchy pushes women to submit. Similarly, Edna is expected to be subordinate and obedient because to Léonce Pontellier's role. Edna is considered as "possession," rather than as Léonce's equal spouse. He believes she will do as he says. His perspective is materialistic. After evaluating previous study, the researcher determines that the narrator's conceptual framework and attitude toward women reflect patriarchal mentality. Kate Chopin (2018) employs creative carving to depict the awful facts of an imbalanced married existence, particularly in relation to Léonce Pontellier. He abuses his wife emotionally since he is a patriarchal man.

After evaluating the data, the researcher discovers no evidence of affection between Edna and Léonce. Their marriage is superficial, without mutual understanding and love. Edna believes he treats her rudely and with little importance. This tyranny exposes her to the realities of the patriarchal system. He accuses her of being a negligent mother after learning that his son is ill. Pontellier was merely attempting to show her power over her husband, as Raoul was not unwell. Léonce Pontellier, a character the author employs to show men's patriarchal attitudes toward women, is constantly oppressed and subjugated in an attempt to belittle women. As a result of her husband's abuse and neglect, Edna finally loses interest in caring for her family and home. Léonce considers it a mental disorder. Léonce should have taken her wife into account, but his persistent focus on business opportunities has turned him into a harsh, materialistic patriarch.

The allocation of the titles "wife" and "mother" startled Edna. She is unhappy in life since society's expectations and labels have destroyed who she is. She is going through an identity crisis. As a result of being converted into her husband's object, Edna acquires a sense of selflessness. Being a mother entails being confined to the control of the children, according to Edna. To emphasize this, the author employs the identity of Madame Ratignolle. She is portrayed as a motherly female role model. She is portrayed as the ideal lady, serving as an inspiration to all women, but especially moms. She is the epitome of what a mother should be.

The death of Edna's mother when she was a small child was a very devastating incident in her life. She is unable to find the motherly affection that society may have compelled her to seek. She is self-sufficient in her daily activities. Edna's personality and feeling of self are still developing. Her ambivalent identity is worsened by her loveless marriage to Léonce. Léonce, you've



never recognized her distinct individuality. Instead, he regards her merely as property over which he has no authority. She awakens from the altruistic sleep to the self-aware world. She takes back her identity. She is no longer following her husband's instructions; therefore, he sees her acts as morbid and illogical.

Edna chooses a different path than other ladies of her time. Edna doesn't follow the morality and behavior standards that people have established for women. Women's independence and autonomy are restricted by these prescribed standards of behavior. After coming to grips with her identity and regaining her freedom, Edna lives her life on her terms. She disputes the assertion that her body and soul are possessed by her spouse and children. She stays true to who she is even after discovering it. She never let marriage and motherhood to diminish her newfound individuality. She defies morality by acting in opposition to it. Her sexual promiscuity causes her to have extramarital encounters.

She challenges the patriarchal institution as a forceful act of rejection of patriarchy. Her struggles against despotism serve as evidence of her genuine feminist nature. She rebels against being owned by anyone and seeks for total freedom. Her actions demonstrate her worth. Her actions are not as altruistic as those of the neighboring housewives. She is never without hope for herself. She achieves total independence at the end when she drowns herself to terminate her life. She releases her soul from any limitations imposed by society. She represents the idea that, even if she were to dedicate her life to someone else, she would never give up on herself. She frees her soul by heeding the counsel of herself. To keep her inner self safe, she gives her life.

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