
**BREAKING CHAINS: EDNA'S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AGAINST
SOCIETY AND FAMILY**

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Article Received: 24/02/2025

Article Accepted: 26/03/2025

Published Online: 27/03/2025

DOI:10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.03.263

Abstract:

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) is a key work of feminist fiction that follows Edna Pontellier's quest for personal independence in the face of societal and familial restraints. Set in the late nineteenth-century American South, the novel depicts a world in which women are expected to conform to conventional gender norms, putting their duty as husbands and mothers ahead of their personal needs. Edna's awakening is a lengthy process of self-discovery, motivated by her frustration with traditional domestic life and desire for independence. This paper, titled *Breaking Chains: Edna's Fight for Freedom Against Society and Family in Kate Chopin's The Awakening*, looks at Edna's journey to self-realization and the challenges she experiences when establishing her independence.

Through an analysis of her relationships with her husband, Léonce Pontellier, her children, and her lovers, Robert Lebrun and Alcée Arobin, she illustrates the societal limits placed on women and the double standards that govern female autonomy. Edna's involvement with painting as a form of self-expression highlights her struggle to define herself outside of marriage and motherhood. Using a feminist lens, this study investigates how Chopin attacks patriarchal standards and reveals the psychological and emotional costs of defying societal rules. Edna's ultimate fate—her suicide—is still a source of contention, with some viewing it as a final act of emancipation, while others see it as a terrible surrender to an unbreakable system.

This paper contends that her death demonstrates both the restrictive nature of patriarchal society and the human cost of pursuing ultimate freedom. By placing Edna as a figure of revolt and tragic resistance, *The Awakening* remains a strong novel that continues

to reverberate in modern discussions on gender, autonomy, and self-determination.

Keywords: The Awakening, Feminism, Patriarchy, Gender roles, Female autonomy, Marriage and motherhood, Social conventions, Self-identity, Rebellion, Desire and sexuality, Freedom vs. Confinement, Suicide and liberation

Introduction

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) Stands As A Seminal Work In American Literature, Provoking Intense Critical Debate Since Its Publication. The Novel's Exploration Of Female Autonomy And Selfhood Was Radical For Its Time, Challenging Deeply Ingrained Social Norms Regarding Marriage, Motherhood, And Personal Freedom. Although Condemned Upon Its Release For Its Depiction Of Female Desire And Defiance, The Novel Has Since Been Reassessed As A Crucial Feminist Text, Offering A Nuanced Critique Of Patriarchal Constraints.

Edna Pontellier, The Novel's Protagonist, Embarks On A Journey Of Self-Discovery That Defies The Rigid Expectations Imposed Upon Women In The Nineteenth Century. Her Dissatisfaction With Traditional Roles As A Wife And A Mother Drives Her To Seek An Identity Beyond Societal Prescriptions. Chopin's Portrayal Of Edna's Awakening Presents A Powerful Commentary On The Tensions Between Individual Agency And Cultural Conventions, Revealing The Emotional And Psychological Costs Of Female Nonconformity.

This Study Examines Edna's Resistance To The Structures Of Marriage And Family, Her Pursuit Of Artistic And Romantic Autonomy, And The Broader Implications Of Her Rebellion. By Situating *The Awakening* Within The Context Of Feminist Literary Discourse, This Analysis Highlights How Chopin Critiques The Limitations Imposed On Women's Lives While Also Interrogating The Viability Of True Independence Within A Patriarchal Framework. Through A Close Reading Of Edna's Evolving Consciousness, This Paper Aims To Contribute To Ongoing Discussions About Gender, Identity, And Freedom In Literature, Positioning Chopin's Work As A Vital Precursor To Modern Feminist Thought.

The Confining Role Of Marriage And Motherhood

Edna Pontellier's Struggle Begins When She Realizes That Marriage And Motherhood Do Not Fulfill Her Sense Of Self. Unlike Adele Ratignolle, Who Represents The Ideal "Mother-Woman," Edna's Identity Is Not Primarily Derived From Her Family. Adele Finds Fulfillment In Caring For Her Husband And Children, Whilst Edna Feels Limited By These Responsibilities. Her Rising Dissatisfaction Marks The Start Of Her Awakening As She Begins To Question The Roles Placed On Her.

Her Husband, Léoncepontellier, Exemplifies Patriarchal Power, Which Expects Women To Be Obedient And Dedicated Caregivers. He Considers Edna An Extension Of

His Household, Perpetuating The Conventional Assumption That Women Exist Exclusively To Serve Their Families. His Disdain For Edna's Growing Independence Reveals The Strict Gender Stereotypes That Rule Their Marriage. As Edna Begins To Defy His Control, Choosing Solitude Above Social Duties And Prioritizing Her Needs, Léonce Becomes Increasingly Upset, Emphasizing The Conflict Between Individual Liberty And Marriage Expectations.

Edna's Connection With Adele Emphasizes Her Difficulty Because Adele Fully Embraces The Traditional Role That Edna Rejects. Adele's Warnings About The Hazards Of Disobeying Cultural Standards Serve As A Reminder Of The Difficulties That Come With Female Independence. In Contrast, Mademoiselle Reisz, An Unmarried Artist, Represents A Life Of Autonomy, Albeit One Marked By Seclusion And Social Isolation. Through These Partnerships, Edna Sees Both The Security Of Conformity And The Challenges Of Carving A New Route.

This Section Delves Into How Societal Standards Shape Women's Roles And The Consequences Of Rejecting Them. As Edna Expresses Her Independence, She Faces Opposition From Others Around Her, Demonstrating The Personal Cost Of Defying Customary Expectations. Her Path Exposes The Difficult Fight Between Self-Liberation And Cultural Forces That Strive To Limit Women To Specific Roles.

Love, Desire, And The Search For Identity

Edna's Relationships With Robert Lebrun And Alcéarobin Represent Her Journey Of Self-Discovery, Showcasing Her Developing Understanding Of Love, Passion, And Autonomy Outside Of Marriage. These Connections Defy Traditional Moral Norms, Allowing Edna To Express Emotions And Want That She Had Previously Restrained As Léoncepontellier's Wife. They Do, However, Illustrate The Societal Limits That Limit Women's Personal Independence, Particularly In Terms Of Expressing Feminine Desire.

Robert Lebrun Exemplifies The Possibilities Of Romantic Love Free Of Responsibility And Commitment. His Caring Nature Ignites Edna's Feelings Of Passion And Longing, Which She Had Never Completely Explored During Her Marriage. Despite His Affection For Her, Robert Eventually Succumbs To Societal Expectations, Opting To Leave Rather Than Flout Moral Traditions. His Leaving Strengthens Their Society's Limiting Rules, Which Condemn Women's Aspirations While Allowing Males To Live Freely.

In Contrast, Alcéarobin Represents Physical Passion Without Emotional Attachment. Edna's Affair With Him Gives Her A New Sense Of Power Over Her Body And Wants, Contradicting The Assumption That A Woman's Sexuality Should Exist Only Within Marriage. However, The Connection Does Not Offer Her Long-Term Fulfillment, As She Finds That Physical Desire Alone Is Insufficient To Satisfy Her Need For Independence.

These Encounters Affect Edna's Self-Perception, Demonstrating That Love And Passion Cannot Entirely Define Her Identity. On A Broader Level, The Awakening Criticizes

The Double Standards That Men And Women Face When It Comes To Love And Betrayal. Through Edna's Search For Selfhood, Chopin Questions The Rigid Structures Of Marriage And Female Freedom, Revealing The Complications Of Personal Liberty In A World That Strives To Confine Women To Conventional Expectations.

Art As A Means Of Liberation

Edna Pontellier Turns To Art As A Form Of Self-Expression And Independence, Utilizing Painting To Affirm Her Individuality Outside Of Marriage And Motherhood. In The Awakening, Artistic Creativity Represents Her Developing Autonomy, Giving Her A Feeling Of Purpose Outside Of Traditional Norms. Unlike Her Regimented Existence At Home, Painting Allows Her To Freely Express Her Emotions And Desires. Edna Discovers A World Via Art In Which She Is More Than Just A Wife Or Mother, But A Unique Woman With Her Own Goals.

At First, Edna's Artistic Activities Are Informal, More Of A Diversion Than A Serious Endeavor. However, As She Becomes More Aware Of Her Discomfort With Traditional Female Roles, She Begins To Take Her Work More Seriously. Her Developing Commitment To Painting Reflects Her Rising Desire For Personal Agency As She Begins To Perceive Art As A Viable Form Of Self-Definition. Unlike The Roles That Society Assigns Her As A Beautiful Wife, A Dedicated Mother Identity As An Artist Is Something She Chooses For Herself. Painting Allows Her To Access And Describe Feelings That She Finds Difficult To Express In Ordinary Life, Which Strengthens Her Sense Of Self. Her Decision To Relocate To The "Pigeon House" Emphasizes Her Desire For Independence. By Leaving Her Husband's House And Creating Her Own Space, She Frees Herself From Household Chores And Embraces A Simpler, More Self-Directed Lifestyle. Moving Out Signifies A Rejection Of Traditional Womanhood Since She No Longer Submits To Her Husband's Authority Or Puts Her Family's Interests Ahead Of Her Own. In This Area, She Can Produce Without Interruption, Emphasizing The Link Between Artistic Expression And Personal Liberty.

However, While Painting Grants Edna A Sense Of Autonomy, She Soon Confronts The Limitations Imposed On Women Seeking Creative And Financial Independence. True Artistic Success Requires Not Only Talent But Also Financial Stability And Societal Acceptance, Both Of Which Are Difficult For A Woman In Her Position To Attain. Unlike Mademoiselle Reisz, Who Has Sacrificed Personal Relationships For Her Career As A Pianist, Edna Is Not Willing To Fully Isolate Herself In Pursuit Of Art. She Desires Both Creative Freedom And Meaningful Connections, But Society Does Not Allow Her To Have Both.

This Section Analyzes How Artistic Expression In The Awakening Serves As Both A Form Of Resistance And A Means Of Self-Exploration. While Painting Symbolizes Edna's Longing For Freedom, Her Inability To Fully Sustain Herself Through Art Highlights The Restrictions Placed On Women's Autonomy. Through Edna's Journey, Chopin Critiques A Society That Limits Women's Creative Potential, Suggesting That True Artistic

And Personal Fulfillment Remains Elusive For Those Who Challenge Traditional Expectations.

The Social Isolation Of The Rebellious Woman

As Edna Distances Herself From Societal Expectations, She Becomes Increasingly Isolated, Both Emotionally And Socially. Her Rejection Of Traditional Roles Leaves Her Without A Clear Place In The World, Making Isolation Both A Consequence Of Her Rebellion And A Catalyst For Her Transformation. She Longs For Both Personal Freedom And Meaningful Connection But Struggles To Reconcile The Two, Realizing That Society Offers Little Space For Women Who Seek Both Independence And Relationships On Their Own Terms. Unlike Men, Who Can Navigate Personal And Professional Ambitions More Freely, Women Are Expected To Prioritize Domestic Duties Above All Else.

The Lack Of Support From Those Around Her Deepens Edna's Alienation. Her Husband, Léonce, Dismisses Her Transformation As Irrational, Urging Her To Return To Domestic Life. He Perceives Her Growing Detachment As A Failure In Her Duties Rather Than An Assertion Of Selfhood. Even Adele Ratignolle, Who Embodies The Ideal "Mother-Woman," Fails To Understand Edna's Dissatisfaction, Reminding Her Of Her Duty To Her Children. Adele's Well-Meaning Concern Underscores Society's Rigid Belief That A Woman's Fulfillment Must Come From Her Role As A Wife And Mother.

Mademoiselle Reisz, In Contrast, Encourages Edna's Artistic Ambitions And Defiance Of Social Norms. However, Reisz Has Paid A Price For Her Independence, Living In Solitude And Often Appearing Eccentric To Others. While Edna Admires Her Freedom, She Hesitates To Embrace Such An Isolated Existence. Caught Between Adele's Conformity And Reisz's Detachment, Edna Struggles To Forge A Path That Allows Both Personal Fulfillment And Connection.

This Section Explores How Edna's Growing Isolation Reflects The Rigid Barriers That Prevent Women From Fully Escaping Patriarchal Structures. While She Experiences Moments Of Exhilaration In Her Independence, She Also Confronts The Loneliness That Accompanies Defiance. Her Journey Highlights The Emotional And Social Cost Of Rebellion, Questioning Whether True Autonomy Is Possible In A World That Offers Women-Only Limited Choices. Chopin Critiques A Society That Forces Women Into Rigid Roles, Showing How Those Who Seek Self-Definition Beyond Prescribed Norms Often Face Exclusion And Misunderstanding.

The Tragic End: Liberation Or Defeat?

Edna Pontellier's Suicide Is One Of The Most Contentious Sections Of The Awakening. Some See It As A Declaration Of Sovereignty Over Her Fate, A Final Rejection Of Societal Restraints. Others Saw It As A Sorrowful Concession, Emphasizing The Impossibility Of Full Freedom For Women In Her Day. Regardless Of Viewpoint, Edna's Story Highlights The Tragic Implications Of A Culture That Denies Women Agency And Puts Them Into Constrained Positions.

One Viewpoint Regards Edna's Suicide As A Form Of Emancipation. Throughout The Story, She Seeks Autonomy Through Love, Art, And Financial Freedom, Only To Discover That Each Option Is Limited By Social Expectations. By Walking Into The Sea, Edna Chooses Her Own Fate, Escaping The Constraints That Society Refuses To Remove. The Ocean, A Repeating Symbol Of Waking And Transformation, Represents The Ultimate Embracing Of Self-Determination. Unlike Her Earlier Awakenings, Which Were Stifled By External Constraints, This Final Act Is Totally Her Own, Free Of The Demands Of Marriage, Parenthood, And Social Conventions.

Some, On The Other Hand, Saw Her Death As A Tragic Resignation. Edna Finds She Can't Exist In Society On Her Own Terms, And Her Growing Isolation Leads To Despair. Every Path She Takes- Romantic Love, Art, And Personal Independence- Fails To Give A Long-Term Alternative To The Traditional Life She Has Spurned. In This Interpretation, Her Suicide Represents The Terrible Loneliness And Unavoidable Difficulties She Suffers As A Woman Who Refuses To Comply. The Expanse Of The Ocean Communicates A Sensation Of Disintegration, Implying The Erasure Of Self Rather Than Its Fulfillment.

This Part Likewise Takes A Nuanced Approach, Viewing Edna's Death As Both An Act Of Resistance And A Remark On The Limited Options Accessible To Women In Her Time. While She Refuses To Conform To Societal Expectations, Her Failure To Forge A Viable Future For Herself Highlights The Melancholy Reality Of Females Living In A Patriarchal World. The Awakening Asks Readers To Ponder The Cost Of Female Independence In A Limited Culture, Making Edna's Fate A Poignant Symbol Of The Hardships Of Women Seeking Self-Definition. Her Death Is More Than Just A Personal Tragedy; It Is A Critique Of A Culture That Provides Few Opportunities For Women To Achieve True Autonomy.

Conclusion

Edna Pontellier's Journey In The Awakening Illustrates Women's Quest For Autonomy In A Society That Enforces Rigid Gender Stereotypes. Through Marriage, Love, Art, And Ultimately Death, She Challenges Societal Expectations But Finds No Space To Exist Freely On Her Own Terms. Her Awakening Is A Highly Personal Yet Universal Battle That Mirrors The Larger Conflict Between Individual Desire And Social Responsibilities. Her Resistance To Traditional Roles Exposes The Limitations Imposed On Women And Highlights The Consequences Of Defying Established Norms.

Her Experiences Highlight The Limits Imposed On Women, Particularly In Marriage And Parenthood. While She Pursues Freedom Through Relationships And Artistic Expression, Both Paths Are Constrained By Cultural Norms. Her Interactions With Individuals Such As Adele Ratignolle And Mademoiselle Reisz Highlight The Restricted Options Open To Women: Full Compliance Or Social Isolation. Edna's Final Act, Walking Into The Sea, Is Open To Interpretation And Represents Either Liberty Or Resignation. Regardless Of Perspective, Her Fate Challenges A World That Provides Few Opportunities

For Women To Achieve True Self-Fulfillment. The Novel Finally Asks Whether Women Can Achieve Full Autonomy In A Patriarchal Culture Or If They Must Always Sacrifice Some Aspect Of Themselves To Live.

Beyond Its Feminist Themes, *The Awakening* Raises Larger Questions About Identity, Self-Expression, And The Repercussions Of Nonconformity. Chopin's Description Of Edna's Internal Conflict Transforms The Work Into A Timeless Examination Of The Human Quest For Freedom. Edna's Struggle Speaks To Readers Of All Ages, Especially Those Who Have Experienced Cultural Pressures That Contradict Personal Goals. Her Quest For Independence, The Conflict Between Desire And Duty, And The Cost Of Self-Discovery Are All Topics That Remain Pertinent In Contemporary Feminist Discourse.

Ultimately, *The Awakening* Remains An Important Piece In Feminist Literary Discourse, Giving Insight Into The Pressures That Form Female Identity And Autonomy. By Delving Into The Intersections Of Gender, Art, And Independence, This Article Highlights The Novel's Enduring Relevance In Conversations About Female Agency And Liberation, Cementing Its Status As A Literary Classic. Chopin's Candid Assessment Of A Woman's Quest For Selfhood Compels Readers To Consider The Limits That Persist Today, As Well As The Ongoing Fight For Gender Equality.

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SP Publications

International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)

An International Peer-Reviewed and Refereed Journal

Impact Factor: 8.175 (SJIF) | ISSN: 2581-8333 | Volume 7, Issue 3 | March 2025

Citation:

Doulin Jebeshma E & Dr.K.Nagarathinam” BREAKING CHAINS: EDNA’S FIGHT FOR FREEDOM AGAINST SOCIETY AND FAMILY” *International Journal of English and Studies (IJOES)*, vol. 7, no. 3, 2025, pp. 256-263. DOI: 10.47311/IJOES.2025.7.03.263.