



Illusion And Identity

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ABSTRACT

This research paper explores the theme of Illusion and identity in the protagonist Edna Pontellier in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899), a work of American literature. The novel portrays the protagonist and her trapped marriage life in which she lost herself and lived her life half-awake bound by social norms. The study focuses on her attempts to challenge the dominant patriarchal system due to her culture's inability or unwillingness to give up its antiquated idealistic beliefs. Edna gets the realization that her life is not owned by her but created by societal demands and expectations. She understands that this delusion has hindered her from leading a life that is authentic to her and must awaken and confront the truth. She gives up her sophisticated life in exchange for freedom in order to achieve ultimate independence. Edna finally rejects the illusion of conformity and embraces her own desires and individuality highlighting her awakening and the pursuit of personal fulfilment.

Keywords: Self discovery, idealistic beliefs, realization, societal demands, freedom, illusion, awakening.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) is an early feminist fiction that talks about women's personal and sexual liberation. Edna Pontellier, the main character is a married woman who is prosperous. Her spouse is a cheerful businessman who occasionally treats her badly. They have two children. She starts to understand her place in the universe as a human being one summer. Instead of disregarding the ongoing oppression of her apparently ideal and inside oppressive marriage she starts to become aware of it. A number of triggers such as her newly discovered affinity with love tunes, a

passion for swimming in the sea and her developing desire for a charming man named Robert Lebrun. She embarks on a solitary, self-discovering adventure. As she resolutely follows her own heart, she begins to avoid false connections, notions and other constraints.

Edna's hunger for liberation makes her travel an unusual one. At last how she accepts herself her awakening about her true self. The novel discusses wide range of topics, including work on sexuality, women's struggle for creative or independent identities, True Womanhood, the New Woman, and the existence of patriarchal control, whether socially, legally, or economically. It investigates the oppositional character of the New Woman and considers how sexuality and independent identity advance comprehension of the conventional asexual, selfless nature of the True Woman as well as the ideology of the New Woman. The impact of male-dominated authority on women as a whole is most significant since no study of the late nineteenth century woman is complete without examining the limitations imposed on women by males. *The Awakening* is a moving account of the desperate fight between women who wanted to take on more responsibility and the persistently constrictive patriarchal society.

Women's rightful roles have long been a source of contention between those who favor keeping women in their traditional roles at home and others who favor releasing them from their traditionally constrictive confines. The woman who accepted this job became an idol, an idealized symbol of femininity, basically a real Woman for the former, who thought that a woman's true place was in her duty as a wife and mother.

The woman who met this standard was expected to marry, submit sexually to her husband without question. An individual sense of self, which would have interfered with her sacrificial responsibilities as a wife and mother, was absent from the ideal woman. Yet much more than that, she was supposed to accept these obligations and the total loss of her identity without protest.

"I know why the caged bird sings, ah me, / When his wing is bruised and his bosom sore. / When he beats his bars and would be free; / It is not a carol of joy or glee, / But a prayer that he sends from his heart's deep core." The image of a caged bird is used in this quotation from Paul Laurence Dunbar's poem *Sympathy* to depict the challenges of women who are restricted by societal expectations and limits. The poem captures the anguish and annoyance of the caged bird that is unable to fly freely. The bird has suffered and is still attempting to escape as evidenced by the bruises

on its wings and soreness in its breast. The phrase might be interpreted as a metaphor for how constrained women are by the expectations and standards of their day. It implies that women's aspirations for equality and liberty are motivated by a genuine yearning for freedom and the chance to realize their potential rather than a desire for status or power. The phrase emphasizes the struggle of women who are restricted by society norms and restrictions and implies that their aspirations for freedom and equality are genuine and deeply felt.

The protagonist, Edna Pontellier embarks on a journey of self-awareness and identity which results in psychological suffering. Edna begins to examine her own needs and aspiration and starts to question the duties and expectations that society has put on her as a woman, wife, and mother. The expectations of Edna's social class and gender battle with her yearning for individual independence and autonomy. She starts to put her husband, her kids, and her typical obligations as a wife and mother out of her reach.

Mrs. Pontellier was not a woman given to confidences, a characteristic hitherto contrary to her nature. Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions. (*Awakening* 32)

Mrs. Pontellier has a propensity for contemplation, which indicates that she has always had a solitary existence. This shows that Ms. Pontellier has always sensed a certain distance from other people and is at ease in alone and reflection. Mrs. Pontellier has long understood that existence has two sides, one of which is outward compliance and the other of which is interior doubt. This shows that Ms. Pontellier is continuously reflecting on and evaluating her own life and decisions rather than merely following social expectations and standards. She wants a deeper knowledge of herself and her position in the world rather than being content with just leading an adequate life on the surface.

Her husband Leonce is presented as a shrewd businessman who is more focused on his social standing and professional relationships than his wife's emotional needs. Edna did not intentionally or consciously choose to marry Leonce, but it was an accident that perceived to be fate or social expectations. Leonce's treatment of Edna mirrors the customs and standards that prevalent in the age in which the novel is set. Instead of seeing their wives as equals or partners, men saw them as possessions or objects to be adored and desired. "He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who

was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation” (*Awakening* 23). As contrast to seeing her as a unique individual with her own thoughts, feelings, and interests, Leonce seems to consider her simply as a way of gratifying his own wants and desires. This exemplifies how Edna’s ability to define and express her own identity has been restricted and limited by patriarchal society.

She begins to realize the limitations of her marriage and the restrictions it imposes on her as she goes through a journey of self-discovery and is more conscious of her wants and goals. Edna learns about her developing self-awareness and self-discovery and realizes, for the first time, where she fits in the world and what makes her unique.

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. (*Awakening* 31)

According to the quotation, coming to this conclusion involves work and careful thinking rather than being simple or quick. The idea that this form of self-discovery is frequently connected to religious or spiritual enlightenment is implied by the parallel to the Holy Spirit. In addition, Edna’s age of twenty-eight underlines the concept that this sort of self-awareness and self-discovery is not restricted to a certain age or stage of life. Irrespective of their age or gender, anyone can experience it at any moment. This is a crucial concept in the book since it implies that personal development and self-discovery are continual processes that may occur at any time in one’s life.

“The years that were gone seemed like dreams - if one might go on sleeping and dreaming - but to wake up and find – oh! Well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life” (*Awakening* 133). The phrase implies that Edna believes her prior existence to be an illusion and that facing truth, whatever the pain and suffering it may cause, is preferable than continuing to live in delusion. In Edna’s comment, she expresses the opinion that she has outgrown the idea of existing in a dreamy state. Even if it means facing painful realities, she wants to awaken to a deeper awareness of herself and the world around her. She understands that this delusion has hindered her from leading a life that is authentic to whom she is

and that in order to free her from it; she must awaken and confront truth.

. “She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods” (*Awakening* 72). Edna finds the process of self-discovery to have a certain appeal or attractiveness to it rather than being completely painful or unpleasant. Edna may explore and comprehend herself in a region between light and shade, between clarity and uncertainty, without feeling overburdened or confined by other people's expectations. According to this passage, Edna is through a profound and transforming process of self-exploration that is both difficult and fruitful and that is guiding her towards a deeper understanding of herself as a person and as a woman.

“Yes,” she said. “The years that are gone seem like dreams-if one might go on sleeping and dreaming-but to wake up and find-oh! Well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life” (*Awakening* 133). The sentence alludes to a feeling of dejection and the knowledge that the past, which may have looked like a dream or an illusion, is indeed gone and cannot be recovered. Overall, the paragraph conveys a sense of disillusionment and a readiness to confront harsh facts of life, which may be connected to earlier trauma or loss experiences.

She starts to look into her own interests and passions since she feels stuck and dissatisfied. Edna feels both delight and sadness as she discovers who she truly is. She receives a fresh sense of independence and freedom, but she must also deal with the repercussions of defying social norms. Nevertheless, Edna finally discovers that being awake and true to herself is preferable to lead a life of silent suffering despite the difficulties she encounters. Chopin contends that the only way to genuinely achieve fulfillment and have a meaningful life is by the means of this awakening.

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