

# The awakening vs. scarlet letter essay sample

[Life](#), [Love](#)



The Power of Romance Versus Society Hester Prynne, the main character in Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter*, is very similar to Edna Pontellier of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, in that both women contradicted the societal standard and followed their hearts as opposed to the rigid marital structure of their respective times in history. Edna and Hester chose to be with men whom they really cared for. At times when marriage seemed to be based more on a convenient loyalty rather than a genuine bond, these women preferred to follow their true feelings. They were scoffed at for doing so, and those of a presumably higher moral standard shunned them for following their hearts. In the case of Hester, a public mockery was made of the adulteress and she was thus eternally condemned to a life of shame. Edna was luckier, as her sin was more acceptable in Louisiana Creole society. The irony is that both women were actually good at heart. Neither intended any harm against anyone "" not even their own husbands who were the victims of their unfaithfulness.

Both Edna and Hester were mothers and both cared deeply for their children. In spite of this, Edna was sometimes incapable of showing her true care and affection for her children. The other " mother-women" who surrounded her seemed to put their children as first priority. This was not true of Edna, who appeared more concerned with her own happiness than that of her children.

Hester and Edna have very romantic personalities in the sense that both of them made decisions based on their affections in the heat of the moment, though they were fully aware of the consequences. Hester committed adultery with one of her town's most respected magistrates, a sin that was punishable by death in colonial Puritan society. This initial decision was not

the only one that Hester Prynne made based on passion. She opted to stay in Salem even after she had been sentenced to live a life of shame represented by the scarlet letter on her bosom. Hawthorne reveals that she made this decision because, deep inside her heart, she wanted to be reunited with her true love, Mr. Dimmesdale.

Edna also made decisions that sometimes seemed irrational. She decided to move out of her house and away from her seemingly picture-perfect life into her own place “” a place where she could dwell away from her husband. Like Hester, she harbored no hatred for her rightful husband. She also felt no real affection for the man, because he was not meeting her emotional needs, despite the fact that Edna was the “ sole object of his existence.” Unlike Hester, Edna had not been forced into the marriage though. It seems more that she and Mr. Pontellier had just grown apart over the years. It was not until the summer at Grand Isle when she fully realized this distance.

Some people actually applauded Edna for following her heart and going with Robert. Such was not the case with Hester, who was almost universally ridiculed for her crime. Hester was made an example of to society. Even young children knew that she was a sinner and an outcast, though they were not quite sure what that meant. In this way, hate was bred even in minds too young to understand it. Hawthorne describes this, “ Man has marked this woman’s sin by a scarlet letter, which had such potent and disastrous efficacy that no human sympathy could reach her. God, as a direct consequence of the sin which man thus punished, had given her a lovely

child." Ms. Prynne and Mrs. Pontellier both went against the fabric of their conservative society.

This was, of course, more extreme in the case of Hester. Though Edna was looked down upon by some for betraying her matronly and spousal obligations, many wished Hester dead, and she was ousted from her place as a participating member of society. Hester's illegitimate daughter, Pearl, also suffered the consequences of her mother's sin. Because she did not feel like anyone cared about her besides her mother, Pearl grew to hate and distrust humankind in general. Edna's children never had to suffer this lack of belonging. They got all the attention they needed from their various caretakers and relatives.

Some of the differences between the lifestyles of the two women can be reduced simply to time period and social stature. Hester lived in a time when any luxury was regarded as frivolous. Any self-indulgence or even outward show of happiness was thought to be the work of the Devil. Because of this strong religious influence on society, Hester was thought to be evil because she gave in to her own needs and desires. Edna lived in a comparably liberal time and place. She had very extravagant possessions and enjoyment of free time was seen as something to be cherished. The Creole French (of whom Edna was not one) are known for their flamboyance and easygoing nature. The Puritans of early Salem lived their lives in a constant battle with the Devil, sin, lust, and recreation. In this close-knit society, Hester was seen as the embodiment of the evil in all of these things. The irony is that Hester considered herself to be an active practitioner of the Puritan faith and

lifestyle. Numerous times in *The Scarlet Letter*, Hester is heard telling her Pearl about her heavenly father.

Both Edna and Hester are outcasts of their society. Edna is an all-American girl from Kentucky. She is unaccustomed to the straightforward Creole lifestyle that she confronts in Louisiana. Because of this, it is easy for her to misinterpret some of the things that people say and do in Louisiana. Hester is an outcast to a much greater degree than Edna because she is forced to adhere to a much stricter system of government and religion than Edna.

Hester Prynne and Edna Pontellier are two women of passionate and romantic motives who refused to conform to the standards of their societies. Despite their stable and comfortable lives with their husbands, these women fell in love with other men. This is not so outrageous as the fact that they followed their impulses and chose to leave their husbands for these men.