

Awakening via the omniscient narrator

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Awakening via the Omniscient Narrator
In Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier transforms from a wealthy product of mid 19th century Creole society into an independent, beautiful soul that acknowledges none of the boundaries of societal code. Her beauty, like the plot, only meets its full potential at the end of the narrative when Edna takes her own life. As the story progresses, she experiences increasingly intensified epiphanies that communicate to her, and the audience, that her soul's full potential is bounded by her life's position in the Creole society of New Orleans.

Throughout the story, symbols of Edna's awakening are revealed via her own admissions, the comments of other characters, and most evidently, through the omniscient narrator. In fact, it is through the omniscient narrator that we learn the most about Edna's true spirit, her fluctuating social stature, and her innermost desires to rid the world (or at least her world) of societal code. "Every step she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual" (Beaty, 102). In no other part of the book does Chopin approach the reader so abruptly with this principle of Mrs. Pontellier's character. Thus, without the façade of symbolism, the reader sees how Edna enjoys the feeling of independence, rebellion, and disregard for societal code. "She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to 'feed upon opinion' when her own soul had invited her" (Beaty, 102), emotions exemplifying her newly acknowledged liberties. From the text, the reader can imply that Edna has recognized these urges her soul contains at some point in the past, and only at this point in the present, has she decided to acknowledge and appease those essential drives. When Edna moves to

the Pigeon-house, the house pleased her because it gave her a “ sense of home” (Beaty, 102). However, she also felt as though she had descended in the social scale, while rising in the spiritual. Edna understands how and why the social structure of Creole society functions. Arguably, the decision to appease her internal drives is within her newfound comfort in the Creole hierarchy. Chopin reveals in the beginning of the narrative, “ Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them.... They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations” (Beaty, 46). At first, this seemingly non-prudent air amongst the elitist society confuses Edna, but later she understands that such characteristics are unmistakable signs of a Creole girl, born with such characteristics. “ She stayed alone in a kind of reverie – a sort of stupor. Step by step she lived over every instant of the time she had been with Robert after he had entered Mademoiselle Reisz’s door. She recalled his words, his looks. How few and meager they had been for her hungry heart! A vision – a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico” (Beaty, 108). Edna’s Awakening is portrayed in two ways throughout the story, first in her repulsion from her proscribed role in society, symbolized by Mrs. Adele Ratignolle. Mrs. Ratignolle represents the model wife and mother of Creole society. She is homely, submissive to her husband, adores her children, and follows all appropriate social procedures

expected of her. With this behavior, Chopin presents her as a foil through which to view Edna. Chopin uses Mrs. Ratignolle to portray Edna's differences, and her awakening. If Adele is the literary foil, then Robert Lebrun is Chopin's agent of change, responsible for Edna's realization of her inner soul, and her soul's true intentions. In fact, Robert and Adele are polar counterparts that determine Edna's fate. For Edna to leave behind her "nouveau riche" title, she must either shape her personality more like Adele, and further immerse herself in Creole society, or she must work towards joining the "cult of true womanhood" concentrating on pleasing herself and spending time with Robert. Edna's Awakening can be summarized by the larger concept of white, male, dominance in the Creole culture. The same struggle is experienced by Chopin, as well as other feminist writers' spanning history, in *The Story of an Hour*. It is, as Chopin portrays directly with the reader throughout the book, Edna's unfortunate duty to free her soul of all imposed regulations, including the sacrifice of her life. Work Cited¹. Beaty, Jerome. New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999. 41-116.