

A typical victorian women in the awakening of k.chopin

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“ The greatest crimes in the world are not committed by people breaking the rules, but people following the rules” (Banksy). During the nineteenth century, men were the dominant figures of the household and women were simply there to cook, clean, and look after the children. This was the rule until women eventually began to break the standards in order to achieve a more satisfactory life. Without this crime, women would still be living an unhappy life wishing they could stray from society’s expectations. In the novel *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin demonstrates through her protagonist’s rebellious actions that during the Victorian period, women were expected to conform to society in an obedient manner, or they would face dire consequences.

The main character, Edna, is described as dutiful and subservient, willing to comply with society’s standards. Chopin displays Edna’s mannerisms and physical appearance in a reserved fashion. Throughout the novel, Edna is constantly portrayed as a conservative woman wearing innocent colors, such as white. At Grand Isle, “ she wore a cool muslin that morning - white, with a waving vertical brown running through it; also a white linen collar and the big straw hat” (Chopin 21). During the nineteenth century, women were expected to be modest and conform to their husband’s requests, and they were often regarded as property. On the beach outside, Edna’s husband says, ““ You are burnt beyond recognition,’ he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage” (Chopin 3). In this time period, people frowned upon women who showed any sign of independence or authority. Although Edna is first

perceived as an obedient wife, in the course of the novel she seeks an awakening and sets out to fulfill her sexual and emotional desires.

Eventually, Edna gets time away from her controlling husband to break out of her shell and start making decisions on her own. She breaks free of this restraint by going swimming in the ocean for the first time. After awakening from her first swim, she transforms into a rebellious character, extremely different from her original self. Once viewed as an obedient wife that is willing to stay at home to care for her family, Edna is now awakened into an independent woman who rebels against nineteenth century ideals of separate spheres. The feeling of liberation overwhelms her as she plunges through the ocean waves: " she attained her newly conquered power and begins to swim out" (Chopin 42). The protagonist's so-called " baptism" is a rebirth for her character that creates stronger feelings which overwhelm her, such as the concept of freedom and control over her own well-being.

Immediately following her renewal, Edna starts taking on a more detached role at home, which is noticed in her behavior as she nonchalantly says " Nothing, I simply felt like going out, and I went out" (Chopin 77). Her once tamed shackles have now been disturbed by her newly donned rebellious lifestyle. Not only does Edna take a stubborn approach against society's roles, she also takes on (and masters) more masculine activities. While there are some men " who knew the race horse as well as Edna, but there was certainly no one who knew it better" (Chopin 113). A significant turning point is when Edna goes out, because this proves that she is no longer conforming

to the culture rules. Edna's ability to swim transforms her old self-conscious mentality into that of a strong, independent individual.

When Edna becomes enlightened, she becomes a self-driven, headstrong woman. Right after the fact, her close friends and family notice this new form and begin to show a strong dislike for how disruptive she has become with regards to Victorian culture. Edna's concerned husband, Léonce, is one of the first characters to pick up on her strange behavior. He explains to his doctor, " she doesn't act well, she's odd, she's not like herself" (Chopin 100). Although Léonce is portrayed as a distant husband, it is in his nature to still care for his wife and look after her health. From this point on in the novel, he constantly worries about Edna because he knows he has lost his true love. Léonce also begins to pick up on her deteriorating social life when " Edna no longer attends the social dinners with the other wives" (Chopin 87). Instead of Edna making a presence at these weekly social gatherings full of gossip, she continues to strive for a self-pleasure and begins to paint. Since Edna's awakening in the ocean, she has been drowning in her determination to reach self-satisfaction, but after coming to the realization that no one or thing will ever be enough to please her, she gives up, and so do the people around her.

Overall, Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* is very focused on the roles of women during the Victorian period. Chopin describes the typical female obligations in the nineteenth century American home and then dives into great depth on the emotions in store for women after they have been " freed." As Stan Lee once wrote, " With great power comes great

responsibility.” The power of becoming independent can be liberating, but if not controlled it may lead to one’s demise. Edna is unable to handle her new freedom and feels overwhelmed, which leads to her decision to commit suicide.