

# The awakening deconstruction

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When understanding a work of literature, most readers would take the work at its face value, not looking into other possible meanings, while a deconstructionist would take apart a text and find many other possible meanings. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin tells the story of Edna Pointillist, who feels that society is constricting and that she needs to be free of the norms set by society. She decides to leave her responsibilities and pursue a life of freedom, which she at first thinks is exactly what she wants. She abandons her life as a housewife and mother to follow a path that leads to her own destruction.

By freeing herself from what she thought was an unhappy life, Edna finds herself more dejected, which leads her to her death. She thinks the only way to be truly free from the oppressiveness of society would be to die, which would release her of all her worries. The point Chopin was trying to convey in *The Awakening* is that society is oppressive and forces women to stay in their place otherwise their reputation would be in jeopardy. The idea falls apart in that no one ever tries to stop Edna from her process of "awakening." Not one person forces her to do her housework or take care of her children. It is merely suggested that she does so. Even though Edna receives warnings and scolding from her husband to be a better mother and to take better care of the family, she ignores them, and Lonce thinks there is something mentally wrong with her (86). When Dean's father comes to visit her, he scolds Lonce for being too lenient and not asserting his authority instead of realizing that Edna was asserting her own independence (107). The idea of an oppressive society disintegrates through this example.

Edna believes that society is constricting her, when there isn't anyone who is limiting her actions. Once, on finding out that Edna has moved into a smaller house, only disapproves because he fears his reputation would be injured because he believes others would think he is having financial difficulties (137). This shows that Once isn't particularly worried about Dean's reputation, only what she could be doing to his reputation. Therefore, Edna isn't necessarily being burdened by the norms of society; she is already partially free to express herself.

Doctor Mandated, on speaking with Once concerning Dean's "condition", asks if Edna has been associating with "pseudo-intellectual women", which Once reports that she hasn't (99). Mademoiselle Rouse could be considered an intellectual woman, being that she often gives Edna advice, whom is also Dean's confidant. Mademoiselle Rouse also warns Edna by telling her "The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth" (122).

So, even the woman whom Edna turns to for guidance tells her she must be strong to break through society's clutches, or she will fall, which foreshadows Dean's death. Chopin's concept is void because Edna continues to challenge authority. Throughout the story, Dean's friends and relatives worry for her reputation, though she seems to not care about it. The society that Chopin displays deeply considers the role of women and how it forces women to conform, otherwise jeopardizing their reputation.

This idea crumbles when Edna throws a house party her father's health, praising him for "the daughter whom he invented" (129). Dean's reputation has obviously not been affected by her actions because of the many people who showed up to her party. They didn't seem to judge her for inviting Robin either. When Adèle visits Edna, she tells her that she worries for the impulsive and reckless nature of her actions, but the two seem to still be close friends despite her actions (141). Her reputation is not affected by her so-called "impulsive and reckless nature".

Also, earlier in her process of "awakening", Leonce scolds Edna for being out on a Tuesday, which is Dean's reception day, and not leaving an excuse for her absence (77). Edna finds that while she was out, there had been many callers, proving that her reputation is not affected. Leonce is only worried about his own reputation throughout the novel. Adèle tells Edna to "think of the children" after she gives birth to a child, warning Edna that her endeavors could also hurt the reputations of her children (164).

It seems that Dean's reputation is not significant in the views of others, therefore diminishing Chopin's notion that not conforming to society standards can ruin a woman's reputation. Although, Chopin intended the work to say that Edna is constricted by society standards and feels that she can free herself by not conforming, Edna feels that society is oppressive and that she can't do things on her own without becoming independent and freeing herself of the responsibilities set for her.

In actuality, the work said that society isn't as oppressive as Edna makes it seem, through her constant dismissal of its nature. Throughout the story, not

one person tries to stop Edna in pursuing her ideas of freedom and independence. Though some people warn her of the consequences of her actions, they do not demand her to stop. This shows that society is not totally oppressive, even though Edna may believe so.