

# A psychoanalytical approach to the awakening

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The psychoanalytic approach understands us from the point of view of our unconscious and early childhood experiences. The approach is based on Freud's belief that there is a structure of the mind that includes the id, the superego and the ego. The plot of *The Awakening*, revolves around Edna Pontellier and the awakening of her unconscious sexuality, the need for love and her desire of independence. Edna and her family go to a resort to spend their summer.

Edna's husband, Leonce, adores his wife but considers her to be neglectful as a wife and a mother. "He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children." (Chopin, 2005, Chapter 3, para. 6). At the resort she meets Robert, the owner's son, and realizes that she can no longer pretend that she is happy with her husband and her children. This unconscious realization is triggered by the sight of the ocean one day. The sight made Edna think of simpler times when she believed that she could attain anything.

Edna reminisced how about how looking at the ocean reminded her of when she was a teenager and would walk through a meadow that "seemed as big as the ocean," (Chopin, 2005, Chapter 7, para. 15). She confided in Madam Ratignolle that "sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided." (Chopin, 2005, Chapter 7, para. 20) I believe this was her first unconscious realization that she missed not having the responsibilities of being a wife and a mother.

Later in the story, the sea becomes a symbol of empowerment. "As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose

herself. ” (Chopin, 205, Chapter 10, para. 10). It was after learning to swim that Edna began to stand up for herself, such as she did when Leonce demanded that she go into the house that evening and she refused. She recalled that in the past she had always succumbed to his demands without a thought. This was no longer the case with her. Finally, Edna chose to end her life in the ocean.

The thought of not being able to have Robert had pushed her to the edge. She also could not bear the thought of forgetting about Robert in the same way that she had forgotten the gentleman that she had crossed the meadow for so many years ago. As she swam out into the water, she was “ thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end. ” (Chopin, 2005, Chapter 39, para. 28)

References Chopin, K. (2005). *The Awakening*. Vitalsource Digital Version. Raleigh, NC: Hayes Barton Press.