

The representation of masculinity in "the awakening" by kate chopin essay

[Literature](#), [Novel](#)



The author of this novel, Kate Chopin, was brought up in an intellectual environment and was aware of the marital problems that were experienced during the Victorian period. 'The Awakening' is a novel that is written in the Victorian society which is patriarchal.

This is a very strict society that has prejudiced conventions that women are supposed to adhere to. The Victorian society puts great emphasis on a rigid set of requirements that women should hold on to unlike their male counterparts who do not have much to do. Women are expected to be ideal wives, devoted mothers, and competent performers in anything.

The story talks about the expedition of Edna Pontellier who is both a mother and a wife. The novel begins when Edna, is on vacation together with her family on Grand Isle. It is here that Edna begins to be reawakened. She meets a man Robert Lebrun, who reignites her sexual desire, becomes a good swimmer, and revives her love for painting. She also gets some female friends who also influence her awakening.

These women include Mademoiselle Reisz and Madame Ratignolle (Chopin 841). After going back home, she starts ignoring most of the conventions within her society and carries on with painting, from where she gets her income which contributes to her financial independence. Consequently, she buys a house and runs away from her husband,

Involves herself in another affair, and gets back with Lebrun who eventually departs her. This leads to her ultimate death in Grand Isle where she drowns herself.

In general, 'The Awakening' points at the societal patriarchal stereotypes that call for women to surrender themselves to their husbands and depend upon their financial support while being truthful to them. These conventions also demand that women should put their kids' interests above their own.

To start with, Edna finds herself caught up between her strong desire to be free and the preconceived patriarchal ideologies within her society. She seems to admire her friend Madame Ratignolle's conformity to the societal ideologies, but chooses not to adhere to them. Women are portrayed to be blinded by the limitations of their gender identities.

The novel uses a lot of symbolism in order to bring out the issue of gender in the society. For instance, the title of Chopin's novel 'The Awakening' is highly symbolic. It connotes the many ways in which Edna who is the main female protagonist attempts to stir up her environment.

She is seen to revive her self-awareness as a woman and as an individual. She also starts to appreciate herself as a woman, as an artist and begins to get pleasure from listening to music.

On the other hand, cigars have been mentioned in several instances, a symbol of masculinity. Ideally, women in this society are not supposed to smoke. This notwithstanding, Edna challenges this convention by constantly and publicly smoking cigars. Birds have also been used symbolically in this novel. They symbolize the capability to soar into the sky, bringing out the issue of freedom.

In this novel women are seeking freedom in this male-dominated society. This issue is clearly brought out by Edna. Houses are also used symbolically. Edna is seen to be having several homes which negatively connotes the constant shifting of the female mindset. Use of the ocean is also prominent in Chopin's novel.

The ocean is usually a large water mass which can be used to represent something that is not easy to comprehend. On several occasions, Edna turns to the ocean for emotional consolation. The ocean is used by the author to represent the patriarchal misconceptions within the general society that are so wide and prominent to be done away with.

At one point in the novel, Edna is seen to watch Madame Ratignolle with the use of masculine eyes. She describes her as walking graciously while her little children ran towards her (Chopin 837). Apparently, this image establishes the masculine ideals within this society.

The representation describes how the men expect their wives to behave. Actually, Madame Ratignolle conforms to both the family and spiritual ideals in this society, and has been used to depict a perfect woman. As a matter of fact, she would be ready to lay her life for her children and is thus a representation of holiness.

In this novel, the author brings about the behavior of the revolutionized woman (Edna) to signify the limitations posed by the continuous conditioning of women which makes them prisoners of their roles. In the novel the author is seen to be questioning the identity of women as well as their roles.

Edna chooses independence over conforming to the societal expectations with regards to her duties to her husband and her family. She also chooses to appreciate her sexuality over being subdued by the masculine gender, and prefers to appreciate art and music over being entertained by others.

In this society, the masculine gender is seen to constantly disapprove women who wander away from their marital expectations. The men feel that they should intervene in the women's decisions and help them in making judgments, both in their careers and their social life. In addition, when it comes to financial issues, men are not satisfied in their wives inputs.

For instance, at one point, Edna's husband reprimanded her for allegedly forgetting to take care of her children, citing that, it is a mother's responsibility to bring up children. He defended himself with the argument that he had very many other responsibilities.

Unquestionably, division of work along gender lines was a custom of the Victorian society. As a matter of fact, a woman is expected to support her home and kids single handedly. As evidenced in the case of Edna and her husband, when a woman went below the requirements of her job, she would be thoroughly scolded by her husband who was her boss.

Undeniably, Edna's father who was a Colonel strengthens this masculine obligation in Edna's husband when he persuaded him to involve practical business expertise into family conflicts.

This is evident when he says; " You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Leonce," " Authority and coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it (Chopin 901)." According to this society, a wife should be handled as a worker.

Moreover, in this novel, most dialogues by women are generally centered on family matters, while men's dialogues are mainly focused on business issues. For this reason, marriage in this society is not highly regarded by the men. They seem to be having more important matters to discuss other than family issues.

In several instances in the novel, masculinity is associated with hard work, determination and conquest over life's struggles. According to this novel, women who attempt to change such stereotypes have to break very strong traditional ties and the attempt is likely to be futile.

In conclusion, ' The Awakening' is a novel that is set within a patriarchal society. This society has stereotypical ideologies that suppress women. Edna refuses to accept the society's dominant patriarchal ideologies and thus attempts to achieve gender equality and freedom from the patriarchal structures within her society which leads to her death. Edna believes that taking away her life is the only way she can achieve her freedom.

This can be an indication of the futility that is associated with any attempt by women to change the patriarchal structures within the society. The act of committing suicide can also signify feminine revolution.

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. New York, NY: Bantam Classic, 1981. Print.