

Symbolism in the awakening



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Symbolism In The Awakening The Awakening contains many symbolic features, such as the way Edna uses art, the birds (the parrot and the mockingbird), sleep, music, and the houses Edna Pontellier lives in, but perhaps two of the most significant symbols are the clothes in the novel, not only of Edna, but also the other characters, and the water, whether it be the ocean, the gulf, or the sea. These two symbols are possibly the most significant because of their direct relationship to Edna Pontellier. Both the water and her clothes have the power to not only emphasize, but help show exactly how and what Edna is feeling. Clothes appear to have significant meaning in The Awakening, enough so that they are mentioned at almost every description of the characters. Edna Pontellier starts the novel fully dressed and appropriately dressed for a woman of her responsibilities, however, at her final moment, she is naked on the beach.

Other women in the story also represent their position and the way they feel in the way they dress. For example, Madmoiselle Reisz never changes her clothes. This could possibly symbolize her physical detachment from anything around her, including nature and any suppressed feelings. In contrast, Ednas clothes represent her physical attachment to society. She sheds her clothes the way a snake sheds its skin when it is time for a new one and it does not fit into the old one any longer.

Edna doesnt feel like she can fit into society any longer. Madmoiselle Reisz, on the other hand, does not seem to have any desire to be more than what she has been given in the society in which she lives. Therefore, she does not change her clothes, because she does not feel the need for change in her life. Other characters, such as Madame Leburn always have new clothes to

cover their bodies. This could, perhaps, represent the constant need to cover their sexuality as women in suppressed roles as wives and mothers.

Edna's nakedness at the end of the novel symbolizes her freedom from any claims her children may have on her and shows how her lack of clothes is equal to her lack of responsibility, of her family and the 1890s society. The Ocean is a clear symbol of freedom for Edna. The water is where Edna feels replenished and she begins to realize that she is not satisfied with her life and roles as wife and mother. This happens on the day she learns to swim, which is something she had wanted to accomplish all summer. By learning to swim, she is empowered and becomes more self-aware, of not only her sexuality, but also of who she is and not who society says she should be.

The water in *The Awakening* could be seen to symbolize Edna's rebirth into a more assertive woman. Every time she enters the water, she gets stronger, until finally her strength is more powerful than her love for her children, or her life. At this point she goes so far out to sea, that the water takes back the strength it had given her. Both the water and the clothes in the novel are very important symbols, both helping to emphasize Edna Pontellier's new life. She starts the novel as a very suppressed woman (fully clothed) and covered by society and its strict roles, and then ends naked as if she is escaping the restricted boundaries of her clothes and of society.

The water is a constant source of new life for Edna, and as her clothes are removed to go into the water, they are replaced by a more greater sense of power and energy, the freedom that the water has helped her realize.