

# Research paper on the awakening by kate chopin

[Art & Culture](#), [Symbolism](#)



The awakening by Kate Chopin brings into perspective the life and desires of a woman to live entirely independent. This includes freedom in terms of intellectual, independence and sexual. In this quest, she ruffles a few feathers with friends and family. In addition she ends up in conflicts with vital virtues and values of her time. The character Kate uses to express her ideas is Edna Pontellier from Louisiana. This is based back in 1890s. Kate Chopin uses a variety of symbols to develop the plot and ideas in the book. These include birds, art, clothes, the sea, the moon, swimming, and music. Kate uses symbolism to unfold issues in the society and in particular those that face women. Such include the desire for freedom and rebellion against spiritual and social norms (Chopin 2000). This paper addresses the employment of the bird symbolism and its implied interpretations together with its importance in plot development.

There is a relationship between the bird symbolism used by Chopin and the contrasts that have been in existence and continue to exist in the western perspective thinking. This incorporates for example, culture and nature, soul and body and lastly activity and passivity. These contrasts are all enshrouded in the difference between man and woman and this is illustrated by the bird symbolism used by Chopin. For instance the noisy birds can be construed to symbolize the mutiny of women. On the other hand this questions the conventional association of women to silence and passivity (Chopin 2000).

As an effective way of commenting on the conventional perception revolving on the differences that connect women with nature, silence, body and passivity in contrast to those associated with men like culture, sound,

activity, and soul, Chopin uses the bird image. Birds are used as a symbol for women. Birds are associated with nature and thus this image apart from showing the relationship between women and nature, are also linked up with the soul. Chopin uses this symbol to break the conventional join between women and the body. Thus she puts to test the organization forming the basis of these concepts and their dual structure.

Chopin uses the symbol of birds to represent freedom. According to her birds ought to be free and therefore when they are caged as the mocking bird and parrot, they represent illegal imprisonment. She connects caged birds to women and their place in society including its various institutions like marriage. It is true that in the 'awakening', birds symbolizes the situation of women which is being entrapped, but, as they continue to pursue their true self through awakening, then the symbols turn out to be of wild birds. In addition even though the birds are presented as captives, they aren't passive at all. This means that even though just like the birds, women are seen as locked up in society; this can be interpreted to mean that they are not really in captivity but in the urge of freedom and the presence of something just like the birds. The use of a caged bird symbol by Chopin is a powerful tool (Chopin 2000). This is because the form of captivity comprehended from the caged bird is quite absolute compared to any other captivity.

The cage limits the bird of all freedom and only spares it the freedom of making noise. This shows that the cage is symbol of torture and uncalled punishment. Thus Chopin through the use of caged birds shows women captivity and their strong urge to attain freedom. The symbol of a caged bird

can be placed parallel to the institution of marriage. According to Chopin, children curb the freedom of women even though they are vital aspects in marriages. In the *Awakening*, it is seen that it is challenging for a woman to attain freedom once married and with children. Just like caged birds women are captives in their marriages despite their attempts to attain freedom as seen in Edna's life (Judith 1999). Similar aspects are experienced in the current day society. The urge and strife by women to attain freedom shows that indeed, women are social and cultural captives.

The symbol of birds is used in two different ways. This is indicated by the two different birds she presents. Both are captives but in different manners (Chopin 2000). The parrot is caged whereas the mockingbird is chained. Both birds are symbols for women but they represent two different categories of women. Some women who are married like Edna are confined in a cage by social prospect. On the other hand the image of the chained mockingbird is brought about by Mademoiselle Reisz who wasn't married. She wasn't limited with marriage but the society offered more opportunities for men than for women without regard to their marital status.

The education system in addition favored men more than women (Petry 1996). Even though women later on started to play part as men's equals, it was not easy for a woman to be embraced in society as a public performer or public speaker. Thus the freedom from marriage enjoyed by Mademoiselle Reisz was not enough since she wasn't free from the society's expectations of women. This is the idea behind the caged and chained birds (Bradley 2005). It is evident that all attempts tried to put a release to women pertaining their social and cultural captives plays a minimal role because

people are within various societal frameworks have fixed set of mind with limits women's freedom.

Another symbol of birds used by Chopin is that of poultry. They are strongly connected with marriage, sexuality, control and ownership. Chopin employs the use of domestic birds to create an image of the lives of women and girls in society. This group of individuals was under a strict control by stiff rules stipulating behavior, sphere and ownership. Just like the birds are domestic, so are the women. This rule is seen to apply to both women and girls.

Moreover, these rules were implemented by not only the men but also fellow women. Women have a social which they cannot evade due to their female nature and the natural exhibits accrued. When it comes to domesticity the obstacles are a little bit indirect eliminating the need for a cage. However, other methods are deployed to achieve control and ownership over women; these include social, ideological and psychological mechanisms. Unlike the caged bird symbolism, poultry symbolism doesn't offer rebellion but a criticism of the women position still occur with reference to such domestic birds. Even though they aren't confined physically but the society norms and spiritual expectations of them doesn't change but seem to be a little encapsulated (Chopin and Kinlaw 1993).

Apart from using birds to symbolize the place and status of women in society and their denied freedom, Chopin also uses birds to symbolize women attempt at self realizations. Success isn't an outcome of such attempts always but it is important as it shows they haven't given up on their independence and equal power. Chopin uses the image of a hooting owl to show Edna's rebellion to her husband and especially his demands. The owl

coincides with the initial signs that Edna wasn't happy in her marriage. Also the disagreements Between Edna and Leonce due to the former's rebellion to the husband were also accompanied by the hooting of the owl. Beryl Rowland relates the hooting of the owl to signify two different aspects. One is that it indicates wisdom or victory and the other is that it was a sign of death. Thus even though Edna seemed victorious she was neglecting her duty as a wife and mother which is termed sacred. Just as the hooting represents search for vain knowledge so was Edna (Barnet e. tal 1997). There are many instances of bird symbolism used by the author of *Awakening* to pass on different messages. The bird's symbols used by Chopin represented women in the society in the early 19th century. During such times women were considered passive, weak and of lesser equality to men. This is illustrated by both the caged and the chained parrot and mockingbird respectively. Marriage was an important institution back then as it is today but it limited the freedom of women. This was especially so if the women had children and had to dedicate herself to the husband and children. This was one of the reasons that pushed Edna to go for self realizations (Chopin and Kate 123).

Men had their freedom and this was seen from the bird scene with a noisy parrot that made Pontellier leave since the parrot belonged to Madame Lebrun and he couldn't do anything to make them stop. He could leave but the birds couldn't due to lack of freedom. Chopin also uses poultry to symbolize women and girls whose freedom is also limited by the society but in a non-caged manner. They are still expected to do what the society expects of them but since they are limited indirectly they don't offer

rebellion. Lastly Chopin uses the image of a hooting owl to symbolize rebellion of Edna to her husband's demands. The owl symbolizes attempt by women in trying to attain freedom (Chopin and Kate 234).

Thematically, the aspect of women freedom and social oppression meets the endearing needs of the audience, which has a clear identification with the current society. However, much rebellion and noise seems to pay off since many forces such as women activism and federal representation comes into being (Bradley and Patricia 2005). Cultural ties are also wearing down as more philosophical interventions and aspects of mobility take the current trend.

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