

# Example of birds in the awakening term paper

[Philosophy](#), [Freedom](#)



Early in the book, a parrot repeats the phrase “ Allez-vous-en! Allez-vous-en! Sapristi! That’s all right!”(Web). Both this parrot and a mockingbird, belonging to Madame Lebrun, set the stage for the introduction of Mr. Pontellier, the main character’s husband. The sound and vision imagery at this point are worthy of analysis. The parrot has literal confinement in a metal cage, but it also refers to the metaphorical confinement that is a part of the life of Edna Pontellier, trapped in place by the expectations of society. In spite of all of the luxuries that her husband places at her disposal, and in spite of the way her husband treats her, Edna is still a woman in a world dominated by men. The bird hollers “ Go away!” in an echo of the way that Edna feels, because she only wants space and freedom in her life. The Awakening is the story of her own spiritual awakening – which is where the meaning of the title comes from – and her own quest to rediscover herself. The parrot speaks in a mixture of languages, much like the Creole culture that Chopin depicts comes from a mixture of American and French traditions. The language which the parrot uses is “ a language that nobody understood,” (Yaeger p. 21). The parrot’s thought process, much like Edna’s, is difficult to express and almost impossible for people outside her situation to understand. After all, the fact that Edna lives in a luxurious home and does not have to complete any work in that home would make her the envy of the majority of women in her society. However, the fact is that even a beautifully gilded cage is still a cage, and she lacks the freedom to do as she wishes. The only creature who appears to have any sympathy with the parrot is the mockingbird, who can only repeat what it hears without having any actual comprehension or internalization of the message. To take this analogy

a bit further, Leonce Pontellier cannot understand his wife's dissatisfaction at all. While Robert Lebrun, with whom Edna carries on a sort of fling, has a better understanding of her moods, he still does not get how she feels. Indeed, in her society, there is no way for her to effectively express the way that she feels. She has no outlet in which she can express her desire for freedom. Chopin's next few lines indicate that the shrieking of the parrot makes Mr. Pontellier uncomfortable. He can walk away from the birds – and his wife – but both of them can make all of the noise that they want, and he has no way of controlling their expression.

Another instance of symbolism with birds in *The Awakening* happens when Edna recollects a vision that came to her while she was listening to music from the piano. The piece, which she termed “Solitude,” featured a man next to a rock on the beach, standing with no clothes on. “His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him” (Chopin, Web). Edna here experiences a solitude of her own, and the emotion is one of utter loneliness. This gives her a sense of enjoying the prospect of her own independence, even though she knows that birds can fly away while she is still trapped in her situation, standing and watching. The likelihood of her own liberation from her marriage to Mr. Pontellier is much less than that of someone accidentally leaving the cage door open so that the parrot can head out to freedom.

After Edna spends a summer on Grande Isle, where she experiences the first “awakening” experiences of learning to swim and listening to the piano, she moves to a house that is to be her own, known as the “pigeonhouse because it's so small and looks like a pigeon house” (Chopin, Web). The fact that her

new home has this name, referring to a place where pigeons must live cooped up, is expressive of a larger truth. However, even though this home is physically smaller than the place where she lived before, it is also a space all her own, where she is free to relish “ the feeling of freedom and independence” (Chopin, Web). In this place she can keep just the things that she has taken for herself, rather than the things that her husband has lavished upon her. While she does not resent these gifts, she also does not see them as her own property. She will be able to live in the house herself and will have a much greater sense of self-ownership than she does in the environment that her husband has given her.

Mademoiselle Reisz is crucial to the awakening that Edna experiences, providing the music that touches Edna’s soul, her own advice, as well as the letters that Robert sends. When Edna describes Mademoiselle Reisz to Arobin, her other lover, she says that Mme. Reisz “ put her arms around me and felt my shoulder blades, to see if my wings were strong” (Chopin, Web). The purpose of this was to see if Edna had the strength to fly above the “ level plain of tradition and prejudice” (Chopin, Web). Mme. Reisz knows that Edna is about to start trying to fly, but she does not know whether Edna will make it as far as she wants to go. She warns Edna that failure is a possibility, but Edna is not as clever as her friend; in her own mind, she is only living as she chooses, and she does not see any grand flight or risk in what she is choosing.

Mademoiselle Reisz, though, perceives that Edna is a bird that wants to escape the responsibilities that society has placed up on her, to her husband and to her children. The “ ground of gold” (Chopin, Web) on which she lives

keeps her confined, because she has been conditioned to see herself as property. Indeed, in the story's last scene, " a bird with a broken wing [is] beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water" (Chopin, Web) mirrors the disappointing end to Edna's life. According to Paula Treichler, Edna's experiences with swimming have changed from " a metaphorical fulfillment" to " disappointment and death" (Treichler, p. 14). The bird with the broken wing mirrors what has happened to Edna; just as her own ideals have not become reality, the notion that the bird had about its own abilities have not come to fruition either. Whether one views the suicide at the end as a failure or an awakening, the truth is that Edna lacks the ability to overcome social expectations herself in any way other than bringing her own life to a close.

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