

# Awakening: family and edna essay



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In *The Awakening*, Edna finds herself unhappy living in a patriarchal society, and gives up her family and life to be content with herself. Her moral ambiguity can be compared to that of many women who sparked the early days of the women's suffrage movement. Edna "[is] fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way" (Chopin 19), and often times gets bored or annoyed with the motherly duties that come with them if it is not convenient. She sees the children as more of a hassle than a blessing like many mothers would think of their child.

Edna " would give up the unessential; [she] would give [her] money, [she] would give [her] life for my children; but [she] wouldn't give [her]self. " (Chopin 51) Edna understands the responsibility that she volunteered for when she had children, but has is internally conflicted as to how much energy she can put into them while still being able to think of herself. The children do not get to be with their mother for last few months of her life, spending the rest of the summer at their grandparent's.

" She was seeking herself"(Chopin 55) and couldn't have any other person in the way of the mission she convinced herself she had to achieve. The innocent children lose their mother long before she commits suicide, something that even in today's society children should never have to experience. Edna struggles with what the Creole society expects of her motherly duties, sparking the beginning of Edna's awakening.

She finds herself making fun of the "[women] fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. " (Chopin 10) The Creole women live in a society that

expects the mother to be there for the child at any moment. Edna's mother died when she was young, so she has never had a motherly figure in her life. She was forced to grow up independently, with just her older sister to serve the motherly duties. Edna's inability to understand why the children would need her any time of the day may be from her own childhood of no active parental figure. Edna loves Leonce, but is not in love with him.

He sees her as a "valuable piece of personal property," (Chopin 3) yet she is the "sole object of his existence." (Chopin 5) Leonce wants a wife not just for love, but for display too, much like a "trophy" wife is considered today. His views towards his wife, however, were not far different from many other men during the late 1800s, especially in the Creole community of New Orleans. The community believed that the "mother's place [was] to look after children," (Chopin 7) while men were allowed to have free will of what they wanted to do including jobs and a social life outside the family.

It would be practically unheard of for a wife to leave her husband, especially with children. Edna has always seen her marriage with Leonce as something of an "accident," (Chopin 23) although not till soon after Edna's first wave of her awakening does she start to realize how forced her marriage really is. Leonce does not physically hurt Edna at all throughout the novel. He shows his kindness through the generosity of his money. He sends his family a box filled with "the finest of fruits, pates, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bon-bons in abundance." (Chopin 7).

Leonce gave Edna a "very charming home" (Chopin 53) that would make Edna comfortable. Although Leonce and Edna were not quite "in love," he

gave Edna whatever she wanted that is appropriate for a married woman to want. Edna finds herself uncomfortable in her husband's house, and buys her own house with his money when he is gone to her sister's wedding. She then has men over to her house that think of their relationships with her as being more than friends.

Edna betrays Leonce and their marriage, blaming him for not allowing her to be independent. Edna has found memories where she grew up, comparing the fields of Kentucky to that of the Gulf of Mexico. She thinks about her childhood when she swims for the first time, as well as when she drowns herself, thinking about "the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks". (Chopin 125) She finds peace and soothing with the thoughts of it, but when her actual father comes down to New Orleans, she sees him as an equal more than a father.

She calls him "Colonel" instead of "father" causing a very formal and strict aura around their relationship, not the father- daughter one that would be expected with three girls. The Colonel, although not a Creole, understands and expects Edna to fulfill the role of a pleasant housewife and mother. When Edna does not want to attend her sister's wedding, the Colonel tells Leonce that he "is too lenient... [and] needs to put his foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife." (Chopin 77).

Edna alienates herself from her family. As Edna's awakening emerges, she casts her family off to the side. Her children are sent away, her husband leaves for business, and she refuses to go to see her childhood family. She attempts to make a stand as someone independent and free willed, yet she

relies on everything that her family has given her to get to where she is.

Edna does not repay the grief and sorrow that she puts upon her husband, children, and family, but instead kills herself to make a stand.