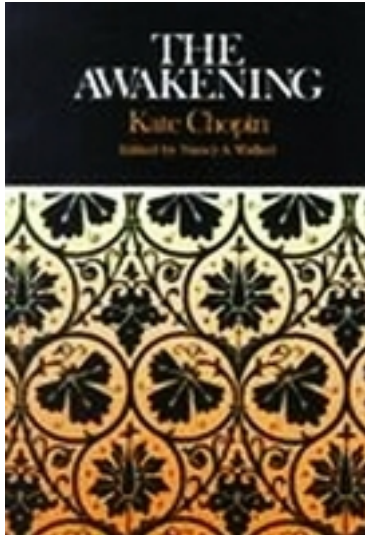


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**Kate Chopin**

**The Awakening**



Title: The Awakening

Author: Kate Chopin

Format: Paperback

Language: English

Pages: 343

Publisher: , 0

ISBN: 0312062354

Format: PDF / Kindle / ePub

Size: 9 MB

Download: allowed

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## Description

First published in 1899, this beautiful, brief novel so disturbed critics and the public that it was banished for decades afterward. Now widely read and admired, "The Awakening" has been hailed as an early vision of woman's emancipation. This sensuous book tells of a woman's abandonment of her family, her seduction, and her awakening to desires and passions that threatened to consume her. Originally entitled "A Solitary Soul," this portrait of twenty-eight-year-old Edna Pontellier is a landmark in American fiction, rooted firmly in the romantic tradition of Herman Melville and Emily Dickinson. Here, a woman in search of self-discovery turns away from convention and society, and toward the primal, from convention and society, and toward the primal, irresistibly attracted to nature and the senses "The Awakening," Kate Chopin's last novel, has been praised by Edmund Wilson as "beautifully written." And Willa Cather described its style as "exquisite," "sensitive," and "iridescent." This edition of "The Awakening" also includes a selection of short stories by Kate Chopin. "This seems to me a higher order of feminism than repeating the story of woman as victim... Kate Chopin gives her female protagonist the central role, normally reserved for Man, in a meditation on identity and culture, consciousness and art." -- From the introduction by Marilynne Robinson.

Complete, Authoritative Text with Biographical and Historical Contexts, Critical History, and Essays from Five Contemporary Critical Perspectives

## Insightful reviews

Barry Pierce: Even though the entire plot of this novel can be summed up as, "woman sits around and does nothing while having feminine thoughts", there is a resounding beauty in its monotony. *The Awakening* is a quick and affecting novel (especially with **that** ending). While I do think that it may be slightly subject to over-hype, there is no contesting its importance as an early feminist work. And on that account, I would recommend it.

Sherwood Smith: It's interesting to read an end-of-the-century novel from the opposite side of the intervening twentieth century, for though there is in Chopin's novel no preoccupation with the remorseless cycle of measured time, the intervening hundred years--and all their evolutions, both cultural and literary--are going to be part of the modern reader's context.

Be aware: this is somewhat spoilery.

As the novel unfolds, it is very difficult to like Edna Pontellier. In these days of two paychecks being required just to survive, on top of the endless drudgery of housework, car maintenance, and children's needs, Edna's dissatisfaction with a life of social engagements, fine dinners that she did not have to prepare or clean up after, and congenial hours of just sitting about on porches chatting idly, make it very hard for a modern reader to sympathize with her.

While she is obsessed with her perceived bonds of slavery, she spares not one thought to the nameless women of color who labor unceasingly in the background doing the drudge work that

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is an inescapable part of daily existence. The woman who appears to be the primary caretaker of Edna's two boys is not even vouchsafed a name; she is dismissed as "the quadroon," a racial epithet that relegates her to an importance somewhere beneath parlor furnishings, which are at least noticed by callers.

Chopin's evocative depiction of life in Louisiana a hundred years ago is fascinating both for the differences and for the moments that resonate with our own experience. Adele Ratignolle's childbirth scene, with its pain and emotional intensity. The ability of children then, as now, to invent games on the dusty ground. Sitting through an amateur theatrical. The sensory details, and the emotional dynamics resultant all transmit that spark of verisimilitude--the scents of flowers. The stickiness of clothing in hot weather. How musical artistry stabs through our primal emotions like a hiltless knife. The moment of realization when the warmth of friendship kindles into lust.

The novel's overarching theme appears to be self-discovery, but it reads to me more like self-involvement. Restless, emotionally stifled Edna is "awakened" first by Mademoiselle Reisz's music, and then by a midnight swim when she dares, for the first time, not to wade, but to strike out into the dark waters and test that elusive nexus between heightened physical endeavor and death.

Her desire to free herself from all her perceived shackles of wifedom and motherhood veer when she discovers, belatedly, her lust for Robert Lebrun, and again when she forsakes the serene, generous, but ambitionless friendship of Adele Ratignolle. She tells Robert that she loves him; he responds in kind; in a desperate act of martyred honor Robert leaves, and Edna shrugs off the world and takes another swim, this one toward the eternal darkness.

It is interesting that Edna's very last images are not of any of her putative loved ones, but of vivid and unconnected sensory details--*The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.* Throughout the novel the presence of solitary lives wink in and out like fireflies: the parrot, the quadroon, Mademoiselle Reisz; even the lovers, who are never named, nor do they interact with anyone else in their total mutual absorption.

Edna connects with four different people, two men and two women, however ephemerally. Each of the four is connected to the rest of their community through a different thread of the lacework of life: Adele and Robert as mother and gentleman, respectively, of society; Mademoiselle Reisz as the artist, and Arabin as the sensualist.

All four live the lives they want to live, the latter two as singles, Robert as a son and brother, and Adele as wife and mother. It is Robert and Adele who, as members of the community, each make sacrificial acts: Robert in leaving to save his and Edna's reputations (he leaves twice) and Adele through childbirth.

Each act is painful, each is a necessity to sustain the implied greater good of the community. Madame Reisz leads an independent existence, having everything she wants except (it is implied) sex. It is she who encourages Edna to "take flight" and though she speaks in terms of

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art, one wonders if in fact the spinster is encouraging Edna to give her the vicarious thrill of passion that she, old and ugly, desires. She certainly knows what it is that Edna wants--as does Adele, who tries to save Edna from cutting herself off from all the other presumed connections of her life in order to satisfy this illicit desire. And of course Arabin represents the life of illicit desire, never responsible, mostly shunned, with no permanent connections outside of the endless quest for gratification.

It appears that the illicit aspect of Edna's desires is the driving force behind her quest. She tries one thing after another, from wandering about the streets as long as she likes to gluttonous eating and adultery, and then abandons them all. She can't be bothered with anything that requires self discipline--not in watching over her children, or communicating with her husband, or even painting.

From the perspective of one who was young during the sixties and seventies, it is not surprising that this novel experienced a rebirth of interest during that period. It seems, looking back, that alienation and self-absorbed behavior were idealized during that time; novels and movies featured young singles who rejected everything but the pursuit of pleasure, and found that meaningless as well. Existentialist angst seemed the *raison-d'etre* of all art, because life was meaningless.

Nowadays we would call her behavior dysfunctional, and Edna certainly is a vivid portrayal of a dysfunctional woman. Despite Chopin's mendaciously casual dismissal of her heroine in her response to the novel's critical rejection as "working out her own damnation" one suspects that Chopin really did admire her heroine. All those reminders of how attractive she was in others' eyes; the firm auctorial intrusion not permitting the reader any sympathy with Mr. Pontellier and his "worship of his household gods"--though it is he who spends the most energy in trying to understand his wife, to communicate with her, and to make her happy. It is he who has the strongest bond with the children, though the culture by that time had already disengaged fathers from active parenting--except in punishment and economic control. The culminating moment of the book is Edna's dinner party, where she is perceived as Aphrodite, the goddess of love--an ironic observation about a woman who doesn't seem to have been capable of real love.

This is not to say that the novel doesn't work. In fact, it is so very well written that it functions on numerous levels; as a slice-of-regional life historical piece, and as an exercise in stylistic brilliance. As a cautionary tale during the early part of this century, when the nascent women's movement was beginning to build up enough speed to cause cultural resistance. As a tale of alienation and self-absorption for the young adult reader, who is often alienated and self-absorbed, as it was for a period in our own recent history when such tales enjoyed their literary éclat. As a tale of dysfunction for contemporary readers, who are engaged in examining the literature of the past so as to find a way to redefine our own roles--gender roles, family roles, community roles--for the future.

Houston: "It sometimes entered Mr. Pontillier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume

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like a garment with which to appear before the world.”(p. 79)

“What have you been doing to her, Pontillier?”

“Doing! Parbleu!”

“Has she,” asked the Doctor, with a smile, “has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women—super-spiritual superior beings? My wife has been telling me about them.”(p. 91)

“Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife.” (p. 99)

“Conditions would someday adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself.” (p. 110)

These quotes sum up for me the difficulty Edna faced as she became herself, or discovered herself. The book is her journey, inward and then outward as well, to finding who she is and how she wants to be. I love the image of ‘daily casting aside’ her old self like a ‘garment.’ Of course, the trouble was that her husband and the men around him all thought that she was losing her mind. The Doctor even accuses the husband of being too lenient. Blame is directed not only at the husband, but also at other women, unnamed ‘pseudo-intellectual’ women. These men cannot understand or explain Edna’s behavior or change in attitude. At this time, and even now, women struggle to gain independence from the role of wife and mother. Trying to figure out where the self is within the confines of those roles, and how to manage the three successfully is still difficult. The last quote is so strong, Edna finally recognizing that she owns herself, that she is not property—not just someone’s wife, mother or even lover or friend—she is her own person and she grows stronger, finding her resolve. This resolve is what leads her to her final decision, becoming absolutely her own person to the exclusion of any other role. The end is somewhat disturbing, though poetic. The struggle between Edna and her environment, her time and those around her—her inner struggles—all seem to lead her to that final point of no return.

Samadrita: frequently i've got witnessed women, who continue to discuss misogyny, sexism, or country their perspectives on a bit of feminist literature, beginning their discourse with anything alongside the traces of 'I'm now not a lot of a feminist...but'. as though you must positioned a substantial distance among themselves and this feared be aware on the onset and deny any attainable hyperlinks whatsoever. as though calling herself a feminist instantly degrades a lady to the placement of a venom-spewing, uncouth, unfeminine, violent creature from hell whose predilections contain despising all men on the earth with a keenness and shouting from the rooftops approximately women's rights on the first opportunity. realization women and gentlemen! Feminism isn't so cool anymore, at the least now not within the approach it used to be within the 80s or 90s. Don't ask what trigger that individual rant yet sure i guess the various 1-star studies of this you possibly can were a possible trigger. So Edna's tale will get a 1 megastar simply because she is a 'selfish bitch' who falls in love with one other guy who's no longer her husband, does not sacrifice her existence for her young ones and feels the stirrings of sexual appeal for somebody she does not love in a romantic way. Edna will get a 1 celebrity



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together with her kids and together with her husband, a revered merchant. on the water's edge, Edna awakens to the truth that she needs to conflict for her happiness, solitude, and freedom. "This could seem like a ponderous weight of knowledge to descend upon the soul of a tender girl of twenty-eight—perhaps extra knowledge than the Holy Ghost is mostly happy to vouchsafe to any woman. however the starting of things, of an international specifically is unavoidably tangled, chaotic and particularly disturbing." I needs to display the finishing of this novel during this review, for these of you susceptible to depart this assessment now, i urge you to learn this e-book and to be gracious to Mrs. Pontellier for the alternatives she makes.

\*\*\*\*\*The Gulf of Mexico awakens Edna. "The voice of the ocean is seductive; by no means ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation. The voice of the ocean is sensuous, enfolding the physique in its soft, shut embrace." Edna overcomes her worry of water—and life. She wades out into the Gulf and unto that gulf she returns 9 months later and permits it to swallow her. I see the query posed by means of different reviews, "How may possibly she abandon her children?" it's a reasonable question--one that's usually requested of suicides. Edna states, "I could supply my lifestyles for my children; yet I wouldn't supply myself. I can't make it extra clear; it's purely whatever which i'm starting to comprehend, that's revealing itself to me." Kate Chopin treats Edna sympathetically. "Who can inform what metals the gods use in forging the sophisticated bond which we name sympathy, which we'd in addition name love." Chopin used to be a Catholic while the Church nonetheless taught that suicide concerned automated excommunication and everlasting damnation (a doctrine dropped as the Church now knows that many folks who kill themselves act lower than compulsion and absence the required volition [free choice] to resist.) is that this a feminist novel? a singular of passion? Of the artist's journey? Of psychological illness? Is it chauvinistic to characteristic a woman's looking of freedom with psychological affliction (e.g., "being crazy"—"hysterical")? Is it attainable to procedure the textual content in a manner that incorporates all of those views and to stay trustworthy to Chopin's imaginative and prescient of Edna? Are melancholy and suicide ethical weaknesses? (I imagine not), or is melancholy a affliction that ravishes like cancer--without regard to the righteousness of the individual? (Ye, i believe it does.) "There have been days whilst she used to be more than happy with no figuring out why. She used to be chuffed to be alive and breathing, whilst her entire being one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant heat of a few ideal Southern day. there have been days whilst she used to be unhappy, she didn't be aware of why—when it didn't look worthy whereas to be comfortable or sorry, to be alive or dead; whilst lifestyles seemed to her like a gruesome pandemonium and humanity like worms suffering blindly towards inevitable annihilation." Mr. Pontellier is a gradual chauvinist--a kindly yet traditional guy who expects his spouse to stick to the social code. "Mr. Pontellier have been a slightly courteous husband as long as he met with a definite tacit submissiveness in his wife." Yet, Chopin doesn't painting him as unpleasantly as we'd count on a guy to be handled in a unique categorised as "feminist." Her husband isn't an ogre. He doesn't bellow, berate, or beat her. now we have encountered a long way worse than Mr. Pontellier. Edna's oppression is cultural, emotional, undefined, and understated. Indeed, many girls might think of Edna to were terribly privileged. Today's unmarried mother, operating jobs for subsistence income, may gladly trade locations with her. Today's profession woman, freed from the encumbrances of husband and children, could have even much less freedom than Edna as a result of calls for of her bosses and her profession. What of medical professional Mandalet's suggestion to Mr. Pontellier? "Woman my expensive buddy is a truly strange and

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mild organism. it should require an encouraged psychologist to deal effectively with them. And whilst traditional fellows like your self and me try and do something about their idiosyncrasies the result's bungling." The genius of Kate Chopin, in "The Awakening," is that Edna speaks to us differently. i'm really not persuaded that I comprehend the novel, Edna, or Chopin. nice fiction, like life, is "tangled, chaotic and exceptionally disturbing." I do remember that Edna Pontellier awakens my curiosity, my love, and and my compassion. The reader needs to "possess the courageous soul. The soul that dares and defies." I dare to give up to the tide and to be awakened. March 30, 2013

Chrissie: this is one other ebook that stunned me. i didn't just like the writing sort on the beginning, yet via the top I loved precisely that, the writing, very much. The writing is descriptive, correct from the beginning, but if it begins not just the locations and scenes are described, but in addition we're informed the character qualities of the concerned characters. this is the classical challenge of being "told instead of shown". After the preliminary presentation of the characters, simply then can we start to discover them. while the tone turns into sensual, appealing and moving. It begins out choppy. probably this isn't a foul technique, to first introduce the disparate characters after which so as to add intensity to every one? you start to monitor them and to appreciate their emotions. it's Edna, and the opposite lady characters you watch, extra so than the male figures. yet what I loved concerning the e-book was once the writing. This is a e-book of early feminism, released first in 1899. The constricts are these put upon ladies through the Victorian period – husband, social standing, young ones and "what will humans say"! We watch the "awakening" of a woman; she turns into conscious of her personal identity, and her correct to have her personal identity. The environment is New Orleans and the Southern Louisiana coast. This used to be my first Librivox audiobook. i need to thank Leslie and Sandy for his or her assist in studying how you can obtain it and for his or her lists of fine Librivox narrators. Elizabeth Klett, narrates this. to inform you the truth, i did not just like the narration at first. i discovered it too rapid, I needed to examine who used to be who and so I had a poor time with the speedy speed. yet then, simply as I grew to love the writing style, I grew to love the narration too. occasionally you want to acclimatize your self to a narrator, and occasionally the narrator has to get into the texture of the story. i can't draw back from this narrator. She is especially good, albeit a piece quick for me. i would like time to imagine whilst I hearken to a book. Then there's the ending..... it's not that i am so definite i love it, yet you'll be surprised. I warrantly that. Again, it isn't the plot that makes me like this book, yet particularly the sensation the writing conjures. I felt Edna's awakening. an outstanding book, and that i suggest it.

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