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Research Paper

Where do I belong? An Unresolved Identity Crisis in Kate Chopin's *"The Awakening "*

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Abstract
The Awakening by Kate Chopin was a daring piece of fiction at the time, and protagonist Edna Pontellier was a divisive figure. She challenged several nineteenth-century notions about women's duties. Her denial of her role as a mother and wife was one of her most shocking actions. Léonce is caring and compassionate, although he is obsessed with his career. Kate Chopin eventually expresses her disapproval. There are two Ednas, an Inner Edna and an Outer Edna, and they are not compatible. Edna Pontellier is trapped between how people perceive her and how she perceives herself. The Outer Edna follows conventional norms, but the Inner Edna doubts her behaviour. It is observed that the Inner Edna gradually takes over the Outer Edna, and she becomes much more entire. Edna resists the cultural and natural constraints of motherhood that drive her to be identified by her title as Leonce Pontellier's wife and mother to Raoul and Etienne Pontellier, rather than as her own, self-determined individual. This is the identity crisis the protagonist experiences and struggles with.
Keywords: *Identity crisis,awakening*

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I. Introduction

The Awakening by Kate Chopin was a daring piece of fiction at the time, and protagonist Edna Pontellier was a divisive figure. She challenged several nineteenth-century notions about women's duties. Contemporaries of Kate Chopin (1851-1904) were shocked by her depiction of a woman with active sexual desires, who dares to leave her husband and has an affair. Instead of condemning her protagonist, Chopin maintains a neutral, non-judgmental tone throughout and appears to even condone her character's unconventional actions. One of Edna's most shocking actions is her denial of her role as a mother and wife. Leonce, Edna's husband, is kind and loving but preoccupied with his work. Kate Chopin eventually expresses her disapproval. Edna resists the cultural and natural constraints of motherhood that drive her to be identified by her title as Leonce Pontellier's wife and mother to Raoul and Etienne Pontellier, rather than as her own, self-determined individual. This is the identity crisis that the protagonist experiences and struggles with.

Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silent reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm.
She slipped them upon her fingers. (Chopin,7).

Edna is a normal wife at the outset of the tale, accepting the restraints signified by a wedding band quietly. The moment should be regarded in dramatic contrast to the scene in which Edna attempts to shatter her wedding ring. Through Chopin's focus on two other female characters, Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna's options of life paths are exhibited. These women are the examples that the men around Edna contrast her with and from whom they acquire their expectations for her. Adele exemplifies womanly elegance and charm. Edna, on the other hand, finds both role models wanting and comes to realise that the life of independence and self-identity she desires contradicts both society and herself.

One of these days," she said, "I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think--try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don't know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am. I must think about it. (Chopin ,87)

Edna understands that society would judge her as a bad woman, but she does not consider herself to be a bad person. Edna aspires to one day rectify the external or internal imbalance.

While Edna's accomplishment demonstrates her newfound wisdom and courage, the language used to describe the event also refers to societal assumptions about women's helplessness. In many ways, Victorian law treated women as dependent minors, granting them rights through their husbands as children would receive rights through their fathers. Edna's rebellious will is not paired with the fortitude required to withstand the consequences of defying social conventions at this point in her awakening, and the tragedy of her story lies in the fact that she never quite attains this power. Thus, in addition to foreshadowing her eventual death in the ocean, the episode in which she first swims foreshadows the potentially dangerous disparity between Edna's desire (her desire to swim) and her stamina.

The pigeon house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to "feed upon opinion" when her own soul had invited her. (Chopin, 99)

The more she rejects the commitments and responsibilities imposed by society, the more Edna develops as an independent woman. Léonce arrives to the cottage and asks that Edna come inside with him, putting her feeling of independence and authority to the test. Edna defies Léonce for the first time in six years, inspired by her previous achievements. She even chastises him for speaking to her with such arrogance. Ultimately, though, the urgent reality of her predicament comes in, and physical tiredness deflates her high spirit. The traditional framework of Léonce and his wife's relationship restored when she walks inside to bed. Léonce outlasts Edna's disobedience, and his statement that he would go to bed after finishing his cigar demonstrates that he can set his own bedtime, but Edna, being infantile, cannot.

There are two Ednas, an Inner Edna and an Outer Edna and how she perceives herself. The Outer Edna follows conventional norms, but the Inner Edna doubts her behaviour. The Inner Edna gradually takes over the Outer Edna, and she becomes much more entire.

Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions (Chopin, 18).

Edna has just returned from her very first swim and is laying in the porch hammock, ignoring her husband's entreaties to come inside to bed. Edna does not comply with Léonce's demand for the first time in her life. Rather, she speaks against his rule and behaves as she likes. The narrator emphasizes that as Edna's ideas and feelings change, she also grows more self-aware and begins to scrutinize her previous actions. Her failure to reconnect to her prior attitude emphasizes her detachment from her former self; although Edna recalls having bowed to her husband's authority in the past, she cannot re-create the reasoning that would have driven her to do so, and her own past conduct appears alien and incomprehensible.

She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denial and resisted. She wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did. (Chopin, 36)

After a few hours of uneasy sleep, Edna awakens. Virtually everyone on Grand Island is still sleeping, but many individuals, including the two lovers and the lady in black, are making their way to the quay to catch a boat to Chênière Caminada for Sunday service. Edna deliberately begs Robert's presence for the first time all summer by requesting one of Mrs. Lebrun's staff to wake him. But, neither Edna nor Robert considers her request to be out of the ordinary. They join the other passengers on the boat, and Robert chats to Mariequita, a young, flirty Spanish girl who is full of questions. Robert quickly redirects his focus to Edna and offers they visit other islands together in the following days. They joke about the wealth they would discover and then squander together. Edna believes that the links that had been holding her to Grand Isle have finally shattered, leaving her unanchored and free to roam anywhere she wants.

"I feel like painting," answered Edna. Perhaps I shan't always feel like it
(Chopin, 62)

Edna deviates from her usual duty as a cleaner by pursuing her gift for painting. Her disregard for home tasks is due to a sudden desire for self-identity rather than a sudden passion for art. Returning to New Orleans, Edna

pursues her painting while ignoring all of her social obligations. Concerned by his wife's shifting attitude and growing disobedience, Léonce seeks advice from the family physician, Doctor Mandelet. Doctor Mandelet, a smart and educated man, feels Edna's metamorphosis is the consequence of an affair, but he conceals his concerns from Léonce. Instead, Doctor Mandelet advises Léonce to let Edna's defiance run its course, as attempting to control her would only fuel her rebellion.

"Yes," she said. "The years that are gone seem like dreams--if one might go on sleeping and dreaming--but to wake up and find--oh! well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life." (Chopin, 116)

Léonce follows the doctor's instructions and leaves Edna at home alone while he is gone on business. With her husband gone and her children gone, Edna completely rejects her previous way of life. She establishes her own residence and considers herself independent—the ownership of no one. Edna pursues an affair with the local seducer, Alcée Arobin, who can satisfy her sexual cravings while her love for Robert remains passionate. Edna, who is never emotionally linked to Arobin, retains power throughout their affair, gratifying her animalistic desires but remaining free of masculine dominance. Edna thinks that living as an awake and conscious being is preferable to suppressing one's true impulses and living according to illusions.

Edna learns a lot about freedom of speech via her friendship with Adele. Creole women could be candid and unrestrained since they were expected and thought to be chaste. Edna is liberated from her formerly prudish conduct and repressed feelings and wants after being exposed to such openness.

The voice of the sea is seductive; never 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 sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace. (Chopin, 18)

These sentences explain the beginning of Edna's awakening process. Undoubtedly, each new character introduced in the narrative serves merely to emphasize Edna's singularity. It appears to imply that Edna is doomed from the start of her waking. Furthermore, the remark of the sea's seductive and appealing voice foreshadows Edna's suicide. Edna's friendship with Adèle kickstarts her "waking" and self-identity process, which is the center of the article.

Edna's awareness increases as she meets Robert Lebrun, Madame Lebrun's eldest, unmarried son. Among Grand Isle visitors, Robert is renowned as a man who picks one woman each year—often a married woman—to whom he then plays "attendant" all summer. He commits himself to Edna that summer, and the two spend their days sunbathing and conversing by the beach. Adèle Ratignolle is frequently with them.

At first, Robert and Edna's relationship appears to be harmless. They typically swim in the sea or engage in idle conversation. Yet, as the summer passes, Edna and Robert become closer, and Robert's love and attention trigger various interior disclosures in Edna. She feels more alive than she has in a long time, and she begins to paint again, as she did in her youth. She also learns to swim and grows conscious of her sexuality and independence. Edna and Robert never openly discuss their feelings for one another, but the time they spend alone together reminds Edna of her childhood dreams and desires. She becomes inexplicably depressed at night with her husband and profoundly joyful during her moments of freedom, whether alone or with Robert. Realizing how deep his attachment with Edna has become, Robert respectfully departs from Grand Isle to avoid consummating his forbidden love. Edna returns to New Orleans a different person.

Unable to remain away, Robert returns to New Orleans, eventually declaring openly his affections for Edna. He professes his love but reminds her that they cannot possibly be together, as she is the wife of another man. Edna reveals to him her newly gained freedom, dismissing her husband's powers over her and describing how she and Robert may live happily together while disregarding anything unrelated to their relationship. Despite his feelings for Edna, Robert is unable to participate in the adulterous affair. Edna gets home to discover Robert gone, with just a message of farewell left in his place.

Edna essentially wants her own satisfaction without being held accountable for the repercussions. She doesn't want to damage her children's future but this phrase appears to imply that if it means ensuring her personal pleasure, she would.

At this moment, Edna is adopted as a type of protégé by the self-sufficient and eccentric elderly pianist Mademoiselle Reisz, who warns Edna of the sacrifices demanded of an artist. Edna is captivated by Mademoiselle Reisz's piano playing and pays her frequent visits. She is also excited to read the letters Robert sends the woman from overseas. Mademoiselle, a lady who spends her entire life for her work, acts as an inspiration and role model for Edna, who continues her journey of awakening and independence. Mademoiselle Reisz is the sole person who is aware of Robert and Edna's hidden love, and she urges Edna to acknowledge and act on her feelings. Edna had previously informed Madame Ratignolle that she would never give up her life for her children or anybody else. Suddenly there was a very intense debate; the two women did not appear to comprehend or speak the same language. Edna attempted to placate her companion by explaining.

I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear;it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me.
(Chopin, 52)

There is a part of Edna's identity - the "essential" - that she claims belongs solely to herself and that she would never give up for anybody, not even her children.

She had days when she felt overjoyed for no apparent reason. When her entire existence seemed to be one with the sunlight, colour, smells, and luscious warmth of that beautiful Southern day, she felt pleased to be alive and breathing. She used to like exploring odd and unexpected areas on her own. She noticed many bright, tranquil areas designed to be a place to dream. And she enjoyed dreaming and being alone and undisturbed.

There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why—when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood. (Chopin, 63)

Edna leaves Robert's arms to attend to Adèle during her difficult and perilous childbirth. She begs him to wait until her return. Adèle notices that Edna is growing increasingly distant from her, and she realises that Edna's friendship with Robert has become stronger. She urges Edna to consider her children and pleads for the socially acceptable lifestyle that Edna abandoned so long ago. When bringing Edna home from Adèle's, Dr Mandelet encourages her to come visit him because he is concerned about the consequence of her passionate but confused activities. Still suffering from Adèle's warning, Edna begins to see herself as having acted selfishly.

Edna experiences both the immense joys and terrible sorrows as a newly awakened, conscious woman.

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. (Chopin, 17)

Edna's awakening has occurred. Edna's first swim is one of the most significant phases in her development. It represents her spiritual rebirth, sexual enlightenment, and self-discovery. Edna has been unable to enter the ocean because she is terrified of losing herself in the wide and lonely expanse of the sea. Edna has developed new confidence in her own isolation as a result of the swim. Edna is aware that she is changing, but she is unaware of how this impacts her worldview. She is partially unconscious of the changes in her identity.

When Edna and Robert sit silently on the porch after she has defiantly submitted herself to the water, it is clear that the experience has implanted in Edna a new sexual awareness. She and Robert exchange no words, but Edna senses "the first-felt throbbings of yearning" in the silence. Despite their increasing love, Edna and Robert are unable to relax and speak frankly until they have fled the clutches of society and tradition, as the day progresses, they spend together on the island of *Chênière Caminada* demonstrates. The island, and Madame Antoine's cabin, represent the independence that comes with self-isolation. Only when Robert and Edna are alone, cut off from reality and their different responsibilities, do they have the freedom to express themselves and indulge in their ideal of being together. When Edna awakens from her slumber, the island appears to have changed. She gleefully entertains the possibility that all of the inhabitants on Grand Island have vanished from the planet, a thought that Robert readily accepts. Yet when they return to Grand Isle, Robert abandons Edna, knowing that their illusion is only that. He recognizes that he can no longer communicate his emotions with the transparency that their seclusion on the Chênière provided.

Edna's most catastrophic realisation is prompted by Robert's inability to break society's constraints. Edna experiences an overpowering sensation of loneliness, haunted by memories of her children and understanding that even Robert would have been unable to satisfy her goals and dreams.

Alone in a world where she has no sense of belonging, she can only discover one solution to society's unavoidable and terrible restrictions. She returns to Grand Isle, the scene of her earliest emotional, sexual, and intellectual awakenings, and commits suicide by drowning. She thinks of her independence from her husband and children as she swims through the smooth, caressing water, as well as Robert's failure to comprehend her, Doctor Mandelet's wise remarks, and Mademoiselle Reisz's bravery. The book does not address whether the suicide is a cowardly surrender or a freeing success.

Yet that night, she was like a tottering, stumbling, clinging toddler that suddenly recognises its strengths and walks alone for the first time, proudly and confidently. She could have screamed with delight. She did yell with excitement as she brought her body to the surface of the water with a few sweeping strokes. Chopin's wording in this section portrays Edna as a kid who has just transcended infancy and is now a full-fledged toddler, using a metaphor of rebirth and childhood growth to illustrate Edna's metamorphosis. Yet, Edna's adventure is not over. Although she violates cultural standards by venturing out alone, she nevertheless has a childhood dread of self-reliance, as seen by her anxiety upon realising she must rely solely on herself to return to shore.

A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (Chopin ,32)

Edna's swimming accomplishment involves more than just being able to swim; it means she has achieved control of her body and motions.

She put it on, leaving her clothes in the shower. But when she was alone alongside the sea, she shed the uncomfortable, pricking clothing and stood nude in the open air for the first time in her life, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that pounded against her, and the waves that welcomed her.

How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! How delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known. (Chopin 127)

This is Edna's penultimate assertion of her identity.

II. Conclusion

The nineteenth-century society offered a new meaning to what it meant to be a woman. Women were expected to be passive, domestic creatures whose major objectives in life were to be the nurturing of their children and submissiveness to their husbands, according to the widely known "rule of real femininity." In Kate Chopin's The Awakening, Edna has turned down these expected roles and suffered as a result. Edna's husband is largely to blame for his wife's "condition" since he stands to embody patriarchal culture.After being chastised by her husband for not being a good mother in the first scene of The Awakening, Edna replies by sobbing, and then with defiance, refusing to come in to sleep against her husband's desires. Her action, along with the voyage into the sea at the end of the novel, shows that she has grown aware of her husband's repressive character, as well as the oppressive nature of the institution of marriage in general. Edna, a woman ahead of her time, challenges the idea of marriage, develops her own sexual wants, and becomes entirely independent of her spouse. Edna's effort, her reluctance, imply that she is aware that there is a manner of expressing and thinking that will authentically portray her desires.By the set standards of the society, she may be a failure but her awakening makes her a complete woman shattering the shackles of patriarchal society.

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