

# An Analysis of the Image of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* from the Perspective of Feminism

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## Abstract

**Kate Chopin occupies an important place in the history of female literature. She is the forerunner of feminist literature. *The Awakening* is Kate's one of the most famous works, which is about a dissatisfied wife's resistance to her husband and society. This paper, mainly from the feminist perspective, analyzes and interprets Edna's main characters in Kate's *The Awakening*. First, it introduces Kate's feminist thought, and the historical and cultural background of her works. Then from the feminist point of view, the thesis analyzes the heroine's identities as wife, mother, and self, and how to pursue her independence, and she was not accepted by the society and finally went to her doom. No individual can exist independently of social rules. We are the representatives of social culture. Chopin's work challenges the patriarchal social order through the heroine.**

## Keywords

**Feminism, Awakening, Image, Wife, Mother, Self-awareness.**

## 1. Introduction

Kate Chopin was born in 1850 in Missouri to a wealthy merchant family. She grew up in a white family with black slaves, the daughter of an Irish father and a French mother. After the death of her father when she was young, she lived in an entirely female family, was raised by her maternal family, grew up with female power, and was bilingual. During her time as a writer, Kate Chopin's favorite writer was Guy de Maupassant. She was moved by Maupassant's affirmation of human loneliness, writing: "No matter what we do or try, in spite of the loving embrace and transmission, in spite of the hunger of our lips, we are always alone." [5] For a woman who had survived fantasies of friendship, love, marriage, and even motherhood, and who had come to recognize the loneliness of all human existence, Maupassant's declaration became an article of faith. In fact, Chopin originally titled *A Lonely Soul*, and the book can be read as Edna's evolution from A romantic fantasy of merging with another to self-definition and self-reliance.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, published in 1899, made a sensation in late 19th-century American literature with its frank portrayal of women's social, sexual, and spiritual awakening. Edna Pontellier, the heroine, discovers her desire for a man after awakening. She refuses to be a submissive wife and a selfless mother to her children, and decides to find herself. What Chopin is advocating here is that a woman should awaken from a patriarchal society: she should not be centered on her husband and children. Instead, she should be seen as an individual, not as 'the other'—a creature without desires and ego, in words. There is no doubt that Chopin's thought is a challenge to the ideology of female identity in the patriarchal society. That's why the overwhelming negative reaction to the novel came out. Contemporary critics almost invariably rejected and disliked her heroines. The *St. Louis Republic's* first review of the novel called *The Awakening* "the story of the stupidest woman". The *St. Louis Mirror* reviewer called the novel

“repulsive of humanity,” while the *Global-Democrat* called it “a sick book.” The *Post* denounced it as “a drink too strong for a moral girl and should have been labeled ‘poison’” [6].

### 1.1. The Historical and Cultural Background

The *Awakening* was written in the late nineteenth century. Industrialization and urbanization have contributed to the fact that life is changing. The industrial revolution transformed the handicraft industry that women had been engaged in at home and were brought into a machine-driven mass production industry. This meant that women in the lower classes could earn wages as factory workers. This was the beginning of their independence, but their income was legally controlled by their husband or father. Middle- and upper-class women are still expected to stay home and do nothing, symbolizing their husbands' wealth.

They were expected to be angels in the family, and they were expected to obey their husband's wishes. There are other women who couldn't stand it: Lucretia Mott, Susan Anthony, and Elizabeth Stanton. In July 1848, they held the first women's rights convention. They adopted a Declaration of Sentiments to win votes. The suffrage movement grew rapidly during the American Civil War. At the same time, feminists began to emphasize “women's individual civil rights, including women's rights to their persons” [1]. In this, feminism differed from women's suffragism because “it emphasised the right to vote alongside women's economic independence and sexual rights” [2]. In 1895, Stanton published her radical book, *The Woman's Bible*. Chopin was aware of these changes and fascinated by the tension between tradition and modernity, so she applied it to *The Awakening*. In many ways, *The Awakening* sums up much of the struggle, illustrating the wrenching process the country and its women are going through.

Chopin saw the true artist as one who challenged convention, one who rejected both decent moral norms and the conventions and formulas of literary success. Her belief in originality and autonomy in writing is expressed by Miss Reisz, the musician in *The Awakening*, who tells Edna that artists must have “brave souls to challenge and challenge” and must rise above “the level of tradition and prejudice” (Chopin 110). Guided by their groundbreaking philosophy, Chopin embarked on her own path, the path of feminism, which eventually led to *The Awakening*.

### 1.2. Domestic and Foreign Research

Cyril Anavon, a French critic, was largely responsible for the revival of the *Awakening*. In 1953 he published a translation of *The Awakening*, which he claimed was “The American *Madame Bovary*.” In the 1960s, Larzer called it “the most important novel ever written about a woman's sex life in America.” [3] Chopin's editor, Per Seyersted, brought her work to the attention of a new generation of feminists by making much of her work available to the public. In addition, the emergence of feminist periodicals and books in the 1970s led to a new understanding of Chopin. “Chopin's book rose from obscurity to ‘classic’ status in part because it presented themes that were subsequently adopted by 20th-century feminism” Michael Gilmore comments. From the 1980s to the 1990s, *The Awakening* was published in large numbers. Nearly a century later, Americans came to understand the full extent of Kate Chopin's novels. *The Awakening* now has a place in classic literature because it uses formal and structural techniques to explore themes of patriarchy, marriage and motherhood, female independence, desire, and sexuality in an honest and artistic way.

When she was creating a heroine who is intellectually curious, independent and sexual, Chopin attempts to ignore assumptions about the physiology and social and intellectual aspects of women. In the story we see Edna's struggle is perhaps the nineteenth century's most vivid and sustained description of what it means for a woman to try to achieve the selfhood that Emerson describes as the greatest task of a human being—“the American Dream of becoming an individual, a self”. Chopin is never a feminist in any sense of the term described in the media, that is, in her lifetime, she never joined or supported any of the organizations or clubs through

which women fought to get political, economic, and social rights equal to those of men. However, as a writer, she supports and encourages feminism by getting rid of the myth of the dominant image of the happy American housewife and mother in her writings, or by killing “the Angel in the House” in Woolf’s words. Her thoughts of feminism are tainted with her own understanding of women rights.

### **1.3. The Layout of the Paper**

This paper, taking the role of being a wife, a mother, and the self as the theme and from the perspective of feminism, analyzes and interprets Edna’s main character in Chopin’s *The Awakening*. This paper is divided into five chapters. The introduction mainly introduces the historical and cultural background of the creation of *The Awakening* and the overall evaluation of *The Awakening* at home and abroad. The second chapter describes the male controlling the female through the female body, and Edna rebelling against her husband through controlling her own behavior. Chapter three discusses institutionalized motherhood and dehumanized motherhood, as well as Edna’s self-assertion through productive activity. Chapter four explores loneliness and suicide as a result of self-assertion. The last part is the summary of the three figures of the heroine and the exposition of the living situation of women in the present society.

## **2. Literature Review**

### **2.1. Generalization of Feminism**

The feminist movement is a social movement that transcends class and race boundaries. Feminist movements in each culture are unique and raise issues about women in that society. The myriad theories of feminism boil down to one sentence: eliminate inequality between men and women in all mankind. In a comprehensive view of feminist theories, some are as fierce as fire, some are as calm as water, some advocate a fight to the death, and some accept compromise. However, all feminist theories have a basic premise: women are oppressed and discriminated in the world.

Women’s secondary sexual status is so pervasive and so enduring. In such a cross-historical and cross-cultural social structure, women are in an unequal position with men in politics, economy, culture, ideology, cognition, concept, ethics, and other fields. Even in the private field such as family, women are also in an unequal position with men. The idea of male power holds that the gender order of male superiority over female is not only universal, but also unchangeable, because it is formed naturally. However, feminism believes that this gender order is neither universal nor unchangeable, because it is not “naturally formed”, but artificially constructed by society and culture.

### **2.2. General Evaluation**

*The Awakening* was condemned for a long time after it was published in 1899. Although novels have never technically been banned, they have always been censored.

Chopin’s novels were considered morally depraved not only because of their visual depiction of women’s sexual desires but also because their heroines were rebellious and undermined traditional female social roles. Libraries in St. Louis and elsewhere have even banned it.

In Kate Chopin’s hometown of St. Louis, Missouri, two newspapers offered different assessments. The *St. Louis Republic* labeled the novel “poisonous” and “tipsy for moral babies”. The *St. Louis Spiel* said, “It is out of sheer weakness that a man is compelled to turn to the gods for help, and would rather die than see the ugly, cruel, hateful beast of lust slowly awake like a tiger. This is the awakening that readers feel when they read Madame Chopin’s heroine.”

Some critics poked fun at Chopin’s choice of material, regretting it: “AN elegant and poetic writer has no need to write the erotic novels that have become so ubiquitous.” (*Chicago Times-*

Herald) Others were disappointed; National Journal said that “recalling the author’s popular short stories”, the novel opens with much anticipation but ends “bitterly disappointing”, hinting at the public’s dissatisfaction with the material: “There is no need to spoil our landscape by reading her.” National Journal called Chopin “another author who is too clever for his own good”. As far as creative art is concerned, this book was considered excellent from the outset. For example, after the book was published, the literary critic C.L. Diego, who disliked the book, said it was sad, it was crazy, it was bad, but it was, it was all peak art. In the 1950s, the famous scholar Brooks said that many a prolific writer could write less in a lifetime than this perfect little book. It has been taken seriously since the 1950s and is now a classic of American literature and has been adapted for opera. It has been pointed out that Kate Chopin, author of *The Awakening*, was even ahead of many of her male contemporaries as a woman writer. For example, instead of denouncing Emma in *Madame Bovary*, as Flaubert did, she praises Edna, her protagonist. In addition, she was ahead of Lawrence in describing her wife’s infidelity as a beautiful thing, without scruples.

### 3. Edna’s Identity as Wife

#### 3.1. The Wife Controlled by Her Husband

According to Simone de Beauvoir’s *The Second Sex*, “Men are subjects and women are objects.” Men see themselves as human and women as ‘sex’ [4]. The female body is considered desirable. The male first controls the female through the male body and then defines her role. Therefore, women should put their focus on family life, and their identity is the angel in the family.

The novel begins with “a green and yellow parrot in a cage outside the door calling incessantly” (Chopin 1) This is a beautiful bird in a cage. He was tamed, spoke a little Spanish, and entertained the family. In literature, caged birds symbolize women under patriarchal rule. Like birds, traditional women were confined to their homes, with fine food and comfortable living environment, all they needed to do was dress up and please their husbands. They have no ego, just the property and objects of men. Because women’s subordination is historically and culturally constructed, this unnatural limitation becomes natural. In the name of women, such as piety, purity, obedience, and domestic life. Women were confined to the home and were considered naive, obedient, and loyal housewives.

Edna’s ring is also a symbol of female confinement. “I don’t recognize you anymore,” Edna’s response is to look at her own tanned hands, realize she’s not wearing a wedding ring, and silently reach out her hand. Her husband takes out the ring and places it on her palm. Edna obediently puts it back on and assumes the role of wife. Marriage has always been a very different thing for men and women. Both sexes are necessary to each other, but this necessity has never produced conditions of reciprocity between them. The marriage made her a slave to a man. He was her master and she was her servant. Taking care of her husband and children is her sacred mission.

Due to the limitation of traditional female identity in patriarchal society, she has no occupation, no personal relationship, and even her name is no longer hers. She is nothing more than her husband’s private property and belongings. On the other hand, a husband is a productive person who can control his behavior and pay attention to social interests. When he was tired, he would return home, where his wife would satisfy his physical and mental happiness. This is why Mr. Pontellier did not allow Edna to stay out late and demanded that she “must” enter the house “immediately” (Chopin 41). Sex was considered to be a service assigned to the wife, and she had to give it to her husband whenever he needed it.

According to Beauvoir, “the woman who lives on the inside is not real.” “In the position of the object, man is alienated, unable to establish his own values and goals, a victim of the will of

others, unable to live in transcendence.” [4] As long as Edna is Madame Pontellier, she cannot transcend the gender roles of wife and mother. Edna’s job is to be a wife, obedient and faithful to her husband; As a mother, loves their children more than themselves, and can die for their children; In marriage, she surrenders her personality, chastity, and loyalty to him. Marriage, for women, is not the sublimation of romantic love, but the absolute institution that keeps women trapped in the domestic realm. No wonder Edna refused to go to her sister’s wedding. Edna “heaved a sigh of relief” when Mr. Pontellier was not at home. An unfamiliar but very beautiful feeling came to her mind” (Chopin 95). Edna can only be herself when her husband is away.

If Edna is a caged bird that craves freedom, then there are some birds that love to be caged and provided with food and comfort. That summer, the Grand Island mothers seemed to have the upper hand. When any harm, real or imagined, threatens their young, they spread their wings and flap around to protect them. They protect their children, worship their husbands, and consider it a divine privilege to disappear as individuals and sprout wings like angels. Women have wings, but they are expected to use them to protect and serve their families, not fly.

### 3.2. **Rebelling Against Her Husband**

Edna is very different from most traditional women in patriarchal societies. Although she married Pontellier and became her husband’s private property, she was always exploring her possessiveness. “Edna was constantly surprised and troubled by a tendency in her heart, though she never expressed it,” (Chopin 22) It was a quiet tendency to fall in love with different men. She had fallen in love with three: a cavalry officer, a young gentleman, and a tragedy. This way of “silent” self-ownership is most clearly illustrated in her infatuation with a famous tragedian:

She had framed pictures of actors on the table, and it was perfectly normal that no one would suspect or say anything. (She liked the ingenuity.) In front of others, she praised her superior talent. Show them a picture of him, a good one. Alone, she lifts the frame and kisses the glass (Chopin 23).

This picture is to Edna what Edna is to her husband. She owns it as private property. Here she has a self-conscious and possessive identity. Holding the photo alone, she could imagine being secretly alone with him. In her ownership of the photograph, Edna establishes her possessive relationship with sex.

Edna’s sexuality begins to manifest itself when she goes on vacation to Grand Isle to form some kind of special relationship with Robert and realizes that “her feelings for Him are completely different from her feelings for her husband, and she has never felt this way before or expected to feel this way.” “She has been used to keeping her thoughts and feelings to herself since childhood. She never suffered for them. They belonged to her from beginning to end, to no one else, and she believed she had a right to them.” (Chopin 62) During their marriage, Edna’s husband loved her but did not respect her. He doesn’t care about her spiritual world. He never asked if she was really happy in marriage; Whether she really loved him; Whether she really liked this kind of life. Because it was enough for him to love Edna. But for Edna, everyday intimacy comforts spiritual loss. Although “everyone declared That Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world,” Edna only rebuffed the controlling husband. As she grew fond of Robert, Edna grew tired of her husband. She began to struggle with her husband, and she began to dictate her own behavior. “Edna, what are you doing here? I thought you were in bed.” Pontellier asked Edna, finding her sitting in a chair. In the past, she would have done as she was told and habitually obeyed her husband’s will. But this time, she said no. “No, I’m staying out.” An unshakable will be blazed within her, and all she wanted to do was deny and confront. By refusing to have sex with her husband, Edna exercised the “eternal right of women” to own herself.

Self-ownership, in the second half of the 19th century, meant that wives had the right to refuse marital sex—which feminists saw as the key to female autonomy. As Lucinda Chandler saw it, the practice of self-ownership means that a woman “has control over herself and is not affected by her husband’s desires.” Edna practiced self-ownership, as feminists advocated.

Not having sex with her husband meant Edna kept her freedom, moving to the pigeon nest, and making a living from painting meant she gave herself freedom. Edna’s first extramarital sexual encounter was with Alcee Arobin. Although there was no love in the relationship. But in her relationship with Arobin, Edna was always firmly in control of the whole thing. She was independent. Technically, kissing Arobin was her own choice, and it was the kiss she had ever truly responded to instinctively. Chopin liberates Edna by giving her heroine the joyful experience of adultery with a man she knows is not her lover. The kiss made Edna realize that she could enjoy her sex. The kiss showed that sex was not limited to duty and procreation and that for her it was a satisfying and welcoming experience.

Edna’s sexual awakening makes her love for Robert more intense. When Robert returns, Edna has made it clear that their love will break through all social barriers: “We will be everything to each other.” (Chopin 143) She thought they would live happily married life together in a new place. She told Robert that she no longer belonged to Mr. Pontellier and that she was no longer at his mercy, but only by her own choice. Despite being a woman, she seems to be a man at heart, and she wants to be a taker, a woman who can control herself.

Chopin believed that true sexual passion itself could help confused people see things as they really are. After her first sexual union with Arobin, Edna, despite her guilt, finally dispelled the fog before her eyes and “saw and understood the monster of beauty and cruelty that is life” (Chopin 109) The awakening of the body is accompanied by the awakening of the spirit. Sex is not the focus of the book. It is the medium through which Edna discovers her identity, the catalyst for self-knowledge. As Edna’s sense of self grows, she rejects anything that stands in the way of her free will. By examining her relationship with the inner world and the outer world, she wanted to break out of the cage of being manipulated and take control of her own life. Edna, from ignoring the traditional responsibilities of women in a patriarchal society to challenging traditional notions of the sanctity of motherhood she has a strong heart.

From the discussion, we find that they mutually agree on the terms of their marriage: “It was to be a form, not anything else, while fixing legally their relation to each other, that was in no way to touch the individuality of either. Each was to remain a free integral of humanity, responsible to no dominating control of so-called marriage laws” (Chopin 140). Here Chopin promotes such a notion that marriage does not necessarily mark the closing stage of a woman’s intellectual existence. However, people around all describe their marriage with shock, with horror and with opposition, especially when Charles leaves his wife alone in Paris for many months. In this sense, their ideal marriage is impossible to last in such a society that expects women to live a completely sheltered, domestic life.

## 4. Edna’s Identity as Mother

### 4.1. Institutionalized Motherhood and Dehumanized Motherhood

Through reading *The Awakening*, we can understand Chopin’s two views: sensibility and motherhood. *The Awakening* is controversial and revolutionary because of both. *The Awakening* begins with motherhood, exploring female passion, and ends with it. It seems to be a gift from nature; A decoy to lure the mother into a race. “Nature takes no account of the moral consequences, of the arbitrary conditions we create, and our obligation to maintain them at all costs.” (Chopin 147)

One of the most institutionalized maternal characters in the book is clearly Adele. Adele is the archetypal subject of institutionalized motherhood. Adele gave birth to four children, an act that

was admired by society at the time. Adele is clearly proud of the fact that she likes to tell people she's pregnant, even if they don't know it when she keeps talking about it. For Adele, motherhood is a role she loves to play and be, and everything Adele does is for her children. She immersed herself in the role of a mother: making clothes for the children, doing housework, and so on. Adele played the piano and continued to do so after becoming a mother, not because she wanted to pursue art, but for her children, who she believed would be entertained and comfortable. In Adele, we can see a distinct mother role—a perfect mother role, one who has no personal pursuit and is completely tied to her family, husband and children. However, what she does not produce creative business, that is, no practical value to show Adele as an individual.

“Sex for a woman always means sex as a woman because it means potential pregnancy” [7] In institutionalized motherhood, women are the sexual slavery of their husbands, followed by the nurturing slavery of their children, which is also the double oppression that women need to face after becoming mothers. On the other hand, we can also see the incomplete mother Edna in the book. Edna is also a mother of two, but the difference is that Edna mainly doesn't want to be the “perfect” mother, and even tries to get out of it. In her mind, she could feel truly relaxed without her husband and children; In one's pigeon nest, one's spirit can produce peace and joy. At the same time, Edna is eager to pursue her own independence. She wants to be a truly independent individual, not an accessory of someone else, and she takes practical actions. She learned painting, although she did not have the skills of a master, but the paintings could be sold, coupled with the funds left by her parents and won in horse racing, so that she had an independent economic foundation. Even more, the mental awakening made her feel guilt-free about the affair. However, Edna's various behaviors will be subject to her various identities and social environment, and finally chooses to die. Another anti-mother character, Miss Reisz, is a childless woman who completely immerses herself in the pursuit of art and accomplishes it by becoming an artist. What we can see is that the extremes of Adele and Reisz work out for the best, while Edna ends up in ruin.

Under the influence of the patriarchal social system, men are regarded as the pillar of society and family, and women are naturally defined as the appendages of society and men. In social cognition, women need to sacrifice themselves for the propagation of the race. Women with female bodies are naturally bound to the role of mothers. They didn't have a choice to be a mother or not to be a mother, they were considered an ethnic group. A lot of religions about motherhood promote the role of motherhood as sacred, motherhood is sacred, and women sacrifice so much of themselves for motherhood. Behind the sanctity, we need to see the essence of the loss of self, sexual slavery, loneliness and vulnerability that comes with motherhood. As a result, mothers are always busy with domestic tasks: washing, cooking, caring for children, etc., and they are rarely connected to the social environment, so they naturally lack multiple options to become individuals. In the social environment at that time, the divine and great mothers were indeed helpless women who were isolated by society and bound by the family. What is important is that the holy promotion of mothers in culture is actually the deception of paternity on women. The high praise for mothers' dedication and sacrifice will make women fall into the trap of motherhood and fail to make their own choices.

#### **4.2. Edna's Self-assertion Through Productive Activity**

At the beginning of the story, Chopin tells us: “Mrs. Pontelier was not a mother” (Chopin 10). Unlike Adele, Edna has expectations and fantasies about motherhood. She rejected the idea that a child was a woman's highest goal, or that a child was bound to be happy in her mother's arms. Although she loves her children, she blows hot and cold to them, depending on her own mood. Sometimes she held them affectionately in her arms, sometimes she left them behind. Edna's two children are stronger and more independent than “the others.” Under Edna's care, if the Pontellieri children fell while playing, they would not cry and rush to their mother's arms for

comfort. Instead, they would get up and wipe away their tears and continue playing. Edna could spend her time painting. She loved art and tried it as another possible source of self-actualization. She wanted to exist as an individual first, not as a mother.

Edna's path to self-awakening is hierarchical, not overnight. Edna's initial awakening begins with the mind. When Edna was young, she refused to pray, and when she grew up, her marriage with Ponderia was considered as "a pure accident", which was the result of Edna's struggle against her father. This was the initial awakening of Edna's mind. She did not want to be arranged in her mind, and she wanted to do things according to her own ideas.

Having become a wife and mother, she didn't want to tie herself down in such a role. She likes art, so she will spend part of her time on painting, and the affairs around her will become her "model". At the same time, her paintings can also become the economic foundation to support her towards independence. She doesn't like false interpersonal relationships, so she no longer hosts dinner parties arranged by her husband to maintain what she sees as false interpersonal relationships, but spends her time on things she likes. During this period, Edna's self-awakening has moved towards deeper thoughts and practical actions. She uses her own funds to rent a cabin and has her own space, in which she can carry out any creative activities she wants, which further promotes Edna towards self. The climax of her self-presentation lies in her feelings for Robert and the release of sexual desire with Arobin. For a married woman, with other men in marital emotions will be called cheating, Edna thinks Robert let her feel the taste of love, she also doesn't hide my feelings for Robert, in Robert leaves, Edna's emotions can only be silently hidden in the heart, and after the racetrack know Mr. Alcee, Edna unleashed her emotions physically.

One of the highlights of the book is that Edna is thinking about Robert at the same time that Arobin is turning on his sexuality. So at this time of Edna who just regards sex as the release of pure desire, isolates spirit in the flesh, through this, Edna's female independent consciousness show incisively and vividly, that the female sex can be used as a purely physiological need, and don't need to consider the other party as their loved ones, or subject to a variety of ethical and moral bound. Edna's awakening is the path from thought to action, and finally to a deeper level of self-independence.

## **5. Edna's Identity as Herself**

### **5.1. The Awakening of Self-awareness**

What happens when the cord that binds man to external reality is cut and he floats. A tramp is lonely. Edna went with the flow. Once you break away from traditional patterns, once you declare "never to belong to anyone else again," you are doomed to endless loneliness.

The original name of The Awakening is Lonely Soul. From both perspectives, the truth of the novel itself is expounded: the clearer a person's cognition of himself is, the stronger an individual's self-awareness is, the less dependent he will be on the things around him, and the more lonely he will feel.

Edna's personal charm lies in her sense of personal independence. When she was young, she was rebellious in evading prayer. Later, she got married to Pontellier in a purely accidental marriage, which was more of a struggle against her father. Edna is different from other women in the article in that she will not sacrifice herself for the sake of her family, and is not subject to the social atmosphere and public cognition at that time. As she emerged from her domestic role to pursue what she needed: to pursue Robert and become an artist, she emerged as an independent and self-confident individual. In the process, she pays the price of loneliness and insecurity that come with independence. From Edna's many behaviors, we can see that she needs to be alone. In the absence of her husband and children, she can feel calm in her heart and have a wonderful feeling in her mind. At the same time, she can have time to think. When

she swims, she wants to go where no woman has gone before, which shows Edna's potential to transcend her gender.

Another character in *The Awakening*, Miss Reisz, is a person who has developed a sense of self before Edna, and who doesn't care what others say about her: some say she's partially deranged; She had her own way of life, no man, no children, no family, only music to accompany her, which made her a great artist. In Edna's quest for self, Miss Reisz has warned her that the most important thing to be an artist is not talent, but a brave soul that can endure the loneliness of freedom.

At the beginning of Edna's self-pursuit, she could not deal with the relationship between independence and love. When she longed for love, she struggled with the idea that love would constrain her to become a free and independent person. At the same time, Robert, her love object, could not accept her life which was different from the traditional life of that era. He had to think a lot about accepting Edna, thinking about whether ethical principles and social customs could allow him to accept such an Edna. Therefore, in this process, Edna was unable to be completely independent like Miss Reisz in the early stage, and fell into a state of complete loneliness in the later stage of her pursuit. Therefore, in the process of pursuing herself, Although Edna gained herself to some extent, she also lost a lot of things about herself.

## 5.2. Edna's Suicide

When complete loneliness appeared on Edna, after loneliness, Edna needed to face the thoughts of death. When you think of yourself as completely independent of society, when you are physically and mentally detached from the social environment, then you lack the value and meaning of your existence in society—that is, to a certain extent, to admit that you are personally close to death. While Edna was obsessed with the pursuit of personal independence, her strong desire for complete independence made her go to the depths of the sea and end her life without looking back.

Edna's destiny is closely linked to the sea and hints at her eventual fate. Edna's desire for love and Robert's rejection may be the cause of Edna's self-destruction. Watching Adele give birth made Edna realize that a woman's fertility and motherhood are closely linked. Adele's reminder of Edna's children makes Edna think about children, not just her own children, but other people's children, and even her future children with Robert, and the impact of sexuality on her independence. She didn't want to give up sex, but she didn't want it to make her a mother and lose her true independence. The contradiction between the two led her to the depths of the sea. The conflict between personal independence and motherhood has plagued Edna since the early days of her quest for self. Early on, she realized that personal independence trumped motherhood. She has said she is willing to give money, time and even her life for her children, but not for herself. This shows that Edna at that time had already possessed self-consciousness. In her opinion, she did not live for the affairs around her. When her husband and children were absent, Edna could relax herself. She has a sense of responsibility for her family and children, but the awakening of self makes her not want to take this responsibility.

In the social environment at that time, women were required to be loyal to their family, husband and children, which was not only a social ethos, but also a perceived institutional norm. Women are mostly regarded as men's appendages, who need to take care of the family, husband and children, which occupy a large part of their life. Obviously, this institutionalized motherhood is extremely restrictive and oppressive for Edna. Edna is constantly tested by her struggle with self-contradiction and responsibility for her children. Apparently, Edna couldn't be as oblivious as Miss Reisz. Miss Reisz had no children of their own, to make her own time and energy to pursue their own affairs, not to leave the time to pursue the ego to take care of the children, this is Edna can't have, she has been in the pursuit of self in the process of bearing the responsibility of this role as a mother, let her can't make a commitment to the process of self-awareness. This,

of course, is what makes Edna different: her role as a mother generates a sense of self-awareness, and when she does so, she has to bear the responsibilities of motherhood. While Adele is immersed in motherhood, Reisz is immersed in the process of being herself. In the 19th century, women sought motherhood and the responsibilities of motherhood rather than female self, so Edna was doomed to fail in her quest for self.

For women, what to choose in society is limited, and under the influence of social environment, they lack the consciousness and the way of self-choice, institutionalization of maternal stresses such a fact that women will put more time and energy into their children; however, some unorthodox behavior causes their children to lose the opportunity to be happy, so, most of their choices are based on what can make their children happier.

## 6. Conclusion

Chopin regards the true artist as one who challenges convention, one who rejects both decent moral norms and the conventions and formulas of literary success; her belief in originality and autonomy in writing must have “brave souls to challenge and challenge” and must rise above “the level of tradition and prejudice”, for which, the protagonist here is a good example.

In the West, the industrial revolution transformed the handicraft industry that women had been engaged in at home and were brought into a machine-driven mass production industry. This meant that women in the lower classes could earn wages as factory workers. This was the beginning of their independence; however, in the past, women in society had no social importance. They have to be part of the patriarchal society. In this novel, we can find such a metaphor. The caged parrot and Edna's ring is also a symbol of female confinement. In such a patriarchal society, a woman has no occupation, no personal relationship and even her name is no longer hers. Women have wings, but they are expected to use them to protect and serve their families, not to fly with them. As a mother, they should love their children more than themselves, and they can die for their children; in marriage, she surrendered her personality, chastity and loyalty to him. Marriage, for women, is not the sublimation of romantic love, but the absolute institution that keeps women trapped in the domestic realm. Against such a social background, our female protagonist, Edna, and her husband love her but do not respect her, which means no care for her spiritual world. Because of this, she does not have sex with her husband to mean her keeping her freedom; moving to the pigeon nest, and making a living from painting means she gives herself freedom. The awakening of the body is accompanied by the awakening of the spirit. Sex is not the focus of the book. It is the medium through which Edna discovers her identity.

Edna is also a mother of two, but the difference is that Edna mainly doesn't want to be the “perfect” mother, and even tries to get out of it. In her mind, she could feel truly relaxed without her husband and children; Edna's female independent consciousness shows incisively and vividly, that the female sex can be used as a purely physiological need, and doesn't need to consider the other party as their loved ones, or subject to a variety of ethical and moral bound. Edna's awakening is the path from thought to action, and finally to a deeper level of self-independence.

When she longed for love, she struggled with the idea that love would constrain her to become a free and independent person, which was not accepted by traditional values. The conflict between personal independence and motherhood has plagued Edna since the early days of her quest for self. All of these made her accept suicide, and this is her only doom. In this paper, we can find Edna is an independent person, a person pursuing freedom and pursuing her complete independence, which is of course against our society. We know any individual can never exist without the rule of one certain society. Any one of us is a member of his or her culture. Only by knowing this, can we better contribute to the development of our society. Through the

awakening, this paper expounds the problems existing in the early period of feminist movement and understands the insufficiency of the development of feminism in that era. In the long process of feminist development, many problems existing in the early stage have been improved. Women's rights in politics, economy, education and other aspects have been guaranteed, and women have equal rights to receive education. In terms of social roles, women are no longer limited to the role of family and mother.

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