

Edna

This is a look at "The Awakening" by Kate Chopin. When you first look at the life of Edna you think there is not much to discuss. Edna is a married woman who at first seems vaguely satisfied with her life--"she grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution." (Chopin, 558).

Edna doesn't know what she wants from life. It is evident from the way she tries to change her life to make it better, that she wants her own happiness. She refuses to stay home on Tuesdays, which she is expected to do to satisfy the social conventions of the time. She spends more time on her art. She goes to races and parties all the time. All of this doesn't seem to help her maintain happiness all the time.

There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. 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 dead or alive; when life appeared to her like a grotesque

Pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. (Chopin, 588)

Edna struggled to make her life more fulfilling. Edna wanted what? Passion, excitement? She states to the Doctor, "But I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others--but no matter--still, I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives." (Chopin, 629).

In the title of "The Awakening" I get the impression of someone waking up and deciding that their life is not what they want. Edna goes from being reasonably happy in her life to very unhappy with her life and tries to change it to make it better. The ways she goes about it are not necessarily the right ways, but at least she tries to change it to make it better.

The acceptable behaviors of the time in which she lived worked against her. Edna stays married because divorce was unheard of in those days. She wants to marry Robert, but he will not because it will disgrace her to leave her husband. She exceeds the social boundaries of the day by going her own way and doing what she wants, but she is still bound by the will of others no matter what she wants. In the time period we are talking about she would have been ostracized by society if she and Robert were to be together. The only solution she sees is to commit suicide. That would not happen in this day and time either, because she would have been able to get a divorce and marry Robert with no special stigma. Edna could not get what she thought she wanted and ended up with no responsibilities.

