The Awakening of a Modern Self

Self-Discovery in Kate Chopin's Novel *The Awakening*

Uppvaknandet av ett modernt jag
Självinsikt i Kate Chopins roman *The Awakening*

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Abstract

This essay argues that *The Awakening* treats the 1890s "modern woman" that arose from feminist ideas and the women's movement, challenging patriarchal society with an independent lifestyle. Following Ringe, this essay suggests that the novel has a purpose of showing the process and the development of the protagonist's individual self. But rather than connect this theme to the transcendentalist notion of the self, as Ringe does, this essay looks at this theme in the light of the notion of the "modern woman". By arguing that Edna develops into a modern woman during this process, the essay finds that she moves from the traditional position as a "patriarchal woman" towards the role of an "emancipated woman". Further, the essay shows that Edna's development and thereby her attempt to change her position fails as the process of self-discovery is conflicted, resulting in Edna's suicide. Finally, by also arguing that the novel treats a woman's self and the process of a development, the essay visualizes that the novel is built-up by seven steps that together constitute the process from "patriarchal woman" to "emancipated woman". This process awakens a self-awareness and self-image within Edna that are strengthened with each of these step as she becomes a "modern woman".

Sammanfattning

Denna uppsats argumenterar för att *The Awakening* skildrar 1890-talets "moderna kvinna" som uppstod från feministiska idéer samt kvinnorörelsen och utmanade det patriarkaliska samhället med en självständig livsstil. Då jag följer Ringe påvisar den här uppsatsen att romanen har ett syfte att visa processen och utvecklingen av huvudpersonens individuella jag. Men istället för att koppla detta till den transcendentalistiska uppfattningen av jaget som Ringe gör, så kopplar denna uppsats detta till begreppet den "moderna kvinnan". Genom att argumentera för att Edna utvecklas till en modern kvinna under denna process finner

uppsatsen att hon flyttar från den traditionella rollen som en “patriarkalisk kvinna” mot rollen som en “emanciperad kvinna”. Uppsatsen visar vidare att Ednas utveckling och således hennes försök att ändra sin roll misslyckas då självupptäcktsprocessen står under konflikt, vilket resulterar i att Edna tar självmord. Genom att också argumentera för att romanen skildrar en kvinnas jag och processen av en utveckling visar slutligen uppsatsen att romanen är uppbyggd av sju olika steg som tillsammans utgör processen från ”patriarkalisk kvinna” till ”emanciperad kvinna”. Denna process väcker en självmedvetenhet samt en självbild inom Edna som förstärks med varje steg medan hon blir en “modern kvinna”.

At the end of the 19th century, feminist ideas and attitudes promoting women's rights spread like fire across America, as the women's movement strived for equality. As women endeavored to gain equality between the sexes and bring an end to male supremacy, feminist ideas and the women's movement rose to prominence in the second half of the 19th century (Bolt 6). As a result, what Per Seyersted terms the "modern woman" arises in the 1890s (103), i.e., women who started to challenge society with an independent lifestyle (Bolt 183-84). Like Christine Bolt, I have defined the women's movement and feminism alike as endeavors of women, for simplicity (41). During the 1890s American author Kate Chopin, known for writing about women's struggle in patriarchal society, wrote about the subject of women longing for equality and freedom, challenging current norms and values. Chopin's novel *The Awakening* was published in 1899, treating women's position in the late 19th century. The novel portrays a young woman, Edna Pontellier, who questions her place as a woman in patriarchal society, feeling constrained by the limitations surrounding motherhood and marriage. Edna wants to be an independent woman, which was unusual during that time. Through her portrayal of Edna, Chopin implies that women wanted more than to be wives and mothers, and that they desired something that men at the time felt women should not desire. She thus confronts patriarchal society and the inequality between the sexes.

In this essay, I follow Donald Ringe in claiming that *The Awakening* is not just a feminist novel arguing for sexual freedom, but that the novel's main purpose is to show the process and the development of the protagonist's individual self. But rather than connect this theme to the transcendentalist notion of the self, as Ringe does, this essay looks at this theme in the light of different female types characterized by the way they deal with the patriarchal society presented in *The Awakening*. Lois Tyson defines patriarchy as any culture that privileges men by promoting traditional gender roles which are used to justify inequities, making the women excluded from equal leadership and decision-making positions in politics,

academia, the corporate world, as well as in the family (81). Patriarchal society's main purpose is to place women in a submissive role. In consequence, women and men have different roles in patriarchal society. Women existed only as wives and mothers, they were supposed to idolize their children and worship their husband, while men were the head of the household, supposed to succeed economically and to provide for his family (Tyson 83).

Chopin portrays women who have taken on different types of female roles in this patriarchal society. Adele Ratignolle is depicted as a "patriarchal woman", a type defined by Tyson as a woman who idolizes their children and worships her husband" (Tyson 86), while Mademoiselle Reisz is depicted as the "emancipated woman", a woman who does not follow gender norms and lives freely and independently on her own (Seyersted 103). Against these other two types, the novel's protagonist Edna Pontellier is depicted as the "modern woman", challenging contemporary norms and conventional expectations as she strives for emancipation, independence and freedom. This essay argues that during this process of self-discovery, Edna develops into a modern woman who is unable to become a fully emancipated woman. She moves from the traditional position as a patriarchal woman depicted by Adéle, towards the role of an emancipated woman embodied by Mademoiselle Reisz, thereby making the two a measure to gauge Edna's development. The essay shows that Edna's development and thereby her attempt to change her position fails as the role as a fully emancipated woman is for her fatally conflicted, resulting in her suicide.

The essay visualizes the process of a development as seven steps that together constitute the process from patriarchal woman to emancipated woman. This process awakens a self-awareness and self-image within Edna that are strengthened with each of these step in her failed attempt to become a "modern woman". Five of these steps come from Ringe (582-587), but since I look upon Edna's awakening as taking place under the aegis of the modern woman rather than under that of the transcendental self, as Ring does, I have added two steps

that are essential to Edna's self-discovery in relation to the modern woman. The first step is to be found in chapter five, when the reader for the first time is introduced to Edna's self-discovery, for the first time not doing what is expected of her. The second step in chapter ten shows Edna testing her limits and experiencing a fear of death and thus a threat to the self, which makes her value her life. In the third step, in chapter 14, she begins to perceive a new self. Her self-development has increased to the point that Edna for the first time acknowledges a change within her. The fourth step takes place in chapter 17, when Edna develops her independence by taking on the behavior of a modern woman. She rebels against both her husband's will and social behavior and routines. The fifth step (one of the two added to Ringe's scheme) starts in chapter 26, when Edna rebels against the patriarchal view of men as head of the household, making her feel like an individual and less like a possession. The sixth step (the second added to Ringe's scheme) comes in chapter 36, when Edna uses language belonging to a modern woman to express and state strong opinions. Finally, the seventh step, in chapter 37, shows how Edna comes to insight regarding her place in life and society, facing up to who she is. Edna has to choose between being a patriarchal woman and thereby give up herself, or emancipate herself and thereby hurt her children. She eludes the situation by taking her life. Edna cannot go back and undo her development and this arguably leads to her suicide.

There is no question that the world depicted by Chopin in *The Awakening* is patriarchal. The novel starts at Grand Isle with Edna's husband Léonce Pontellier looking displeased at his wife leaning against a supporting post in the sun: "'What folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat! […] You are burnt beyond recognition,' he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage" (Chopin 3). Furthermore, when Léonce comes home late at night he wakes his wife her and tells her anecdotes, news and gossip from the day. Disapproving of his wife's lack of interest,

"he thought it very discouraging that his wife evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation" (Chopin 8). Nor does he value Edna as a mother: "He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them" (Chopin 9). From these examples it becomes clear that Edna and her husband's relationship reflects the norms of patriarchal society, indicating, as they do, that Léonce looks at his wife as his personal property, rather than his equal companion.

As mentioned above, the patriarchal woman is represented by Edna's friend Adéle Ratignolle, who embodies the ideal notion of how women should behave during her time period; she is described as a mother-woman who idolizes her children and worships her husband. She has womanly grace, charm, and beauty (Chopin 12-13). Adéle is very careful to please her husband: "She would not consent to remain with Edna, for Monsieur Ratignolle was alone, and he detested above all things to be left alone" (Chopin 63). Putting her husband and his interests and needs first, she also believes that "'a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that – your Bible tells you so. I'm sure I couldn't do more than that'" (Chopin 75). Giving her life for her children is her essential function in life.

On the other hand, Mademoiselle Reisz represents the emancipated woman, who has successfully placed herself outside patriarchal society. Mademoiselle Reisz does not follow gender norms and lives freely and independently on her own. She is described as "a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost everyone, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others" (Chopin 39). She is looked upon as "an artist" whose music "shakes a man!" (Chopin 41). While a lot of people are impressed by her piano skills and appreciate her music, they

nevertheless also disapprove of her and her behavior and are anxious to mark their distance from her. Due to her personality, attitude and behavior, a former neighbor says that he does not want anything to do with her since she is the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street (Chopin 93). Mademoiselle Reisz is considered to intrude on men's rights, violating the patriarchal gender norms of society by not acting like a woman should, having her own household and economic independence.

These two are static within the story since neither Adéle nor Mademoiselle Reisz undergo any changes. The last role, the modern woman embodied by Edna, however, does: not being happy with her marriage or life, she strives for something more than being a mother and wife who follows the everyday routines and rules assumed by her husband and society at large. The first two roles may be used as tools to analyze the development of Edna's self-development in relation to patriarchal society. Seyersted explains that "all chapters are given to her inner growth. The other figures and the setting are worked out only to the degree they can support or contrast her development" (150).

As mentioned, Ringe posits five steps that are specifically important for Edna's self-development. Three are set in the first half of the novel, at Grand Isle, and two are set in the other half of the novel, in New Orleans. The first step comes in chapter five when Edna, following Robert Lebrun to the beach, feels contradictory impulses that bewilder her as she listen to her own will and goes against the social rules. This is the first time the reader is introduced to Edna's awakening, and also the first time she does not do what is expected of her: "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 21). This event initiates Edna's process of self-discovery. Jennifer B. Gray explains that "Her awakening makes visible her position in patriarchal society and gives her the desire to seek alternative roles". […] Edna's awakening allows her to resist the various 'interpellations' of

the dominant patriarchal ideology and experiment with both alternative and oppositional roles" (54).

The second step is found from chapter ten and forward. Shortly after the first important step there is a night where Edna is in a different state of mind than usual:

> But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with overconfidence. […] 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 soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before. (Chopin 43)

This new state of mind makes Edna swim out in the ocean, testing her limits and thereby experiencing a fear of death as she realizes how far out she is. As Ringe suggests, one can see that the awakening of a self and its process is triggered by Edna's experience in the ocean (582). The threatening event in the ocean give rise to Edna's self-awareness and self-image as she fears for her life, finding her life and herself important and valuable. This self-discovery and new self-awareness cannot be lost as she cannot undo the events of the night, and thereby there is no going back in her development after her awakening.

Consequently after this event, Edna refuses to obey her husband for the first time, creating a conflict between them. Léonce finds his wife outside when he comes home at night, but when telling her to go inside Edna answers him: "Don't wait for me" (Chopin 49). Léonce shows irritation and impatience, and finally commands his wife to come in. The narrator informs the reader that Edna usually would have yielded to his desire and submitted to his command, but at that moment as she felt the way she did, she had to deny and resist: "Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream, to feel again the realities pressing into her soul" (Chopin 49). The fact that

Edna refuses to obey her husband indicates that her self-discovery process has reached a new level that she never has been in touch with before, one that affect her behavior. As Bernard J. Paris argues convincingly, "Edna awakens out of a ´life-long stupid dream` of habitual submission to her husband and her society's expectations of her as woman" (216). Edna does not only break her habitual submission to her husband, but also to the rules of society concerning the roles of women. Throughout this development Adéle forms a contrast to Edna. While Edna goes against her husband and refuses to obey him, Adele, as was expected of women in that time, worships her husband and is very careful to please him (Chopin 63). In not yielding to her husband's command Edna on the contrary does not as a woman of that time was expected to, moving towards becoming a modern woman, challenging contemporary norms and conventional expectations.

The third important step towards Edna's self-discovery is when she and Robert Lebrun in chapter 14 returns from Chenière Caminada after spending a Sunday there. Edna finds that "herself- her present self- was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect" (Chopin 63). This observation shows how Edna's self-development has increased to the point that she for the first time acknowledges a change within her. After that self-reflection, Edna hears about Robert Lebrun's coming departure to Mexico, which her irritated and frustrated. When Madame Lebrun sends Adéle with a request to join the, Edna answers: "No', […] 'I can't go to the trouble of dressing again; I don't feel like it'" (Chopin 69). That she stands up for what she wants shows that she is growing more independent and ready to follow her inner judgment. With her behavior going against the social rules, Edna begins to act more like a modern woman instead of being a patriarchal woman.

The process is ongoing, but this is when Edna sees things with different eyes. But as Ringe and many other critics point out, the process is not complete until she returns to New Orleans, where from chapter 17 on her rebellion becomes complete when she is back in the community and faces the social demands on her new self. The fourth step shows Edna rebelling not only against her husband's will, but against society. As Ringe argues, "She refuses to take seriously the social forms through which the community functions, but instead determines to go her own way, independent of both her family and the society in which they live" (584). This part of her process is spread out over several chapters, where Edna distances herself further from the role of a patriarchal woman and behaves more like Mademoiselle Reisz. Among other things, Edna refuses to follow the custom of having "reception days":

> On Tuesday afternoons-Tuesday being Mrs.Pontellier's reception day-there was a constant stream of callers-women who came in carriages or in the streetcars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted. […] Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, remained in the drawing room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors. Men sometimes called in the evening with their wives. This had been the programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before. (Chopin 78-79)

The narrator says that: "She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household […]" (Chopin 89). This behavior is highly disapproved of her husband, Léonce proclaimed that people do not do such things and that her behavior was inappropriate (Chopin 80). The narrator expresses a growing tension between Edna's new self and her husband: "Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute

disregard for her duties as a wife angered him" (Chopin 89). The one thing that Edna cannot do, however, is to return to her previous lifestyle: "When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward" (Chopin 89).

Reflecting upon the patriarchal life of Adéle and her husband, Edna concludes that: "[i]t was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle–a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium" (Chopin 88). This shows that Edna has stronger and higher opinions than before about society and its unwritten rules. Edna knows that she is not like Adele and that Adele's life is not one for her, and she does not think that she herself has developed in a negative direction. Her new role as a modern woman makes her value her new self in a more positive light, and makes her identify herself more with Mademoiselle Reisz. While everyone in the novel say negative comments about Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna says that: "She seems to me wonderfully sane" (Chopin 131). This demonstrates that she has a different point of view than of those with patriarchal views: she has become a modern woman.

Becoming a modern woman means that Edna has developed stronger opinions than before about society and its unwritten rules. Her attitude and thoughts have developed to the point where she is prepared to do what she wants and feels like regardless what others think of her. She shows the independence and behavior of a modern woman trying to emancipate herself. At this point even her husband acknowledges the immense change within her, a change that affects her behavior enormously and creates strong reactions. "It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself" (Chopin 90). Edna herself reflects

upon her change: "'One of these days […] 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 130). Clearly, then, Edna recognizes that her new behavior patterns pin her down as different and abnormal when seen from a patriarchal perspective.

The fifth step (one of the two added) starts in chapter 26. Edna does not only go against unspoken social norms, but also rebels against the patriarchal position of her husband as the head of the household and the one supposed to provide for his family and succeed economically (Tyson 83). Edna moves out from her husband's house and rents a small house which she provides for by herself. As Gray explains, "She leaves the home purchased with the wealth of her husband, the acceptance of which hails her as an object, and enters a home of her own choosing. She leaves Leonce, and supports herself 'on the income from her art and from a legacy of her mother's'" (67). The reason for these changes, Edna tells Mademoiselle Reisz, is that "I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence" (Chopin 125). She writes her husband a letter about her intentions, but "[w]ithout even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna hastened her preparations for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving into the little house around the block" (Chopin 134). His response, as to be expected, is negative, demanding that she does not follow it through (Chopin 148). Edna, however, goes against his wishes and continues with her plans, and the house makes her happy and pleased: "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" (Chopin 149). Her actions indicate that Edna's developments of self-discovery is developed to the level that she finally feels like an individual human, and less

like a possession and a lifeless object. However, the seeds that will ultimately lead to her own destruction are at the same time sown. As Gray points out, “For a time, Edna lives in the illusion that she is indeed autonomous, a free, single woman without the burden of her role as wife and mother. However, it is only an illusion, for her husband and her children are temporarily absent, rather than suddenly nonexistent” (66).

Nevertheless, Edna’s role as a modern woman trying to emancipate is enormously strengthened by this act as the house represent her desire for freedom and independence. Her actions also indicate that her inner strength is developed as she takes extreme decisions by herself that goes against conventional expectations and behavior. In violating patriarchal gender norms of the society, she resembles Mademoiselle Reisz more and more, having her own household and economic independence, and in not acting like a patriarchal woman should. As a consequence, Adéle, the typical patriarchal woman, reacts to Edna’s new self: “‘In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn’t mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone […]’” (Chopin 153). Like Edna’s husband, Adéle thus sees to see Edna’s change as something negative. Her new behavior and actions are not agreeable to society since they no longer answer to a patriarchal woman.

In chapter 36 the sixth step (the second of the two added) is to be found. The tremendous development of Edna’s self-discovery is also shown by her language: she expresses strong opinions that belong to a modern woman. As she says to Robert, “I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself. It doesn’t matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like” (Chopin 169). It was not a desirable behavior of a woman of that time to express feelings and opinions, but at this point, Edna does not care what people think of her. Like Mademoiselle Reisz, she has become

an independent woman also in the way she expresses herself. Further in the conversation Edna tells Robert that "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy, she is yours,' I should laugh at you both" (Chopin 171). Her statement that no one owns her, that she is no one's possessions and that she makes her own decisions, not only indicates her lack of submission to her husband but also releases her from the bonds of the patriarchy society and the social rules concerning the role of women.

The seventh step, which consists of Edna's final awakening, facing who she is, can be found from chapter 37 to the end of the novel. We saw above that some of her actions were an illusion that could not last, and reflecting on life Edna finally gains an insight regarding her "self" and her place in life and society. In this brief but important step, events follow upon each other fast. Edna goes to Adéle to be with her during her labor, and as Edna witness "the scene of torture" (Chopin 175), Adéle appeals to her: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!" (Chopin 175). As a result, Edna talks to Doctor Mandelet, telling him that "'I'm not going to be forced into doing things. I don't want to go abroad. I want to be left alone. Nobody has any rights–except children, perhaps–and even then, it seems to me–or it did seem–' She felt that her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly" (Chopin 177). This scene implies that Adéle's words affect Edna and makes her unsure of what she thinks is right in life. Right after this she finds out that Robert has left her for good.

These events together make Edna lie awake that night, reflecting upon life. As Ringe concludes, "Edna's final awakening, her ultimate self-discovery, reveals an inner nature that is devoid of hope […] She faces the truth about herself, that for her no lasting union with anyone is possible. Even her children appear to her as enemies, as 'antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered her and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the

rest of her days'" (586-587). Edna is not willing to sacrifice herself for her children; she can give up everything else but not herself, and this makes the children play the role of antagonists, being the only thing standing between Edna and emancipation, and the children is the only ones she cannot hurt (Chopin 181). As Paris argues, "By sacrificing her life, she will avoid the unbearable feeling of being enslaved and will protect her children from the shame she would have brought upon them if she insisted on having her own way" (235). And that is why her suicide becomes the only option. In Gray's words, "because of her awakening to herself as an individual, she cannot exist in the female roles sanctioned by patriarchal ideology. Her only escape from this ideology is death. […] Edna takes drastic action to elude the ideological system into which she is born" (54). As Gray conclude, "Heroically, Edna escapes oppressive ideology, but tragically, does so only in death" (72). Edna comes to realize that she cannot be her true self within a patriarchal society because it will hurt her children, but at the same time she cannot undo her self-development and give herself up by going back to being a patriarchal woman.

As suggested by Ringe, Paris, and Gray, Edna saves herself by choosing death and thereby eludes the situation of having to choose between being enslaved or bringing shame over her children. To this we can add Lawrence Thornton's observation: "Because of the social conventions that prescribe behavior in her world, Edna has nowhere to go, succumbing to the promises of romanticism while living in a society that will not tolerate the terms she sets for her own freedom" (52). Edna figures out that her new self has no place in the contemporary society with its social conventions. She awakens to an understanding that she can neither play the role of a patriarchal woman—since she cannot undo her development, her self-awareness and self-image—nor play the role of an emancipated woman—since she cannot fulfill her terms to reach complete independence and freedom. She stands between the two polar roles represented by Adéle and Mademoiselle Reisz, a position she cannot accept

since she cannot live by the role as a "devilishly wicked specimen of the sex", as Edna comments on herself (Chopin 130). The ending shows Edna being far removed from the role of a patriarchal woman, but also not succeeding to emancipate herself. As a result, Rosemary Franklin explains that: "it is still not clear whether Edna Pontellier is a hero or a victim" (510). However, looking at Edna's death from the perspective of the theme of the self in relation to the modern woman opens up the possibility that the end can illustrate her final control over her own life: making her own decisions and living a free independent life makes her as the hero of her own life.

To conclude, this essay has demonstrated that *The Awakening* is not just a feminist novel arguing for sexual freedom, but delineates the development of the protagonist's individual self, a process of self-discovery. The purpose is highly relevant as Chopin wrote about how she saw life and was known for writing about women's struggle in patriarchal society and the subject of women longing for equality and freedom, challenging current norms and values. The novel has been read from the perspective of the contemporary "modern woman" that arose from the women's movement in the 1890s. Doing so has shown that the process of self-discovery awakens a self-awareness and self-image within Edna. It is through this process the protagonist awakens: she starts striving for independence and freedom, thereby developing into a modern woman struggling to reach emancipation. She moves from the traditional position of a patriarchal woman towards that of an emancipated woman, thereby moving from a similarity with Adele to that of Mademoiselle Reisz. However, her process of self-discovery is conflicted and ends with Edna being unable to emancipate herself due to her love for her children. This places her in a conflict. Her emancipation is not feasible but her development cannot be unmade since she cannot return to her previous situation as a patriarchal woman either, conforming to the behavior expected by society. As argued, to retain final control and freedom, Edna eludes this dilemma by

committing a suicide whereby she neither gives up her self nor sacrifices her children. Edna's final act gives her ultimate control over her own life and enables her to remain a free and independent woman that makes her own decisions.

Through seven distinct steps we have followed Edna's development into a modern woman who is striving to become an emancipated woman and distances herself from the role of a patriarchal woman. Five of these steps are drawn from Ringe, but to these I have added an additional two steps that focus on events that in her process gradual strengthen her role as a modern woman. The first three steps are placed in the first half of the novel, situated at Grand Isle, where Edna's self-discovery and transformation into the role of a modern woman is in focus. Due to a developed self-awareness and self-image she perceives a new self, and with small steps she starts going against conventional expectations and breaking norms. The last four steps, situated in New Orleans, are placed in the second half, where Edna's role as a modern woman is strengthened and she tries to emancipate herself. Her new independent self acts out against society's demands and expectations, highly challenging norms and conventional expectations. But due to the life she already has and to a society which she cannot change, an emancipation is conflicted. She understands that her new self is impossible to carry on with and that she cannot be happy and live as neither a patriarchal woman nor an emancipated woman. She eludes by taking suicide to remain final control and free herself as she "had resolved never again to belong to another than herself" (Chopin 114). Thereby, the end indeed can be read as a result of an attempt to elude the situation in order to achieve absolute freedom and final control is her life.

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