

**Independence Leading to Physical and Emotional Solitude in Kate Chopin's
*The Awakening***

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Abstract

This paper sheds light on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* published in 1899 on the main character, Edna Pontellier's journey towards exploring her autonomy and desires, which eventually leads her to physical and emotional solitude. Drawing on feminist perspectives enriched with Simone de Beauvoir's concept of women as cultural construction, Virginia Woolf's advocacy for financial and psychological liberation, and Betty Friedan's ideas about women's unhappiness towards domestic roles, this paper employs qualitative textual analysis to examine Edna's resistance to socially prescribed roles. The research further highlights characterization, symbolism and events to explore the relationship between independence and solitude in the novel. She challenges the societal expectations assigned to women such as marriage, motherhood and femininity of her time and seeks autonomy and selfhood that move beyond patriarchal constraints. The finding reveals that when Edna defies her gender roles of a wife and a mother while seeking freedom and identity, she detaches herself from her family, intimate relationships and the community she lives in. The paper draws the conclusion that the novel depicts independence both as liberating and isolating, that demonstrates the consequences a woman encounters with in her struggle to assert their individuality in a patriarchal society.

Keywords: domestic, feminism, independence, isolation, psychological, solitude

Introduction

In feminist discourse, the concepts of independence have occupied a central position since long. Throughout history, women's lives have been defined by social and cultural expectations that prioritize marriage, motherhood and domestic work over personal autonomy. In this regard, feminist thinkers have argued that these roles constructed by the society limit women from utilizing their full potential and develop an independent identity. Simone de Beauvoir (1956) contends that women are socially constructed as the “Other” and denied autonomous subjectivity in patriarchal cultures (p. 16). Likewise, Virginia Woolf (1929) calls attention to the need of women's psychological and economic independence, which are essential for their intellectual and personal growth arguing that "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (p. 4). Betty Friedan (1997) further uncovers the dissatisfaction experienced by women who are confined to domestic responsibilities and socially prescribed gender roles. These feminist perspectives have contributed significantly for examining women's struggles for autonomy and selfhood in society.

In this context, *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin emerges as a significant novel for its portrayal of female consciousness and resistance to social constraints. The novel was published in 1899 with the original title *A Solitary Soul*. When it was first published, the novel gained immense criticism for its portrayal of female sexual desire and female marital infidelity in a male-dominated society. The novel, set in the patriarchal society of the late nineteenth century, deals with the struggles of a woman who strives for individuality and freedom beyond the socially prescribed roles of wife and mother. Through Edna Pontellier, the protagonist, Chopin interrogates the prevailing social norms that confined women to mere domestic sphere and denied them the opportunity to participate outside the realm of domesticity for self-expression and autonomy. As Edna gradually awakens to her own identity and defies societal norms, she begins to questions the assumptions that shape her life and seeks for existence beyond traditional expectations.

The Awakening has been interpreted in different ways by scholars with varied perspectives on Edna's transformation. like Farhadiba H Khan (2022) interprets Edna as a “new woman” who rejects societal norms in an attempt to achieve her identity. In the

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same vein, Joseph R. Urgo (1987) views Edna's self-expression as an act of resistance to social conformity, while Donald Pizer (2001) foregrounds Edna's struggles against the biological and social constraints placed on the conditions of motherhood and marriage in which she exists. These studies focus on issues of identity, rebellion and female autonomy. Existing scholarship, however, has extensively investigated Edna's awakening and quest for independence, while less attention has been paid to the relationship between independence and solitude as interconnected experiences. The novel, thus, suggests that the pursuit of autonomy is not necessarily an emancipatory one by tracing Edna's path toward personal, sexual and psychological independence. The more Edna distances herself from social duties and obligations and the more she strives for artistic, emotional and psychological liberation, she becomes increasingly alienated from the social institutions that has provided her a sense of belonging and stability. As she becomes more self-aware, she experiences physical and emotional isolation from her family, friends, lovers and dominant cultural values. Hence, *The Awakening* offers independence as a form of liberation and a process that results into both physical and emotional solitude.

The study examines how the novel portrays the relationship between independence and solitude from the feminist perspectives of Beauvoir, Woolf and Friedan. It interrogates the ways in which Edna's pursuit of autonomy challenges patriarchal expectations and how it drives her toward growing sense of physical and emotional isolation that results into her death at the end. It further reveals that her eventual death embodies the complexities of self-realization in a restrictive social system. This study aims to explore independence not only as liberating but also as an isolating experience and to demonstrate how Chopin constructs solitude as a significant consequence of Edna's quest for identity.

Literature Review

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has been extensively studied for its portrayal of female identity, self-exploration, a rebellion, and struggles against the constraints of biological and social realities. Scholars have approached the novel from diverse perspectives such as feminism, naturalism. Postmodernism, Romanticism and narrative studies by producing contrasting interpretations of Edna Pontellier's awakening and her

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eventual fate.

Many scholars read *The Awakening* as a feminist novel. Critics like Farhadiba H Khan (2022), in "Consolidation Through Rebellion in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*" states that in her journey of self-actualization, Edna rebels against the moral and social restraints upon women set by the patriarchal society as she refuses traditional female roles of a mother and a wife. She argues that through her "control and awareness of her sexual and artistic potentials" (p. 1243), Edna rejects societal norms and transforms herself into "a New Woman" (p. 1243). Therefore, Edna is a new woman who searches for her identity by rejecting societal barriers imposed upon females. Likewise, Joseph R. Urgo (1987), in "A Prologue to Rebellion," focuses on Edna's self-exploration and expression as a prelude to rebellion. He states that "in order to live in society she must silence herself. This she rejects" (p. 23). and argues that her refusal to silence her emotions and desires challenges the social order. She transforms herself by expressing her desires and emotions and rejecting her gender roles. While these studies primarily explore female independence as a liberating force focusing more on female autonomy and resistance, yet pay comparatively less focus on emotional and psychological consequences they encounter with.

While some critics label *The Awakening* as a non-feminist. In this regard, criticizing feminism in *The Awakening*, Christina R. Williams (2008), in "Reading Beyond Modern Feminism: Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*", argues that the novel is often misread as a feminist text for its focus on female self-exploration, while he suggests exploring the themes of identity and naturalism. Analyzing Edna's characterization, he mentions that "Edna never moves beyond the control of masculine characters"(p. 55) but instead confines herself within the societal norms of being engaged with male characters. Therefore, her journey is more personal awakening than a social rebellion.

Others viewed the novel as a naturalist and postmodern fiction. Donald Pizer (2001) posits that *The Awakening* is a naturalistic text that focuses on Edna's struggles against the constraints of biological and social realities. He argues that Edna "fails because she is a woman living within the limitations placed on the conditions of motherhood and marriage in which she exists" (p. 12), and these deterministic forces

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shape her life. In the same vein, Nazmi Al-Shalabi (2015) on "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Postmodernist Study" claims the novel as a postmodern fiction, as it contains characteristics such as irony, self-reflexivity, intertextuality and open-ended closure. She mentions that Edna "abandons her husband and children to be free" (p. 276), highlighting Edna's meaningless life, her rejection of social roles and the collapse of the Pontelliers family.

In addition to thematic interpretations, some scholars have also examined the narrative and symbolic techniques of the novel. In this context, Xianfeng Mou (2011) interprets *The Awakening* from the perspective of Chopin's narrative techniques, particularly her use of free indirect discourse to portray Edna Pontellier's emotional, spiritual and artistic awakening. According to Mou, Chopin "charts Edna's remarkable journey of growth both as a woman and as a female artist" (p. 104). He further reveals that the shifting narrative voice in the novel reflects Edna's gradual awakening highlighting her search for identity, independence and a separate artistic space. Robert S. Levine (1982) studies *The Awakening* from the perspective of sleep and circadian rhythms. He argues that Edna Pontellier's loss of sleep is the sign of her growing resistance against the conventions of patriarchy and society. So, he writes the central drama of the novel is "Edna's rebellion against the ordering patterns of both nature and community" (p. 72). He adds that Edna's altered rhythms symbolize her pursuit of independence and her rejection of the confines of societal norms. Likewise, Donald A. Ringe (1975) analyzes the novel through Romantic and Transcendentalist imagery, where he suggests that Edna's awakening represents the emergence of her true self and just sexual liberation. To this, he mentions the metaphor of sleep-awakening in the novel symbolizes "the emergence of the self or soul into a new life" (p. 581) and he stresses on Edna's journey toward self-awareness and individuality.

Existing scholarship on Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* has extensively explored through feminist, naturalist, Postmodern and narrative perspectives. They focus primarily on Edna Pontellier's quest for identity, resistance to patriarchal norms and self-expression. Feminist readings emphasize emergence of Edna as a "New Woman", while naturalist and postmodern studies emphasize on social determinism and fragmented subjectivity and most studies tend to frame independence as a liberating or

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transformative process. Although the female character, Edna Pontellier in the novel received sustained attention throughout the scholarship, she is, rather considered as mere representations of quest for identity rebellion or self-exploration, than the emotional and psychological consequences brought up by this independence, especially the ways in which Edna's pursuit of independence results into both physical and emotional solitude. Furthermore, the relationship between her social and familial isolation and her eventual death has not been adequately explored as a central interpretative concern in the scholarship. Therefore, the present study fills this void by investigating how Chopin represents independence as both a form of liberation and a process leading to solitude which culminates in Edna Pontellier's tragic death.

Methods and Materials

This study adopts a qualitative research design based on textual analysis to explore the interconnection between independence and physical and emotional solitude in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. Grounded on the key theories of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, Virginia Woolf's *A Room of One's Own*, and Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* as its theoretical framework, the analysis employs feminist literary criticism. The study incorporates Beauvoir's concept of women as the "Other" to examine Edna's struggle against patriarchal society, Woolf's advocacy for the need of a separate space for women for financial and psychological liberation for the analysis of Edna's search for personal and financial freedom and Friedan's notion of "the problem that has no name" to interpret her dissatisfaction with domestic roles. Moreover, Chopin's novel *The Awakening* is taken as a primary source, while books, articles, journals, and the other scholarly sources related to the novel and the feminist literary theory serve as secondary sources. The method used in this study is an in-depth analysis of Edna's character development, symbolism and its contribution to Edna's pursuit of independence that results into physical and emotional isolation.

Results and Discussion

In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin critiques the societal constraints imposed upon women that confine them within the roles of a wife and a mother designed by the society through Edna Pontellier's experience. The novel examines how the quest for independence interrogates the dominant gender norms and how it creates physical and

emotional isolation through Edna's gradual awakening and self-discovery. Edna's transformation when interpreted in the light of Simone de Beauvoir's (1956) concept in *The Second Sex* that "One is not born, but rather becomes a woman" (p. 273), reveals her growing awareness that femininity is a social construction rather than a natural condition. Due to her growing realization towards her prescribed gender roles, she pursues her dreams seeking personal, artistic and sexual autonomy. Her resistance to the patriarchal norms becomes the foundation of both her independence as well as increasing solitude.

Use of Symbolism in Edna's Pursuit of Independence and Solitude

In the novel, *The Awakening*, symbols play a significant role in depicting the ways in which Edna's journey towards an independence woman leads to physical and emotional solitude. The symbols of birds, the sea and "the pigeon house" are employed to explore the themes of freedom, entrapment, identity and autonomy in the novel. At the same time, these symbols reveal both physical and emotional isolation Edna experiences as she detaches herself from social expectations. Using these symbolic representations, Chopin exhibits how Edna's pursuit of independence remains inseparable from her growing sense of alienation.

In the novel, Chopin introduces birds as a symbol of both freedom and entrapment. The caged parrot represents the protagonist, Edna Pontellier, who is trapped under the bondage of marriage and cannot set her wings to the outer world. The cage is a limited sphere where women are confined within the four domestic walls. This is the world created by society for women. The green and yellow parrot hanging in a cage outside the door at the beginning of the novel tries to awaken the protagonist, Edna Pontellier, by repeating over and over: "Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That is all right!" (Chopin, 2008, p. 5). Like the caged parrot, Edna also senses a trap in the Pontellier's house, bounded by societal norms and traditions. Therefore, she desires to be freed from the obligations of a mother and a wife. She feels that just as Leonce owns the parrot, he also treats her as his possession, so he as a "Subject" (Beauvoir, 1956, p. 16) looks at his wife as "a valuable piece of property" (Chopin, 2008, p. 7). Edna becomes aware of her relationship with her husband and picturizes herself as a mere object rather than an individual. This is the relationship that compels her to question the

restrictions of her marriage, and she seeks independence and identity, breaking the societal barriers.

Likewise, towards the story's conclusion, the bird turns out to be a dangerous sign. When Robert abandons her love, Edna gets dejected and realizes the hollowness of their relationship, which ultimately draws her to be defeated and rejected. She rushes to the sea in Grand Isle, where she awakens for the first time and watches a bird who is hurt like her, "A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water" (Chopin, 2008, p. 120). The bird with the broken wing drowning in the sea indicates her tragic ending as an outcome of her quest for freedom. Perhaps Edna is not strong enough to break the social cages placed on women. Edna is isolated and broken like the bird due to her failure to discover her true self and love challenging traditional norms and values. This emptiness prompts her to commit suicide in the final scene.

Similarly, Chopin designs the sea as a room of freedom and escape from the space constructed by the patriarchal world. The sea in the novel, also serves as a powerful symbol of Edna's self-exploration and autonomy. Initially, Edna ignores Robert's proposal to go to the sea, but later, she acts as per his request and swims. While at sea, she 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, 2008, p. 17). This is the place where she awakens to her individuality and her desires. The sea seems seductive, calling Edna to escape from societal expectations and norms, explore herself, and enjoy her independence, while it also signifies the solitude Edna experiences on her way to independence. Hence, "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" (Chopin, 2008, p. 18). When she learns to swim, she feels overjoyed and liberation "A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her soul" (Chopin, 2008, p. 32). Her exultation is an expression of realization to her own power and freedom which reflects the emancipation from patriarchal constraints. In the final part of the story, the sea acts as a means of escape for Edna from societal obligations as she fails to meet the expected roles of a mother and a wife in society. Her last swim in

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the sea is a never-ending isolation that Edna undergoes as an outcome of her struggle for independence.

As Virginia Woolf (1929) in *A Room of One's Own* argues, "a woman must have money and a room of her own if she is to write fiction" (p. 4) and asserts for the need of financial and psychological independence for intellectual and creative growth. She further opines that the patriarchal society prevented women from writing openly, and as a result, women did not get ground to flourish. Accordingly, Edna needs a separate space to refine her artistic skills and be financially and psychologically independent because she cannot dedicate herself to her passion for painting in the patriarchal society. Edna refuses all social and household duties, spending time painting in a small studio. She is set up on the top floor of their house, "her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him" (Chopin, 2008, p. 62). Leonce feels she is perhaps out of her mind when she engages herself in painting, but she is, in fact, finding her true self, which rejects the housewife role. Therefore, he expresses his frustration, "It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier day which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family" (Chopin, 2008, p. 62). Women, like Edna, are prevented from realizing their productive and creative talents in a patriarchal society, according to Woolf (1929). So, Edna rebels against her husband and society and decides to move to her dream house, "the pigeon house". It represents a room of her own where she can find her identity other than the identity of a mother and a wife. It is an attempt to be free from the bondage of marriage and motherhood. She realizes a sense of triumph at her possession, "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" (Chopin, 2008, p. 99). Furthermore, moving to "the pigeon house" allows her to be self-reliant and autonomous, as asserted by Woolf for financial and psychological independence. Meanwhile, the absence of her children strikes her, while returning from her in-laws' house after meeting her children, she encompasses with such thoughts:

It was with a wrench and a pang that Edna left her children. She carried away with her the sound of their voices and the touch of their cheeks. All along the journey homeward their presence lingered with her like the memory of a

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delicious song. But by the time she had regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul. She was again alone. (Chopin, 2008, p. 100)

Edna has to be physically and emotionally away from her family and societal expectations after leaving her husband's house. As Edna begins to explore herself, her feeling of alienation increases.

Independence and the Constraints of Gender Roles

In Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening*, the protagonist, Edna Pontellier's journey towards independence leads her to solitude through her detachment from societal roles and her relationships. Earlier in the novel, Edna appears to be docile, submissive, obedient and uncomplaining. Leonce's indifferent attitude towards Edna and her passionless marriage to Leonce Pontellier make her aware of her subordinate place in her husband's life and she begins to struggle for independence. She discovers that "He is the Subject, he is the Absolute-she is the Other" (p. 16) as described by Beauvoir (1956). In male dominant society, men are considered active and prestigious whereas women are treated as commodities and passive creatures. In the same manner, Leonce shows no concern to Edna's discomfort at her sunburn, rather he considers her "as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property that has suffered some damage" (Chopin, 2008, p. 7). Then, Edna figures out the social construction of gender roles which binds women within limited space and exhibits her dissatisfaction with her husband and domestic roles where she is identified as the negative object or "Other" and he is the dominating "Subject" as stated by Beauvoir (1956, p. 16). Such social construction is condemned by women like Edna in the novel. As time progresses, being unhappy with her gender roles as a mother and a housewife, she desires to break free societal constraints that hinder a woman in exercising her freedom in the society she lives. Her struggle for independence is evident: "She was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world" (Chopin, 2008, p. 62). She is quite aware of socially constructed gender roles that are generated by the pervasive patriarchal biases of our civilization. Edna defies the societal norms by realizing her being and personal freedom. Afterward, Edna begins to rebel silently. When Leonce returns from the club late at night, he describes what has happened, but Edna is indifferent to him. Therefore, Leonce thought "it very

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discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him” (Chopin, 2008, p. 9). Though Leonce considers Edna as "Object" she appears to be passive towards him and her assigned duties. A man with patriarchal mentality, Leonce condemns Edna for neglecting her wife's duty to take care of their children and he expresses his dissatisfaction as "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 (Chopin, 2008, p. 10). But Edna remains silent and cries and experiences what Betty Friedan called “the problem that has no name” in *The Feminine Mystique* regarding the unhappiness of women despite living in material comfort and fulfilling the role of wives and mothers (Friedan, 1997, “The Problem That Has No Name”). Edna's silent reaction reveals both her dissatisfaction with her husband and a rebellion towards her patriarchal expectations. Her self-awareness gradually awakens and she is not characterized as a mother-woman and therefore, Chopin (2008) mentions:

In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels (p. 12).

Unlike the "true feminine" who had no desire for higher education or careers rather found themselves complete within the domestic sphere like Adele Ratignolle (Friedan, 1997, “The Problem That Has No Name”), Edna refuses to acknowledge her domestic roles as a mother and a wife. Likewise, she declines to attend her sister, Margaret's wedding. For Edna "a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth" (Chopin, 2008, p. 71) and her refusal to attend her sister's wedding is an act of rebellion because marriage has confined her into the domestic sphere losing her own identity. Despite her father's attempt to constrain her within the norms of society, she dares to refuse her husband and father's invitation to attend her sister's wedding.

In a conversation between Edna and Adele, she discloses that she will never sacrifice herself for her children or anyone else, leading to an argument between them “I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my

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children; but I wouldn't give myself" (Chopin, 2008, p. 52). This mirrors Edna's self-awakening of female consciousness in her relationship with her children. Friedan criticizes the dissatisfaction Edna experiences and argues about "the societal assumption that women could find fulfillment through housework, marriage, sexual passivity, and child-rearing alone" ((Friedan, 1997 "The Problem That Has No Name). Hence, Friedan claims that many housewives are unsatisfied with their lives but they could not express their feelings like Edna. Besides, Edna's search for freedom and self, discarding her gender roles of a wife and a mother, leads her to physical and emotional isolation.

Sexuality Awakening and the Solitude Independence

With time, Edna seems more concerned with herself and her happiness and begins to express her thoughts and feelings freely. She neglects the responsibilities of her family and social obligations. Edna breaks social codes and follows her desires, or will where women are not allowed to exhibit sexual desires in her society. Edna's infatuation with Robert is a way of demolishing one of the patriarchal rules set for women "For the first time she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman" (Chopin, 2008, p. 50). She learns to voice herself through her painting and by maintaining extramarital affairs with Robert Lebrun and Alcee Arobin. Besides, Robert plays a vital role in awakening her sexuality by resisting her gender roles. Her awakening includes her exploration of own passions and desires and she welcomes her sensuality and freedom.

Meanwhile, due to her awakening sexuality, Edna builds a relationship with Alcée Arobin, a womanizer. After kissing Arobin for the first time, Edna feels "neither shame nor remorse" (Chopin, 2008, p. 89). Such bold act challenges the patriarchal expectations that define women as weak and submissive. Beauvoir (1956) points out that when a woman is in love, "she gives herself to him entirely" (p. 620). This is visible in Edna's blind love towards Robert for whose love she leaves behind everything. She submits herself to Robert, but her sacrifices are not appreciated. Instead, Robert leaves her because she is a married woman, a social tag she carries which cannot be discarded, makes her even more frustrated. So, when her love affair fails, it has devastating effects on Edna. The men that have come into her life give her more pain,

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"She had said over and over to herself: "Today it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me; it doesn't matter about Leonce Pontellier" (Chopin, 2008, p. 120). After this incident, Edna carries a deep void within herself as her sexuality and expression are repressed since women are not openly praised or even wholly accepted by the patriarchal society. In this way, her state of mind puts her to increasing physical and emotional isolation while pursuing independence.

Eventually, Edna's growing independence leads to increased isolation in the form of her tragic end. Though Edna attains freedom of mind and spirit, yet at the cost of social isolation, which is an outcome of women disregarding patriarchal norms. When Edna finds that Robert has abandoned her and her love, she gets restless and hurt. She is unable to sleep and keeps reflecting upon her journey of life the whole night because "the problem that has no name". Edna believes that she cannot be her true self within a patriarchal society because it will hurt her children, but at the same time she cannot step back to the role of Leonce Pontellier's wife or a mother and be a patriarchal woman. While at the sea at Grand Isle for the final swim she remembers "she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children" (Chopin, 2008, p. 120) and indeed, she does not want to sacrifice for anyone except herself. This reflects Friedan's conclusion stating 'I want something more than my husband and my children and my home' (Friedan, 1997 "The Problem That Has No Name"). Hence, Edna's suicide symbolizes her final escape from societal constraints, as she believes that her independence is not celebrated in the true sense in the patriarchal society. Hence, Chopin (2008) concludes, "Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her. "Good-by- because I love you." He did not know, he did not understand. He would never understand" (p. 121). Edna is isolated and broken due to her failure to discover her true self and love. In search of freedom and identity, Edna remains unsuccessful in overcoming the complexities she is surrounded with, and this provokes her to commit suicide in the final scene. Her death, here, is an outcome of her search for independence in the socially constructed world.

Conclusion

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* presents how Edna's quest for independence gradually draws her towards physical and emotional solitude when she cuts off the ties

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she has had with the society. Employing Simone de Beauvoir's concept of woman as the "Other", Virginia Woolf's advocacy for psychological and economic independence, and Betty Friedan's critique of women's dissatisfaction towards domestic roles, this study reveals that Edna's alienation emerges from the society that merely provides little space for a woman to define herself outside the realm of patriarchal expectations. Being unhappy with the domestic roles of a mother and a wife, Edna senses her positions as the "Other", and she begins to explore her dreams pursuing personal, artistic and sexual freedom. Her awakening challenges the patriarchal constraints that are built upon to confine women within prescribed gender roles.

Chopin's use of symbolism plays a significant role in reflecting Edna's pursuit of independence and its eventual outcome. The symbols of the birds, the sea and the pigeon house illustrate her desire for freedom, self-expression and identity. While these symbols simultaneously reveal the social and emotional isolation that accompanies her rebellion. Though Edna becomes successful in asserting her personal desires by resisting restrictive gender roles, she increasingly remains detached from her family, intimate relationships and community. Instead, her independence progresses towards alienation than social acceptance. Chopin presents independence and solitude as deeply interconnected through the use of symbolism in the novel highlighting a complex and isolating experience. Edna gets isolated and broken due to her failure to discover her true self and love, and commits suicide at the end. Her death is the result of the struggle a woman encounters while searching for independence in the socially constructed world. The novel, therefore, suggests that when a woman challenges the established social norms and values, she is often excluded and isolated instead of recognition.

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