

The Awakening

by Kate Chopin

Opening of the book takes place at Grand Isle, at the resort of Madame Leburn, where the main character of the story, Edna Pontellier, is having vacation with her husband, a wealthy Creole Leonce, and their two sons. Being not a Creole, Edna begins feeling more and more disturbed with her modest life-style and social requirements of Creole community. She got married without love to a man, who was a hardworking businessman. He used to treat Edna as a possession. Spending time during the vacation with her two friends, Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratingolle, Edna learns a lot of new things. She begins realizing that there must be much more to life than just boring family routine.

Besides, Edna gets closer with elder son of Madame Leburn, Robert. They enjoy talking and swimming in the sea together. In this friendship Robert helped Edna to recognize her own individuality and uniqueness as a woman. She experiences a lot of new feelings and develops attitude towards Robert. In turn, soon he also finds himself to be deeply in love with Edna. He understands that Edna is not a usual lady like many of the Creole women around. But knowing that he loves a married woman, who can not belong to him, brings him to despair. One day at dinner Robert tells his mother that he intends to go to Mexico for long time. After Robert's departure Edna suffers extreme loneliness. She thinks only about him and his image follows her everywhere.

Soon the family of Pontellier returns to their house in New Orleans. Some noticeable changes take place in Edna's behavior: she ignores her family and social duties, sends children away to grandparents, refuses to go out and to receive guests, starts painting and visiting Jockey Club. She does not attend wedding of her own sister, saying that weddings are sad events, and refuses to join her husband in his long-term business trip. Soon Edna moves to another house, a small "pigeon-hole", which she found for herself. She lives there alone and it satisfies her longing for independence. She visits only Mademoiselle Reisz, who plays piano for her and gives emotional inspiration. Besides, Mademoiselle Reisz shows Edna

letters from Robert. Tired of separation from her beloved man, Edna starts an affair with Alcée Arobin, who serves her needs and shares her sexual pleasures. But Edna does not give a lot of meaning to this relation, because she is still in love with Robert.

One day Edna learns that Robert is back to New Orleans. She finds him at Mademoiselle Reitz's and talks to him excitedly. Robert expresses his love to her and says that he had to go away, because they could not be together. Edna replies that she wants to be only with him, that she is an independent and almost free woman now. During this conversation a servant of Madam Ratingolle enters and asks Edna to go with him immediately to visit his mistress. When Edna is back, she finds Robert gone and reads his farewell note. Dejected, the next day she goes to Grand Isle, the place where they have met. Edna enters sea waters and starts swimming away from the shore. The story does not give a clear answer, whether she will be back alive or whether she will die in waters.

The book is easy to read; it is quite deep and moving. But, to my mind, its romantic mood together with its classic, smooth and very slow development of the events makes it to be more interesting for girls rather than for boys. As I could understand, the main idea of the novel was to demonstrate the way of becoming and self-recognition of a woman as an individual, to show process of re-evaluation and realizing her own uniqueness, attraction, sex appeal, and to promote social ideology of equality of rights, which had to be supported and developed at the beginning of XIX century.

I have to admit that the role of expressive details and symbols in the novel is really outstanding. Throughout the narration, Kate Chopin effectively uses a variety of very descriptive images of surrounding environment, like birds, natural waters, or skies. In addition, the author engages a lot of attention of a reader on patterns of Edna's sleeping and awakening in different places and under different circumstances. That is how the allegory of "*sleep and awakening*" supports meaning of title of the book.

Bibliography:

- Chopin, Kate. "The Awakening" New York: Dover 1993, 166 pages.