

Literary Theory Essay

The Awakening - Marxist Theory

In *The Awakening*, by Kate Chopin, she explores the consequences of a Capitalist driven society, illuminating the societal customary behavior constructed, specifically in Edna, through the plague of the need to succeed and excel both socially and economically.

Before Edna's awakening she was enslaved in a life of image and class obsessed people. Her existence revolved around getting married to a wealthy man and having children. All in the hopes to move up the social ranks. Those around her, her husband and friends were all consumed with the image they had to create for oneself. Competing to be the richest, the best dressed, to have the best marriage. However, as their social status grew their meaning interactions and decisions became more about show than just living. For instance, Edna's husband loved wealthy money consumed trinkets, always looking for something shiny to add to the collection. Throughout the novel one acquires a sense that one of his most valued possessions is his wife. Through the commodification of his own wife, Chopin illuminates the severity society inflicts on a person, when they are made to feel that wealth equals happiness. However, as Edna's fortune grew so did the emptiness inside, her need for self discovery and definition. Living in an Orthodox Capitalist society where women are viewed and handled as property, enabling them to survive on their own, enslaved them to the security of a man's checkbook. This demoralization of Edna caused her boycott of societal norms. For example, she stops the waiting customary on Tuesday. But this simple act of defiance in a money hungry, greed driven classist society, was a lash against not only her honor as a wealthy higher class woman, but her whole family's image in the judgemental eyes of the community. This judgement was the most damaging social status, which

to her husband was the worst possible outcome. Throughout the piece Edna learns that this Capitalist society didn't employ the American Dream. Money and popularity don't make people happy and not all competition is healthy, when it consumes those who are enslaved to the notion that they need to be the best and insecure to the thought of being anything less. So Edna decided to leave.

This departure and disconnect from the life at which she knew was the first major step in her self revelation. Many people close to Edna thought it to be insane that a wife and mother of two would abandon her family, by any means. But then to the believe she could make it on her own in an economic and social patriarchy was foolish. However, Edna began to spread her wings when her husband and children went away. She bought her own house and servants, and she even started painting. As she started to expand she realized the hold modern capitalism had on her, embedded inside of her was this belief that she needed to be wealthy, beautiful, successful all in order to mean something. As she grew as a person she came to the conclusion that she did not need a man to define her socially and did not need him to support her financially. So she began to sell her art work. This small foot step penetrated into the male driven and dominated economy. Edna began to obtain the capabilities to fend for herself, to survive on her own means. The societal customs of a socially acceptable family consisting of a motherly wife, children and a strong wealthy husband , all wrapped in a shiny bow, began to vanish. She realized to reach the so called "American Dream" wasn't necessarily to strive as hard as possible for success, which should not be defined by money, yet by what makes one happy. Edna never changed from being a rugged individual but what did alter were her motives. Before her selfish acts were to make her family look presentable on an economic standpoint, which meant money and expensive clothes,

to the hopes of climbing the rungs of the social ladder. However, as Edna explored herself definition and decided what she wanted out of life, she took a step back from her roles in society and made the selfish decision, whether right or wrong, to take the action needed to better herself emotionally. Edna's awakening transported her out of the corruption of a capitalist society, driven by the desire and starvation for more materialistic earthly possessions, into a social secluded community where she was free. To be Edna the woman versus Edna the wealthy motherly wife.

Throughout, *The Awakening*, Chopin explores and dissects the societal actions acquired by man when money is crowned not only the means of survival economically but the ultimate declaration of social status. Through Edna's awakening to the real meaning of life's worth, one realizes that money and status are not it. That the American Dream is no thriving off an overly consumed capitalist society, yet suffering from the monsters of its creation and exaggeration. Chopin shines a light through Edna, that social and economic excellence is not nearly as important as understanding one's true self and the acceptance of fellow being.