



The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction

Kate Chopin, Rachel Adams (Introduction)

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When it first appeared in 1899, **Kate Chopin's** *The Awakening* was greeted with cries of outrage. The novel's frank portrayal of a woman's emotional, intellectual, and sexual awakening shocked the sensibilities of the time and destroyed the author's reputation and career. Many years passed before this short, pioneering work was recognized as a major achievement in American literature.

Set in and around New Orleans, *The Awakening* tells the story of Edna Pontellier, a young wife and mother who, determined to control her own life, flouts convention by moving out of her husband's house, having an adulterous affair, and becoming an artist.

Beautifully written, with sensuous imagery and vivid local descriptions, *The Awakening* has lost none of its power to provoke and inspire. Additionally, this edition includes thirteen of Kate Chopin's magnificent short stories.

Stories Included in the Volume:

The Awakening

Emancipation: A Life Fable

A Shameful Affair

At the 'Cadian Ball

Désirée's Baby

A Gentleman of Bayou Têche

A Respectable Woman

The Story of an Hour

Athénaïse

A Pair of Silk Stockings

Elizabeth Stock's One Story

The Storm

The Godmother

A Little Country Girl

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The Awakening and Selected Short Fiction Details

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Yoana says

Review of *The Awakening* here.

The short stories are also great, especially *At the 'Cadian Ball*, *A Gentleman of Bayou Têche* and *Elizabeth Stock's One Story*, showing a diverse and vital talent for storytelling.

The introduction, however, is dismal. First of all, it promptly spoils the novel and almost all of the stories, without any warning whatsoever. Secondly, it's rambling and lacks focus or any discernible point, wandering from trying to excuse or erase Chopin's racist beliefs to pointlessly asking questions about her personal life that lead nowhere. And thirdly and most offensively of all, it contains completely ridiculous accounts of the short stories that feel as though they were written by an internet troll to get a rise out of Chopin lovers by purposefully misunderstanding every single one of them. (view spoiler)

So, in conclusion, it's 4 stars for the novel and stories and 1 for the Introduction.

Sherry Verma says

Kate Chopin is officially one of the best authors I've read works of. Breathhtakingly beautiful; I'm afraid any review I write will not be able to do justice to the beauty *The Awakening* is. It really did take up and wonderfully portrayed, like the title suggests, the awakening of a woman. More like, human beings in general. You don't have to necessarily be a woman or have a feminist approach to life to understand or appreciate this work of Chopin. I believe there are these empty places in our soul that only a few exceedingly beautiful things in life can fill up. And for me, this book, *The Awakening* and the other short fiction did that magic. I read all of Chopin's short stories with as much enthusiasm as I read *The Awakening*. My favorite of all the thirteen short stories present in this edition was *Desiree's Baby*. It was crazy good. Feminism and racial inequality exquisitely blended together to form a delightful read.

Also, there were a lot of sentences in all the stories in French, which this lovely edition, Barnes & Noble Classics had translated for better understanding of the works. So if you can get your hands on this edition, that'd be pretty good.

Gela says

Possibly one of the best books I have ever read about a depressed, hedonistic person who is likable.

Ella says

I stumbled upon a deeply discounted cache of these B&N classics in January, and so far they're pretty enjoyable. This one is no exception. Included are timelines, essays, *The Awakening* and many other stories

by Kate Chopin. Rachel Adams does a decent job of putting this non-English-major in the right frame, and she annotates nicely so I wasn't constantly having to search the dictionary or web to figure out what various Creole or local language actually meant.

The Awakening is the big deal here, but I enjoyed reading the other stories for the first time. Kate Chopin is constantly pushing the boundaries and reworking the themes she explored in The Awakening. Her subjects seem very modern, given the era in which she wrote. (Though the language can, at times, still be rather jarring and dissonant.) It was very helpful to have Adams' discussion of Chopin's complete work to explain that while some stories may seem racially insensitive (at best) in other ways, she's clearly progressive. Reading the extras made the actual work a bit less distressing or confusing.

When rereading the Awakening, though, all I could think was that if Edna Pontellier lived in 2018, someone would have given her antidepressants (her doctor comes close to doing that anyway) and we wouldn't have this book. She'd be alive, caring for her children and who knows what would be happening internally. As a person who takes antidepressants, I'm not sure how I feel about that, but it was my overarching feeling as I read this again: nobody would let this woman just be in 2018, and it wouldn't be just the patriarchy or society that quieted her down, it would be the medical community and our most helpful selves telling her that she can get through it, and here's a little pill to help with that, now you go, girl - be everything you can be.

I'm glad it was written in 1899 rather than 2018, because it's a wonderful story of a woman driven to distraction and suicide, doing all the things she's not "supposed" to do or feel, and it's pretty realistic. It may be extreme, but despite the funny words and buggy rides, this is a very modern woman's story. Most of her stories are downbeat, minor key works, but they all hone in closely on women's interior lives and the ways we navigate those interiors with the external world. She doesn't give easy answers, but she always makes me think.

Rebecca says

3.0 stars

Read for my Advanced Placement Literature and Composition class.

This novel was assigned to me over the summer in preparation for my AP class. And while I was not completely blown away, there were some things I enjoyed. 90% of this book dragged quite a bit, and I was thoroughly bored out of my mind. It picks up in the end, with Edna's suicide.

There was not one character I liked in this entire novel. Most of them seemed ditsy, or dramatic *cough* Edna *cough*, or downright dull. And although this partly is due to the time period, I still feel as though Chopin could've done a better job at making her characters likable. To be honest, my favorite character was the caged bird in the beginning.

Which brings me to my next point. Symbolism is used in all of Chopin's works so beautifully, and this work was no exception. I loved how the caged birds in the beginning symbolize Edna and Mademoiselle Reisz. I loved how she was so scared of the sea in the beginning, and then it became her escape. I loved how her children symbolizes the life she hated, and the Pigeon House symbolizes the life she so desperately wanted.

Although I didn't particularly care for Edna, you can certainly empathize with her. She lived the first part of

her life with a strict father, and then was married off to a man she didn't love, from a society she didn't understand. She was left to be someone's property, to care for children she never wanted.

However, even if she didn't want her children, her very obvious neglect was very concerning. While I understand it was really not her choice to have her children, you would think she would be a little more mindful of them and their well-being. The most she thought about them was when she decided she absolutely had to kill herself because society would ridicule them for their mother's actions.

Now let's discuss her awakenings. I thought they were very well done. Robert awakened her sensually, by loving her and being the man she loved. I found it sad that he decided to leave her forever. Of course, Arobin awakened her sexually. Her final awakening, in the sea, was where she finally realizes society's views of her will not change, and the only way she can be happy to escape the world.

Overall, while the writing dragged on for the vast majority, Chopin does have a way with words. She arranges her sentences in such a way that is nothing short of beautiful, using only the best words to paint her images and create her story.

Biblio-Athena says

"In short, 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....perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman."

-The Awakening

I'll be honest, as forward-thinking, liberal, feminist, and scandalous as the *The Awakening* and the other short stories in this book may be, I found it a little tedious to get through. I had hoped to finish this book sooner, but somehow it took a month to get through.

If you consider the time period this book is set in, the plot of *The Awakening* could be considered quite scandalous. However, I think having a little background of Chopin, as is offered through the timeline and introduction provided in this book, helps you understand her sentiments. Chopin was one to make her views known, about the value of women's independence, self-love, as well as about race and diversity. While the end of *The Awakening* still suggests a romantic notion of love and women's stereotypical idea about it, the lead-up was still one that meant to make clear that a woman should be master of her own life. This was also very abjectly (and quite tragically) made clear in the short story *The Story of an Hour*.

"There would be no one to live for her during those coming years; she would live for herself. here would be no powerful will bending hers in that persistence with which men and women believe they have a right to impose a private will upon a fellow-creature." - *The Story of an Hour*

My favourite story in this book, though, was *Desiree's baby*. So heart-wrenching. I think, especially

considering the circumstances we are living in now, this story is so appropriate and profound. It brings to the forefront the discussion of race, and how we esteem one's color above their character. It is a bittersweet read, with a start full of promise, and a sort of cliff-hanger ending of a revelation. I don't want to spoil it but let's just say I'd hate to be in his shoes.

The other short stories were not as memorable. I didn't like the thread of promoting adultery that ran through the stories, that even when married or committed that it is permissible to cheat in order to have a taste of freedom. That suggestion left a sour taste in my mouth. I think adultery is unforgivable, especially that which is done in complete secret and hidden behind the pretense that you would never, ever do such a thing. That just seems very unfair to your partner, who has to live with your lie, believing you could do no such thing. Neither a man nor a woman should be forgiven for deceiving the other so. That was one aspect of the 'women's independence and self-before-others' theme of these stories that I gave a thumbs down to.

The writing is not necessarily the kind that pulls you in. It's a very basic narrative, a telling of a story. There is plot, character development, and story development, but that escalation is not one you want to run up in order to reach the climax, but one you dawdle up to. You need some rough terrain in order to make the story an enjoyable, bumpy ride. But hey, it's a classic. It makes good points, it's eye-opening, it's brash, it's open-minded. There is a lot to take away from these stories. So if you would rather read for plot, look elsewhere. But if you want to read for a life lesson, it's worth picking up.

"The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings."

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Jose says

Most important in any book is the writing style and diction. Kate Chopin gets an A+. I am not a big reader of feminist literature, but Chopin managed to put into words the whirlwind of thoughts and emotions that surged through Edna effectively. When reading these sort of psychological books, I notice what a tough time authors sometimes have doing this. I am reminded of Wally Lamb's "meh" attempt at doing this in his novel, *We are Water*, and marvel at the effortlessness with which it seems Chopin accomplished this. Chopin managed to take me to late 19th century Louisiana. Nothing is superfluous or silly. For Chopin, each description of setting, every character, every piece of dialogue has purpose; there is an awesome depth to her brevity. Overall, wonderfully written.

What else can I say? Chopin shows us the journey of a woman into uncharted territory; territory so uncharted that Chopin's contemporaries rejected it as bullshit. I think that more than ever this novel resonates with its readers. Edna's liberation is not just a symbol of feminism, but definitely a symbol of all of our attempts at breaking apart from society. And it shows us the dangers of taking our individualism to a dangerous extreme—an extreme where we become so isolated from the people around us that we can no longer be functional members of a society. When Edna realizes that there are things that she will never change, no matter how much she tries, rather than be satisfied with a compromise, she prefers to lose the war. There really are three choices, I think: rebelling, but never achieving one's ultimate desire (bliss while in this life), compromising and living with the fact that there are things that we desire but must sacrifice, or oblivion, never knowing if rebelling was worth it or if complacency really would eventually bring satisfaction.

Becki says

This book has an underlying theme to each of its stories. Some would call it empowering for women. I would call it selfish. The women in these stories expect their lives to be perfect without any effort from themselves. I didn't like any of the stories and I will never read anything from this author again.

Richp says

I read the part of the intro first, the short stories second, the novel third, and finished the intro and other stuff last. Damn the notes for spoilers for other portions, but fortunately I did not read the spoilers in the intro.

I rate the stories 5, The Awakening 4, and the Rachel Adams stuff 1.

The stories were a real find for me, and I rate some of them among the best I've ever read. There are many 500 page novels that contain less to think about than some of these shorts, which is OK if they contain a good story, but many long novels don't. This was a real surprise to me, I did not expect nearly so much.

The Awakening suffers somewhat in comparison, primarily by its lack of brevity, but it is still an interesting novel.

The intro should have been split into an intro with a brief bio and description of the time and place of writing and publishing, and a follow-up piece at the end with the critical and public reaction, along with any analysis and plot discussion. The way this was put together, I classify this as part of the "literature education" business that is so concerned with its hoity-toity status as a profession, that it takes much of the joy out of reading.

Sierra Bookworm??? says

I read The Awakening in October for AP English Literature, then slowly made my way through the short stories in the back. I would rate all of the stories in this bind-up between 3.5-5 stars, so I just went with the highest number :). All together, I really enjoyed reading through Chopin's notable works and admire her strength and understanding that shows through them.

S. Adam says

Okay, technically, I haven't finished reading the book because I still need to read the short stories that follow The Awakening. However, I must write what I think about Chopin's prized story before it escapes me. I absolutely disliked Edna Pontellier. I came into this novel with many expectations, primarily that this would be an amazing feminist novel. Nope! It was not, which I am okay with. I am not okay with how unhappy Edna is with her life. Yeah, her husband isn't super romantic, but her life seems to be pleasant. When he sees that she is acting peculiar, he gives her space and trust. She is wealthy, has marvelous social dinners, and two

adorable sons. Her life seems pretty darn great. Yeah, I understand that she sought her personal freedom, but compared to the mulatto women she has employed as nannies and maids, she seems pretty darn free to me. I have nicknamed this book "Rich white girl problems". I may have liked her more if she was not so immature. She refuses to attend her sister's wedding for no apparent reason even though it would mean a lot to her sister and father, and she smashes vases and stomps on her wedding ring like a juvenile. Um, girl, aren't you like 28? Her love for Robert does not seem like love but more like an obsession. It promises her adventure and change, which she is justified for wanting, but she could have gone about it more maturely. First, she was never for sure that Robert reciprocated it, so it seemed like she lived mostly on fantasy. Once, Robert came back and she pulled out the truth in him, she was ready to do anything for him--not very independent. Also before Robert returns, she has that affair with Alcee just because she felt like it. Alright, cool, she should be free to do so, but it just shows how capricious she is. I suppose she is groundbreaking by breaking social norms of the time, like moving out of her home and leaving her children, but at the end her suicide just proves she is weak. She is not an example for anyone. She lacks maturity and strength. I don't see her as an example for either women or men, or anyone really. I see that she felt oppressed and suffocated, but she was too extreme in her way of escaping. I will say that I enjoy the description of the Creole life in New Orleans. I love that history that Chopin relates. I hope her short stories don't disappoint.

James Henry says

I get why this entered the feminist literature canon in the 60s and 70s. But I also understand why people kinda shrugged their shoulders when it came out in 1899.

Colleen says

This book honestly had a big impact on me when I was in highschool. I read it in the summer before my junior year of high school, when I had just turned 16. I was immediately captivated by Chopin's beautiful, lyrical way of writing, as if she were painting a portrait of this forgotten, enchanted world of Louisiana and the Cr  ole culture. The book both shocked me and marked me, and it encouraged me to read a very well-written biography on Kate Chopin in the months to follow. Nice to see such an independent, forward-thinking woman (Kate Chopin) who, though her life was marked by several early deaths, nevertheless had a relatively happy life with her husband, who encouraged her in her writing until his untimely death.

Most recently, I reread this book for a Feminist literature class here in France entitled "The Three Faces of Eve." It's been a joy to reread this work of literature after six years of intensive study of the French language. It certainly makes the task of interpreting the "local color" passages much easier! This book is a gem, and the short stories are all worth a read.

Lisa Penninga says

Kate Chopin & Mary Shelley are such goddesses of the written word! I love this book, and reading it again, appreciated Chopin's insight into the world of the late 1800's. An awakening truly becomes a prison when there is no place to spread one's wings.

"Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusion all one's life."

"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."

"A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, the light which, showing the way, forbids it."

Lauren says

Imagine you were married to a man (or woman) who treated you like a piece of property, like you were a house that had to be maintained—not even like a dog that could be adored. Edna Pontellier doesn't have to imagine. At age 28, she is married to Leonce Pontellier and has two children. She is on autopilot, never coloring outside of his clearly marked lines.

Let me give you an example of how insufferable Leonce is: So, Edna wants some time alone and is relaxing in a hammock outside, when her husband walks up and says are you coming in to bed. And she's all no thanks I'm gonna chill here. And he's like ok and sits by her drinking and smoking a cigar. He gets another drink, lights another cigar. After a few hours she's like I guess I'll go to bed because this joker won't leave me alone. She goes in the house and asks for formality's sake are you coming to bed. And he's all when I finish this cigar.

He always has to win. A.l.w.a.y.s. It's infuriating, and not in a charming-Rhett-Butler-way.

Anyway, the family spends the summer on the Grand Isle off the gulf coast of Louisiana, where Edna befriends Adele and where she meets Robert, both contribute to the snow-ball effect of her "awakening."

Adele is a chaste married woman who is very much in love with her husband and devoted to her children. She is what Leonce Pontellier considers to be "the ideal woman." Despite her purity, Adele is a Creole woman and very outspoken. She says things that Edna's more reserved manner deems unrefined, yet Edna soon learns to appreciate Adele's idiosyncrasies and adopts some of her outspokenness.

Robert and Edna spend ample time together on the Isle, bathing, talking, just laying about in the sun. Their adoration for each other grows quickly; however, it takes Edna a while to figure out what she's feeling (of course!). And the awakening begins! But her husband's presence really dulls the whole romance. When Robert realizes that he is in love with a married woman, he packs up and abruptly moves to Mexico.

After he is gone, Edna's awakening is still developing. She learns that she doesn't ever want to sacrifice herself for anyone, including her husband and children. Edna would give her life for her children, but herself is a sacred thing that she seeks to protect. She begins to shed her old nature and embodies the New Woman. Edna moves out of her husband's house, has a purely physical affair (while Robert is in Mexico), and takes up painting, which she used to do before she got married.

This novel was revolutionary for its time. Chopin overturned Victorian era novels by really focusing on a woman's inner life, her sexuality, her rationale, and her yearning for independence. A woman sleeps with a

man she doesn't love! *Gasp* A woman wants five minutes to herself! Well, I never.

A lot of folks think Edna is selfish and I would agree to some extent; but, who isn't selfish? For Edna, the only way out, the only way to fight is to make herself the top priority. Anyone with an ounce of intelligence would try to escape a loveless marriage and an unproductive life like Edna's. Plus, I refuse to buy into the idea that when a woman has children her life must be forfeited. And I'm stepping off the soap box...

As much as I liked this book and recommend it to everyone, all I could think at the end was, thank God that was over 110 years ago.
