The Concepts Of Motherhood And Woman In Kate Chopin’s The Awakening

In Kate Chopin’s “The Awakening,” the concept of motherhood and the norms of living as a woman are challenged through visual imagery, disturbing diction, and declarative syntax to emphasize the difficult journey of becoming independent.

Visual imagery illuminates the beginnings of awakening for a woman stuck in a society that objectifies women and influences them to succumb to inferiority. While Edna Pontellier feels tempted to go to the beach with Robert, a man that is not her husband, “a certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her -- the light which, showing the way, forbids it” (pg 17). Edna is beginning to break the boundaries of feminine culture in her society as she is overcome with a craving for independence from her unloving marital relationship, which is not a common occurrence for the normally conforming female. Later on, the Pontelliers have friends and their families come to stay at their home with a party the same night, and after dancing with three people, Edna seats herself, looking out towards the Gulf as “the moon [comes] up, and its mystic shimmer [casts] a million lights across the distant, restless water.” (pg 33). The mystic, uneasy ocean illuminates Edna’s tense desire to gather insight on the mystery of climbing over the wall female norms, reaching a new side of knowledge and power that is beyond the understanding of present society. After a clash of conflicting views of the relationship between Edna and Robert, the Pontelliers and their companions, the Ratignolles, walk down to the beach together while “the white light of the moon [falls] upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep” (pg 36). The symbolism conveys an enigma for overcoming social norms and how Edna must explore it to better understand her journey of freedom, not only expecting her independence to come without pursuing personal strength and will. Continuing their stroll on the cove, most of the Pontiliers and Ratignolles walk into the water and “the sea [is] quiet now, and [swells] lazily in broad billows that [melt] into one another and [do] not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that [coil] back like slow, white serpents.” (pg 36). The serpents, just as those in the story of Adam and Eve, suggest Edna’s temptation to swim greater distances than any female has before in a sea of mystery and beauty, to which the gender roles will be challenged to fulfill self-actualization.

Disturbing diction highlights the escalation of overwhelming emotions and willingness to penetrate the terrifying mystery of the future. Edna begins to discover her connection with Robert and how these new emotions are “troubling” (pg 60) her deeply. With Edna having a husband, this emphasizes her difficulty to break out of the constraints of a common societal marriage and to instead push for something she wants to divulge her attention and time into. After Robert leaves and wishes Edna not to forget him, she convulsively bites her handkerchief as her emotions are “tearing” (pg 60) at her even more violently than before. Edna feels the weight of her true emotions which conveys that her rebellious nature is near to escaping, despite society’s idea that a woman must remain in a marriage and cannot make decisions for herself; she knows what she wants and is beginning to strive for her own wellbeing and happiness. The contemplation of the present and Edna’s newly claimed emotions from Robert’s leaving “torture” (pg 61) her in an extreme manner. Edna is becoming a newly awakened woman in her society, but she faces sexism and denial for her rights which her new self demands to change, and will not go down without a fight. After Edna feels overwhelmed

due to Robert’s sudden disappearance, Mademoiselle Reisz talks to her about a thought that constantly echoed in her mind, or more closely “possessed” her. Although Edna feels confident that she must dive head-first into this challenge of curing the fatalities of gender discrimination, the idea of Robert leaving still lingers in her mind, illuminating how she has men in her life that restrain her from being completely independent and willing to be a woman that does not rely on male figures.

Declarative syntax conveys the progress of reaching for independence and equality in society, including times of being pressured into obeying strict standards. Edna, unhappy and disinterested in her marriage, throws her wedding ring onto the floor and breaks a glass vase, however, she “held out her hand and taking the ring slipped it upon her finger” (pg 71). By illuminating that she had given into society’s standard of marriage, Edna puts forth that she will run into walls that will be difficult to overcome on her journey of self-discovery, so it will take time and building strength to make it. As Edna ponders about what she had done to her wedding ring in an almost regretful manner, she “began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked” (pg 76). The declaration of her mindset exploits Edna’s newly found way of living as she only wants to do things she wants to do, not conforming to her husband’s superiority and overall overcoming the sexist wall that define her as a powerless girl. As Mr. Pontellier discovers his wife’s awakening and fresh perspective on the feminine standard, he states to a doctor that “she’s got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women” (pg 88). Leonce proclaims that Edna’s interest in building women’s right to be independent from marriage and motherhood is near to a psychotic break which conveys how men see themselves as the exceptional gender, and he is beginning to be smothered with this fresh perspective on female identity.

Society has been accustomed to the idea of male superiority since civilization became a reality, but not until very recently did women stand up to break the chains of their inferiority. Men have found it difficult to encourage the awakening of females attempting to demolish social barriers and reach for the independence they deserve because of their desire to be powerful and dominant. Women must bend over backwards to prove that all people should have the same standards despite their gender, drawing equality back into society from the darkness it was once hidden in. Overall, The Awakening highlights the journey for freedom that inflames women with the constant obstacle of belittlement pressured by men, yet the ability of women to carry themselves with courage over the once masculine line, pursuing a new societal role for them in the future.