

THE APPLICATION OF ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICAL APPEALS  
IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND "ATHENAISE"

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## ABSTRACT

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### THE APPLICATION OF ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICAL APPEALS IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND "ATHENAISE"

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Kate Chopin has a merited place in the literary canon for her works of realism—specifically *The Awakening* and “Athenaise”—that reveal progressive messages about a woman’s search for identity. Although objective in her depiction of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* and Athenaise in her short story “Athenaise,” Chopin justifies her support of nonconformity in a patriarchal society as each central character faces challenges in her pursuit of selfhood. This study investigates the relationship between Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals—as defined in his foundational treatise *Rhetoric*—and Chopin’s application of the appeals in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise.” By providing extensive examples from two of Chopin’s works, the argument is made that Chopin wrote with persuasive intention by using ethos, pathos, and logos in her depiction of characters and situations in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise.” Chopin uses ethos in her portrayal of the main characters of each work. For example, it is in the nature of both Edna and Athenaise to be nonconforming. Chopin also uses pathos to evoke the emotions of her audience as she shares the obstacles her characters endure. Finally, Chopin presents characters who operate on reason, or logos, often influenced by societal expectations. This study concludes with a discussion of Chopin’s influences as well as her literary, rhetorical, and

feminist impact. The conclusion offers an evaluation of Chopin's application of Aristotle's rhetorical appeals and a suggestion for further rhetorical study.

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CHAPTER I

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE APPLICATION OF ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICAL  
APPEALS IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND "ATHENAISE"

Aristotle's *Rhetoric* has provided guidance for oral discourse for centuries since classical times. The work contains principles of rhetoric that can apply not only to oral delivery but also to literary texts. A study of Aristotelian appeals to literary works provides important insights. Major authors from many cultures and time periods have reflected Aristotle's appeals in their works. An important American writer whose works include evidence of the Aristotelian appeals is Kate Chopin. With the publication of ninety-six short stories, two novels, thirteen essays, and twenty poems, Chopin has made significant contributions to literature of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. Her fictional works record the experiences of women in a way that examines and transcends the lines of gender and sexuality. According to esteemed Chopin scholar and biographer, Per Seyersted, in his introduction to *The Complete Works of Kate Chopin*, Chopin achieved literary recognition "through her insight into character, her sense of form, her lucid and precise language, and her light touch" (31). Chopin noticeably incorporated the elements of realism in her works. Although similar in style to other realists, "[s]he was too much of a pioneer to be accepted in her time and place. She had a daring and a vision all her own, a unique combination of realism and pessimism applied to woman's immutable condition" (Seyersted, "Introduction" 33). Chopin made her

literary mark and deserves recognition for such commendable achievements as well as consideration of the persuasive intention with which she wrote *The Awakening* (1899) and “Athenaise” (1896), two of her works that demonstrate the appeals of ethos, pathos, and logos. Although there is extensive literary scholarship on *The Awakening*, no scholar has investigated substantively Chopin’s use of Aristotle’s rhetorical appeals in this notable novel. And “Athenaise” is an earlier story of Chopin’s that often goes unnoticed but should be brought to the attention of Chopin scholars and readers. Similarly to the use of rhetorical appeals in *The Awakening*, Chopin incorporates Aristotle’s appeals in her development of characters and situations in “Athenaise.”

With persuasive intent in mind, Aristotle argues that the speaker/writer may rely heavily on the rhetorical modes. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle defines rhetoric as “the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion” (181). Aristotle identifies three modes of persuasion the speaker/writer should consider and implement: ethos, pathos, and logos. He argues that “[t]he first kind depends on the personal character of the speaker; the second on putting the audience into a certain frame of mind; the third on the proof, or apparent proof, provided by the words of the speech itself” (181). Other rhetoricians and scholars of rhetoric have interpreted the appeals established by Aristotle. In *The Rhetorical Tradition: Readings from Classical Times to the Present*, Patricia Bizzell and Bruce Herzberg define Aristotle’s appeals, explaining that “[t]he arguments that one discovers or ‘invents’ should appeal to reason (*logos*), emotion about the subject under discussion (*pathos*), and trust in the speaker’s character (*ethos*)” (31). Cicero, too, synthesized Aristotelian theory; in his rhetorical theory, “he collected most of what was



known about Isocrates, Plato, and Aristotle, gave it his own political stamp, and transmitted it both through Quintilian and through his own works” (Bizzell and Herzberg 285). For example, in *De Oratore*, Cicero defines the purposes of persuasion as “the proof of our allegations, the winning of our hearers’ favor, and the rousing of their feelings to whatever impulse our case may require” (324). As argued by Aristotle and Cicero, speakers and writers employ the rhetorical appeals in their texts to develop an argument and subsequently persuade their audiences.

In this study, the *Rhetoric* will be used as a foundation of analysis in order to argue that Kate Chopin used the rhetorical appeals as she wrote with persuasive intention to achieve her authorial purpose. In “Chopin and the Dream of Female Selfhood,” Barbara C. Ewell shares her views of Chopin’s persuasive goal for writing fiction: “For Chopin, writing was a means of exploring and articulating what she saw—life—particularly the life of women and their struggle to achieve selfhood, the ‘sacred integrity’ that Emerson and others saw as essential to the American Dream” (159-60). Chopin clearly wanted progressive change—specifically for women—to occur as a result of her efforts as a writer, according to Ewell. And Martha Fodaski Black agrees in her essay “The Quintessence of Chopinism,” as she argues that a “close analysis of the novel [*The Awakening*] reveals that Chopin examines the interdependence of female sexuality and gender roles to challenge assumptions about women” (95). Thus, “*The Awakening* [as well as several of her other short works] reveals the influence of late-nineteenth-century feminists and their search for a new kind of heroine on whom women could model their lives” (95). This dissertation argues that in seeking to explore and reveal the various

experiences and norms of women in the late nineteenth century—specifically as they encounter challenges in their pursuit of achieving selfhood—Chopin has articulated her persuasive intent in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise” by using ethos, pathos, and logos as a central focus in her depiction of characters and situations.

Chopin was well known for and became successful for her short fiction, as she was “welcomed in more than a hundred press notices as a distinguished local colorist” with the publication of half of her fifty tales and sketches in *Bayou Folk* in 1894 (Seyersted, “Introduction” 25). Two years later, Chopin published “Athenaise” (1896)—a story about a woman’s lack of interest in her marriage and subsequent pursuit of self-fulfillment. Athenaise does, however, return to wifedom and expectant motherhood when she discovers she is pregnant. Although the story has a seemingly happy ending, Seyersted argues “this tale is on a deeper level a protest against woman’s condition” (“Introduction” 27). The story’s implication is that regardless of despondency or the desire for independence, a woman should devote herself to her designated roles as wife and mother. Chopin returns to the subject of protesting the condition of women by depicting a heroine who rejects her roles as wife and mother in *The Awakening*. Once she begins her pursuit of achieving selfhood, Edna Pontellier does not return to her former roles as Athenaise does. She has an affair with Alcee Arobin and seeks one with Robert Lebrun, moves out of her husband’s house, and explores artistic endeavors. As Edna becomes sexually, socially, and artistically awakened, she discovers her individual identity but realizes it conflicts with the societal expectations of wifedom and motherhood. Edna believes she will experience freedom through her choice and act of

suicide. Although she ends her life, according to Seyersted, “her victory is her awakening to consciousness and authenticity” (“Introduction” 29). She considers herself victorious because her final decision is entirely hers. Chopin wrote with honesty, without any intention of appeasing her nineteenth-century audience as she knew the content might displease them—particularly the male readers—because Edna is sexually awakened, and love has diminutive significance in her affairs. Chopin’s controversial work of art, created with “easy, graceful, and clear style,” serves as “a perfect vehicle for the unsparing and deeply moving emotional truth” conveyed in *The Awakening* through the experiences of Edna Pontellier and other characters (Seyersted, “Introduction” 32). Thus, her character and thematic developments provide the novel with the verisimilitude of a true work of realism.

Chopin conveys emotional truths and appeals to the emotions of readers as she depicts characters and situations in “Athenaise” and *The Awakening* with persuasive intent. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that “persuasion may come through the hearers [or readers], when the speech [or text] stirs their emotions” (182). Appealing to the emotions of the audience/reader validates the rhetorical process as it appeals to both the moral and emotional sides of the audience/reader in an attempt to persuade. According to Bizzell and Herzberg in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, by using pathos, the speaker/writer appeals to the hopes, fears, and values of the audience/reader as “pathos moves the passions” (808). In *De Oratore*, Cicero also supports the effectiveness of pathos in persuasion; “[f]or men decide far more problems by hate, or love, or lust, or rage, or sorrow, or joy, or hope, or fear, or illusion, or some other inward emotion, than by reality, or authority, or any legal

standing, or judicial precedent, or statute” (328). In “Athenaise” and *The Awakening*, Chopin uses pathos as she describes the emotional distress the female protagonists experience as they confront their feelings of frustration and unhappiness in their marriages. Chopin persuasively intends for the reader to feel the emotions the characters feel or at least understand and sympathize with the characters in their times of emotional distress—often aroused by the female protagonists’ quest of achieving individualized identity. Chopin evokes a wide array of emotions in her readers. By evoking anger within the reader, for example, Chopin intends to persuade her audience to recognize the social injustices her female protagonists endure. In her article “Taming the Sirens: Self-Possession and the Strategies of Art in Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*,” Lynda S. Boren explains the emotional appeal used in the development of Edna’s character:

Edna’s psyche is extremely vulnerable. She seems to suffer from unaccountable fluctuations in mood; at least she seems to be only half aware of why she feels the way she does, even though Chopin’s readers comprehend Edna’s justifiable reactions to the suppression of her natural vivacity. Edna is either unable or unwilling to parcel out her emotional life, as does Adele Ratignolle, who confines her emotions to the socially safe soiree musicale, with its light music and proper settings. Instead, she succumbs to the overpowering spell cast by Mlle. Reisz’s artistry and the strains of Chopin. (187)

Chopin further engages her audience’s emotions as she describes how Edna deals with her uncertainties and discontented feelings through musical experience and artistic expression. Edna uses both art and music as forms of expression as she struggles to face

her troubled emotions directly. With persuasive intent, Chopin presents the emotional coping experience of Edna as one her audience can understand and perhaps even share, thus creating an emotional connection between the character and the reader. Chopin uses the pathetic appeal as she depicts Edna and Athenaise's fluctuations in mood. Chopin also uses pathos to draw the reader in to sympathize with and relate emotionally to other characters in the works—such as Athenaise's husband Cazeau, brother Monteclin, and male companion Gouvernail—as well as in the novel—such as Edna's husband, Leonce Pontellier; lovers, Robert Lebrun and Alcee Arobin; friends, Adele Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz, and Madame Lebrun; and medical consultant, Dr. Mandelet.

Furthermore, Chopin incorporates Aristotelian logical appeals in “Athenaise” and *The Awakening* with persuasive intention. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle explains the significance of logos, for “persuasion is effected through the speech itself when we have proved a truth or an apparent truth by means of the persuasive arguments suitable to the case in question” (182). In defense of Aristotle's concept of logos, in *Rhetoric: A Synthesis*, W. Ross Winterowd contends that rhetoric “is in a sense a fusion of dialectic and ethics. Dialectic provides a logical or pseudological means of proof, and it is toward proof of one kind or another that rhetoric aims” (22). Cicero affirms the duality of logos in *De Oratore*, as he asserts that “[f]or the purpose of proof, [...] the material at the orator's disposal is twofold, one kind made up of the things which are not thought out by himself, but depend upon the circumstances and are dealt with by rule, [...] the other kind is founded entirely on the orator's reasoned argument” (324). For example, in *Women and Autonomy in Kate Chopin's Short Fiction*, Allen Stein suggests that in “Athenaise,”

Athenaise makes a reasoned argument when she returns to her husband because of “the oppressive nature of the marriage contract,” rather than of her own free will (24).

Athenaise makes a logical decision, considering her pregnant state and the social pressure she feels to return to her husband. The reader can easily recognize the logical reasoning of Athenaise’s decision, for “[g]iven the paucity of options available to most young women of her time and place, it was virtually inevitable that she would” return to her husband (Stein 24-25). This decision rooted in *logos* contrasts with Edna’s decision to part ways from her husband and children by getting her own place and later ending her own life. According to Peter Ramos in “Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*,” Edna’s decision stemmed from “patriarchal pressures of that period [which] posed several obstacles for even the most privileged women” (145). Ramos further argues that “patriarchal-social pressures forced upon such a woman were either inescapably deterministic or, somehow, entirely avoidable through a kind of mythical rebirth achieved through the act of suicide” (146). Edna’s suicide, then, is predictable and within reason to her because she no longer wishes to face the pressures of society. Chopin’s persuasive intent is explored as she depicts scenarios in which her characters make decisions rooted in the logic often formed by societal expectations of women during the late nineteenth century.

Finally, using *ethos* successfully in accordance with Aristotle and Cicero’s definitions, in “Athenaise” and *The Awakening*, Chopin creates fictional characters with whom her audience can identify, sympathize, and/or deem credible. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle suggests that “[w]e believe good men more fully and more readily than others” (182).

And supportive of Aristotle, in *De Oratore*, Cicero contends that “to paint their characters in words, as being upright, stainless, conscientious, modest, and long-suffering under injustice, has a really wonderful effect” (329). In analyzing the ethos of Chopin’s main characters, their personal goodness, character traits, and actions are examined. For example, the varying perceptions of Athenaise’s ethos is evaluated, for her credibility is compromised when she leaves Cazeau. However, her ethos is restored when she returns to him eager to devote herself to wifedom and motherhood. The varying perceptions of Edna Pontellier’s ethos in *The Awakening* is also examined and compared to other female characters, such as Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz. For example, Edna rejects the role of “mother-woman,” whereas Adele exemplifies and embraces it. Consequently, Edna’s rejection of this role affects how others perceive her. In Edna’s and Athenaise’s pursuit of achieving selfhood, the perception of their ethos may be lessened in the eyes of other characters as well as nineteenth-century readers. The ethos of the other main characters in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise” is analyzed as well, for their influences on Edna and Athenaise shape their character.

Aristotle’s ethical appeal can be applied not only to Chopin’s characters but also to Chopin. Because of the extensive literary criticism she received during and after her lifetime, Chopin’s reputation is examined in this study. Chopin’s critics were mostly concerned with her feminist themes as well as her objectivity toward her female characters’ abandoning or rejecting the expected gender roles of women during the nineteenth century. In fact, in *Kate Chopin*, notable Chopin scholar and biographer, Emily Toth, explains that “[b]y the end of 1894, Kate Chopin was already coming into

conflict with traditional views of what should be written, particularly about independent women. But she did not seem inclined to stop, and her friends abetted her” (253).

Regardless of the criticism she knew she would inevitably receive, Chopin depicted several female characters who did not fit the traditional mold. One such character is Athenaise. Toth posits that initially “Athenaise” received mixed reviews: “*The Century* and the *Chap-Book* rejected ‘Athenaise,’ and then, on July 12, 1895, Horace Scudder of *The Atlantic*” praised the story (*Kate Chopin* 274-75). Although “Athenaise” pushes the limits of traditional expectations for women, Athenaise does, however, return to her husband as the story concludes. In her biography on Chopin, Emily Toth provides a summary of *The Atlantic*’s approval:

*The Atlantic* gave ‘Athenaise’ a subtitle, ‘A Story of Temperament,’ as if to suggest that the story’s problem was just a matter of individual peculiarities. But ‘Athenaise’ is a criticism of the institution of marriage itself: Cazeau, more than once, ponders the fact that his marriage is a mistake, but it is ‘a thing not by any possibility undone’ [(Chopin, “Athenaise” 427-28)]. ‘Athenaise’ includes a discussion of grounds for legal separation—mistreatment, drunkenness, and abuse—but Athenaise’s own objection is not enough: ‘the sweeping ground of a constitutional disinclination for marriage’ [(431)]. As for Gouvernail, who had already appeared in ‘A Respectable Woman,’ and reappears in *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin made him the spokesman for the ideas of her own intellectual coterie in St. Louis. Unlike Robert in *The Awakening*, who cannot imagine that a woman can belong to herself and not to her husband, Gouvernail of ‘Athenaise’ believes



in a freer kind of lover: ‘When the time came that she wanted him,—as he hoped and believed it would come,—he felt he would have a right to her’ [(450)]. But if Kate Chopin had written that kind of story, in which a married woman freely pursues a single man, she could not have published it in an American magazine.

(Toth, *Kate Chopin* 275)

Although Chopin wrote a story about a woman’s quest to discover her own identity apart from her marriage, Chopin concluded “Athenaise” with more caution in 1896 than *The Awakening* in 1899. Hence “Athenaise” did not receive as much attention as *The Awakening*, although the reviews were comparatively divided. According to Per Seyersted in his biography on Chopin, a well-known Boston editor, Houghton Mifflin, approved of the story as he claimed, “‘I am delighted with the story, and so, I am sure, will be our readers’” (qtd. in Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 69). And Mifflin’s words of approval “were the words with which H.E. Scudder of the *Atlantic* accepted ‘Athenaise’” (Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 69). However, others considered “Athenaise” to be a “forceful story”—one Richard Watson Gilder “refused, perhaps with a comment on its lack of ethical value” (69). Seyersted contends that Chopin only applied Gilder’s changes to “Athenaise” and other stories “to get them published in the prestigious *Century*” (69). Regardless of its criticism likely prompted by its theme of a woman’s quest for self-fulfillment, Seyersted further argues that “Athenaise” is considered “one of Kate Chopin’s most important efforts” (*Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 114). *The Awakening* takes precedence, though, as it is the work that received the most attention of Chopin’s works.

Although Chopin is well known for her short fiction, according to one of her letters compiled in Toth and Seyersted's *Kate Chopin's Private Papers*, her "first efforts in literature took the form" of a novel, *At Fault* (1890) (Chopin qtd. in Toth and Seyersted 205). With more of an interest in short story writing than novel writing, Chopin shared her reasoning for her preference: "The novel does not seem to me now [to] be my natural form of expression. However, should the theme of a novel present itself I should of course try to use it" (205). Such a theme presented itself when she was inspired to write *The Awakening* only a few years later. Initially, *The Awakening* received positive reviews. In fact, the first review by Lucy Monroe in the March of 1899 *Book News* was "extremely favorable":

so keen in its analysis of character, so subtle in its presentation of emotional effects that it seems to reveal life as well as to represent it. In reading it you have the impression of being in the very heart of things, you feel the throb of the machinery, you see and understand the slight transitions of thought, the momentary impulses, the quick sensations of the hardness of life, which govern so much of our action. It is an intimate thing, which in studying the nature of one woman reveals something which brings her in touch with all women—something larger than herself. This it is which justifies the audacity of *The Awakening* and makes it big enough to be true. (Monroe qtd. in Toth, *Kate Chopin* 328)

Monroe commended Chopin for her elements of realism in *The Awakening*, particularly in her development of complex yet relatable characters. An independent woman in Chicago, Monroe shared similar views with Chopin as she was a strong advocate of

women's rights in marriage. Never marrying, Monroe's sister lived a lifestyle comparable to Mademoiselle Reisz (Toth, *Kate Chopin* 329). Therefore, the independent women in Monroe's life influenced her positive reaction to *The Awakening*. In addition to supportive critics, in "Kate Chopin on Divine Love and Suicide: Two Rediscovered Articles," Toth shares that many "women readers wrote Chopin warm letters of praise and invited her to give readings" (121). The first review of the novel in St. Louis that came out on March 25<sup>th</sup>, 1899, in the *St. Louis Republic* was also encouraging:

The phase of development which Mrs. Kate Chopin describes in *The Awakening* is rare in fiction, but common enough in life. A woman who has been merely quiescent, who has accepted life as it came to her, without analysis and without question, finally awakens to the fact that she has never lived. Mrs. Chopin tells the whole of her story, with its inevitable consequences of joy and suffering. Quietly as the work is done, it makes her intensely real; it brings her out with extraordinary distinctness and force. It is the work of an artist who can suggest more than one side of her subject with a single line. The environment is Southern, and it is by no means the book of a single character. (qtd. in Toth, *Kate Chopin* 329)

Once again, Chopin was applauded for the artistry of her realism. Although Chopin's initial reviews were positive and she worked vigorously on *The Awakening*, twelve days after its publication on April 22, 1899, according to Seyersted, the harsh criticism began:

Frances Porcher set the pattern for what was shortly to become a general condemnation of the book by reviewers. Writing about it in Reedy's *Mirror*, she

declared that Edna ought to have been satisfied with her marriage since Leonce had given her everything, including all the freedom a woman could desire. Even so, she would not have judged the heroine overharshly if she had ‘awakened to the gentle touch of Love, pure and simple,’ but her love was of such a ‘sensual and devilish’ kind that the reviewer wished Kate Chopin had not written the novel. (*Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 173-74)

Perhaps because Edna Pontellier has a sexual awakening instead of one rooted in romantic love, critics such as Porcher sharply criticized Chopin. While Edna might love Robert to some extent, she certainly does not love Alcee, yet she has an affair with him that is driven by her awakened sexual desires. And because Chopin wrote with such objectivity and without condemning Edna for her infidelity, some critics and readers reacted negatively to *The Awakening*. Chopin also suffered social disapproval personally. In fact, Seyersted explains that some “social acquaintances began to shun her, and she was cut [off] even by some of her friends. In short, she was nothing less than ‘persecuted,’ as a man who knew her has put it” (*Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 175). Not only did the criticism affect her socially but also professionally, according to Seyersted, for “[w]hen her third collection of stories was turned down by her publisher a few months later, she evidently felt herself a literary outcast, and her writing, which had slowed down after *The Awakening*, was soon to cease altogether” (“Introduction” 30). Although some social acquaintances and unforgiving critics discouraged Chopin, the positive reception of *The Awakening* from those in her social circle uplifted her spirits. In fact, according to Seyersted, in *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*,

Kate Chopin received letters from her friends voicing more favorable reactions. A man found the tale to be a moral one with its ‘sermon against un-naturalness and Edna’s marriage.’ A woman friend regretted that both fiction and life defeated those who dared to defy the ‘trammels of conventionalism,’ but admitted that a happy ending would be foreign to the school of Realism, and hence also to Kate Chopin, who was as ‘realistic as Zola.’ (174)

Regardless of her literary support system, the negative reception from critics seemed to outweigh the positive reaction she received at the time of the publication of *The Awakening*. And Seyersted elucidates that “the matter affected her so strongly,” because “she believed the scandal had blocked her chances for literary success,” and “the St. Louis censure of her made her feel she was looked upon as morally suspect and even as a ‘social disgrace’” (*Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 178). However, in opposition to claims made by other Chopin scholars, such as Kenneth Eble, Toth and Seyersted, two of the most esteemed experts on Chopin, argue in *Kate Chopin’s Private Papers* that “*The Awakening* was not, in fact, ever banned. Nor contrary to legend was Chopin ever denied membership in any literary societies. Nor was she widely shunned in St. Louis” (133). But rather “[t]he Wednesday Club hosted her reading, and she received fan letters and warm congratulations from women, and some favorable notices” (133). According to Toth and Seyersted, copies of *The Awakening* were not taken off the shelves in the St. Louis library because of condemnation of the content but instead because “they were worn out” (133). Therefore, some critics and biographers have obviously exaggerated the extent of negative criticism Chopin received.

The feminist movement in the 1960s elevated Chopin's stature, reviving interest in *The Awakening*. According to Julia Kristeva in her noteworthy essay, "Women's Time," the second generation of feminists wanted recognition of female identity. These women were "[e]ssentially interested in the specificity of female psychology" (19). Such views align with many of Chopin's texts that explore the female psyche as well as a woman's search for identity as separate from her predetermined gender roles. Thus, not only did the second wave of feminism revive interest in Chopin's works, but it also gave them validity and purpose. Although Chopin did not identify as a feminist, her works certainly contain feminist themes. She served as a precursor for feminist authors of the twentieth century. Additionally, Toth and Seyersted contend "[t]he fierce 1890s condemnation of *The Awakening* was, of course, one of the major reasons it was revived some seventy years later" (132-33). In fact, Toth and Seyersted posit "[a]fter Per Seyersted's Chopin biography appeared in 1969, calling her 'A Daring Writer Banned,' rebellious readers raced to find the forbidden book—which is now securely in the American literary canon" (133). Thus, in time Chopin gained the readership for which she aspired.

Not only did the feminists and Seyersted revive interest in Chopin and her works, but also Seyersted observes that in 1953, "Cyrille Arnavon published his searching analysis of Kate Chopin's courageous realism," and "[s]ince then, several critics, including Kenneth Eble, Robert B. Bush, Edmund Wilson, Larzer Ziff, and George Arms have done their part in elevating her from the status of a regional writer to a pioneer realist" ("Introduction" 30). Her ethos restored, Chopin persevered as a writer and gained

readers and admirers, particularly among succeeding generations, and should still have a presence in literary scholarship today. Her works continue to attract serious scholarship and are central to the American literary canon and rhetorical traditions.

CHAPTER II  
THE EMPHASIS OF ETHOS IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND  
"ATHENAISE"

Of the three rhetorical appeals defined by Aristotle in developing the power of argument, ethos is, according to Aristotle, the most vital. As he explains in Book I of his foundational treatise *Rhetoric*,

[p]ersuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible. We believe good men more fully and more readily than others: this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely true where exact certainty is impossible and opinions are divided. This kind of persuasion, like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of his character before he begins to speak. It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses. (182)

Roman rhetoricians, Cicero and Quintilian, drew largely on the rhetorical ideologies of the Greeks—predominantly Plato, Isocrates, and Aristotle. Supportive of Aristotle, in *De Oratore*, Cicero also recognizes the importance of ethos, as he argues that for the “purposes of persuasion,” the speaker/writer must win the listener’s/reader’s favor (324).



Cicero agrees with Aristotle that “nothing in oratory is more important than to win for the orator the favor of his hearer” (328). Similar to Aristotle, in Book XII of *Institutes of Oratory*, Quintilian comments on the goodness of one’s character: “Let the orator, then, whom I propose to form, be such a one as is characterized by the definition of Marcus Cato, a good man skilled in speaking” (413). And even predating Aristotle, Plato recognizes the significance of ethos in *Gorgias*. According to Bizzell and Herzberg in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, “Plato supplements the logical appeal of arguments with the ethical appeal of Socrates’ advanced age and reputed wisdom” (29-30). Although in *Rhetoric* Aristotle argues that rhetoric “as the power of observing the means of persuasion” can be applied to “almost any subject presented to us,” in using the ethical appeal in works of literature, writers must consider the varying conditions a written text presents (181). To establish himself or herself, the speaker may use verbal as well as nonverbal methods, and he or she even has the ability to do so before making the first point of the speech. On the contrary, according to Robert Connors in his article “The Differences between Speech and Writing: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos,” the writer “is severely limited in the ethical appeals he or she can offer. Unseen by the reader, left to show a personality only through the product, the writer is in a position of fewer but more controllable possibilities” (285). Although in a role similar to the speaker, the writer exerts his or her ethical appeals through the style and argumentation of the text (285). When establishing ethos through the written word, the writer not only establishes ethos through the product as a whole but also through individual characters.

Kate Chopin demonstrates her use of the ethical appeal in her development of characters and situations in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise.” Chopin establishes ethos in her works by appealing to Aristotle’s notion of “good moral character” or personal disposition of her characters (*Rhetoric* 213). In Book II of *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that persuasion is affected by the “right impression of the speaker’s character” (236). Earlier in Book II, Aristotle suggests consideration of “the various types of human character, in relation to the emotions and moral qualities, showing how they correspond to our various ages and fortunes” (217). Aristotle identifies and describes the nature of two types of characters—the “Youthful type of character” and the “character of Elderly Men” (218). According to Aristotle, the youthful type of characters “are changeable and fickle in their desires” and “trust others readily,” whereas the experiences of elderly men make “them distrustful and therefore suspicious of evil” (218, 219). This study identifies and examines these types of characteristics as well as other characteristics, impressions, and actions of Chopin’s main characters in two major works. The application of ethos is first applied to the female protagonists of *The Awakening* and “Athenaise” and then to the other key characters of the two works. With a clear articulation of persuasive intent, Chopin reveals the social norms of women in the late nineteenth century as she depicts her female protagonists’ encountering challenges in their pursuit of achieving selfhood.

As the story “Athenaise” begins, Chopin forms Athanais’s ethos through her unexplained, prolonged absence and disinclination toward marriage. Athenais does not hate her husband but rather realizes that she does not like being married:

‘It’s jus’ being married that I detes’ an’ despise. I hate being Mrs. Cazeau, an’ would want to be Athenaise Miche again. I can’t stan’ to live with a man; to have him always there; his coats an’ pantaloons hanging in my room; his ugly bare feet—washing them in my tub, befo’ my very eyes, ugh!’ (Chopin, “Athenaise” 431)

Athenaise stays with her family for a longer period of time than she had informed her husband. Because of her extended stay and hesitation about returning to Cazeau, her brother Monteclin questions her behavior with the assumption that Cazeau has been treating Athenaise poorly. Chopin’s depiction of Athenaise is nontraditional, for “[t]he day had not come when a young woman might ask the court’s permission to return to her mamma on the sweeping ground of a constitutional disinclination for marriage” (431). It was not common for a woman to leave a marriage for the mere reason of not wishing to be married any longer. Athenaise not only stirs up trouble in her own marriage but also caused her parents grief during her youth. In fact, “[p]eople often said that Athenaise would know her own mind some day, which was equivalent to saying that she was at present unacquainted with it” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 433). Chopin establishes Athenaise’s ethos by providing information about Athenaise’s behavior in her youth as explanation for her current decisions in her marriage. Chopin describes Athenaise as one without a defined sense of self. Athenaise’s parents were aware of her absentmindedness and “had hoped—not without reason and justice—that marriage would bring the poise, the desirable pose, so glaringly lacking in Athenaise’s character. Marriage they knew to be a wonderful and powerful agent in the development and formation of a woman’s character”

(433-34). Her father, especially, had high hopes that her marriage would have a positive influence on her: “‘Well, Cazeau is the one! It takes just such a steady hand to guide a disposition like Athenaise’s, a master hand, a strong will that compels obedience’” (434). Athenaise’s father expected that Cazeau’s involvement in Athenaise’s life would improve her character. Perhaps it does have that effect for some time; however, for no obviously socially acceptable reason, Athenaise decides she no longer wants to be with Cazeau. She simply grows tired of him and the status of being married. Because she does not have an acceptable reason, she loses any chance of understanding or sympathy from her audience, for

[h]e had never scolded, or called names, or deprived her of comforts, or been guilty of any of the many reprehensible acts commonly attributed to objectionable husbands. He did not slight nor neglect her. Indeed, Cazeau’s chief offense seemed to be that he loved her, and Athenaise was not the woman to be loved against her will. (“Athenaise” 434)

Athenaise embodies the attributes of a strong-willed woman. Her wishes, though, are unorthodox as she wishes to leave a husband who has been good to her.

Chopin further establishes Athenaise’s ethos as one who uses others for her own benefit. Athenaise enjoys the company of Gouvernail, a male friend she meets while she is away from her husband. Although Athenaise does not act on any desire with Gouvernail, she does, however, allow him to devote himself entirely to her. In fact, she seems to take advantage of his infatuation with her, letting him tend to her every need without giving him anything in return. And when she discovers she is pregnant with

Cazeau's child and prepares to return home, she leaves Gouvernail seemingly unsatisfied. However, he is a respectable gentleman who helps her through her time in need without any intention of seeking his own fulfillment. Fulfilling her duty as a wife and expectant mother, though, she returns home to her husband and restores herself to social expectations.

Once Athenaise discovers she is pregnant, her apathetic, dissatisfied demeanor completely changes. She "spent a day of supreme happiness and expectancy," and "passing through the long stretches of monotonous woodlands, she would close her eyes and taste in anticipation the moment of her meeting Cazeau. She could think of nothing but him" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 453, 454). This shift in her behavior is obviously a result of her knowledge of the pregnancy and sense of expectation. And according to Per Seyersed in *Kate Chopin*, Athenaise's behavioral change redefines her moral character, for awareness of their child causes her to appreciate the devoted husband she has, "learn[ing] to think of others, or at least of children" (113). Because she returns home to fill the expected societal role as a content wife and mother, there is not only a restoration of Athenaise's moral character but also order in the common household of the nineteenth century.

Contrary to the example of Athenaise, Edna Pontellier, the central character in *The Awakening*, does not take the path of return as Athenaise does. And order is not restored in *The Awakening* with adherence to societal expectations. In fact, the opposite occurs. Edna completely abandons her roles as wife and mother in her pursuit of self-fulfillment and does not return to these roles. Chopin defines Edna's ethos early in the

novel. It is in the nature of Edna to be nonconforming, as her actions demonstrate a movement away from traditionally assigned behavioral patterns. Chopin depicts Edna as a solitary rebel, for she does not lead a movement or involve others in her break from societal norms. Edna asserts her independence on many levels, provoking both condemnation and admiration.

Edna's ethos is initially formed from the perspective of others in the novel. According to Deborah Gentry in *The Art of Dying*,

Chopin begins the novel in a dispassionate, understated manner, showing us Mrs. Pontellier from the perspective of how her husband and society view her. In the sense that Edna has been indoctrinated with this view, it is how she sees herself. It is against this backdrop that we watch Edna's growth as an individual and her actions of attempted rebellion. (26)

Mrs. Pontellier rebels against society's expectation of her, wishing not to be defined by society but instead insisting on defining herself. With rhetorical purpose, Chopin does not refer to Edna by first name until Chapter VI. Thus, Gentry further argues that "[t]he irony underlying Chopin's external presentation of Edna in these first few chapters becomes apparent when the reader finally learns Edna's first name and gains insight into her personal thoughts in Chapter VI" (26-27). Accordingly, Gentry observes "[i]n this pivotal chapter—one of the most important in the novel—Chopin shifts her focus from an external and objective view of Edna to the internal and subjective: what is going on inside her mind" (27). In the beginning of the novel, Edna's solitary demeanor is reflected in the distance Chopin creates between Mrs. Pontellier and the reader.

Edna's independent nature is also revealed in her lack of interest in her husband's presence and interests. Leonce "thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 885). Her lack of interest is not customary of a wife in the real or fictional world of the late nineteenth century. And as the novel continues, the reader discovers that Edna did not marry Leonce because she loved him but instead with the motive of upsetting her father and sister who violently opposed that she marry a Catholic (Chopin, *The Awakening* 898). She did not want her family to define her; therefore, she rebelled by moving away from the traditional pattern expected of her.

Edna does not embrace the typical behaviors of wife and mother. Her children do not define her, for "Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 888). In fact, "[i]f one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing" (Chopin 887). Such behavior is unusual for children, for most seek their mother's care and attention when harmed. But Edna does not exhibit the traits of a protective mother, and her children acknowledge this behavior and react accordingly. Her detachment is further exhibited through her inconsistency with her children, for Edna was

fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville.

Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing. Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 899)

Edna's children are not her central focus as they are to most women who adhere to societal expectations; however, she loves them passionately. But in her search for self-fulfillment, Edna speaks with certainty that she would not give up herself for her children. She says, "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 929). Edna defines herself apart from her children and does not believe she was meant to be solely a mother.

Edna's rejection of wifehood and motherhood further establishes her rebellious, independent ethos. According to Seyersted in *Kate Chopin*, Edna's "revolt against her conventional roles as a wife and mother and against her biological destiny is naturally more representative for the female than the male mind" (138). In the late nineteenth century, women were more likely than men to reject their conventional roles because of the limitations within such roles. Edna does not conceal her opposition toward her roles as wife and mother from Leonce, for "her new and unexpected line of conduct bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 939). Regardless of his reactions, Edna "had resolved never to take another step backward" (939). Edna thinks that her established



roles hold her back from other life experiences. Therefore, she asserts that she will no longer allow motherhood and wifehood to limit her. Although in “Finding the Self at Home: Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Cather’s *The Professor’s House*,” Katherine Joslin suggests that “Kate Chopin’s theme of female suffocation in the home arose from cultural changes taking place around her”—as more and more women were becoming less interested in their roles and thus seeking self-fulfillment (167). Feeling suffocated in her roles, Edna seeks independence and a chance to redefine herself.

Further matters with Mr. Pontellier establish Mrs. Pontellier’s ethos. For example, when Leonce leaves to have dinner at the club after being dissatisfied by the quality of the food their cook prepared, Edna becomes frustrated by the scene he made, even though she was used to such scenes. She took off her wedding ring and “flung it on the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 934). And “[i]n a sweeping passion she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear” (934). Edna reacts to her husband’s departure impulsively. Only when the maid enters the room does Edna put her ring back on. That she takes off her ring and flings it so carelessly, merely because Leonce was upset by the quality of the meal and decided to leave for dinner elsewhere, reveals her impetuous nature, as she is impulsively willing to throw away her marriage symbol over a minor dispute. Chopin defines Edna’s character as one who reacts without putting much thought into her actions.

Not only do the relationships Edna shares with her husband and children form her ethos, but also her relationships with Robert and Alcee during her time of awakening form her behavior as one who lacks self-control. In describing the youthful type of character in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle suggests that “[o]f the bodily desires, it is the sexual by which they are most swayed and in which they show absence of self-control” (218). Being relatively young in her pursuit of self-fulfillment, Edna lacks the ability to restrain herself. Edna has an emotional attraction to Robert that eventually becomes a physical longing. In his article “Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*,” Peter Ramos argues that as Edna becomes enamored with Robert, she constructs a fantasy identity with him—“involving herself and Robert as lovers completely secluded from the world [...]—that she both nurtures and refrains from acting on, in part because of the social constraints and limitations she must face in the world” (149). However, he struggles to reciprocate wholeheartedly because she is married. Robert Lebrun understands social constraints and expectations. To escape the temptation, he leaves for Mexico. Although disheartened by his absence, Edna finds herself sexually awakened in her experiences with Alcee Arobin while Robert is away. In fact, when Alcee “leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to hers. It was the first kiss of her life to which nature had naturally responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 967). Alcee is the first man to awaken Edna sexually. And while she considers the reproaches of her husband and Robert, she realizes that life is a “monster made up of beauty and brutality,” and she feels “neither shame nor remorse” (967). She worries about what her husband and Robert would think

but continues the affair regardless of their potential disparagement. Although Chopin describes the scene with subtlety, in *Kate Chopin*, Seyersted identifies that Edna's "action of clasping Alcee's head symbolizes her double awakening as an erotic being, and as an independent individual who craves to be an active subject rather than a passive object. For her, all return to past submission and all continuation of self-delusion is impossible" (143). Once she has her first sexual encounter with Alcee, there is no going back to accepted social norms. Although she does not feel shame or remorse, "[t]here was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 967). Edna commits adultery; however, she regrets her choice to some extent because love is absent from the act. Regardless of the slight regret she experiences, she continues her affair with Alcee as her sexual awakening serves to redefine her identity.

Edna's independent identity continues to form as she gets her own place without the consent of her husband. In fact, "[w]ithout even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna hastened her preparations for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving into the little house around the block" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 967). She acts impulsively and independently, putting little thought into her decision and how it may affect her family. Her behavior coincides with Aristotle's description of the youthful type of character as "changeable and fickle in their desires" (*Rhetoric* 218). Edna's impetuous departure from her family is foreshadowed at the beginning of *The Awakening* when she shares a childhood memory with Madame Ratignolle. Her tendency to run away from problems or situations in which she feels

uncomfortable began when she was a child. She remembers walking through a meadow in Kentucky on a summer day, and she tells Adele that “[l]ikely as not it was Sunday,’ she laughed; ‘and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service’” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 896). Although she claims that ““following a misleading impulse without question”” was behavior only common to her in her youth, she admits that ““sometimes [she] feel[s] this summer as if [she] were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided”” (*The Awakening* 896, 897). Edna’s recollection foreshadows that she will likely make future decisions without giving them much thought or consulting others—thus asserting her independence, even petulance. And sure enough, she moves with unclear reasons. In fact, she sets her plan without informing Leonce. She tells Mademoiselle Reisz, ““I have not told him yet. I only thought of it this morning’” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 963). Regardless of Edna’s intention for moving with a lack of clarity, “she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself” (963). The impulsive nature behind her decision as well as her unwillingness to inform her husband defines her self-direction. She aspires to free herself from her suffocating roles.

Along with getting her own place, Edna continues her romantic affairs. She is upset when she discovers that Robert has returned to New Orleans without informing her. He keeps his distance because he respects the sanctity of marriage. Although at first he “came back full of vague, mad intentions,” he realizes a relationship will not work between them because her obligation is to Mr. Pontellier (Chopin, *The Awakening* 992). Upon hearing his reasoning, Edna calls Robert foolish for thinking she is anyone’s

possession (992). She declares her independence as well as her love for him regardless of her marital status:

‘I love you,’ she whispered, ‘only you; no one but you. It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. Oh! you have made me so unhappy with your indifference. Oh! I have suffered! Now you are here we shall love each other, my Robert! We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence.’ (Chopin 993)

Expressing her freedom, Edna asserts that because of the passion she feels for Robert, nothing or no one else in her life is of any importance or consequence. She ignores her husband and children, wanting only to be with Robert. Although Edna claims to love Robert, while Robert was away, Edna was having an extramarital affair with Alcee. Therefore, Chopin depicts Edna as a woman who while seeking self-fulfillment is consumed by impulsivity.

Although Edna ignores her husband and children as she seeks independence, she maintains her friendships with Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratignolle. With genuine concern for her friend, Adele Ratignolle assesses Edna’s complicated disposition:

‘In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn’t mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone.’ (Chopin, *The Awakening* 979)

Adele observes Edna’s childishness and impulsiveness as such behaviors are reflected in Edna’s recent, abrupt changes. Although also advised by Adele to “think of the children,”

Edna “meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a dead wound—but not tonight. Tomorrow would be time to think of everything” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 997). Edna puts off thinking of her children and the impact her changes of behavior and location have had on them. Edna’s ethos is one of self-interest. She realizes, too, that “she would never sacrifice herself for her children” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 999). So she chooses to remove herself entirely as “[t]he children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul’s slavery for the rest of her days” (999). However, “she knew a way to elude them” (999). She would end her life but make it look like an accident, because “they need not have thought they could possess her, body and soul” (1000). She does not wish to give any part of herself to her children, behavior typically expected in motherhood. Accordingly, she abandons her roles as mother and wife because she does not want to devote herself fully to these roles as they lead to her unhappiness. Chopin creates an unconventional character who is not willing to accept the limitations of roles she entered.

Although Edna’s suicide seems to derive from self-defined intentions, some critics defend or at least explain the complexity of Edna’s choice to end her own life. In Deborah Gentry’s *The Art of Dying*, she argues that Edna’s suicide “pleased neither the conservatives of the 1890s nor the liberals of the 2000s, because the former did not see Edna’s death as penitent but defiant and the latter do not see it as necessary at all” (21). Chopin’s nineteenth-century readers saw the act as one of defiance because Edna had exhibited few, if any, signs of depression. Thus, her final act does not result from a worsening mental illness but rather from her rejection of the roles she is no longer willing

to fill. On the contrary, with the commonality of divorce in the twenty-first century, the readers of the 2000s might likely think Edna could leave Leonce and further explore her extracurricular and sexual passions, so release through suicide would not be necessary. After considering these two audiences, Gentry contends that “the reader must understand the complex motivations behind Edna’s suicide and how the actions of the novel lead inexorably to that conclusion” (21). Gentry seemingly defends Edna’s suicide, as she explains the true meaning of Edna’s awakening,

which is nothing short of an awakening to the true circumstances of existence for a woman shorn of the romantic illusions that society foists upon her—an existence in which the deck is so stacked against women that the only true choice left to them is to continue this oppressive existence or to die. (22)

Once Edna is awakened to her condition, she is ultimately moving toward suicide. Gentry confirms that Chopin wrote with persuasive intention as she validates Chopin’s decision to end her novel with Edna’s suicide: “Chopin from the outset clearly intended the outcome of the novel, portraying Edna as doomed rather than damned. Few novels move with such economy of purpose to a consistently foreshadowed conclusion” (20). Chopin foreshadows Edna’s suicide in some of the novel’s first scenes as Edna learns to swim; thus, she was aware from the start of the power of water and its dangers. Gentry argues that suicide was Edna’s only choice, for “suicide is not a running away from life but a running to it. It becomes the only choice available to a woman who has placed individual dignity [...] above all else” (22). Because her death is described as “visionary rather than violent,” it “can be interpreted in a completely positive way, allowing the reader to see

Edna as finally triumphant rather than defeated” (Gentry 43-44). Ultimately, Gentry defends Edna’s independent nature and argues that it was through suicide that Edna could finally be free.

Other Chopin scholars, however, such as Peter Ramos in “Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*,” do not recognize Edna’s suicide as triumphant. Edna considers suicide as a form of freedom from the societal expectations she is no longer willing to meet. Although Edna seeks freedom, she believes, according to Ramos, that “freedom is only a state of negation—a freedom *from* restrictions, rather than a freedom *to* take up and act on one’s choices” (150). Thus, her perception of freedom contributes to her decision to take her own life. However, with Edna’s warped sense of freedom, Ramos argues that “[t]o ultimately reject all the available social roles, as Edna does by the novella’s end, is not to live freely but to live chaotically and without meaning, is to eliminate the very identities Edna would otherwise inhabit and use to represent herself” (154). Although she wishes to eliminate her identity as a mother—“because motherhood and selfhood were incompatible in Edna’s century,”—the livelihood of her children contributes to her decision (Ramos 152). She does, in fact, think of the children in the end, for, according to Seyersted in *Kate Chopin*, she “takes her life because she, on the one hand, insists on sexual and spiritual freedom, and, on the other, acknowledges a duty not to ‘trample upon the little lives’” (146). She thinks that abandoning her roles and living on selfishly would hurt her children perhaps more than their having to face their mother’s death. Seyersted further defends the validity of Edna’s decision, for he explains that “[h]er suicide was entirely valid for her time, when her



ideas of self-assertion were bound to be condemned outright by the Victorian moral vigilantes” (146). According to several critics, Edna seemingly had no other choice but to take her own life, as her ability to achieve selfhood is restricted by societal expectations.

Edna’s search for freedom through selfhood provides Chopin’s work of realism with existential qualities. Exhibiting the ideology of existentialism through Mrs. Pontellier’s attitude, Seyersted contends that Chopin “seems to say that Edna has a real existence only when she gives her own laws, when she through conscious choice becomes her own creation with an autonomous self” (*Kate Chopin* 147). However, “while such a developmental freedom may strengthen the self, it is accompanied by a growing sense of isolation and aloneness, and also anguish” (147-48). As Edna gets closer to achieving selfhood, she pushes herself further away from others. Seyersted argues that it is “[w]hen a woman in the existential manner assumes sole responsibility for her life, which then depends on her own efforts” that “freedom becomes something of a negative condition and she herself indeed a solitary soul” (*Kate Chopin* 149). Consistent with Edna’s demeanor on her quest for self-fulfillment and subsequent isolation from the community and her loved ones, *A Solitary Soul* was Chopin’s original title for the novel. Therefore, it is through her suicide that Edna achieves the ultimate form of solitude. In fact, Seyersted posits that “her suicide is the crowning glory of her development from the bewilderment which accompanied her early emancipation to the clarity with which she understands her own nature and the possibilities of her life as she decides to end it” (*Kate Chopin* 150). Edna’s self-defining nature caused *The Awakening* to be “something of a landmark in nineteenth-century American literature in that it

reaches out beyond woman's obtaining equality in law and love to the existentialist demand for dictating one's own destiny, and even beyond that to the horror of freedom" (150). Through her suicide, Edna finally achieves the solitude and freedom she sought throughout the entirety of the novel.

Some critics suggest that there was no way to end the novel other than with Edna's suicide, whereas others claim Chopin's authorial choice was influenced by her audience of publishers and readers. Peter Ramos shares Emily Toth's suggestion—that "Chopin had Edna commit suicide in order to accommodate the moral demands publishers and readers would place on a woman who committed such transgressions" (Ramos 146). And such an interpretation "implies that Chopin, succumbing more or less willingly to outside pressures, produced a compromised piece of literature" (146). Although objective toward Edna's immoral decisions in her depiction of her character and actions, perhaps Chopin ended the novel with Edna's suicide to provide the nineteenth-century reader with a sense of justice for Edna's defiance. On the contrary, Ramos argues that the twentieth-century reader "care[s] about Edna and feel[s] justifiable sympathy for her plight" (146). He further explains that

[i]t's far easier to see her either as an innocent victim crushed by a merciless, absolute patriarchy, or as having the last laugh by ducking out of life's impassible and unfair obstacles. But these readings implicitly overlook the courage and discipline of women like Edna who did survive and rise above such pressures. (146)

Ramos supports the ethos of Edna, explaining that the twentieth-century reader either sympathizes with her or commends her on her ability to go against the norm all the way to her death. Although the modern reader tends to show Edna sympathy as she ends her own life, Chopin did not share such understanding. According to Emily Toth in her article “Kate Chopin on Divine Love and Suicide: Two Rediscovered Articles,” “modern readers have long assumed a deep identification between Chopin and her heroine,” because they observe “that Chopin makes the ending attractive, maternal, sensuous” (121). However, “the *Post Dispatch* interview suggests that Chopin’s own attitude toward women’s suicide was more critical than sympathetic” (121). Although she writes objectively, her personal opinions about suicide were indeed critical. And, according to Toth, Chopin never exhibited any suicidal tendencies herself.

Supportive of Chopin’s critical stance on women’s suicide, Ramos suggests another way to read the ending of *The Awakening*—“as a subtle, but intentionally crafted, warning” (147). He argues that Edna’s suicide serves as “an example of what can happen to a protagonist whose unwillingness to continue dedicating herself to any of the available social roles leads her to abandon all of them in favor of enticing yet ever-elusive freedom, the kind one associates with a tantalizing, idyllic childhood” (147). Perhaps Chopin is warning her readers that freedom is not as desirable as one would think once one is in pursuit of it. In Edna’s pursuit to achieve freedom and selfhood, Ramos contends that she refuses “to dedicate herself to an identity or creatively transform one for herself”; hence it is a “particular failure, one that ends in suicide” (147). Although she abandons her roles as wife and mother in pursuit of love and art, Ramos suggests that

the “inaccessibility of ‘true’ love for her, as with ‘true’ art, is a symptom of how absolutely society prohibits her attempts at autonomy and selfhood” (153). Thus, she was fighting an unwinnable battle with society as well as with herself. Furthermore, Ramos asserts that because Edna “finally comes to believe that she cannot achieve individuality or personhood,” she “ultimately responds by attempting to live outside of all social constructions, beyond [...] identity [...] as she comes to reject in succession the various social roles available to her: whether that of wife, mother, woman of society, artist and/or lover” (149). However, she can only live outside of these roles in isolation for so long before she becomes a solitary soul without purpose in life.

While some critics defend Edna’s choice to end her own life, others critique Chopin’s inconsistency in characterization leading up to Edna’s suicide. In “Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent,” George Spangler argues that the greatest fault of the conclusion is that it “asks the reader to accept a different and diminished Edna from the one developed so impressively before” (254). Spangler further explains that “the most striking feature of Edna’s character has been her strength of will, her ruthless determination to go her own way. In thought and act she has rejected unequivocally the restraints of conventional morality, social custom and personal obligation to her husband and children” (254). Up until her suicide, readers commend Edna for her determination to achieve selfhood. However, Spangler points out that “in the final pages, Mrs. Chopin asks her reader to believe in an Edna who is completely defeated by the loss of Robert, to believe in the paradox of a woman who has awakened to passionate [sic] life and yet quietly, almost thoughtlessly, choose death” (254). Such a decision is unlike Edna who

has fought so hard to experience freedom. Therefore, Spangler suggests that it was a decision made with rhetorical purpose. Spangler argues that in order for Chopin to establish pathos and justice in the conclusion, it “leads to a painful reduction in Edna’s character. For in the final pages Edna is different and diminished: she is no longer purposeful, merely willful; no longer liberated, merely perverse; no longer justified, merely spiteful” (255). Although Spangler assesses the reasoning for Chopin’s decision, he declares that it comes with a cost. Spangler asserts that such a change in character “prevents a very good, very interesting novel from being the extraordinary masterpiece some commentators have claimed it is” (255). Regardless of Spangler’s judgment, in “The Independent Women and ‘Free’ Love,” Chopin biographer, Emily Toth, affirms the quality of *The Awakening*, suggesting that it “is a book American literature was not yet ready for. Kate Chopin, like Edna, ventured where no woman had before, extending the definition of the American independent woman to include sexual freedom, at a time when women were still presumed to lack sexual feelings” (659). Although certain authorial decisions might have compromised the reception of *The Awakening*, the novel and its author deserve recognition for producing a landmark in American literature.

In *The Awakening*, Chopin develops Edna’s character objectively; however, other characters and the reader react to her behaviors and often form a negative perception of her ethos. In her essay, “Finding the Self at Home: Chopin’s *The Awakening* and Cather’s *The Professor’s House*,” Katherine Joslin shares the negative reception of Edna Pontellier’s character and condition, and thus *The Awakening* and Chopin herself, according to fellow author Willa Cather:

According to Cather's reading of Chopin, Edna Pontellier works against herself, in the end annihilates herself, by nurturing a passion that exists only in her fancy, in her brain, in an ideal world, instead of living in the more prosaic but ultimately healthier domestic world around her. In nineteenth-century fiction, women who go against the conventions of their social group, especially those where the sexual rules are in question, meet with disaster almost without exception. (Joslin 166-67)

Although Chopin spoke through Edna with persuasive intent, some nineteenth-century audiences did not sympathize with Edna. In "Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of *The Awakening*," Robert Treu argues that nineteenth-century audiences critiqued the book on "a matter of moral condemnation of its main character that was supposed to represent important American values" (21). The disconnect and condemnation affected the success of Chopin's novel at the time of its publication. In fact, Treu posits "[t]hese attacks were also harsh enough to effectively end Chopin's career as a writer and, incidentally, end serious discussion of the book for half a century" (21). In his article, "A Forgotten Novel," Kenneth Eble explains that although Chopin had established herself as a worthy author, because of the negative reception of *The Awakening*, she lost acceptance and popularity as an author at the time:

When Kate Chopin's novel *The Awakening* was published in 1899, it made its mark on American letters principally in the reactions it provoked among shocked newspaper reviewers. In St. Louis, Mrs. Chopin's native city, the book was taken from circulation at the Mercantile Library, and though by this time she had established herself as one of the city's most talented writers, she was now denied

membership in the Fine Arts Club. The St. Louis *Republic* said the novel was, like most of Mrs. Chopin's work, 'too strong drink for moral babes' and should be labeled 'poison.' *The Nation* granted its 'fine workmanship and pellucid style,' but went on, 'We cannot see that literature or the criticism of life is helped by the detailed history of the manifold and contemporary love affairs of a wife and mother.' (7)

Although Emily Toth and Per Seyersted later disproved that Chopin received the extensive criticism Eble describes, some critics and readers did indeed question her credibility, a reaction which subsequently affected her reputation as a writer during her lifetime.

Chopin wrote six stories following the negative reception of *The Awakening*; although, they lacked merit, according to Kenneth Eble; and because of Chopin's "innocent disregard for contemporary moral delicacies," *The Awakening* was forgotten (Eble 8). But according to George Spangler in "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent," Kenneth Eble "rediscovered it for a limited American audience in 1956" (249). Less than a decade later, in "*Patriotic Gore* (1962), Edmund Wilson brought the novel to the attention of a far larger audience than Eble could have reached" (Spangler 249). In fact, Wilson "called it 'quite uninhibited and beautifully written,' 'a very odd book to have been written in America at the end of the nineteenth century,' and made clear that its obscurity was unjustified" (249). Spangler suggests that likely as a result of Wilson's "authoritative notice," two academic literary historians, Warner Berthoff and Larzer Ziff, "affirmed the merits" of *The Awakening* (249). In reviewing Ziff's book, *The American*

1890s, literary journalist Stanley Kauffmann declared that *The Awakening* “‘deserves a place in the line of major American fiction’” (Spangler 250). Furthermore, in “Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of *The Awakening*,” Robert Treu argues that “[m]ore recent readings frequently approve of the novel for its artistry while condemning Edna’s ‘romantic yearning’ as a character flaw which contributes to her death” (21). Twentieth-century critics, readers, and feminists revived *The Awakening* and other controversial stories such as “The Storm”; hence the voices of Chopin’s female protagonists were deemed valuable and returned to prominence in American literature.

Although the ethos of Chopin’s female protagonists should be considered with the highest importance, ethos can be applied to Chopin’s development of other key characters as well in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise.” With persuasive intention in mind, Chopin depicts Gouvernail, Athenaise’s male friend, and Alcee Arobin, Edna’s lover, with distinctively dissimilar ethos. Chopin portrays Gouvernail as a gentleman, whereas Alcee in *The Awakening* is portrayed as quite the opposite. Alcee is a cad with a stained reputation for seducing women.

Chopin consistently depicts Gouvernail as a respectable gentleman throughout “Athenaise.” Gouvernail was “greatly pleased to meet” Athenaise only to later discover that she was married (Chopin, “Athenaise” 443). However, he still offered Athenaise his friendship. He “was a liberal-minded fellow”; and even so, “a man or woman lost nothing of his respect by being married” (444). Although Gouvernail is not the marrying type, he respects that Athenaise is currently married. In fact, after she “told him how glad she was to see him,” and though “it pleased him immensely” and he “detect[ed] as he did that the



expression was as sincere as it was outspoken,” “[h]e drew a chair up within comfortable conversational distance of Athenaise” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 446). He respects that she is a married woman, remaining friendly in conversation but keeping an appropriate physical distance; for according to Joyce Dyer in “Gouvernail, Kate Chopin’s Sensitive Bachelor,” “underneath Gouvernail’s liberal attitude toward the institution of marriage lies a rigorous and demanding morality” (65). Thus, Chopin depicts him as a reputable gentleman. He does, however, feel tempted to approach Athenaise, for

[h]e knew that she would undress and get into her peignoir and lie upon her bed; and what he wanted to do, what he would have given much to do, was to go and sit beside her, read to her something restful, soothe her, do her bidding, whatever it might be. (Chopin, “Athenaise” 447)

Nevertheless, he shows restraint, further establishing his respectable nature. In fact, he even tells himself that “there was no use in thinking of that” (447). Gouvernail fully devotes himself to Athenaise without expecting anything in return, for “every moment that he could spare from his work he devoted to her entertainment” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 449). And although “[h]e wondered what would happen if he were to put his arms around her” and “[t]he impulse was powerful to strain her to him” and “the temptation was fierce to seek her lips,” “he did neither” (450). His ability to restrain himself at a time in which Athenaise is incredibly vulnerable is indeed honorable and further establishes his ethos as a reputable character. Just because he restrains himself, though, does not mean that he does not have growing feelings for Athenaise. But “[h]e was patient; he could wait. He

hoped some day to hold her with a lover's arms" (450). He waits not for her to be unmarried but rather for her to be emotionally ready to begin another relationship:

[t]hat she was married made no particle of difference to Gouvernail. He could not conceive or dream of it making a difference. When the time came that she wanted him,—as he hoped and believed it would come,—he felt he would have a right to her. So long as she did not want him, he had no right to her,—no more than her husband had. (450)

That he respects her readiness or lack thereof once again causes him to gain the reader's admiration. He does not force himself on Athenaise during this vulnerable time in her life and marriage but rather practices restraint until she is ready to be his. This practice, though, does not come without challenge, for "[i]t was very hard to feel her warm breath and tears upon his cheek, and her struggling bosom pressed against him and her soft arms clinging to him and his whole body and soul aching for her, and yet to make no sign" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 450). Even after "she kissed him against the neck," "he endured like a stoic" (450). He does not give in to bodily temptations, thus maintaining his respectable disposition.

Gouvernail remains devoted to Athenaise even when he realizes he no longer has a chance to be with her. When Athenaise decides to return to her husband, she finds Gouvernail "waiting with a carriage to convey her to the railway station" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 453). His demeanor remains respectable as they prepare to part ways, for "[h]e was kind, attentive, and amiable, as usual" and also "respected to the utmost the new dignity and reserve that her manner had developed since yesterday" (453). He buys

her ticket and “took defeat gracefully” (453). He respects her wishes to return. Although pained by her departure, he does not let his feelings interfere with what is in the best interest of Athenaise—that she return to her husband, as she is impregnated with his child. He truly cares about Athenaise and puts her needs before his own. Therefore, Gouvernail is depicted as a true gentleman with good moral character who adheres to social expectations.

On the contrary, in *The Awakening*, Alcee Arobin seemingly takes advantage of Edna Pontellier in her time of sexual awakening. He does not respect that Edna is married, for “[i]t was at his instigation that Mrs. Highcamp called to ask her to go with them to the Jockey Club to witness the turf event of the season” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 957). A man known to take interest in married women, “Arobin caught the contagion of excitement which drew him to Edna like a magnet” (957). He also made the first move, for he “drew all her awakening sensuousness. He saw enough in her face to impel him to take her hand and hold it while he said his lingering good night” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 959). In addition to Alcee’s limited restraint, he is also very persistent, for he requests to see Edna again even after she declines his requests twice. She speaks honestly about his insistence: ““No. Good night. Why don’t you go after you have said good night? I don’t like you”” (960). Somewhat embarrassed and apologetic, he responds:

‘I’m sorry you don’t like me. I’m sorry I offended you. How have I offended you? What have I done? Can’t you forgive me? [...] You see, I go when you command me. If you wish me to stay away, I shall do so. If you let me come back, I—oh! You will let me come back?’ (960)

Because of Alcee's persistently seductive behavior, Edna "felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour" (960). And as a result, she pondered what "he would think," though she "did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun" (960). Initially, Edna keeps her distance from Alcee because of her devotion to Robert. However, Alcee recognizes her vulnerability when Robert is away. Not only does Alcee come in between Edna and her husband but also between Edna and Robert. Therefore, it is in his nature, or ethos, to be manipulative. This kind of behavior was expected of Alcee, though, for when Dr. Mandelet left the Pontellier's house, concerned with Edna's behavior, he muttered to himself, "I hope it isn't Alcee Arobin" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 953). Alcee has a bad reputation because of his past affairs with married women. Thus, Dr. Mandelet worries that Alcee's involvement in Edna's life explains her recent changes in behavior. Not only does Dr. Mandelet express his concern regarding Alcee's potential involvement with Edna, but Madame Ratignolle, too, advises Edna against associating with Alcee: "[S]omeone was talking of Alcee Arobin visiting you. Of course, it wouldn't matter if Mr. Arobin had not such a dreadful reputation. Monsieur Ratignolle was telling me that his attentions alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 979-80). Yet Edna has an affair with this disreputable man anyway, consequently tainting her character as well.

Edna's love interest, Robert Lebrun, differs from Gouvernail in "Athenaise," since he does give in to the temptations presented with Edna. However, he attempts to

end his relationship with Edna and does not take advantage of her during her vulnerable time, as Alcee Arobin does. Chopin depicts Robert as indecisive and unwilling to commit: “Since the age of fifteen, which was eleven years before, Robert each summer at Grand Isle had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 890). His character is formed with commercial concern, as Robert’s ethos is driven by preserving his mother’s reputation and business. He helps his mother’s guests as they come and go. However, Robert does not commit himself to one woman but rather rotates women yearly. In *The Art of Dying*, Gentry describes him as someone unwilling to “follow through with his intentions,” for Chopin portrays him “as the perennially adolescent male” (32). Chopin parallels his indecisiveness with going to Mexico to his indecisiveness with women. And according to Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, the youthful types of character, as Robert is depicted, “are changeable and fickle in their desires” of which are “quickly over” (218). Adele Ratignolle does not consider Robert as trustworthy, for Gentry argues that Adele “senses the danger inherent in Robert’s romantic attentions to the emotionally-receptive Edna” (32). Consequently, “she asks him to desist in his attentions towards Edna” (32). However, Robert does not consider his intentions to be malevolent, as Gentry suggests, he “has no intention of backing away from his involvement with Mrs. Pontellier, a relationship which he portrays as of the noblest kind” (32). In fact, he even goes so far as to compare his inherently good intentions to the bad ones of Alcee, whom he deems as dishonorable. Gentry contends that Robert establishes this comparison “to make the point

that he is not like Arobin; he is not a victimizer of women” (32). Although by the conclusion of the novel, “it becomes apparent that he is” (32). Even though Robert does not engage in sexual acts with the married women he charms each summer, Edna’s hopeless infatuation with him is evidence of his victimization. Furthermore, Gentry asserts that “[a]lthough it might appear that Robert finally took Adele’s warning seriously and for the sake of Edna did the ‘right thing’ and left, by the end of the novel it becomes quite apparent that Robert fled before an assertive Edna to protect his romantic illusions” (34). He knew he could not possess Edna as long as she remained married. However, to further complicate matters, Gentry explains that “Edna tries one more time to integrate the disparate elements of her life when Robert returns to New Orleans. Interestingly, he makes no attempt to contact her, preferring still to worship her from afar. His hesitancy confuses Edna, and she never seems to comprehend fully Robert’s perception of her” (37). Edna interprets his actions as playing games and being unclear about his intentions; however, his moral character is formed by his upholding community standards and by refusing to be involved romantically with a married woman.

Although Robert is irresolute, his respectable nature is made clear in his resistance to be with Edna. Such nobleness is a reflection of his youthful type of character; for in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that the lives of the youth “are regulated more by moral feelings than by reasoning,” as “moral goodness leads us to choose what is noble” (218). Therefore, influenced by morality, Robert tells Edna that he has been fighting against their being together. When she asks why, he explains: “‘Because you were not free; you were Leonce Pontellier’s wife. I couldn’t help loving you if you were

ten times his wife; but so long as I went away from you and kept away I could help telling you so”” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 991-92). While he had wished for Edna to be his own wife, he held back out of respect for the Pontelliers’ marriage. He wants Edna as his wife and does not wish to share her or take part in an affair. Edna responds to his expression by calling him foolish for thinking a wife is a man’s possession. And when she returns, she finds him no longer there. He left a note that said: “I love you. Good-bye—because I love you”” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 997). Robert’s note further demonstrates his moral character, for he truly loves Edna but does not want to participate in an affair or compete with Mr. Pontellier for her love. Instead, he steps away as an act of chivalry and self-control.

Since the ethos of the other men in the female protagonists’ lives has been examined, so should the nature of their husbands. In “Athenaise,” the ethos of Cazeau is revealed by his reaction to his wife’s absence; it could be perceived one of two ways—as trusting or detached. Athenaise “did not return in the evening, and Cazeau, her husband, fretted not a little. He did not worry much about Athenaise, who, he suspected, was resting only too content in the bosom of her family” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 426). Either he trusts her entirely, or he is simply unemotional toward her absence. Chopin describes him as “distinguished looking,” as he “succeeded in commanding a good deal of respect, and even fear sometimes” (426). His maid offered her “opinion of the unchristianlike behavior of his wife in leaving him thus alone after two months of marriage,” yet it “weighed little with him” (427). Although he is comfortable with solitude, his apathy may be viewed as insensitive. However, Athenaise’s absence does cause him to

experience a “dull, insistent pain,” as he is indeed affected by Athenaise’s unexpected departure and unknown return (427). Cazeau reflects on Athenaise’s “growing aversion” toward him, a factor which kept him “far awake into the night” (427, 428). Although unfortunate for Cazeau to experience, his genuine nature is revealed in his concern about his marriage and possibility of losing Athenaise. In fact, his caring disposition is further exhibited as he “saddled his horse and went himself in search of her” (428). The reader does not question his concern for Athenaise’s absence.

Although Chopin characterizes Cazeau as caring, Athenaise’s brother Monteclin does not acknowledge Cazeau’s considerate nature. Monteclin “made no attempt to disguise the dislike with which his brother-in-law inspired him” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 429). Monteclin had asked Cazeau for a loan and was declined, a fact which ultimately led to his abhorrence. The reader, though, is not convinced by Monteclin’s grudge because Athenaise’s father Miche and his oldest son “both esteemed Cazeau highly, and talked much of his qualities of head and heart, and thought much of his excellent standing with city merchants” (429). After Monteclin questions Athenaise about her reasoning for why she left Cazeau, the reader discovers that Cazeau does not abuse her or drink, and she does not hate him either (Chopin, “Athenaise” 431). Therefore, the reader finds it difficult to accept Monteclin’s hatred. And Cazeau’s esteemed ethos is further established when the reader discovers

[h]e had never scolded, or called names, or deprived her of comforts, or been guilty of any of the many reprehensible acts commonly attributed to objectionable husbands. He did not slight nor neglect her. Indeed, Cazeau’s chief offense



seemed to be that he loved her, and Athenaise was not the woman to be loved against her will. (Chopin, "Athenaise" 434)

When Cazeau tries to show Athenaise affection when he brings her back to their home, he practices patience as she exhibits coldness. He confirms his love for her, which "was significant coming from Cazeau, who was not often so unreserved in expressing himself" (435). He "held out his hand to her" although she refused to touch it. He handles such rejection with dignity, as he "rested his hand, that she would not touch, upon her head for an instant, and walked away out of the room" (435). He responds calmly to his wife's aloofness, not revealing any frustration but instead leaving the room peacefully. Such reactions reveal Cazeau's patient demeanor.

However, Athenaise knows her brother Monteclin detests Cazeau, so upon meeting up with him, she shares her latest frustrating encounter she experienced with her husband—knowing Monteclin will take her side. She was upset when "he had said, in that aggravating tone of his, that it was not the custom on Cane river for the negro servants to carry the keys, when there was a mistress at the head of the household" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 437). While Cazeau's aggravation upset Athenaise, and she knew it would upset Monteclin as well, "Athenaise could not tell Monteclin anything to increase the disrespect which he already entertained for his brother-in-law; and it was then he unfolded to her a plan which he had conceived and worked out for her deliverance from this galling matrimonial yoke" (437). Although Monteclin and Athenaise loathe Cazeau, Chopin continues depicting Cazeau in a respectable light as the story progresses.

After Cazeau discovers that Athenaise had left home again, he realizes that “the loss of self-respect seemed to him too dear a price to pay for a wife” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 438). Seyersted argues that Cazeau does not want a wife who does not want him, wishing that she “return only if it is her own will to do so” (*Kate Chopin* 113). Therefore,

[h]e wrote a letter, in which he disclaimed any further intention of forcing his commands upon her. He did not desire her presence ever again in his home unless she came of her free will, uninfluenced by family or friends; unless she could be the companion he had hoped for in marrying her, and in some measure return affection and respect for the love which he continued and would always continue to feel for her. (Chopin, “Athenaise” 439)

Although it takes courage to back away, he does not remain silent for long. He gets in a heated argument with her brother Monteclin, who accuses him of being the reason Athenaise leaves: “I know you mus’ ‘a’ done Athenaise pretty mean that she can’t live with you; an’ fo’ my part, I’m mighty durn glad she had the spirit to quit you” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 439). Cazeau retorts fervently by saying, “[L]et me remine you that Athenaise is nothing but a chile in character; besides that, she’s my wife, an’ I hol you responsible fo’ her safety an’ welfare. If any harm of any description happens to her, I’ll strangle you, by God, like a rat” (439). He still cares for Athenaise dearly, regardless of her apathy toward him. His unconditional love further reveals his caring nature. Although the reader sees Cazeau in a positive light, Monteclin and Athenaise paint a different picture, for after hearing about Cazeau from them, Gouvernail “pictured Cazeau as

unbearable, and did not like to think of him” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 448). And as Athenaise contemplates if Gouvernail has ever loved anyone, she considers the type of love Cazeau has for her, deeming it as passionate, rude, and offensive (449). Cazeau still lacks acceptance with Athenaise.

It is not until she discovers that she is pregnant that Cazeau’s acceptance returns for Athenaise. In fact,

[a]s she thought of him, the first purely sensuous tremor of her life swept over her. She half whispered his name, and the sound of it brought red blotches into her cheeks. She spoke it over and over, as if it were some new, sweet sound born out of darkness and confusion, and reaching her for the first time. She was impatient to be with him. Her whole passionate nature was aroused as if by a miracle. (Chopin, “Athenaise” 451)

She has fallen back in love with her husband with this discovery. Athenaise plans to write Cazeau a letter, knowing “he would forgive her, for had he not written a letter?” (451). She is confident that her husband will take her back with open arms, as she knows it is in his nature to be forgiving. Although her letter was “penned with a single thought, a spontaneous impulse,” she knew “Cazeau would understand” (451, 452). She is affirmed that her husband knows her well and is understanding—both commendable attributes that confirm his ethos. She feels confident, too, that “after what had gone on before, Cazeau would await her at their home; and she preferred it so” (452). She knows he will await her and forgive her for her absence. And as she gets closer to their reuniting, “she would close her eyes and taste in anticipation the moment of her meeting with Cazeau. She

could think of nothing but him” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 454). Her feelings toward him have come full circle. And when they see each other again, at first they stand in silence; “[b]ut Athenaise turned to him with an appealing gesture. [...] He felt her lips for the first time respond to the passion of his own” (454). She finally shares the same love with him; and ultimately Athenaise, the reader, and even Monteclin, to some extent, acknowledge his esteemed ethos, for “he had no fault to find since she came of her own choice” (454). So as the story concludes, Cazeau exemplifies the traits of a good moral character and can be expected to be a virtuous husband and father.

Cazeau is proactive about improving matters with Athenaise. On the contrary, in *The Awakening*, Edna’s husband Leonce keeps his distance and remains somewhat aloof as Edna explores her awakening and freedom. However, his ethos is established with the reader, for according to Spangler, “he is portrayed as a thoroughly likable man of good nature and intention, successful in his business, popular with his peers, devoted to his wife and children” (252). The Pontelliers spend their summers at Grand Isle in the Lebrun cottages. Because of Mr. Pontellier’s status, he “had the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased to be entertaining” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 881). Not only is Mr. Pontellier of high status, but he also puts time and care into his appearance: “Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and rather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed” (881). As Mr. Pontellier is preparing to leave for a business trip, his favorable relationship with his children is revealed: “Both children wanted to follow their father when they saw him starting out. He kissed them and

promised to bring them back bonbons and peanuts” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 883). However, when he returned, he “had forgotten the bonbons and peanuts for the boys. Notwithstanding he loved them very much and went into the adjoining room where they slept to take a look at them and make sure that they were resting comfortably” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 885). Although forgetful, such actions reveal that Mr. Pontellier is a good father, further establishing his ethos in a positive light.

Mr. Pontellier’s behavior is contrasted with his wife’s when he discovers Raoul, their son, has a fever. He is concerned about the matter, whereas Mrs. Pontellier shows little concern; for she insists that he “had gone to bed perfectly well [...] and nothing had ailed him all day” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 885). Following Edna’s lack of concern, Leonce “reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. [...] He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them” (885). His criticism of Edna portrays him as an oppressive husband but at the same time a good father. Before returning to the city for business again, Mr. Pontellier “gave his wife half of the money which he had brought away from Klein’s hotel the evening before” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 887). The fact that he shares his money equally with his wife makes him appear to be a generous character. And he showers her with gifts as well, for a “few days later a box arrived for Mrs. Pontellier from New Orleans. [...] It was filled with friandises, with luscious and toothsome bits—the finest of fruits, pates, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bonbons in abundance” (887). Leonce also gains the respect of the reader by how much he loves and devotes himself to his wife, for “[h]e fell in love, as

men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and an ardor which left nothing to be desired. He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 898). However, as he notices his wife growing fond of Robert, he feels the need to assert his dominance. When she remains outside “past one o’clock,” he speaks to her with impatience and irritation: “I can’t permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 912). Edna responds by refusing to submit to his orders. She remains outside; and he keeps her company, drinking wine and smoking cigars. And when she is ready to go inside, she asks if he is coming, too. He says he will come in when he finishes his cigar. Thus, Spangler argues that “[i]n response to the new Edna the best he can manage is a kind of dogged self-control, and his best counts for nothing” (252). Whether he acquiesces or stands his ground, Edna has already begun to distance herself from him. In fact, Spangler points out that “[w]ithin a few months of this night she will move out of his house and seek a lover, and he will drop out of the narrative as inconspicuously as he has passed from her consciousness” (252-53). However, Spangler posits that “Mr. Pontellier is not alone” in his inability to make Edna happy, for “none of the men in the novel is prepared to cope with Edna” (253). But Mr. Pontellier does what he can and gives Edna her space, thus revealing his flexible nature as a character.

However, the fit Mr. Pontellier throws when Edna has a limited explanation for leaving their house on a Tuesday reveals his lack of trust in his wife because of her recent changes as well as his own insecurities. He insists that she ““should have left some suitable explanation for [her] absence”” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 932). He tells her: “I

should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things; we've got to observe les convenances if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession” (932). Leonce cares about appearances and maintaining society's conventions. He scans the names of his wife's callers from the day, “reading some of them aloud, with comments as he read” (933). Such behavior reveals his irritable, controlling nature. Edna acknowledges this behavior and addresses her concern with her husband: ““Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?”” (933). After insisting that ““such things count,”” Mr. Pontellier voices his disapproval of their meal (933). He “would not touch [the scorched fish]. Edna said she did not mind a little scorched taste. The roast was in some way not to his fancy, and he did not like the manner in which the vegetables were served” (933). Mr. Pontellier acts fastidious, complaining about every part of the meal. And he uses his money to justify his behavior, claiming that they ““spend enough in this house to procure at least one meal a day which a man could eat and retain his self-respect”” (933). He demonstrates his need to control not just his wife but also his employees, for he insists that his cooks ““need looking after, like any other class of persons that you employ”” (933). Instead of finishing his meal, he leaves abruptly, telling Edna that he will get his dinner at the club. This was not unusual behavior for Leonce, for she was “somewhat familiar with such scenes” (934). Such behavior exhibits his insistence on excellence. Perhaps he becomes easily bothered by the food, because what is really bothering him is that Edna is losing interest, but he is not ready to accept the possibility at that point in the novel.

Although Chopin depicts Leonce as somewhat insecure and easily bothered, he does seem to care genuinely about Edna. As he leaves for work, he “told her she was not looking well and must take care of herself” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 935). He worries about her wellbeing, and such concern establishes his ethos as a caring moral character. Mr. Pontellier worries about her mental health, in particular, for “[i]t sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier’s mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 939). However, he “let her alone as she requested” (939). Realizing that he must do something, he consults Dr. Mandelet and asks him over for dinner to assess his wife’s changes in behavior. He tells the doctor how she has changed:

‘Her whole attitude—toward me and everybody and everything—has changed. You know I have a quick temper, but I don’t want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I’m driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I’ve made a fool of myself. She’s making it devilishly uncomfortable for me.’ (Chopin, *The Awakening* 948)

Even though Leonce is mostly concerned with how his wife’s changes are affecting him, the fact that he comes to the doctor with his concern shows a diligent approach to caring for and supporting his wife.

The reader recognizes Leonce’s caring nature; however, Edna’s father perceives Leonce’s reactions to Edna’s recent behavioral changes as too lenient. When Edna’s father comes into town and they fight over her attendance at her sister’s wedding, “Mr. Pontellier declined to interfere, to interpose either his influence or his authority. He was



following Doctor Mandelet's advice, and letting her do as she liked" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 954). Leonce follows Dr. Mandelet's orders with hope for his wife's betterment, thereby revealing his good moral character. Edna's father, though, does not perceive Leonce's tolerance as caring but rather tells Leonce, "'You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Leonce. [...] Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it'" (954). Although he respects the Colonel, he continues to follow the doctor's advice. For the most part, Leonce allows his wife to make her own decisions without much interference until the issue of Edna's leaving their home surfaces; however,

[w]hen Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife's intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. She had given reasons which he was unwilling to acknowledge as adequate. He hoped she had not acted upon her rash impulse; and he begged her to consider first, foremost, and above all else, what people would say. He was not dreaming of scandal when he uttered this warning; that was a thing which would never have entered his mind to consider in connection with his wife's name or his own. He was simply thinking of his financial integrity. It might get noised about that the Pontelliers had met with reverses, and were forced to conduct their ménage on a humbler scale than heretofore. It might do incalculable mischief to his business prospects. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 976-77)

As an archetypal businessman, Mr. Pontellier worries not about the root of the problem but rather how her moving will affect him professionally and perhaps financially. His

ethos is related to the expectations of his time. Concerned about his reputation and business, he worries about what others will think. However, expressing this concern only pushes Edna farther away. To save face, he made plans to have renovations done on their home, so people would assume Edna's relocation was because of their home's renovation. While this act reveals Mr. Pontellier's tactfulness, it also reveals that he is one to cover up a problem rather than try to resolve it. Spangler argues that although Mr. Pontellier is "concerned and sympathetic" regarding the changes in Edna, "he is also uncomprehending and, at times, more than a little exasperated" (252). He has some qualities of good moral character, but his inability to handle matters with Edna because of his own selfish concerns compromise his good-hearted nature. However, Edna does what she wants regardless of Leonce's disapproval. Leonce ultimately has no recourse in the matter.

Since Leonce is not someone Edna believes she can confide in during her time of rediscovery, for support and friendship, she turns to Mademoiselle Reisz and Madame Ratignolle—two women representative of the two options women can take in life in the time period of the novel. In *The Art of Dying*, Gentry suggests that with varying roles in society, both Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele Ratignolle contribute "to the changes in Edna" through their influence and encouragement (29). And in "Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*," Ramos contends that these women "explicitly inhabit social identities available to them only to actively and creatively transform them. In doing so they implicitly demonstrate the options available to women of this time period, options Edna fails to exercise and sustain" (147). In her friends, Edna

views the two extremes of female identity. Mademoiselle Reisz enjoys her independence and artistry whereas Adele Ratignolle embraces wifehood and motherhood.

As Edna started her life with Leonce, she chose the option Adele Ratignolle represents—that of wife and mother. However, Edna eventually rejects this role, refusing to commit herself fully to it. Although Edna is not a “mother-woman,” mother-women “seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 888). And they were easy to spot, for they “were women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels” (888). Edna’s friend Adele was “the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm,” for she fit this “mother-woman” role entirely (888). She was so esteemed in her community that “[i]f her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture” (888). Chopin establishes a character foil between Edna and Adele. Although Adele grows very fond of Edna, they could not be more different in the manner in which they fill their societal roles as wife and mother. Even Madame Ratignolle possesses “the more feminine and matronly figure” between the two women (Chopin, *The Awakening* 894). Madame Ratignolle serves as a dear friend to Edna, for she “was very fond of Mrs. Pontellier, and often she took her sewing and went over to sit with her in the afternoons” (Chopin *The Awakening* 888). Madame Ratignolle is the epitome of the model wife and mother. She “had been married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one” (889). Although Edna has two children, she does not consider herself comparable to Adele in the likeness of motherhood. And Gentry argues that Adele

does not serve as “a role model for Edna in her struggle” (30). Instead, Gentry suggests that she is the “supreme mother-woman, and in her way, she is mothering her friend Edna as another in her brood. Adele epitomizes the traditional feminine role that Edna is rejecting for herself as too confining, and this rejection is the source of some friction between the two women” (30). Adele mothers Edna during her time of awakening instead of serving as a comparable mother. Edna does not exhibit the mother-woman qualities as Adele does. Looking out for Edna as she notices Robert becoming fond of her, she asks him to “let Mrs. Pontellier alone” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 900). Adele can already tell Edna is distressed, and she does not want Robert to complicate her life further. Even after their summer at Grand Isle, Edna and Madame Ratignolle’s intimacy “had not declined, and they had seen each other with some frequency since their return to the city” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 936). Madame Ratignolle is supportive of Edna’s interest in art, for she tells her that her talent is “immense” (937). In fact, Edna lends Adele most of her drawings. Adele “appreciated the gift far beyond its value and proudly exhibited the pictures to her husband when he came up from the store a little later for his midday dinner” (937-38). Her good moral character is indeed strong because of the support she shows Edna and the esteemed role she serves in the community. Although critics associate Edna’s artistic endeavors with Mademoiselle Reisz, in “The Awakening of Female Artistry,” Deborah Barker points out that “it is Adele to whom Edna brings her sketches, and she is the first person to whom she confides her desire to paint. Adele’s good opinion and faith in her friend’s talent allow Edna ‘to put her heart into her

venture”” (73). Even though Adele embodies the roles of wifehood and motherhood Edna rejects, she still supports Edna’s artistic interests.

Adele Ratignolle’s support continues when Edna gets her own place. However, she does worry about Edna’s wellbeing, for she “complained that Edna had neglected her much of late” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 979). But like a good friend, she wanted to see her “little house and the manner in which it was conducted” (979). Although supportive of Edna’s nontraditional living situation, she does, however, express concern about her behavioral changes. She speaks honestly with Edna about her impulsivity: ““In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life”” (979). Adele does not insist that Edna stay married and have more children. Ramos argues that instead Adele encourages Edna “to thoroughly investigate, live within, accept responsibility for (and possibly modify) a fictitious but practical role—in other words, to cease from being a child by taking the freedoms and responsibilities that come with adulthood seriously” (155). Adele’s advice further establishes her ethos, for it reveals that she is a true friend, wanting what is best for Edna. Even though Adele is the epitome of the mother-women, Ramos posits that she “is able to extend the very boundaries of her social identity,” and “[n]o one seems to dispute the social power she wields in her extended community” (155). Unlike Edna, Adele does not feel confined by her roles as wife and mother. She chose these roles and willingly meets the societal expectations that come with them. Furthermore, Adele does not lose herself to her roles but rather exemplifies them with pride. She also forms a strong social identity apart from her family. Therefore, her role and credibility in the community, along with

her genuine friendship with Edna, affirm her ethos. As she becomes more concerned with Edna's impulsivity, Adele suggests that Mademoiselle Reisz come to stay with her.

Mademoiselle Reisz is representative of the other option women can take in life at the time of the novel—an option Edna explores when she decides to seek independence and dabble in visual art. Mademoiselle Reisz “is an influence on Edna’s awakening,” according to Gentry in *The Art of Dying* (33). Her music awakens Edna’s soul. She played her a song entitled “Solitude,” and “[t]he very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier’s spinal column” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 906). Although “[i]t was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano,” “[p]erhaps it was the first time she was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth” (906). Such abiding truth gave Edna the utmost respect for Reisz. And others were awed by her music, claiming “‘no one could play Chopin like Mademoiselle Reisz’” (907). Mademoiselle Reisz’s acclaim as a musician heightens her respect in the community. Soon to develop a friendship, Mademoiselle Reisz sees something in Edna, insisting that she is “the only one worth playing for” (907). This confirms Edna’s ethos within the artistic community, for Mademoiselle Reisz’s interest in her raises her esteem. In addition to their mutual interest in music, Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna find that they have Robert Lebrun in common. As Edna deals with an array of feelings with regard to Robert and her struggles of fulfilling her roles as wife and mother, she “hunted up Mademoiselle Reisz” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 940). She enjoys listening to her play piano and seems to admire her independence. And she visits her because she knows of the relationship she has with

Robert and wonders if he has written to her while he is in Mexico. But mostly, Mademoiselle Reisz's "music penetrated her whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 964). Mademoiselle Reisz's music inspires Edna to revisit her preferred form of creative expression—painting. She influences Edna's decision to seek independence, as Edna sees that Mademoiselle Reisz is getting on with life well without filling the roles of wife and mother. However, the difference between Reisz and Edna is that Reisz did not abandon roles of which she previously had vital responsibilities as Edna does when she abandons her roles as wife and mother. Reisz simply chose a life of music and independence and remains devoted to this life. In addition to her earning the reader's respect because of her devotion to her art, Mademoiselle Reisz also demonstrates her ethos by offering Edna words of wisdom, for "[s]he says queer things in a bantering way that you don't notice at the time and you find yourself thinking about afterward" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 966). Thus, Edna seeks Reisz's advice as she embarks on the many changes in her life. According to Ramos, Reisz is "different from other representations of meek, self-effacing spinsters of this period," yet "this woman here—an aging, un-married, impolite trouble-maker—is not only tolerated but universally respected" (149). And for this reason, Edna and other characters in *The Awakening*, as well as Chopin's audience, have the utmost respect for Mademoiselle Reisz.

Edna does not receive counsel just from her female friends. Dr. Mandelet also provides advice to her during her evolving time. Dr. Mandelet in *The Awakening* and Monteclin in "Athenaise" provide counsel to one or both partners of the married couples

in the two works. Dr. Mandelet is depicted as credible because of his position as a doctor. He advocates for Edna to return to her traditional marriage, whereas Monteclin urges his sister to leave her husband in “Athenaise.” They both use their established positions of influence to persuade the female protagonist.

Dr. Mandelet attempts to influence Edna’s decisions in *The Awakening*. He serves as the Pontelliers’ trusted doctor. However, he varies from Monteclin in “Athenaise,” for he does not use his influence selfishly. Leonce seeks the wisdom of Dr. Mandelet when Edna begins acting differently toward him and starts abandoning her roles as wife and mother. So “[o]ne morning on his way into town Mr. Pontellier stopped at the house of his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandelet” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 947). Although the doctor “was a semi-retired physician, resting, as the saying is, upon his laurels,” Leonce seeks his guidance because “[h]e bore a reputation for wisdom rather than skill—leaving the active practice of medicine to his assistants and younger contemporaries—and was much sought for in matters of consultation” (947). Immediately, the doctor’s ethos is established as he is known for his wisdom and esteemed reputation. In fact, “[a] few families, united to him by bonds of friendship, he still attended when they required the services of a physician. The Pontelliers were among these” (947). This honor reveals the Pontelliers’ respected reputation in the community as well. When Mr. Pontellier and Dr. Mandelet meet, Mr. Pontellier tells the doctor that Edna ““doesn’t act well. She’s odd, she’s not like herself”” (946). After Mr. Pontellier tries to explain his wife’s changes in behavior, Dr. Mandelet asks the appropriate questions: ““has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women—



super-spiritual superior beings” as well as “[n]othing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?” (948). After Leonce provides the doctor with a “no” to both inquiries, Dr. Mandelet advises that Leonce send her to her sister’s wedding. However, Leonce tells Dr. Mandelet that she opposes the idea, for she “says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth” (948). The doctor reflects on this news and then suggests the following:

‘let your wife alone for a while. Don’t bother her, and don’t let her bother you. Woman, my dear friend, is a very peculiar and delicate organism—a sensitive and highly organized woman, such as I know Mrs. Pontellier to be, is especially peculiar. It would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully with them. And when ordinary fellows like you and me attempt to come with their idiosyncrasies the result is bungling. Most women are moody and whimsical. This is some passing whim of your wife, due to some cause or causes which you and I needn’t try to fathom. But it will pass happily over, especially if you let her alone. Send her around to see me.’ (*The Awakening* 949)

Not only does his advice suggest his reputation in dealing with women, but he also establishes a sense of equality between Mr. Pontellier and himself as he deems them both “ordinary fellows.” The only advice he suggests that Mr. Pontellier oppose is that he directly send Edna to his office to see him, for Mr. Pontellier does not see any reason for that and worries it might alarm Edna. Accordingly, Dr. Mandelet suggests that he come over to the Pontelliers for dinner, so he can assess Edna’s behavior in a more casual manner in her natural environment. Once they make that arrangement, Mr. Pontellier

informs the doctor that he will be traveling for business soon and wonders if he should take Edna along. The doctor advises that he not contradict her. If she wants to go, he suggests that Mr. Pontellier take her along. However, if she does not wish to go, he suggests that he allow her to stay at home (Chopin, *The Awakening* 949). And the doctor assures Mr. Pontellier that “[t]he mood will pass. [...] It may take a month, two, three months—possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience” (949). Leonce feels comforted after being assured by Dr. Mandelet that his wife’s mood will pass. However, the doctor leaves their conversation wishing he had asked if there was another man in the situation. Dr. Mandelet’s intuitive contemplation reveals his wise nature, for Dr. Mandelet is right to ponder about another man because that is certainly one of the reasons for Edna’s changes in behavior.

When the doctor comes to the Pontelliers for dinner, he finds it difficult to keep up with the conversation Edna and her father are engaged in about horse racing. However, “[h]e had certain recollections of racing in what he called ‘the good old times’ when the Lecompte stables flourished, and he drew upon this fund of memories so that he might not be left out and seem wholly devoid of the modern spirit” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 952). So even in an area in which he feels lacking, he demonstrates some knowledge. Mr. Pontellier, on the contrary, expresses his disapproval on the topic, while “the Doctor remained neutral” (952). This is a smart move on the part of the doctor as he does not wish to appear as choosing a side between the Pontelliers. Such tact further establishes his intelligent nature. As they dined, Dr. Mandelet watched Edna observantly.

Although he does not observe anything strange about Mrs. Pontellier at dinner, his wise demeanor is reflected in his apparel and conduct as he leaves their dwelling:

The Doctor doubled his old-fashioned cloak across his breast as he strode home through the darkness. He knew his fellow-creatures better than most men; knew that inner life which so seldom unfolds itself to unanointed eyes. He was sorry he had accepted Pontellier's invitation. He was growing old, and beginning to need rest and an imperturbed spirit. He did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him. 'I hope it isn't Arobin.' He muttered to himself as he walked. 'I hope it isn't Alcee Arobin.' (Chopin, *The Awakening* 953)

As the doctor leaves, he is reminded of his old age and wishes he had not involved himself in the Pontelliers' matter. According to Aristotle's description of an elderly man's character in *Rhetoric*, Dr. Mandelet's "experience makes [him] distrustful and therefore suspicious of evil" (219). Dr. Mandelet suspects that Alcee Arobin, known for his immoral behavior with married women, is involved in the changes Mr. Pontellier has observed in Mrs. Pontellier. And the wise doctor is indeed correct that Alcee cannot be trusted, thus validating his credibility and intelligent nature once again.

Dr. Mandelet provides medical assistance during Madame Ratignolle's pregnancy, further depicting his credible, reliable nature. After the birth, he notices Edna's dismay. The doctor offers her a ride home, but she tells him she would rather walk. However, he could tell she was upset and "directed his carriage to meet him at Mrs. Pontellier's, and he started to walk home with her" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 995). He tries to relieve her hysteria by assuring her that she should not have been there for the

birth (995). He tells her, ““That was no place for you. Adele is full of whims at such times. There were a dozen women she might have had with her, unimpressible women. I felt that it was cruel, cruel. You shouldn’t have gone”” (995). In trying to comfort Edna, he gives her validated reasoning for why she has become frazzled—that it is because of the whimsical nature of Adele. The doctor tries to ease her hysteria at such a time when she is reminded of her dislike and fear of childbirth. After Edna tells the doctor that one should “think of the children,” he responds by saying, “[t]he trouble is [...] that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost”” (996). He justifies Edna’s apprehensive nature about being a mother—that she has been forced into it because of Nature’s conditioning. After her disturbing response, he worries that she is in trouble and offers his counsel:

‘It seems to me, my dear child, you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you. I know I would understand, and I tell you there are not many who would—not many, my dear.’ (Chopin, *The Awakening* 996)

Dr. Mandelet uses his understanding of Edna’s opposition toward married life and children to win her over to confiding in him. He claims others would not understand her situation as he does. And after Edna speaks of her despondency and suffering, Dr. Mandelet urges her to come speak with him, with words of guilt embedded in his speech: ““I will blame you if you don’t come and see me soon. We will talk of things you never

dreamed of talking about before. It will do us both good. I don't want you to blame yourself, whatever comes'" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 996). In this case, the doctor uses persuasion to entreat Edna into coming and seeing him about her changes in attitude. This decision is made with reason rather than morals in mind, for Dr. Mandelet believes such revelation will increase Edna's chances of recovery. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that elderly characters "guide their lives by reasoning more than by moral feeling" (219). Although Edna feels that she can talk with Dr. Mandelet, it is, however, too late for her to improve her current state of unhappiness.

Monteclin uses a similar form of persuasion in "Athenaise" to sway his sister's decision to leave her husband, for he uses the respect he knows Athenaise has for him to his advantage. And because of her youthful type of character, as described by Aristotle in *Rhetoric*, she "trust[s] others readily, because [she] ha[s] not yet often been cheated" (218). She is completely oblivious to her brother's malicious intentions. Monteclin holds a grudge against Cazeau for the reason of his declining Monteclin's request for a loan prior to his marrying Athenaise. Subsequently, Monetclin sets out to convince Athenaise to leave Cazeau as soon as she admits to being discontented in her marriage. His character is infused with hatred toward Cazeau; however, everyone else in the Miche family sees Cazeau in a positive light. Therefore, it is somewhat strange that Monteclin does not share the same impression. Unlike her other family members, Monteclin does not encourage Athenaise to return to her husband. Instead, he stands convinced: "'W'en 'Thenaise said she wasn' goin' to set her foot back in Cazeau's house, she meant it'" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 430). Although Athenaise may be determined, Monteclin remains

persuaded for more than just his understanding of his sister's resolve; he does not want her to return to Cazeau, so he refuses to urge her to fight for her marriage. While this may seem like behavior of a supportive brother, it derives from ulterior motives. In fact, "[t]he turn of affairs was delighting him" (430). He pries about the reason for Athenaise's dissatisfaction: "'Come, now, 'Thenaise, you mus' explain to me all about it, so we can settle on a good cause, an' secu' a separation fo' you. Has he been mistreating an' abusing you, the sacre cochon?'" (430). Monteclin does not wish to help Athenaise resolve her marital problems but rather immediately starts planning for her separation from Cazeau. He does not consider what she wants; instead he uses his own perception of Cazeau to form his opinion about how Athenaise should move forward. This behavior forms Monteclin's selfish, resentful nature. And when Monteclin discovers Cazeau has not been abusing Athenaise or drinking heavily, he "felt disconcerted and greatly disappointed at having obtained evidence that would carry no weight with a court of justice" (431). One would expect her brother to be relieved to discover that she had not been enduring hardships. But instead, he is disappointed because he realizes the marriage would be difficult to end for the mere reason of her being unhappy. Monteclin's twisted perception of the situation further characterizes him as unreliable and indignant. Thus, he does not exhibit the attributes of good moral character.

Although the reader is made aware of Monteclin's selfish intentions, Athenaise remains unaware. Monteclin acts supportive and is perceived that way in the eyes of his sister as he shares words of encouragement: "'I'm mighty durn sorry you got no better groun's 'an w'at you say. But you can count on me to stan' by you w'atever you do. God

knows I don' blame you fo' not wantin' to live with Cazeau'" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 431). Monteclin poses as sympathetic, but really he has a vendetta against Cazeau that he still has not resolved. As Athenaise's husband, Cazeau has given her and her family no reason to wish for his separation from their family. Monteclin simply does not like him because he still has not gotten over Cazeau's refusal to lend him money. Monteclin's unwillingness to let this rejection go forms his character. Athenaise knew that "Monteclin had spoken out" about his hatred of Cazeau (432). And when Cazeau said nothing further when Athenaise was not ready to leave with him, "Monteclin stood by, exasperated, fuming, ready to burst out" (432). Monteclin wants Cazeau to raise his voice and act out of anger, so he is infuriated when Cazeau remains calm in response to Athenaise's rejection. If Cazeau were to make a scene, it could provide more justifiable grounds for Athenaise to leave him rather than her merely not wishing to be married to him any longer. Not only does Monteclin wish to provoke the worst behavior of Cazeau, but he also continues to pressure Athenaise into remaining apart from her husband: "'If you don' wan' to go, you know w'at you got to do, 'Thenaise,' fumed Monteclin. 'You don' set yo' feet back on Cane River, by God, unless you want to,--not w'ile I'm alive'" (432). As he is her brother, Monteclin's words influence Athenaise's decision to stay apart from her husband for the extended time she does. Monteclin seems to use his power of influence to manipulate his sister into staying away from her husband whom he detests. Cazeau remains calm throughout this time of Athenaise's confusion about their marriage; however, he does confront her about her brother's opposition toward him:

‘That brother of yo’s, that Monteclin, is unbearable. [...] He’s developed into a first-class nuisance; an’ you better tell him, Athenaise,—unless you want me to tell him,—to confine his energies after this to matters that concern. I have no use for him or for his interference in what regards you an’ me alone.’ (Chopin, “Athenaise” 434-35)

Cazeau is not one to give into confrontation, but he realizes that Monteclin’s interference has likely influenced Athenaise’s willingness to remain apart from him. Therefore, he asserts himself and points out Monteclin’s unnecessary involvement. Through Cazeau’s observations of Monteclin’s character, the reader becomes aware of Monteclin’s true nature as one to get involved in the matters of others and shrewdly manipulate his vulnerable loved ones. Although the reader and Cazeau are mindful of Monteclin’s sly nature, Athenaise remains dubious that her brother would purposely obstruct her marriage. And Cazeau unfortunately fails to convince his wife of acknowledging her brother’s manipulative tactics. Everyone else but Monteclin sees Cazeau in a positive light; however, Athenaise still relies on her brother’s advice and support:

[i]t seemed now to Athenaise that Monteclin was the only friend left to her in the world. [...] He alone had always been with his sympathy and his support. Her only hope for rescue from her hateful surroundings lay in Monteclin. Of herself she felt powerless to plan, to act, even to conceive a way out of this pitfall into which the whole world seemed to have conspired to thrust her. (Chopin, “Athenaise” 436)



While Monteclin has the utmost regard in his sister's eyes, he is aware of her isolation and uses it to his advantage, as he knows he is the only one she trusts during this challenging, shifting time in her life. And as Athenaise saw her brother upon meeting him during this trying time, "[h]e seemed to her, as he drew near, the embodiment of kindness, of bravery, of chivalry, even of wisdom; for she had never known Monteclin at a loss to extricate himself from a disagreeable situation" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 437). Although he embodies good moral character in her eyes, she remains oblivious that he comes to her rescue because of his own selfish, resentful intentions. She even notices that Monteclin was prone to involve himself in disputes but does not yet realize that his involvement is for his own enjoyment. She does realize, however, that she "could not tell Monteclin anything to increase the disrespect which he already entertained for his brother-in-law; and it was then he unfolded to her a plan which he had conceived and worked out for her deliverance from this galling matrimonial yoke" (437). At this point in the story, Athenaise begins to recognize her brother's odious nature. Although she trusts Monteclin, her realization of his abhorrent intentions leads to her judgment that "[i]t was not a plan which met with instant favor, which she was at once ready to accept, for it involved secrecy and dissimulation, hateful alternatives, both of them" (437-38). However, Athenaise's respect for her brother remains intact as "she was filled with admiration for Monteclin's resources and wonderful talent for contrivance. She accepted the plan; not with the immediate determination to act upon it, rather with intention to sleep and to dream upon it" (438). After considering his plan for three days, she wrote to him "that she had abandoned herself to his counsel," for she did not wish "to live on with

a soul full of bitterness and revolt” (438). She finally realizes the bitterness in her brother’s intentions, subsequently deciding to make her marital decisions on her own.

Regardless of Athenaise’s rejection of her brother’s plan and realization of his indignant nature, when Athenaise’s family cannot find her, they “turned instinctively to Monteclin, and almost literally fell upon him for an explanation” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 439). The family’s reliance on Monteclin affirms his ethos. Although “[t]here was much mystification in his answers, and a plain desire to mislead in his assurances of ignorance and innocence,” the fact that his family turns to him for support and answers shows that perhaps he is reliable (439). But also, the fact that he does not give away Athenaise’s location reveals his loyalty to her. Monteclin is happy for his sister even though she returns to her husband. Although “[h]e more than suspected the cause of her coming,” “he had no fault to find since she came of her own choice” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 454). He suspected she was pregnant but respected her decision to return to Cazeau since it was, in fact, her decision to make. Because his manipulation subsides as the story concludes, he finally exhibits the attributes of a supportive character, as he now appears to be more of a supportive brother than one with selfish, ulterior motives as he initially displayed.

The main characters’ nature greatly affects not only the characterization in “Athenaise” and *The Awakening* but also plot and thematic development. And Chopin’s depiction of ethos affected her readers and standing in the literary community. The ethical appeal can clearly be applied to “Athenaise” and *The Awakening*.

CHAPTER III  
THE PROMINENCE OF PATHOS IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND  
"ATHENAISE"

Speakers and writers often build the persuasiveness of their texts through the application of the Aristotelian appeal to pathos. In Book I of his treatise *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that persuasion not only develops through the speaker or writer, but it can also develop through the audience or reader:

[P]ersuasion may come through the hearers, when the speech stirs their emotions. Our judgments when we are pleased and friendly are not the same as when we are pained and hostile. It is towards producing these effects, as we maintain, that present-day writers on rhetoric direct the whole of their efforts. (182)

This passage from Aristotle demonstrates the value of pathos and its power to persuade. Audiences, whether of hearers or readers, are often persuaded when their emotions are evoked. Speakers and writers gain their audience's attention when they evoke pity or fear—the two most commonly evoked emotions used to persuade. Preceding Aristotle, Plato acknowledges the importance of pathos in *Gorgias*. According to Bizzell and Herzberg in *The Rhetorical Tradition*, "Plato supplements the logical appeal of his arguments with the [...] pathological appeal of [Socrates'] well-known martyrdom" (29-30). Socrates experienced martyrdom because he died for what he believed in and, in effect, gained the sympathy of his followers. Cicero supports Plato and Aristotle's argument

regarding pathos as he claims in Book II of *De Oratore* that “the art of speaking relies wholly upon three things”—one of which is “the rousing of [the hearers’] feelings to whatever impulse [the speaker’s] case may require” (324). Cicero’s support is clear as he suggests that the speaker must feel the emotions he wishes to evoke in his audience, for he claims “it is impossible for the listener to feel indignation, hatred, or ill-will, to be terrified of anything, or reduced to tears of compassion, unless all those emotions, which the advocate would inspire in the arbitrator, are visibly stamped or rather branded on the advocate himself” (330). In relation to evoking the audience’s emotions, Cicero comments specifically on the orator’s incorporation of compassion; for “compassion is awakened if the hearer can be brought to apply to his own adversities, whether endured or only apprehended, the lamentations uttered over someone else, or if, in his contemplation of another’s case, he many a time goes back to his own experiences” (334). Of the three rhetorical appeals, pathos requires the most interaction from the audience, as the effectiveness of the speaker or writer’s persuasion is dependent on the audience’s emotional reaction. Not only did other classical rhetoricians support Aristotle’s definition of pathos, but rhetoricians through centuries also recognized the significance and application of the appeal to pathos. According to Bizzell and Herzberg, seventeenth-century French rhetorician, Rene Rapin, for example, notes that “classical authors excelled not only in oratory” but also in other genres as “the other genres can be judged [...] on the effectiveness of their appeals to logos, pathos, and ethos” (805). Rapin defines pathos as an appeal “to the faculties of affection and will” (Bizzell and Herzberg 805). Later in the eighteenth century, George Campbell endorses the use of pathos

because of its ability to “move[] the passions” (Bizzell and Herzberg 808). For centuries, rhetoricians used or advocated the use of pathos to persuade audiences.

Contemporary scholars of rhetoric continue the emphasis on the appeal to pathos articulated by Aristotle. According to James Herrick in *The History and Theory of Rhetoric: An Introduction*, “[t]hough he was critical of speakers who manipulated the emotions of their audiences, Aristotle nevertheless thought a study of human emotions, or *pathos*, to be essential to a systematic treatment of rhetoric” (88). Aristotle recognized the necessity of pathos with regard to persuasion but did not support the Machiavellian intentions with which some speakers used the appeal. Aristotle defines pathos as ““putting the audience in the right frame of mind”” (Aristotle qtd. in Herrick 88). Once the audiences experience the intended frame of mind speakers desire for them to experience, they can then be persuaded effectively. Herrick further argues that Aristotle’s treatment of pathos “is not simply a ‘how to’ of arousing different emotions. It is, rather, a detailed psychology of emotion intended to help the student understand human emotional response toward the goal of adjusting an audience’s emotional state to fit the nature and seriousness of the particular issue being argued” (89). Accordingly, speakers and writers evoke the emotions of their audiences with persuasive intention in mind in order to raise awareness about an issue. In *Aristotle on Emotion*, W.W. Fortenbaugh not only comments on Aristotle’s definition and application of pathos but also defends the validity of pathos as a form of argumentation. He contends that Aristotle’s “treatment of emotions [...] brought a deductive method to rhetorical study and so helped meet the demand for a philosophical rhetoric”; and it was “analysis of emotion [that] made clear

the relationship of emotion to reasoned argumentation” (16, 17). Aristotle’s treatment of emotions reveals a blend of pathos and logos, for the appeals are not always used as entirely separate forms of rhetoric. In fact, Fortenbaugh elucidates that

[b]y construing thought or belief as the efficient cause of emotion, Aristotle showed that emotional response is intelligent behaviour open to reasoned persuasion. When men are angered, they are not victims of some totally irrational force. Rather they are responding in accordance with the thought of unjust insult. Their belief may be erroneous and their anger unreasonable, but their behaviour is intelligent and cognitive in the sense that it is grounded upon a belief which may be criticized and even altered by argumentation. (17)

Aristotle identified emotion as a worthy appeal—one that evokes intelligent behavior from the audience. He draws a connection, too, between pathos and logos as an evocation of emotion often results in reasoned persuasion. According to Fortenbaugh, Aristotle’s defense of pathos ensued a positive reception of the appeal:

Viewed as an affliction divorced from cognition, emotion was naturally opposed to reason and conceived of as something hostile to thoughtful judgment. It was Aristotle’s contribution to offer a very different view of emotion, so that emotional appeal would no longer be viewed as an extra-rational enchantment. Once Aristotle focused on the cognitive side of emotional response and made clear that an emotion can be altered by argument because beliefs can be altered in this way, it was possible to adopt a positive attitude towards emotional appeal. (18)

Clearly Aristotle changed how people perceived the emotional appeal; after he validated its role in persuasion—particularly its connection to reason—its negative connotation diminished.

Of the three rhetorical appeals, pathos requires the most audience interaction; for the audiences' ability to be persuaded is determined by their emotional reaction to the text. Hence reader-response and pathos are closely connected. In "Reader-Response and the Pathos Principle," Nan Johnson draws a parallel between reader response and pathos as she suggests that "[t]raditional rhetorical theory has assumed that the comprehension of oral and written language is influenced [...] by the frame of mind of the reader/hearer who interprets what is heard or read in terms of subjective factors such as emotional frame of mind, position, age, etc." (152). Johnson argues that Aristotle's principle of pathos is "parallel to the basic assumption of reader-response criticism: the premise that the act of understanding of the meaning of textual features is affected by the predisposition of the reading mind" (152-53). The reader's likelihood of understanding the text is increased when he or she can make an emotional connection with it. Johnson further explains that "literary works must be seen as stimuli that activate elements of the reader's personal experience" (153). By including relatable situations in their texts, writers have the ability to evoke their audience's emotions. And when the writer personalizes the text for the reader, the writer can then persuade the reader effectively. Critics have found, however, that there is more than just one way to connect pathos and reading. Johnson compares the views of reader-response critics on emotion and the reading experience:

Bleich regards emotional life and social norms as the major influences on the reading experience; Holland insists that readers seek out identity themes in what they read; Fish argues that interpretation is constrained by the bias of interpretative context; and Rosenblatt describes the development of reading response as influenced by the reader's 'inner responses' of past experience and knowledge of reality. (155)

Although the views of reader-response critics vary in how writers evoke the emotions of the reader, emotions are evoked nonetheless and with reasonable persuasive intention. Johnson argues that "[t]raditional rhetorical theory assumes that response to language is predisposed by the particular structure of the comprehending mind, the emotional, psychological, and sociological dimensions of personality and character, and by the listener/reader's identification with the interests foregrounded in the discourse" (155). Therefore, each reader can have a different emotional reaction to the text depending on how he or she identifies with the material. Furthermore, Johnson posits "[t]hat subjective interpretation is a basis of comprehension and a key to persuasion is so explicit a principle in classical rhetoric that its authority is not seen by rhetoricians like Aristotle and Cicero to be an issue to argue for but to argue from" (155-56). It has long been understood that a text can have multiple interpretations; and with subjective interpretations come varying emotional reactions to the text the writer should consider. Hence according to Johnson, Aristotle considers pathos "to be an appeal that relies on the speaker's ability to anticipate characteristic human response and provide certain stimuli to play upon the subjective factors of emotion and situation" (156). In effect, the writer



must consider the varying emotions readers experience when planning to persuade his or her audience. Johnson further contends that “[o]bserving that a listener tends to be persuaded by, and understand issues in terms of, ‘anything that touches himself,’ Aristotle insists that audiences are influenced by age, fortune, emotions, and moral qualities, and various types of human character” (156). Implementing one or more of these factors in a text often results in an evocation of the reader’s emotions and subsequent persuasion.

Speakers and writers often use pathos because they realize the great impact it can have on their audience. In “‘Pathos’ in the ‘Poetics’ of Aristotle,” B.R. Rees claims that pathos “is an action which causes destruction or pain,” and “[i]t arouses pity and fear” (4). Rees also asserts that “pathos is the focal action or event of every plot, whether simple or complex” (5). Writers use pathos in their plot development, as the audience’s reaction is essential to an effective plot. The audience often relates or at least sympathizes with the struggle of the protagonist, demonstrating such relation or sympathy through their emotional reactions. According to Rees, Aristotle makes a “careful distinction between the use of ‘spectacle’ and the use of plot to arouse pity and fear, so that, without actually seeing the incidents, one is moved to pity and fear by simply hearing of them” (10). The same spectacle applies to reading about the incidents. By describing events through the use of vivid imagery, the writer can evoke pity and fear in his or her audience.

Not only does pathos play a significant role in developing plot but also in maintaining the quality of literature; for the quality of literature is often determined by its

ability to persuade through the evocation of emotion. In Leon Golden's article "Catharsis," he contends that "serious literature is hardly respectable unless it performs some 'catharsis'" (51). Literature has the greatest impact on readers, too, when they have a cathartic experience provoked by the text. Golden explains that catharsis "has been taken to mean either the 'purgation' of the emotions of pity and fear from the consciousness of the audience that witnesses the tragedy or as the 'purification' in a moral or ethical sense of these emotions" (51). Such "pitiful and fearful events [...] are] a universal condition of existence"; therefore, the audience can relate (58). The art, or text, illuminates human experience. The writer knowingly uses emotions with the persuasive intention of evoking the emotions of his or her audience.

Although Golden and Johnson argue that the pathetic appeal can be used in writing as well as oratory, writers should consider the benefits and obstacles they may likely encounter as they try to appeal to an audience's emotions through the written word. With regard to pathetic appeals, in "The Differences between Speech and Writing: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos," Robert Connors explains that "the speaker can relate to the audience with a fairly certain knowledge of its response, while the writer can never know for sure what his or her readers are like or what they next expect" (286). Because of this hindrance, writers must use their resources to ensure an emotional reaction from their readers. While speech can rely on the environment, Connors suggests that "the writing must provide its own context" (286). Writers must work strategically to build an emotional bond with their audience through the text exclusively because they are unable to bond in person as a speaker can through the use of more than just the text but also

mannerisms and other forms of nonverbal communication that can be communicated through the act of speaking. Because of the potential unacquaintedness of the writer's audience, Connors argues that writers tend to address "what Chaim Perelman calls the universal audience, which encompasses all reasonable and competent men and women" (286-87). Because the writer cannot look out at the faces of his or her audience and adjust the discourse accordingly, the writer "must be more on guard intellectually than the speaker and must anticipate the expectations of readers and meet them; otherwise, the discourse will lose all pathetic appeal, and the reader will put it down with disgust or impatience" (287). Therefore, writers must put themselves in the reader's position and consider the most effective ways to evoke emotionally their wide range of readership. Writers often appeal to pathos by depicting characters with which their readers empathize.

In *The Awakening* and "Athenaise," for example, Kate Chopin appeals to the emotions of her readers effectively by drawing them in to sympathize with and relate emotionally to her female protagonists as well as other major characters. Chopin evokes a wide array of emotions in her readers. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle recognizes the complexity and multiplicity of human emotions. He defines emotions as "[t]hose feelings that so change men as to affect their judgments, and that are also attended by pain or pleasure. Such are anger, pity, fear and the like, with their opposites" (214). Writers, including Chopin, have their characters experience such feelings, a pattern which subsequently affects their readers' judgments and, in effect, persuades them. Aristotle explains that the

emotions must be arranged under three heads, initially discussing anger. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle advises that the speaker/writer

must discover (1) what the state of mind of angry people is, (2) who the people are with whom they usually get angry, and (3) on what grounds they get angry with them. It is not enough to know one or even two of these points; unless we know all three, we shall be unable to arouse anger in any one. (214)

Chopin seems cognizant of all three emotional elements associated with anger as she depicts the societal limitations of women during the time period in which she wrote and set her works. As characters, such as Edna in *The Awakening* and Athenaise in “Athenaise,” are angered by the limitations of their society, Chopin intends for her audience to become angered as well. And Chopin’s intention for using pathos was indeed successful. For example, in *Kate Chopin*, Emily Toth references the emotional reaction Kentucky poet, Madison Cawein, had in her reading of Chopin’s *The Awakening*:

‘She made me feel everything she speaks of in this fine novel. [...] It is a beautiful book as I have said before, and a sorrowful one. But the most lovely things are those, I think, that are founded on pathos, and suggest the mortal human that appeals to us only through its sweet sorrow, that is akin to nothing we on earth that we know.’ (Cawein qtd in Toth, *Kate Chopin* 356)

Cawein observes Chopin’s effective use of pathos as she shares her emotional reaction to the “sorrowful” novel. By Cawein’s and other readers’ recognizing the tragedy of Edna’s struggle to attain selfhood, Chopin’s persuasive intention is achieved. Toth references another poet, R.E. Lee Gibson, who agrees that Chopin was a fine writer in her ability to

stir human emotions: “I have no patience with any one who would fail to recognize the great power and pathos of the splendid story which you have told in *The Awakening*” (Gibson qtd. in Toth, *Kate Chopin* 356). Gibson not only recognizes Chopin’s powerful use of pathos in *The Awakening* but also believes all other readers should acknowledge Chopin’s stirring of human emotions is so powerful, it cannot be ignored.

A common emotional reaction authors often intend for their audiences to experience is sympathy for the main character. In her chapter of *The Art of Dying* entitled “Kate Chopin’s Rebel with a Cause,” Deborah Gentry asserts that “Chopin creates a sympathetic character in Edna Pontellier and that the novel involves us in Edna’s struggle—a struggle to find personal freedom and fulfillment in a social structure that demands female submission” (22). By using pathos, Chopin emotionally engages the reader to experience Edna’s struggle alongside her. Although Gentry suggests that “this struggle is doomed,” it “should not come as a surprise to the reader, since from the first chapter Chopin consistently foreshadows Edna’s inevitable failure and death” (22-23). The reader follows Edna on her journey regardless of its foreseeable end. Perhaps it was Chopin’s intention to have the reader struggle alongside and empathize with Edna in order to understand better the female’s struggle to achieve selfhood in a patriarchal society that did not encourage female fulfillment outside of wifehood and motherhood. Gentry clarifies that Edna’s quest is not a sexual one but rather one in “need of the individual ego to assert itself without restraint” (23). On her journey, Edna aspires to achieve selfhood or individualized identity. However, Edna sometimes struggles to express her emotions on this journey. In fact, Gentry argues that “Chopin portrays Edna

as more emotionally repressed and naïve than sexually oppressed” (28). Therefore, the reader can more easily sympathize with Edna’s quest if he or she understands the true purpose of it. And with understanding the quest, the reader can observe that, according to Gentry, “Chopin’s fatalistic view in the novel echoes that of the Greek tragedians, where the more the protagonist struggles to avert his fate, the more surely he seals it” (28). Edna cannot expect to be rewarded in her quest of self-discovery; hence, the reader has reason to sympathize with her foreseeable failure.

Throughout *The Awakening*, Chopin uses pathos as she describes Edna’s impulsivity and fluctuations in mood. At the start of the novel, Edna has an emotional calling to the sea that foreshadows her suicide: “It moved her to dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 893). Although Edna had not exhibited any suicidal tendencies, her emotional reaction of agony when around the sea indicates her struggle and thus gives the reader reason to pity her character. Chopin’s description of the sea invites the reader to experience Edna’s connection to it:

[T]he 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. The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.  
(*The Awakening* 893)

Chopin’s use of sensory language evokes the emotions of the audience, connecting them to Edna’s emotional calling to the sea.

Edna's emotion-driven impulsiveness began as a child when she would run away from her prayers. Her prayers were "read in the spirit of gloom by [her] father that chills [her] yet to think of" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 896). Edna found sadness and fear in prayer rather than hope. However, she "was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question" (*The Awakening* 896). But such feelings resonate with Edna in adulthood. She is reminded of her emotions' influencing her decisions when "this summer [she was] walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (*The Awakening* 897). She makes decisions without a distinctive purpose, instead allowing her emotions to guide her. And her impulsivity carries over to her role as a mother as well, for "[s]he was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them" (*The Awakening* 899). Once she is away from them, however, she starts to miss them: "How glad she was to see the children! She wept for very pleasure when she felt their little arms clasping her; their hard, ruddy cheeks pressed against her own glowing cheeks. She looked into their faces with hungry eyes that could not be satisfied with looking" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 978). Her reactions to her children are often based on her mood of the moment. But because her moods fluctuate so frequently, neither her children nor the reader can anticipate the emotion she will express toward her children. Such uncertainty can also result in the reader's sympathy for the Pontellier children as their mother is not consistent in her care and love for them.

Using the appeal to pathos, Chopin reveals Edna's fluctuation in moods and impulsive nature in her romantic relationships as well. After Edna discovers her desire for Robert, her impulsivity increases: "She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 913). Her emotions guide her decisions with Robert; she abandons her responsibilities as wife and mother. Some readers may sympathize with Edna as she struggles with lost direction whereas others may fear what will come of such irresponsibility. Along with her impulsivity, Edna's fear of religion continues into adulthood as "[a] feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service" she attended with Robert (*The Awakening* 916). In her time of despondency, Robert takes care of her and allows her to sleep. When she awakens, she realizes that she and Robert had spent an entire day together. Developing an emotional connection with Robert, "[s]he regretted that he had gone. It was so much more natural to have him stay, when he was not absolutely required to leave her" (*The Awakening* 921). Because he cared for her during a time of emotional distress, she feels emotionally attached to him and becomes saddened by his departure. Edna feels that Robert's voice "was musical and true. The voice, the notes, the whole refrain haunted her memory" (*The Awakening* 922). Although she adores Robert, perhaps his voice haunts her memory because she knows she cannot have him as a married woman because of social restrictions. The reader sympathizes with Edna as she experiences emotional distress when she learns that Robert is leaving for Mexico without giving any notice. Edna tells Madame Ratignolle, "I hate shock and surprises. The idea of Robert starting off in such



a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were a matter of life and death! Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me” (*The Awakening* 925). With Adele, Edna focuses on the unpredictability of the situation more than Robert’s forthcoming absence; however, with Robert, Edna is more open with her emotions, thus opening herself up to the reader as well. As they say their goodbyes, Edna expresses her feelings about his departure: “I’ve grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your actions seem unfriendly, even unkind. You don’t even offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter” (*The Awakening* 926). Edna addresses Robert’s abrupt change, wondering why he is leaving so suddenly. The reader sympathizes with Edna as it is obvious that she is heartbroken by his sudden plans for departure. As Robert prepares to leave, “Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively, striving to hold back and to hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another, the emotion which was troubling—tearing—her. Her eyes were brimming with tears” (*The Awakening* 926-27). Although Edna had previously expressed her feelings to Robert, Robert’s parting words lack explanation. Therefore, Edna’s mood changes as she hides her emotions and tears from him because she feels like the adoration between them is one-sided. In fact,

[f]or the first time she recognized anew 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. [...] The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held,

that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 927)

Through Chopin's use of pathos, the reader sympathizes with Edna when she feels emotionally tormented by Robert's intended departure and resistance to return her love.

Unaware of Edna's infatuation with Robert, Mr. Pontellier does, however, observe her fluctuation of moods. Because he is inept to assess or solve the problem, he confers with their family doctor about the matter. When Leonce consults Dr. Mandelet about Edna's changes in behavior, initially Dr. Mandelet generalizes the emotions of women, claiming "[m]ost women are moody and whimsical" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 949). He assumes that Edna is merely exhibiting common behaviors many women experience. However, when he dines with the Pontelliers, he observes "no trace of that morbid condition which her husband had reported to him. She was excited and in a manner radiant" (952). Although Dr. Mandelet does not recognize Edna's demeanor as problematic, his observation does, however, prove that her moods are indeed fluctuating. In fact, Edna's emotions even fluctuate with the weather:

When the weather was dark and cloudy Edna could not work. She needed the sun to mellow and temper her mood to the sticking point. [...] On rainy or melancholy days Edna went out and sought the society of the friends she had made at Grand Isle. Or else she stayed indoors and nursed a mood with which she was becoming too familiar for her own comfort and peace of mind. It was not despair; but it seemed to her as if life were passing by, leaving its promise broken and unfulfilled. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 956)

Regardless of the weather, Edna seems dissatisfied with her life. The weather only intensifies her fluctuation of moods.

As Edna begins to experience different awakenings, she realizes the comfort she gets from solitude. In fact, after Leonce left for New York, “she breathed a big, genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 955). Regardless of one’s gender, most readers can likely relate to the relieving feeling of having time to one’s self. As the novel progresses, it becomes clear that Edna prefers solitude over company because as she sits at her dinner party among friends, “she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 972). Even though it was her idea to invite everyone to her home, she grows bored of their company and hopeless because of her feelings of boredom. Because of her comfort found in solitude as well as her impulsive nature, Edna decides to get her own place on a whim. Leonce responds accordingly, for “remembering Edna’s whimsical turn of mind of late, and foreseeing that she had immediately acted upon her impetuous determination, he grasped the situation with his usual promptness and handled it with his well-known business tack and cleverness” (*The Awakening* 977). Leonce tries to balance Edna’s irrationality with his calm demeanor. Hence Chopin establishes a contrast between their characters; Edna makes decisions haphazardly and driven by emotion whereas Leonce uses reason and logic in his reactions to his wife’s decisions.

Throughout *The Awakening*, few decisions made by Edna are formed with reason but rather as an emotional reaction that stems from her inability to achieve selfhood in a patriarchal society. According to George Spangler in his article “Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent,” Edna is driven by her emotions or her “passional self, a self whose needs are not to be denied by social custom, conventional morality, or domestic obligations” (251). Whether it be her passion for art, Robert, or solitude, her passions drive her decisions. Edna is not fully aware, though, of the impact her emotions have had on her, thereby experiencing “a discontent which is apt to bring her to tears for no apparent reason” (251). In being driven by her emotions, Edna has no control of them. For example, even though at first she was looking forward to her dinner party with close friends, she finds herself bored and hopeless with no control over such feelings of dissatisfaction. In support of Chopin’s use of pathos, Spangler suggests that the reader experiences Edna’s emotional drive as

there is a disturbing, even alienating ruthlessness about Edna, but a ruthlessness which eludes moral categories because it is no more and no less than the reflection of her passional nature’s drive for fulfillment. This is the heart and the great triumph of Mrs. Chopin’s characterization—that the relentless force that compels Edna is felt—and felt insistently—rather than analyzed, explained and, least of all, condemned. (251)

Edna feels an incessant drive to be fulfilled and is disappointed when people from whom or activities from which she was hoping to receive fulfillment do not meet her satisfaction. She gets temporary joy from painting, from Robert, from her

companionships with Adele and Mademoiselle Reisz; however, nothing and no one can fill the void Edna experiences. In feeling, to some extent, what Edna feels, the reader can sympathize with her dissatisfaction caused by her inability to achieve an individualized identity.

Not only does the reader sympathize with Mrs. Pontellier but also Mr. Pontellier as he struggles to appease his wife who is often dissatisfied in their marriage and with her husband's interests. The reader pities Mr. Pontellier because "his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 885). It was expected of wives to express interest in their husbands' endeavors, but Edna does not meet this societal expectation. And her resistance bothers Mr. Pontellier. However, the reader continues to sympathize with Edna, too, in her relationship with Leonce because of the emotional distress she experiences from her arguments with her husband, particularly after Mr. Pontellier reproaches her for her inattention to their children as "[s]he began to cry a little, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her peignoir" (*The Awakening* 886). Some time passes, and "[t]he tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier's eyes that the damp sleeve of her peignoir no longer served to dry them" (*The Awakening* 886). The reader sympathizes with Mrs. Pontellier not because Mr. Pontellier was not justified in his criticizing of Mrs. Pontellier for her negligence but rather because her emotional reaction was unexpected, even to her:

She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never to have weighed

much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood. An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with vague anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day. It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 886)

Once again, Edna's fluctuation of moods causes the reader to pity her and her husband too; even though he was kind and devoted to her, she felt oppressed and anguished in her marital relationship with him. And the society ladies of New Orleans make matters worse for Edna as they "all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 887). Even though she feels discontent in her marriage, because Mr. Pontellier is perceived as an ideal husband, she is pressured to ignore her feelings of dissatisfaction and oppression. The reader sympathizes with Edna's predicament.

Although the reader is more familiar with Edna's emotions than any other character, Chopin shares the feelings of Mr. Pontellier as well to gain the sympathy of the reader. Mr. Pontellier reacts emotionally to his wife's inattention to her "duty toward their children," for "[i]t was something which he felt rather than perceived, and he never voiced the feeling without subsequent regret and ample atonement" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 887). He can tell that his wife does not care for their children consistently as most mothers do, a behavior which upsets him. But he is in a troublesome situation that remains problematic whether he addresses the issue or not. Her feelings toward the

children lack consistency, and bringing it up only creates tension between Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier. Although Leonce is bothered by Edna's negligence toward their children, Edna does not have to worry about Leonce's inquiring much about her affairs outside of their family unit because "the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 891). Not only is jealousy absent from their marriage but also passion is. Before meeting Leonce, Edna "was overtaken by what was supposed to be the climax of her fate. It was when the face and figure of a great tragedian began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses. [...] The hopelessness of it colored it with the lofty tones of a great passion" (*The Awakening* 898). In the "midst of her secret great passion" for another man, she met Leonce and married him only to spite her family (*The Awakening* 898). However, Leonce fell in love with her. Although "[s]he grew fond of her husband," Edna "realiz[ed] with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution" (*The Awakening* 898). Passion was absent for Edna from their marriage from the start, thus resulting in an emotional disconnect between them. In this case, the reader sympathizes with both characters because their marriage lacks neutral desire.

With passion nonexistent, Edna begins to recognize the monotony of her marriage. She feels that she has been going "through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 912). Because she does not attain satisfaction from her marriage, she finds it elsewhere. And with her developing feelings for Robert, "her will [to stand up to her husband] had blazed up, stubborn and resistant"

(*The Awakening* 912). With Robert's involvement in her life, she no longer feels dependent on her husband. However, because of her distress over Robert's departure for Mexico, tension with Mr. Pontellier increases. He questions her about her recent absence from her Tuesday reception day (Chopin, *The Awakening* 931). And he makes a fuss about their dinner as well (*The Awakening* 933). As a result, Edna reacts emotionally by flinging her wedding ring off and stomping it into the carpet (*The Awakening* 934). Furthermore, Edna becomes disconnected from her life: "She felt no interest in anything about her. The street, the children, the fruit vender, the flowers growing there under her eyes, were all part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic" (*The Awakening* 935). Robert seemed to be her only chance at happiness; but because he leaves her, she seems to feel that everyone else is against her. Edna visits the Ratignolles, though, with hope of preserving her marriage. However, "Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui" (*The Awakening* 938). Seeing the Ratignolles in their happy marriage instead affirmed to Edna that she did not want such a traditional life. Not only did she experience boredom in observing their relationship, but she also "was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle,--a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium" (*The Awakening* 938). Edna



pities Adele as she is unable to understand how Adele experiences contentment in her roles as wife and mother.

Once Edna gains the affirmation that such roles are not a suitable fit for her, the reader sympathizes with Leonce as he experiences shock when Edna completely abandons her duties as a wife (Chopin, *The Awakening* 939). Some readers might support Edna, for she wished “never to take another step backward” (*The Awakening* 939). However, other readers might sympathize with Leonce as he becomes angered by Edna’s recent changes and abandonment of her duties (*The Awakening* 939). Regardless of his anger, Leonce leaves her alone as she requested. Even though Leonce allows Edna the freedom to achieve selfhood, her moods continue to fluctuate:

There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. [...] There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,--when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 940)

The reader sympathizes with Edna’s inability to maintain happiness as well as Leonce’s inability to handle Edna’s fluctuating behavior. Leonce shares with Dr. Mandelet the emotional turmoil and discomfort he has endured with Edna:

‘Her whole attitude—toward me and everybody and everything—has changed. You know I have a quick temper, but I don’t want to quarrel or be rude to a

woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me.' (Chopin, *The Awakening* 948)

As Leonce shares his struggle with Dr. Mandelet, both the physician and reader sympathize with his discomfort. Leonce is severely limited as to how he can proceed with the matter. After the doctor suggests that Leonce encourage Edna to attend her sister's wedding, her response evokes the emotions of the reader to sympathize with Leonce. Edna tells him that "a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 948-49). Although Leonce does not always express his emotions outwardly, the reader pities him for having to hear such harsh words from his wife. In "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent," Spangler explains Chopin's use of pathos in evoking the emotion of pity for Leonce. Spangler argues that Leonce "is immediately sensitive to the change taking place in his wife; and his concern is sympathetic enough to allow for his taking the advice of their old family doctor to ignore Edna's whims for a time in the hope that her curious mood will pass" (252). Although fearful of expressing such concern to Edna directly, Leonce seeks guidance from one he considers an expert. However, even after his consultation with Dr. Mandelet, Spangler suggests that "he never really understands what has happened to his domestic life. Instead he must simply confront more and more evidence that he and his children are no longer of consequence to his wife; and his bafflement [...] generates a pathos which few readers could ignore and which further

enriches the novel” (Spangler 252). The reader sympathizes with his situation because it becomes clear that Edna has no intention of remaining a part of their family.

Because of Edna’s discontented feelings in her marriage, she seeks the attention of Alcee Arobin who later awakens her sexually. Although Alcee Arobin has “a perpetual smile in his eyes, which seldom failed to awaken a corresponding cheerfulness in any one who looked into them and listened to his good-humored voice,” he is “not overburdened with depth of thought or feeling” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 956-57). Edna and others do not find him insightful; however, Edna seems to use him in an attempt to cure her boredom and despondency. Although Edna does not connect with Alcee emotionally, he, however, “admired Edna extravagantly” and “caught the contagion of excitement which drew him to Edna like a magnet” (*The Awakening* 957). He has an emotional connection to Edna that is perhaps different from the connections he had with previous married women. And at first, Edna seems interested in Alcee, too, for she “felt extremely restless and excited. [...] She wanted something to happen—something, anything; she did not know what. She regretted that she had not made Arobin stay a half hour to talk over the horses with her” (*The Awakening* 958). Her excited feelings and anticipation of what will come from their affair are likely a result of her boredom and despondency in her marriage. She is hoping that Alcee will stir passions in her that Leonce never could, and he does sexually but not emotionally. Alcee begins to develop feelings for Edna, but Edna does not reciprocate. After his persistence annoys her, he tells her, “‘Your manner has misled me, Mrs. Pontellier,’ he said finally. ‘My own emotions have done that. I couldn’t help it’” (*The Awakening* 960). He claims to have fallen for her, which he

explains has resulted in his annoying and unwanted persistence. Edna, too, lets her passion get the best of her with Alcee, for “[s]he felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour” (*The Awakening* 960). However, he “was absolutely nothing to her” (960). He awakens her sexually but does not provide the romance she desires. Nonetheless, he is willing to endure Edna’s fluctuation in moods:

He was ready at all times to submit to her moods, which were as often kind as they were cold. [...] They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face: in a way that pleased her at last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 961)

Alcee stirs Edna’s sexual passions. However, the love absent from their affair causes an emotional reaction in Edna. After their first sexual encounter, “Edna cried a little that night after Arobin left her. It was only one phase of the multitudinous emotions which had assailed her” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 967). In fact, Edna experiences “a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips” (*The Awakening* 967). She regrets that her affair with Alcee is formed only by lust. Edna’s shame and regret appeal to her audience on a moral level.

Regardless of the love absent from their affair, Alcee remains in Edna’s life for as long as she will tolerate him. After her dinner party, Edna becomes exhausted as she was

tired, “chilled, and miserable. [She] feels as if [she] had been wound up to a certain pitch—too tight—and something inside of [her] had snapped” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 976). Alcee tries to be supportive, wishing that she “feel better and happier in the morning” (*The Awakening* 976). However, he takes advantage of her during this emotionally draining time, for “he did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties” (*The Awakening* 976). Because he had already stirred her passions by awakening her sexually, he knows she is vulnerable to his appeals. As a result, the reader sympathizes with Edna’s vulnerability and naiveté. But even when Alcee discovers that Edna is interested in Robert, he still acts persistently with her, claiming, ““You know that I only live when I am near you,”” when she tells him to go away (Chopin, *The Awakening* 986). He uses such manipulation in an attempt to appeal to Edna’s emotions and perhaps the reader’s, too. However, she sees through his charm and resists his emotional coercion. Edna denies Alcee of emotional intimacy.

While Edna experiences apathy in her affair with Alcee and marriage with Leonce, she is overwhelmed with feelings in her relationship with Robert. In fact, most of Edna’s decisions with Robert are driven by her emotions as she “could not have told why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, and in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 893). Not only are her decisions about Robert influenced by her emotions, but she also has an intense, emotional longing for him when he is gone. In fact, she misses and appreciates him more when he is not around than when he is: “She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from

her, just as one misses the sun on a cloudy day without having thought much about the sun when it was shining” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 907). She appreciates more than just his youthful presence. Robert teaches her how to swim; and soon after, she develops a longing for the sea as in some way, it connects her to Robert. She experiences feelings of elation when she masters swimming, for she “shout[ed] with joy. [...] A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength” (*The Awakening* 908). This emotional reaction to her mastery of swimming is the catalyst of her awakening. She gets such joy from learning to swim that she wonders what else she is missing out on in life. Although proud of her accomplishment, she struggles to control her emotions and confides in Robert about it:

‘I never was so exhausted in my life. But it isn’t unpleasant. A thousand emotions have swept through me tonight. I don’t comprehend half of them. Don’t mind what I’m saying; I am just thinking aloud. I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz’s playing moved me tonight. I wonder if any night on earth will ever again be like this one.’ (Chopin, *The Awakening* 909).

Edna tries to come to terms with her fluctuation of moods, realizing that both learning to swim and hearing Mademoiselle Reisz’s music emotionally stirred and awakened her. Robert then jokes with Edna about spirits haunting the Gulf. He realizes that he has captivated her intrigue, but “[h]e could not explain; he could not tell her that he had penetrated her mood and understood. He said nothing except to offer her his arm, for, by her own admission, she was exhausted” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 910). Realizing that she

has fallen for him emotionally, he avoids talking about it. Although Robert knows he, too, is responsible for Edna's emotional reaction, he does not respond passionately because of her marital status. However, not talking about their feelings does not make them any less apparent. When Robert takes her back to her cottage and waits with her while she awaits Mr. Pontellier's return, they sit in complete silence: "no multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire" (*The Awakening* 911). The passion she was missing in her marriage she found in her companionship with Robert. And as they spend more time together, "his face was suffused with a quiet glow when he met her" (*The Awakening* 914). Such a glow is reflective of love that is developing between them. In "Kate Chopin on Divine Love and Suicide: Two Rediscovered Articles," Emily Toth references a *Post Dispatch* interview in which Chopin commented on divine love, claiming that "we all feel love—true, pure love, is an uncontrollable emotion that allows of no analyzation and no vivisection" (118). At this point in their relationship, they see no need in talking about the love between them as it is an uncontrollable emotion meant to be experienced, not analyzed. Robert and Edna also joke about finding hidden treasure "for the fun of seeing the golden specks fly" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 916). Their lack of reason reflects their youthful naiveté; and their decisions are prompted by their emotions, not by reason or reflection.

When Robert leaves for Mexico with limited notice, Mademoiselle Reisz observes the emotional toll Robert's absence takes on Edna. His "going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything" (Chopin, *The Awakening*

927). In fact, Edna's "whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing" (*The Awakening* 927). She even goes to see Madame Lebrun, so she can see pictures of him. And when Edna discovers that Madame Lebrun had received a letter from him, "Edna experienced a pang of jealousy because he had written to his mother rather than to her" (*The Awakening* 928). She discovers that her feelings for Robert evoked her emotions, particularly jealousy, far more than Leonce: "The sentiment which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel" (*The Awakening* 929). According to Cicero in *De Oratore*, "the emotion of jealousy is by far the fiercest of all" (333). That Edna is jealous of Robert's own mother reveals how emotionally infatuated she is with him. She realizes, too, that it was not until she developed this relationship with Robert that she became in tune with her emotions. In other words, he is the first man for whom she really feels something emotional. In fact,

[s]he had all her life long been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles. They belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 929)

Up until this point, she had often kept her feelings to herself. Because she has limited experience with controlling such emotions, they easily develop from one extreme to the next. When Mademoiselle Reisz shares with Edna a recollection of Robert and his brother Victor fighting over a Spanish girl, Edna experiences a pang of jealousy again:



“For some reason she felt depressed, almost unhappy” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 930).

Even though this interaction occurred in the past, Edna’s emotional connection to Robert makes her feel that she cannot control her emotions. Wishing to avoid such emotional reactions when hearing about Robert, Edna tries to forget him. However,

[s]he was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 936)

The reader can likely relate, through perhaps a shared experience, to Edna’s emotional longing to be with someone who is unattainable. Although Edna attempts to forget Robert, when she reads a letter he addressed to Mademoiselle Reisz, “Edna was sobbing, just as she had wept one midnight at Grand Isle when strange, new voices awoke her. She arose in some agitation to take her departure” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 946). She finds it difficult to control her emotions about Robert even when she wishes to forget him, once again causing the reader to sympathize with her emotional distress.

Edna’s emotional distress subsides upon hearing the news of Robert’s forthcoming return from Mexico. It becomes apparent that her happiness is dependent upon his presence: “She was already glad and happy to be alive at the mere thought of his return. The murky, lowering sky, which had depressed her a few hours before, seemed

bracing and invigorating as she splashed through the streets on her way home” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 965). Allowing Robert to determine her happiness or lack thereof puts Edna in a very vulnerable position. However, she enjoys the joy of knowing he is returning and decides to inform Leonce about her decision to move into her own house. She “wrote a charming letter” that “was brilliant and brimming with cheerfulness” (*The Awakening* 965). The idea of having a place of her own where Robert could visit her brings Edna joy. Although Edna is happy about Robert’s return, she also exhibits feelings of jealousy: “A vision—a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 987). Her pangs of jealousy reveal her vulnerability since she has allowed Robert’s presence in her life to determine her happiness. But nonetheless, the next day, “[t]he morning was full of sunlight and hope. Edna could see before her no denial—only the promise of excessive joy” (*The Awakening* 987). She is optimistic about his return, likely because she has plans to have her own place where they can be together and hopes he will return the love this time now that Edna appears independent from her husband.

However, the reader sympathizes with Edna when her expectations are not met. Although she expected him, “Robert did not come that day. She was keenly disappointed. He did not come the following day, nor the next. Each morning she awoke with hope, and each night she was a prey to despondency” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 988). Her happiness is dependent on his arrival. Hence the reader pities her desperation. But in time, Robert finally comes to see her and deems her cruel as she “seem[s] to be forcing [him] into disclosures which can result in nothing” (*The Awakening* 990). She wishes to remain

married but still be with him, and he does not condone such unorthodox behavior. In *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that the lives of the youth “are regulated more by moral feelings than by reasoning,” as “moral goodness leads us to choose what is noble” (218). Robert’s moral character influences his decisions with Edna, and subsequently, Robert’s resistance appeals to the reader’s morals. Edna is a youthful character too; however, she is more influenced by her emotions than her morals. Although Edna feels hurt by Robert’s words, she holds back her emotions, “determined not to be personal again and make him uncomfortable” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 991). She does not want to be too forward and scare him off. Regardless of her original intention to mask her emotions and not be too personal, after he shares why he has struggled to be with her, she confesses that he has “[her] so unhappy with [his] indifference” (*The Awakening* 993). She admits that her happiness is dependent on his reciprocation of love, which once again puts her in a vulnerable state. In fact, according to Spangler, “[t]hrough Robert she expects the satisfaction of both her romantic and passional longings. Robert, however, is much too scrupulous” (250). Edna wants Robert to give her the romance and passion that has been absent from her marriage. However, she is unwilling to end her marriage to be with him. And because he is a moral young man, he cannot participate in an affair with a married woman. So he leaves her a note with a brief but reasonable explanation for why he can no longer be in her life. As to be expected and because she relies on Robert to make her happy, she becomes emotionally distressed when she discovers he cannot be with her any longer. When Robert leaves the note with the message, “I love you. Good-by—because I love you,” Edna “grew faint when she read the words. [...] She did not sleep” (Chopin,

*The Awakening* 997). She does not accept the rejection because she identifies herself through her infatuation with Robert instead of through her own means of achieving selfhood independently. However, according to Spangler, “as she and Robert confess their mutual love, romantic sentiment must make way for her determination to protect and express her independent selfhood” (251). This is the reason that, although she loves Robert, she refuses to leave her husband. She wants Robert but on her own terms.

But once Robert removes himself from the relationship, Edna loses all hope. Because her happiness is dependent on time spent with Robert or thoughts of him, she finds no reason to live once he is gone from her life. The next day, she returned to Grand Isle, as

[d]espondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 999)

Because she allows herself to find happiness only in Robert, she experiences extreme feelings of isolation and desperation when she realizes that they cannot be together. Realizing that Robert will no longer be by her side, she considers the attention she could get from other men. But she fears a life of many suitors and what that would do to her children: “Today it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn’t matter about Leonce Pontellier—but Raoul and Etienne” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 999). She does think of the children and realizes that they would have a better

life without her rather than with her and her continual discontentedness and fluctuation of moods and suitors. Spangler argues that with such a conclusion, Chopin “managed to provide both pathos and poetic justice, pathos to please her sentimental readers and justice to satisfy her moralistic ones” (255). Chopin provides poetic justice by ending the life of her protagonist who rejects the traditional roles as wife and mother. However, Spangler suggests that the sentimental, pathetic ending “is implicit in the image of ‘a bird with a broken wing’ which Edna, just before her death, sees ‘reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water’” (255). Edna lacks strength, yet seeks freedom, like the bird. Thus, pathos is evoked through that of “feminine self-pity” (255). Edna pities her situation and realizes that even in her attempts to achieve selfhood, she could not maintain happiness. Therefore, because of such pity and realization, she frees herself through death. Chopin appeals to pathos as she depicts Edna initially at Grand Isle among societal ladies until her final delineation of Edna as she swims to her death. Not only does Chopin use pathos in her portrayal of Edna independently and in her relationships with men but also in her relationships with other females.

Chopin evokes her audience’s emotions in her description of Edna’s relationships with Adele Ratignolle and Mademoiselle Reisz. According to Deborah Gentry in *The Art of Dying*, “[s]trong emotions are stirred in Edna by her developing relationships with both women” (33). In fact, Robert is not the only one who stirs Edna’s passions. Mademoiselle Reisz’s music evokes Edna’s emotions and changes something in her. After Mademoiselle Reisz played her first song for Edna, “Edna had entitled [it] ‘Solitude.’ [...] When she heard it there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing

beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 906). Edna connects with the song, and the imagery Chopin uses to describe Edna’s imagination encapsulates Edna’s emotional state. She feels isolated like the rock and hopeless like the man but seeks freedom like the bird. The man’s nakedness could even be representative of Edna’s awakening; for after hearing the song, she is reborn as a new woman aspiring to achieve selfhood. In hearing Mademoiselle Reisz’s music, “the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her” (*The Awakening* 906). Although the reader cannot hear the music, the reader can relate to Edna’s experience because of Chopin’s use of vivid, sensory imagery and pathos. An emotional connection can be formed between Edna and the reader if the reader shares an experience of music stirring his or her passions. Edna’s emotional reaction to Mademoiselle Reisz’s music creates an emotional connection between her and the reader as well as between her and Mademoiselle Reisz. In fact, an emotional bond forms between Edna and Mademoiselle Reisz when “Mademoiselle Reisz perceived her agitation and even her tears. She patted her on the shoulder as she said: ‘You are the only one worth playing for’” (*The Awakening* 907). Mademoiselle Reisz is honored and delighted by Edna’s enjoyment of and emotional reaction to her music. Chopin engages the audience’s emotions as she describes how Edna listens to Mademoiselle Reisz’s music as she struggles to face her troubled emotions directly.

Once Edna forms an emotional connection with Mademoiselle Reisz through her music, she also connects with her emotionally through friendship. When Edna experiences moods in which she contemplates her unhappiness and death, she “hunted up Mademoiselle Reisz” to comfort her (Chopin, *The Awakening* 940). While Robert is away, Edna seeks the companionship of Mademoiselle Reisz and discovers that Robert had written her a letter. She becomes upset that he did not write her one; although, she is pleased to find that she was discussed in his letter addressed to Mademoiselle Reisz (*The Awakening* 945). Regardless of the form of emotional distress Edna faces, Mademoiselle Reisz is Edna’s escape, for “[t]here was nothing which quieted the turmoil of Edna’s senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz. It was then, in the presence of that personality which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna’s spirit and set it free” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 961). Perhaps because Mademoiselle Reisz has achieved the individualized identity for which Edna aspires, Edna feels emotionally connected to her. It is Mademoiselle Reisz’s friendship as well as her “music [that] penetrated her whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul. It prepared her for joy and exultation” (*The Awakening* 964). Edna listens to Mademoiselle Reisz’s music as she deals with her uncertainties and discontented feelings. The music brings her pleasure and gives her a new look on life.

Although Adele Ratignolle offers an equally devoted friendship to Edna as Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna’s emotional reactions to each woman differ significantly. Whereas Mademoiselle Reisz’s music brings Edna elation or serves as a way for Edna to deal with emotional distress, Adele’s experience of childbirth causes Edna anguish and

anxiety. As the novel comes to a close, Adele requests Edna's presence at her childbirth. Although Adele "was possessed of a cheerful nature, and refused to take any situation too seriously, especially a situation with which she was so familiar," "Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 994). Seeing Adele in this state further validates Edna's rejection of motherhood. In fact, "[w]ith an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture. She was still stunned and speechless with emotion when later she leaned over her friend to kiss her and softly say good-by" (*The Awakening* 995). Unlike many women, Edna does not recognize the majestic, natural beauty of childbirth. Instead, she experiences extreme emotional distress after viewing it. In *The Art of Dying*, Gentry gives the reader further reason to sympathize with Edna as she explains that Edna "has children like Adele but cannot find fulfillment or even acquiescence in a biologically determined role that strips her of her individuality" (36). Especially after seeing Adele give birth, Edna is reminded that her own children deprive her of her individuality and prevent her from achieving selfhood.

Edna Pontellier is not the only female character in *The Awakening* with whom the reader sympathizes. The reader sympathizes with Madame Lebrun because of her early loss of her husband. Thus, "[i]t was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 902). Although



Madame Lebrun is saddened by her husband's death, she perseveres by managing a small hotel on Grand Isle with her sons' assistance. Madame Lebrun is a capable woman with business skills that demonstrate an adjustment to life's realities.

The reader also sympathizes with Dr. Mandelet as he regrets getting involved in the Pontelliers' drama. Soon after Leonce requested Dr. Mandelet's attention, Dr. Mandelet realizes "[h]e did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 953). He learns too much about Edna as his initial suspicions regarding her involvement with Alcee Arobin prove to be correct. In fact, the reader shares his fear and concern of Alcee's involvement with Edna, for Alcee has a notorious reputation for breaking up marriages because of his record of seducing married women (*The Awakening* 953). Although Dr. Mandelet regrets getting involved with the Pontelliers, he continues to help Edna handle her emotional distress. And Edna appreciates the doctor's care and attention, but she tells him, "'Don't think I am ungrateful or that I don't appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way'" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 996). She admits to having an emotional problem but does not find his suggested methods helpful. Through her depiction of both minor characters, such as Dr. Mandelet and Madame Lebrun, as well as major characters, such as Edna Pontellier and Robert Lebrun, Chopin evokes the emotions of her readers.

Chopin's prominent use of pathos is not limited to *The Awakening*. Chopin also uses the pathetic appeal in her portrayal of characters and their situations in her short story "Athenaise." In "Athenaise," Chopin evokes the emotion of pity predominantly.

And the reader pities more than just the protagonist, Athenaise. For example, the audience pities Cazeau, her husband, as he felt Athenaise's absence, "like a dull, insistent pain" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 427). Chopin intends for the reader to sympathize with Cazeau as he is unclear about his wife's location or if she will be returning home. Not only is he pained by her absence but also that their marriage lacks the two-sided emotions of love and adoration because of Athenaise's apathy, for "[t]he marriage had been a blunder; he had only to look in her eyes to feel that, to discover her growing aversion" ("Athenaise" 427). Cazeau recognizes her hatred toward him, a situation which causes the reader to sympathize with him. Instead of addressing the issue, Athenaise handles her aversion through isolation from her husband. Athenaise's behavior causes Cazeau to be "a good deal mystified" as she "had shut herself up in her room" without an explanation for her unhappiness ("Athenaise" 429). Once again, Athenaise's behavior causes the reader to sympathize with Cazeau. And when she goes to her family's house and Cazeau comes looking for her, he expresses his anger on his face when Monteclin tells him that Athenaise has made up her mind that she would never set her foot back in his house: "It brought two fiery red spots to Cazeau's cheeks, and for the space of a moment he looked wicked" ("Athenaise" 430). He responds angrily because he feels that he has no control in the situation. His wife has made up her mind and has her brother speak on her behalf. The reader sympathizes with Cazeau's predicament and understands why he responds angrily.

Not only does the reader sympathize with and perhaps share Cazeau's emotions but also Athenaise's in her struggle to achieve selfhood. Athenaise's decision to leave

Cazeau is influenced by her emotions as she responds to Monteclin's question about whether she hates Cazeau: "'No, I don't hate him,' she returned reflectively; adding with a sudden impulse, 'It's just being married that I detest an' despise'" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 431). She hates being married, an attitude which could possibly be a shared experience with which the reader can relate. When Cazeau confronts her at her family's house, "[s]he appeared neither angry nor frightened, but thoroughly unhappy, with an appeal in her soft dark eyes and a tremor on her lips that seemed to him expressions of unjust reproach, that wounded and maddened him at once" ("Athenaise" 431). She is unhappy by the sight of him, for she has decided she no longer wishes to be his wife. Although her reasoning is exorbitant and influenced by her emotions, Cazeau keeps his composure. And when he brings her home, "Cazeau once more ate his supper alone; for Athenaise went to her room, and there she was crying again" ("Athenaise" 433). The reader may sympathize with both characters in this situation. Cazeau is at a loss regarding how to handle this troubling situation with his wife whereas Athenaise is unhappy in a marriage from which, because of the time period and adamancy of her husband, she cannot leave. However, the reader may lack sympathy for Athenaise because she decides "with gathered and fierce vehemence [...] that she would not continue to enact the role of wife to Cazeau" ("Athenaise" 434). So even if she must remain legally married to him, she decides she will no longer act as his wife. But at the same time, the reader empathizes with Athenaise, for she "called marriage a trap set for the feet of unwary and unsuspecting girls, and in round, unmeasured terms reproached her mother with treachery and deceit" ("Athenaise" 434). The reader sympathizes with Athenaise as she finds

herself unable to achieve selfhood because of the entrapment of marriage. Upset that Cazeau remains normal upon her return, “Athenaise had little heart to eat, only playing with her food before her, and she felt a pang of resentment at her husband’s healthy appetite” (“Athenaise” 435). She wants Cazeau to be upset as she is. She does not realize that he is simply better at hiding his emotions.

One emotion Cazeau cannot mask, though, is his abhorrence toward Monteclin and his interference in their marriage. Athenaise, too, has an emotional reaction to this issue. When Cazeau complains to Athenaise about Monteclin’s coming in between them, she responds emotionally rather than reasonably: “‘It’s strange, if you detes’ Monteclin so heartily, that you would desire to marry his sister.’ She knew it was a silly thing to say, and was not surprised when he told her so” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 435). Obviously he married her because he loved her; her brother did not factor into the matter. Cazeau defends himself, and the reader pities Cazeau as he shares why he truly loves his wife. Yet she responds by “ignor[ing] the hand held out to her. She was resting her chin in her palm and kept her eyes fixed moodily upon the table” (“Athenaise” 435). Although Athenaise is cold to her husband, perhaps the reader understands her in her time of isolation:

It seemed now to Athenaise that Monteclin was the only friend left to her in the world. Her father and mother had turned from her in what appeared to be her hour of need. Her friends laughed at her, and refused to take seriously the hints which she threw out,--feeling her way to discover if marriage were as distasteful to other women as to herself. Monteclin alone understood her. He alone had always been

ready to act for her and with her, to comfort and solace her with his sympathy and his support. Her only hope for rescue from her hateful surroundings lay in Monteclin. Of herself she felt powerless to plan, to act, even to conceive a way out of this pitfall into which the whole world seemed to have conspired to thrust her. (Chopin, "Athenaise" 436)

Because Athenaise feels isolated during this time, when she meets with Monteclin, "[s]he had never been so glad to see Monteclin before" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 437). Monteclin devises a plan for Athenaise to leave Cazeau. Although Athenaise's decisions thus far have been motivated by her emotions, she rejects her brother's plan because she does not want "to live on with a soul full of bitterness and revolt, as she had done for the past two months" ("Athenaise" 438). She rejects a plan entirely rooted in hatred. The reader sympathizes with Cazeau as "a terrible sense of loss overwhelmed Cazeau. It was not new or sudden; he had felt it for weeks growing upon him, and it seemed to culminate with Athenaise's flight from home" ("Athenaise" 438). Cazeau decides, however, that he only wants Athenaise if she wants him, too. He then tells Monteclin that he holds him responsible for her wellbeing, threatening him if anything happens to Athenaise. As he speaks to Monteclin, "[t]he only sign of anger was a savage gleam in his eyes" ("Athenaise" 439). Cazeau often wears his emotions on his face, particularly anger toward Monteclin as he is a prime reason Athenaise has remained apart from Cazeau for as long as she has.

Monteclin's decision to help Athenaise during her time of uncertainty is driven by his hatred toward Cazeau. In fact, he "made no attempt to disguise the dislike with which

his brother-in-law inspired him” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 429). Not only does he strongly dislike his brother-in-law, but he also gets joy from his sister’s distress and possibility of leaving Cazeau as “[t]he turn of affairs was delighting him” (“Athenaise” 430). Such emotional reactions reveal a sadistic nature in Monteclin. Athenaise even observes his “disgusting expressions” (“Athenaise” 431). Hence the reader likely sympathizes with Athenaise and her naiveté toward her brother who has ulterior motives in his involvement with their dispute. Monteclin feels “disconcerted and greatly disappointed” when he discovers Athenaise’s reason for leaving Cazeau has no justifiable reasoning behind it (“Athenaise” 431). He questions the likelihood of their parting since her reasoning is based merely on temporary emotional distress and apathy toward marriage.

Whereas Cazeau’s emotional reaction to the situation is mostly anger, Athenaise’s emotions vary. Once Athenaise leaves Cazeau, she experiences an array of emotions: “Athenaise reached her destination sound of skin and limb, but a good deal flustered, a little frightened, and altogether excited and interested by her unusual experiences” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 440). She is scared by the idea of being alone but excited by it as well. When Athenaise gets to the house on Dauphine Street in New Orleans where she will be lodging, she “had not yet grown lonesome or homesick; the newness of her surroundings made them sufficiently entertaining” (“Athenaise” 444). In fact, “[s]he found it diverting to sit there on the front balcony watching people pass by, even though there was no one to talk to. And then the comforting, comfortable sense of not being married!” (“Athenaise” 444). Athenaise is enthusiastic about the newness of her situation. Living apart from Cazeau finally gives her a chance at achieving selfhood. However,

when Athenaise realizes that she needs the assistance of a gentleman staying at the same place she is lodging to address her letter to her brother, she “exhibit[s] some confusion and trepidation at being forced to request a favor of him at so early a stage of their acquaintance” (“Athenaise” 445). While she finds independence enjoyable at first, she soon realizes her dependence on others. And as Athenaise adjusts to her new dwelling, she starts to experience the negative effects of solitude: “The voices about her served to reveal to Athenaise the feeling of loneliness that was gradually coming over her. Notwithstanding certain dormant impulses, she craved human sympathy and companionship” (“Athenaise” 445-46). Because she has not yet formed a complete individualized identity, she does not experience contentment in solitude.

Depending on others for happiness, Athenaise seeks the companionship of another. She finds such companionship in Gouvernail, a man lodging at the same place as her; for “[s]he shook hands impulsively with Gouvernail, and told him how glad she was to see him” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 446). Although he did not expect such joy from Athenaise, “it pleased him immensely, detecting as he did that the expression was as sincere as it was outspoken” (“Athenaise” 446). They initially enjoy each other’s company. And Gouvernail sympathizes with Athenaise’s situation; in fact, after she “complained that things seemed all wrongly arranged in this world, and no one was permitted to be happy in his own way,” “he told her he was sorry she had discovered that primordial fact of existence so early in life” (“Athenaise” 446). The reader, too, pities Athenaise in her existential crisis and struggle to achieve selfhood. In response to Athenaise’s sharing of her emotional distress, Gouvernail comforts her, for she “could

not have held out through the month had it not been for Gouvernail” (“Athenaise” 448). As a result, she begins to rely on him. In fact, “[h]e found her crying one night, not openly or violently” (“Athenaise” 449). And he was there by her side. However, “Athenaise did not admit feeling heart-sick, body-sick, when he questioned her; she supposed it was nothing but homesick. A letter from Montecelin stirred her all up. She longed for her mother, for Montecelin” (“Athenaise” 449). Because she had never left home before, leaving not just Cazeau but her family as well is perhaps too much for her to experience all at once. And “[a]s Gouvernail listened to her, a wave of pity and tenderness swept through him” (“Athenaise” 450). He feels sorry for her and comforts her accordingly. A true gentleman, “she would not be lonely and unhappy, with Gouvernail there to comfort her” (“Athenaise” 450). He pities her in her unhappiness and does his best to console her; however, his consoling is surprisingly not what restores Athenaise’s happiness.

Without immediate explanation, Athenaise’s emotions and outlook on life completely shift. In fact, “[h]er whole being was steeped in a wave of ecstasy. [...] One mood quickly followed another, in this new turmoil of her senses, and the need of action became uppermost” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 451). Something about her body and temperament changes. She discovers she is pregnant. Upon discovering her pregnancy, she becomes elated and wishes to see Cazeau, for “[s]he was impatient to be with him. Her whole passionate nature was aroused as if by a miracle” (“Athenaise” 451). She is excited to see her husband again. And even as she plans to leave, “there was the agreeable excitement of getting ready to leave, of packing up her things” (“Athenaise”



452). All things bring her joy now that she realizes the good news. As Athenaise leaves Gouvernail, though, the reader sympathizes with him as “he was thinking, ‘By heaven, it hurts, it hurts!’” (“Athenaise” 453). He was trying to be a gentleman toward her in hopes that she would enjoy his company as much as he enjoys hers; however, he could not have predicted that she would become pregnant. Nevertheless, excited about her return home, “Athenaise spent a day of supreme happiness and expectancy. The fair sight of the country unfolding itself before her was balm to her vision and to her soul” (“Athenaise” 453-54). Her outlook on life and surroundings becomes optimistic, for “[s]he was charmed with the rather unfamiliar, broad, clean sweep of the sugar plantations. [...] And passing through the long stretches of monotonous woodlands, she would close her eyes and taste in anticipation the moment of her meeting with Cazeau” (“Athenaise” 454). And when they meet again, passion stirs. For the first time, there was mutual passion between Cazeau and Athenaise, as “[h]e felt her lips for the first time respond to the passion of his own” (“Athenaise” 454). Emotions are evoked in both the characters as they share the joy of expectancy, which reunites their love for each other. As Athenaise and Cazeau reconnect emotionally, the reader connects with the characters through Chopin’s use of pathos.

Through her pathetic descriptions of several characters and their situations in “Athenaise” and *The Awakening*, Chopin evokes the emotions of both her nineteenth-century audience as well as today’s contemporary readers. Chopin’s most prominent use of pathos is in her depictions of Edna and Athenaise as they struggle to achieve selfhood in a time period in which an identity was almost impossible for a woman to obtain

outside of her roles as wife and mother. Although Athenaise eventually finds contentment in wifehood and motherhood, Edna does not. Therefore, varied emotions are evoked in the reader as each woman experiences a different journey to self-discovery.

CHAPTER IV  
THE IMPORTANCE OF LOGOS IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND  
"ATHENAISE"

Aristotle's appeal to logos is an element of rhetoric in Chopin's *The Awakening* and "Athenaise." Some characters make decisions and display behavior rooted in logic. In his explanation of the logical appeal as "a truth or an apparent truth" in *Rhetoric*, Aristotle argues that "[a] statement is persuasive and credible either because it is directly self-evident or because it appears to be proved from statements that are so" (182, 183). Aristotle further defines logos as he explains that the speaker/writer must be able "to reason logically" to persuade effectively (182). To inspire confidence in their characters, writers must develop characters with "good sense" (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 213). However, Aristotle argues that the confidence of the audience is jeopardized when one or more of the following causes occurs:

Men either form a false opinion through want of good sense; or they form a true opinion, but because of their moral badness do not say what they really think; or finally, they are both sensible and upright, but not well disposed to their hearers, and may fail in consequence to recommend what they know to be the best course.  
(213)

The good sense, along with good moral character and goodwill, of the speaker/writer—or the writer's characters—can sway the audience. In *De Oratore*, Cicero agrees with

Aristotle's definition of logos—that in order to persuade, the speaker/writer should rely on “the proof of our allegations” (324). Such claims must contain logic and reasoning.

Aristotle's definition of logos carried through classical rhetoric into the Medieval Period. In *On Christian Doctrine*, Augustine affirms the study of logos. In *The Rhetorical Tradition*, Bizzell and Herzberg provide a synopsis of Books I-IV of Augustine's *On Christian Doctrine* in which they reveal Augustine's support of logic: “Since God has made a ‘reasonable order of things,’ to learn logic is to point out preexisting (divinely created) truth but not to create truth with one's words” (Bizzell and Herzberg 453). Also during the Medieval Period, Boethius composed a treatise on logic entitled *De Topicis Differentiis* in which he analyzes and advocates the topical logic used in the classical systems of Aristotle and Cicero (Bizzell and Herzberg 486). Renaissance rhetoricians relied on classical principles as well, for they supported Aristotle's definition of logos. For example, in Book II of *The Advancement of Learning*, Francis Bacon declares that “Logic handleth reason exact and in truth. [...] Aristotle doth wisely place Rhetoric as between Logic on the one side and moral or civil knowledge on the other” (744). Aristotle's definition of logos as a truth, as well as the ability to reason logically, echoed throughout the classical, Medieval, and Renaissance periods of rhetoric.

Although traditional rhetoric came under attack during the Enlightenment, the importance of the logical appeal was emphasized by several rhetoricians who relied on classical principles. Bizzell and Herzberg argue that during this period, “classical rhetoric provided a method for making judgments about literature” (805). In fact, seventeenth-century rhetorician and critic Rene Rapin “uses the language of psychology, noting that

logos is an appeal to the faculty of understanding” (Bizzell and Herzberg 805). George Campbell defines logos similarly to Rapin in his eighteenth-century epistemological analysis of rhetoric, *Philosophy of Rhetoric* (Bizzell and Herzberg 808). However, in the nineteenth century, Richard Whately did not support Campbell’s understanding and interpretation of logic. Whately was, however, a strong advocate of Aristotle’s definitions and applications of rhetoric. In fact, in his treatise, *Elements of Rhetoric*, he deems Aristotle “the best of the systematic writers on Rhetoric” (1006). With his reliance on Aristotle’s traditional rhetorical appeals, Whately did not support how some rhetoricians of the Enlightenment interpreted Aristotle’s appeal to logos. Another nineteenth-century rhetorician, Adams Sherman Hill, applies classical rhetoric to written discourse in his text *The Principles of Rhetoric* in which he differentiates between logic and rhetoric as logic “teaches the right use of reason,” whereas “Rhetoric, being the art of communication by language, implies the presence [...] of at least two persons,—the speaker or the writer, and the person spoken to or written to” (1149). Hill references Aristotle who Hill argues “makes the very essence of Rhetoric to lie in the distinct recognition of the hearer. Hence, its rules are [...] relative to the character and circumstances of those addressed; for though truth is one, and correct reasoning must always be correct, the ways of communicating truth are many” (1149). Speakers and writers—often through the various sensible decisions and behaviors of their characters—can communicate truth or apparent truth, as defined by Aristotle.

Modern and postmodern rhetoricians, such as Richard Weaver, Stephen Toulmin, and Chaim Perelman, have also used or referenced Aristotle’s definition of logos in their

critiques and analyses of rhetoric. For example, in “A New Rhetoric: A Theory of Practical Reasoning,” Perelman discusses the new period of rhetoric and its reliance on classical, fundamental ideas, such as logos:

One of the richest and most confused of all is that expressed by the term *logos*, which means among other things: word, reason, discourse, reasoning, calculation, and all that was later to become the subject of logic and the expression of reason. Reason was opposed to desire and the passions, being regarded as the faculty that ought to govern human behavior in the name of truth and wisdom. (1401)

Although Perelman identifies logos as a perplexing term, he does, however, note the progression of the term and its worthy application in rhetorical persuasion. Throughout time, speakers and writers have used logos to convince their audiences of the legitimacy of their reasoning or that of their characters. This pattern subsequently led and continues to lead to effective persuasion.

Appealing to the logic and reasoning of an audience through the written word presents notable circumstances writers consider. According to Robert Connors in “The Differences between Speech and Writing: Ethos, Pathos, and Logos,” after the writer presents his or her work, “the responsibility for analysis and understanding rests on the reader”; for “[u]nlike a speaker, the writer cannot help his or her logical case by repeating its thesis again and again” (289). However, Connors argues the advantage of written discourse is that “[t]he self-paced act of reading allows the reader to review complex concepts over and over until they are completely understood” (289). Accordingly, the writer has more latitude than the speaker to discuss multifaceted concepts without fear of

the audience's misapprehension. Connors identifies another advantage writing has over speaking—"the precision it allows in word-structure formulations" as "[t]he speaker has a tendency because of the greater time-pressure to rely on formulaic utterances" (289). Not only can the writer incorporate complex topics with more ease than the speaker, but also the writer can use a wider range of stylistic features without the concern of perplexing the reader.

The logical appeal can be identified in Kate Chopin's texts, *The Awakening* and "Athenaise," through her development of female protagonists as they encounter challenges in achieving selfhood as well as in the behaviors of other main characters who adhere to societal expectations. Chopin depicts scenarios in *The Awakening* in which her characters make decisions rooted in logic often formed by patriarchal systems of the late nineteenth century. Leonce Pontellier is presented through logos in his depiction as a businessman and provider for his household. Operating on reason, Leonce Pontellier takes on the roles of father and mother when Edna withdraws from her motherly duties. Although he accepts this responsibility, he realizes that it will be challenging: "He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 885). Leonce Pontellier's values represent logos as he ensures the protection of his business, children, and household. Guided by reason, Leonce comments on Edna's foolishness for withdrawing from her duties: "'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 days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of

her family’” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 939). Leonce exerts reason formed through societal expectations.

Leonce disapproves of Edna’s withdrawing from wifely duties as well. He wants a suitable and logical explanation for Edna’s going out on a Tuesday instead of tending to her obligations expected of her on this day. Because “[t]his had been the programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before,” he insists that she ““should have left some suitable explanation for [her] absence”” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 932). Because Leonce operates on reason, he expects it of others, especially his wife. He tells her: ““I should think you’d understand by this time that people don’t do such things; we’ve got to observe les convenances if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession”” (*The Awakening* 932). Leonce does not want Edna’s unorthodox behavior to get out to the public and affect the reputation of his business. While on a business trip, Leonce continues to use logos when he expresses his disapproval upon discovering his wife’s sudden plan to move from their home: “When Mr. Pontellier learned of his wife’s intention to abandon her home and take up her residence elsewhere, he immediately wrote her a letter of unqualified disapproval and remonstrance. She had given reasons which he was unwilling to acknowledge as adequate” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 976-77). When the reader considers the time period especially, it becomes clear that Mr. Pontellier is reacting through logos as he responds to the abrupt change in his wife.

Although Leonce is guided by reason as he addresses the recent changes in Edna, he is unsuccessful in his dissuading her of nonconformity. Unable to revert Edna to her



roles, he operates on reason as he decides to consult an elderly physician. Experienced physicians use keen judgment when giving prescriptions, diagnoses, and advice. In fact, Aristotle discusses the wise, reasonable demeanor of the elderly in *Rhetoric*; for he suggests that they “guide their lives by reasoning more than by moral feeling; reasoning being directed to utility and moral feeling to moral goodness” (Aristotle, *Rhetoric* 219). Leonce seeks the reasonable wisdom of Dr. Mandelet when Edna begins acting differently toward him and starts withdrawing from her roles as wife and mother. So “[o]ne morning on his way into town Mr. Pontellier stopped at the house of his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandelet” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 947). Although the doctor “was a semi-retired physician, resting, as the saying is, upon his laurels,” Leonce seeks his guidance, because “[h]e bore a reputation for wisdom rather than skill—leaving the active practice of medicine to his assistants and younger contemporaries—and was much sought for in matters of consultation” (*The Awakening* 947). Dr. Mandelet uses logic and reasoning to assess his patients’ ailments. When Mr. Pontellier and Dr. Mandelet meet, Mr. Pontellier tells the doctor that Edna “‘doesn’t act well. She’s odd, she’s not like herself’” (*The Awakening* 946). After Mr. Pontellier tries to explain his wife’s changes in behavior, Dr. Mandelet asks reasonable questions: “‘has she been associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women—super-spiritual superior beings’” as well as “‘[n]othing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?’” (*The Awakening* 948). When Dr. Mandelet learns that neither applies to Edna, he finds it sensible to advise that Leonce send Edna to her sister’s wedding. However, Leonce tells Dr. Mandelet that she strongly opposes the idea, for she “says a wedding is one of the

most lamentable spectacles on earth” (*The Awakening* 948). Considering the time period, such a response from a married woman is unexpected. However, neither Dr. Mandelet nor Leonce understands Edna’s identity crisis. But Dr. Mandelet reasons that if he comes over to the Pontelliers’ for dinner and sees Edna’s behavior in her home where she is likely to express herself naturally, he will be able to assess her condition. Once the plan is set, Mr. Pontellier shares his upcoming travel plans with Dr. Mandelet and asks if it would be reasonable to take Edna along. Using logic, the doctor advises that Leonce not contradict Edna but instead allow her to make the decision about whether or not she would like to accompany him on his business travels (Chopin, *The Awakening* 949). With the rational intention of giving Mr. Pontellier hope, the doctor assures Mr. Pontellier that “[t]he mood will pass. [...] It may take a month, two, three months—possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience” (*The Awakening* 949). Dr. Mandelet considers her behavior, and with effective reasoning, deduces that Mrs. Pontellier’s mood is temporary and will pass.

As the novel progresses, Dr. Mandelet also becomes a voice of reason to Mrs. Pontellier. When Edna becomes distressed after witnessing Adele Ratignolle give birth, he tries to relieve her hysteria by assuring her that it was unreasonable for her to have been present for such an event (Chopin, *The Awakening* 995). He tells her, “That was no place for you. Adele is full of whims at such times. There were a dozen women she might have had with her, unimpressionable women. I felt that it was cruel, cruel. You shouldn’t have gone” (*The Awakening* 995). He provides Edna with validated reasoning for why she has become weary and with the logical intention of comforting her. The doctor tries

to ease her distress because he deduces that it has been caused by her realization that motherhood is not her calling. After Edna tells the doctor that one should ““think of the children,”” he responds by saying, ““[t]he trouble is [...] that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost’” (*The Awakening* 996). He rationalizes Edna’s apprehension about being a mother—suggesting that she has been forced into it because of Nature’s conditioning. The reader could also interpret this view to mean that she has been pressured into it by a patriarchal society. Although he rationalizes her response to Adele’s giving birth, he still worries that she is in trouble and offers his sound advice:

‘It seems to me, my dear child, you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you. I know I would understand, and I tell you there are not many who would—not many, my dear.’ (Chopin, *The Awakening* 996)

Instead of forcing his methods on Edna, he reasons with her and truly tries to understand her situation. Using logic in his role as her physician, he hopes that she will trust him and be willing to follow his advice.

Also presented through logos, Mademoiselle Reisz serves as another voice of reason to Edna. As an independent female musician, Mademoiselle Reisz has operated on reason in her life decisions to remain unmarried and childless so she can devote her life’s focus to music. Her musical talent, too, is developed through skill and reasoned intention.

Since Edna reveres her and her artistic gift, Mademoiselle Reisz tries to guide Edna on her own creative journey. With effective reasoning, Mademoiselle Reisz explains artistry to Edna: ““To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts—absolute gifts—which have not been acquired by one’s own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul”” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 946). Mademoiselle Reisz possesses a courageous soul and subsequently develops musical talent and achieves success. However, just because Mademoiselle Reisz lives an independent, artistically fulfilling life does not mean she did not have to struggle to achieve selfhood. In fact, in “Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*,” Peter Ramos argues that “it would be absurd to assume that Madame Reisz is absolutely free—in general, or from all the patriarchal pressures with which she must surely contend” (149). Although Mademoiselle Reisz seems free, “[o]ne could argue that Madame Reisz’s character only demonstrates how absolutely art and family were incompatible for women at this time” (149). Mademoiselle Reisz has to fight for her individualized identity as an artist and seemingly had to sacrifice having a family to become a successful artist. Through her artistic journey, Mademoiselle Reisz is aware of the challenges and expectations of patriarchal society, but through skill and reasoning, navigates around these barriers to live a life dedicated to music and independence. Because of her success as an artist and her ability to live independently, Edna respects Mademoiselle Reisz. In fact, she serves as a voice of reason to Edna regarding matters with Robert. With good sense, Mademoiselle Reisz explains to Edna the reason that Robert left for Mexico and has not written to her: ““It is because he loves you, poor fool, and is trying to forget you,

since you are not free to listen to him or belong to him’” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 964).

An outsider looking in on the relationship between Edna and Robert, Mademoiselle Reisz is able to assess their situation rationally and tries to relay this rationality to Edna so she, too, can understand why Robert left and cannot be with her.

Also presented through logos, Adele Ratignolle acts as a voice of reason to Edna. Because Edna spends extended time with Adele, Adele begins to influence Edna as

[t]he excessive physical charm of the Creole had first attracted her, for Edna has a sensuous susceptibility to beauty. Then the candor of the woman’s whole existence, which every one might read, and which formed so striking a contrast to her own habitual reserve—this might have furnished a link. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 894)

Edna is attracted to Adele’s beauty but soon realizes that she and Adele are quite different. Adele’s good sense used in caring for her skin parallels with her good sense as a mother: “Madame Ratignolle, more careful of her complexion, had twined a gauze veil about her head. She wore dogskin gloves, with gauntlets that protected her wrists” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 895). She is considered a mother-woman; and operating on reason, she takes good care of herself and her children. Her tendency to guide others extends beyond her protecting and using good sense with her children. For example, Adele uses good sense as she warns Robert to stay away from Edna. She tells him, “let Mrs. Pontellier alone. [...] She is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously” (Chopin, *The Awakening* 900). And she

calls attention to Robert's lack of reasoning when he acts like he is completely innocent of showing Edna any interest:

'You are not thinking of what you are saying. You speak with about as little reflection as we might expect from one of those children down there playing in the sand. If your attentions to any married woman here were ever offered with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the gentleman we all know you to be, and you would be unfit to associate with the wives and daughters of the people who trust you.' (Chopin, *The Awakening* 900)

Adele realizes that Edna is different from the Grand Isle crowd and deems it careless for Robert to give Edna too much attention for fear that she will misinterpret his intentions. In response, Robert lacks discernment when he tells Adele that "'there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking [him] seriously'" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 901). Not thinking rationally, Robert does not consider the varying reactions Edna could have to his affable attention. Adele, however, believes that one should reflect on decisions before making them, serving as a voice of reason to Robert and again to Edna toward the end of the novel. In fact, Adele speaks with further good sense when she gives Edna advice regarding her living alone: "'You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living alone here'" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 979). Adele advises Edna with the reasonable intention of suggesting that Edna think her decisions through instead of making them on a whim. Adele considers the varying obstacles that could occur with Edna's living alone. For example, she advises

against her associating with the notorious Alcee Arobin as she had heard from someone that he had been visiting Edna.

After considering Adele's advice, Robert begins to distance himself from Edna. In fact, he "sometimes held away from her for an entire day" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 907). He is presented as acting through logos in his decision to remain unattainable. While most of Robert's decisions are formed logically, the passion between him and Edna jeopardizes his ability to reason. In effect, Robert's occasional lapses in judgment reveal his naiveté. For example, he and Edna talk of spirits and treasures. He tells her, "'I'll take you some night in the pirogue when the moon shines. Maybe your Gulf spirit will whisper to you in which of these islands the treasure is hidden—direct you to the very spot, perhaps'" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 916). The fantasy of their banter mirrors the fantasy of their relationship. However, mostly motivated by his good sense and morals, Robert leaves for Mexico. He leaves before he and Edna get too close since she is married and he respects the sanctity of marriage.

When Robert returns from Mexico, he decides to operate on reason by speaking to Edna frankly. Robert recognizes the unorthodox nature of his and Edna's relationship because of her marital status. He tells her, "'you seem to be forcing me into disclosures which can result in nothing; as if you would have me bare a wound for the pleasure of looking at it, without the intention of healing it'" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 990). He realizes their relationship has no future and does not see any reason in continuing it if it will inevitably fail. When Edna asks him why he has been fighting against their love, he explains truthfully: "'Because you were not free; you were Leonce Pontellier's wife. I

couldn't help loving you if you were ten times his wife; but so long as I went away from you and kept away, I could help telling you so'" (*The Awakening* 991-92). He uses distance to separate their love, so he can resist the temptation of becoming romantically involved with a married woman. Although his decisions had been formed with reason, he confesses to Edna that his love for her has caused him to think irrationally: "Something put into my head that you cared for me; and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild dream of your some way becoming my wife. [...] I came back full of vague, mad intentions'" (*The Awakening* 992). Although outwardly Robert acts rational, his love for her causes him to doubt his good sense. And Edna calls attention to his irrational thoughts: "You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose'" (*The Awakening* 992). Although Edna seemingly rejects Robert by calling him "foolish," she confesses her love for him and only him: "We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of consequence'" (*The Awakening* 993). However, operating on reason, Robert leaves Edna's house even though she asks him to stay while her presence is needed during Adele's childbirth. He provides his reasoning for leaving in a note that says, "I love you. Good-by—because I love you'" (*The Awakening* 997). He leaves her because of his love for her. He also realizes that she could never be his entirely—that they could only ever be together on her terms. Ultimately, his morals and ability to reason guide his decision to end his relationship with Edna.



Chopin also presents characters in “Athenaise” who are guided by reason. For example, Cazeau, Athenaise’s husband, exhibits behaviors rooted in logic and community expectations. Cazeau is a reasonable man with good sense. Similar to Leonce in *The Awakening*, Cazeau operates on reason as the provider of his household. At first, when Athenaise does not return home, “he fretted not a little. He did not worry much about Athenaise, who, he suspected, was resting only too content in the bosom of her family” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 426). Cazeau assumes that Athenaise has a logical explanation for her prolonged absence. Using reason, he does not allow his emotions to affect his judgment. However, after Athenaise’s absence extends beyond a reasonable time and without explanation, Cazeau deems it rational to locate her. It was “[o]n the third day [he] saddled his horse and went himself in search of her,” for “[s]he had sent no word, no message, explaining her absence, and he felt that he had good cause to be offended” (“Athenaise” 428). That Cazeau would go in search for his wife after three days of her unexplained absence seems logical as “the task of bringing his wife back to a sense of her duty seemed to him for the moment paramount” (“Athenaise” 428). He adheres to the societal expectation that a husband must ensure his wife fulfills her domestic duties. Furthermore, when Athenaise’s mother tells him that Athenaise had been dancing each night she had been gone, Cazeau uses logic as he comes to the conclusion that she had not been merely dancing every night but instead was escaping their marriage (Chopin, “Athenaise” 430). Athenaise’s mother, too, operates on reason as she realizes there is no controlling Athenaise because Athenaise is nonconforming.

The contrast in rationality between Cazeau and Athenaise is revealed as they discuss their marital troubles. Cazeau deems it unreasonable that Monteclin becomes involved in their affairs; and in response, Athenaise claims Cazeau is irrational for marrying Monteclin's sister. However, she realizes after she responds that "it was a silly thing to say" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 435). But she tries to rebuild her argument as she says, although still in violation of logos,

'I don't see, anyhow, w'at reason you had to marry me, w'en there were so many others. [...] There was Marianne running after you fo' the last five years till it was disgraceful; an' any one of the Dortrand girls would have been glad to marry you. But no, nothing would do; you mus' come out on the rigolet fo' me.' (Chopin, "Athenaise" 435)

Realizing Athenaise's complaint was formed with emotion, Cazeau attempts to respond with reason: "I can't see w'at the Dortrand girls or Marianne have to do with it. [...] I married you because I loved you; because you were the woman I wanted to marry, an' the only one" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 435). Cazeau explains the reason behind his marrying Athenaise. However, her unwillingness to accept Cazeau's reasoning prevents Athenaise from understanding why Cazeau loves her.

Cazeau is driven by the societal expectation to continue one's marriage until death, regardless of Athenaise's opposition. And even though "Cazeau realizes that the marriage had been a blunder," "he believes it to be their duty to make the best of it" (Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 112). Because of this duty and the vow they made to each other, "[h]e could not think of himself loving any other woman"

(Chopin, “Athenaise” 439). Perhaps because of his true love for Athenaise as well as divorce being uncommon, Cazeau cannot imagine moving on if he and Athenaise were to part ways. However, Cazeau proceeds to do something unusual for a married man in the late nineteenth century. Because he “could not think of Athenaise ever—even at some remote date—caring for him,” “[h]e wrote her a letter, in which he disclaimed any further intention of forcing his commands upon her. He did not desire her presence ever again in his home unless she came of her free will” (“Athenaise” 439). Although Cazeau’s initial reactions to Athenaise’s unhappiness had been in alignment with the societal expectation to maintain a marriage regardless of a wife’s despondency, Cazeau operates on reason as he realizes that his marriage can only be fulfilling if both he and Athenaise are happy and willing partners.

In contrast to characters in “Athenaise” and *The Awakening* who are presented through logos, Chopin also depicts characters who sometimes violate logos because of emotional influences or patriarchal pressures. Chopin presents Athenaise as a character who tends to violate logos. Although some of Athenaise’s decisions are considered unorthodox, she did, however, operate on reason in adherence to societal expectations when she married Cazeau. As she reflects on her marriage with Cazeau, she realizes that it was rational to marry Cazeau “because she supposed it was customary for girls to marry when the right opportunity came. Cazeau, she knew, would make life more comfortable for her” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 430). Such a supposition was common for women, particularly during the late nineteenth century. In *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography*, Seyersted asserts that “Athenaise is an example of the not uncommon

phenomenon, the immature girl who marries merely because it is customary and only to find that she would rather be a Miss again” (112). Because Athenaise rushes to marry, she loses her sense of self when she discovers that Cazeau does not fulfill her completely. Because of this societal expectation, Athenaise’s decision to leave her husband is perceived by the other characters to be formed with no apparent logic as she leaves merely because “[i]t’s jus’ being married that [she] detest[s] an’ despise[s]” (Chopin, “Athenaise” 431). And even her brother Monteclin recognizes the unorthodox nature of her decision to leave Cazeau, for he “felt disconcerted and greatly disappointed at having obtained evidence that would carry no weight with a court of justice” (“Athenaise” 431). Athenaise leaves home to seek an identity separate from her role as wife. Such journeys were deemed socially unacceptable, though, during the time period and thus were perceived by others as illogical. However, Chopin argues for independence and self-determination:

Athenaise was not one to accept the inevitable with patient resignation, a talent born in the souls of many women; neither was she the one to accept it with philosophical resignation, like her husband. Her sensibilities were alive and keen and responsive. She met the pleasurable things of life with frank, open appreciation, and against distasteful conditions she rebelled. Dissimulation was as foreign to her nature as guile to the breast of a babe, and her rebellious outbreaks, by no means rare, had hitherto been quite open and aboveboard. (Chopin, “Athenaise” 433)

Chopin depicts Athenaise as a nonconforming character easily influenced by her emotions. Because her emotions and rebellious behavior drive her decisions, she often makes decisions with limited reflection. Her parents recognize this tendency in their daughter and hope her marriage to Cazeau will improve Athenaise's disposition. In fact, "[h]er parents had hoped—not without reason and justice—that marriage would bring the poise, the desirable pose, so glaringly lacking in Athenaise's character" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 433-34). Her parents' reasonable aspiration stems from their realization that "[it] takes just such a steady hand to guide a disposition like Athenaise's, a master hand, a strong will that compels obedience" ("Athenaise" 434). Thus, they become frustrated when she refuses to return as Cazeau's wife. They expect their daughter to be controlled in marriage, but Athenaise rebels against such limitation. They consider her decision irrational because Cazeau "had never scolded, or called names, or deprived her of comforts, or been guilty of any of the many reprehensible acts commonly attributed to objectionable husbands" ("Athenaise" 434). At this point in the story, Athenaise's family—even Montecelin who has a strong hatred toward Cazeau—finds her decision to leave Cazeau inexplicable. Although the other characters find her leaving to be enigmatic, Athenaise does have a logical reason for her departure—to seek an individualized, self-defined identity.

Athenaise is presented through logos when she rejects Montecelin's plan for her to depart permanently from her marriage. After reflecting on his plan for extended time, she realizes that she does not wish "to live on with a soul full of bitterness and revolt" from which the letter was formed (Chopin, "Athenaise" 438). She recognizes that Montecelin's

intent for devising the plan derives from his abhorrence of Cazeau, not from rationality. As the story progresses, so does Athenaise's ability to reason. Once on her own, Athenaise thinks with reason instead of her emotions, realizing that "[t]o live on at the expense of Monteclin's generosity was wholly out of the question, and Athenaise meant to look about for some suitable and agreeable employment" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 442). Her brother cannot support her indefinitely; she must become self-sufficient if she wants to live an independent life. Finding such employment could present challenges. Because Athenaise felt oppressed in her marriage, she initially enjoys her freedom as "the newness of her surroundings made them sufficiently entertaining" ("Athenaise" 444). She enjoys the start of this life apart from Cazeau and her family; but because she is unfamiliar with living independently, she becomes dependent on someone else to care for her. In fact, her new friend Gouvernail seems to take the places of her family: "For the time he was everything to her that she would have him; he replaced her home and friends"; and "[h]e understood a thousand times better than she herself understood it that he was acting as a substitute for Monteclin" ("Athenaise" 449, 450). Although Athenaise left home in search for an identity outside of her marriage, she soon discovers that she does not know how to attain selfhood.

Instead, and in alignment with late nineteenth-century societal expectations, Athenaise reaches fulfillment when she discovers expectant motherhood. Her interest in being independent diminishes when she realizes she is pregnant. Upon this discovery, Athenaise falls back in love with her husband, for "[a]s she thought of him, the first purely sensuous tremor of her life swept over her" (Chopin, "Athenaise" 451). News of

having his baby restores her adoration of Cazeau. But this sudden shift is emotional in Athenaise's mind; "[h]er whole passionate nature was aroused as if by a miracle" ("Athenaise" 451). Athenaise can find no reasonable explanation for her aroused passion for her husband upon discovery of her pregnancy. However, Athenaise makes a logical decision to return home, considering her pregnant state and the social pressure to remain married. Athenaise's initial portrayal is that of one who violates logos, but societal expectations guide her adjustment to conform.

Similar to her portrayal of Athenaise, Chopin also depicts Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* as a character who violates logos. Edna is nonconforming and often influenced by her emotions. Because of her emotional influences, she does not always make decisions with reason and reflection. Edna admits to Adele Ratignolle that her tendency not to reflect began as a child: "I was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 896). She realizes, too, that she has been experiencing such tendencies lately in adulthood—"aimlessly, unthinking and unguided" (*The Awakening* 897). Although she violates logos because of her impulsive inclination, Edna's nonconforming nature is not without justification. That she wants to be fulfilled by more than merely wifedom and motherhood is understandable. But the way in which she withdraws from her roles can be perceived by the other characters and some readers as a violation of logos and social expectation. For example, when Edna does not resume her routine Tuesday duty, she provides Leonce with an unclear reason for her change as she says she "simply felt like going out" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 932). Edna's behavior continues to change without

any clear reason to Leonce or Mademoiselle Reisz. Edna's move out of the Pontellier house lacks defined reasoning, for it was "[j]ust two steps away," laughed Edna, "in a little four-room house around the corner" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 962). Edna claims that her reason for leaving is that she "keep[s] too many servants" and is "tired bothering with them" (*The Awakening* 962). Mademoiselle Reisz calls attention, though, to her contradictory reasoning: "That is not your true reason, *ma belle*. There is no use in telling me lies. I don't know your reason, but you have not told me the truth" (*The Awakening* 962). Although Mademoiselle Reisz is uncertain of Edna's actual reason for moving, she deems the one Edna provides as untrue. Not only does Edna move with indistinguishable reasoning, but she also fails to consult with Leonce before she makes her plan: "Without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna hastened her preparations for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving into the little house around the block" (*The Awakening* 967). To Leonce and Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna moves without clear or logical reflection. In fact, "[t]here was no moment of deliberation, no interval of repose between the thought and its fulfillment. Early upon the morning following those hours passed in Arobin's society, Edna set about securing her new abode and hurrying her arrangements for occupying it" (*The Awakening* 967). However, the reader can deduce that Edna moves in an attempt to achieve selfhood, but she does not explain this intention clearly to her husband or friends.

Although Chopin remains objective in her portrayal of Edna throughout the novel, she does, however, offer a logical explanation for Edna's initial feelings of isolation and desperation. Among the others at Grand Isle,



Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun's. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 889)

Edna feels like an outsider, a fact which explains why she seeks self-actualization through swimming and other forms of awakening. She was "different from the crowd" at Grand Isle (Chopin, *The Awakening* 894). Because Edna feels like an outsider and does not achieve fulfillment as a wife or mother, such feelings of isolation lead Edna to become desperate for some form of attention, whether it be from Robert or Alcee.

Since Edna is unhappy in her marriage, her falling for the temptation of other men is not unfathomable. Because Leonce is "spending most of his time in his clubs," "Edna is therefore in a vulnerable position, and she is subtly influenced by the presence of Robert and by the general Grand Isle atmosphere" (Seyersted, *Kate Chopin: A Critical Biography* 135). Also, "[a]s her frustration increases and her longing fixes itself on Robert, the first practical result is an unreasoning, stubborn resistance to the will of her husband, whose very presence reminds her of the false role of devoted wife and mother which impedes the expression of her latent selfhood" (Spangler 251). Edna withdraws from her roles as wife and mother and attempts to find a new identity in her relationship with Robert. Initially, Edna realizes that it is unreasonable to fall for Robert, since she is married to Leonce. In "wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 893). But because Robert teaches her to

swim, he awakens something in her that causes her to seek fulfillment outside of her marriage and family.

Although the reader likely understands Robert's reasoning for leaving Grand Isle, Edna does not acknowledge the justifiable reason for his departure and is instead bothered by the news as she explains, "The idea of Robert starting off in such a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were a matter of life and death! Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 925). In fact, she had "grown used to seeing [him], to having [him] around [her] all the time, and [his] action seems unfriendly, even unkind" (*The Awakening* 926). It is within reason, though, that his abrupt departure changes Edna's perception of him. Still bothered by Robert's absence, Edna struggles to rationalize why she loves him. She confides in Mademoiselle Reisz and realizes that love is difficult to explain: "do you suppose a woman knows why she loves? Does she select?" (Chopin, *The Awakening* 964). When Mademoiselle Reisz asks her why she loves Robert, she responds playfully:

'Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin, and a little finger which he can't straighten for having played baseball too energetically in his youth.' (Chopin, *The Awakening* 965)

Edna is unable to rationalize why she loves him. But in Edna's defense, love is often formed by emotions, not reason. So perhaps her love for him is not something that can be rationalized or explained logically.

Emotions continue to drive Edna's decisions with Robert. After reading Robert's final parting note, Edna does not spend much time in reflection but instead returns to Grand Isle to end her life. She does, however, reason with herself, to some extent, and comes to the conclusion that she is destined to be alone and unhappy:

There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach. (Chopin, *The Awakening* 999)

Because she is overcome by despondency and has given up on achieving selfhood, Edna is not thinking logically. She ends her life by drowning in the sea which is the catalyst of her awakening. Chopin, however, chose Edna's method of suicide deliberately. In fact, in *The Art of Dying*, Gentry argues that "drowning is the preferred method for women to commit suicide," for "death by drowning usually allowed the victim and her family to escape the stigma that was attached to the suicide and the negative legal consequences" (40). Thus, it was the most logical way for Edna to end her own life. There would be no proof that it was intentional as her death could be called what Gentry suggests to be "an accident that might have resulted from her recent evident mental instability" (40). Her children would not have to suffer from the idea of their mother killing herself because

death by drowning can easily be interpreted as accidental. And it makes further sense that Edna would die in water because, as Gentry posits, “[i]n the works of many artists, male and female, water becomes not only the means of the woman’s death, but a symbol in the work of her fallen state and a predictor of her necessary end” (42). Chopin uses logic with persuasive intention in her portrayal of the water being symbolic of Edna’s challenge and ultimate failure to achieve an individualized identity. In fact, water comes full circle in the novel, for according to Gentry,

[t]he images and tone utilized in the first swimming scene recur precisely in Edna’s final scene when she returns to Grand Isle, and seemingly on the spur of the moment decides to kill herself. Since these scenes are so closely parallel in construction, Edna’s end has been made necessary by her beginning. (43)

Chopin parallels these scenes intentionally and perhaps with the purpose of revealing that Edna was doomed from the start of the novel to fail in her pursuit of selfhood in a patriarchal society. Furthermore, with Chopin’s choice of Edna’s committing suicide by drowning, Gentry contends that she leaves “Edna in a dreamlike trance, a fantasy. By not describing in detail Edna’s physical death or its aftermath, Chopin suggests a tone of peace and escape” (43). With persuasive intent, Chopin suggests that through suicide Edna is finally free. In fact, “Edna awakens to her situation as a woman, and in her quest for identity through a life of significant action, she must paradoxically choose suicide as the only means available to her to achieve her goal” (45).

Although Edna achieves freedom through suicide, she does not achieve selfhood. In “Unbearable Realism: Freedom, Ethics and Identity in *The Awakening*,” Ramos argues

that Edna's "final actions serve as an example of what can happen to a protagonist whose unwillingness to continue dedicating herself to any of the available social roles leads her to abandon all of them in favor of enticing yet ever-elusive freedom, the kind one associates with a tantalizing, idyllic childhood" (147). Because Edna feels like she can never be free in any role in society, she chooses the only form of freedom available to her—death by her own hand. Although she finds peace in an end to her life entirely her own, Edna's childhood, however,

was far from idyllic, given her mother's early death and her father's stern personality, and this may have some relation to her life-long quest for such freedom. But Edna's search for such an unrestricted, undefined and, ultimately, impossible state—a freedom from identity—ironically deprives her life of meaning (and finally of life itself). (Ramos 147)

What Edna searches for cannot be found in the patriarchal society of the late nineteenth century. In fact, what she searches for may not be attainable in any society, for it is implausible to be free from identity.

While some critics, such as Ramos and Gentry, provide validated reasoning for Edna's suicide, other critics assert that Edna's suicide lacks reasoning. For example, in "Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Partial Dissent," Spangler argues that "the reasonings and feelings attributed to her as motivation at the end do not bear scrutiny" (254). Spangler suggests that the ending does not make sense—that "[i]f the rest of the novel existed only at the sentimental, romantic level, then Edna's suicide would be conventionally appropriate and acceptable: a woman surrenders her chastity and death is

the consequence” (254). But the novel explores more than just sentiment and romance; Edna is on a journey of self-discovery. So to give herself to the sea before the end of her journey is illogical. In “Surviving Edna: A Reading of the Ending of *The Awakening*,” Robert Treu also asserts that the ending is unreasoned—

[I]t is not at all clear that Edna’s death is the most likely outcome of the sequence established in the text. It is too likely to be disregarded, obviously, but no more likely than a reasonably strong real-life swimmer becoming tired, panicking, and then finding the strength to reach the shore safely. No rules of nature or probability are breached by making an inference other than Edna’s drowning. Even if we do infer Edna’s drowning, it does not follow that her death is necessarily a suicide. (23)

Treu suggests that Edna’s drowning could have been accidental. In that case, perhaps she returns to the sea because it was the catalyst of her awakening and she wishes to revisit that which awakened her originally. However, Treu wants Chopin’s readers and critics to consider the varying interpretations of the tragic ending. For example, Treu proposes that a logical reason for Edna’s suicide can be found in Chopin’s novel: “Edna’s witnessing of her friend’s suffering during childbirth, the memory of her own similar suffering, along with the timing of Robert’s decision to break with her, have all been cited as motivation for Edna’s suicide” (28). Treu claims that Chopin gives valid reasoning for Edna’s suicide and also contends that critics and modern readers find her suicide to be within reason derived from determinism, for “[w]hether we see Edna as the victim of a vengeful God (she was raised a Calvinist) or of a hostile environment, her suicide is inescapable”

(28). Although Treu provides several logical justifications for Chopin's intention to end her protagonist's life by suicide, Treu argues that some readers and critics still struggle to accept the logical intention of Chopin to have her female protagonist in pursuit of selfhood die by her own hand. Hence "[a]ttempts to see the final paragraphs of the novel as a unified and logical presentation of Edna's motive for suicide have frustrated serious readers by asking them to choose a single strand from a complex skein of possible cause and effect connections" (29). Perhaps she kills herself because of the shame experienced as a result of her sexual promiscuity or because she does not want to live without sexual freedom. Or perhaps she is upset by not achieving selfhood because of societal constraints. Regardless of the position the reader or critic takes regarding Edna's reasoning for suicide, Treu claims that "[c]ritics, whatever ideological position they argue from, have seen the novel's ending as part of a dialectic in which Edna's desire for freedom and society's condemnation of that desire are set against each other and the resolution provided by Edna's suicide" (29). Therefore, Treu agrees with other critics that Edna's inability to achieve selfhood in a patriarchal society pushes her to suicide. But coming to such a conclusion was not easy for Chopin. She wants freedom for Edna, but freedom through selfhood was not reasonable at the time for all women. Therefore, it is reasonable that there are varying interpretations of and reactions to the ending as Treu argues that:

The movement that Kate Chopin describes in *The Awakening* is difficult, leading as it does toward an undefined future. She could not point to an easy triumph for Edna because none was available in the world she knew. So, instead of writing a

Utopian novel, she wrote one in which the contradictions of her social world are shown for what they are, and the door opened for discussions of the future. (30)

It would not have been consistent with the times for Edna to be successful in her pursuit of an individualized identity after abandoning her roles as wife and mother. Likewise, Treu mentions that critics who consult Bakhtin's dialectal interpretations "see Edna's suicide as a logical extension of their dialectal readings" (32). Although tragic and widely debated, Edna's suicide has been proven by various critics to be a logical conclusion to Chopin's novel.

Perhaps Edna would not have been driven to suicide, though, if she had pursued her artistic talent more fully, finding her identity in her artistic interests instead of through other people. However, Edna does not possess the courageous soul Mademoiselle Reisz describes. Looking up to Mademoiselle Reisz, Edna starts to free herself from her family to explore her artistry, but Ramos suggests that Edna "is also prone to constructing certain fantasies of identity" and "lacks the will (and the belief) to commit herself to acting on these fantasies" (149). Edna lacks the courageous soul the artist must possess as well as the willingness to commit to an identity. Ramos contends that "[b]ecause these fantasies fail to become realized, the temptation, both for Edna and the reader, is to assume that no suitable identity for a woman like Edna is available. That is, Edna finally comes to believe that she cannot achieve individuality or personhood" (149). It is within reason that she does not believe she can achieve an individualized identity because of the feminine mystique that women develop an identity only through their husband and children, not their individual selves. Edna is aware of this societal



expectation but tries to fight against it. As a result, Ramos argues that Edna “responds by attempting to live outside of all social constructions, beyond any workable, practical fiction, entering what she imagines to be a space of unmediated reality beyond identity [...] whether that of wife, mother, woman of society, artist and/or lover” (149). In effect, Edna struggles to achieve selfhood outside of societal constructs. The reader realizes that such an identity cannot be formed, “precisely because such an existence, even if achievable, cannot be sustained” (150). Therefore, the novel takes a logical progression with Edna’s suicide. Ramos suggests that entering such a state “would become akin to madness, and, ultimately, would direct itself toward oblivion, toward self-annihilation” (150). Chopin uses logos in her illustration of “the fatal danger inherent in such a quest in which a woman/artist abandons all available social identities” (150). Abandoning all forms of identity, whether traditional or nontraditional, prevents Edna from having any sense of self and ultimately leads to her despair and suicide.

Edna feels constricted by the societal roles available to her because she cannot defeat patriarchal pressures, faltering by the challenges of seeking selfhood. However, Ramos argues that “while *The Awakening* asserts that there is only a limited set of available social roles for a woman like Edna, it implicitly reminds the reader, at the same time, that the content of these roles—as well as their flexibility—is by no means completely circumscribed” (151). Women have some options within their roles—as the reader sees with the roles of Adele Ratignolle, Mademoiselle Reisz, and Madame Lebrun—; however, it is clear to the reader that Edna feels constricted not just because of society’s constraints but also because she does not commit herself fully to filling any

certain role. Even though Edna realizes she has freedom, Ramos contends that “this freedom is not enough: she must then act on and willfully sustain her choices in order for them to have any meaning beyond whim” (151). Because she does not act on or sustain her choices, she finds herself dissatisfied even by her freedom and awakenings.

According to Ramos, Chopin’s “novella illuminates the socio-economic and cultural realities women like Edna faced, as well as the physical desires and social needs society denied them” (151). Edna desires to be more than a mother and wife, wishing to serve a vital role in society as an artist and to explore her sexual awakening further. But realizing that fighting for an individualized identity in a patriarchal society would be challenging, Edna’s “self-defeating choices stem, in part, from the fact that she believes with increasing intensity that no favorable identity or social function is available to her” (152). She does not feel that society will accept the person she wishes to become, so she ends her life on her own terms instead. In fact, Ramos argues that Edna’s “suicide seems related not so much to her intimacies with others (however unfulfilling or impossible these might be) as to the insurmountable social, patriarchal restrictions she must face” (152). But as Ramos previously argues and Mademoiselle Reisz points out, Edna must devote herself to a new role or talent willfully; however, Edna lacks such will. Therefore, Ramos asserts that “[t]he problem Edna faces, the more pressing and essential issue, is not so much a matter of how many available roles there are to choose from, but of how to fight for and dedicate oneself to (and then modify) any of those roles in the first place” (154). But she eventually rejects all roles. And “[h]er rejection thus leads to a kind of despair in many ways akin to madness, for both (madness and a surrendering of the will)

involve relinquishing the sole means of self-representation in a society that already limits and undermines women's ability to do so" (154-55). Edna's rejection only pushes her further away from achieving selfhood, which reveals her violation of logos. In fact, Ramos argues that "her withdrawals only succeed in obliterating the social positions she might otherwise use to determine as much of her own life as possible" (155). So it is not just patriarchal society that limits Edna; Edna too limits herself. Because she does not have the will to establish an individualized identity, "after Edna has freed herself from Leonce, from her roles as wife and woman of the house, including many of her child-care responsibilities, she still feels empty, feels her own life to be without meaning" (156). Her life could have meaning if she were to accept and devote herself to a new and fulfilling role. And in the first half of *The Awakening*, "Edna seems to have no problem choosing new identities; her gradual refusal in the second half to work towards sustaining such identities adumbrates a pattern, the logical end of which is suicide" (158). Therefore, Ramos agrees with several other critics that Edna's suicide is a logical step in her self-destructive path. Furthermore, Edna's "sense of the practical, available social identities is erroneously and therefore tragically limited" (160). Edna is not entirely to blame for her limitations. Patriarchal society has limited Edna. She simply surrenders in a battle she feels she cannot win. Because being a wife and mother is often all women know, they ultimately feel discouraged or challenged in their pursuit of an identity beyond what they know.

Many readers find value in the effort that Edna Pontellier made to define herself and look upon her character as a heroine who tried to resist patriarchal limitations and

assert her own independence and right to self-definition. Both Athenaise and Edna Pontellier are characters developed by Chopin to reveal dimensions of women that assert unconventional ideas and behaviors. Chopin is nonjudgmental in her portrayal of these characters. She presents the characters objectively and suggests that there is reason for their thoughts and behaviors as they question and rebel against stereotypes. Contemporaries of Chopin might condemn the independence of Athenaise and Edna, but later readers identified with and championed their search for meaningful self-definition.

## CHAPTER V

### A CONCLUSION TO THE APPLICATION OF ARISTOTELIAN RHETORICAL APPEALS IN KATE CHOPIN'S *THE AWAKENING* AND "ATHENAISE"

Writing with rhetorical, persuasive intention and a feminist message about women's struggle to achieve selfhood, Kate Chopin drew inspiration from various sources. She "was influenced by the feminism of Madame de Stael and George Sand and the realism of Flaubert and Maupassant" (Seyersted, "Introduction" 32). Chopin's style of writing was clearly inspired by the French author Maupassant. Chopin identified him as her greatest literary mentor. She marveled at his works and described him with admiration in her essay entitled "Confidences" as "a man who had escaped from tradition and authority, who had entered into himself and looked out upon life through his own being and with his own eyes; and who, in a direct and simple way, told us what he saw" (701). According to Toth and Seyersted, in *Kate Chopin's Private Papers*, Maupassant "told stories the way she wanted to: without creaking, old-fashioned machinery, and with a clear-eyed and unsentimental focus on reality" (130). Chopin adopted a similar approach to writing. In her essays, Chopin insisted that "no author can be true to life who refuses to pluck from the Darwinian tree of knowledge and to see human existence in its true meaning" (Seyersted, "Introduction" 23). Using the logical appeal in her writing, Chopin reveals what Aristotle defines as the "truth and apparent truth" of the female journey to self-actualization. In close observation of the human experience, Seyersted

argues that Chopin “concentrated on the immutable impulses of love and sex; and Whitman and Maupassant were two of the authors who spoke most deeply to her, probably because they acknowledged the existence of Eros and because they had helped to extend the literary limits to the treatment of sex” (“Introduction” 24). By depicting scenes of love and sex in her writing, Chopin stirs the emotions and appeals to the pathos of her readers.

Regardless of her influences, Seyersted affirms that Chopin was undoubtedly an “independent and original” writer as she turned to aspects of the female condition which other authors hesitated to explore (“Introduction” 32). For example, in *The Awakening* and “Athenaise,” Chopin explores a woman character’s dissatisfaction in her marriage and journey to discover her own identity. That a female writer addressed such issues at a time before women had even the right to vote is certainly worthy of attention and praise. Considering all of these influences and topics addressed, readers and critics can recognize that Chopin was indeed a formidable writer. In fact, Toth and Seyersted suggest that “Kate Chopin’s surviving writings, public and private, show a woman with humor and an appreciation for gossip. But she was also a highly disciplined, ambitious writer whose aims sometimes conflicted with expectations for women, and especially for mothers” (131). Although a proud mother herself, Chopin was not afraid to address women’s apathy toward motherhood or other womanly roles. Consequently, such conflict depicted in some of her works led to criticism but also progression for women. While Chopin received harsh criticism for going against the grain in a patriarchal society, her progressive outlook on women’s roles in society began to give women a voice in a

society when many were not heard. Moreover, “[i]n real life, she seems to have embodied the contradiction she describes in chapter VII of *The Awakening*: ‘the dual life—that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions’” (Toth and Seyersted 131). Because she questioned societal expectations, she has her female protagonists question as well. Chopin was ahead of her time, setting the foundation for feminists to come. Many of Chopin’s works were revived with the second wave of feminism as feminist literary critics tried to redefine the American literary canon by including women’s voices to diversify the depiction of the American experience. Germaine Greer, Gloria Steinem, and Betty Friedan were prominent feminists of the second wave of feminism who made a strong argument for women’s autonomy. In fact, social critic, Betty Friedan, published *The Feminine Mystique* in 1963 in an effort to address and eradicate gender inequality. Published almost a century after Chopin’s writing career, *The Feminine Mystique* suggests for women what Chopin depicts in her characterization of Edna Pontellier in *The Awakening* and Athenaise in “Athenaise”:

When society asks so little of women, every woman has to listen to her own inner voice to find her identity in this changing world. She must create, out of her own needs and abilities, a new life plan, fitting in the love and children and home that have defined femininity in the past with the work toward a greater purpose that shapes the future. (Friedan 338)

Chopin listened to her inner voice and has her female protagonists take this path long before Friedan published her manifesto. Both Edna and Athenaise seek an individualized identity outside of their circumscribed roles. Although they struggle, the fact that they

listen to their inner voice and pursue a new identity sends Chopin's intended persuasive message that other women can and should as well. According to Erin Riney in her thesis on feminist re-visioning and women's writing, "many regard Chopin's novel *The Awakening* as the literary equivalent of Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique* in mobilizing readers for the women's movement" (3). Through her publishing of *The Awakening* and "Athenaise," Chopin brought a woman's desire to achieve selfhood outside of wifehood and motherhood to the literary canon. Although some women felt complete in these roles, many women sought identity outside of motherhood and wifehood. In *The Feminine Mystique*, Friedan suggests that "[i]t was the need for a new identity that started women [...] on that passionate journey, that vilified, misinterpreted journey away from home" (80). Although both Edna and Athenaise struggled on their journeys away from home, that they leave their homes in the first place suggests the empowerment of women to pursue selfhood.

During Chopin's literary career and before the second wave of feminism attacked gender inequality, a woman's identity, or ethos, was established through her roles as wife and mother. A woman cannot be whole, or fully alive, if her greatest destiny is solely to become someone's wife. Because the ethos of Edna and Athenaise is of a nonconforming nature, they both feel incomplete in their roles as wives. Perhaps they feel incomplete because they have been living according to the feminine mystique. Although each female protagonist would like to obtain selfhood, without a designated purpose beyond wifehood and motherhood, she cannot achieve an individualized identity. Instead, she finds her identity in others. According to Barbara C. Ewell in "Chopin and the Dream of Female



Selfhood,” Kate Chopin “attempts to show in her fiction what it means to be a female self, how that self is defeated in its struggles” (159). Neither Edna nor Athenaise achieves selfhood because of the challenges they face in patriarchal society. In “Athenaise,” Athenaise seeks selfhood by moving away temporarily from her husband, but she does not achieve it, as she soon realizes her dependence on others as well as her pregnant state. However, Athenaise does not come to the destructive ending that Edna does. Instead, she comes to a joyful acceptance of her situation with impending motherhood. In *The Awakening*, Edna tries to find her identity through lovers, sex, and art, but struggles to find a purpose or identity entirely her own. As presented in the previous chapter, several critics make the reasoned argument that Edna struggles to achieve selfhood because she does not think it is achievable in a patriarchal society. Perhaps Chopin uses Edna and Athenaise as examples for other women—that they should keep fighting for an individualized identity regardless of the struggles they face. In fact, Ewell argues that

in Edna’s triumph Chopin suggests the hope of a self that is also selfless, one not wholly defined by others or wholly careless of the responsibility of others, neither wholly object nor subject of desire. In that ambivalent triumph, then, lies a revolutionary image of the dream of female selfhood. (165)

Although ignoring the question of identity was the societal expectation for women during Chopin’s lifetime and before the second wave of feminism, women had to suffer the crisis of identity to grow fully as individuals. Evoking the emotions of her audience, in *The Awakening*, Chopin depicts Edna as she suffers the crisis of identity to become fully human; however, Edna allows societal and internal limitations to inhibit her. Edna

wishes to release her solitary soul into an accepting society but does not find such acceptance; instead, she gives herself over to the inviting sea. Athenaise also suffers through a crisis of identity as she attempts to live independently but realizes she cannot. Because both women are confined by patriarchal pressures, they struggle to grow independently.

Chopin makes the logical argument that women deserve to grow independently as she demonstrates her support of women's pursuing fulfillment outside of wifehood and motherhood. Although Chopin portrays Edna and Athenaise as women trapped by the feminine mystique, by depicting Edna's tragedy as well as Athenaise's struggle but eventual resolution, women in the late nineteenth and twentieth centuries had a better chance at achieving self-actualization. Chopin was ahead of her time in having two female protagonists—Edna and Athenaise—of works published in the late nineteenth century attempt to break out of the patriarchal limitations to achieve selfhood. In effect, Chopin has demonstrated her argument for women's autonomy. With such demonstration, Chopin has persuaded her audience effectively by Aristotle's standard, as argued in Book I of *Rhetoric*—that “we are most fully persuaded when we consider a thing to have been demonstrated” (Aristotle 180).

In writing with persuasive intention, Chopin demonstrates her use of the Aristotelian rhetorical appeals. The three rhetorical appeals—ethos, pathos, and logos—can be applied to *The Awakening* and “Athenaise” as demonstrated in this study. Chopin uses ethos in her depiction of the character traits and actions of her main characters, creating characters with whom her readers can relate and identify. Chopin also uses

pathos as she stirs the emotions of her readers by describing the emotional condition of her female protagonists on their arduous journey of self-discovery as well as the struggles of other characters. Finally, Chopin applies logos in her depiction of the reasonable truth in Edna and Athenaise's fight for autonomy as well as the logical reasoning characters use in their decisions influenced by societal expectations. By using the rhetorical appeals, Chopin challenges stereotypical assumptions about women and shares their struggle to achieve selfhood.

This rhetorical study documents that Chopin wrote with persuasive intention through her use of the Aristotelian rhetorical appeals and sends a feminist message through this demonstration. Perhaps this work of study will lead to other applications of feminist rhetoric to Chopin's works.

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