

KATE CHOPIN'S EDNA PONTELLIER: PROFILE OF BIPOLAR
DISORDER

A THESIS

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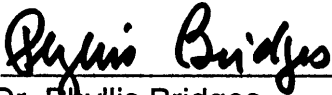


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ABSTRACT

Kate Chopin's *Edna Pontellier* has been the subject of considerable psychological and feminist criticism in the last thirty years. Psychological scholarship focuses on Edna's losses suffered during her childhood and on the unconscious processes of her mind to explain her adult behavior. Feminist scholarship also looks at childhood issues, but it focuses primarily on Edna's patriarchal marriage and Victorian society as the creator of her personality and lifestyle. Neither of these critical perspectives adequately explains many seemingly irresolvable issues. The purpose of this paper is to demonstrate how the psychological illness Bipolar II Disorder affects Edna's thoughts and behavior throughout the novel. The diagnosis also connects psychological and feminist criticism, augments and enhances them, and challenges some of the current scholarship by introducing new behavioral motivations.

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CHAPTER 1

EXPLANATION OF BIPOLAR II DISORDER

Buried in negative reviews, Kate Chopin's novel The Awakening went out of print shortly after her death in 1904. Critics claimed the novel was about a selfish, stupid woman who had no redemptive value. Sixty-five years later, Per Seyersted published Chopin's collected works in an era when students were clamoring for a new kind of heroine – a rebel of sorts who could stand as an icon of the independent, sexually-awakened modern woman. Chopin became a star in the 1970s, and her novel's main character Edna Pontellier became a symbol of the feminist movement. The last three decades have brought forth an abundance of critical scholarship on the novel from many different approaches, including the feminist. The critical debate tends to focus on certain seemingly irresolvable issues such as the ambiguous ending of the story and the extravagant dinner party Edna throws in honor of herself. This thesis examines and applies two schools of criticism in its exploration of the novel's heroine: psychological (or psychoanalytic) and feminist. Most importantly, the study introduces a new interpretation to current psychological scholarship by diagnosing Edna with a specific mood disorder, which the American Psychiatric Association terms bipolar II disorder. This approach not only challenges the feminist slant that has dominated criticism of Kate Chopin's work for the last thirty

years, but it creates an entirely new way of reading the novel.

Psychological Approach

Psychological scholarship on The Awakening developed from a long history of connecting literature and the mysterious undercurrents of the human psyche. The psychological approach to literature actually began as early as the fourth century BC with Aristotle's definition of tragedy. Most literary critics have been at some point concerned with the psychology of writing. During the Renaissance, Sir Philip Sidney wrote about the moral effects of poetry. The romantic poets Coleridge, Wordsworth, and Shelley developed theories about the imagination (Guerin 126). Finally, famed Austrian psychiatrist Sigmund Freud applied his psychoanalytic theories, which deal with the nature of the unconscious mind, to literature nearly one hundred years ago, giving birth to the modern psychological approach. Through his extensive client research, Freud provided evidence that hidden psychological forces over which humans have little control give rise to most behaviors. He theorized that the mind is like an iceberg, in which the vast density of mental processes lies unseen below the surface of the conscious mind. Freud also believed that "powerful social taboos" prevent "certain sexual impulses"; therefore, the mind represses them into the unconscious and then later releases them in less forbidden behaviors or in dreams (Guerin 127-28).

According to Freud, understanding the human psyche allows us to value literature on a new type of scale. For example, great literary works of all ages and cultures share the same psychological elements that Freud studied in his patients – “from Sophocles’ *Oedipus Rex* to Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*” to modern day novels and plays (Walker 219). Freud’s interest in literary artists led him to write criticism of contemporary works based solely on his psychoanalytic theories. Many of his contemporaries quickly followed suit. Otto Rank believed that writers transfer unconscious wishes into “literary fantasy and he used Freud’s theory of the Oedipal complex to explain the similarity of literary heroes through the ages (221). Ernest Jones, one of Freud’s students, provided the first comprehensive psychoanalytic study of major literary works in Hamlet and Oedipus, in which he discusses the psychological makeup of Hamlet and explains how that affects his decision-making and behavior.

During the first half of the twentieth century, many other critics embraced the idea that psychological and psychoanalytic theory could offer a new comprehension of literature, and soon entire books on psychoanalytic criticism appeared. Adherents of the approach believed that authors actually reveal their own repressed wishes, desires, and defense mechanisms in their works. Later, critics shifted their focus toward the psychology of literary characters and the psychology of the reader and the text. Contemporary psychological studies cover all of these issues. According to the French structuralist psychoanalyst

Jacques Lacan, the unconscious mind is a language, “a form of discourse.”

Indeed, creative writing is a psychoanalytic discourse, and critics study literature in order to learn more about unconscious processes (Walker 224-25).

Psychological interpretation also offers new ideas about a work’s thematic and symbolic issues and enhances understanding and appreciation of literature. It applies accepted psychological theories and diagnoses to characters providing insight into a character’s inner struggles and outer behavior.

Too many questions concerning Edna’s behavior and cognitive reasoning heretofore have been inadequately answered. This thesis resolves the problem by uncovering Edna’s biologically based bipolar II disorder, which consists of alternating episodes of mania and depression. The awareness of mania and depression date back to the ancient world, with many Greek and Persian physicians realizing that the two symptoms were connected. The word mania derives from the Greek *mainesthai*, which means, “to be insane” (Mondimore 257). Eighteenth and nineteenth century physicians increasingly used the term, but only in the early twentieth century did psychiatrists clearly introduce and study mania and depression as belonging to the same set of disorders, thanks to the ground-breaking work of German psychiatrist Emil Kraepelin, who introduced the term “manic-depressive insanity” (12). The sufferer experiences periods of mania that can be anywhere from great enthusiasm to a transcendental fervor with panic, delirium, or psychosis, followed or preceded by periods of depression

that can be merely gloomy or profoundly despairing. In some cases, a patient displays opposite moods simultaneously, known as a mixed episode. The symptoms and diagnosis of bipolar disorder are complex, and there is more than one type. Therefore, a thorough explanation of the disorder is presented at the end of this chapter.

A main purpose of this paper is to demonstrate that bipolar II disorder affects Edna's thoughts and behavior throughout the novel. This important interpretation may lead to a considerable re-examination of The Awakening. Of course, recognition of the psychological connotations does not diminish future interpretive possibility of Chopin's novel, nor does it discount insights gained from other critical approaches. What it does is increase respect for the greatness of Chopin and her remarkable pre-Freudian understanding of the human psyche. She created a novel that has appealed in a profound way psychologically to decades of readers worldwide, as does all great literature, mainly because it derives from both pleasant and unpleasant – even taboo – processes in the unconscious mind. Two critical approaches currently provide the best interpretation and explanation of the novel: psychological and feminist. Whereas critics who use psychoanalysis and certain other psychological theories, such as existentialism, focus on childhood experience as being the primary creator of adult behavior, this thesis uses the clinical approach to concentrate on the mental illness that Edna suffers from as an adult, which has a biological cause.

Finally, this thesis connects, adds to, enhances, challenges, and fills in gaps left by the prevailing psychological and feminist criticism.

Feminist Approach

Unlike psychological scholarship, the feminist approach has been in practice for only a short time. The 1970s brought a dramatic increase in the number of women literary scholars, and feminist criticism expanded to incorporate elements from other theories including psychoanalytic, new historicism, classical mythology, and linguistics. In essence, feminist critics elevated the status of Kate Chopin from an obscure regional writer to an internationally known author of American fiction. Many feminist critics study the work of women writers throughout history who managed to find their own voice, producing a literature of their own, despite the heavy restraints put upon them by a stifling patriarchal society. For example, Patricia Meyer Spacks studied women's literary history to discover how great women writers have felt about themselves and their lives and how they have imagined the reality of their time. Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar found that certain issues recur in nineteenth century women's writing because those authors wrote in a social and literary culture that was dominated by the patriarch (Walker 161). This thesis supports much of the feminist discussion of The Awakening, especially the argument that Chopin intended to portray Edna as the icon of nineteenth-century women who struggled to make a new path in a society that strongly opposed such an action,

who struggled to find autonomy in a world that offered very few options to women and firmly resisted change, and who struggled to awaken the passions that Victorian society considered deviant. However, this thesis contends that despite Chopin's intentions Edna's desires and actions appear to be shaped much more by her psychology than by any need to change society's attitudes toward women.

Bipolar Disorder

Bipolar disorder is like a chameleon, changing its symptoms and its episodes from one person to the next and even within the same individual. The following pages are a compilation of the explanations of bipolar disorder discussed in Francis Mondimore, John Clarkin, E.S. Paykel, Robert Carson, and the DSM-IV. In this disorder, moods take on a life of their own, fluctuating beyond the person's control. Sometimes mood episodes are mild and the fluctuations do not cause the person to become clearly psychotic or morbidly depressed, making it appear as though the victim simply is more moody than other people are. This belief results in their being labeled as difficult or immature, just as some critics describe Edna; and their problems and behavior are dismissed. Perhaps the most devastating feature of bipolar disorder is that, unlike a medical illness, it has no clear-cut beginning, middle, or end. Criteria for bipolar II include at least one major depressive episode, one or more hypomanic episodes, an absence of a manic or mixed episode, and a "clinically significant

distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning,” which is caused by the depressive stage, not the hypomanic episode (DSM-IV 362). The symptoms of bipolar disorder may develop, then with or without treatment remit for any given period, only to return unmercifully. According to Mondimore, “the hallmark of bipolar illness – especially bipolar I – is the tendency of the illness to relapse” (34). Interestingly, bipolar II disorder seems to attack women more often than it does men. Ten to fifteen percent of persons diagnosed with the disorder commit suicide (DSM-IV 360).

Mania

The main two bipolar disorders are termed bipolar I and bipolar II. Both present episodes of opposite extremes of mood – mania and major depression – hence, the term bipolar. The difference between these disorders is in the type of mania experienced. Bipolar I causes a full-blown manic episode, which is extreme and potentially dangerous. The manic state usually develops slowly over a period of days or weeks. At first, the person's mood is elevated and he or she feels a sense of well being and an inflated self-esteem. Eventually, the individual enters a state of grandiosity, which can reach delusional proportions that causes the individual to believe he or she has special knowledge, power, or talent, and makes grandiose plans based on these beliefs. For example, a person may quit his job because he suddenly has the idea to write the great

American epic, despite having no talent or previous interest for writing. There is also an increase in goal-directed activity that entails excessive planning of multiple activities. Extreme delusions, such as believing one is God or a member of a royal family, are common.

Ultimately, a very unpleasant mood usually surpasses the good feeling that begins the manic episode. The elated and expansive mood in mania can quickly give way to an angry, irritable mood that can lead to violence toward others or self. For a time, alternation between the exalted state and extreme irritability is common. Cognitive changes soon follow, and the sufferers feel a heightened ability to concentrate and to reason. They experience what psychiatrists term "flight of ideas," in which thinking processes accelerate to an incredible pace. It is said this experience resembles watching two or three television programs simultaneously. As the victim's mind races lightening fast from one subject to another, he or she feels pressured to speak faster and faster in an attempt to discuss everything that comes to mind. In severe cases of "flight of ideas," the person cannot get half way through a sentence before a new thought enters the mind and he or she must begin a new sentence. He or she talks nonstop, sometimes becoming theatrical and using jokes, puns, and songs to exaggerate their meaning. Distractibility is a problem, as the mind is unable to filter out background noise and other irrelevant stimuli. Overconfidence and a feeling of indestructibility can lead to several excessive, indiscriminate behaviors

in the manic person. For instance, the sufferer may walk up to a stranger and begin an extensive conversation about personal experiences or whatever may be on his or her mind at the time. It is common for someone in a manic phase to go on an extravagant spending spree that can become financially catastrophic, because there is no concern for how much money is spent or where it will come from when the bills come due. The manic person loses all sense of responsibility and concern for his or her welfare, which when added to an increased sex drive, can lead to promiscuity, including uncharacteristic bisexual or homosexual behaviors regardless of their marital state. In fact, mania causes such a lack of restraint that infatuations or even engagements may result with an individual that would never be considered during a period of normal mood. According to one early psychiatrist, "incomprehensible engagements, also pregnancies, are not rare in these states. I know cases in which the commencement of [mania] was repeatedly announced by a sudden engagement" (Mondimore 5). Addictive behaviors are common during mania such as gambling and the use of drugs and alcohol. Mania causes an increased and intrusive sociability that causes the person to make unreasonable and presumptuous demands on friends, such as showing up unannounced at their homes or place of business at all hours, and it causes the sufferer to behave in an aggressive manner. Physical symptoms include an abundance of energy and a decreased need for sleep and food, mainly because the person simply does not have time for it because he or she

constantly needs to act on the incredible new ideas they are having. The final criterion necessary for a bipolar I diagnosis is that the person must present disturbance severe enough to cause noticeable impairment of daily functioning or to require hospitalization. The course of a manic episode develops over a few days, frequently following psychosocial stressors, and lasts from a few weeks to several months. Usually, major depression immediately precedes or follows a manic episode. The average age of a first manic episode is the early twenties, though later onset is also common. It is interesting to note that many studies performed before the advent of effective modern treatment showed that bipolar I patients tended to switch from depression to mania without an interval of normal functioning (35). There have also been several studies showing that individuals, who change from depression to mania as Edna appears to do, are more difficult to treat than are those who switch from mania to depression (37).

Hypomania

The difference in bipolar I and bipolar II disorders is in the degree of mania experienced. In 1881, a German psychiatrist named Mendel published a book in which he coined the term "hypomania" for the condition of mild euphoria that does not progress to full-blown mania (15). Hypomania does not exhibit the psychotic symptoms and potential violence of mania. It is not severe enough to cause a marked impairment in social and occupational functioning and therefore does not require the person to be hospitalized. According to the DSM-IV,

hypomania is a period of abnormally “elevated, expansive, or irritable mood that lasts at least 4 days” (335). These symptoms correspond to those felt by people who are experiencing the beginning of a full-blown manic episode. Flight of ideas is not common, but rapid speech is present. Despite pressured speech, it is not typically difficult to interrupt the person, as it is with someone suffering a manic episode. Hypomania causes distractibility, which is evidenced by rapid change in conversation or behavior. While uninvolved observers may not notice the unusually elevated mood, it is crucial for diagnosis that those close to the person recognize a distinct difference, as Dr. Mandelet notices the change in Edna. There is an extra enthusiasm for sociability, but not to the extreme degree as with mania, and mood might alternate between ebullience and petulance. Unlike mania, hypomania does not cause grandiosity, but it does produce inflated self-esteem to the point of narcissism. Edna’s narcissism is one of the recurring themes in The Awakening and will be discussed later in this study. As with mania, these feelings can lead to foolish, impulsive, and addictive behaviors. Edna spends quite a bit of time gambling at the racetrack. A hypomanic episode might cause a person to squander money on extravagant shopping sprees. Edna impulsively rents a house and throws an extravagant dinner party. Heightened sexual awareness and lowered inhibition usually result in risky and immoral sexual behavior. Edna participates in an extramarital affair with Alcee, hopes for another one with Robert, and decides by the end of the novel that she

would continue having affairs with different men. Overconfidence and irritability can lead someone to quit a job, invest a life's savings in a get-rich-quick scheme, drive too fast, or engage in other potentially self-destructive behaviors.

Nevertheless, these behaviors do not reach the level of impairment that is distinctive in mania. Similar to a manic episode, hypomania causes goal-directed planning and activities to increase, but they are usually creative and practical rather than unrealistic and grandiose. Edna suddenly takes up painting and eventually sells some of her work to support her new lifestyle. The course of a hypomanic episode begins suddenly, fully developing within a day or two and lasting for anywhere from days to months. The episode is usually preceded or followed by a major depressive episode. As many as 15% of people with hypomania ultimately develop a manic episode, in which case the diagnosis would change from bipolar II to bipolar I.

Major Depression

The common denominator in bipolar I and bipolar II disorders is a major depressive episode, which "is a period of at least 2 weeks during which there is either depressed mood or the loss of interest or pleasure in nearly all activities" (320). The depression found in bipolar disorder is different from a "normal" depression, such as that felt by someone who has lost a job or who is grieving a death. That type of depression is based on an actual event; there is a reason for feeling miserable and it is dispelled after an appropriate amount of time. Major

depression is an unmerciful state of anguish that dominates every aspect of the individual for an extended period when there is no external reason for it.

Feelings of extreme sadness, worthlessness, and guilt dominate the person's thoughts most of the day. The sufferer sees every minor event as evidence of personal deficiencies. The notion of worthlessness or guilt can even reach delusional dimensions, such as someone believing he or she is personally responsible for the trouble in the Middle East. Severely depressed people may believe that most or everything they do is inadequate. They lose the ability to feel pleasure or interest in activities or hobbies that were formerly enjoyed. For example, an avid gardener stops tending her vegetable patch, no longer caring whether it shrivels and dies while the weeds take over. In some cases, sexual interest is considerably reduced. All the senses are dulled, so that food tastes bland, colors appear drab, and flowers lose their fragrance. Major depression causes mental torment, filling a person with anguish even at times when he or she should feel joy. Many suffering individuals exhibit increased irritability, overstated frustration over minor concerns, and angry outbursts. Those close to the person observe social withdrawal.

During the acute phase of a depressive episode, marital and family functioning can be severely impaired. The effect depression has on family life is clearly seen in Edna's home, as is discussed in later chapters. Marriages

typically suffer from tension, hostility, lack of communication and affection, and sexual dissatisfaction or cessation. Studies also reveal depressed women lack involvement and communication with their children and feel resentment for them, rather than affection (Clarkin 17-18).

Thought processes, memory, and concentration all slow and become inefficient so that even simple tasks are overwhelming. The depressed person may lose the ability to follow a conversation or the storyline of a movie and may take an extraordinary amount of time to make an easy decision. This type of depression usually disturbs sleep patterns, causing either insomnia or hypersomnia. Disturbed sleep patterns are an important and recurring issue with Edna. Other types of depression typically produce insomnia; however, hypersomnia is the more common impairment in bipolar disorder. Similarly, it also causes appetite disturbances that may transpire in either direction, causing a person to eat too little or, as in Edna's case, very often. Another physical symptom of major depression is fatigue with listlessness, even to the point of exhaustion. As in a manic episode, persons suffering from severe depression may experience delusions. They may come to believe that awful things are happening, or will happen, in their lives. For example, they may believe that they are going to be fired from their job or that their spouse is going to leave them, although there is no evidence to support such beliefs. Depressed individuals may develop psychosomatic symptoms such as bodily aches and pains. In

extreme cases, paranoid delusions can occur such as the belief that the government is trying to control the person's mind. Delusionally depressed people can become a danger to others and themselves. Naturally, the most serious consequence of major depression is the potential for suicide. Depressed individuals tend to view many of life's circumstances as insurmountable, and they simply do not have the energy or desire to attempt to overcome. The course of major depression usually develops over days or weeks, but a period of mild depression and anxiety lasting weeks or months may precede it. According to the DSM-IV, only five of the preceding symptoms must occur during the same 2-week period for a diagnosis of major depression, one of which must be a "depressed mood for most of the day, nearly every day," or diminished interest in formerly pleasurable activities for "most of the day, nearly every day" (327). The three most common symptoms "are depressed mood, loss of interest and anxiety" (Paykel 4). Patients with a slow developing depression might not be able to date the onset of their disorder, because an acute phase can be preceded by a period of mild and fluctuating symptoms that can last years (Paykel 1).

Mixed Episode

Another bizarre mood type found in bipolar disorder is a mixed episode, consisting of both mania and major depression simultaneously. As long ago as the seventeenth century, a physician observed the rapid cycling of the two

symptoms, stating that “they succeed each other in a double and alternate act; or take each other’s place like the smoke and flame of fire” (Mondimore 25). The symptoms can become a mingled state of “anxious mania” or “excited depression.” A mixed episode usually includes “agitation, insomnia, appetite dysregulation, psychotic features, and suicidal thinking,” and it must last nearly every day for at least one week to count toward diagnosis (DSM-IV 333). Like the manic episode, a mixed episode causes changes severe enough to impair social or occupational functioning or to require hospitalization, and it may produce psychotic features. Because a mixed episode exhibits signs of full-blown mania, it is considered a feature of bipolar I disorder only. If at any time a person diagnosed with bipolar II disorder develops a mixed episode, his or her diagnosis is changed to bipolar I. A mixed episode may arise from either a manic or depressive episode, and may last for weeks to months and then either remit, or change into a depressive episode. Edna appears to experience these mixed symptoms the last night and day of her life, so it is possible that condition would have continued long enough to change her diagnosis to bipolar I disorder, had she lived.

Rapid-Cycling Specifier

“Rapid-Cycling” is a specifier that “can be applied to Bipolar I Disorder or Bipolar II Disorder” (DSM-IV 390). The main characteristic of rapid-cycling disorder is that at least four distinct mood episodes must occur within a year,

which may present “in any combination and order,” as long as they “meet both the duration and symptom criteria for a Major Depressive, Manic, Mixed, or Hypomanic Episode and must be demarcated by either a period of full remission or by a switch to an episode of the opposite polarity” (390). As many as 5-15% of people suffering from bipolar disorder have rapid cycling episodes, and an astounding 70-90% of those victims are women. The reader will see in chapter three that Edna appears to suffer from the rapid-cycling form of bipolar II disorder. Notably, “The development of rapid cycling is associated with a poorer longer-term prognosis,” as evidenced by Edna’s premature demise (391).

CHAPTER 2

EDNA'S DEEPENING DEPRESSION

The Awakening opens with Edna's seemingly enjoying herself at a luscious Gulf Coast resort on Grand Isle. She and her new friend Robert are chatting and laughing about some "amusing adventure" they had previously experienced while playing in the water. At first, Edna appears happy at Grand Isle, but that night she provides a glimpse into her developing depression. Her husband comes in late from drinking and gambling at Klein's hotel and wants to spend some time with her and probably to make love, but Edna's only desire is to sleep. Leonce checks on his sons and decides that one of them is sick. When he comes back to the bedroom, he reproaches his wife for habitually neglecting their sons. The reader should recall that one of the requirements for a diagnosis of either depression or hypomania is that a close friend or family member must notice a change in mood and/or behavior of the person. Highly irritated, Edna jumps out of bed and, after tending to the boy, spends the rest of the night crying on the porch: "The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier's eyes that the damp sleeve of her peignoir no longer served to dry them" (7). She does not understand why she is crying; she only knows that she feels "an indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a 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" (8).

The reader can clearly see Edna's bipolar depression in this scene because she exhibits the symptoms of irritability, overstated frustration, and crying, as well as the fact that she does not know why she feels such a general misery. According to Mondimore, "some patients with the depression of affective disorder say they do not feel particularly depressed. Usually they seem to mean they are not sad and do not feel like crying, but they certainly are unhappy. They seem to be simply miserable, very irritable and short-tempered, impatient and restless, unable to relax [...]" (Depression 23). Some feminist critics view this scene as proof that Leonce is selfish, domineering, and excessively critical of Edna; but more importantly they say it sets the stage for Edna's realization that she is truly unhappy in her marriage, and for her coming rebellion. This thesis challenges that contention and views Leonce as a concerned husband -- evidence of that is shown in the next chapter -- and that her marriage is not a cause of her depression, although Edna does not love her husband. Instead, her bipolar depression is causing the typical symptoms of tension, hostility, lack of communication and affection, and sexual dissatisfaction or cessation within her marriage; and it is causing her mental discomfort regardless of her social, marital, and parental circumstances (Clarkin 17).

The setting of this first important scene, which is no doubt psychologically symbolic, “establishes the strong associations present throughout the novel between rebellion and the sea” (Levine 72). As Edna sits crying on the porch, “there was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak, and the everlasting voice of the sea, that was not uplifted at that soft hour. It broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night” (7). The sea beckons Edna to open herself to its passionate, mystical forces and to resist sleep. Her “act of resistance paradoxically creates a passivity of consciousness that nurtures these internal stirrings” (Levine 72). In fact, Edna’s bipolar depression leaves her emotionally needy, longing for anything that can ignite her fantasies and fill her emptiness. Nevertheless, Wolff believes that Edna becomes “entranced by the ocean because its ‘language’ neither compromises nor distorts her most intimate passions. Yet it cannot allow her to assert and confirm ‘self’; for ironically, like society, the sea requires an immersion of ‘self’” (Wolff, *Un-utterable* 5).

Although psychological investigation of The Awakening began with Wolff’s essay “Thanatos and Eros: Kate Chopin’s The Awakening,” the author of this thesis disagrees with the main tenant of that writing. Wolff bases her arguments on R.D. Laing’s very broad and faulty interpretation of the schizoid personality. Edna clearly does not have schizoid personality disorder, although she does appear to display similar symptoms at the beginning of the novel. According to the DSM IV, the primary feature of this disorder is “a pervasive pattern of

detachment from social relationships and a restricted range of expression of emotions in interpersonal settings” (641). People with the disorder also manifest the tendency to be socially isolated and “may have very little interest in having sexual experiences with another person” (638). The schizoid individual “almost always chooses solitary activities,” and lacks “close friends or confidants other than first-degree relatives.” Finally, this personality disorder causes “emotional coldness, detachment, or flattened affectivity” (641). It will become clear in the next chapter that while some of Edna’s early symptoms are similar to those of schizoid personality disorder she is actually exhibiting temporary symptoms of depression. Edna’s symptoms become completely different as she progresses into a hypomanic phase and do not resemble symptoms of a schizoid personality disorder, thereby disproving Wolff’s theory. At the same time, this thesis does agree with Wolff’s assertion that “The importance of Chopin’s work does not lie in its anticipation of ‘the woman question’ or of any other question; it derives from its ruthless fidelity to the disintegration of Edna’s character” (242). Cyrille Arnavon agrees that “Edna’s tragedy is presented in a dramatic and tragic form, an extension of the conflict in the innermost recesses of her mind, where the normal and the abnormal can be said to exist side by side. Mentally unbalanced, Edna provides an example of a psychosis with a direct bearing on her external life and her behavior,” and it affects every aspect of her life (Culley 186).

The reader notices early in the novel that Edna's bipolar disorder causes her to seriously lack involvement and communication with her children. She is not a "mother-woman," hovering around her children "with extended, protecting wings." Instead, she lets their quadroon nurse handle their daily needs leaving Edna free to pursue her own desires. She is most unconcerned with "the present material needs of her children," and is not going to interrupt her summer to sew winter night garments as her friend Adele is doing for her own children (9-10). While Edna is "fond of her children," she gladly allows them to spend as much time with Leonce's mother as possible and she sometimes seems to forget their very existence. Edna explains to Adele that she would give up her money and her life for her children's sake, but she would never give up herself, meaning she places her own needs and desires ahead of her children. Feminist critics argue that Edna has a strained relationship with her husband and children because she feels like their possession. However, psychoanalytic research shows that women who lose a parent before age eleven interact less with their children than do women who grow up with both parents. Therefore, psychological critics believe Edna's behavior is due to unfulfilled childhood needs (Ryan 7). Wolff states that her feelings of imprisonment are only "projections of her own attitudes and fears" because she appears actually to have a good deal of freedom from her children and husband (*Thanatos* 245). Fox-Genovese states that Edna "remains tied to an unsatisfied maternal longing that forces her either to

subordinate herself to, or to divorce herself from, her own children” (7). This thesis asserts that Edna’s dysfunctional relationships with her family are due to her bipolar disorder. It is common for a depressive episode to severely impair marital and family functioning. Not only do marriages suffer, but also depressed women commonly lack involvement and communication with their children; they may feel resentment for them, rather than affection (Clarkin 17-18).

Additional psychological factors can increase the depression experienced by a woman with bipolar II disorder. This thesis agrees with psychological criticism of The Awakening that asserts the view Edna’s childhood plays a major role in Edna’s depression, as it is a well-known fact that the early death of a parent can lead to depression in adulthood. The fact that her mother died when she was very young “is a quiet core in the story as Edna refers to early memories of her father but apparently has no memory of her mother” (Ryan 6). Later in the novel, it becomes apparent what kind of husband and father Edna’s father is when he tells Leonce that “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.” Even Leonce understands that the Colonel “had coerced his own wife into her grave” (68). Dana Jack’s essay *Silencing the Self: The Power of Social Imperatives in Female Depression*, states that a “lack of a supportive, confiding relationship with a partner and the death of a mother before age eleven” is a contributing factor to women’s depression. A lack of clear self-identity and depression, which

describes Edna, are directly related to “an early environment where the child learned that his/her actual self was unacceptable, and developed a false self to present to the world, becoming self-alienated and cut off from emotions in the process.” It is important for the reader to know that the lack of an affectionate relationship between a woman and her father is substantial in the development of a woman’s depression, because Edna has a very cold and distant relationship with her father. Finally, a woman like Edna who is susceptible to depression tends to lose her sense of self when she tries to fit into the role of wife and mother, which is “defined by society as self-sacrificing and oriented to the needs of others.” Trying to force herself into such a character inevitably causes her to suffer from an inner “division” that leads to an outwardly conforming person who lives out society’s ideal of woman, and “an inner, secret self who is angry and resentful” (Ryan 4-5).

Edna’s depression causes her to be especially needy and lonely and she has always felt the need to fill the void left by the early death of her mother. Although she has never been “a woman given to confidences,” one morning she reveals important information about herself to Adele in an attempt to make a connection with the ultimate mother-woman. She discloses a vivid and prominent childhood memory “of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she

walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water" (17). She does not remember where she was going, her sunbonnet blocked her vision, or whether she was frightened or happy, but she does remember feeling as though she "must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it." This connection with the image of infinity suggests Freud's description of the "oceanic state," which is a time during early childhood when the infant develops an erotic connection with its environment, the mother's body, and its own body. Edna's "swim" through the tall grass sea shows her longing to return to the symbiosis of the oceanic state in an attempt to return to the mother she lost at such an early age (Taylor 1). It is important that her memory surfaces while she is with Adele, because Edna sees her as a mother figure. While Edna cannot generate a maternal connection toward her children, she gleefully responds to Adele's motherly attentions that morning, attempting to fulfill her childhood needs: "she had put her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder. She was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor" (19).

Psychoanalysts and feminists alike have been interested in why it is apparently Adele and not Robert who awakens Edna's sensuality. The psychoanalytic point of view is that Adele is the ultimate "mother-woman." Edna uses obvious sexual imagery when she describes Adele as possessing "two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them," and she appears a portrait of "the

bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams" (9). Adele is also the type of woman who lives for and through her children, idolizes her husband, and persists "in making" her pregnancies "the subject of conversation," showing that she loves every aspect of her womanhood (10). Wolff points out that "a late twentieth century reader may innocently suppose that Adele's preoccupation is purely maternal. The full truth is quite otherwise: in the discourse of the day, Adele has elected to flaunt her sexuality – to celebrate both her ardor and her physical enjoyment" (*Un-utterable* 9). Adele fulfills the ideal of motherhood and temporarily fulfills Edna's needs for a mother figure. When Adele places her hand on Edna's, it is perhaps "the first sensuous contact that Edna has had with anyone – perhaps in her conscious memory, certainly since adolescence" (Wolff, *Thanatos* 247). Adele also provides an example of one of the two choices Edna has for her life; the other is almost complete isolation, as embodied by the unlikable pianist Mademoiselle Reisz. The bipolar diagnosis alters this reading by agreeing that Edna is longing for a mother figure and that she is trying to fulfill lifelong emotional needs, but adding that these issues contribute to Edna's developing depression and that as bipolar depression is a physiological condition, it would have developed regardless. In addition, depression makes a person very lonely. Any contact, especially with someone who attempts to reverse the self-critical thinking of depression with attention and praise, will spark a feeling of appreciation and neediness. Not only is this what happens between

Edna and Adele, but it also occurs between Edna and Robert, which is expounded in the next chapter.

The reader learns that Edna has probably suffered from depressive episodes for years, which is very common in bipolar II disorder, when her mind wanders back in time to reveal that she had been greatly infatuated with a young engaged man. However, she had come to “the realization that she herself was nothing, nothing, nothing to the engaged young man.” That summer at Grand Isle Edna thought a lot about such past disappointments, which became “a bitter affliction to her” (18). Edna had experienced a few more fantasized romances when she was younger. Taylor calls these early infatuations “a paradigm of repression and self-devaluation” that “have the common feature that the relationships are, per se, unrealizable.” This causes Edna to consolidate “her self-image of nothingness and faulty feminine identity” (3). The disappointing crushes simply reinforced Edna’s early depressive episodes; during her adult bipolar depression, Edna’s mind returns to the incidents that fed her childhood depression. A symptom of depression is the dwelling on past failures, mistakes, and disappointments just as Edna does. It is known that depressed individuals tend to regard their past lives as “worthless and indicative of nothing but failure” (Paykel 4). They relive in their minds all the regrets and losses of their lives, and they open old wounds and feel guilty about past mistakes. Chopin also introduces Edna’s memory of her mother’s death while she and Adele -- her

surrogate mother -- are sitting on the beach holding hands and stroking each other: "The action was at first a little confusing to Edna, but she soon lent herself readily to the Creole's gentle caress. She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others" (17). It is clear that Edna became fixated as a child on her need for a mother. Adele is a poor substitute for a mother figure, and Edna soon turns to the only alternative she can find – the sea.

A few weeks after Edna's revelations to Adele the reader sees Edna's deepening depression. During a party at the resort, Edna seeks solitude out on the gallery. Because of her depression, she lacks the confidence to ask Mademoiselle Reisz to play the piano: "she feared it would be useless to entreat her." When the pianist asks Edna what she would like to hear, she is too embarrassed and lacking in confidence to choose a selection: "Edna was a trifle embarrassed at being thus signaled out for the imperious little woman's favor. She would not dare to choose [...]" (25). Edna exhibits similar lack of confidence and self-criticism earlier in the novel. While sitting with Adele and Robert one afternoon, Edna attempts to paint a portrait of Adele. Although it "bore no resemblance to" her, Madame Ratignolle thinks it is a fine rendition. On the other hand, Edna thinks it is rather displeasing: "After surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface and crumpled the paper between her hands" (13). During the party, Mademoiselle Reisz plays a tune that

causes Edna to imagine a figure of a man whose “attitude was one of hopeless resignation,” and she decides to call the musical piece “Solitude” (25-26).

Lacking confidence, seeking solitude, and envisioning negative images are all symptoms of depression. According to Mondimore, “Many patients with depression find that their minds continually return to the same unpleasant thoughts. Even though they try to put such thoughts out of their minds, their mental activity is drawn to the same depressing theme as if by some force like magnetism or gravity” (Depression 24). Before the song is finished, Edna “trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her.” Then at midnight, in one of the most discussed scenes of the novel, the entire group of resort guests decides to take a swim at “that mystic hour and under that mystic moon” (26). Many people had tried and failed to teach Edna to swim that summer: “a certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water” (27). Edna’s failure to learn could result from “her buried memories of the oceanic phase and the lost mother” (Taylor 4). But on that fateful night, Mademoiselle Reisz’ music arouses Edna’s soul, “swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body,” signaling a “coming reunion with those forces the sea symbolizes” (5). That night she finds the ability to swim away from the shore. “She would not join the groups in their sports and bouts [...],” instead choosing to remain solitary while she is in the water, as a depressed individual would. The narrator makes a statement that goes back to Edna’s description of the grass sea of her childhood:

“As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself.” Suddenly, “a quick vision of death smote her soul” (28). “The sea is both a generative and a destructive force in The Awakening,” representing the possibilities of both life and death for Edna (Stone 2).

The bipolar diagnosis alters both psychoanalytic and feminist critics’ interpretations that the sea is the central figure for Edna’s “rebirth” into her search for a new identity. This thesis contests the type of rebirth and search for identity that other critics see Edna undergoing. Edna is definitely undergoing personality and behavioral changes, but she is not consciously and actively seeking to change her inner self, to change her identity, to rebel against the shackles of marriage. These things result from her physiological/psychological disorder. This thesis does agree with these critics on the importance of the psychological symbolism of the sea and how it parallels Edna’s emotional need for nurturing, and the psychoanalytic symbolism of the sea representing the embodiment of womanhood, the womb, and birth. Like most feminist critics, Eleanor B. Wymard sees Edna experiencing a “deep yearning for inner freedom,” but she provides an existential psychological analysis as well (374). She points out that Chopin links Edna’s journey with the image of the Gulf, beginning with the midnight swim, in which Edna faces what psychotherapist “Karl Jaspers calls the ultimate situations such as death or guilt” (Wymard 379). Once Edna reaches a certain distance during her solitary swim, she encounters a death

vision, at which moment she experiences a primitive state of consciousness, and “the threat of infinity increases her sense of aloneness, separateness, and inner contradiction because her knowledge cannot be integrated with the falseness of her society” (380). Franklin agrees that it is the sea which first stimulates Edna’s psychological development during that fateful night, stating that “it draws her and wraps her in a welcoming and final embrace” (3-4). Feminists such as Francesco Pontuale read Edna’s sudden will to swim as her spiritual merger with the sea, leading to a “reborn” Edna. The narrator first introduces Edna’s growing attachment with the sea in chapter six: “The 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 scene of Edna’s crying because of Leonce’s rebuke foreshadows this feeling. There was no sound but the hooting of an owl and “the everlasting voice of the sea,” which “broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night,” which suggests mourning a childhood loss (Platzky 1).

The bipolar diagnosis does not disagree with or take away from the psychoanalytic interpretation that the Gulf waters represent the primal mother. Again, the psychoanalytic approach is simply a different type of analysis than the clinical approach taken by this thesis. “The inarticulate murmurs and whispers

are her voice,” because young Edna had no mother and she was forced to endure the presence of a cold, harsh father, which leaves her soul rather solitary and “so bereft of nurture that her desire is inarticulate and overwhelming,” causing Edna to forever search for the elusive feeling of being loved (Franklin 4). With the death of Edna’s mother, her older sister Margaret took over the role of housewife, but she was “matronly and dignified” and “was not effusive; she was practical.” Because Margaret was an inappropriate mother-substitute and her father was cold and distant, it is most unlikely that Edna properly recovered from her mother’s death. In addition, Edna’s younger sister Janet was a “vixen,” trapping Edna between two extreme examples of female personality, in which she attempts to accommodate both. Her internalization of “this contradiction combines with other of Edna’s psychic needs to produce an ‘identity’ which is predicated on the conscious process of concealment,” resulting in two Ednas (Wolff, *Thanatos* 242). Edna’s childhood experiences contribute to her early depressive episodes. As an adult battling bipolar depression, she allows her memories of those childhood experiences to reinforce her negative feelings. While feminist critics in general tend to view this psychic event as positive, psychological critics like Taylor and Fineman understand that it is instead a repressive and regressive event, a reversal and not a progression, with which the author of this thesis agrees. Some feminist scholars view the sea as an image for the feeling of freedom that Edna experiences while immersed in it. The Gulf

“functions as a catalyst” for the fantasies of freedom she comes to experiment with in her life on land, and becomes a passage for escape from her unhappy life and marriage (Taliaferro 49-50). Perhaps Edna connects with the sea because it allows her control of her body and gives her a sense for the first time of her own power and sense of independence. After all, the narrator describes her during that first swim as a “child, who all of a sudden realizes its powers” (27). Before that night, Edna felt a rift “between her mind and her body, between thought and feeling, between conception and acts” (Bogard 2). The sea ultimately brings union with Edna’s spirit and her physical self, awakening a desire for freedom. Taliaferro also sees the physical power Edna feels in the water extending to a sensual awakening. She and Dyer agree that “the sea is the novel’s central symbol of romantic possibility. It announces both the sexual and spiritual freedom Edna hopes to achieve” (Taliaferro 51). In a bit of a contradiction, Taliaferro goes on to state that her newly found sense of sexual freedom is the reason she later refuses to go in to bed with her husband. A bipolar diagnosis again reveals that depression is the reason Edna seems to “be developing a new, more independent persona” after her mystical night in the Gulf (51). The growing desire for isolation that is often seen in depression has clearly been misconstrued as a developing independence.

From a bipolar perspective, Edna clearly exhibits the symptoms of depression: social withdrawal, petulance, physical fatigue, disturbed sleep

patterns, lack of sexual desire, and lack of communication and affection with her husband. Despite her joyful experience of learning to swim moments before, upon reaching land she immediately changes into dry clothes and walks toward the resort cottages, despite the others' pleas for her to join them. Madame Lebrun notices Edna's behavioral quirks and tells Leonce that she sometimes thinks Edna "is capricious" (28). When Robert catches up with her, she becomes irritable and confused, and she expresses an overwhelming feeling of fatigue:

You don't know anything about it. Why should you know? I never was so exhausted in my life. [...] A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them. [...] I wonder if any night on earth will ever again be like this one. It is like a night in a dream. The people about me are like some uncanny, half-human beings. There must be spirits abroad to-night. (28)

She continues to feel extremely sensitive to Robert's words: "Don't banter me," she said, wounded at what appeared to be his flippancy" (29). Edna feels exhausted, "her arms hanging limp, letting her white skirts trail along the dewy path" (29). Robert has to help her into her hammock once they reach the cottage. However, her depression causes her to complain about Robert's swinging the hammock; and after she moodily instructs him to get her white shawl, she does not trouble herself to put it on, but instead holds it in her hand.

For an unspecified amount of time, they sit there not saying a word until the other bathers are heard returning from the beach; then Robert leaves her.

Wayne Batten offers a very interesting psychological interpretation of that enigmatic night, incorporating Carl Jung's idea of the archetype of animus. Edna believes the night feels like a dream. Robert responds by identifying her accomplished swimming that night with folklore; he tells Edna about a Gulf spirit that rises at midnight on that mystical night under the shining moon to inhabit a worthy mortal for just a few hours. That night the spirit finds Edna, and "perhaps he will never wholly release her from the spell" (29). Apparently, this "spirit only appears at times of crucial change, governed by the lunar, dream-like aspect of consciousness. He arises from the sea as the woman's animus arises from the unconscious at a moment when a new, more comprehensive organization of the psyche has become possible" (Batten 79). The danger with the animus -- woman's unconscious male identity -- is that "with its direct access to the unbounded unconscious, it will dominate the psyche, eventually extinguishing the ego-consciousness; the woman is possessed by the archetype." Edna chooses a typical defense mechanism and projects her animus onto a flesh-and-blood man; in this case, the man is Robert. Projection is dangerous, but it does open "the way through dialog to a relationship in which the transcendent figures are beneficially contained" (79). According to Jung, this "male personification of the unconscious" can display both positive and negative aspects. It is most likely to

“take the form of a hidden ‘sacred’ conviction.” Very importantly, it is the father who shapes his daughter’s animus with “convictions that never include the personal reality of the woman herself as she actually is,” which sometimes causes the animus to be “a demon of death” (Jung 189). Psychologically, the death animus represents a specific type “that lures women away from all contacts with real men. He personifies a cocoon of dreamy thoughts, filled with desire and judgments about how things “ought to be,” which cuts a woman off from the reality of life” (191). Diagnosing Edna with bipolar II disorder does not dispute Batten’s theory that she uses defense mechanisms to deal with her depression. Edna does project her needs, largely stemming from her dysfunctional childhood and adding to her bipolar depression, onto Robert and Adele. However, Edna’s “dreamy” fantasy life results from a psychological defense mechanism created to fight her depression, regardless of whether or not Jung’s theory is correct.

Because of Edna’s depression, she feels the need to isolate herself from her husband when he returns from his swim. He desires her to go inside with him, probably for sexual relations, but she stubbornly “settled herself more securely in the hammock.” Her depression also causes irritability toward Leonce; she tells him to “go to bed [...] I mean to stay out here. I don’t wish to go in, and I don’t intend to. Don’t speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you” (31). She lay in the hammock until dawn, then went to bed for a few “troubled and

feverish hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible, that eluded her [...]" (31). Wymard believes that Edna's "encounter with infinity" in the Gulf changes Edna's outlook, which drastically changes her relationships with others, particularly with Leonce; that is why she chooses to rebel that night and refuses to go into the cottage, into Leonce's bed (Wymard 380). Pontuale sees Edna's annoyance and lack of communication with her husband as the result of her swim and her suddenly new personality that wants to question and rebel against Leonce's authority and "the limitations of her role as wife and mother" (5). Bogard views Edna's alleged rebellion as an act of "integrity" because she finally places her feelings ahead of the wishes of her husband because to do otherwise would "violate" her desires (2). Many feminist critics read this scene as additional evidence that Leonce is an insensitive, inconsiderate husband who sees Edna only as a possession. Leonce does make a few attempts to connect with his wife, and his seeking medical help for Edna later in the novel shows that most of the fault lies with Edna, especially since she admittedly does not love him and "never exerts herself to even such efforts at communication with him as might encourage a supportive emotional response" (Wolff, *Thanatos* 252). While critics who employ psychoanalysis notice that Edna turns her emotions inward, that she refuses to attempt communication with her husband, and that through her passiveness allows a series of misunderstandings, they do not come to the conclusion that these are symptoms of depression brought on by her bipolar

disorder, because they are not taking a clinical approach to Edna. Instead, those critics are looking at Edna's dysfunctional childhood and at patriarchal society for causes of her behavior.

Edna awakens early the next morning and sends for Robert on a whim, hoping to convince him to attend mass with her on Caminada Cheniere. The reader should recall that disturbed sleep patterns are one of the symptoms of depression, which Edna experiences throughout her stay at Grand Isle. She also exhibits impaired thought processes by simply following an impulse and not thinking through her actions. She does not think to prepare food and drink for them to eat that morning, prompting Robert to remark that "he had often noticed that she lacked forethought" (32). Not only are her thought processes fallible, but again someone close to her has noticed an impairment in her behavior.

Furthermore, Edna's self-deprecating manner shows again when she tells Robert that Leonce would never be in a bad mood if it were not for her. Once they reach the church at Caminada, Edna's depression becomes too great and "a feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service. Her head began to ache, and the lights on the altar swayed before her eyes" (34). Leaving the service immediately, Robert takes her to Madame Antoine's house to rest.

Oddly, Edna sleeps there all afternoon, again showing that her depression is causing disturbed sleep patterns. After she awakens, she eats supper and lounges with Robert until Madame Antoine returns from Vespers. Upon their

return to the cottage on Grand Isle late that night, Edna's depression again causes her to be solitary rather than spend time with the Ratignolles or Madame Lebrun and the others.

Sometime after that night, Edna is horrified to learn that the one person who has provided a reprieve from her depression -- Robert -- is leaving for Mexico suddenly and without warning. His departure frustrates "Edna in the normal course of projecting the affect-laden archetype, who remains tied up in her framework of illusions and therefore unsusceptible to dialog" (Batten 81). Edna is already in the midst of a depressive episode when she learns the heartbreaking news of Robert's departure. She goes to her cottage and displays several symptoms of depression. She is highly agitated and "a hundred different things" require her immediate attention as she tries to deal with her tremendous disappointment. She is "overheated and irritable" and begins "to set the toilet-stand to rights, grumbling at the negligence of the quadroon [...]." Edna's depression is causing her great fatigue. When Adele entreats her to join everyone else she replies rather sullenly that she could not "go to the trouble of dressing again" (42). Edna remains depressed for the rest of her vacation on Grand Isle and displays clear symptoms of her disorder. "Robert's going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing" (44).

Edna clings to her memories and refuses to concentrate on the present. She is easily irritated with her children but scolds the nurse for not being more attentive toward them, and she is annoyed that no one seems to give her loss enough consideration. However, it was not long before she and Leonce were back in the city, and Edna's psychological condition begins to swing the opposite direction.

CHAPTER 3

PSYCHOLOGICAL SUFFERING IN THE OPPOSITE DIRECTION

For six years, Edna has received visitors in her New Orleans home on Tuesdays. One such evening several weeks after the Pontelliers return from Grand Isle, Leonce arrives home to find that Edna is not wearing her usual reception gown. The reader now observes Edna entering the hypomanic phase of bipolar II disorder. Upon questioning her, Leonce learns that she did not stay home that day to welcome guests, nor did she leave an excuse for her visitors, nor does she justify her actions to Leonce, except to say that she “simply felt like going out” (49). Edna seems little interested in who dropped by the house that day, instructing the boy in waiting to give the tray of calling cards to her husband, because she does not care to look at them. Naturally, Leonce is concerned about the impression such an impropriety might leave on his business associates whose wives are the usual callers. After explaining that she must be more considerate, Edna fumes, “Mercy! [...] Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?” (49). Since the reader last saw Edna wallowing in her depression at Grand Isle, there is a noticeable change in Edna’s behavior. She used to care about her reception day, gratuitously donning her special gown and sitting through a constant flow of visitors, never complaining through six years of marriage. Suddenly, without an apparent motive and without any

explanation for Leonce, Edna feels the need to do something different; and she cannot understand her husband's concerned reaction to her turnabout. Not knowing what to do about Edna's strange behavior, he complains about the dinner, which he does not eat, and then withdraws to his club leaving Edna sitting alone at their dinner table. In the past, his leaving in a huff would have left her feeling depressed, blameworthy, and "completely deprived of any desire to finish her dinner." After one similar episode, she wasted an entire evening studying a cookbook and preparing a week's menu, which, in her depressed state of mind, left her feeling guilty that "she had accomplished no good that was worth the name" (50). However, this night was different; Edna finished eating her dinner while her anger intensified: "Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire that lighted them" (50). Edna then goes to her bedroom and paces back and forth "without stopping, without resting. She carried in her hands a thin handkerchief, which she tore into ribbons, rolled into a ball, and flung from her" (50). She rips her wedding ring off her finger, throws it on the floor, and attempts to smash it with the heel of her boot. Unsuccessful in her assault, she grabs a glass vase because "she wanted to destroy something" and hurls it to the hearth where it shatters into pieces, providing the "crash and clatter [...] she wanted to hear" (51). The next morning, Edna is "unusually pale and very quiet," possibly indicating a lack of sleep, and she is still combative toward her husband and refuses to meet him in town later to shop for new fixtures (51). This episode is

just the first of many to come that marks a drastic change from Edna's past submissive, effacing behavior. Feminist critics like Karen Simons believe that Edna has suddenly and uncharacteristically decided to rebel "against the restrictions of conventional civilized life" when she returns home from Grand Isle (2). They see Edna's moment of change as a rebellion that has been building for a lifetime, at least since that symbolic day when she ran through the tall grass sea away from her father's pontificating Presbyterian sermons and away from the paternalistic and female-imprisoning society in which she lives. Levine expands the target of Edna's supposed rebellion by proposing that the highly ordered and circumscribed Pontellier home "suggests the strictly ordered character of the culture, and so Edna's decision to wander through New Orleans on her Tuesday receiving day signifies a resounding rejection of the community's social patterns" (75). The feminist theory does not explain the timing of Edna's wish to rebel against her husband, children, and her own life long identity, nor does it adequately explain the reason. However, the diagnosis of hypomania does give a definite reason for her abrupt change of heart and the timing of it because hypomania is an unexpected disorder that causes the petulance, anger, and childish behavior that she now exhibits. The reader must recall that hypomania usually develops within only a day or two, usually preceded or followed by a major depressive episode, and lasts from days to months.

Symptoms of Edna's hypomania become much more explicit following that first event. Edna begins to do as she pleases. She completely ends her Tuesday receptions and refuses to visit people who leave calling cards at her home. She stops managing her household, "going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice" (54). Distractibility and rapid change of behavior or capriciousness are symptoms of hypomania. Leonce is "completely bewildered" and "shocked," growing angry at her disregard while she becomes more insolent. Although the reader learns early in the novel that Edna does not have much talent for painting, she is now obsessed with spending much of her time painting, while letting her "family go to the devil," fulfilling the symptom of increased creative activity. After an argument over these issues, she irritably tells Leonce to "let me alone; you bother me." Leonce begins to wonder if Edna has a mental imbalance, noticing that she is clearly no longer herself. The reader should recall that the diagnosis of hypomania is greatly dependent on someone close to the patient observing a noticeable change in behavior and personality, as Leonce observes in Edna.

One of the symptoms of hypomania is that someone close to the bipolar victim must recognize that something is wrong. Like many loved ones of those suffering from hypomania, Leonce cannot figure out what is wrong with Edna; he only knows that he finds her recent behavior disturbing. One morning, Leonce's concern for Edna leads him to the family physician for professional advice. Dr.

Mandelet's immediate response is that Edna looked perfectly well the last time he saw her. Leonce agrees that she appears well, "but she doesn't act well. She's odd, she's not like herself. I can't make her out" [...] (62). He explains that Edna has been neglecting her home and that her attitude toward everything and everyone has changed; she "is peculiar." He "nervously" states that "she's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me [...]." She "goes tramping about by herself," and does not come home until after dark. She refuses to attend her sister's wedding, calling marriage "one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth," and Leonce makes it clear that they are not having marital relations (63). Unfortunately, Dr. Mandelet's only advice for Leonce is to let Edna do as she pleases. He believes that "this is some passing whim" of a typically "very peculiar and delicate organism" -- women, all of whom he regards as "moody and whimsical," making it a waste of time to attempt an understanding of Edna's strange behavior. In his sarcasm, the doctor unwittingly makes the correct comment that "it would require an inspired psychologist to deal successfully" with a woman like Edna (64). In Leonce's visit with the doctor, the reader is presented with two additional clues that Edna is suffering from a hypomanic episode. First, Edna reveals her selfish and inconsiderate state of mind by refusing to attend her sister's wedding. Second, the reader learns that she goes around by herself and does not come home until after dark, behavior that is careless. Mondimore tells the story of a man who displayed similar behavior

during one of his hypomanic episodes. A writer named “Brad” had an idea for a television script involving a cocaine addict. Although he would usually be practical and perform his research at a library, during this episode he decided that to research the matter properly he must go to the source. Not normally a “brave person, and certainly not a fool,” Brad’s hypomania caused him to feel so “uninhibited” and “confident” that he “found myself walking down streets at midnight that I would have been nervous walking down in broad daylight” (Bipolar 171-72).

Edna’s hypomanic exuberance increases as she works with “great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything” (55). Hypomania-induced goal-oriented planning and creative activities begin to take over her life. Because of her new obsession with painting, she sets up a little studio and completely engrosses herself in the hobby. She enthusiastically enlists the entire household in her new occupation and forces her sons, the housemaid, and the nurse to pose for hours while “the drawing-room went undusted.” Many feminist critics misinterpret her newfound fanaticism for painting as an expression of her fight for independence and self-identity. Gilbert adds that Edna’s hobby “allows her to recreate both her present and her past in more satisfactory forms” (103). Next, the reader is informed “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. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places.” However:

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. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood (56).

Unfortunately, the reader is not made aware of how many of these separate episodes of deep depression and hypomania Edna has nor of how long each episode lasts. However, it does appear that Edna is suffering from the rapid-cycling form of bipolar II disorder, without a partial or full remission between episodes, but instead immediately switches to the episode of opposite polarity.

The arrival of Edna’s father ushers in a new hypomanic phase. He is a former Confederate colonel who is a hard drinking, irreverent, Bible-quoting Presbyterian, who enjoys telling Confederate war stories in which he appears the hero. Taking a stern patriarchal view of marriage, he tells Leonce that he should put his foot down with Edna, use coercion and authority to manage a wife (68). Psychoanalytic critics tend to examine how the great psychological scars made by her father, which serves to augment the affects of bipolar disorder, affect Edna as an adult. She remains detached from him, indicating “the familiar

process of evasion at work. The narrator's comment that Edna is 'not very warmly or deeply attached' to her only surviving parent seems calculatedly inadequate, as does Edna's response when he visits her in New Orleans" (Taylor 2). Although the two have a strained relationship, his presence seems "to furnish a new direction for her emotions" (65). During his stay, Edna discovers that for the first time she feels acquainted with her father and that he interests her, though only temporarily, and she is amused to keep busy by taking care of all his needs. Berggren suggests that the timing of the father's visit coincides with Leonce's candidly acknowledging Edna's rebellion and that Chopin temporarily tries to guide Edna to a more masculine character, as seen by her display of race horse knowledge "in the company of New Orleans dandies," and her father's temporarily becoming a model for her new personality (2). Berggren disagrees with Sullivan and Smith's theory "that Edna's motherless childhood with this ogre of a father" leaves her on the continual search for love, because "she remains curiously buoyant during her father's visit" (2). This disagreement does not negate Sullivan and Smith's argument because Edna's intensifying hypomania causes her buoyancy, regardless of her past experiences with her father. Her hypomania also explains her so-called masculine behavior.

One night during her father's visit, Dr. Mandelet spends dinner with them and does not see a "trace of that morbid condition which her husband had reported to him. She was excited and in a manner radiant" (66). Her hypomanic

fervor for sociability is evident as she greatly enjoys herself at dinner and spends the evening talking about the horse races that she and her father had attended earlier in the day, where they had gambled and met other racing enthusiasts. After dinner, she tells an exciting, vivid story that keeps her listeners on the edges of their seats about two lovers who paddled a boat into the Baratarian Islands one night and were never seen again. Edna's hypomania loosens her conscience and causes her to lie inexplicably about the story, telling her party that Madame Antoine had told it to her, but she had actually made it up herself. During the evening, Dr. Mandelet observes that his hostess is no longer "the listless woman he had known," but instead was "palpitant with the forces of life [...] She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun" (67). Therefore, another person who is close to Edna notices a change in her behavior. Later, when Edna refuses her father's request to attend her younger sister's wedding without offering an excuse, her father cannot believe her incomprehensible lack of consideration and respect, but it fits perfectly with her hypomanic state of mind. One psychoanalytical reading of this behavior is that her "disinterest suggests her deep-rooted repression of the traumas of her childhood" (Taylor 3). When he finally leaves town, she is very happy to be rid of him and "his padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his 'toddlies' and ponderous oaths," which "are vexations; what Edna has chosen not to be acquainted with, the text implies, is that these are symptoms of a poisonous family gestalt" (2).

Soon after, when Leonce prepares to leave for New York, Edna shows him exaggerated affection and thoughtfulness, and expresses great concern for his health and well being, a pattern which concurs with the bipolar symptom of increasing sexual awareness and an excessive disposition. She exhibits great energy as she bustles around, preparing clothing and goods for his trip, and she cries and carries on when he leaves "calling him her dear, good friend" and saying she would surely miss him too much and would join him in New York shortly. However, when she is finally alone, Edna feels "a radiant peace," for even the children and their quadroon nurse had left her to stay at Grandmother Pontellier's farm. Edna feels a "very delicious" and incredible relief as she wanders around the inside and outside of the house, observing every item as if for the first time. She works in the garden and plays with the children's dog. "Even the kitchen assumed a sudden interesting character which she had never before perceived." She "begged" the cook to let her "take all thought and responsibility of the larder upon her own shoulders," and when she realizes that she has neglected her reading, she determines to begin a new "course of improving studies." Her hypomanic energy is leading her to make additional grandiose plans that she does not follow through and to take on more responsibility than she is use to handling. The meal that evening tastes unusually good; Edna feels particularly pleasant as she talks a long time to the dog, who is "beside himself with astonishment and delight over these

companionable advances,” as though it is the first time for Edna to act so congenial (69-70).

Edna's awakening hypomanic sexuality is first introduced while her father is in town. The two attend a soiree musicale at the Ratignolles' home, where two gentlemen guests catch her fancy, prompting her to flirt openly with them. The narrator also reveals that many times Edna would pass male strangers on the street, then continue thinking and fantasizing of them. Later, this heightened sexual desire is fully explored with the scoundrel Alcee Arobin. The reader should recall that individuals suffering from hypomania feel an inflated self-esteem to the point of narcissism, which often leads to foolish, impulsive, and addictive behaviors in addition to loose sexual behavior. In Edna's case, she continues her interest in gambling on the horse races after Leonce leaves, attending many times and meeting a new circle of friends who contribute to her reckless new habits while she abandons her old friends and acquaintances. Just like with Edna's painting, feminist critics mistakenly see this behavior as her asserting a new identity and rebelling against marriage and social mores. One day Arobin and Mrs. Highcamp call for Edna to attend the races. She impresses them with her knowledge of horse racing and with her high stakes gambling. The hypomanic symptom of addiction comes over her: “the fever of the game flamed in her cheeks and eyes, and it got into her blood and into her brain like an intoxicant” (71). She repeatedly returns to the races where “the excitement came

back upon her like a remittent fever" (73). On another occasion, after a day of gambling at the races, Arobin takes her home. She is extremely restless, hungry, and excited as she hums a song and pokes at the fire. The narrator emphasizes her inner restlessness and excessive energy, telling the reader that "she wanted something to happen – something, anything; she did not know what." She is in a talkative mood, what might be called the pressured speech of hypomania; she regrets not making Arobin stay longer to keep her company. She counts her winnings, then goes to bed where she tosses for hours with great agitation, her mind too filled with thoughts to sleep (72).

Typical of someone suffering from hypomania, Edna does not use good or rational judgment to guide her behavior. She does not see anything wrong with running around town at all hours with a young, unmarried man of fashion who has a reputation for philandering with married women. She has also cut ties with all of her friends and acquaintances except for Mademoiselle Reisz and Adele, whom she rarely sees. Her hypomanic irritability, agitation, and childish emotional outbursts appear again; she quarrels with Arobin over nothing, and yells: "I don't like you,' [...] in a high, excited pitch [...]" (73). She tries to gain control of her emotions and tells him that she is "greatly upset by the excitement of the afternoon; I'm not myself" (74). In the midst of her emotional turmoil, her hypomanic sexual urges are growing, informing the reader that Arobin appeals "to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her" (75). Edna reveals her

mental disturbance to Arobin when she tells him that “One of these days [...] I’m going to pull myself together for a while and think – try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don’t know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex” (79). This thesis agrees with Portales’ statement that Edna never does “address this issue.” Her lack of self-reflection is apparently “the fundamental trait of Edna’s character. At no point in The Awakening does she pull herself together to think about or consider the possible consequences of her acts. She never, for instance, thinks about what is likely to happen if she leaves her husband,” and this is how Edna “approaches life. She simply does not worry about tomorrow; [...] Motivated primarily by impulse, she acts thoughtlessly” (Portales 433). Sullivan and Smith agree that “Edna does not think; she is driven. She acts impulsively; she has fancies, dreams, moods, sensations, and passions; but she rarely has thoughts” and is completely “ignorant of the consequences of her acts [...]” (150). Edna decides to neglect her household, her husband, and her children, and then she moves into her own house “and commits adultery, all without quite understanding what she is doing. ‘She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice’” (Sullivan 151). Edna never considers “where in her tiny house the children might live, nor does she think of how she will work things out with Leonce.” She insists on throwing away societal conventions and doing as

she pleases, but her desires are usually “described as capricious, unguided, unthinking, and misleading. Despite the partisan narrative assertion that Edna is ‘realizing her position in the universe as a human being’ and that she is ‘seeking herself and finding herself,’ she seems not to know what she is doing, where she is going, or what she wants” (151). This is the perfect description of someone with bipolar II disorder.

Edna is driven solely by her hypomania-induced sex drive in her affair with Arobin. She obviously has no romantic interest in him because while he tries to seduce her, she thinks aloud, responding to him only because he happens to be in her presence. She enjoys “the touch of his fingers through her hair,” but then her mind wanders to other subjects as she muses over “what character of a woman” she is and talks about a conversation she had with Mademoiselle Reisz (79). Arobin becomes annoyed at her absolute refusal to keep her mind on him and to return his affections, but she rebukes him for it: “Oh! talk of me if you like [...] but let me think of something else while you do” (79). Immediately afterwards, Edna finally gives in and makes love with Arobin for the first time. While she is left feeling contradictory sensations, none of them is shame or remorse. Her only mild regret is that it “was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips” (80). Critics are puzzled by Edna’s affair. Ryan states that “neither her affair with Arobin nor her romantic dream of a life with Robert Lebrun are adequately explained as lust and love” (5). According to Fox-Genovese,

Edna's relationships with them "partake of, even as they mask, the longing for the lost mother" (Ryan 5). Berggren declares that Edna's "happiest moment of employment comes as she cleans house in a frenzy the morning after she has first slept with Arobin. A guilt mechanism clearly triggers this spirited, but essentially negative activity" (6). It is hypomania, not guilt that "triggers" her frenzy of activity the next morning, which is aimed at preparing for her upcoming dinner party and her move from her husband's home. According to Wolff, Arobin offers "lust. Sex divorced from all other feelings. The expression of that raw libido that was presumed to be part of men's nature (as 'virility'), but categorically denied as a component of the normal female" (*Un-utterable* 15). Furthermore, she sees the affair not as "an affirmation of identity for Edna, but another form of maiming – a cascade of simple sentences in largely parallel form to configure alienation and disintegration – the novel's shortest, most mutilated chapter" (16). Portales concludes that the reader is never told why it is that Edna "rather indifferently takes up [...] with Arobin," and why she so covertly leaves her husband and children. Edna also does not understand her reasons for her behavior because "one act simply leads to another. No one act by Edna explains or imperatively forecasts the next; her life is a series of acts that cannot be explained in terms of goal or aim. She simply lives" (434-35). Margo Culley, who reads The Awakening as "an existential novel about solitude," believes that Edna dreads solitude, which "brings a confrontation with the ultimate aloneness –

death – and thus the threat of extinction of the fragile, newborn self.” This dread causes Edna to seek “the deliverance of the imagination; her sexual awakening now leads her to seek the deliverance of the flesh” as a possibility of escape from solitude (Culley 247). Clearly, many critics observe all of these symptoms of bipolar II disorder, but without a working knowledge of psychology, they only recognize the fact that Edna’s behavior is odd; they do not comprehend that there is a mental disorder controlling that behavior. According to the feminist critic Carley Rees Bogard, Edna had originally chosen to sacrifice her identity and real love to become the wife of a man she does not love and a mother to children she does not appear to want. However, Edna is still sacrificing her identity and the true love she has always wanted when she settles for sexual freedom and has the affair with Arobin (3). However, the bipolar II diagnosis makes the reader understand that Edna is not consciously aware of sacrificing anything. The victim of bipolar II disorder is simply trying to enjoy himself or herself and is unaware that he or she is making important decisions or that there will be any consequences to those decisions. Other feminist critics like Wendy Taliaferro, Maria Anastasopoulou, and Carol Stone interpret Edna’s affair with Arobin “as a rite of passage to sexual autonomy” (Stone 1). Bipolar II disorder not only provides the reason for Edna’s affair, but it also furthers the general feminist theory of her need to escape from solitude and to seek sexual and social

freedom.

After the night that she and Arobin make love, Edna impulsively decides to move out of her husband's home and into a small cottage around the corner. Wolff points out that it "is virtually coincidental with the beginning of her affair with Arobin" (*Thanatos* 249). However, the importance of these events is that they occur just when Edna's most discussed hypomanic episode is climbing to its pinnacle. Before moving and without waiting for Leonce's response to the news of her decision, she throws herself into planning a grand farewell dinner party. Clearly, she has no consideration for her husband's feelings or opinions regarding a major life decision that should affect the entire family. After all, what does she plan to do when Leonce comes back from his trip -- will she stay in her little cottage or return to her husband's home? If she plans to stay in her cottage forever, where does she propose the children stay when they come home from their grandmother's farm? A victim of hypomania, Edna does not logically think through her actions; she does not think of the future and of consequences that come with it. Her energy level is at an all time high; she has a million things to do at once and "a feverish anxiety attended her every action in that direction. There was no moment of deliberation, no interval of repose between the thought and its fulfillment" (80). She wakes early in the morning to busy herself all day transporting goods from one house to the other and to plan the extravagant

dinner, the cost of which Leonce will pay without much concerning Edna. The reader should remember that one symptom of hypomania is extravagant spending.

Edna has built the dinner party into a magnificent affair in her hypomanic mind, but the reality is a very small event with an odd assortment of characters. One of the novel's longest sustained scenes, the dinner is in a lavish setting that includes a massive candelabrum full of wax candles and yellow silk shades, dozens of red and yellow roses, silver and gold, crystal, and large and luxurious chairs. Edna's inflated self-esteem is revealed by the sparkling cluster of diamonds she wears in her hair and by her golden satin gown, perfectly reflecting her attitude and appearance that night, "which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules [...]." Yet, in the midst of her glory, Edna "felt the old ennui overtaking her [...] like something extraneous, independent of volition. It was something which announced itself; a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords wailed," and her hypomanic induced peevishness is again exposed when Victor Lebrun sings the song that reminds her of Robert. She yells at him to stop singing; but when he continues she slams her wineglass upon the table, shattering it and spilling the contents over Arobin's legs. Victor apologizes to her with a kiss on the palm of her hand, revealing her sexual sensitivity when "the touch of his lips was like a pleasing sting to her hand. She lifts the garland of roses from his head and flung it across the room" (84-86). The

hypomaniac diagnosis agrees with Simons' point that Edna "is alarmed to find that she has no control over her sexual impulses. Far from becoming 'the powerful goddess of love' Sandra Gilbert seeks to reveal, Edna has become subject to irrational forces which she does not understand [...]" (2). Gilbert proposes that The Awakening is a "feminist and matriarchal myth of Aphrodite/Venus," and "the dinner party scene is of crucial importance, for here, as she presides over a Swinburnian Last Supper, Edna [...] 'becomes' the powerful goddess of love and art into whose shape she was first 'born' in the Gulf [...]" (91). This scene is Edna's "Last Supper," just before her realization that she "has no viable role" in her contemporary society (103-04).

Hypomania causes a person to be impulsive and irrational. That is why Edna moves into the cottage around the corner from Leonce's home. Wymard believes that Edna moves out of her husband's house because she is growing "more self-conscious and reflective about the value of independent choice" in her quest for identity. "The move indicates that Edna must penetrate her own consciousness deeply – and alone," to the extent of countering the values of her culture (382). Batten asserts that Edna's illusions correspond to "the group of ballads known as 'The Daemon Lover' or 'James Harris,' in which a woman abandons her husband and children to answer the call of her former lover, who appears at her window after a long absence at sea and tempts her with the promise of riches." An early version of the tale speaks of the lover as a man-like

spirit, whereas in a later version he is a cloven-hoofed demon, and the “woman is drowned or carried to hell aboard his golden ship” as punishment for her rebellion against the traditional feminine role. Batten believes that Edna’s move to the cottage “is also a move to act out the archetypal story of the woman governed by animus.” Her lack of concern “for the consequences and contingencies of violating convention indicates that her new illusions will mediate with the social world as poorly as her previous ‘illusions’ mediated latent aspects of her psyche” (Batten 82). Edna’s “illusions” and “lack of concern” for the consequences of her decisions are caused by her hypomanic episode.

Many feminist scholars see Edna’s move from her husband’s home as her attempt to flee “from a society that relegates women to the domestic role” and to find her special place of independence that transcends the usual female role (Pontuale 6). Schweitzer believes that Edna’s move is because of the growing force and individuality in her artwork. “Freedom and independence unencumbered by responsibility have become crucial to her search for phallic subjectivity,” but eventually Edna comes to see her new house as just another cage because her newly awakened desires are still restrained by the society in which she lives (Schweitzer 175). Walker realizes that evidence of Edna’s lack of control over her feelings and actions continues to accumulate throughout the novel and that when she does move out of Leonce’s house, “it is not so much a conscious action as a series of unplanned, unconnected moves.” Furthermore,

Walker believes that Edna has become highly emotional, so that her decisions are being made at the unconscious level; she does not understand them or know what to expect from them. The narrator informs the reader that Edna's "sense of reality had gone out of her life; she had abandoned herself to Fate, and awaited the consequences with indifference" (255). Walker does not realize it, but her observations are additional proof for the diagnosis of bipolar II disorder.

A few days after the party, Edna's hypomanic exuberance leads her to spend a week with her children at their grandmother's house, "giving them all of herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence" (90). Professedly happy, she acts interested in everything the boys want to do and in the stories they tell her. After she returns to New Orleans, Adele becomes the third person to notice that Edna is different by stating: "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" (91). Edna still feels an infatuation for Robert though "she had tried to forget him [...] the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her" (52).

One of the more frequently asked questions about The Awakening, is why does Edna appear to fall for a young man like Robert? After all, he is immature, irresponsible, lacking direction in his life, and cannot even afford to buy cigars, which among the men at Grand Isle are an important statement of status and manhood. Pat Shaw points out that Robert's immaturity is:

prefigured by an old photo of Robert as an 'infant with a fist in his mouth' which Edna discovers. This and other pictures of Robert as an adolescent merely amuse Edna, who once again (as on the beach) seems more maternal than passionate in responding to her young admirer. We as audience, however, combine the photo scenes to 'see' qualities about Robert that Edna does not clearly see [...]. Robert has remained juvenile. He may deserve Edna's maternal patience, but he does not justify her sexual passion. And he is certainly unworthy of her immolation. (182)

The audience cannot suspend reality long enough to believe in the pairing of "the mature, passionate Edna and the callow Robert," and only by seeing it "as a tangible representation of the intangible authorial imagination can we appreciate that Robert functions metaphorically in the narrative design as child-lover" (Shaw 182). As Berggren states, "Robert offers perhaps the most pathetic example in The Awakening of a purposeless life." His own mother favors Robert's younger brother, "the dark, volatile, 'worthless' Victor," and Berggren wonders if Edna "will be more than another such footnote to a wasted life" (5). Some psychoanalytic critics believe that like the strangers on the street who linger in Edna's fantasies long after they have passed, Robert is a projection of a dream lover, a romanticized ideal, a theory that this thesis agrees with. Taylor and Fineman believe "that embedded in" Edna's childhood "memories are fantasies which

indicate a propensity to displace her libidinal needs onto a male other than her father.” They go on to state that because of her mother’s death and her father’s harshness, she “creates a fantasy of a man who affirms her as a female. This is, clearly, a defensive attempt at restitution [...] to find a pre-Oedipal object attachment as a restitution for the mother” (3). In the first chapters of the novel, Edna appears to develop a crush on Robert; they do spend a significant amount of time together while Leonce works in New Orleans all week and plays at the Grand Isle club during the weekend. Because Edna is depressed and lonely, when Robert showers her with undivided attention and compliments, listens intently to everything she says, and makes her believe that he is truly interested in who she is and what she thinks, it is natural that she would respond to him. Sara Desaussure Davis believes that Robert merely acts as a narcotic on Edna, numbing the pain of her depression (Platzky 2).

Many psychoanalytic critics, such as Franklin, see Robert as an infatuation or as just another adolescent crush and not as a real love interest (2). However, Taylor and Fineman discuss the possibility that Edna is not only searching for a mother figure in Adele during her stay at Grand Isle, but she is also looking for male-given love that she never received from her father. Her childhood memories are loaded with “fantasies which indicate a propensity to displace her libidinal needs onto a male other than her father.” In fact, “Leonce is a representation of the Oedipal father of her fantasy, a displacement from the

original father" (3-4). However, Leonce does not fulfill Edna's needs; and she creates an ideal in her mind of "a man who affirms her as a female," which is "a defensive attempt at restitution [...] to find a pre-oedipal object attachment as a restitution for the mother." Robert is there at just the right time when Edna is depressed and needy, and she uses him to create a circumstance that "is a paradigm of repression and self-devaluation" (3). In essence, Robert becomes Edna's attempt to recreate her childhood fantasies, rather than someone whom she can truly love. In agreement with Taylor and Fineman, Sullivan and Smith state that Edna's loss of her mother and her "emotionally impoverished" childhood are the reasons for her "adult behavior," such as her attempt to make Adele her mother-surrogate. Her emotionally impoverished childhood is also the reason "for the intensity of her need to be loved," which is why she believes that she loves Robert. According to Sullivan:

One might wonder about the nature of a love which seems not to focus on the personality and character of its regard, for to Edna, Robert is featureless: '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.' (154)

Like her childhood cavalry officer and the tragedian, Robert is a fantasy man who derives much of his "fascination from being inaccessible." Furthermore, because

Edna “realizes herself in an extramarital affair,” it shows that her “passions are displaceable. Edna “cannot love; she is, instead, hungry for it” (154). Schweitzer agrees that Robert is very much like a child, but she goes on to say that he is also an Oedipalized son to Edna, or that he is her narcissistic double and that her “sustained desire for” him originated from “two traumatic separations, the birth of her children and the early death of her mother” (179). Wayne Batten uses the previously discussed animus archetype to explain that Edna projects her animus onto Robert. Wolff interprets the novel by assuming Edna has a schizoid personality, an argument that this thesis has already debunked, and because of that personality disorder she fears feeling imprisoned, but she wants Robert in some form regardless. Wolff suggests that the perfect solution for Edna's dilemma would be for her to have a relationship with Robert without ever truly having it. As Robert provides some distraction from Edna's depression during her stay at Grand Isle, she comes to see him as an extension of her desire and does not conceive of him as a separate individual, finding it difficult “to separate his will or his wishes from her own.” Only after Robert leaves for Mexico and Edna is home in New Orleans does she allow herself to feel an intense passion for him, “because once physically absent, he can be made magically present as a phantom, an object in her own imagination, a figure which is now truly a part of herself” (Wolff *Thanatos* 245). Wolff further states that Edna is a grown woman, therefore chasing after fantasies of the tragedian, the cavalry officer, and the

young engaged man, as she did as a young schoolgirl, is no longer enough for her. This adult need for a relationship leads her to Arobin because she does not have to form a real connection with him. She can respond sensually to him because she has no feelings for him, thus extinguishing the anxiety that she would otherwise feel over being made a possession (245). Taylor and Fineman see Edna's affairs as "an effort to recreate the compensatory fantasies of her youth," while Arobin

represents a further development in her regression and the gradual failure of her fragile defenses. There is none of the affective rapport she feels with Robert. Rather, he appeals to an 'animalism that stirred impatiently within her;' [...] It is now clearer than ever that sexuality without loving is the splitting to which Edna has been doomed by the loss of the mother-infant attachment. This is her deepest pathology, and the proof of it is that with Alcee she is able to experience sexual arousal without true attachment to her love object. (5)

Other critics including Brigitte Wilds Craft believe that Edna's "obsessive desire for Robert" compromises "her independence and productivity, and she is ultimately unable to picture herself alone" (133). At times when she appears to make any effort toward a goal, she is sidetracked with thoughts of Robert. For example, while painting in her atelier she hums the song that Robert sang to her

on their boat ride back from Caminada, causing “a subtle current of desire” to sweep over her, “weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn.’ Likewise, when Victor Lebrun sings this song at Edna’s dinner party, she is equally affected and her reaction initiates the break-up of the party” (Craft 134). While Craft sees Edna’s obsession with Robert as the reason that she does not spend the necessary time developing her inner being, bipolar II disorder is what accounts for both her obsession with Robert and her lack of personal growth. Hypomanic diagnosis does not negate the possibility that Edna is trying to regenerate her youthful fantasies of love with Arobin and Robert or that her sexual experimentation is not partly motivated by a quest for the love that she did not receive from her parents as a child. However, hypomania alone provides a complete explanation for her behavior and does not leave any unanswered questions, as the other theories do. Some feminist critics make the mistake of interpreting Edna’s feelings for Robert as love. This theory does not work because if she really loved him why would she not want to leave her husband at the end of the novel so they could be together freely? Why would she have sexual relations with another man not once, but three times? Wendy Taliaferro does not quite agree with other feminist scholars because she believes that Edna creates “romantic delusions” for Robert because, unlike Leonce, Robert is very sensitive to Edna’s needs and communicates well with her. “She sacrifices reality for her romantic fantasies, and her often rash behavior is a result of

selfishness as she pursues her illusive, fanciful flights through various affairs, parties, and rejection of her children" (48). Bipolar II disorder causes the rash and selfish behavior that Taliaferro discusses. Walker understands that Edna mistakes her newly awakened sexual feelings, as feelings of love for Robert; and she believes that through the rest of the novel, Edna does not run away from her family, but instead "runs toward the promise of sexual fulfillment in the person of Robert" (255). Fox-Genovese believes that "the love Edna seeks transcends any social possibility;" otherwise, the purely sexual affair she had with Arobin would have satisfied her. What drives her comes "from deeper sources and seem to permit no assuaging short of delirium," and what she feels for Robert mostly comes "from the repressed longing for the mother who died before helping Edna to become a woman" (Fox-Genovese 260). Of course, a hypomanic individual cannot be satisfied.

The diagnosis of bipolar II disorder both agrees with and alters the views of psychoanalyst and feminist critics regarding Edna's attraction to Robert. The diagnosis agrees with Desaussure Davis' assertion that Robert acts as a narcotic for her pain of loneliness and depression. He is a distraction and an infatuation, not a true love object. Edna is also searching for a father figure, and perhaps she believes the attentive and devoted Robert can fulfill this need. The bipolar diagnosis also concurs with those feminist critics who see The Awakening as a romantic quest and believe that Edna projects her ideal lover onto the only object

available to her – Robert. The question remains, why would Edna remain so interested in Robert months after he left Grand Isle if it was not love, if he was only a narcotic, if he was only a figure onto which an ideal love image was projected? In the months after Edna's return to New Orleans, while Robert is so far away from her and despite his broken promise to write her during his absence, Edna's infatuation appears to grow. It is during this period that she is swinging into a hypomanic phase, which causes heightened sexual awareness and lowered inhibition. However, the reader soon learns that Robert's return from Mexico is not the reunion that Edna has long fantasized about.

CHAPTER 4

THE END OF A STRUGGLE

The first time Edna sees Robert after his return to New Orleans she scolds him for not writing to her as he had promised, but then she teases and flirts with him, laughs and puts her hand on his shoulder. During Edna's depression at Grand Isle, she was quite offended when Robert rested his head on her shoulder; she thought it a great impropriety. Now, she is freely touching him without a second thought. This behavior shows her elevated and expansive mood, heightened sexual awareness, and lowered inhibition. When Arobin interrupts them, causing Robert to quickly depart, Edna is greatly annoyed that her plans for Robert -- most likely plans to seduce him -- are thwarted. She tells Arobin to "go away and amuse yourself. Don't stay." Afterwards, she sits "alone in a kind of stupor" reliving the last few hours and months, coming to the conclusion that Robert "had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico" than now that he is in New Orleans and is available to her (97). Wolff points out that in addition to Robert's return being very disappointing for Edna, "it moves the static, imaginary 'love affair' into a new and crucial stage; it tests, once and for all, Edna's capacity to transform her world of dreams into viable reality" (252). Edna's hypomanic mind built up the romantic "world of dreams," which she continues despite this initial setback. Her hypomanic episode continues the next

morning when she awakens “full of sunlight and hope. Edna could see before her no denial – only the promise of excessive joy. She lay in bed awake, with bright eyes full of speculation” (98). The text does not say that Edna slept that night. The previous scene leaves off with her daydreaming about Robert and then the next morning she is wide awake. Therefore, it is possible that in her hypomanic ecstasy, Edna did not sleep that night just as she has displayed sleep disturbances throughout her depressive and hypomanic cycles. She cheerfully spends the morning fantasizing about how she wants things to be with Robert, reading and answering her husband’s and children’s letters, promising to send them a package of bonbons, and working for “several hours with much spirit” (99). Her hypomania leads her to make additional grandiose plans when she visits an art dealer. After discussing the possibility that she and Leonce will take a summer trip to France, she negotiates to send the dealer some Parisian studies in time for the Christmas season.

Edna does not see Robert for several days. In the meantime, she spends a lot of time with Arobin, who “had detected the latent sensuality, which unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature’s requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom” (99). Perhaps the reason Edna’s “sensuality” is “latent” is that this is the first hypomanic episode she has ever experienced, and it “unfolded under” Arobin because he simply was an available target for her increased sex drive. Quite by accident, Edna and Robert finally run into each other late one

afternoon. They exchange a few heated words because Edna is upset that he has ignored her, but then he accompanies her to her cottage. As Robert sits in a chair with his eyes closed, Edna leans over and gives him “a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being,” and he eagerly returns the affection. Schweitzer reads this scene as role reversal: “Edna acts out the pattern of the male hero of romance [...] a complete role reversal in which Edna is aggressive and Robert is passive [...] completely inverting the gender roles of the Sleeping Beauty fairy tale to which the title of the novel makes ironic reference” (176). Actually, Edna’s hypomanic sex drive is motivating her to seduce Robert and to behave in a traditionally masculine, aggressive manner. He declares his feelings for her but again disappoints her immensely by saying that he has been fighting against his emotions because she is not free; she is Leonce Pontellier’s wife. While in Mexico, Robert thought of Edna all the time; he “was demented, dreaming of wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free, [...]” perhaps Leonce would set Edna free (102). She finds this idea absurd and tells him that he has

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. If he were to say, ‘Here, Robert,

take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both.

(102)

The bipolar diagnosis agrees with Wolff's assertion that Edna "wants a new paradigm," whereas Robert simply intends "to rearrange the actors of the old one" (*Un-utterable* 17). Edna now feels free to act as an independent woman, free to act on her desires; but

In a passage that is usually cited as Edna's moment of freedom, she begins by sounding like a conventional mother as she scolds Robert [...]. The chastising, infantilizing maternal voice has become fully articulate with the legislating, commanding patriarchal voice, even at the moment of Edna's rejection of male power over her person and her self. (Schweitzer 177)

Edna is not trying to reject male power; she is not interested in taking on a feminist role and fighting for her perceived rights and independence. Rather, she is suffering from a mental illness that causes her to behave in certain ways that can easily be misinterpreted by other critics. Robert's color drains from his face when he hears Edna's proclamation and when he asks her to explain her meaning. At that most inopportune moment, Edna is summoned to attend her friend Adele's accouchement. Robert begs her to stay, but she cannot break her promise to Adele, and she leaves him with the words "I love you [...] only you; no one but you. [...] 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" (102-03). Edna's behavior in this scene is very strange and contradictory. According to Ryan, Edna believes that Robert is merely "the dream of an unattached attachment," a fact which explains why she seems indignant when he speaks of marrying her. Although it appears that Edna does not want a complete commitment with Robert, just before she leaves him that night she declares "an all-consuming attachment" (Ryan 5). Furthermore, if her relationship with Robert is the only thing that matters, why does she leave him to attend Adele? Wolff suggests that staying with Robert would have "meant consummation, finally, the joining of her dream-like passion to a flesh and blood lover; to leave was to risk losing that opportunity," a reaction which makes it appear that Edna "is unconsciously ambivalent about achieving the goal which has sustained her fantasies for so long." After all, "No real duty calls her. Her presence at Adele's delivery is of virtually no help" (*Thanatos* 253). Edna must finally realize that Robert does not live up to her fantasies and that no man ever could. Ultimately, she comes to understand that nothing in this world can ever satisfy her needs, devastating her and filling her with "a sense of inner emptiness," which Wolff believes is the true reason for her final act in the novel. Edna's decision to leave Robert at that crucial moment suggests that she refuses "to compromise her dream of Robert (and in this sense it might be interpreted as a flight from reality):" Alternatively, at that moment of true awakening, Edna turns

to Adele, the ultimate mother figure, “as a last desperate attempt to come to terms with the anguish created by her unfulfilled ‘Oceanic’ longing” (Wolff 253). Wymard believes that when Edna chooses to leave Robert to attend Adele, she has already realized that he would only “treat her as an object possessed,” that no man would give her the freedom she requires, and that she cannot “have a satisfying personal relationship” (383). This thesis agrees with Wolff and Wymard because a hypomanic individual’s attention span is short, easily distracted, and subject to indiscriminate changes in behavior. Furthermore, in her hypomanic mind, Edna does not want any restrictions placed on her extreme new lifestyle, but Robert has just made it clear that he would require her to maintain a monogamous relationship with him. This has never been Edna’s intention.

During Adele’s accouchement, Edna begins “to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. [...] She began to wish she had not come; [...] But Edna did not go. With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene [of] torture” (104). According to Stone, watching Adele give birth shatters the myth that childbirth is a moment of joy, and it shatters Edna’s romantic illusion that ignored the facts of nature, against which she cannot rebel. It is possible that Adele’s departing words to Edna, “think of the children” is the catalyst for her actions the next morning

because the words “remind her of her mother-role which conflicts with her new-found freedom.” Those words awaken Edna to a dreadful truth, which leads to realizations that

she cannot live as a conventional wife or mother any longer, and society will not accept her newfound self. The solitude she enjoys makes for artistic growth, but she is bound to children, home, social duty. She will not sacrifice her new autonomy [...] she will not relinquish the core of her vision [...] she freely goes to the sea, losing her life. But she does not lose her self.

This thesis agrees that Edna feels great conflict between her hypomanic drive to be left alone so she may do as she pleases and the reality that she does have the roles of wife and mother, which bring with them responsibilities that she does not want. She has tasted freedom now that Leonce and her sons are away, and she does not want to lose it. However, this thesis disagrees with Stone’s conclusion that the ending is both a triumph and a tragedy because by walking into the sea Edna “succeeds in giving birth to a new self even though the fact that she cannot live on earth as this new self is tragic” (3-4). Suicide is nothing but a tragedy, and Edna resorts to this end because she can no longer deal with the mental turmoil that she has endured for so long.

Adele’s delivery leaves Edna feeling confused; she “still felt dazed when she got outside in the open air” (104). Sensing that something is troubling her,

Dr. Mandelst decides to walk Edna home. Her mind feels foggy, "as if her thoughts had gone ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them" (105). The doctor expresses his concern that it was terribly cruel of Adele to expect Edna to witness her event since Edna is such an impressionable woman, to which she answers "I don't know that it matters after all. One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better" (105). During their conversation, she tells the doctor that she is not going to Europe with Leonce because she is "not going to be forced into doing things." She just wants to be left alone to do as she pleases. Her words become as incoherent as her thoughts, and she abruptly stops speaking. The doctor lectures her on the illusions of the young, how they do not consider moral consequences, and how nature uses their illusions as "a decoy to secure mothers for the race" (105). For months, Edna has ignored the consequences of her behavior, but this night she is forced to look at the possibility of an unwanted pregnancy and to consider the lives of her two sons. She responds to the doctor; "The years that are gone seem like dreams – if one might go on sleeping and dreaming – but to wake up and find – oh! Well! Perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life" (105). Dr. Mandelst encourages Edna to share her troubles with him because he is one of the only people who would understand, but she refuses stating:

There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others – but no matter – still, I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives. Oh! I don't know what I'm saying, Doctor" (105).

Edna admits that she is considering trampling the lives of her husband and children because her hypomanic condition is driving her to abandon reason and responsibility in pursuit of pleasure. Wolff asserts that Edna's behavior continues her "fairy-tale hope of absolute happiness." Her only concern is to get home and continue "their love-making;" she did not conceive of Robert's "weakness and his fondness for illusions" (*Un-utterable* 17). This further illustrates that Edna's bipolar emotions are out of control, because she is very selfish in her pursuit of pleasure. Furthermore, Edna does not face reality when she fails to consider Robert's response to her admission that she only wants to have an affair with him; she does not want to leave Leonce and marry Robert. Once Edna reaches her house, she sits on the front porch and reminisces about her time spent with Robert only a few hours earlier, she "could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one" (106). Edna "grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy," but as she enters her house and searches for Robert she recalls "Adele's voice whispering. 'Think of the children' [...]. that

determination had driven into her soul like a death wound – but not to-night. Tomorrow would be time to think of everything” (106). Unfortunately for Edna, all that is waiting for her that night is a note that simply states “I love you. Good-by – because I love you” (106). Growing faint at the words, Edna situates herself on the sofa for the rest of the night, never sleeping nor moving from her position. Her illusions of possessing Robert are broken; but as Batten states, “longing to possess, Edna is herself possessed. Jung writes that the woman at this stage ‘becomes wrapped in a veil of illusions by her demon-familiar, and, as the daughter who alone understands her father (that is, is eternally right in everything),’” her animus takes control. Because Edna had been projecting her animus onto Robert, she is now “left a prey to its negative effects, impersonal and hapless sexuality [...]” (Batten 83). Wymard argues that Robert’s leaving forces Edna to realize that no man will ever comprehend her deep need to be treated as a human being rather than as an object possessed. Encountering a moment of true existential crisis, she cannot bear to return to the falseness embraced with Leonce, Alcee, and Robert (383). Actually, Edna is struggling with the emotional turmoil caused by her mental illness. Schweitzer concludes that during that long sleepless night Edna is trying to find her natural identity, but the real battle is between her and her children (165). She believes that “from Edna’s perspective, however, motherhood is the introduction to a double alienation, the traumatic separation from her children and the gap between the

images of the role she is required to play and the reality of her individual experience,” and that motherhood to Edna means giving up her desires, her sense of self, and her freedom from responsibility and convention (169).

Hypomania is a very narcissistic illness.

Later the next day, Edna unexpectedly arrives at the Grand Isle resort “looking tired and a little travel-stained” (107). Victor Lebrun is doing some patch work as the Spanish girl Mariequita sits next to him, “handing him nails from the tool-box.” He is describing Edna’s dinner party to the girl, exaggerating every detail. Batten asserts:

Edna’s ‘veil,’ woven of dream, fantasy and folklore, gains a still deeper archetypal reference through a set of images applied to her, images which associate her with both Venus and Psyche. [...]

Victor Lebrun says that ‘Venus rising from the foam could have presented no more entrancing a spectacle than Mrs. Pontellier,

blazing with beauty and diamonds at the head of the board.’” (83)

Victor’s portrayal of Edna concurs with Robert’s premise after the midnight swim that she “‘will never again suffer a poor, unworthy earthling to walk in the shadow of her divine presence.’ The divine aura, the effulgence of reified archetype, actually makes the woman fragile” (83). Furthermore, Batten compares the myth of Edna to “the myth of Psyche, in which Eros himself serves as *animus*, holding Psyche captive in his sumptuous palace, visiting her bed nightly, but adjuring her

never to look upon him" (83-84). Once Psyche looks at Eros in the light, he flees from her, and she drowns herself in a river. Batten compares the scene to the one in which Edna and Arobin make love the first time: "It was a flaming torch that kindled desire" (84). Eros is transformed in the light "from the serpent she expected to the most ravishing of lovers; after intercourse with Arobin," a light is shone for the first time on Edna's life, leading her to realize that she cannot love Arobin, "and therefore the light, figurative and literal, cannot survive Robert's farewell note. After receiving it 'She did not sleep. She did not go to bed. The lamp sputtered and went out'" (84).

On that final day, Edna definitely appears to exhibit symptoms of a mixed episode. She seems cheerful and talkative and is "very hungry." She hopes that fish will be served for dinner, but first wishes to refresh herself with a swim. Although the water is much too cold and Victor and Mariequita beg her not to go, she acts as though going to the beach is urgent: "I'd better go right away, so as to be back in time" (108). Her continuing feverish speech, cheerful attitude, and foolish insistence to swim in the cold Gulf suggests that she is suffering a manic episode. Edna then walks toward the Gulf "rather mechanically, not noticing anything special except that the sun was hot. She was not dwelling upon any particular train of thought," suggesting that her thoughts are racing, which is another symptom of mania, while her mechanical motion suggests depression. Edna believes that "she had done all the thinking which was necessary" the

previous night (108). However, her night of thinking gave her no “self-insight and no rational plan of action. It can hardly be called thinking at all” (Sullivan 151).

Bipolar disorder does cause irrational thinking and behavior, and people with the illness who are left undiagnosed rarely have self-insight into the cause of their changing personality or their motivations. One thing she did realize the previous night is that she will need a succession of sexual encounters with various men to satisfy her needs. She repeatedly says, “To-day it is Arobin; to-morrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn’t matter about Leonce Pontellier – but Raoul and Etienne!’ She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adele Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children” (108).

Sullivan and Smith believe that at this point, Edna actually considers suicide in order to elude her sons, who would rob her of her newfound identity. Otherwise, she would have to sacrifice her new identity and freedom to protect her children from the pain she would inflict on them (152). They do not understand why Edna does not choose another alternative, such as leaving Leonce and moving to a house that is farther away from him than just around the corner, and allowing the boys to live with their grandmother. They even suggest the children could be told that Edna is dead, thus permitting her to freely live the immoral and artistic life she wants. Thus, the boys would be spared the humiliation of having a mother who is known for her adultery and eccentricities. However, these critics realize

that "Edna acts not by reason but by emotion. Indeed, her self destruction looks like an act of aggression against those children who would drag her into her soul's slavery and against her husband and Robert as well, both of whom must suffer grief and guilt" (152).

Throughout the novel, the reader sees Edna awakening to her enjoyment of sensuality. The problem is that "along with all her other mimicry of masculine freedom, the satisfaction of her desire shatters her romantic illusions as she is forced to accept her sexual nature in her affair with Arobin," and she is reminded by the "scene of torture" that her physical being cannot find freedom from bearing more children or from the two children she already has. Schweitzer sees this realization as the reason for Edna's return to the Gulf, where she can "'elude' the tyranny of the children, that is, an overwhelming maternal responsibility which amounts, in her eyes, to a soul-killing self-sacrifice" (183). She believes that "Edna willingly gives up a life in which selfhood is defined either in terms of self-possession or self-sacrifice" (184). The reader also learns the despondency that came upon Edna the night before never left her. That morning at Grand Isle she was indeed suffering from depression. "There was no one thing in the world that she desired," and she came to realize that even the thought of Robert "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 not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach" (108).

As Edna stands at the edge of the Gulf she listens to the voice of the seductive sea "never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude" (108). She sees a bird with a broken wing fluttering toward the earth, conjuring up the image that Mademoiselle Reisz spoke of when she told Edna that the one who soars above the level plain of tradition must have a strong pair of wings, implicating that her final swim "is far from being the courageous act of a strong and free woman" (Sullivan 152). She had put on her bathing suit; but as she stands there by the shore "absolutely alone," she decides to cast off "the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air" (108). Gilbert views this action as symbolic of divesting herself "of her old life as a 'real' woman – a wife, mother, and mistress" (105). More likely, she is experiencing a mixed bipolar episode and is not fully aware of her thoughts and behaviors. She simultaneously has feelings that are strange, awful, and delicious, which well describes a full-blown manic episode. She feels "like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known" (109). The author's choice of words symbolizes the birth many feminists attribute to her last moments. Edna's "physical response to the sensuousness of the familiar world renovated it and regenerates herself. [...] she gives birth to herself as a creature

which has become its own mother" (Schweitzer 163). Edna stands nude at the edge of the water whose wavelets coil "like serpents about her ankles," which is sexual imagery used to associate

the sea with her sensual awakening and fulfillment encourages us to imagine the sea as lover. [...] The final dream of Edna Pontellier is not only of the lover's embrace but also of the mother's embrace – the longing to attain an intimacy denied by her vision of an isolated future and by her memory of loss and rejection. [...] Edna returns, at the novel's close, to the maternal womb for the repose and nurture she cannot find in the human world. (Ryan 6)

Edna walks out into the water, then swims as far as she can. Taliaferro states that "as Edna walks toward her death, 'she is like a somnambulist, mesmerized by her ultimate seducer, the sea. There is no way around it: Edna Pontellier was misled; her awakening ends with the Big Sleep'" (54).

Edna continues her journey into the Gulf; she seems manic as her mind races and she is filled with memories of the blue-grass meadow through which she swam as a child, "believing that it had no beginning and no end" (109). This memory is meaningful "for perhaps she sees in the sea the death of death – a cyclical regeneration, resurrection or reincarnation" (Taliaferro 52). She also appears depressed as she thinks of Leonce and the children: "They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and

soul.” She thought of how disappointed Mademoiselle Reisz would be if she could see her now; she would laugh and sneer at her. Edna can hear her voice saying, “And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies” (109). Whereas Edna wonders whether Mademoiselle Reisz would laugh or sneer at her, Berggren believes “the more pressing question” that seems to remain unanswered, “is whether the reader should laugh, or sneer, or weep.” Why, Berggren asks, does Edna give up now that she has finally stripped away the last layer, “when she presumably has begun to comprehend her own mind?” (6). The answer is that Edna does not comprehend her own mind; she has moved into a more extreme type of bipolar disorder. As exhaustion consumes her body, she thinks of Robert’s goodbye note and how he does not understand her and never would. Looking into the distance, Edna briefly feels the flame of terror that she once knew. Finally, she hears her father and her sister Margaret’s voices, “the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air” (109). According to Berggren, Edna remains “mysterious to the last.” The final paragraph simply confirms Edna’s dilemma. The sounds she hears from her childhood symbolize “the ultimate flight from adult responsibility,” and Edna dies because she never comes to realize her own true nature (6). Although these last images are from her childhood, they

“have the focus and sensory immediacy of illusions, completing the cycle of life by approximating Edna’s return to significant moments in her childhood” (Batten 76). According to Ryan:

The keen sensory reactions” of the last paragraph return Edna to “her childhood and define her early needs and desires. These memories are paired with her reaction to Robert who she believes has rejected her. [...] This pairing of recent rejection and early childhood is logical if we accept that Edna’s longing for love and understanding was first frustrated in childhood. (Ryan 2)

Many critics argue that Edna does not intend to commit suicide, including Taliaferro, who points out she requests that dinner be served as soon as she returns from her swim. Instead, it seems “that Edna made an unconscious, impulsive decision in terminating her life” (52). Portales agrees that Edna only intends to go for a swim and immediately return for supper:

Though we are told her despondency following Robert’s goodbye note ‘had never lifted,’ and that she takes off her ‘unpleasant, pricking’ old bathing suit, and walks into the water nude, these facts should not suggest that Edna goes into the water intent on suicide.

Like all her previous acts, one act simply leads to another. (435)

Edna’s suicide is concurrent with her “increasingly more noticeable impulsive actions.” Portales also believes, as so many feminist critics do, that Edna is

“lulled by the seductiveness of the waves,” forfeiting any other choices that she might have. Standing at the edge of the water, she again abandons “herself to any passing caprice” and wades into the water. This swim seems to take Edna back to that day during her childhood when she swam through the ocean of Kentucky bluegrass. Satisfying that childhood impulse, she continues to swim farther out to sea and “acts in keeping with her previous behavior for she has literally gone too far; and physically exhausted, she cannot swim back to the beach” (435-36). Portales points out that Edna’s suicide is consistent with her pattern of disregard for “consequences of her actions” and her inability to consider alternatives to her final action. By swimming out too far, Edna does not have to make a decision: “the consequences of her swimming out are inescapable; her final act simply cannot be obviated” (436). Taliaferro looks at Edna’s last thoughts and sensations in an attempt to define the purpose of Edna’s suicide: “her father’s authoritative voice, the barking of an old dog chained to a tree, and the spurs of the cavalry officer. All of these thoughts deal with the past and allude to male authority, bondage, and her romantic fantasies in relationships” (53).

Critics of The Awakening read the novel and Edna’s suicide just as Taliaferro suggests: “Chopin’s ambiguous narrative voice ‘encourages its readers to project their own fantasies into the novel and to see Edna the way they wish to see her’” (48). Many critics including Wolkenfeld, Yeager, and Bloom see Edna’s

suicide as a terrible defeat (Treu 5). Taliaferro states that “Edna’s quest for identity ends where it begins, and her suicide leaves her powerless. Just as the waves encircle her body, her ‘awakening’ to selfhood circles to her ‘awakening’ to death by the sea, and they nullify one another” (54). Psychoanalytic critics say that Edna chooses drowning as her method of death for a reason. There

is a period of rhapsodic union or fusion with another, and this is the period of early infancy, before the time when a baby begins to differentiate himself from his mother. It is the haunting memory of this evanescent state which Freud defines as ‘Oceanic feeling,’ the longing to recapture that sense of oneness and suffused sensuous pleasure – even, perhaps, the desire to be reincorporated into the safety of pre-existence. (Wolff, *Thanatos* 253)

The theory that Edna attempts to go back to this state of “pre-existence,” back to the womb by letting the loving embrace of the sea engulf her being is echoed by feminist and psychological critics alike. Wolff theorizes that Edna has a psyche that “protects an infantile, oral fixation, and that Edna’s fascination with the sea betrays a longing to return to the gratifying ‘oceanic’ state of the infant still at one with the mother, still immersed in the amniotic fluid” (Batten 77). Batten disagrees with Wolff’s argument by pointing out that “Edna’s last sensations do not accord with a ‘regression, back beyond childhood, back into time eternal.’ Instead, they leave her at a time in childhood having special significance for her”

(77). Psychological critics of The Awakening also discuss the “odd tension between freedom and determinism” throughout the novel, which culminates in Edna’s suicide and which is seen as both freedom from social, marital, and sexual mores and “enslavement” to her self-destructive mental state (Ryan 2).

Edna seems to be

caught between her own desire to overcome her loneliness by merging with Robert and to end her isolation and her desire to remain absolutely free, unhindered in her quest for an individual identity. [...] Edna’s reaction to Robert demonstrates how torn she remains between the either/or of selflessness and selfishness, and how easily she resigns herself to a sense of hopelessness. (Ryan 6)

The reader can see that Chopin carefully constructed a character whose childhood was marred by a dysfunctional family that did not meet her needs, a background which “left her with a lifelong struggle” to find an attachment with someone who would accept and support her “emerging sense of an authentic self” (2). Ryan asserts that “Edna is not destroyed because her sensuality is awakened but rather because the awareness of her sensuality emotionally resurrects her frustrated need for intimacy.” Edna finally realizes that a future of sexual conquests will not satisfy her need for attachment, and she fears being left alone. At the same time, she fears “entrapment” by her children and her

lovers; and she realizes that she cannot maintain a free and independent self. According to Ryan, this fear of both “engulfment” and “estrangement is a common effect of depression, one often understood as resulting from the depressive’s early frustration of dependency and intimacy needs” (4). This thesis agrees somewhat with Ryan’s assertion that Edna is “caught between” two extremes. However, the agreement is not complete. Rather, Edna is struggling with the isolation and loneliness that comes with her depressive episodes and with the emotional chaos, personality crisis, and desire for unrestrained passion brought on by hypomania.

Many feminist critics read The Awakening as the story of “a woman’s emancipation from a stuffy, middle-class marriage with its domestic routines and rigid standards prescribing how to be a good wife and mother.” They see Edna as courageous for exploring her sexuality and artistic creativity and for deciding her own destiny by choosing suicide. Sullivan and Smith reject these views, pointing out that “Edna never really becomes a free woman because she confuses impulsive action with liberation and because she never understands herself or her own wishes and goals” (147-48). Her impulsive action is caused by her hypomania. By diagnosing Edna with bipolar II disorder, the reader can now see that the feminist argument is incorrect. The reader learns at the end of the novel that Edna does not intend to leave her husband or free herself from her middle-class confinement. The new diagnosis concurs with Sullivan and Smith,

that Edna never understands the reason for her anguish. Reading the novel as a female Bildungsroman, Bogard believes that Edna tries to debunk the myths of the female artist that say a “woman should choose love instead of artistic expression” and that a true artist must give oneself completely to art. However, Edna is not strong enough to battle these myths, and she fails. Therefore it is defeat that leads her to return “to the womb-like embrace of the sea, the consummation of her passion” (2-4). Paradoxically, while Edna chooses not to live for other people and their social, religious, and familial expectations, she cannot live without other people; she has many emotional needs that require the love and support of a close, caring relationship. However, Edna cannot find anyone who understands or nurtures “her desire to redefine herself outside of traditional societal roles for women,” not even Robert (3). Bogard believes that when Robert leaves her, she is completely lacking “inner resources to sustain her through such alienation,” and she awakens to the fact that “she cannot achieve either autonomy or connection with others, she surrenders and stops struggling. [...] When she moves from what Chopin calls despondency to indifference, her life takes on a new feeling of unreality. She has awakened to consciousness from a life-long dream only to find her reality a nightmare” (3-4). Bogard thinks that the point of the novel is that Edna refuses to choose the only two options her society allows women: the all consuming role of wife and mother, like Adele Ratignolle chooses, or the lonely outcast female artist, like Mademoiselle Reisz.

Edna's quest is now a total failure, and she gladly embraces the sea's loving womb (4). Other critics including Taliaferro dismiss the view that Edna is some type of "feminine goddess of autonomy" who defies social conventions, but they agree that Edna's death is a failure, a tragedy. Comparing Edna's search for self with the symbol of the illusive and ambiguous sea, which has the "ability to toss its riders and for its capacity to prevail as the source of a storm," Taliaferro perfectly describes the life of a hypomaniac when she says that Edna's search is governed by impulsiveness and blind, careless thoughts that lead to death. Furthermore, while Edna appears to achieve some brief form of independence, "she sacrifices reality for her romantic fantasies, and her often rash behavior is a result of selfishness as she pursues her illusive, fanciful flights through various affairs, parties, and rejection of her children" (48).

Sullivan and Smith's view of Edna's suicide is that she is not performing "an act of self-knowledge or self-assertion nor a wish to protect her children, but the result of a series of depressions that become suicidal after Robert leaves her" (153). They believe that the reader is given clues about Edna's childhood and "current relationships" throughout the novel that predict Edna is the type of woman who might commit suicide. Left motherless when she was very young, Edna was raised by a "dour older sister," and a cold, distant father who had treated her mother badly, causing her to seek refuge in a mental life of dreams and romantic fantasy. The early loss of her mother is an especially large

determinant of Edna's adult behavior and of "the intensity of her need to be loved, a need so urgent that when Robert frustrates it, she kills herself" (154). Ultimately, it is possible that Edna's "conscience eventually punishes offenses against unconsciously held moral convictions no matter what indulgence reason may presently grant. Edna may refuse motherhood, reject her husband, and become sexually promiscuous, but eventually her unrecognized guilt will demand terrible retribution" (156). Sullivan and Smith conclude that The Awakening portrays both the "feminist's heroine" and a psychologically troubled woman in "unresolved tension," and encourages "readers to project their own fantasies into the novel and to see Edna as they wish to see her" (157). This thesis agrees with Sullivan and Smith regarding Edna's lack of cognizance in her suicide because she is in a mixed episode. Edna does not make a conscious and rational decision. This thesis also agrees that the novel provides information throughout that intimates Edna's emotional distress and the possibility that it could culminate in a tragedy. This thesis disagrees with the critics' assertion that something so simple as a guilty conscience could lead to Edna's self-inflicted death.

Several critics have compared Edna's story to various myths, including those of Aphrodite and Icarus. Roger Platizky gives a very interesting interpretation "of Edna's internal struggle and suicide" using the myth of Philomela. Platizky shows that there are "psychological indicators in the novel"

showing that like Philomela, Edna might have suffered sexual abuse in her childhood and that she is wrestling “with a repressed post-traumatic memory,” which could be partly accountable “for her extreme mood changes, boundary problems, and suicide (1).” While there is no sure evidence of sexual violation in the novel, it is clear to the reader that Edna’s childhood was completely dysfunctional. Philomela’s tongue was cut out, preventing her from initially voicing her violation by Tereus; Edna is described as one who conceals thoughts and emotions, never able to voice them. Later in the novel, “Edna’s extreme mood swings – from elation to despondency” suggest that she “is trying to block something more than just her realization that she is unhappy in her present marriage (1).” There seem to be two Ednas, and “the suicidal Edna is the one headed most directly toward ‘inevitable annihilation’ in the novel, her depressive prophecy appears more self-reflexive and self-fulfilling than socially critical or deeply philosophical.” According to Platizky, it is suggested several times in the novel that Edna is mourning something lost in childhood, as when Leonce rebukes her for being inattentive to her sons, and “the Pontellier cottage is described as ‘a mournful lullaby.’” Furthermore, when Edna feels in control of her body and her relationships, she seems happy and carefree; but when she does not feel in control, just as “someone who has been physically violated,” she is extremely depressed. Edna also has “problems with boundary-setting and addictive infatuations,” and she is vulnerable to “feelings of being invaded and

overwhelmed,” to which Wolf ascribes Edna’s oral fixation. A person “who had been violated or ‘invaded’ would be especially susceptible to boundary problems and the kinds of narcissistic love attachments Wolff describes Edna as having with Robert Lebrun.” Platizky recognizes the fact that “Edna’s adulterous relationships” are of an “addictive nature [...] – ‘To-day it is Arobin; tomorrow it will be someone else. It makes no difference to me’” – and that she “is being driven toward these men more by compulsion than desire” (1). As Desaussure Davis implies, “Robert and Alcee have the effect of a narcosis on Edna; being with them helps her medicate her pain and block depressive thoughts, but the effect of the ‘fix’ is not long-lasting enough to fill the void or block the despondency” (Platizky 2). Platizky sees Edna as possibly fleeing “from mood to mood, from man to man, and finally to the suicidal embrace of the sea, where no one can possess her again” (2). He points out that when Edna is about to walk down to the Gulf for her final swim, Victor Lebrun tells Edna that he will have Philomel cook a meal for her. Unlike the mythical Philomel, Edna does not have a caring sister “to fully understand her plight or vindicate her,” so she “drowns in solitude, engulfed only by memories from childhood [...] taking a secret she could never share with her” (2). The reason for this, not seen by Platizky, is that Edna’s hypomanic episode is driving her sexual desires and fueling her lack of inhibitions. Indeed, she has no control over her relationships. Platizky’s theory can be ruled out because he takes much liberty by imagining an event that is

never discussed or intimated in the novel. The mood swings and depression that Platizky discusses in his liberal theory of what motivates Edna can be accurately viewed by modern psychology as a mood disorder. All of Edna's behaviors that he describes as possible signs of a sexual assault case are definite symptoms of bipolar II disorder. Edna's fleeing from one mood to the next can be explained by her switching from one bipolar cycle to the next; her proceeding from one man to the next occurs when she is experiencing hypomanic sexual enthusiasm, and her "suicidal embrace of the sea" happens while Edna is caught in the turbulent frenzy of a mixed episode.

Batten concludes that, "Adele's final admonishment to 'think of the children' bears a moral weight from which she cannot escape. Edna is overwhelmed, finally, not only by transcendent forces but also by the orientation of her society toward them," which dissuades her from realizing her fantasy self (87). Batten believes that "Edna's struggle achieves Promethean dimensions because her fascination with *animus* both charts a crucial phase of psychic development and brings her into opposition with the sexless mother archetype which commands her social world" (88). In the end, she cannot go forward with "her inmost nature" and she returns "to the erotic darkness which Psyche laments, to her first demon lover, to the point when past and present, illusion and reality, thought and sensation merge in the blissful embrace of *animus*, the shepherd of her soul" (88). Roscher states that Edna's *animus* "as part of her

unconscious, has prevented the integration of her personality, that has blinded her to positive possibilities and kept her from mature relationships, will conspire to drive her into the ocean" (295). As Edna submerges herself into the Gulf, "the traumas that have damaged her soul are washed away, the *animus* is at peace," and Edna is "reborn" (296). Of course, what has harmed her personality and prevented her from enjoying mature relationships is her bipolar disorder.

Rosowski argues that there is a distinct difference between Edna's inner, true self and her outer, false self. This difference causes Edna to attempt escape, through suicide, from family, "lovers," and "time and change," in order to isolate her inner self. Craft refutes this assertion, stating that "this privileging of the inner self is dangerous and naïve, however, for it implies the presence of a 'real' or 'true' self that has not been tainted by the social world." Craft disagrees that by such a "withdrawal," Edna might return to a "real self." She claims that "Rosowski ignores the pervasive and inescapable effect social ideology has on all aspects of life." Furthermore, "Sandra Gilbert seems equally to ignore the omnipresent effects of society in her interpretation of Edna's suicidal swim," that Edna swims "back into her own life, back into her own visions, back into the imaginative openness of her childhood," and into a world untouched by "the restrictive culture of the nineteenth century (Craft 1)." Craft claims that such a belief in solipsism cannot be affected by society and is therefore impossible because "there is no escape from the social." In Craft's analysis, Edna does not

wish to "create a new space which she occupies alone" (132-33). With one of her last statements to Robert, "Now that 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," she "not only erases the importance of herself as an individual but her painting, her life, everything outside this relationship is nonchalantly discarded in a heap" (134). Like so many feminist critics, Craft believes that without Robert Edna sees no reason to continue living because freedom from family and social restriction "does not free Edna to stand alone or to glory in her individuality" (134). Shirley Foster apparently agrees with Craft's interpretation by stating that "Edna is finally defeated not only by social pressures...and by biological tyrannies, but also by personal conventionality which cannot envisage a new life other than in vaguely romantic terms" (Craft 137). Craft agrees with Spangler that Edna suffers from disillusioned romantic ideals, but she disagrees that Edna kills herself solely as a reaction to losing Robert. Instead, it is because she cannot come to terms with the many types of possession to which she is subject. After Robert leaves, "Edna admits that 'the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone,'" showing that she has finally realized her romantic fantasies are not real (Craft 137). Craft does not want to "glorify the 'freedom'" that Edna supposedly achieves through "the rejection of her role as Mrs. Pontellier" and her consequent suicide, but she does accept that "Edna creates

an ideological fissure” that creates “a place for a turn-of-the-century woman to say ‘I do not know what options exist for me, but I know that I cannot accept the ones offered to me’” (138).

Many critics read The Awakening’s ending as positive rather than as the terrible defeat of Edna’s journey, claiming that drowning offers Edna “the promise of freedom – from husbands, children, lovers, responsibility, and confrontation. Self-destruction is also an act of defiance [...]” (Lupton 95). Gilbert states that after Adele reminds Edna “of her instrumentality” during the childbirth scene, and Robert speaks of marrying her, so that she would “belong to him,” Edna decides that the only way “to assert her autonomy,” to “elude” the chains of her responsibilities, and to emerge as her true self, is to take that final swim. Gilbert argues “that Edna’s last swim is not a suicide – that is, a death [...]” Instead, Edna questions “the limitations of both reality and ‘realism.’” Gilbert claims that the final sentences of the novel show Edna’s swimming “not into death but back into her own life, back into her own vision, back into the imaginative openness of her childhood” (104).

According to existential analysis, “Edna’s suicide is a defiant act of will appropriately occurring when she is most deeply in touch with herself and the natural rhythms of nature. Her moment of psychic rebirth coincides, paradoxically, with the moment of her physical death” (Wymard 375). She states that Edna defies the limitations “of human life” by transcending them through her

act of suicide. Although Edna is “chained by biology, convention, and social morality,” she manages “her own destiny,” regardless of the consequences (375-76). Like so many critics, Wymard believes that Edna’s “existence is at stake” because she has found a new “authentic self” that she cannot absolve from the responsibilities of the “biological and sociological” reality of her life. Through suicide, Edna is choosing her sense of self, fulfilling her freedom, and refusing “to be victimized by a false reality which promises, to her, only living death” (382-83). For Wymard, it is stunning

that suicide is the self-assertion of that freedom, the only way that the real Edna sees to attack the conforming Edna who has drained all of her creative potential. The existentialist would maintain that one must respect that decision as the most honest act of Edna’s life; by it she chooses, for the first and last time, her own self-definition. During her sea-walk, Edna is whole. (384)

Wymard sees Edna’s demise as “a revelation of human possibilities, not a nihilistic cure for feminine oppression. To preserve her freedom, Edna Pontellier disengages herself from any involvement with the world” (384). This thesis both agrees and disagrees with Wymard’s analysis by agreeing there is a “conforming Edna who has drained all of her creative potential.” She is the depressed Edna seen mostly at Grand Isle. However, this thesis disagrees with Wymard’s assertion that only the selfish, narcissistic, sexually immoral, hypomanic Edna

seen in New Orleans, who struggles to finally emerge after twenty-nine years, only to shortly destroy herself is the real Edna. She remains a mystery to Wymard and many critics and readers, but this thesis makes clear that the real nature of Edna's character and behavior is shaped by her bipolar disorder.

Many feminist critics view Edna's death as a positive attempt to find freedom and independence and as a successful conclusion to her journey of self-discovery. Simon reads The Awakening:

as the dramatization of a woman's struggle to achieve selfhood – a struggle doomed to failure either because the patriarchal conventions of her society restrict her freedom, or because the ideal of selfhood that she pursues is a masculinely defined one that allows for none of the physical and undeniable claims which maternity makes upon women.

Simons claims that Edna commits suicide because in both of these views, "she cannot be a mother" and be her true self simultaneously, given the restrictive society in which she lives and because "the focus on gender/self limits the scope of Chopin's vision." She believes that Edna has "built her entire existence around her desire for something transcendent," but when she witnesses Adele's "scene of torture," she realizes that her ideal spiritual world is just an illusion, and she chooses death rather than to live without the fantasy (1).

Many feminist critics view Edna's death as positive because swimming into the Gulf is symbolic of rebirth. Psychological critic Pat Shaw agrees with that view but expands the reading of the ending to include the audience, stating that the author takes the audience into death with Edna, "as external, scientific observer and as psychic sharer. [...] we complete the transposition from external, analytical viewer and move 'inside' to become part of Edna's mind [...]." The last paragraph changes the reader into a direct participant in Edna's mind, actually seeing and hearing what Edna experiences, transforming the audience "from removed, occasionally disinterested outsiders we suddenly find ourselves sharing mental space with one who is about to die" (183). Ivy Schweitzer sees Edna's suicide as a "refusal to be re-integrated into the bourgeois, patriarchal order." Edna rejects "society's notion of selfhood conceived as self-possession and all that implies" (162). Schweitzer points out that as Edna swims deeper into the sea, she is progressively thinking through her entire life, first "thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child' escaping the hypocritical words of her father's Sunday prayers [...] she rehearses her progress through the various stages of possession," from her husband and sons, then Mademoiselle Reisz, and finally Robert. During Edna's "death and her release [...]. She has escaped the figural, and in her recapturing of intense fragments of memory, the voices become the wordless sounds of progressively less human and less discursively bound objects:" from her father's and sister's voices, to an

old dog barking, a cavalry officer's spurs clanging, bees humming, and pinks emitting a fragrance (Schweitzer 185). At the end of her life, Edna's perceptual faculties are mixed; sounds and smells are not necessarily her memories or objects that she is currently witnessing: "Unlike the 'narcotic' effect of purely sensual love or the heavy odor of chloroform which deadened Edna's sensations during childbirth, the sounds and smells of the final sentence check the downward mood and movement" (186). Schweitzer rebuts Wolff's assertion that Edna completes a regression back into eternity, instead proposing that Edna's ending is "a progression backwards through a series of memories to a sensuously maternal space, the space in which she can recapture her lost mother and her own [...] motherhood." Ultimately, Schweitzer believes that in "answering the seductive voice of the sea, Edna is not hopelessly resigned, and the bird emblemizing this moment, though disabled with a broken wing, is at least free of its cage. They both enter the sea" (184).

In "The Second Coming of Aphrodite," Sandra Gilbert argues that The Awakening exhibits a feminist and matriarchal myth of the goddess of love who is powerful, autonomous, and free to exercise her own sexuality. She believes that Edna has become a character in a "feminist fantasy" as opposed to a masculinist and patriarchal myth. In this context, Gilbert views Edna's final swim as a triumphant return to her own life, back to the imagination of her childhood. During her periods of hypomania brought on by her disorder, Edna does feel

powerful, autonomous, and free to express her sexuality. According the DSM-IV, elevated mood, inflated self-esteem, uncritical self-confidence, and increased sexual activity are all characteristics of such an episode. However, psychoanalytic criticism concentrates on Edna's loss as a reason for her final swim. Edna's unconscious mind, which is overwhelmed by the early death of her mother, controls her actions. In addition, Edna's older sister Margaret was a cold and distant figure, never offering a proper substitute for her mother. Edna thus became fixated in her longing for her mother, resulting in a life-long quest for reunion. The Gulf of Mexico plays the central role in this journey because bodies of water are classic psychological symbols for birth and for the relationship between mother and child. Psychoanalysts agree with feminist scholars that Edna is returning to the womb, so to speak, with her final swim. However, contrary to Gilbert's belief that Edna's final movement toward reunion with the mother is triumphant, psychoanalysts describe it as an inward and repressive action, as an ultimate act of self-destruction. Chopin's brilliant pre-Freudian awareness of the unconscious mind leads her to create in Edna unresolved pre-Oedipal longings to merge with a love object rather than experience the independence and sense of self that she purportedly seeks. Concurrently, the bipolar II diagnosis shows that witnessing the torturous scene of her friend's giving childbirth thrusts Edna into a depressed episode. The night before her suicide, Edna grows despondent and does not go to bed, does not sleep. The

next morning she enters a mixed episode, in which she experiences states of severe depression and mania simultaneously. That is why, as so many critics comment, Edna commits suicide “mechanically,” as if she does not know what she is doing. The mixed episode causes delusions and hallucinations on that final day of her life: a barking dog, clanging spurs, humming bees, voices of friends and family, and strange odors. According to the DSM-IV, a mixed episode causes “rapidly alternating moods (sadness, irritability, euphoria) accompanied by symptoms of a Manic Episode [...] and a Major Depressive Episode [...]. The symptom presentation frequently includes agitation, insomnia, appetite dysregulation, psychotic features, and suicidal thinking” (333). Delusions and hallucinations, such as those experienced by Edna in the final paragraph of the novel, are commonly present in a mixed episode. Symptoms must last for at least one week for a clinical diagnosis of mixed episode to be made, and for a change from the diagnosis of bipolar II disorder to bipolar I disorder. Because Edna commits suicide on the first day of mixed episode symptoms, this thesis can only suggest the possibility that she was beginning to suffer this variation of bipolar disorder.

During the past two decades, a frequent feminist emphasis on the conclusion of the novel is that Edna’s character is a deviation from the historically acceptable portrayal of punishing a woman for her sins. Death or suicide is a common ending for women who transgress social mores. Craft agrees and

points out that Edna's death "takes on social significance for two reasons. First, Edna was the catalyst of her death, not the recipient of a toll exacted by society," and second, "Death itself becomes a symbolic protest against the reproduction of a respectable female and the connivances of a respectable community" (138). However, researchers have performed many studies in the last three decades, proving that there is a high risk of suicide among individuals with mood disorders. Before modern treatments for bipolar disorder, suicide rates were as high as 30 to 60 percent. Even with today's medications, suicide studies show that bipolar patients commit suicide at a rate 30 to 80 times more than the non-bipolar population (Mondimore, Bipolar 238).

While many critical theories of The Awakening seem to rehash similar explanations for Edna Pontellier's behavior, the claim of this thesis is new and different. This paper demonstrates that bipolar II disorder affects Edna's thoughts and behavior throughout the novel, and it answers many questions not adequately answered before. Of course, this new psychological diagnosis does not diminish future interpretive possibility of Chopin's novel, nor does it discount insights gained from other critical approaches. Rather, it clarifies the relationship between current psychological and feminist scholarship and increases respect for the greatness of Chopin and provides her remarkable pre-Freudian understanding of the human psyche.

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