

Individuality and Convention in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*: A Hegelian Dialectic Approach

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Abstract

This research paper studies the themes of individuality and convention in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* from a Hegelian dialectic perspective. The significance of the study lies in the fact that it fills a gap in knowledge that has not been fully addressed in relation to the theme of individuality and convention using Hegel's dialectics. It examines the work to discover the vacillations of the heroine between rebellion and conformity and evaluate the outcome. Hegel's framework of thesis, antithesis and synthesis is applicable to the analysis of the opposing themes. The study has managed to answer its key research questions. First, convention in the novel is represented by stringent social norms, patriarchy, matrimony, and women's conformity with them. Second, individualism is mainly represented by Edna who struggles to put her inner self first, her misogamy, and her extra-marital romances. Third, interaction between individuality and convention tips the balance in favor of convention for the following main reasons: Edna's compliance and ambivalence and Robert's wavering and estrangement. Ultimately, the thesis comes into interaction with the antithesis to allow convention to prevail, leveraging and isolating Edna before she commits suicide.

Keywords: Convention, Hegel's dialectics, individuality, Kate Chopin, *The Awakening*

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Introduction

Kate Chopin (1850–1904) is an American novelist and short-story writer famous for her works about the inner lives of acute, bold and intelligent women. She is extensively renowned for being one of America's prominent authors and "an interpreter of New Orleans culture" (*Encyclopaedia Britannica*, "Kate Chopin", 2022, para. 1). She kept "pushing against the boundaries of what was proper for American authors to say in print" (Toth, 1999, p. 8). Skaggs (1985) asserts that "Chopin's characters are struggling to find a place of their own in their communities; some are trying to cope with their need for love; and a few are already reaching timidly for autonomy" (p. 12).

Chopin's novel *The Awakening* was published in 1899 and was initially entitled *A Solitary Soul*. It describes "a young mother's struggle to achieve sexual and personal emancipation in the oppressive environment of the post-bellum American South" (Bracken, 2021, para. 1). The novel was commonly censured "for its portrayal of sexuality and marital infidelity." Yet, it has later been recognized as "a landmark work of early feminist fiction." *The Awakening* has also been labeled as "a case study of 19th-century feminism" (para. 2). One of its major themes is that of "self-ownership" or "bodily autonomy", which "signified a woman's right to have control over her own body and identity" (para. 8).

The Awakening has been critically analyzed especially from feminist and psychoanalytic perspectives. The theme of individuality versus convention, however, has not been fully investigated using Hegel's dialectic approach. This research work aims at studying the theme of individuality versus convention in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* using Hegel's dialectic framework of thesis, antithesis and synthesis. The study is very rewarding in that it fills a knowledge gap that has not fully been addressed in relation to the theme of individuality versus convention in Chopin's *The Awakening* from a Hegelian dialectic perspective. It aspires to examine the work to discover the vacillations of the heroine between rebellion and conformity and evaluate the outcome. It also provides the opportunity to experiment with philosophical and literary criticism principles and apply them to actual texts. The study seeks to answer important questions related to the way Chopin treats the theme of individuality versus convention in *The Awakening* following Hegel's dialectics. How is convention represented in the novel? What represents individuality as antithesis? What is the outcome of the interaction between individuality and convention?

Literature Review

The Awakening has impelled several kinds of analyses from different critics using an array of critical approaches. Evans (2014) explored a comprehensive collection of scholarly studies of the novel from numerous critical standpoints. The novel was first criticized for its daring erotic content (Mambrol, 2018). Fletcher (1966) discussed Edna's innermost spiritual needs. Burriss (2018) approaches the novel from a symbolic viewpoint focusing on a catalog of symbols. Ryan (1998) approaches *The Awakening* from a psychological perspective. Kaplon (2012) dealt with the heroine's struggle against various social and natural rules. Sharma (2014) focused on the feminist themes in the novel.

Previous studies have not used the thesis-antithesis-synthesis framework to study individualism and conformity in Chopin's novel. In this study, the researchers are keen on applying Hegel's dialectics to study the theme of individuality versus convention in the novel. The Hegelian

dialectic approach is made up of "(1) a beginning proposition called a thesis, (2) a negation of that thesis called the antithesis, and (3) a synthesis whereby the two conflicting ideas are reconciled to form a new proposition" (Schnitker & Emmons, 2013, p. 35). Hegel's dialectics of thesis, antithesis and synthesis have not been investigated in relation to the theme of individuality and convention in *The Awakening*. Hence, it is crucial to address the gap and probe the subject using basic Hegelian terminology.

This study deals with the application of the three major parts of Hegel's dialectics, thesis, antithesis and synthesis, to analyze the theme of individuality versus convention in *The Awakening*. The thesis is a "formal statement illustrating a point" that is followed by the antithesis that "contradicts or negates" the thesis. The synthesis "resolves the conflict between the thesis and antithesis" (Schnitker & Emmons, 2013, p. 978). Levitt's "go-reverse" principle stipulates that "every time there is a strong movement in one direction of tastes, values, attitudes and activities, another movement emerges that's almost the complete opposite" (Revolutions in Opposites, 2017, para. 11).

Levitt (2017) says:

The prevalence of competing opposites is a persistent theme in the history of mankind; Othello had Iago, Jefferson had Hamilton, Lenin had Stalin, the id has its ego, the straight culture of the 50s and early 60s had the counterculture of the mid-60s and 70s. (para. 3)

In the present study, the Hegelian concepts of thesis, antithesis and synthesis shall be respectively dealt with in the main parts of the project following the research design below.

The study of individuality and convention in Chopin's *The Awakening* uses close textual analysis with Hegel's guiding principles of thesis, antithesis and synthesis as discussed above. It is divided into three main parts. Part one demonstrates the ways convention is manifested through patriarchy and social rules. Part two studies individualism as displayed mainly through the character of Edna who stands in the way of conformity. Part three deals with the interactions between convention and individuality and the subsequent outcome.

Thesis: Convention

Convention in the novel is represented by stringent social norms, patriarchy, matrimony, and women's conformity with them. The novel is set in a strictly conventional setting where social rules and customs have to be rigorously observed. Patriarchy and male domination do not initially prevent women, including the heroine, from complying with the norms no matter how stern they may be.

Stringent Social Norms

People in Edna's entourage, especially women, hold social and religious obligations, ranging from house chores to counting beads, in the highest regard (Chopin, 2018, Chap. 21) even when they lead to their distress. The Colonel, her father, strongly believes in the institution of marriage (Chap. 23). Yet, Edna can feel Madame Ratignolle's pain resulting from what she considers the terrifying and depressing experience of giving birth (Chap. 37). Ladies in black symbolize stern religious rituals (Chap. 12). Holding parties is a social obligation, not a means of entertainment. Edna has to receive guests at her home every Tuesday (Chap. 17). Madame Lebrun throws a boring socially-motivated party. Madame Ratignolle plays the piano, not for pleasure but, out of respect for her family. Likewise, two young girls play it only because it is conventional for

them to perform (Chap. 9). A mother asks her little daughter to dance and mock femininity in front of everybody, in conformity with patriarchal codes (Chap. 9).

Patriarchy

Patriarchy dominates all aspects of life in the novel. Edna and her sisters are raised by a patriarchal father in a strict and deterring manner (Chap. 24). Then Edna is transferred to a similarly domineering husband. Pontellier is described as a grouchy quick-tempered man who constantly seeks order and tranquility. He is a hot-blooded intimidator who presumes he must always prevail (Chap. 3). He is even unable to understand or laugh at jokes and does not seem to reap any benefits from his wife's company (Chap. 1). Pontellier is fond of reading old newspapers and can be easily annoyed by Madame Lebrun and her parrot's noise or by children playing nearby (Chap. 1).

Moreover, Mr. Pontellier is a contradictory person, loving and arrogant at the same time (Chap. 1). He often reprimands and intimidates his wife, then simply buys her big-budget gifts for reconciliation (Chap. 3). He tries to be patient, but in vain (Chap. 11). He breaks his promise to his children but ironically reproaches his wife for neglecting them (Chap. 3) until they became self-contained and self-reliant (Chap. 4). He criticizes his wife's dinner, eats out, and warns her to accomplish her duties (Chap. 17). In fact, he considers Edna a private property he does not want to see impaired, rebuking her even for an unpleasant suntan she got on the beach (Chap. 1). Pontellier assumes that Edna has to devote her life to satisfying all of his needs without any kind of reciprocation. And when she does not comply, he criticizes her poor performance as a mother (Chap. 3). When he comes home late at night, he wakes Edna from her deep sleep just to tell her about what he did during the night. And when she looks heavy-eyed, he feels offended by her supposed indifference (Chap. 3). His patriarchal attitude has a dramatic impact on their marriage.

Matrimony

The male-controlled relationship between men and women leads to a loveless marriage between Edna and her husband. Indeed, she does not love her husband as she acknowledges to Madame Ratignolle. Rather, it was he who went head over heels for her and influenced her to marry him (Chap. 7). That is why they are legally and conventionally connected only on the exterior (Chap. 2). Pontellier is mainly preoccupied with his business and barely concerned about his wife's presence or absence (Chap. 14). Their formal communications bear a resemblance to commercial transactions (Chap. 2). He would rather invite Robert to a neighboring hotel for dinner and entertainment, ignoring his wife and leaving her behind (Chap. 1). However, patriarchal practices often thrive on women's complicity.

Women's Conformity

Most women in Edna's world are mostly defined by obedience and compliance. Their lives are mainly dedicated to their children's wellbeing. Edna's friend, Madame Ratignolle, is extremely caring, and selfless when it comes to her children who always come first (Chap. 4). She keeps herself busy sewing clothes for her children even at Edna's cottage (Chap. 4). For her, motherhood gives significance to her life and makes it worth living (Chap. 16). Edna herself initially acquiesces to social convention. She is reserved, (Chap. 2), submissive, compliant, and tolerant (Chap. 1). Despite her anguish, she respects customs and receives whatever her husband gives her with

appreciation and meekness, and bids him a merry goodbye (Chap. 3). She checks on the children only to satisfy him (Chap. 3). In addition, the way she was raised taught her that romance is not for upright women, whether married or not, and that marriage is about honor and stability, not pleasure and liberty (Chap. 7). When Robert tries to teach her how to swim, she feels scared (Chap. 10). She sticks to her guns, entrusting her arrogant husband with her wedding rings and then reclaiming them as a sign of commitment (Chap. 1). However, her devotion would not last for long.

Antithesis: Individuality

Individualism is mainly represented by Edna who struggles to put her inner self first, by her misogamy, and by her extra-marital romances.

Inner Self First

As a result of unendurable social and marital conventions, Edna starts looking inward and meditating (Chap. 2). She has always been conscious of the discrepancy between her free inner life and the conventional outer life (Chap. 7) and the need to focus more on her internal life, and less on external conventional surfaces (Chap. 19). She begins to struggle against the rules and habits suppressing and stifling her life (Chap. 13), seeing herself not as a traditional wife or mother, but rather as a self-reflective contemplative individual who thinks outside the box (Chap. 7). Her actions begin to be based on her own feelings and inner yearnings rather than on what family and society expect of her (Chaps. 11 and 15).

Edna begins by deliberately ignoring social rules and highlighting her own autonomous choices (Chap. 17). She considers criticizing the cook for the unpalatable dinner, then gives up the idea (Chap. 18). Step by step, she manages to break some longstanding customs and traditions in favor of her own desired lifestyle (Chap. 17). For instance, she considers her own perception of life to be more valuable than Madame Ratignolle's conventional social attitudes, developing an admiration for her own beliefs and attitudes (Chap. 18). She proves unconquerable by Madame Ratignolle (Chap. 33). She prefers working on increasing her own self-awareness rather than satisfying a husband's desires (Chap. 11) or attending to children's needs (Chap. 5). She stands against the institution of marriage.

Misogamy

Edna thrusts aside familial commitments along with social obligations. Her frustrations are mainly related to her being a wife and mother (Chap. 22). Above all, she abhors the idea of marriage and feels sickened and disheartened by harmonious conventional marriages (Chaps. 18). We learn from her husband that she perceives marriage as a major aspect of female subjugation (Chap. 22). Mrs. Pontellier cries intensely because of the injustice and darkness she feels following a domestic dispute. (Chap. 3). She starts looking back in anger at her strange choices in life (Chap. 7). She prefers to sleep in a dirty hammock than in her marital bed (Chap. 10). She also considers motherhood an impediment to her freedom (Chap. 16). Edna reacts with loathing and horror regarding accouchement (Chap. 37). She refuses to comply with men's whims and the social conventions that control her relationships (Chap. 12). When her husband asks her to come inside, she disobeys and stays in her hammock (Chap. 11). She also rejects to help him select some furniture for the house (Chap. 18) and overtly refuses to wear her usual Tuesday dress, puts on an

ordinary one, and bluntly goes out for the day instead of hosting guests (Chap. 17). Edna prefers to sleep in an outdoor swinging couch rather than the discomfort of her bed (Chap. 21). When her friends compliment her husband's generosity, Mrs. Pontellier regards it with disdain (Chap. 3).

Edna does not act following the conventional wife stereotype, which infuriates her husband (Chap. 4). When he reprimands her, she returns fire and defends herself (Chap. 19). Furthermore, she confidently confronts her husband concerning her dire situation as a woman (Chap. 22) and decides to move out of his house to lead a financially-independent life on her own in a smaller one. She even decides to celebrate the occasion (Chap. 26). Prior to embracing an independent life in her new separate house, she holds an extravagant carefully-arranged party on her birthday (Chap. 30). She adores living freely in her new little attic room (Chaps. 32, 33), being influenced and fascinated by the way Mademoiselle Reisz lives in a small, disorderly upper floor apartment (Chap. 21).

Thus, she succeeds in brushing aside the major tenets of marriage, allegiance to and cohabitation with a husband, and financial dependency (Chap. 26). She closes her eyes to her household and does as she pleases (Chaps. 18 and 19). She goes out whenever she wants (Chap. 18), but certainly not to her sister's wedding (Chap. 22), which infuriates her father (Chap. 24). She chooses painting over looking after her house and children (Chap. 18). However, she underestimates her painting and stops painting when she feels down even though she enjoys it and spends a lot of time working on it (Chaps. 19 and 25). Edna tells Madame Ratignolle that she is ready to look after her children to the detriment of anything except her own self (Chap. 16). She is delighted to see her husband and children leave the house for some time. She enjoys her free time reading and studying Emerson's essays on freedom and self-reliance, away from familial ties and obligations (Chap. 24).

The essential practical changes she makes in her life help her take back her own true spiritual self (Chap. 29). Gradually, Edna's frustration with the status quo begins to dissipate. Now she can spend some time with Creoles who are free and outgoing (Chap. 4). Swimming also brings her power, reassurance, and pleasure (Chap. 10). She admires the feeling of walking naked into the cold ocean and swimming away into deep water (Chap. 38). When she dives into the ocean, she is actually diving into her own soul (Chap. 10). She learns from Mademoiselle Reisz's disregard of the exterior and fascination with her own fancies (Chap. 21). She dismisses conventional musical displays and only enjoys Mademoiselle Reisz's music because it is individually played from the heart (Chap. 9). When Edna begins to pursue her own feelings and opinions and act on them, she becomes undisturbed and more contented now that her exterior is in reconciliation with her interior. As for her cold marital relationship, she is going to replace it with far warmer friendships.

Romance

Unlike her marriage, Edna's relationship with other men, especially Robert, seems joyful and relaxed (Chap. 1). Edna wants Robert to be her mate in her quest for freedom (Chap. 10). Robert shows readiness to close his eyes to conventions and embark on a possible romantic relationship with Edna (Chap. 12). It was Robert who first persuaded her to accompany him to the beach, symbol of freedom (Chap. 5). In addition to their similar exterior appearances, Edna and Robert are also connected internally (Chap. 2) and become more and more romantically involved (Chap. 10). They look like an equal couple who converse straightforwardly and humorously about

all sorts of topics and interests (Chap. 2). Edna appreciates Robert's openness when he talks about his past friendships with women (Chap. 5).

Unlike the other people, Robert and Edna consider themselves independent individuals, not mere members of society (Chap. 10). They eat, relax, joke, laugh, and go on adventures together (Chaps. 1 and 13). He praises her drawings (Chap. 5) and she accepts his invitation to go visit a romantic island (Chap. 12). That is why Edna feels joyful about a potentially successful relationship with him (Chap. 35). Edna feels excited to learn about his arrival and reappearance in her life. (Chap. 26). His visit elates her and energizes her painting activity (Chap. 35). They finally come close to confessing their love for each other (Chap. 33). She realizes that she can experience real romance and friendship only with Robert, so she dismisses all other sterile relationships when he comes back (Chap. 34).

Other relationships with men include Aribin and Victor. She sees Arobin almost every day (Chap. 26). He spends a romantic evening with her at her house (Chap. 25), and they kiss on the lips (Chap. 27). He apologizes to her in a romantic letter (Chap. 26). As for Victor, she finds his lighthearted romantic exchanges with her more valuable than rigid marriage-oriented engagements (Chap. 26). She learns from his free and unconventional ideas about romantic relationships (Chap. 20). He sings to her and kisses her hand (Chap. 30). She finds him more innocent in his romance than in cunning and devious Arobin's (Chap. 30).

Synthesis: Convention Prevails

The borderline between individuality and convention sometimes becomes unclear and fuzzy. There is undoubtedly a tense interaction between them in the novel, just as in real life. The social order around Edna sometimes seems to transform into her own version of individuality, or so it seems. But when it does not, she believes she can never easily reduce the disparities to reach a middle ground that requires individuality to yield to convention or vice versa. Convention ultimately holds sway. Interaction between individuality and convention tips the balance in favor of convention for the following main reasons: Edna's compliance and ambivalence and Robert's wavering and estrangement.

Convention Leveraged

Even though Edna stands firmly against convention, she initially succeeds in taking advantage of it to a certain extent. She recognizes familial ties only through observing women's rights. When her own terms are disrespected, family bonds crumble (Chap. 38). She is delighted to see her father, the Colonel, because she could practice masculine activities in his company (Chap. 23). She loves performing manly activities with him, sketching him, betting with him at the races, and going to parties with him (Chap. 23). She bets magnificently at the horse races (Chap. 25). She also turns loving and caring for her husband when he gets ready to leave home for business trips (Chap. 24). When she decides to leave him, she holds a farewell party at his house using his own money (Chap. 29). She moves to her new house and cleans and decorates it with the help of servants from her old one (Chap. 29). She makes her children and caretaker pose for her drawings (Chap. 19). Furthermore, Edna's positivity and delight in her relationship with Robert strangely positively affects her relationship with her husband (Chap. 27). However, individuality would soon give in to convention.

Edna's Compliance

Edna's conventional reticence emanating from social rules prevails over her persuasions and desires especially at the beginning of the novel (Chap. 7). She was raised to be reserved, respect convention, and restrain herself from any socially unacceptable behavior (Chap. 4). She feels gloomy and almost blames herself for following Robert to the beach (Chap. 6), and does not allow him to lay his head on her arm (Chap. 5). Though Edna does not have much devotion to her children, she pretends to do (Chap. 4), sewing clothes for her children even though she does not like it (Chaps. 4, 5). She compliments Madame Ratignolle, the symbol of convention, by sketching her (Chap. 5). Sometimes, she seems unable to escape social convention as when she had to attend to her friend's accouchement (Chap. 36). She feels bored during church services, but she attends them (Chap. 13). Robert's return causes her to reactivate relationships with the social world, remembering her family and exchanging letters with her husband and children (Chap. 35). Edna eventually works with the doctor to try and harmonize her freedom and autonomy with social rules (Chap. 38). She makes it clear to the doctor that she yearns for freedom without having to offend or harm to those around her (Chap. 38).

Ambivalence

Edna takes pleasure in her liberating, yet confusing, rebelliousness, being driven into an unruly and uncertain new world (Chap. 28). When she initially becomes attentive to her distinctiveness, she seems uncertain about the way she should act on her own thoughts and feelings (Chap. 6). In the absence of convention, her emotions become unpredictable (Chap. 32) and her behavior inconsistent because of her tempestuous emotions (Chap. 19). Her interest in appearances and glamor is an attempt to make up for an ambiguous and gloomy internal feeling of despair and vulnerability (Chap. 30). She becomes more and more emotionally and spiritually confused (Chap. 29) and fails to come up with a new value system of her own excluding convention (Chap. 38). In rejecting social conventions, Edna does not want to turn wicked like Arobin; she would rather live in peace, probably like Victor (Chap. 30).

Edna also seeks validation for her awakening from conventional people. She asks Madame Ratignolle for her opinion about her drawings (Chap. 18). When Madame Ratignolle praises the drawings, Edna offers her most of them (Chap. 18). When she decides to move to a new house, she writes to her husband a lovely letter (Chap. 26). Her uncertainty casts a shade on her relationship with her children. She tells Madame Ratignolle that her love for her children is only occasional and discontinuous (Chap. 7). She strives for freedom, but feels uncomfortable about having to abandon her children (Chap. 38). After moving out, she visits them and spends an enjoyable time, but when she leaves, she feels delighted to be on her own again (Chap. 32).

Edna's ambivalence extends to her marital and extra-marital relationships. She angrily stamps on her marriage ring and then puts it back on with frustration (Chap. 17). She waits for her husband while dreaming of Robert's voice (Chap. 14). She cannot decide on going abroad with her husband, accepting and refusing at the same time (Chap. 38). Edna does not love Arobin, but his romantic advances that are missing in her marriage rouse her (Chap. 25) and his kiss excites her (Chap. 28). She accepts his invitations but treats him with disinterest (Chap. 35). She strikes a loveless relationship with him and then feels guilty about it (Chap. 33). After her exciting meeting with him, she writes a heated letter to her husband but only in her mind (Chap. 25). She ponders the question of whether she is a good or a bad woman because of her relationship with Arobin

(Chap. 27). Edna's excitement by Arobin's courtship is incomprehensible given the fact that she loves Robert (Chap. 25). When she remembers Robert, she feels ashamed of her relationship with Arobin who is only concerned with her body (Chaps. 25 and 31). In addition, though she has rebelled against the possessiveness of her husband, she surrenders herself to the possessiveness of Robert's love and feels jealous about any potential friendships he might strike up with other women (Chap. 34).

Convention Prevalent

Being unable to find an alternative to customs and traditions, Edna becomes like a bird whose wing has been broken by convention (Chap. 38). Social conventions restrain and deter her experience of freedom (Chap. 35). Her husband and society in general frown upon and condemn her behavior (Chap. 17). She cannot get divorced (Chap. 26). Her husband complains to the doctor that Edna is acting abnormally and flouting her duties as a wife and mother, and that she even delves into women's rights (Chap. 22). The doctor advises Pontellier to be patient until Edna's so-called strange temperament fades away (Chap. 22). He alludes to the fact that after a woman's unlawful affairs are over, she will make amends and return to her husband in the end (Chap. 23). When the latter decides to buy Edna expensive gifts to settle her down, her father directs him toward adopting an uncompromising sterner attitude (Chap. 24).

When she decides to relocate, her husband becomes worried, not about the relationship, but about what people might think of the move (Chap. 32). Madame Ratignolle is also troubled by Edna's change and jumps to defend the social order (Chap. 8). She warns her that people are gossiping about her relationship with Arobin (Chap. 33). The fact that Edna needs Arobin's sensual love is socially groundbreaking and unconceivable (Chap. 25). Madame Ratignolle also warns Robert against establishing a relationship with Edna (Chap. 8). Edna tries her utmost to free Robert from convention, but her efforts ultimately come to no avail because of Robert's wavering (Chap. 36).

Robert's Wavering

Robert is initially pleased with Edna's transformation (Chap. 8). Yet, his fascination with freedom proves to be restricted by conservatism (Chap. 20), which makes him both daring and conventional at the same time (Chap. 8). That is why the gap between him and Edna begins to widen (Chap. 15). He avoids her (Chap. 8) and hides his emotions toward her in compliance with social rules (Chap. 33). He sits silently next to her on the beach (Chap. 10). She can see love in his eyes, but he remains nonchalant and behaves mannerly (Chap. 33). When she invites him to dinner, he first declines and then accepts (Chap. 33). When Edna talks to him in an easygoing way, he rejects it, trying to keep up with the Joneses (Chap. 36). He mostly swings over between good manners and seriousness (Chap. 33). He is evasive most of the time, shunning any intimate topics (Chap. 36), but feels jealous of Arobin's photograph in Edna's room (Chap. 33) and when Arobin arrives, he leaves (Chap. 34). When he finally confesses his love for Edna, he decides to keep away and walk out on her since he cannot be with her in a conventional marital relationship (Chap. 36). He acknowledges having been cold and strict with her for the same reason (Chap. 36). He leaves her a note saying that he departed from her because he loves her (Chap. 38).

Edna feels deeply offended by Robert's alienating attitude (Chap. 20). She finds his reserve idiotic and hurtful (Chap. 20). She also feels disappointed and disheartened by his determination

to leave. Even the way he says goodbye is straight and conventional (Chap. 15). Mademoiselle Reisz tells Edna that Robert loves her and that is why he needs to forget her (Chap. 26). However, she keeps thinking about him all the time (Chap. 18) and feels frustrated to learn that Robert does not often mention her in his letters (Chap. 20). When she reads his letter to Mlle Reisz and finds out that he mentions her, she cries (Chap. 21). Edna turns sad most of the time because of Robert (Chap. 15). During the months Robert is away, she keeps thinking about the summer she spent with him at Grand Isle (Chap. 33). She visits Madame Lebrun to get his news (Chap. 16). Something immaterial attracts her towards him (Chap. 26). Romance, for her, is not rational or practical like marriage (Chap. 26). Being too deeply entrenched in convention, Robert withdraws from Edna's journey of self-recognition and disobedience and decides to leave.

Edna Leveraged

Edna's change has had an impact on herself and those around her. She starts neglecting her children and watching them inattentively (Chap. 18) and her family starts to operate uneasily in her retreat (Chap. 14). Her new invigorating friendships disturbed her orderly daily routine (Chap. 13), and Arobin succeeds in dishonestly manipulating her, frustrating her ambition to become strong and independent (Chap. 26). Her power and steadfastness disintegrate when Arobin's maneuvers captivate her (Chap. 31). He exploits her cheerfulness and permits himself to touch her (Chap. 27) and she accepts his seduction and touches even though she does not really want to (Chap. 31). When Arobin expresses his feelings for her, he does it in an ambiguous and pretentious way (Chap. 25). He tries his best to alienate Edna from her friends in to have all of her attention (Chap. 27).

Edna succeeds to a certain extent in overcoming hardships as she becomes less and less reserved (Chap. 7). Her personality develops from being discreet and reticent to becoming lively and charismatic (Chap. 25). Robert's absence does not fully disrupt her rebirth. She can still freely swim in the ocean on her own (Chap. 16) and find peace and contentment in the company of Mademoiselle Reisz (Chap. 26). Edna also detaches herself from undesirable people (Chap. 36). She stands firm on dismissing Arobin and not seeing him except on her own terms (Chap. 29). She refuses to accept flowers from him (Chap. 31). She declines his offers and invitations even to go for a walk and pays no attention to his dalliances (Chaps. 25 and 34). She exploits her husband's absence and feels free to send for Robert to be summoned (Chap. 12). She refuses to have a conventional romantic bond with him and starts to regulate her relationships with men and ask them for respect (Chap. 5). She laughs at Robert and tells him that her soul is no longer the property of anyone (Chap. 36). Her success in overcoming some of the hurdles on the way proves to be incomplete as she gradually draws towards her isolation from society altogether.

Isolation

When Edna disposes of social conventions, she finds no alternative standards or code of conduct to follow or to live by, and she strongly feels that void (Chap. 35). She feels vaguely confused and disappointed (Chap. 15). Apart from Robert, she feels detached from and unconcerned about the people around her (Chap. 16). She considers her children self-reliant and her husband mainly indifferent. That is why she thinks her role in the family is only transitory and her pullback from their lives poses no real problem (Chap. 14). That is why she evades even her own children (Chap. 38). However, she feels unfulfilled by her love relationships with men,

because they turn out to be mostly superficial (Chap. 33). The ultimate objective of love according to convention is marriage; those who refuse marriage are treated like outcasts who are forced to lead a lonely life (Chap. 8). Edna cries to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play a piece called "Solitude" because it reflects the rupture in the ties between her and other people (Chaps. 9 and 10). She thinks of a story about two lovers who go adrift at sea (Chap. 23).

Robert's Estrangement

Edna seeks to escape her inner emptiness and gloomy days or at least alleviate them (Chaps. 20 and 25). Robert is the only one who touches her soul (Chap. 31) and she finds her life without Robert hollow and pointless. It is as if her awakening is at the mercy of his love (Chap. 16). Their relationship seems equal, genuine and courteous, unlike his love affairs with other women (Chap. 5). She desperately begs him to wait for her (Chap. 36). However, Robert departs and leaves her traumatized and restless (Chap. 38). She keeps waiting for him to come to visit her anytime, but she finally gives up hope (Chap. 35). Besides, Edna is dismayed to learn that Robert had a relationship with a girl named Mariequita in the past (Chap. 16). He does not even mention Edna in his letters (Chap. 16). When he comes back, he does not hurry to see her, which further depresses her (Chap. 33). When she suddenly runs into him, she demands an explanation of his absence (Chap. 36).

Edna starts to think dolefully of her inadequate relationship with Robert (Chap. 34) and the needless estrangement in their romance (Chap. 38). She often stays at home and broods about all the things that make her unhappy (Chap. 25). In the absence of Robert, Edna's romantic experience fluctuates between a number of partners (Chap. 25). She searches for pleasure and gratification, but in the company of opportunistic and devious people like Arobin (Chap. 25) who cannot fill the void she feels inside her heart and soul (Chap. 36). As a result, she becomes indifferent to anyone around her, including Robert who shunned her. She takes refuge from society in a small remote café (Chap. 36) and feels absolute alone now (Chap. 38).

After her painful estrangement from people around her, Edna is only left with the love of freedom, but a hollow kind of freedom (Chap. 38). She remembers that a wayward unruly bird must have strong wings (Chap. 27). The frustration she experiences with people and following Robert's departure makes Edna yearn for the ocean, where her awakening once started delightfully (Chap. 38). The ocean appeals to her because they both share the qualities of emptiness and loneliness (Chap. 38). She realizes that she cannot be free and happy at the same time in a conventional environment (Chap. 38). She immerses herself in the beloved emptiness of the ocean and presumably drowns in a peaceful manner (Chap. 38).

Conclusion

This research paper has studied the themes of individuality and convention in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* from a Hegelian dialectic perspective. The use of the Hegelian dialectic approach of thesis, anti-thesis and synthesis to examine convention and individuality in the novel has proven to be operative. For the study has managed to answer its key research questions, reaching the following results: First, convention in the novel is represented by stringent social norms, patriarchy, matrimony, and women's conformity with them. Second, individualism is mainly represented by Edna who struggles to put her inner self first, her misogamy, and her extra-marital romances. Third, the interaction between individuality and convention tips the balance in

favor of convention for the following main reasons: Edna's compliance and ambivalence and Robert's wavering and estrangement. Ultimately, the thesis comes into interaction with the antithesis to allow convention to prevail, leveraging and isolating Edna before she commits suicide. Applying the thesis-antithesis-synthesis dialectic approach to analyze the conflicting themes of convention and individuality in *The Awakening* has proven to be a fruitful exploration of literature. This article can be taken as a future model to study conflicting themes in other works of literature that lend themselves to examination through Hegel's dialectic perspective.

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