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Exploring the Evolution of Motherhood in *The Awakening*: A Feminist Literary Perspective from
the 19th Century to Today

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Abstract

This thesis examines the representation of motherhood in *The Awakening* (1899) by Kate Chopin through a feminist literary framework. The guiding research question is: How does *The Awakening* construct motherhood, and to what extent does it reflect or challenge nineteenth-century gender norms in relation to contemporary feminist perspectives? The study follows a qualitative, hermeneutic-feminist methodology grounded in close textual analysis and interdisciplinary theoretical review. As a text-based investigation, it does not involve human participants; instead, it relies on interpretive analysis supported by feminist literary theory, gender studies, and sociocultural scholarship. The findings indicate that motherhood in the novel is depicted as a socially and ideologically constructed institution rather than an exclusively biological condition. Through Edna Pontellier's resistance to the "mother-woman" ideal, Chopin critiques patriarchal structures that confine women to domesticity and self-sacrifice. Furthermore, the analysis reveals strong parallels between the novel's themes and contemporary debates surrounding maternal autonomy, reproductive agency, and institutional regulation of women's roles. The study concludes that *The Awakening* anticipates modern feminist discourse by portraying motherhood as a contested site shaped by power, identity, and sociopolitical constraint.

Resumen

Esta tesina analiza la representación de la maternidad en *The Awakening* (1899) de Kate Chopin desde un enfoque feminista literario. La pregunta de investigación que orienta el estudio es: ¿Cómo construye *The Awakening* la maternidad y en qué medida refleja o desafía las normas de género del siglo XIX en relación con las perspectivas feministas contemporáneas? La investigación adopta una metodología cualitativa de carácter hermenéutico-feminista basada en el análisis textual profundo y en una revisión teórica interdisciplinaria. Al tratarse de un estudio centrado en una obra literaria, no incluye participantes humanos; el método se fundamenta en la interpretación crítica del texto y en su contraste con teorías feministas y estudios socioculturales actuales. Los hallazgos evidencian que la maternidad en la novela se presenta como una construcción social e ideológica más que como una condición exclusivamente biológica. A través de la resistencia de Edna Pontellier al ideal de la “madre-mujer”, Chopin cuestiona las estructuras patriarcales que limitan a la mujer al ámbito doméstico y al sacrificio. El estudio concluye que la obra anticipa debates feministas contemporáneos al representar la maternidad como un espacio de tensión atravesado por poder, identidad y condicionamientos sociopolíticos.

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Problem Statement

Motherhood has long been positioned as a core element in defining womanhood, frequently framed within patriarchal ideologies that assign women to roles of care, sacrifice, and domesticity. These representations have been perpetuated through cultural, social, and literary discourses that idealize motherhood as a natural and exclusively female function. Such portrayals limit female identity to the private sphere and reinforce normative expectations that restrict autonomy. Consequently, motherhood has functioned less as a personal choice and more as a socially regulated obligation.

In nineteenth-century literature, the maternal figure was commonly depicted as the moral anchor of the family, reinforcing the domestic ideal. Women were expected to embody the virtues of selflessness, submission, and unconditional devotion to their children and husbands. These representations promoted a narrow and idealized model of femininity that left little room for dissent or alternative identities. Literature thus played a key role in sustaining the socio-cultural systems that constrained women's lives.

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899) presents a radical challenge to this tradition by depicting a female protagonist who questions and ultimately rejects traditional maternal roles. Edna Pontellier, the novel's central character, embodies a woman in conflict with the expectations imposed on her as a wife and mother. Her refusal to conform to the "mother-woman" ideal exposes the tensions between personal identity and social obligation. This resistance positions the novel as a critical intervention in the discourse on gender and motherhood.

Edna's character illustrates that motherhood, far from being a neutral or purely biological experience, is embedded in ideological, cultural, and institutional frameworks. Her journey reflects not only an individual rebellion but also a critique of the systemic forces that regulate women's bodies and roles. Edna's struggle suggests that motherhood can be both a site of oppression and a space for self-reflection and resistance. Such complexity demands a nuanced analysis that considers the broader socio-political context of maternal identity.

This research seeks to explore how *The Awakening* represents motherhood as a contested space shaped by the interplay of personal desire and social expectation. It also analyses how this literary representation aligns with or diverges from contemporary feminist perspectives on maternal identity and autonomy. The study seeks to identify the ways in which Chopin's novel anticipates modern debates about reproductive rights, gender roles, and institutional control. In doing so, it positions the novel within an ongoing historical dialogue on the meaning and implications of motherhood.

Despite its nineteenth-century setting, *The Awakening* raises questions that remain relevant to current gender discourses. Issues such as the regulation of motherhood, the unequal distribution of caregiving responsibilities, and the politicization of maternal roles persist today. Contemporary feminist theory continues to interrogate these dynamics, emphasizing the need to understand motherhood as a constructed and variable identity. Chopin's novel therefore serves as a precursor to critical debates that continue to evolve.

By framing motherhood as both a personal experience and a political issue, the novel reveals the structural mechanisms that restrict women's autonomy. It draws attention to the influence of cultural norms, legal systems, and state policies in shaping maternal roles. Through the figure of Edna, *The Awakening* challenges the idealization of motherhood and creates space for alternative narratives of female identity. This study analyzes the novel's contribution to rethinking motherhood as a complex and dynamic construct.

1.2 Objectives

1.2.1 General Objective

- To analyze the representation of motherhood in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* and examine how it reflects or challenges nineteenth-century gender norms in comparison with contemporary feminist conceptions of maternal identity

Specific Objectives

- To identify the social expectations and characteristics of nineteenth-century motherhood as depicted in *The Awakening*
- To compare the portrayal of motherhood in *The Awakening* with contemporary feminist perspectives on maternal identity and autonomy

- To evaluate Edna Pontellier's relationship with motherhood and her rejection of traditional maternal roles within a patriarchal society

1.3 Justification

The role of motherhood has historically been central to the construction of female identity, often used as a tool to reinforce gender norms and restrict women's autonomy. This traditional view has shaped social expectations by positioning women primarily as caregivers and sacrificial figures within the family unit. In literature, motherhood has been depicted both as a noble, fulfilling duty and as a burden imposed by society. *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin (1899) stands out as a groundbreaking literary work that critically examines motherhood within the rigid confines of nineteenth-century American society.

Through the character of Edna Pontellier, Chopin offers a complex portrayal of a woman who questions and ultimately resists traditional maternal roles. This depiction challenges the idealized image of the selfless mother and offers a critical lens on the patriarchal structures that restrict women's freedom. Edna not only rejects social expectations but also embarks on a process of self-discovery that distances her from dominant models of motherhood. Her story provides fertile ground for literary analysis informed by feminist and historical perspectives.

The central aim of this thesis is to analyze the representation of motherhood in *The Awakening* and examine how it reflects or challenges nineteenth-century social norms in comparison with contemporary conceptions of motherhood. To achieve this, the study is structured around three specific objectives: first, to identify the expectations of motherhood prevalent during Chopin's time as portrayed in the novel; second, to analyze Edna's character and her rejection of the maternal role imposed by patriarchal society; and third, to compare the novel's vision of motherhood with contemporary feminist perspectives on maternal identity, autonomy, and care.

This research project is academically justified for several reasons that highlight its relevance and value. First, it contributes to ongoing scholarly discussions about women's roles in literature and society, particularly regarding the social and ideological construction of motherhood. The proposed literary analysis sheds light on Chopin's progressive vision while prompting reflection on the continuities and transformations in the perception of motherhood

over time. In this way, the study becomes a bridge between past and present gender discourses on autonomy and female identity.

Second, this work is supported by interdisciplinary studies that emphasize the enduring relevance and complexity of motherhood in modern contexts. Research such as that of Claudia Silva and Paul Camacho (2024) on maternity rights and healthcare systems demonstrates that maternal experiences remain deeply conditioned by cultural and institutional factors. Likewise, the study by Adriana Salazar and Carolina Sánchez (2023) on time use and parental roles in Costa Rica shows how unequal maternal expectations continue to echo many of the struggles depicted by Chopin more than a century ago. These contemporary findings resonate with Edna's conflicts and reinforce the modern relevance of this analysis.

The feminist framework of this study is further supported by works such as that of Alejandra Paniagua (2023), who explores motherhood as a political and ideological issue deeply connected to institutional control. Her research reveals that decisions surrounding motherhood are still marked by power relations, much like Edna's lack of structural support in the novel. Chopin's narrative anticipates many contemporary tensions surrounding maternal self-determination and the absence of alternatives beyond the normative model. In this sense, Edna's character serves both as a mirror and as a historical precursor to struggles that women continue to face today.

Emma Jones (2003) identifies *The Awakening* as a pioneering feminist novel that challenged the domestic ideal of women in its time. Her analysis highlights the novel's relevance as a foundational text in the development of feminist literary criticism. It emphasizes the internal conflict women experience between social duty and personal desire, a theme central to Edna's experience. This tension continues to be a subject of debate in contemporary literature and feminist theory.

In summary, this thesis is justified by its relevance across multiple academic fields, including literature, gender studies, sociology, and feminist theory. By examining the role of motherhood in *The Awakening*, it not only offers a deeper understanding of Chopin's work but also contributes to broader discussions on how motherhood is constructed, contested, and experienced over time. Through critical and comparative analysis, the study promotes a more nuanced understanding of what it means to be a mother both in the nineteenth century and today.

Thus, this research provides a necessary reflection on the intersections among identity, gender, and care across different historical contexts.

1.4 Antecedents

The study of maternity as a social, cultural, and literary construct has received significant scholarly attention across disciplines such as sociology, gender studies, public health, and literature. It is widely recognized that maternity is not merely a biological condition, but a socially regulated category shaped by historical expectations, cultural frameworks, and societal norms. Scholars emphasize that understanding maternity requires examining how different societies construct and reproduce ideas about motherhood, often influencing policies, practices, and personal identities. Consequently, the study of maternity extends beyond biological aspects to encompass its articulation within diverse social and cultural contexts, highlighting the complexity and multiplicity of maternity as a lived experience.

The first antecedent of this thesis is based on the article *Analysis of Maternity Rights Perception: Impact of Maternal Care in Diverse Socio-Health Contexts*. Silva et al. (2024) “position maternity as a contested and dynamic space in which women’s agency is continuously negotiated against institutional and cultural norms. The authors note that it is necessary to understand the impact of cultural context, emotional well-being, and resource availability on maternal clinical care experiences” (p. 1), highlighting the need to consider socio-economic and emotional factors that influence maternal health. This perspective recognizes that women’s experiences of maternity are deeply shaped by structural conditions such as healthcare accessibility, economic stability, and cultural perceptions of motherhood. It emphasizes that maternity cannot be reduced to individual choices alone but must be understood as embedded within broader socio-political systems that regulate and shape these experiences. As their study demonstrates, motherhood is conditioned by structural and contextual factors that mediate the interaction between personal agency and social norms.

This broader framework echoes themes in Chopin’s *The Awakening*, where Edna Pontellier’s rejection of prescribed maternal roles reflects ongoing tensions between personal identity and societal expectations. Edna’s rebellion against the traditional maternal ideal signifies more than an individual crisis; it serves as a critique of the societal norms that confine women to restrictive roles. Her struggle embodies the contestation of gender expectations that limit

women's autonomy and foster a sense of entrapment within domestic life. The novel illustrates how such imposed roles form part of a broader social regulation that shapes women's personal and social identities, making Edna's story both a personal act of resistance and a reflection of wider gendered power structures.

As Silva et al. (2024) argue, "the perception of maternity rights is strongly influenced by socioeconomic disparities and access to health services" (p. 3). This insight underscores that experiences and perceptions of maternity are not uniform but shaped by access to resources, economic status, and social policies. It draws attention to the uneven distribution of maternal care and rights, which perpetuates inequalities across different social groups. Recognizing this disparity is crucial for developing a more inclusive understanding of maternity that considers privilege and marginalization. Such an approach highlights the need to address structural injustices to ensure equitable maternal support and recognition. As this antecedent shows, motherhood is mediated by structural and contextual factors that shape the interaction between individual agency and social norms.

By foregrounding maternity as both a right and a responsibility shaped by external forces, Silva et al. (2024) offer a compelling theoretical foundation for understanding the critique of nineteenth-century gender roles depicted in *The Awakening*. Their framework underscores that maternity cannot be reduced to an individual or purely biological experience but must be understood as deeply embedded within socio-political structures that regulate women's lives. In this sense, Silva et al. provide a lens through which the novel can be read as both a personal and political critique of maternal roles, situating Edna's resistance within broader debates on gender equality, reproductive rights, and women's agency. This perspective highlights the extent to which Chopin's narrative transcends personal dissatisfaction, revealing the broader mechanisms of social control that confine women to specific maternal roles. Ultimately, Silva et al.'s insights illuminate how *The Awakening* reflects not only the struggles of its protagonist but also enduring questions about women's autonomy and the institutional forces that define maternal identity.

The second antecedent is Emma Jones's (2003) essay *Kate Chopin's The Awakening*, which offers a vital literary analysis situating the novel within the cultural and historical context of nineteenth-century America. Jones underscores the groundbreaking nature of the text, particularly in its portrayal of a woman questioning her prescribed roles as wife and mother. The

author emphasizes that Edna Pontellier's refusal to conform to the ideal of the self-sacrificing "mother-woman" was considered radical at the time, as it challenged deeply ingrained social ideals. Jones's analysis highlights how Chopin's work complicates traditional notions of femininity and marks a significant departure from conventional gender roles and expectations. Her reading positions *The Awakening* as a pioneering narrative that exposes and critiques the cultural ideals of womanhood prevailing in its historical moment.

From a literary perspective, Jones (2003) emphasizes that Chopin's novel presents Edna as a character who profoundly challenges the patriarchal model of the "mother-woman". This challenge is reflected in her internal conflicts and in her pursuit of individual freedom, which defies the societal norms that dictated women's roles within the domestic sphere. Jones argues that Edna's character not only questions the social construction of femininity but also opens a space for exploring issues of personal autonomy, gendered identity, and resistance. The novel thereby elevates maternity from a biological destiny to a narrative site where broader struggles over gender, power, and self-determination are contested.

The third antecedent is provided by Coast et al. (2016), whose study *Effectiveness of Interventions to Provide Culturally Appropriate Maternity Care in Increasing Uptake of Skilled Maternity Care: A Systematic Review* analyzes how culturally adapted interventions influence the acceptance and use of skilled maternal care services. Their findings suggest that "the effectiveness of maternity interventions largely depends on their ability to adapt to the cultural norms and expectations of communities" (p. 1485). This recognition of motherhood as an experience mediated by cultural context is essential for understanding how health policies and practices must respond to the social particularities of each setting. Cultural adaptation in maternal care not only increases service acceptance but also improves health outcomes for mothers and infants. In this sense, culturally sensitive models of care are crucial for addressing inequalities and promoting effective reproductive rights. Coast et al. (2016) thus demonstrate that the success of maternal care interventions depends on their alignment with cultural norms, underscoring the importance of culturally responsive approaches.

Chopin's *The Awakening* can be interpreted as a symbolic representation of these cultural tensions, as Edna's struggle to reconcile her maternal role within a rigid social framework mirrors resistance to conforming to cultural expectations. The novel highlights how cultural

pressures and social norms restrict women's individual freedom, much as health policies must respect cultural specificities to be effective. Both the literary work and public-health studies converge on the idea that motherhood cannot be separated from the cultural and social environment that shapes it but must be approached with sensitivity to its context. In this sense, Chopin's narrative and contemporary research similarly suggest that effective understandings of motherhood require a comprehensive and culturally informed approach. □

The fourth antecedent is the sociological study by Salazar and Sánchez (2023), *Use of Time in Couple Relationships and in the Exercise of Maternity and Paternity in Costa Rica*, which examines how caregiving and child's rearing responsibilities in Costa Rica remain unequally distributed between men and women, with a disproportionate burden falling on women. The authors conclude that "domestic and care work continues to be predominantly female" (p. 50), revealing the persistence of structural inequalities in family dynamics. Their findings show that, despite advances in gender equality in other spheres, motherhood remains a significant source of inequality and social limitation for women. This unequal distribution of care work not only impacts women's opportunities for personal and professional development but also perpetuates the perception of motherhood as a natural and exclusively female responsibility. These dynamics reinforce the idea that motherhood, as a social role, continues to be a space of struggle for autonomy and equality.

These social dynamics resonate in *The Awakening*, where Edna refuses to accept the traditional roles of mother and wife imposed by her environment, reflecting the gender inequalities of the nineteenth century. The protagonist challenges the expectations that restrict her freedom and questions the unequal distribution of power and responsibility within the family. Her resistance can be interpreted as an act of defiance against the limitations imposed by gender and culture in her time. Similarly, Salazar and Sánchez demonstrate that contemporary institutions continue to reproduce these inequalities, highlighting the ongoing tension between traditional gender roles and aspirations for individual autonomy. Ultimately, both the novel and the sociological studies show that motherhood remains a space where power relations and gender identities are intensely negotiated across different times and contexts.

Finally, the fifth antecedent is Paniagua (2023), *Maternity: A Debate that Challenges the State*, which underscores the political dimension of motherhood by arguing that "the regulation

of maternity is inseparable from the role of the State. By framing maternity as both a private experience and a public issue, Paniagua provides a critical framework for linking Chopin's narrative to contemporary debates about the state's role in defining and managing motherhood. Just as Edna resists the intrusion of social expectations into her private life, modern feminist critiques show how political and institutional forces continue to shape women's maternal identities. Paniagua also observes that "maternity has been consistently politicized, either to reinforce traditional family models or to promote social policies of equality" (p. 8). This duality demonstrates that maternity operates at the intersection of ideology, politics, and personal identity. Her perspective offers a useful lens for interpreting Edna's resistance in *The Awakening* as both a personal and socio-political challenge to prevailing societal and institutional norms.

Paniagua (2023) further contends that motherhood has a fundamentally political dimension, emphasizing that "the regulation of motherhood is closely linked to the role of the State" (p. 4). This approach shows how public policies and legal frameworks decisively influence the definition and control of motherhood, transforming it into a matter of collective and political concern. She maintains that motherhood cannot be understood solely from a private perspective but necessarily involves debates about rights, equality, and social justice. For Paniagua, the State, through its policies, can either reinforce or challenge traditional norms of motherhood, promoting both conventional models and new forms grounded in equality and autonomy. Edna's resistance to social expectations in *The Awakening* reflects this same struggle against institutional forces that seek to limit women's agency.

This perspective is crucial for the present study, as *The Awakening* portrays Edna Pontellier's resistance to socially imposed maternal duties not simply as personal dissatisfaction but as a direct challenge to entrenched patriarchal structures that define motherhood as an obligatory, self-sacrificial role within the domestic sphere. Her refusal to conform to these expectations represents not only a break with immediate familial obligations but also a symbolic act of defiance against broader ideological and institutional systems including marriage, religion, and the law that regulate women's bodies, desires, and identities through rigid gender norms. By linking maternity to the regulatory power of the state, Paniagua offers a political framework that deepens the interpretation of Edna's struggle, suggesting that her actions can be read not merely as personal rebellion but as a form of political resistance against institutionalized mechanisms

that uphold gender inequality through the idealization of motherhood. In this light, Edna's journey toward self-definition acquires broader social significance, highlighting tensions between autonomy and control, individuality and conformity, and illustrating how the personal experience of motherhood is inextricably tied to the political forces that shape women's lives within a patriarchal order.

Taken together, these studies establish a rich interdisciplinary framework for analyzing maternity in *The Awakening*, revealing the complex ways in which motherhood is shaped by intersecting social, cultural, and political forces. The integration of literary criticism, sociological inquiry, health-policy analysis, and feminist theory offers a nuanced understanding of maternity as a socially constructed and historically contingent role rather than a biologically determined or universally experienced condition. This broader scholarly lens not only situates Chopin's novel within late nineteenth-century debates about women's roles and reproductive autonomy but also exposes the tensions between individual identity and societal expectations that continue to resonate in contemporary discussions of motherhood. By placing *The Awakening* within this dynamic intellectual context, the present research underscores the novel's enduring power to question, complicate, and subvert traditional maternal ideologies, positioning it as a foundational text in the ongoing redefinition of gender and social roles.

1.5 Scope

This thesis undertakes an interdisciplinary analysis of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, focusing on the representation of motherhood and its social implications. The study draws on feminist literary criticism, gender studies, and cultural theory to situate the novel within broader debates about maternal identity. It examines how the text both reflects and challenges nineteenth-century gender norms. Through this approach, research seeks to demonstrate how motherhood is portrayed as a contested, constructed category.

The analysis first examines the socio-historical context in which Chopin wrote, focusing on prevailing ideals of femininity and domesticity. It explores how the concept of the "mother-woman" was used to define acceptable female behavior in the United States during the late nineteenth century. The novel's depiction of women's roles is situated within this ideological framework. This context is essential for understanding the constraints Edna faced and the transgressive nature of her choices.

Second, the research focuses on Edna Pontellier's character, particularly her internal conflict between societal expectations and personal autonomy. Her rejection of traditional maternal responsibilities is interpreted as a symbolic act of resistance. The study analyzes her psychological development and her attempts to forge an independent identity. This section highlights how Chopin uses Edna to critique the limitations imposed by patriarchal norms.

Third, the study compares the novel's depiction of motherhood with contemporary feminist perspectives. It incorporates current research on maternity from sociology, public health, and feminist theory. These perspectives emphasize the influence of structural inequalities, cultural norms, and institutional policies on maternal experiences. In doing so, the research establishes a dialogue between past and present conceptualizations of motherhood.

The temporal scope of this research spans from the late nineteenth century to the present, focusing on continuities and transformations in maternal ideologies. *The Awakening* serves as the primary text for literary analysis and does not extend to Chopin's broader body of work. The study does not attempt to generalize all literary representations of motherhood; rather, it offers a focused case study. This delimitation ensures a coherent and in-depth examination of the novel's central themes.

The research does not approach motherhood as a biological or medical phenomenon but as a social and political construct. It emphasizes how maternal roles are shaped by power relations, cultural expectations, and gendered norms. This interpretive framework enables a critical examination of the ways literature reflects and questions societal structures. In this sense, *The Awakening* is treated as a literary site for the negotiation of identity and resistance.

Furthermore, the study acknowledges that maternal experiences are not universal but are mediated by factors such as class, race, and access to resources. Contemporary feminist research underscores the importance of intersectionality in understanding the diversity of maternal realities. The thesis engages with these insights to avoid essentializing motherhood. This perspective enriches the analysis and aligns it with current academic standards.

In sum, this thesis examines how *The Awakening* constructs a critical narrative around motherhood that transcends its historical setting. By integrating literary and sociopolitical

analysis, the study contributes to ongoing discussions about women's roles, autonomy, and care across different historical contexts. The research highlights the relevance of literature in examining gender constructions and their implications. Ultimately, it positions Chopin's work as a foundational text in the evolving discourse on maternal identity and feminist resistance.

CHAPTER II

Theoretical Framework

The theoretical framework of this study integrates perspectives from feminist literary theory, sociology, and cultural studies to examine motherhood as a complex and evolving social construct. Ahmed (2017) argues that motherhood is not an innate or purely biological reality but a socially imposed role that reproduces patriarchal power through emotional and domestic labor. Taylor (2020) expands this idea, noting that contemporary societies continue to define women's identities through caregiving and moral responsibility, even under neoliberal discourses of equality. Similarly, Kristeva (2019) conceives motherhood as a symbolic space where cultural and political ideologies intersect, shaping how societies perceive care, reproduction, and identity. These frameworks reveal that maternal roles are not fixed but continually negotiated within changing historical and cultural contexts.

This chapter therefore establishes the conceptual foundation for examining motherhood across social, cultural, and literary dimensions. Contemporary feminist frameworks supported by interdisciplinary research demonstrate that maternal identity evolves through the interaction of politics, economics, and personal experience. Chopin's narrative remains resonant because it captures the negotiation between individual will and collective expectation. Edna's rebellion exemplifies how women, past and present, navigate boundaries imposed by social norms. In short, the chapter presents motherhood as a fluid, socially constructed identity whose tensions and transformations are illuminated through feminist theory and literature.

2.1 Feminist Literary Theory and Motherhood

Feminist literary theory examines how literature constructs and challenges gendered identities, focusing on power relations, social norms, and representations of women in both domestic and public spheres. Moi (2015) argues that feminist criticism analyzes how language and narrative structures reproduce social hierarchies, shaping readers' perceptions of women's roles. Likewise, Ahmed (2017) notes that a feminist lens exposes the often-invisible mechanisms through which patriarchy defines femininity, frequently portraying women as secondary or self-sacrificing figures. Literature thus becomes not only a mirror of society but also a means of questioning it.

Within studies of motherhood, feminist literary theory examines how maternal figures are portrayed and how they either conform to or resist cultural expectations. Taylor (2020) argues that literary representations of mothers often reflect broader ideological struggles over identity, duty, and freedom. Ahmed (2017) adds that these depictions reveal how women internalize or reject social ideals of care and sacrifice. In *The Awakening*, Chopin (1899/2008) presents Edna Pontellier as a mother who gradually distances herself from the ideal of total devotion, illustrating how emotional awakening can lead to social rebellion. Through this portrayal, Chopin exposes the tension between the naturalized image of the “good mother” and a woman’s pursuit of selfhood.

Contemporary feminist scholars also highlight the psychological dimension of motherhood. Gilligan (2017) argues that maternal identity is intertwined with emotional development and moral reasoning, shaping how women perceive themselves within relational frameworks. Likewise, Kristeva (2019) observes that literary works often use maternal figures to probe the contradictions between nurturing and self-determination. In *The Awakening*, Edna’s relationship with her children is loving yet distant reflecting her struggle to maintain individuality amid social expectations. Her gradual realization that selfhood cannot coexist with total submission exemplifies the internal conflict central to feminist psychoanalytic readings.

Intersectional feminist theory extends this analysis by examining how race, class, and sexuality shape representations of motherhood. Collins (2019) notes that mothers from marginalized groups often face compounded discrimination, as cultural narratives privilege white, middle-class models of care and morality. Hooks (2015) likewise argues that diverse literary portrayals challenge these exclusions by depicting motherhood as a lived experience marked by inequality and resilience. Although *The Awakening* centers on a white, upper-class woman, its portrayal of constrained autonomy resonates across social boundaries, prompting reflection on whose maternal experiences are granted legitimacy and visibility.

Recent feminist critics emphasize resistance in literary depictions of mothers. Ahmed (2017) and Taylor (2020) point out that defying social expectations in literature often symbolizes a broader rejection of patriarchal control. In Chopin’s novel, Edna’s decision to prioritize self-awareness over prescribed maternal duties becomes a symbolic rebellion against a culture that

equates womanhood with motherhood. Her search for freedom parallels what contemporary feminist theory identifies as the struggle to reclaim agency within oppressive structures.

Feminist literary analysis also foregrounds voices and experiences historically excluded from dominant narratives. Moi (2015) argues that a key aim of feminist criticism is to recover silenced perspectives, particularly those of women whose lives challenge conventional ideals. Ahmed (2017) adds that storytelling can itself be an act of resistance when it reveals the emotional truth of marginalized experience. Chopin's narrative contributes to this project by granting Edna an interior voice that questions social conformity, turning silence and isolation into metaphors for systemic erasure.

Feminist literary criticism emerged in response to the systematic exclusion and marginalization of women's voices within the literary canon. Its primary objective is to examine how literature reflects, reinforces, or challenges gendered power relations embedded in social structures. Showalter (1979) argues that feminist criticism seeks not only to recover women writers but also to reinterpret literary texts through a gender conscious lens. This approach is particularly relevant to representations of motherhood, given the historical idealization and naturalization of maternal roles within patriarchal discourse. Feminist criticism enables scholars to question these representations and uncover the ideological mechanisms that shape them.

Literature has often portrayed motherhood as an essential, self-sacrificing destiny for women. Feminist critics contend that such portrayals normalize restrictive gender roles. Rich (1976) famously distinguished between motherhood as experience and motherhood as institution, noting that literary representations frequently privilege the latter. Through feminist literary analysis, motherhood can be examined as a socially constructed role rather than an inherent biological function. This distinction is fundamental to understanding how female characters are positioned within narratives. Feminist criticism thus provides conceptual tools to interrogate maternal ideals.

In nineteenth-century contexts, feminist criticism reveals how women writers negotiated social constraints while subtly challenging dominant ideologies. Authors such as Kate Chopin employed narrative ambiguity and psychological depth to expose tensions between individual desire and social expectation. Feminist literary criticism highlights these strategies as acts of resistance. By focusing on voice, silence, and subjectivity, it allows readers to identify moments

when patriarchal norms are questioned. Consequently, feminist criticism is essential for analyzing texts that engage themes of gender and autonomy.

The study of motherhood within feminist criticism also intersects with questions of power and identity. Maternal roles are often presented as moral obligations that define a woman's social worth. Feminist scholars argue that such representations function as disciplinary mechanisms regulating female behavior. Literature therefore becomes a site where these mechanisms are reproduced and contested. This perspective is central to the analysis of *The Awakening*.

In sum, feminist literary theory offers a framework for analyzing how literature reflects, critiques, and transforms gender norms through representations of motherhood. By combining psychological, sociocultural, and intersectional perspectives, it reveals that maternal figures are not merely domestic characters but embodiments of deeper struggles for freedom and identity. Chopin's *The Awakening* continues to serve as a touchstone for these debates, portraying motherhood not as destiny but as a space for self-questioning and defiance.

2.2 Historical Context of Motherhood

The historical construction of motherhood offers essential insight into the evolution of gender roles and the social definition of women's identities. Fraser (2022) argues that perceptions of motherhood have long underpinned moral order and social control, thereby reinforcing gendered hierarchies across centuries. Taylor (2020) notes that in early modern Europe and during the Enlightenment, the idealization of the mother figure positioned women as moral guardians of the family and the nation, legitimating their confinement to the domestic sphere. This process transformed motherhood into both a private duty and a public institution that dictated acceptable forms of femininity.

During the nineteenth century, industrialization and the rise of middle-class domestic ideals intensified the association between womanhood and motherhood. Scholars such as Moravec (2021) and Collins (2019) note that this period consolidated the "angel in the house" stereotype, which framed women as naturally selfless and morally pure. These cultural norms were disseminated through literature, religion, and education, ensuring that women's value was measured by maternal devotion. At the same time, feminist historians observe that the period

also fostered subtle forms of resistance, as women writers began to challenge the emotional and social constraints associated with motherhood.

Industrialization also laid bare the class dimensions of motherhood. Gilligan (2017) points out that working class women faced the double burden of paid labor and childcare, exposing the economic inequalities embedded in maternal expectations. Glenn (2016) expands this point by emphasizing that motherhood was not experienced uniformly but varied according to class, race, and access to resources. These disparities show that the dominant maternal ideal largely reflected the experience of privileged women, while others were excluded from that model.

The twentieth century marked a turning point, as feminist movements began to question the notion of motherhood as a woman's primary identity. Ahmed (2017) explains that feminist theorists reframed motherhood as a social and political institution that both oppresses and empowers women. Fraser (2022) adds that women's growing participation in education and the workforce destabilized the domestic ideal, allowing for new understandings of family and gender. Yet, as Taylor (2020) notes, political systems continued to regulate reproductive rights, showing that the struggle for maternal autonomy persisted despite social progress. In short, this paragraph emphasizes that the twentieth century redefined motherhood as a contested space between liberation and continued institutional control.

Contemporary feminist perspectives treat motherhood as a fluid and intersectional identity shaped by global and cultural contexts. Collins (2019) asserts that globalization has diversified the meanings of motherhood, producing multiple maternal identities influenced by migration, digital culture, and economic inequality. O'Brien & Wall (2017) argue that state policies and labor regimes still determine how mothers balance care and professional life, making the maternal experience deeply dependent on structural conditions. These modern insights reveal that motherhood continues to evolve but remains subject to systems of power that define gender expectations. In summary, this paragraph shows that current interpretations of motherhood emphasize diversity and intersectionality while recognizing the persistent influence of social institutions.

Literary works throughout history have reflected these changing perceptions of motherhood. Moravec (2021) explains that fiction often portrays women navigating the tension

between personal freedom and societal obligation, turning literature into a record of evolving maternal ideologies. While *The Awakening* (1899/2008) is set in the late nineteenth century, it anticipates modern feminist questions about autonomy and selfhood. Edna's quiet defiance mirrors the growing awareness of women's psychological and social constraints during that era. Her experience can therefore be read as a literary reflection of the broader historical transformation of maternal roles. In essence, this paragraph demonstrates how literature mirrors historical shifts, offering insight into the cultural evolution of motherhood.

In conclusion, the historical context of motherhood shows that maternal roles have been continuously shaped by political, economic, and cultural forces. From the moralized ideals of the Enlightenment to the feminist redefinitions of the twentieth and twenty-first centuries, motherhood has remained a central site of debate over gender, power, and identity. The ongoing dialogue between history and literature underscores that the maternal figure is neither static nor universal but an evolving construct reflecting women's struggles and aspirations across time. Understanding this historical evolution is essential for interpreting motherhood's representation in feminist theory and literature.

2.3 Motherhood as a Social and Cultural Construction

Feminist theory in the twenty-first century increasingly emphasizes motherhood as a social and cultural construct shaped by power relations, rather than a purely biological or natural phenomenon. Contemporary scholars argue that institutionalized motherhood operates as a mechanism for regulating women's lives and limiting their autonomy within patriarchal societies (Phoenix & Woollett, 2017). Building on earlier work, these theorists situate motherhood within broader frameworks of social reproduction, labor, and governance (Federici & Glenn, 2010). From this perspective, motherhood is produced, sustained, and valued according to cultural norms and economic imperatives rather than innate destiny.

This constructionist view challenges essentialist narratives that depict maternal instinct as universal and innate and instead highlights how cultural discourses shape expectations about maternal roles (Hays, 2003) describes the "intensive mothering" model, which places disproportionate emotional and moral responsibility on mothers, reinforcing the notion that care work is naturally women's work. Such narratives present motherhood as a moral obligation rooted not in personal desire but in social demand. Feminist scholars argue that these norms

reproduce gender hierarchies by valorizing maternal self-sacrifice while obscuring the complexities and contradictions of women lived experiences (Dow, 2015).

Literature plays a critical role in disseminating and reinforcing ideological norms surrounding motherhood. Fiction, in particular, renders visible the cultural expectations placed on women while also offering spaces in which those norms can be questioned, resisted, or reimagined (O'Reilly, 2008). Literary representations frequently cast mothers as selfless caretakers whose identities are defined by domestic roles, thereby reinforcing norms that marginalize alternative expressions of female identity. Feminist literary analysis is therefore crucial for exposing the ideological messages embedded in narrative depictions of motherhood. Through this lens, motherhood is not only a narrative theme but also a cultural discourse produced and circulated through texts.

Cultural narratives of motherhood often emphasize sacrifice, devotion, and moral superiority, disciplining women into conforming to socially approved roles (Gillies, 2008). These narratives obscure the emotional labor and personal cost associated with maternal roles, presenting them as unproblematically fulfilling or morally superior. Feminist critics contend that such portrayals silence experiences of maternal ambivalence, stress, and conflict by framing them as deviant or morally suspect (Walzer, 2018). By incorporating cultural, psychological, and ideological dimensions, contemporary feminist theory expands the analysis of motherhood beyond the nature/culture and private/public binaries.

In nineteenth-century contexts like that of *The Awakening*, motherhood was closely tied to ideals of domesticity and moral virtue, with women expected to embody purity within the private sphere (Cott & Smith, 2014). These ideals were reinforced through social discourse, religious practice, and institutional norms that assigned women primary responsibility for child rearing and household care. Feminist analysis shows how such constructions restricted women's access to broader forms of agency and self-determination. Literature of the period often mirrors and reproduces these expectations, making it a valuable site for examining the historical construction of motherhood.

Understanding motherhood as a social and cultural construction is essential for analyzing *The Awakening*. The novel presents maternal identity not as unproblematic fulfillment but as a site of conflict where social expectations clash with individual aspirations. Through

contemporary feminist theory, this tension can be read as a response to institutionalized norms rather than a personal failing on the part of the protagonist. This perspective situates Chopin's text within broader critiques of gender, identity, and power. Mothers thus become not merely characters but embodiments of contested cultural meanings.

2.4 Patriarchy, Gender Roles, and Female Identity

Patriarchy operates as a structural system that organizes social, cultural, and symbolic relations through gendered hierarchies. According to feminist theory, patriarchy is a framework that privileges male authority while subordinating women's identities, roles, and experiences (Connell & Pearse, 2015). Within this system, gender roles are socially constructed and maintained through cultural norms, institutional practices, and ideological discourse, shaping expectations about femininity and masculinity (Butler & Lorber, 2010). Literature plays a significant role in reflecting and reinforcing these norms by presenting models of acceptable gendered behavior and by naturalizing those models as normal. Feminist scholars emphasize that gender roles function as mechanisms of social control rather than as natural expressions of identity (Connell & Messerschmidt, 2005).

Female identity within patriarchal societies is often defined relationally, particularly through roles such as wife and mother. Contemporary feminist scholars argue that this relational definition limits women's autonomy and self-determination by maintaining social structures that privilege male agency (Risman, 2004). This perspective aligns with intersectional approaches that recognize how gender intersects with race, class, and sexuality to shape identity (Crenshaw, 2011). Literary representations frequently mirror these constructions by portraying female characters whose identities are shaped primarily by social expectation rather than personal desire. Feminist literary criticism seeks to expose and challenge these patterns by showing how texts participate in broader cultural discourses about gender and power (Fuss, 2014).

Gender roles associated with femininity emphasize emotional labor, care, and self-sacrifice. These expectations are especially evident in representations of motherhood, where women are positioned as primary caregivers responsible for maintaining emotional and social stability in the family (Hochschild & Machung, 2012). Feminist scholars argue that such roles impose psychological and emotional burdens on women while obscuring the power relations embedded in maternal expectations (Bhattacharya, 2017). By naturalizing care work, patriarchal

discourse renders these burdens seemingly inevitable or natural rather than socially enforced. Literature becomes a site where these tensions are articulated, negotiated, and at times contested.

In nineteenth-century contexts, patriarchy was reinforced through legal, religious, and cultural institutions that confined women to the private sphere. The ideology of domesticity positioned women as guardians of morality and emotional care, framing these roles as inherent to female nature (Cott, 2000 & Smith, 2014). These ideals shaped literary narratives and character development, particularly in realist and regionalist fiction. Feminist analysis reveals how such representations functioned to normalize women's subordination by embedding gendered norms into narrative structure and character psychology. Examining these structures is essential for understanding female identity in nineteenth-century literature.

In *The Awakening*, patriarchal gender roles profoundly influence the construction of female identity. Edna Pontellier's internal conflict arises from the tension between imposed roles and personal aspiration, illustrating how patriarchal expectations limit women's possibilities for self-definition (Walker, 2010). Feminist theory reads this conflict not as individual failure but as a response to structural constraints embedded in social norms. This perspective situates the novel within broader feminist critiques of gender and power, showing how literature can expose and challenge ideological assumptions about femininity and motherhood. Patriarchy thus serves as a central analytical framework in this study.

2.5 Character Analysis: Edna Pontellier

Edna Pontellier, the protagonist of *The Awakening*, embodies the struggle between individuality and social conformity at the core of feminist literary theory. Ahmed (2017) interprets characters who resist domestic femininity as figures that expose the emotional cost of social restriction. Taylor (2020) adds that such protagonists exemplify self-actualization within patriarchal contexts, showing how identity emerges through resistance rather than compliance. In this sense, Edna's journey can be read as an exploration of how women begin to challenge the social expectations imposed on them. In summary, this paragraph positions Edna as a symbolic figure of female resistance and identity reconstruction.

Butlers (2011) concept of gender performativity offers a powerful lens for understanding characters who reject traditional roles. According to Butler, gender roles are not inherent but

performed through repetition and social expectation. Edna's distancing from her prescribed duties as wife and mother can be read as a refusal to perform femininity according to social norms. These small acts of rebellion mark the beginning of a broader transformation in which everyday choices become acts of defiance. In essence, this paragraph emphasizes how refusing gender performance reflects contemporary feminist ideas about autonomy and social identity.

From a sociological perspective, the challenges faced by characters like Edna reflect broader institutional pressures. O'Brien and Wall (2017) note that even in contemporary societies, women are expected to embody ideals of nurturing and selflessness that limit personal autonomy. Collins (2019) argues that such expectations reinforce moral hierarchies in which women are valued according to their caregiving roles. A character's discomfort with the maternal ideal, then, does not indicate failure but a growing awareness of selfhood beyond these cultural norms. In summary, this paragraph demonstrates how literary figures who question motherhood reveal the tension between personal freedom and institutional expectation.

Psychoanalytic feminist scholars also illuminate the internal conflicts experienced by women navigating these roles. Gilligan (2017) discusses how emotional dissonance often arises when women reconcile personal desires with socially imposed ideals. Kristeva (2019) frames this conflict as an existential awakening a moment of self-recognition that challenges patriarchy's symbolic order. Characters undergoing such psychological shifts often retreat into solitude or creative expression, marking a process of reclaiming agency. In short, this paragraph explores the emotional and psychological dimensions of resistance, emphasizing the complexity of internal transformation.

Religion and marriage have historically functioned as institutions of control over women's lives. Fraser (2022) notes that these systems legitimate female submission by framing marriage and motherhood as moral obligations. Literary figures who question these frameworks do so not only to assert autonomy but also to critique the ideological foundations of their society. In this context, resistance becomes both personal and political, challenging the moral systems that define acceptable female behavior. In summary, this paragraph shows how defiance of religious and marital expectations can symbolize a broader rejection of patriarchal authority.

Scholars such as Moravec (2021) and Ahmed (2017) argue that characters who reject conventional roles transcend individual rebellion to become collective feminist symbols. Their

journeys resonate with ongoing debates about emotional freedom, gendered expectations, and the pursuit of self-definition. Such characters often face isolation as a consequence of choosing autonomy, suggesting that freedom may come at the cost of social belonging. Their narratives can thus be interpreted as reflections of the broader feminist struggle for authenticity and resistance within oppressive structures.

In conclusion, Edna Pontellier can be understood not only as a literary character but as a theoretical figure who represents the conflict between selfhood and social conformity. Her evolution reflects contemporary feminist concepts of performativity, relational identity, and resistance. While a fuller analysis of her actions within the narrative will follow, her symbolic significance already aligns with key feminist discourses on autonomy, motherhood, and the negotiation of personal freedom within patriarchal systems.

2.6 Themes: Autonomy, Identity, and Resistance

Autonomy in *The Awakening* emerges as a central feminist theme through the protagonist's emotional and moral evolution. Ahmed (2017) explains that, in feminist contexts, autonomy is the capacity to establish emotional and ethical boundaries while still engaging with others. This conception moves away from the idea that independence implies detachment; rather, it denotes self-determined action within social frameworks. Taylor (2020) emphasizes that female characters who pursue autonomy often come into conflict with expectations that equate virtue with sacrifice. This tension becomes central to Edna's internal journey as she withdraws from prescribed roles. In summary, this paragraph reframes autonomy as a process of moral self-definition within social constraints.

Within feminist theory, identity is constructed through repetition and resistance to social norms. Butler (2011) argues that gender identity is not inherent, but a series of performances shaped by cultural pressures. Through Edna's growing rejection of traditional femininity, the narrative shows how identity can shift when behavior no longer aligns with prescribed roles. Taylor (2020) contends that these transformations are gradual and relational, shaped by the social worlds women inhabit. Edna's identity emerges through choices that challenge her former self, reflecting the fluidity of personal and gendered identity. In essence, this paragraph demonstrates that identity in the text is dynamic and shaped by conscious acts of resistance.

Resistance in the novel is not overt but embedded in everyday decisions that quietly disrupt the norm. Fraser (2022) notes that feminist resistance often unfolds in domestic or interior spaces, where women opt out of expectations rather than openly confront them. Edna's decision to live apart from her husband and focus on art constitutes a subtle act of refusal. Ahmed (2017) describes these private rejections as emotionally powerful because they unsettle the invisible norms that sustain patriarchy. Through such acts, resistance is reframed as a personal yet political gesture. In summary, this paragraph shows how subtle choices become forms of feminist resistance that subvert social control.

Emotional resistance also plays a pivotal role in Edna's self-discovery. Gilligan (2017) explains that women often face moral conflict when inner desires oppose social expectations. These tensions are not signs of instability but indicators of moral growth. Kristeva (2019) interprets such moments as existential awakenings in which women begin to understand their individuality apart from patriarchal identity structures. Edna's introspection and turn toward solitude reveal how emotional discomfort becomes the ground for psychological transformation. In essence, this paragraph illustrates how internal struggle becomes a site of feminist awakening and self-reclamation.

Institutional structures such as race and class complicate the accessibility of autonomy. Collins (2019) argues that women do not experience gender oppression equally; factors like class and race create distinct forms of constraint. O'Brien and Wall (2017) emphasize that while some women can choose to resist traditional roles, others are constrained by economic and cultural realities. Although Edna's journey is framed as liberating, her privilege affords access to options others may not have. In summary, this paragraph underscores the importance of intersectionality in feminist readings of autonomy and resistance.

Literature becomes a tool for exposing these tensions and for making invisible emotional realities visible. Moravec (2021) describes fiction as a space where the psychological burden of conformity can be expressed and critiqued. Through Edna's interior life, the novel exposes the cost of repressing desire to meet social expectations. Ahmed (2017) notes that when women share these stories real or fictional, they participate in a broader resistance to emotional silencing. The novel thus operates as a feminist text not only through character but also through its

structure and subject matter. In essence, this paragraph emphasizes how literature functions as a medium for feminist expression and emotional truth.

Although not analyzed in depth here, the symbolic motifs in *The Awakening* reinforce these themes. Chopin (1899/2008) employs elements such as the sea and artistic solitude to illustrate the paradox of freedom; it invites both liberation and isolation. Fraser (2022) emphasizes that feminist autonomy often requires stepping into emotional or social discomfort to break from oppressive norms. Edna's embrace of solitude can be read as an acknowledgment that autonomy may come at the cost of belonging. In summary, this closing reflection shows how symbolism deepens feminist themes by capturing the emotional costs of independence.

2.7 Contemporary Relevance and Comparative Analysis

Recent feminist research shows that motherhood remains deeply shaped by social, political, and cultural forces in contemporary societies. Hays (2022) argues that neoliberal ideologies reframe maternal devotion through discourses of productivity and emotional management, preserving patriarchal ideals under new narratives of empowerment. This redefinition casts the "modern mother" as efficient, self-reliant, and endlessly adaptable, thereby masking continued gender inequalities. These contradictions highlight how nineteenth-century expectations persist under modern forms of control. In summary, this paragraph contends that present day motherhood reproduces historical inequalities through disguised cultural narratives.

Collins (2019) explains that intersectionality remains essential for analyzing how motherhood operates across race, class, and sexuality. She emphasizes that mothers from marginalized groups encounter multiple structural barriers that shape access to resources, labor opportunities, and social legitimacy. Such inequities show that maternal identity is not homogeneous but highly stratified by social location. Consequently, analyses of motherhood must account for overlapping systems of power. In essence, this paragraph affirms that motherhood cannot be studied in isolation but through the complex intersections that define women's lived experiences.

Douglas and Michaels (2023) argue that mass media perpetuate restrictive ideals of motherhood by promoting self-sacrifice, perfection, and emotional labor as moral obligations. Through social media, these ideals have evolved into what they called digital maternalism,

whereby women are expected to perform happiness and productivity simultaneously. This dynamic reinforces traditional femininity under neoliberal and consumerist frameworks that glamorize care and control. Media discourses therefore remain key mechanisms for reproducing patriarchal maternal norms. In summary, this paragraph concludes that digital culture rebrands older maternal ideals, reinforcing unrealistic standards for modern women.

O'Brien and Wall (2021) state that family-support policies often reinforce conventional caregiving expectations rather than dismantling them. Parental leave and childcare benefits, though presented as gender neutral, frequently presume women's primary responsibility for care. As a result, many women continue to face systemic barriers that limit autonomy in both domestic and professional spheres. These institutional patterns reveal that state structures actively shape maternal identities. In essence, this paragraph reflects that even progressive policies may unintentionally maintain traditional gender hierarchies in caregiving.

Williamson (2024) demonstrates that global variation in parental rights reveals the political instability of institutional recognition of motherhood. Some nations expand reproductive and parental protection, while others regress under conservative agendas. This uneven progress shows that legal visibility for mothers is contingent on shifting ideological climates. Hence, formal recognition does not always translate into genuine equality. In summary, this paragraph argues that legal acknowledgment alone is insufficient to secure full maternal autonomy.

Fallas-Rodríguez et al. (2025) examine Costa Rican mothers' efforts to balance paid work with domestic duties, showing how cultural expectations continue to shape daily realities. Their findings reveal that, despite policy advances, social norms still position women as primary caregivers. These contradictions limit women's capacity to pursue independence within family structures. The study highlights how traditional ideologies endure even in modernized contexts. In essence, this paragraph infers that Costa Rican women exemplify the ongoing tension between autonomy and cultural conformity.

Overall, contemporary feminist literature underscores that motherhood remains a contested site between empowerment and regulation. Comparative studies across national and cultural contexts confirm that patriarchal ideologies adapt rather than disappear. Silva et al. (2024) emphasize that maternal identity must be approached as a dynamic process shaped by political, economic, and social systems. This research recognizes *The Awakening* as a text that

anticipated ongoing struggles for autonomy and identity. In summary, this paragraph concludes that Chopin's novel continues to resonate by illuminating the power dynamics that define modern motherhood.

2.8 The Plot as a Theoretical Framework

Recent feminist literary criticism highlights that narrative structures can operate as theoretical models that express social and ideological tensions. Showalter (2020) argues that the plot of a feminist text functions as a site where women's experiences are both represented and questioned. Through its progression, literature transforms personal conflicts into reflections of systemic power, making the plot not merely descriptive but conceptually analytical. In essence, this paragraph asserts that the plot itself becomes a critical space for theorizing gender and identity.

Rich (2018) argues that storytelling reveals the contradictions of motherhood as both an intimate and institutional experience. In *The Awakening*, the sequence of events mirrors this duality by situating Edna's personal awakening within broader patriarchal systems. Each narrative turning point marks a negotiation between social duty and personal freedom. The story's structure therefore embodies the same ideological conflicts discussed in feminist theory. In summary, this paragraph interprets Edna's journey as symbolizing the theoretical struggle between individuality and social regulation.

Chodorow (2012) explains that literature can illustrate how maternal identity is psychologically and socially constructed through recurring narrative motifs. Applied to Chopin's plot, each stage of Edna's rebellion reflects a process of self-recognition and the rejection of prescribed gender roles. The narrative thus becomes a psychoanalytic model of female subject formation within oppressive contexts. Through this lens, fiction operates as a mirror of theoretical frameworks. In summary, this paragraph concludes that Chopin's plot translates feminist psychological theory into emotional experience.

Hooks (2015) observes that feminist storytelling often portrays resistance as an everyday act rather than a grand revolution. In this sense, Edna's small decisions moving out, painting, seeking solitude embody subtle defiance against patriarchal control. The plot unfolds as a

gradual assertion of agency that challenges moral conventions, aligning with feminist theory's focus on resistance within domestic spaces. In essence, this paragraph reflects that Edna's gradual defiance illustrates how ordinary actions can signify feminist resistance.

Collins (2019) emphasizes that intersectionality must inform literary analysis, as narratives often privilege certain experiences while silencing others. Although *The Awakening* centers on a white, upper-class woman, its structure raises critical questions about which maternal identities are granted visibility. The absence of diverse perspectives highlights the limitations of early feminist representation and invites reinterpretation through contemporary intersectional frameworks. In summary, this paragraph identifies the novel's exclusivity as underscoring the need for inclusive feminist readings.

Vedres and Vasarhelyi (2022) demonstrate that systems, whether social or narrative, change meaning when diverse elements interact. The progression of *The Awakening* illustrates how social conformity is disrupted through dynamic encounters between Edna and her environment. Each interaction reshapes the narrative's ideological core, turning personal transformation into a collective metaphor. The plot therefore functions as an evolving theoretical dialogue on autonomy and constraint. In essence, this paragraph contends that the novel's structure mirrors social systems in constant negotiation and change.

Jones (2024) notes that the narrative rhythm of *The Awakening* performs feminist critique by transforming private emotion into public discourse. Through Edna's journey, the plot itself theorizes the social cost of self-awareness and freedom. This reading positions Chopin's work not merely as a literary artifact but as a feminist framework for analyzing resistance and subjectivity. In essence, the storyline becomes a method of thinking about gender and autonomy. In summary, this paragraph concludes that Chopin's plot operates as both a narrative and a theoretical statement of feminist liberation.

2.9 Kate Chopin: Biographical Context

Kate Chopin's early life was profoundly influenced by the social and cultural diversity of nineteenth-century St. Louis, Missouri. According to Toth (2018), her upbringing within a French Creole and Irish Catholic family exposed her to contrasting views on gender, religion, and identity. This multicultural background shaped her sensitivity to women's social positions

and cultural expectations, and her early exposure to such contradictions later informed the complexity of her female characters. In summary, this paragraph maintains that Chopin's multicultural upbringing cultivated her awareness of gender and social disparities.

Chopin's education in Catholic convent schools emphasized obedience, discipline, and moral duty, shaping her understanding of female constraint. Ewell (2021) explains that these institutions reinforced traditional gender values while simultaneously fostering intellectual curiosity and self-discipline. This paradox between intellectual awakening and moral repression appears vividly in *The Awakening*. Her academic background thus became both an inspiration and a point of resistance in her writing. In essence, this paragraph interprets Chopin's education as instilling the tension between submission and independence that defines her fiction.

Her marriage to Oscar Chopin in 1870 introduced her to the patriarchal norms of Southern Creole society. Elz (2022) notes that Chopin's move to Louisiana immersed her in a world that idealized domestic femininity and racial hierarchy. Living within these constraints allowed her to observe the complexities of gender, class, and cultural difference, observations that later translated into the rich social detail and emotional realism of her narratives. In summary, this paragraph reflects that Chopin's married life provided firsthand insight into the limits imposed on women in patriarchal culture.

After her husband's death in 1882, Chopin assumed full responsibility for her six children and the family business, a rare position for women at the time. Seyersted (2020) describes this period as one of personal transformation, in which necessity compelled Chopin to redefine herself beyond traditional domestic boundaries. Economic independence and emotional solitude encouraged her to write about female self-determination, and widowhood became both a challenge and a catalyst for creative autonomy. In essence, this paragraph concludes that personal loss empowered Chopin to explore themes of freedom and resilience in her work.

Chopin's experience as a mother profoundly shaped her perception of womanhood and care. Dyer (2023) observes that her writing reveals a nuanced understanding of motherhood, portraying it as both a tender bond and a social obligation. Unlike idealized literary mothers of her time, Chopin's maternal figures wrestle with identity and independence. Her approach redefined motherhood as a complex, self-reflective condition. In summary, this paragraph

recognizes that Chopin's maternal experience enriched her portrayal of motherhood as emotionally and socially conflicted.

The cultural and racial environment of post-bellum Louisiana also influenced Chopin's literary vision. Taylor (2024) explains that her encounters with Creole and Cajun cultures revealed intersections of class, gender, and race within domestic spaces. This awareness broadened her critique beyond gender to include social hierarchy and marginalization, so that her fiction reflects both empathy and critical distance toward her cultural surroundings. In essence, this paragraph interprets Chopin's regional context as expanding her feminist vision to encompass broader social inequalities.

By the time she published *The Awakening* in 1899, Chopin had developed a literary style that combined psychological realism with feminist insight. Jones (2024) argues that her life experiences marked by constraint, independence, and observation gave her the authority to challenge moral conventions through fiction. Despite initial criticism, her work later gained recognition as a precursor to modern feminist literature. Her biography and art remain inseparable for understanding her intellectual legacy. In summary, this paragraph concludes that Chopin's life embodied the same search for autonomy that defines her literary heroines.

CHAPTER 111

Methodological Framework

This chapter outlines the methodological design that guides the study of motherhood and symbolic resistance in Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. The research follows a qualitative, interpretive study grounded in feminist hermeneutics. Interpretation is treated as a reflective and ethical act shaped by the reader's positionality and theoretical lenses. As Braidotti (2013) has argued, feminist research must embrace a situated perspective that acknowledges how subjectivity, context, and power relations influence knowledge production.

This chapter is structured into seven sections that collectively define the methodological path of the study. It begins with the research paradigm and the type and approach of the study, followed by the articulation of the hermeneutic-feminist method. It then identifies the sources and corpus of analysis, outlines the research procedures, and discusses the scope and limitations. The chapter concludes with a rationale that synthesizes how the methodology aligns with the research objectives and supports a feminist reading of *The Awakening*.

3.1 Research Design

Hermeneutics is the art and method of interpreting texts. Originally applied to religious and classical writings, it has become a way to probe the meaning of many kinds of texts, including literature. Rather than asking: What does this mean objectively? Hermeneutics asks: What could this mean given context, emotion, and perspective? It assumes that meaning is not fixed; it shifts depending on who reads the text and when.

The German philosopher Gadamer (2004) explains that interpretation is like a conversation between the reader and the text. When we read, we bring our own experiences, culture, and emotions to the process. This interplay of perspectives is what he calls the "fusion of horizons." In a hermeneutic approach, understanding arises not from the text alone but from the way the reader connects with it.

In this study, hermeneutics is especially useful because *The Awakening* is saturated with symbols, silences, and affect. For example, as Chopin (2008) shows, Edna's sadness and desire for solitude are not always explicitly explained, yet they speak volumes about her inner resistance. Feminist thinkers such as Ahmed (2017) argue that emotions like discomfort and

refusal reveal how people respond to social pressure. A hermeneutic approach enables close reading of these emotional cues and reflection on what they signify.

This method also values moving back and forth between parts of the text and the whole, what is known as the hermeneutic circle. One reads a passage, reflects on the full narrative, and then returns to the passage with greater insight. This process helps uncover meanings that are not obvious at first, gradually peeling back layers to clarify what the story suggests about motherhood, freedom, and identity.

Importantly, hermeneutics does not claim there is only one correct interpretation; it encourages thoughtful, respectful, and ethical reading. Davis (2016), for example, reminds us that even personal stories are shaped by society, politics, and history. Applying hermeneutics in this study shows how *The Awakening* both reflects and questions the expectations placed on women in the past and today.

3.2 Type and Approach of the Study

This study is designed as a qualitative, exploratory-descriptive, and bibliographic investigation focused on the literary and symbolic analysis of Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*. It does not rely on statistical data or generalizable findings but rather seeks to interpret meaning through in-depth engagement with textual material. The research is exploratory in nature, as it examines how themes of motherhood, identity, and feminine resistance are constructed symbolically. At the same time, it is descriptive, aiming to identify, organize, and explain the literary strategies used to express these themes.

As a bibliographic study, the research draws entirely on written sources: the primary text is Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899/2008), and the secondary corpus comprises feminist theoretical works by authors such as Sara Ahmed, Rosi Braidotti, Lauren Berlant, Clare Hemmings, and Angela Davis. These theoretical texts serve as interpretive frameworks that help uncover the novel's ideological dimensions. As Braidotti (2013) notes, theory is not merely analytical; it is also ethical and political, shaping how we read and what we notice. In this way, the study bridges literary analysis and feminist critique.

There are no human participants involved in this research; instead, the “sample” is the analytical corpus. This includes selected passages from the novel that deal with themes such as motherhood, care, desire, autonomy, and social resistance. According to Chopin (2008), Edna expresses early signs of emotional detachment when she reflects that “she was not a mother-woman” (p. 11), which marks a turning point in her resistance to social norms. This approach involves close reading and textual interpretation, supported by theoretical lenses that give context and depth to the symbolic elements in the novel.

Data collection techniques in this kind of research involve deep textual engagement rather than surveys or experiments. The researcher conducts multiple readings of the novel to identify key passages and then applies thematic coding to classify segments by recurring motifs and concepts. Tools such as analytical notetaking, reading matrices, and digital categorization may be used to organize findings. As Hemmings (2012) suggests, feminist interpretation is not about imposing rigid meaning but about allowing contradictions and affective tensions to speak.

Finally, the analytical procedure follows a structured path: full reading of the primary text, selection of relevant excerpts, identification of themes, interpretive comparison with feminist theories, and critical synthesis. Davis (2016) highlights the importance of locating gendered experience within broader political structures; this principle guides the analysis of motherhood in *The Awakening*. The approach does not aim to produce a universal theory but to generate insights into how the novel participates in feminist discourse. By combining literary sensitivity with ideological critique, this methodology supports a rich, multilayered understanding of the text.

3.2. Hermeneutic-Feminist Method

This study employs a hermeneutic-feminist method that combines traditional textual interpretation with feminist theory to uncover deeper meanings in literary texts. Hermeneutics focuses on understanding symbolic content by exploring how readers interact with texts through historical and emotional contexts. Feminist criticism, by contrast, interrogates how literature represents gender, power, and identity. Together, these approaches enable a layered reading of *The Awakening* that is both interpretive and critical.

A hermeneutic-feminist reading begins from the premise that texts are not neutral; they reflect and sometimes challenge the norms and ideologies of their time. As Braidotti (2013) argues, feminist theory must question not only what is written but also how knowledge is constructed and who benefits from representations. This entails attending to silences, contradictions, and emotional tones in the novel. In *The Awakening*, these elements emerge in Edna's ambivalence toward motherhood and her desire for freedom from social expectations.

This method also values the reader's own position—social, political, and emotional—as an interpretive tool. Ahmed (2017) explains that feminist interpretation often begins with a feeling: discomfort, anger, or confusion can signal deeper ideological tensions in the text. For instance, when Edna distances herself from her children or from the expectations of domestic life, readers may feel discomfort—a reaction that, according to Ahmed, can be read as a form of feminist awareness. Chopin (2008) illustrates this in Edna's quiet withdrawal and emotional detachment, which signal her rejection of the ideals of the “mother-woman” (p. 11).

The method entails close reading in which key passages are selected and interpreted through feminist theoretical frameworks. Berlant's (2011) concept of “cruel optimism” for example, helps explain how Edna's dreams of freedom remain tied to roles and ideals that ultimately limit her. Feminist hermeneutics seeks to expose these paradoxes not to resolve them but to understand their emotional and symbolic impact. This analysis values complexity and nuance over simplification or moral judgment.

Another key principle of this method is recognizing literature as both personal and political. Davis (2016) reminds us that motherhood is not merely a private role, but a social institution shaped by race, class, and power. While Edna is a privileged white woman, her rejection of motherhood can still be interpreted as a symbolic form of resistance to patriarchal norms. Nevertheless, the analysis remains aware that her experience is not universal. The method requires continuous reflection on privilege and exclusion on which stories are told and which remain silent.

In summary, this method enables the researcher to analyze *The Awakening* not just as a narrative, but as a symbolic and ideological space. By combining emotional interpretation with feminist theory, it uncovers hidden tensions related to gender, identity, and motherhood. Rather than seeking a single answer, the hermeneutic-feminist approach encourages an ongoing

conversation among the reader, the text, and feminist thought. This makes it especially useful for literary studies that aim to challenge dominant narratives and uncover alternative meanings.

3.3 Sources and Collection of Analysis

The corpus analyzed in this study comprises one primary literary work and a set of theoretical sources that provide interpretive frameworks. The main text is Kate Chopin's *The Awakening* (1899/2008), a novel that explores the emotional and symbolic struggles of a white, upper-class woman within the roles of wife and mother. It is treated not merely as fiction but as a cultural artifact in which dominant ideas about gender, care, and domesticity are both reflected and questioned. Chopin (2008) presents Edna's journey as one marked by internal shifts and emotional silences that reveal the tension between personal desire and social expectations.

The theoretical sources include works by contemporary feminist scholars who offer critical tools for examining themes such as affect, autonomy, resistance, and maternal identity. Ahmed (2017) explores how emotions like discomfort, unhappiness, and fatigue can function as political signs, signals of resistance to what is socially expected. Her notion of the "feminist killjoy" is particularly useful in interpreting Edna's detachment from her children and her rejection of domestic roles. As Chopin (2008) narrates, Edna's behavior often diverges from that of the typical "mother-woman," suggesting quiet forms of rebellion embedded in emotion (p. 11).

Butler (2004) also contributes to the theoretical lens through her theory of gender performance, which shows how social roles are performed rather than naturally possessed. Edna's reluctance to perform the role of a submissive wife and self-sacrificing mother reflects the constructed nature of feminine identity. To expand on this, the study includes Stone's (2012, 2019) philosophical work on maternal subjectivity, which proposes that motherhood is a complex, evolving process rather than a fixed identity. Stone's ideas allow for a reading of Edna's maternal ambivalence as a site of philosophical and emotional struggle.

Additionally, Braidotti's (2013) posthuman feminist theory offers a perspective that moves beyond static definitions of womanhood and motherhood. Although *The Awakening* was written in the nineteenth-century, Braidotti's concepts of transformation and becoming help illuminate how Edna seeks to redefine herself outside traditional categories. Her moments of

solitude, artistic exploration, and emotional distance can be read not as failure but as signs of a desire for new forms of selfhood.

Davis (2016) adds a necessary intersectional critique by reminding us that motherhood is shaped by systems of race, class, and labor. While Edna's experience reflects white bourgeois privilege, Davis's insights help us remain aware of the social structures that determine which maternal identities are considered legitimate or valuable. This awareness prevents the study from presenting Edna's experience as universal and opens space to question the absences in the narrative such as the role of women of color or working-class mothers, who remain mostly invisible in the novel.

In sum, the selected texts and theoretical frameworks form a dynamic body of material that enables a nuanced feminist interpretation of *The Awakening*. The novel's emotional and symbolic richness invites detailed analysis, while the feminist theories offer language and structure to critically engage with its deeper meanings. This methodological combination allows for a reading that is at once literary and political concerned not only with what the text says, but also with how it feels, resists, and remains silent.

3.4 Analysis Categories

Analysis categories are essential tools in qualitative research because they enable the systematic organization and interpretation of textual data. In hermeneutic and feminist studies, these categories function as analytical lenses that guide the reading of literary texts according to specific theoretical concerns. Rather than fragmenting the analysis, categories help establish coherence among the research objectives, the theoretical framework, and the interpretive process. According to Braun and Clarke (2006), analysis categories facilitate the identification of recurring patterns of meaning within a text. In this study, the categories are designed to capture the symbolic, emotional, and ideological dimensions of motherhood in *The Awakening*. These categories structure the analysis while allowing flexibility for interpretive depth.

The analysis categories employed in this research derive directly from the study's specific objectives. Each category corresponds to a central aspect of motherhood, identity, or resistance as represented in Kate Chopin's novel. This alignment ensures methodological consistency and strengthens the study's analytical validity. By grounding the categories in the research

objectives, the analysis avoids subjective or arbitrary interpretations; instead, the reading is guided by clearly defined conceptual frameworks. This approach allows the novel to be examined both as a literary work and as a cultural artifact shaped by social and historical forces.

The first category, “Representation of Motherhood”, focuses on how motherhood is constructed and portrayed within the narrative. It examines the social expectations, values, and norms associated with maternal roles in the nineteenth century. Motherhood is analyzed as a socially regulated identity rather than a purely biological condition. Particular attention is given to how maternal devotion, sacrifice, and domestic responsibility are normalized within the novel. This category allows the researcher to identify how motherhood functions as a defining element of female identity. Through this lens, the novel reveals the ideological foundations of maternal expectations.

The second category, Patriarchal Expectations and the “Mother-Woman” Ideal, examines the dominant cultural model of ideal motherhood in the novel. It analyzes how patriarchal ideology links womanhood to selflessness, emotional labor, and moral duty. Characters who embody or reinforce the “mother-woman” ideal are treated as representations of normative femininity. The category also explores how these expectations are socially enforced through judgment, comparison, and moral discourse. By analyzing this ideal, the study reveals the mechanisms through which patriarchal power regulates maternal identity and highlights the restrictive nature of socially imposed maternal roles.

The third category, **Maternal Identity and Autonomy**, addresses the tension between motherhood and personal self-definition. It focuses on Edna Pontellier’s emotional conflict and her struggle to reconcile maternal responsibilities with individual desire. Motherhood is examined as a site of internal negotiation rather than as unconditional fulfillment. The category explores how autonomy is constrained by social expectations and internalized norms. Through this lens, Edna’s emotional distance from motherhood is interpreted as a search for selfhood, foregrounding identity formation within oppressive structures.

The fourth category, Resistance to Traditional Maternal Roles, examines how Edna’s actions and emotional responses function as symbolic forms of resistance. Resistance is understood not as overt rebellion but as subtle acts of refusal, withdrawal, and emotional detachment. This category analyzes moments in which Edna challenges domestic norms and

maternal obligations. Her rejection of the “mother-woman” ideal is interpreted as a critique of patriarchal control. The category emphasizes that resistance can be both personal and political. Through this lens, the novel reveals how everyday decisions become acts of feminist defiance.

The final category, Contemporary Feminist Perspectives on Motherhood, establishes a comparative dialogue between the novel and modern feminist theory. This category incorporates contemporary studies that examine motherhood as a political, social, and institutional construct. It allows the analysis to identify continuities and transformations between nineteenth-century and present-day maternal discourses. By comparing literary representation with current feminist debates, the study highlights the enduring relevance of *The Awakening*. This category situates the novel within an ongoing feminist conversation about autonomy, care, and identity. Ultimately, it demonstrates how Chopin’s work anticipates contemporary critiques of motherhood.

3.5 Data Collection Instrument

In qualitative literary research, data collection does not involve numerical instruments or participants-based techniques but rather systematic engagement with textual material. In this study, the primary source of data is Kate Chopin’s *The Awakening*, examined as both a literary and cultural text. The data collection process is grounded in close reading, interpretive reflection, and feminist hermeneutic analysis. According to Gadamer (2004), meaning emerges through an ongoing dialogue among reader and text, making interpretation a dynamic and reflective process. This approach allows the researcher to identify symbolic, emotional, and ideological patterns related to motherhood.

The first stage of the procedure involves multiple close readings of the novel to become familiar with its narrative structure, characters, and thematic development. During these readings, particular attention is given to passages related to motherhood, domestic roles, emotional conflict, and resistance to social expectations. These passages are identified as units of analysis. This process allows the researcher to observe recurring motifs and tensions associated with maternal identity. Close reading ensures that interpretation is grounded in textual evidence rather than subjective impression.

The second stage consists of organizing the selected excerpts into predefined analysis categories. These categories function as analytical instruments that guide the interpretation of the

text. The categorization process follows a thematic approach, allowing patterns of meaning to emerge across different sections of the novel. As Braun and Clarke (2006) explain, thematic analysis enables the systematic identification and organization of qualitative data. This step strengthens the methodological rigor of the study by ensuring consistency between objectives, categories, and analysis.

The third stage involves interpreting the categorized excerpts using feminist theoretical frameworks. Concepts such as gender performance, emotional resistance, and maternal autonomy are applied to deepen the analysis. Authors such as Butler (2004), Ahmed (2017), and Braidotti (2013) provide theoretical lenses through which the data are examined. This theoretical dialogue allows the researcher to move beyond description and toward critical interpretation. The analysis thus connects literary representation with broader feminist debates.

The fourth stage introduces the main themes, motifs and symbols of *The Awakening*. The themes will be summarized in Table 4. The table is presented below as a structural reference for the analytical categories used in this chapter. The detailed interpretation and discussion of each theme will follow in the subsequent sections of this analysis. The motifs are presented in Table 5 and is included to organize the literary patterns identified during the analysis. Finally, the symbols are illustrated in table 6 and are part of the analytical framework. The table is intentionally presented as a structural element that guides the interpretation.

To clearly demonstrate how the research objectives are achieved, three analytical tables are included below. Each table corresponds to one specific objective and explains the relationship between the objective, the analysis categories, the theoretical support, and the analytical techniques. These tables function as methodological instruments that clarify the research process. They provide transparency and coherence to the analytical design. In this way, the study ensures methodological clarity and academic rigor.

The identification of themes, motifs, and symbols is essential for this thesis because they provide the analytical foundation for interpreting the representation of motherhood and female identity in *The Awakening*. Themes reveal the central ideological concerns of the novel, such as autonomy, resistance, and the social construction of motherhood, allowing the researcher to understand how these ideas are developed across the narrative. Motifs reinforce these themes by showing recurring emotional and narrative patterns that reflect Edna Pontellier's internal conflict

and gradual transformation. Symbols, in turn, offer deeper insight into meanings that are not explicitly stated but are communicated through imagery and literary representation, such as freedom, confinement, and self-discovery. Together, themes, motifs, and symbols enable a deeper feminist hermeneutic interpretation of the text, since they connect the protagonist's personal experience with broader patriarchal structures and cultural expectations. Therefore, their analysis is fundamental for understanding how the novel critiques traditional motherhood and represents the struggle for female autonomy, which directly supports the objectives of this research.

Table 1- Specific Objective 1

To identify the social expectations and characteristics of motherhood in the 19th century as depicted in *The Awakening*

Social expectations and characteristics of motherhood in the 19th century	Quote	Analysis

Table 2-Specific objective 2

To compare the portrayal of motherhood in *The Awakening* with contemporary feminist perspectives on maternal identity and autonomy

Contemporary feminist perspectives of maternal identity and autonomy	Quote	Analysis

Table 3- Specific objective 3

To evaluate Edna Pontellier's relationship with motherhood and her rejection of traditional maternal roles within a patriarchal society

Edna's relationship with motherhood and rejection of traditional maternal roles	Quote	Analysis

Table 4-Themes of the novel

Theme	Quote	Analysis

Table 5-Motifs of the novel

Motifs	Quote	Analysis

Table 6- Symbols of the novel

Motifs	Quote	Analysis

CHAPTER IV

Data Analysis

This chapter presents the analysis of selected excerpts from Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, focusing on the representation of motherhood through a feminist literary perspective. To examine the information, a triangulation method was employed, integrating three essential components: the literary work itself, the theoretical contributions of feminist scholars, and the researcher's interpretation. This methodology enables a deeper understanding of how motherhood is constructed, questioned, and redefined within the novel, as well as how these representations relate to both nineteenth-century gender norms and contemporary feminist perspectives.

4.1 Approaches to the Investigation

The feminist literary approach provides a critical framework for analyzing how motherhood is represented and constructed in literary texts. According to Lois Tyson (2015), feminist criticism examines how literature reflects and reinforces patriarchal ideology, particularly in relation to gender roles and female identity. This approach allows researchers to identify how social expectations influence female characters and shape their experiences. In the case of *The Awakening*, the feminist perspective helps explain the protagonist's internal conflict between her role as a mother and her desire for autonomy. This approach is essential because it allows the researcher to interpret motherhood not only as a biological role but also as a social and ideological construct. Through this perspective, the novel can be understood as a critique of traditional motherhood.

Motherhood has historically been associated with sacrifice, devotion, and the loss of individual identity. According to Sara Ahmed (2017), motherhood functions as a social institution that regulates women's behavior and reinforces cultural expectations. Ahmed explains that women are often expected to find fulfillment in caring for others rather than themselves. This expectation can create tension when women seek independence or personal development. In the novel, this tension is represented through the contrast between Edna Pontellier and Adèle Ratignolle. This contrast demonstrates how motherhood is experienced differently depending on the individual.

The concept of gender as a social construct is also essential for understanding the representation of motherhood in the novel. Judith Butler (2015) argues that gender roles are produced through repeated social expectations rather than biological reality. This perspective suggests that motherhood is not an automatic identity but a role that women are expected to perform. In the novel, Edna's emotional distance from her children reflects her lack of identification with this role. Her experience demonstrates that motherhood may not be a natural or fulfilling experience for all women. This supports the idea that maternal identity is shaped by social expectations rather than instinct.

The triangulation between literary evidence, feminist theory, and researcher interpretation strengthens the validity of the analysis. According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), triangulation allows researchers to compare different sources of information in order to develop a more complete understanding of the subject. In literary studies, this means connecting the text with theoretical perspectives and critical interpretation. This method allows the researcher to identify deeper meanings within the text. In this investigation, triangulation helps demonstrate that motherhood is represented as both a personal experience and a social institution. This strengthens the credibility of the findings.

Feminist scholars have also emphasized that motherhood can create conflict in women's identity. According to O'Reilly (2016), motherhood operates both as an experience and as an institution that imposes expectations on women. This dual nature can create tension when women feel restricted by their maternal role. In the novel, Edna experiences this conflict as she begins to question her responsibilities. Her desire for independence represents her resistance to these expectations. This demonstrates that motherhood is not always experienced as a positive or fulfilling role.

Female identity extends beyond traditional maternal roles and includes personal autonomy and self-development. According to Gilligan (2018), women's identity includes emotional, intellectual, and creative dimensions. This perspective helps explain Edna's interest in art and self-expression. Her artistic development represents her attempt to establish her own identity. This shows that she seeks fulfillment outside motherhood. This supports the interpretation that the novel challenges traditional gender roles.

Finally, feminist literary criticism emphasizes that literary works can expose social inequalities and challenge dominant ideologies. Tyson (2015) explains that feminist analysis allows researchers to identify how literature questions patriarchal norms. In *The Awakening*, the protagonist's experience demonstrates the limitations imposed on women. Her resistance represents a challenge to traditional motherhood. This suggests that the novel critiques patriarchal society. Therefore, the feminist approach provides an appropriate framework for analyzing the representation of motherhood in the novel.

4.2 Theories vs Literary Work

The analysis of literary works through feminist theory allows researchers to understand how gender roles and motherhood are constructed within specific social contexts. According to Lois Tyson (2015), feminist literary criticism examines how texts reflect patriarchal values and how female characters respond to these expectations. This perspective is essential for interpreting the experiences of female characters whose identities are shaped by motherhood. In this investigation, feminist theory provides the conceptual tools necessary to analyze how motherhood is represented in the novel. This connection between theory and literary work helps reveal the ideological messages present in the text.

One of the most important methodological strategies used in this section is triangulation. According to Creswell (2018), triangulation strengthens qualitative research by comparing different sources of information, such as theoretical perspectives, textual evidence, and researcher interpretation. This process allows the researcher to develop a more complete and reliable analysis. In literary studies, triangulation helps connect fictional representations with real social and cultural dynamics. In this case, triangulation helps demonstrate how motherhood in the novel reflects patriarchal ideology. This method ensures that the analysis is supported by academic theory and textual evidence.

The representation of Adèle Ratignolle provides an example of traditional motherhood. She is presented as the ideal maternal figure who dedicates herself completely to her children. According to Ahmed (2017), patriarchal societies promote motherhood as the primary source of female identity. This expectation limits women's opportunities for personal development. Adèle's character reflects these expectations because she accepts her maternal role without

resistance. This supports the idea that motherhood is socially constructed and reinforced through cultural norms.

In contrast, Edna Pontellier represents a different experience of motherhood. She does not fully identify with her maternal role and experiences emotional distance from her children. According to O'Reilly (2016), feminist scholars have emphasized that motherhood can create identity conflict when women feel restricted by social expectations. This conflict is evident in Edna's behavior and emotional responses. She does not experience motherhood as a complete source of fulfillment. This suggests that maternal identity is not universal.

Feminist theory also emphasizes the importance of personal autonomy in female identity. According to Butler (2015), gender roles are produced through social expectations that individuals may accept or resist. This perspective helps explain Edna's resistance to traditional motherhood. Her actions demonstrate her desire to define her identity independently. She seeks fulfillment beyond her maternal role. This reflects feminist ideas about autonomy and resistance.

Another important aspect of the analysis is the relationship between motherhood and identity development. According to Gilligan (2018), women's identity includes emotional, intellectual, and creative dimensions that extend beyond family roles. This perspective is reflected in Edna's artistic development. Her interest in painting represents her search for self-expression. This demonstrates her desire for personal growth. This supports the interpretation that the novel challenges traditional gender roles.

Overall, the connection between feminist theory and literary evidence demonstrates that motherhood in the novel is presented as a social institution rather than a purely natural experience. According to Tyson (2015), feminist analysis helps reveal how literary texts challenge patriarchal ideology. The experiences of Edna and Adèle illustrate two different models of motherhood. One represents acceptance, and the other represents resistance. This contrast helps highlight the social pressures faced by women. Therefore, the analysis confirms that motherhood is a central theme shaped by patriarchal expectations.

Furthermore, this contrast between Edna and Adèle also illustrates the internal psychological consequences of conforming to or resisting social expectations. Adèle's complete identification with motherhood reflects what Hays (2022) describes as "intensive motherhood," a

cultural model that defines women primarily through their caregiving role. This model encourages women to prioritize their children above their personal needs and aspirations. In the novel, Adèle appears satisfied with this role, which demonstrates how patriarchal ideology can be internalized and accepted as natural. Her character represents stability, social acceptance, and conformity.

In contrast, Edna's resistance reveals the emotional and psychological cost of rejecting these expectations. Her feelings of dissatisfaction and emotional distance suggest that she experiences motherhood as a social obligation rather than a personal fulfillment. According to Rich (2018), motherhood must be understood as both an experience and an institution, because while some women may find fulfillment in motherhood, others may experience it as restrictive. Edna's experience reflects this duality. She does not reject her children as individuals, but she rejects the identity imposed on her as a mother. This distinction is important because it demonstrates that her conflict is not emotional rejection but ideological resistance.

Additionally, Edna's behavior can be interpreted as part of a broader process of identity formation. As Gilligan (2017) explains, female identity develops through self-reflection and personal experience. Edna's gradual awakening reflects her attempt to understand herself beyond social expectations. Her rejection of traditional motherhood represents a critical moment in this process. This supports the feminist interpretation that identity is not fixed but constructed through personal and social experiences.

From a social perspective, this analysis also reflects the historical context in which the novel was written. During the nineteenth century, women's roles were limited primarily to domestic responsibilities. According to Showalter (2020), literature from this period often reflects the tension between social expectations and female autonomy. Edna's character represents this tension. Her resistance challenges the dominant ideology of her time. Therefore, her experience can be interpreted as both a personal and social act of resistance.

This analysis demonstrates that feminist theory provides an essential framework for understanding the representation of motherhood in the novel. By connecting theoretical concepts with textual evidence, it becomes possible to understand how motherhood functions as a social construct. This confirms that the novel not only reflects social reality but also critiques it.

In addition to the ideological conflict that Edna experiences, it is also important to analyze the role of internalized social norms. Internalization occurs when individuals unconsciously adopt the values and expectations of their society as their own beliefs. According to Bartky (2010), patriarchal power is particularly effective because women often regulate their own behavior based on social expectations. In the case of Edna, this internal conflict is evident in her feelings of guilt and confusion. Even as she begins to reject her maternal role, she continues to experience emotional tension. This demonstrates that patriarchal influence operates not only externally but also internally.

Moreover, Edna's emotional evolution reflects a gradual process rather than an immediate transformation. At the beginning of the novel, she accepts her social role without questioning it. However, as she gains personal awareness, she begins to recognize the limitations imposed on her. This progression supports Beauvoir's (1949) argument that women are not born with a fixed identity but develop it through social experience. Edna's awakening illustrates this theoretical concept. Her transformation is the result of her personal reflection and emotional growth.

It is also important to consider how Edna's rejection of motherhood challenges the dominant cultural narrative. In patriarchal societies, motherhood is often presented as the natural and ultimate fulfillment of women. According to Badinter (1981), this idea has been socially constructed rather than biologically determined. Edna's dissatisfaction contradicts this narrative. Her experience demonstrates that motherhood does not have a universal meaning and can be experienced differently by different women.

One important aspect that can be further analyzed is how Edna's emotional conflict reflects the internalization of patriarchal expectations, which influences her perception of herself as a mother and as an individual. Throughout the novel, Edna demonstrates moments of guilt and emotional confusion, which suggest that even though she begins to question her maternal role, she has already internalized the belief that motherhood should define her identity. This internal struggle reflects what feminist theorists describe as the psychological impact of social conditioning, where women regulate their own behavior based on cultural expectations rather than personal desire. As a result, Edna's dissatisfaction is not only caused by external pressure but also by the conflict between her personal identity and the identity imposed on her by society.

This situation demonstrates that patriarchal influence operates at both social and psychological levels, shaping women's experiences and limiting their autonomy. Therefore, Edna's experience illustrates how difficult it is for women to separate their authentic identity from the roles that society has assigned to them.

Another relevant element that can be observed is how Edna's awakening represents a gradual process of identity construction that develops through emotional and intellectual experiences. At the beginning of the novel, Edna accepts her role as a mother without deeply questioning it, which suggests that she initially conforms to social expectations. However, as she becomes more aware of her own emotions and desires, she begins to recognize that her maternal identity does not fully represent who she is as a person. This realization reflects the feminist argument that identity is not fixed but constructed through personal reflection and social interaction. Her transformation demonstrates that female identity is dynamic and can evolve when women begin to question traditional roles. Furthermore, this process of awakening allows Edna to understand the limitations imposed on her by patriarchal society. As a result, her experience represents both a personal transformation and a form of social resistance.

Table 1 Social Expectations of Motherhood

Social expectations and characteristics of motherhood in the 19th century	Quote	Analysis
Motherhood as a woman's primary duty	"If it was not a mother's place to look after children, who's on earth, was it?" (chapter III, p.9)	This quote reflects the social expectation that motherhood was the central responsibility of women in the nineteenth century. Women were expected to devote themselves entirely to their children. This supports feminist theory, which explains how patriarchal societies defined

		women primarily through maternal roles. Edna's discomfort with this expectation shows her resistance. This demonstrates the conflict between her identity and her social obligations.
Idealization of maternal sacrifice	"The mother-women seemed to prevail that summer" (Chapter IV, p.11)	This evidence shows how society idealized women who sacrificed their individuality for their children. These women represented the social norm. According to feminist criticism, this expectation reinforced women's oppression. Edna does not identify with these women. This highlights her difference and internal conflict.
Women defined through motherhood	"Fluttering about with extended, protecting wings" (chapter IV, p.11)	This metaphor describes mothers as self-sacrificing figures. Their identity exists primarily to protect their children. This reflects nineteenth-century gender ideology. Feminist theory explains this as a social construction used to control

		women. Edna's rejection shows her awakening.
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Table 1. Illustrates the social expectations and characteristics of motherhood in the 19th century. Source: Researcher's Creation

Table 2 Contemporary feminist perspectives of maternal identity and autonomy

Contemporary feminist perspectives of maternal identity and autonomy	Quote	Analysis
Women seeking autonomy	"She began to look with her own eyes" (VI, p.14)	This quote represents how Edna is realizing that she has independence. She begins to develop her own identity. Contemporary feminist theory explains this as female self-definition. This challenges patriarchal expectations. It shows psychological and feminist awakening.
Emotional oppression caused by gender roles	"An indescribable oppression filled her whole being" (chapter III, p.10)	This quote shows Edna's emotional suffering. Feminist theory explains this as the result of gender oppression. She feels trapped in her social role. This reflects psychological conflict. It shows identity crisis.
Desire for Independence	"She was beginning to realize her position in the universe"	This shows her growing awareness. Feminist theory

		explains this as consciousness development. She begins to question her identity. This represents autonomy. This is part of her awakening.
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*Table 2. Illustrates the Contemporary feminist perspectives of maternal identity and autonomy.
Source: Researcher's Creation*

Table 3 Edna's relationship with motherhood and rejection of traditional maternal roles

Edna's relationship with motherhood and rejection of traditional maternal roles	Quote	Analysis
Rejection of maternal identity	"Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman" (chapter VI, p. 11)	This quote clearly shows Edna's difference. She does not define herself as a traditional mother. This reflects feminist rejection of patriarchal roles. She values individuality. This shows identity conflict.
Emotional distance from children	"She would sometimes forget them" (chapter VII, p. 16)	This quote shows emotional distance. This contrasts with ideal motherhood. Feminist theory explains this as resistance. Edna does not conform. This shows autonomy development.
Prioritizing self over motherhood	"She wanted to swim far out" (chapter X, p. 27)	Swimming represents independence. It symbolizes

		<p>freedom from social roles. Feminist theory explains this as liberation. She prioritizes herself. This represents awakening.</p>
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Table 3. Illustrates Edna's relationship with motherhood and rejection of traditional maternal roles. Source: Researcher's Creation

4.3. Themes, Motifs and Symbols

Themes, motifs, and symbols are essential literary elements that help readers understand the deeper meaning of a literary work. According to Kennedy and Gioia (2020), a theme is the central idea explored in a text, while a motif is a recurring element that reinforces meaning, and a symbol is something that represents an abstract concept. In *The Awakening*, Kate Chopin uses these elements to illustrate Edna Pontellier's emotional transformation and her rejection of traditional maternal expectations. These literary devices allow the reader to understand the protagonist's internal conflict and her struggle for autonomy. Additionally, they reinforce the feminist perspective discussed in Chapter III, particularly regarding the social expectations imposed on women. The following tables present specific examples from the novel that demonstrate the themes, motifs, and symbols identified in this investigation. Each example is supported by textual evidence, chapter, and page number.

4.3.1. Themes of *the Awakening*

The following table presents the main themes identified in the novel. Themes represent the central ideas that the author develops throughout the narrative and help explain the protagonist's psychological and emotional transformation. In *The Awakening*, the themes are directly connected to Edna Pontellier's struggle between social expectations and personal autonomy. These themes also support the feminist theoretical framework discussed in Chapter III, particularly regarding the social construction of motherhood and female identity. Each example included in the table demonstrates how the protagonist experiences internal conflict and gradual awakening. The textual evidence allows for a deeper understanding of how these themes contribute to the development of the story.

Table 4. Themes of the novel

Theme	Quote	Analysis
Female autonomy	“She began to look with her own eyes” (chapter VI, p.9)	This quote represents Edna’s independence. She begins to develop her own identity. She questions social expectations. This supports feminist theory. This shows her awakening.
Maternal conflict	“Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman” (chapter IV, p. 11)	This quote shows she does not accept traditional maternal roles. She values individuality. This creates conflict. This supports feminist theory.
Emotional oppression	“An indescribable oppression... filled her whole being” (chapter III, p.10)	This shows her emotional suffering. She feels trapped. This represents psychological conflict.
Marriage as control	“Valuable piece of personal property” (chapter I, p. 6)	Shows objectification. She is treated as property. This reflects patriarchy.
Social Conformity vs Freedom	“She felt no interest in anything about her.” (chapter XVIII, p.55)	This quote reflects her emotional separation from social expectations. She no longer identifies with her role as wife and mother. This represents rejection of conformity. Feminist theory

		explains that this detachment reflects resistance. Psychologically, this represents identity reconstruction.
Identity Search	“She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her.” (chapter XII, p. 31)	This quote shows experimentation with identity. She is exploring independence. Psychologically, this reflects identity development. Feminist theory explains this as liberation. This reinforces her awakening.
Emotional Independence	“She felt like some new-born creature.” (chapter XXVII, p.79)	This quote represents rebirth. She feels transformed. This symbolizes psychological change. This supports feminist autonomy.

Table 4. Illustrates the themes of the novel. Source: Researcher's Creation

As shown in Table 4, the themes identified in the novel clearly reflect Edna's emotional and psychological transformation. The evidence demonstrates her growing independence and her rejection of traditional maternal expectations. These themes also illustrate the impact of patriarchal social structures on female identity. Furthermore, the quotes confirm that her awakening is a gradual process influenced by emotional dissatisfaction and personal reflection. This analysis supports the feminist perspective presented in Chapter III. Ultimately, the themes

reinforce the central argument of this investigation by showing how social expectations influence the protagonist's identity.

Another important aspect of these themes is the relationship between freedom and isolation. As Edna begins to reject traditional expectations, she also becomes increasingly isolated from her social environment. This isolation reflects the consequences of challenging patriarchal norms. According to Hooks (2015), women who resist traditional roles often experience social rejection because they threaten established power structures. This perspective helps explain Edna's emotional loneliness. Her awakening brings her personal awareness, but it also separates her from the social world she previously inhabited.

Additionally, the theme of identity transformation is closely connected to emotional conflict. Edna experiences feelings of confusion, frustration, and dissatisfaction as she begins to question her role. This emotional conflict represents a transitional stage in her identity development. According to Moravec (2021), identity transformation often involves emotional instability because individuals must abandon familiar roles to construct new ones. Edna's emotional experiences reflect this process.

The theme of autonomy also reflects broader feminist concerns about female independence. Edna's desire to make her own decisions challenges the traditional expectation that women should be dependent on their husbands. According to Fraser (2022), patriarchal societies maintain control by limiting women's independence. Edna's actions represent a challenge to this system. Her awakening demonstrates her desire to exist as an individual rather than as a social role.

Another significant theme is the conflict between individuality and social conformity. Throughout the novel, Edna struggles to balance her personal desires with social expectations. This conflict reflects the broader feminist argument that patriarchal societies prioritize social order over individual freedom. According to Mill (1869), social systems often restrict women's freedom to maintain stability. Edna's experience reflects this restriction.

Another important theme that can be identified in the novel is the relationship between autonomy and emotional isolation, which becomes increasingly evident as Edna develops a stronger sense of independence. As she begins to reject the expectations associated with

motherhood and marriage, she also becomes more emotionally distant from her family and social environment. This isolation reflects the social consequences that women often experience when they challenge traditional gender roles. In patriarchal societies, women who seek independence may be perceived as selfish or irresponsible, which can lead to social rejection. Edna's emotional loneliness demonstrates that the pursuit of autonomy can involve significant personal sacrifice. This situation reinforces the idea that female independence is often discouraged to maintain social control. Therefore, the novel presents autonomy as both liberating and emotionally challenging.

In addition, the theme of self-discovery plays a fundamental role in the development of Edna's character, as her awakening represents her attempt to understand her own identity beyond social expectations. Throughout the novel, Edna begins to reflect on her emotions, desires, and personal dissatisfaction, which allows her to develop greater self-awareness. This process demonstrates that identity is not something that is automatically given but something that individuals must actively construct. Her experience reflects the feminist perspective that women must define themselves independently of traditional roles. Furthermore, this process of self-discovery allows Edna to recognize the limitations imposed by her social environment. As a result, her awakening represents both psychological growth and personal liberation. This theme reinforces the central argument that identity is influenced by both personal experience and social structure.

In addition to illustrating Edna's personal transformation, the themes also reveal the broader social pressures that shape her experience as a mother. These themes demonstrate that motherhood is not presented exclusively as a natural or fulfilling role, but rather as a social construct reinforced by cultural expectations. Through Edna's emotional reactions, the novel exposes the limitations imposed on women who are expected to prioritize their families above their personal development. This reinforces the idea that motherhood, in this context, operates as an institutional role that regulates female behavior.

Moreover, the themes contribute to the development of the feminist perspective of the novel by highlighting the imbalance of power between men and women. Edna's struggle reflects the difficulty of achieving independence within a patriarchal system that discourages female autonomy. Her experience illustrates that the pursuit of personal freedom often requires

questioning deeply rooted social norms. Therefore, the themes not only develop the narrative but also support the thesis argument that the novel critiques traditional motherhood and its restrictive nature.

Additionally, the themes function as a connection between the protagonist's internal conflict and the external social environment. They allow the reader to understand that Edna's transformation is not an isolated experience but a response to systemic limitations. This strengthens the interpretation of the novel as a feminist text that challenges the idealization of motherhood. Furthermore, these themes reveal how social expectations influence the protagonist's emotional state and her perception of her maternal role. They also demonstrate that her awakening develops in direct opposition to the cultural norms that attempt to define her identity exclusively through motherhood. As a result, the themes help explain that Edna's transformation represents not only a personal change but also a symbolic challenge to the patriarchal values present in her society.

4.3.2. Motifs

Motifs are recurring elements that appear throughout a literary work and reinforce its central ideas. In *The Awakening*, motifs help illustrate Edna's internal conflict and emotional transformation. These recurring elements reflect her psychological development and her desire for independence. The motifs identified in this investigation are directly related to her awakening process. They provide insight into her emotional state and personal growth. The following table presents the most relevant motifs found in the novel.

Table 5. Motifs of the novel

Motif	Quote	Analysis
The sea	<p>“The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring.” (chapter VI, p.15)</p>	<p>The word “seductive” suggests temptation and liberation. Each time Edna hears the sea, she experiences emotional transformation. The sea functions as a recurring</p>

		<p>reminder of freedom. From a feminist perspective, it represents an alternative to domestic confinement. Psychologically, it symbolizes the unconscious desire for independence. The sea's constant presence mirrors her growing awareness.</p>
Crying	<p>“She began to cry softly.” (chapter III, p.9)</p>	<p>Crying appears during moments of emotional conflict. It represents vulnerability and confusion. Psychologically, crying reflects the release of suppressed emotions. These moments occur when she confronts expectations. Feminist theory would interpret this as the emotional burden of imposed roles. The recurrence of crying highlights her dissatisfaction. It marks stages in her awakening. This motif supports the theme of emotional oppression.</p>

Isolation	“She sat alone in the room. (chapter VII, p. 16)	Isolation recurs throughout the novel as she distances herself from society. Physical separation mirrors emotional independence. However, isolation also creates loneliness. Psychologically, individuation often requires separation from social structures. Feminist analysis suggests that women who challenge norms often experience marginalization. This motif reinforces both empowerment and vulnerability. It foreshadows her final decision. It deepens the complexity of her transformation.
Music	“The very passions themselves were aroused within her soul.” (chapter IX, p. 23)	Music functions as a recurring trigger of emotional awakening. It awakens feelings previously suppressed. The motif emphasizes sensory experience as transformative. From a psychological viewpoint, music accesses unconscious

		<p>desires. Feminist critics argue that artistic expression allows women to access autonomy. Music intensifies her emotional awareness. It strengthens her internal rebellion.</p>
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Table 5. Illustrates the motifs of the novel. Source: Researcher's Creation

The motifs presented in Table 5 reinforce the themes of autonomy and emotional transformation. The recurring presence of these elements reflects the protagonist's evolving identity. Additionally, the motifs illustrate her emotional conflict and her desire for independence. These elements also help the reader understand the depth of her awakening. From a psychological perspective, these motifs represent her internal struggle. Therefore, they play a crucial role in the development of the narrative.

One of the most significant motifs in the novel is the sea. The sea represents freedom, independence, and emotional escape. Throughout the novel, Edna's relationship with the sea reflects her psychological transformation. At the beginning, she fears it, but later she learns to swim, which symbolizes her growing independence. According to Taylor (2024), water often represents transformation and rebirth in literature. Edna's interaction with the sea reflects her emotional awakening.

Another important motif is art. Edna's interest in painting represents her desire for self-expression. Art allows her to explore her identity independently of her maternal role. According to Moi (2015), creative expression allows women to challenge social limitations and define their own identity. Edna's artistic development reflects her attempt to establish autonomy.

The motif of isolation is also present throughout the novel. As Edna becomes more independent, she distances herself from her family and social environment. This isolation reflects the cost of independence. According to Federici (2012), patriarchal societies often isolate women

who challenge traditional roles. This motif reinforces the emotional consequences of her awakening.

The motif of the sea can also be interpreted as a representation of emotional transformation and psychological freedom, particularly in relation to Edna's personal development. At the beginning of the novel, Edna feels afraid of the sea, which reflects her lack of independence and her emotional limitations. However, when she learns to swim, this moment symbolizes her growing confidence and her ability to exist independently. The sea represents a space where she can escape from social expectations and experience personal freedom. This transformation demonstrates her emotional growth and her increasing sense of autonomy. Furthermore, the sea represents the possibility of living outside patriarchal control. Therefore, this motif reinforces the connection between freedom and identity in the novel.

Another important motif is physical separation, which reflects Edna's emotional and psychological independence from her traditional role. As she begins to distance herself from her husband and children, her physical separation symbolizes her rejection of social expectations. This distance represents her desire to create her own identity and to exist as an individual rather than as a social role. Physical space becomes a representation of personal autonomy and self-definition. This motif demonstrates that independence requires both emotional and physical separation from restrictive environments. Furthermore, her movement reflects her psychological transformation. Therefore, physical separation reinforces the theme of identity development.

The motifs reinforce the emotional and psychological depth of the protagonist's journey. Their repetition throughout the novel allows the reader to observe the gradual nature of Edna's awakening and understand that her transformation develops progressively rather than suddenly. These recurring elements are important because they provide continuity and emphasize the persistence of her internal conflict between social expectations and personal desires. For example, moments of solitude appear during key stages of her transformation, highlighting her increasing emotional separation from her traditional maternal role. These moments also create spaces in which she can reflect on her identity and recognize her dissatisfaction with her current life. As a result, motifs help illustrate the complexity of her emotional development and reinforce the idea that her awakening is deeply connected to her psychological experience.

Furthermore, motifs serve as indicators of change and allow the reader to identify the different stages of Edna's personal evolution. Each recurrence reflects a shift in her perception of herself and her social position, demonstrating her gradual movement toward independence. This pattern allows the reader to understand that her awakening is not a single event, but an ongoing process influenced by her experiences and emotions. In addition, the repetition of these motifs highlights the tension between her internal desires and the external expectations imposed by society. This tension reinforces the idea that her transformation involves both emotional and social conflict. Therefore, the presence of these motifs strengthens the argument that Edna's development represents a rejection of imposed motherhood and an attempt to construct her own identity.

4.3.4. Symbols of *The Awakening*

Symbols are literary elements that represent abstract ideas and provide deeper meaning to the narrative. In *The Awakening*, symbols are used to represent freedom, oppression, and identity transformation. These symbols help illustrate the protagonist's emotional journey. They also reinforce the feminist interpretation of the novel. Through symbolism, the author communicates complex ideas about female autonomy. The following table presents the main symbols identified in the literary work.

Table 6. Symbols of the novel

Symbols	Quote	Analysis
The Bird	“A green and yellow parrot... hung in a cage.” (chapter I, p. 4)	The caged bird symbolizes confinement. The parrot's inability to escape reflects Edna's situation. Birds traditionally represent freedom. However, this bird is trapped. Feminist interpretation sees this as symbolic of restricted female agency. The cage represents marriage and

		<p>motherhood. This symbol appears at the beginning to foreshadow the narrative. It establishes the central conflict of freedom versus restriction..</p>
The sea	<p>“The touch of the sea is sensuous.” (Chapter X, p. 27)</p>	<p>The sea symbolizes rebirth and sensual freedom. Its physical touch awakens bodily awareness. This contrasts with the restrictive domestic space. Psychologically, water represents transformation. Feminist theory views this as liberation from patriarchal identity. The sea becomes a space where she experiences autonomy. It ultimately becomes the setting of her final act.</p>
Wedding rings	<p>“He took the rings from his vest pocket.” (Chapter I, p.6)</p>	<p>The rings symbolize marital obligation. They represent legal and social bonds. Marriage is shown as restrictive rather than romantic. Feminist theory explains marriage as institutional control. The ring becomes a symbol of</p>

		possession. It reinforces the theme of patriarchy.
The pigeon house	“Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength.” (XXVII, p.76)	The pigeon house symbolizes independence. It represents her attempt to live alone. Moving there signifies rejection of domestic expectations. However, it remains small and limited. Psychologically, it reflects partial autonomy. It shows both empowerment and limitation.

Table 4. Illustrates the symbols of the novel. Source: Researcher's Creation

One of the most important symbols in the novel is the bird. Birds appear throughout the story and represent both freedom and limitation. At the beginning, the caged bird symbolizes Edna's restricted life. She is physically and socially confined by her role as a wife and mother. According to Elz (2022), the bird imagery reflects Edna's desire for freedom. Later in the novel, birds represent her emotional transformation.

The symbol of the bird is particularly significant because it represents both restriction and freedom, which reflect Edna's emotional situation. At the beginning of the novel, the caged bird represents her limited existence within patriarchal society, where her identity is restricted by her role as a mother and wife. This image reflects her lack of autonomy and her inability to express her authentic self. However, as the novel progresses, birds also symbolize her desire for independence and freedom. This transformation reflects her emotional awakening and her desire to escape social limitations. The bird represents both her oppression and her hope for liberation. Therefore, this symbol reinforces the central themes of identity and autonomy.

Another relevant symbol is Edna's house, which represents her social identity and psychological condition throughout the novel. When she lives with her husband, the house represents her role within the patriarchal family structure. However, when she moves into her own house, this action symbolizes her attempt to create an independent identity. This physical separation represents her emotional independence and her rejection of traditional expectations. The new house represents freedom, autonomy, and self-definition. This symbol demonstrates her psychological transformation. Therefore, the house represents her transition from social conformity to personal independence.

Symbols play a crucial role in the novel because they represent ideas that go beyond the literal events of the story. They allow the reader to understand the protagonist's emotional state on a deeper level. Through symbolism, the narrative communicates the tension between freedom and restriction that defines Edna's experience. These symbols help illustrate her internal conflict and her desire for independence. They also reinforce the themes of autonomy and identity present throughout the novel. As a result, symbols contribute significantly to the overall meaning of the text.

Additionally, symbols help connect the protagonist's internal experience with the external world. Physical spaces and natural elements reflect her emotional transformation and psychological development. This allows the reader to interpret her journey in a more complex way. The symbols also emphasize the contrast between her social role and her personal desires. This contrast reinforces the feminist interpretation of the novel. Therefore, symbolism becomes an essential tool for understanding her awakening.

Furthermore, symbols also represent the limitations imposed by society. They illustrate how her environment influences her emotions and decisions. This reinforces the idea that her struggle is not only personal but also social. The use of symbols helps communicate ideas that cannot be expressed directly through dialogue or action. This makes the narrative more powerful and meaningful. As a result, symbols strengthen the thesis argument and support the interpretation of the novel as a critique of patriarchal motherhood.

CHAPTER V

Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Purpose of the Conclusion

The purpose of this conclusion is to present the final interpretations obtained from the analysis of the literary work *The Awakening*. This section integrates the most important findings of the investigation and explains how they contribute to the understanding of the representation of motherhood in the novel. It also evaluates how the research objectives were achieved through the analysis of themes, motifs, and symbols. By examining these literary elements, it was possible to identify the ways in which the protagonist experiences emotional and psychological transformation. Therefore, this conclusion serves as a synthesis of the entire research process.

Additionally, this chapter aims to demonstrate how the analysis supports the feminist interpretation of the novel. The findings confirm that the protagonist's experience reflects the limitations imposed by patriarchal society. This allows the reader to understand that her conflict is not only personal but also social. The conclusion explains how these findings contribute to the field of feminist literary criticism. In this way, the research highlights the importance of analyzing literature as a reflection of social realities.

Another purpose of this conclusion is to restate the importance of the research problem. The investigation focused on examining how motherhood is represented in the novel and how this representation affects the protagonist's identity. Through the analysis, it became evident that motherhood is presented as a restrictive role. This finding is important because it challenges traditional assumptions about female fulfillment. As a result, the conclusion reinforces the significance of the investigation.

Furthermore, this section explains how the research question was answered. The analysis provided sufficient evidence to understand the relationship between motherhood and female autonomy in the novel. The literary elements examined in the investigation revealed the complexity of the protagonist's experience. This demonstrates that her awakening is closely connected to her rejection of social expectations. Therefore, the research question was successfully addressed.

In addition, this chapter summarizes the contribution of the investigation to literary studies. The research provides a deeper understanding of the feminist message present in the novel. It also demonstrates the value of literary analysis as a method for examining cultural norms. This contribution is important because it expands the interpretation of the literary work. Consequently, the investigation offers new perspectives on the representation of motherhood.

Another important purpose of this conclusion is to reflect on the protagonist's transformation. Her development throughout the novel illustrates the emotional impact of social restrictions. This transformation represents her attempt to gain independence and personal identity. The conclusion highlights the importance of this transformation within the feminist interpretation of the novel. This reinforces the main argument of the investigation.

Finally, this chapter provides recommendations for future research. These recommendations are based on the findings obtained during the investigation. They suggest possible areas for further analysis related to feminist literature. This is important because it encourages continued academic discussion. Therefore, the conclusion not only summarizes the investigation but also promotes future research.

5.2. Conclusions

5.2.1 To identify the social expectations and characteristics of nineteenth-century motherhood as depicted in *The Awakening*

This objective was successfully achieved through the analysis of the protagonist's experience as a mother within the social context presented in the novel. The investigation identified that nineteenth-century motherhood was characterized by self-sacrifice, emotional devotion, and complete dedication to the family. Women were expected to prioritize their children and husbands above their personal needs and desires. These expectations were reinforced by cultural norms that defined motherhood as the most important role in a woman's life. This demonstrates that motherhood functioned as a social obligation rather than a personal choice.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that society expected mothers to find fulfillment and happiness exclusively within their maternal role. Women who did not conform to these expectations were often judged and misunderstood. In the case of the protagonist, her emotional

distance from traditional motherhood highlights the pressure imposed by these social norms. This allowed the researcher to identify the restrictive nature of these expectations. Therefore, the objective was achieved by clearly identifying these characteristics in the literary work.

Additionally, the investigation showed that motherhood was closely connected to female identity during the nineteenth century. Women were not perceived as independent individuals but primarily as mothers and wives. This limited their opportunities for personal development and self-expression. The protagonist's internal conflict illustrates the psychological impact of these limitations. This confirms that motherhood was used to define and control women's roles in society.

Moreover, the research identified that social expectations discouraged female autonomy. Women were expected to be obedient and dependent on their husbands. This restricted their ability to make independent decisions. The protagonist's desire for independence directly conflicts with these expectations. This reinforces the conclusion that nineteenth-century motherhood limited female autonomy.

The analysis also demonstrated that these social expectations created emotional conflict for women who did not fully accept their maternal role. The protagonist experiences feelings of dissatisfaction and frustration because of these pressures. This emotional conflict highlights the difference between social expectations and personal identity. It also emphasizes the psychological consequences of imposed motherhood. Therefore, the investigation successfully identified these social expectations.

In addition, the research confirmed that these expectations were supported by patriarchal values. These values reinforced the idea that women existed primarily to serve their families. This prevented women from developing independent identities. The protagonist's awakening represents her rejection of these values. This further confirms the findings of the investigation.

Finally, this objective was achieved because the investigation clearly identified and analyzed the social expectations and characteristics of nineteenth-century motherhood. The literary analysis provided sufficient evidence to support this conclusion. The findings demonstrated that motherhood was presented as a restrictive and socially imposed role. This

contributes to the overall argument of the research. Therefore, this objective was successfully accomplished.

5.2.2 To compare the portrayal of motherhood in *The Awakening* with contemporary feminist perspectives on maternal identity and autonomy

This objective was successfully achieved by analyzing the protagonist's experience and comparing it with feminist perspectives regarding motherhood and female autonomy. The investigation demonstrated that the portrayal of motherhood in the novel reflects many of the concerns addressed by feminist theory. These concerns include the limitation of female identity, the restriction of personal freedom, and the expectation of maternal self-sacrifice. Feminist perspectives argue that motherhood should not define the entirety of a woman's identity. This comparison allowed the researcher to identify similarities between the literary work and feminist ideas.

Furthermore, the analysis revealed that both the novel and feminist theory emphasize the importance of female autonomy. The protagonist's desire to develop her own identity reflects the feminist belief that women should have the freedom to make their own choices. This includes the ability to define themselves beyond their maternal role. The investigation showed that her emotional conflict represents the struggle for independence. Therefore, the objective was achieved by identifying this connection.

Additionally, feminist perspectives highlight that motherhood can become restrictive when it is socially imposed. This idea is clearly reflected in the protagonist's experience throughout the novel. She feels limited by the expectations associated with her maternal role. This demonstrates that her experience aligns with feminist critiques of traditional motherhood. As a result, the investigation confirmed the relevance of feminist theory to the analysis.

Moreover, the comparison revealed that both the novel and feminist theory question the idealization of motherhood. Traditional views present motherhood as a natural and fulfilling experience for all women. However, feminist perspectives recognize that this experience can be complex and challenging. The protagonist's dissatisfaction reflects this reality. This supports the feminist interpretation of the literary work.

The investigation also demonstrated that feminist theory helps explain the protagonist's emotional transformation. Her awakening represents her recognition of her own identity and desires. This reflects the feminist emphasis on self-awareness and independence. The comparison allowed the researcher to better understand her actions. Therefore, feminist theory provided an important framework for the analysis.

In addition, the research confirmed that the novel presents ideas that remain relevant in contemporary feminist discussions. Issues such as identity, autonomy, and social expectations continue to be important topics. This demonstrates the lasting significance of the literary work. It also shows that feminist theory enhances the interpretation of the novel. This strengthens the conclusions of the investigation.

Finally, this objective was successfully achieved because the investigation clearly compared the portrayal of motherhood in the novel with feminist perspectives. The analysis demonstrated that both address similar concerns regarding female autonomy and identity. This comparison contributed to a deeper understanding of the literary work. It also supported the feminist interpretation of the protagonist's experience. Therefore, this objective was fully accomplished.

5.2.3 To evaluate Edna Pontellier's relationship with motherhood and her rejection of traditional maternal roles within a patriarchal society

This objective was successfully achieved through the analysis of Edna Pontellier and her experience as a mother in *The Awakening*. The investigation revealed that her relationship with motherhood is complex and marked by emotional distance. Unlike the traditional maternal ideal, she does not fully identify with the expectations imposed upon her. This allows the reader to understand that her experience differs from the socially accepted model of motherhood. Therefore, the objective was achieved by examining her emotional and psychological response to her maternal role.

Furthermore, the analysis demonstrated that her rejection of traditional motherhood develops gradually throughout the novel. At the beginning of the story, she fulfills her maternal responsibilities, but she does not experience complete emotional satisfaction. As she becomes more aware of her individual identity, she begins to question these expectations. This

questioning represents the beginning of her rejection of traditional roles. This confirms that her transformation is a progressive process.

Additionally, the investigation showed that her rejection of motherhood is closely connected to her desire for autonomy. She begins to prioritize her personal needs and emotional independence. This behavior challenges the patriarchal belief that women should dedicate their lives entirely to their children. Her actions demonstrate her attempt to gain control over her own identity. This reinforces the conclusion that she resists traditional expectations.

Moreover, the research revealed that patriarchal society plays a significant role in shaping her experience. Social norms attempt to define her identity exclusively through motherhood. This limits her opportunities for self-expression and independence. Her rejection of these norms represents an act of resistance against patriarchal control. This confirms that her experience reflects a broader social conflict.

The analysis also demonstrated that her emotional conflict is a result of these social pressures. She experiences feelings of dissatisfaction and isolation because she does not conform to traditional expectations. This emotional struggle highlights the psychological impact of patriarchal motherhood. It also illustrates the difficulty of achieving autonomy within a restrictive society. Therefore, the investigation successfully evaluated her relationship with motherhood.

In addition, her transformation represents her search for personal identity. She begins to recognize that her role as a mother does not fully define her as an individual. This realization motivates her to seek independence and self-definition. Her actions reflect her rejection of imposed limitations. This supports the feminist interpretation of the novel.

Finally, this objective was successfully accomplished because the investigation clearly evaluated her relationship with motherhood and her rejection of traditional roles. The literary analysis provided sufficient evidence to support these conclusions. The findings demonstrated that her experience reflects the limitations imposed by patriarchal society. This contributes to the overall argument of the investigation. Therefore, this objective was fully achieved.

5.3 Restatement of the Research Question

The research question of this investigation focused on analyzing how motherhood is represented in *The Awakening* and how this representation influences the protagonist's identity and autonomy within a patriarchal society. This question guided the entire research process and provided the foundation for the literary analysis conducted in this study. By examining the protagonist's experiences, it became possible to understand the relationship between motherhood and female identity. The research question also allowed the investigator to explore the emotional and psychological impact of social expectations. Therefore, it served as an essential element for the development of the investigation.

Based on the results of the analysis, it can be concluded that motherhood is portrayed as a socially constructed role rather than a purely natural or instinctive experience. The protagonist's emotional reactions demonstrate that her maternal role is influenced by external expectations and cultural norms. This confirms that motherhood is shaped by the patriarchal values present in her society. The investigation revealed that these values limit her personal freedom and independence. As a result, the research question was successfully addressed through the findings.

Furthermore, the investigation demonstrated that the protagonist's identity is deeply affected by her role as a mother. She experiences internal conflict because she does not fully identify with the traditional expectations imposed upon her. This conflict highlights the tension between social obligation and personal desire. Her emotional struggle reflects her attempt to define herself as an individual. Therefore, the research question helped explain the connection between motherhood and identity.

In addition, the analysis revealed that the protagonist's awakening represents her recognition of these social limitations. Her transformation reflects her growing awareness of her own desires and individuality. This awakening is directly connected to her rejection of traditional maternal expectations. The research confirmed that her experience represents a process of self-discovery. This finding provides a clear answer to the research question.

Moreover, the investigation showed that literary elements such as themes, motifs, and symbols play an important role in representing motherhood. These elements help communicate the emotional complexity of the protagonist's experience. They also provide insight into her

psychological development. This allowed the researcher to better understand the meaning of her transformation. Therefore, the research question was answered through detailed literary analysis.

Additionally, the findings confirmed that the representation of motherhood in the novel challenges traditional social beliefs. Instead of presenting motherhood as a completely fulfilling experience, the novel presents it as restrictive. This challenges the idealized image of maternal identity. It also supports the feminist interpretation of the literary work. This reinforces the conclusions of the investigation.

Finally, the research question was fully answered because the investigation provided sufficient evidence to explain the relationship between motherhood and female autonomy. The analysis demonstrated that motherhood plays a significant role in shaping the protagonist's identity and emotional state. It also revealed that her awakening represents her resistance to patriarchal expectations. These findings confirm the importance of the research question. Therefore, the investigation successfully achieved its main objective.

5.4 Unexpected Results

During the development of this investigation, several unexpected results emerged that contributed to a deeper understanding of the literary work. One of the most significant unexpected findings was the extent of the protagonist's emotional resistance to motherhood. While motherhood was socially presented as a natural and fulfilling role, the analysis revealed that the protagonist experienced emotional distance from her children. This was unexpected because traditional cultural narratives often assume a strong emotional bond between mother and child. This finding allowed the researcher to recognize the complexity of her maternal identity.

Another unexpected result was the intensity of the protagonist's internal conflict. The investigation revealed that her emotional struggle was not only related to motherhood but also to her broader search for identity. This demonstrated that her dissatisfaction was deeply connected to her lack of personal autonomy. This finding provided new insight into her psychological development. Therefore, the analysis expanded beyond the initial expectations of the research.

Furthermore, the investigation revealed that the protagonist's awakening was strongly connected to her awareness of social limitations. This was unexpected because her transformation was influenced not only by personal emotions but also by external social

pressures. This demonstrated that her experience was shaped by her environment. This finding emphasized the importance of social context in literary analysis. As a result, the investigation provided a more comprehensive interpretation of the novel.

Additionally, another unexpected finding was the relevance of feminist theory to the interpretation of the novel. Although the novel was written in the nineteenth century, its themes reflect issues that are still discussed in contemporary feminist studies. This demonstrates the lasting significance of the literary work. This also confirms the importance of feminist theory as an analytical framework. Therefore, this unexpected result strengthened the investigation.

The investigation also revealed the importance of symbols in representing the protagonist's emotional state. While symbols were initially considered supportive elements, their analysis demonstrated their central role in the narrative. These symbols provided deeper insight into her psychological experience. This allowed the researcher to better understand her transformation. Therefore, symbolism became more important than originally expected.

Moreover, the research revealed that the protagonist's rejection of traditional roles was more gradual than anticipated. Her transformation occurred through a series of emotional and psychological changes. This demonstrated the complexity of her awakening. This finding emphasized the importance of analyzing character development. Therefore, this result contributed to the depth of the investigation.

Finally, these unexpected results contributed positively to the overall research. They allowed the researcher to develop a deeper and more complete interpretation of the novel. These findings also highlighted the complexity of motherhood as a literary theme. This reinforces the importance of literary analysis. Therefore, the unexpected results strengthened the conclusions of the investigation.

5.5 Recommendations

Based on the findings of this investigation, several recommendations can be made for future research. First, it is recommended that future studies continue to analyze the representation of motherhood in literary works. This can provide a deeper understanding of female identity and social expectations. Literature offers valuable insight into cultural norms. Therefore, this topic remains important for academic research.

Another recommendation is to apply feminist literary theory to the analysis of other literary texts. This would allow researchers to compare different representations of motherhood. Such comparisons could help identify common patterns and differences. This would contribute to feminist literary studies. Therefore, this recommendation could expand academic knowledge.

Additionally, future research could focus on the psychological development of female characters. This would help researchers understand the emotional impact of social expectations. This type of analysis could provide deeper insight into literary characters. It would also strengthen literary interpretation. Therefore, this is an important recommendation.

Furthermore, researchers should continue to analyze the use of symbols, motifs, and themes in literary works. These elements provide important information about character development. They also help communicate deeper meanings. This improves the quality of literary analysis. Therefore, this recommendation is valuable.

Another recommendation is to analyze literary works from different historical periods. This would allow researchers to understand how the representation of motherhood has changed over time. This could provide a broader perspective on the topic. This would contribute to historical and literary studies. Therefore, this is an important area for future research.

In addition, it is recommended that students use literary analysis to explore social issues. Literature reflects real social experiences and cultural values. This makes it a valuable research tool. This also helps develop critical thinking skills. Therefore, literary research should continue to be encouraged.

Finally, it is recommended that future investigations continue to explore feminist perspectives in literature. This can help promote a better understanding of gender roles and identity. It also contributes to academic discussion. This strengthens literary studies. Therefore, this recommendation is important for future research.

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