

TOWARD A "VARIORIUM"  
(OR COMPREHENSIVELY ANNOTATED)  
EDITION OF KATE CHOPIN'S  
*THE AWAKENING*

By

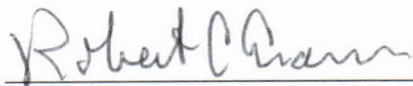
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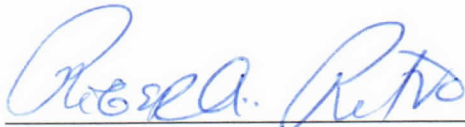
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## INTRODUCTION

### I. Explanation and Justification of a Variorum- Edition

The main goal of this thesis is to contribute to preparing a complete, comprehensive, greatly detailed variorum (or extensively annotated) edition of Kate Chopin's significant novel *The Awakening*. Variorum editions have a long and highly regarded history in the field of literary studies, and heavily annotated editions of primary texts are common in other disciplines. Annotated bibliographies are usual in almost every field of scholarship, but a variorum edition tends to be far more detailed and complete than even the best annotated bibliographies. This is because a variorum edition of a text comments on almost *every* detail *ever* cited by *any* commentator on the primary text. In literary studies, classic variorum editions include, for example, the ones of Shakespeare's works prepared in the late nineteenth century under the direction of Horace Furness (editions which are currently being revised and reissued by the Modern Language Association). The best recent example of a variorum edition of the sort proposed here -- and the best model of the kind of work I set out to do in this thesis -- is the variorum edition of the works of John Donne currently being issued in massive volumes published by Indiana University Press under the general editorship of Gary A. Stringer. The Donne variorum edition provides a comprehensive account of what has been said about practically every line of every poem written by Donne, taking its annotations from the thousands of pieces of critical commentary that have accumulated since the poems first began to circulate in the late 1590s. The Donne variorum edition has been the work of a

team of scores of scholars laboring for more than two decades, and of course my own thesis cannot -- and does not -- hope to provide anything nearly so complete. Instead, my thesis attempts to make a significant contribution toward a larger project of preparing a thoroughly annotated variorum edition of *The Awakening*.

Because no single person could possibly hope to offer, in a single master's thesis, a completely annotated variorum edition of *The Awakening*, I have had to limit my focus to a more manageable body of commentary. I have chosen to focus on commentary mainly published during the late 1980s and the 1990s for several reasons:

- \* One annotated bibliography already exists of pre-1975 commentary; it was prepared by Marlene Springer. (Unfortunately, this bibliography, like most such works, is very skimpily annotated.)

- \* Commentary published in the 1970s and early 1980s has already often been summarized, if only in very general fashion, several times (see Green and Caudle 57-59). Such commentary has also often been widely reprinted and is thus more easily available to many readers than the most recent commentary happens to be.

- \* Another annotated bibliography, prepared by Suzanne Disheroon Green and David J. Caudle and published within the last few years, does cover post-1975 material, and the annotations it provides are somewhat more detailed than the ones provided in the earlier (pre-1975) annotated bibliography. However, neither this new bibliography nor any existing piece of scholarship does what my thesis tries to do: provide a detailed, chapter-by-chapter, paragraph-by-paragraph account of a significant portion of Chopin scholarship.

\* Another reason for focusing on more recent scholarship is that the authors of such commentary are often reacting to the work of earlier students of Chopin. They quote from that earlier work extensively, and they either agree with its arguments, disagree with them, or offer new arguments of their own. Thus, the value of focusing on the most recent scholarship rather than on earlier work is that the most recent scholarship in a sense subsumes or contains the earlier work. By focusing on the most recent work, I have been able to educate myself about both the latest and the most traditional aspects of Chopin criticism. If, instead, I had focused only on the earlier work, I would have been confining myself to work that still has much value but that has often been superseded.

Like the Donne variorum, my thesis not only provides detailed annotations of thousands of specific sentences in Chopin's novel, but it also offers general annotations on various broader topics, such as characters, themes, imagery, symbolism, etc.

Having now explained the purpose of the following thesis, I should perhaps address an even more basic question: why devote so much intensive attention to one novel?

## II. Goals, Value, Methods, and Focus of the Present Work

Kate Chopin was a woman ahead of her time. She had the foresight to be able to feel and understand the potential that women possess to be far more than dominated, subservient housewives, and then she wrote about it. When she wrote her great novel *The Awakening* in the late 1800s, the book was considered scandalous. She was ostracized by

much of the literary world, and most of her writings were ignored throughout the twentieth century. However, although she has not always been recognized as one of the foremost writers of American literature, she is now considered one of the most important American authors of her time. Her short stories are amazing -- twisting and turning in ways that mesmerize the reader and usually surprise him or her at the end. Widely considered her most important novel, *The Awakening* has, since its rediscovery in the 1960s, been especially popular with casual readers as well as with academic critics. Often thought to be a book understood only by women, it is now enjoyed and studied by persons of both genders with equal approval.

In the thirty years since *The Awakening* was "rediscovered," hundreds of articles and many books have been written about it. One problem, though, is that serious readers seeking convenient access to all these interpretive ideas and critical analyses have had only a few options: either they must themselves read through all the published secondary material, a process which is terribly time-consuming even for the most committed student and also pragmatically difficult (since it is virtually impossible to locate everything in print); or they must rely on annotated bibliographies that summarize the material in an inadequate and/or selective manner; or they must rely on a few general books that summarize the material in only a cursory manner. All three methods leave the truly interested reader -- the reader who wants to know as much as possible about Chopin's book -- frustrated in his or her search for meaning.

The main purpose of this thesis, then, has been to begin to help make readily available an edition of Chopin's great novel that also makes easily accessible the best

critical insights about the specific details of her work. Such an edition will benefit a variety of readers in a variety of ways. For the undergraduate student, the edition will serve as a guide to understanding the novel, but it will also (perhaps even more importantly) teach him or her how to read *any* work more closely to find deeper meanings than the ones communicated by the simple words on the page. The edition will therefore also help teach such undergraduate readers how to analyze literature critically. For the graduate student, the edition will serve as a comprehensive overview of an enormous amount of critical analysis, thereby allowing him or her to see what has already been done and thus prevent the tendency toward repetition that is so common in so much scholarship in so many disciplines. For the professional academic critic, the edition will serve as a useful compendium of critical analyses by combining the comments of hundreds of acclaimed critics into one volume, again saving scholars from the danger of reinventing the wheel, not to mention the frustration of not having access to needed materials. For the casual reader, the edition will serve as a supplement to the novel, explaining many of its details while also providing insights into the mind of Chopin.

### III. Format of the Thesis

In working on this project, I have combed through scores of articles written about *The Awakening*, focusing especially (for reasons already mentioned) on critical work done since the late 1980s and especially during the 1990s. In particular, I have focused on book-length anthologies of criticism offering mainly new (i.e., previously unpublished)

material. I chose this focus partly in order to make sure that I would be exposed to as many different approaches to the novel as possible. My thesis annotates particular passages from *The Awakening*, reporting what different critics have had to say about each passage. I used a digitized version of the novel to search for specific words, phrases or passages on which critics had commented, and then I briefly summarized and paraphrased what the critics have said about those specific words, phrases or passages. The summaries are given as endnotes placed at the conclusion of each chapter of *The Awakening*, with each critic's comments listed in chronological order. Each paragraph of the novel has been numbered, with the chapter number followed by the paragraph number within that chapter. For instance, for the fifth paragraph in the second chapter, the reference number is "2.5." The number of each paragraph in the novel is "mirrored" (potentially, at least) by an endnote with a corresponding number. Summaries of critics' comments on each paragraph are included in the appropriate endnote.

The following sample annotation (using only one critic as an example) illustrates the format of the thesis:

**[39.23]** The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.

**[39.23]** (Seyersted 1969): This lyrical passage returns to the bird symbolism used from the very beginning of the book. The injured bird symbolizes the vulnerability of female (unlike male [see 9.18]) aspirations for freedom (159).

**[39.24]** Edna had found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

**[39.25]** She put it on, leaving her clothing in the bath-house. But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

**[39.24-25]** (Seyersted 1969): This passage echoes 9.18 and 27.12. Edna now understands more fully the comment made by Mlle. Reisz in 27.12 (159).

**[39.26]** How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

**[39.26]** (Seyersted 1969): The disrobing symbolizes a rebirth into freedom from standard morality (159).

**[39.27]** The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

**[39.27]** (Seyersted 1969): This passage symbolizes Edna's ensuing union with the universe, like Venus "returning to the foam," just as the novel comes full circle (160).

**[39.33]** She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

**[39.33]** (Seyersted 1969): This paragraph echoes 7.23; both passages



suggest how Edna (and women) are entrapped by nature (symbolized by the fertilizing bees) and patriarchy (symbolized by the spurs). The sea symbolizes the all-encompassing erotic instinct from which humans can never escape, and it also suggests the gap that now divides men and women (190). The final paragraph refrains from sentimental pity or melodrama; instead, Chopin lifts Edna to the dignity of a symbol (161).

In addition to annotating particular passages from the novel, this thesis also includes several general comments from critics on topics such as the book's characters, themes, style, tone, etc. The following sample illustrates the kind of general commentary included:

**ADELE** (Seyersted 1969): Adele is Edna's foil, especially as a mother, but she does sometimes use her children to win social recognition and approval. Generally, though, she represents the Biblical ideal of womanhood (154). Adele appeals to men because, by seeming weak, she appeals to the male need to seem strong (148).

**CHILDREN, EDNA'S=S** (Seyersted 1969): The boys are not fully individualized or given very complex motives; their speech is never presented, and they are depicted mainly as burdens on Edna's time and attention (154).

**EDNA** (Seyersted 1969): Edna kept her early passions hidden even from the men who motivated them (134). Chopin's brother-in-law thought Edna had been modeled on a real Creole woman, although no surviving evidence confirms this claim (137). In creating Edna, Chopin combines a contemporary American emphasis on a woman's freedom to choose an appropriate mate with a contemporary French sensuality. She also juxtaposes Edna not with the conventional brunette seductress but with a well regarded mother figure who adheres to conventional morals (140). At first Edna is motivated less by feminism than by romantic passion (141). Edna seems unconnected with Christianity and is twice described moving away from church services (154). The whole novel revolves around her and is presented almost entirely from her point of view. Chopin's own tone toward Edna is generally objective; she neither praises nor condemns her main character (161). Although Chopin employs touches of comedy and irony in dealing with the other characters, her treatment of Edna is fundamentally serious (161).

**EDNA'S DEATH** (Seyersted 1969): Edna commits suicide (a valid choice) because she cannot reconcile her desire for freedom with her commitment to her children. Her death is motivated less by social pressures than by her loss of illusions about ideal love, as in 38.10 (146-47). Her

death symbolizes her freedom but also her failure to reconcile her own self-centered impulses with her social context (149). It results from her clear realization of her own position in life and, in that sense, is a victory, a refusal to submit to her conditions (150). By dying, she takes control of her fate even while facing something that seems inevitable and that therefore matters to others besides herself (158).

**HISTORICAL CONTEXTS** (Seyersted 1969): The differences between Chopin's novel and Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* reflects differences in nineteenth-century French and American societies, particularly in the positions of girls and in attitudes toward marriage (139-40). Divorces were far less common in Louisiana than elsewhere in the United States (144).

**IMAGERY** (Seyersted 1969): The sun is repeatedly associated with eroticism (152). Chopin reinforces meanings by repeating and varying images (162).

**LADY IN BLACK** (Seyersted 1969): The fact that she often trails and observes the young lovers connects even this character with the eroticism of the novel as a whole (153).

**LEONCE** (Seyersted 1969): Leonce is ambitious and materialistic (134).

**Mlle. REISZ** (Seyersted 1969): Mlle. Reisz, another character counterpointed with Edna, is as far from the Biblical ideal of a woman as Adele is close to that ideal. But at least Mlle. Reisz exercises an autonomy that Edna finds attractive, although even she indulges in worship of great men (154-55).

**SETTING** (Seyersted 1969): Maupassant's short story "Réveil" is similar in basic plot to Chopin's novel, which also resembles Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* in various details (although Chopin's story is distinctive in tone and details) (138-39).

**STRUCTURE** (Seyersted 1969): Although many writers of short stories write disjointed novels, in *The Awakening* nearly everything contributes to the book as a whole, partly because of Chopin's sharp focus on Edna and on her psychological development (150).

**STYLE** (Seyersted 1969): Although Chopin's lyrical style has sometimes been criticized as excessive, it seems generally restrained and appropriate to her theme and sometimes befits Edna's own romantic impulses. Although Chopin's style is not daring, it is clear, simple, and precise and seems appropriate to her objective tone (162).

**TECHNIQUE** (Seyersted 1969): Chopin's impressionism is typified by the ways she uses images of the Gulf to imply Edna's moods (162).

**THEMES** (Seyersted 1969): By the conclusion of the novel, Edna has arrived at an outlook that resembles twentieth-century existentialism, with its emphasis on the loneliness of human freedom. Such freedom is especially hard for a woman to attain and exercise (147-48). Chopin implies that women's desires for freedom cannot be truly successful (149). Passion is an important theme in this novel, with its focus on literal and metaphorical births (153).

**TITLE** (Seyersted 1969): The title is appropriate to the themes of "sleep- (or drowsiness-) awakening and bewilderment-understanding" which recur, in varying forms, throughout the novel (158).

**TONE** (Seyersted 1969): Although Edna is seduced by the Creole Alcée, Chopin refuses to make her a victim of a "foreign" sensuality; her urges are innate (142). Throughout the work, Chopin balances pessimism and vitality (162).

#### IV. Conclusion

The thesis as a whole, then, consists of an annotated version of *The Awakening*. Although the thesis is not be able to report *all* the commentary that has been generated about the novel since its first publication, it does make a substantial contribution to such a comprehensive project. As mentioned earlier, I focused especially on edited volumes including diverse essays, so that I would be exposed to a wide range of critical styles and opinions. As was also mentioned earlier, I have focused on recent rather than earlier criticism, so that I would be exposed, through such reading, not only to standard critical insights but also to the ways in which those insights have recently been questioned, challenged, or extended. The thesis concludes with a section in which I discuss, in general terms, the findings of my survey of so much recent commentary on Chopin's novel.

Ideally, my thesis will help make not only Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, but also some of the best insights about it, more accessible to a wide range of readers, thereby allowing a more gratifying experience in the reading and/or the studying of this marvelous work of an extremely talented woman author. My hope is that this thesis will help ensure that Kate Chopin will continue to be recognized as an exceptionally talented author and as a woman who was indeed ahead of her time.

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## THE AWAKENING

by Kate Chopin

### CHAPTER 1

[1.1] A green and yellow parrot, which hung in a cage outside the door, kept repeating over and over:

[1.2] *"Allez vous-en! Allez vous-en! Sapristi! That's all right!"*

[1.3] He could speak a little Spanish, and also a language which nobody understood, unless it was the mocking-bird that hung on the other side of the door, whistling his fluty notes out upon the breeze with maddening persistence.

[1.4] Mr. Pontellier, unable to read his newspaper with any degree of comfort, arose with an expression and an exclamation of disgust. He walked down the gallery and across the narrow "bridges" which connected the Lebrun cottages one with the other. He had been seated before the door of the main house. The parrot and the mockingbird were the property of Madame Lebrun, and they had the right to make all the noise they wished. Mr. Pontellier had the privilege of quitting their society when they ceased to be entertaining.

**[1.5]** He stopped before the door of his own cottage, which was the fourth one from the main building and next to the last. Seating himself in a wicker rocker which was there, he once more applied himself to the task of reading the newspaper. The day was Sunday; the paper was a day old. The Sunday papers had not yet reached Grand Isle. He was already acquainted with the market reports, and he glanced restlessly over the editorials and bits of news which he had not had time to read before quitting New Orleans the day before.

**[1.6]** Mr. Pontellier wore eye-glasses. He was a man of forty, of medium height and rather slender build; he stooped a little. His hair was brown and straight, parted on one side. His beard was neatly and closely trimmed.

**[1.7]** Once in a while he withdrew his glance from the newspaper and looked about him. There was more noise than ever over at the house. The main building was called "the house," to distinguish it from the cottages. The chattering and whistling birds were still at it. Two young girls, the Farival twins, were playing a duet from "Zampa" upon the piano. Madame Lebrun was bustling in and out, giving orders in a high key to a yard-boy whenever she got inside the house, and directions in an equally high voice to a dining-room servant whenever she got outside. She was a fresh, pretty woman, clad always in white with elbow sleeves. Her starched skirts crinkled as she came and went. Farther down, before one of the cottages, a lady in black was walking demurely up and down, telling her beads. A good many persons of the *pension* had gone over to the *Chênrière Caminada* in Beaudelet's lugger to hear mass. Some young

people were out under the wateroaks playing croquet. Mr. Pontellier's two children were there sturdy little fellows of four and five. A quadroon nurse followed them about with a faraway, meditative air.

**[1.8]** Mr. Pontellier finally lit a cigar and began to smoke, letting the paper drag idly from his hand. He fixed his gaze upon a white sunshade that was advancing at snail's pace from the beach. He could see it plainly between the gaunt trunks of the water-oaks and across the stretch of yellow camomile. The gulf looked far away, melting hazily into the blue of the horizon. The sunshade continued to approach slowly. Beneath its pink-lined shelter were his wife, Mrs. Pontellier, and young Robert Lebrun. When they reached the cottage, the two seated themselves with some appearance of fatigue upon the upper step of the porch, facing each other, each leaning against a supporting post.

**[1.9]** "What folly! to bathe at such an hour in such heat!" exclaimed Mr. Pontellier. He himself had taken a plunge at daylight. That was why the morning seemed long to him.

**[1.10]** "You are burnt beyond recognition," he added, looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of personal property which has suffered some damage. She held up her hands, strong, shapely hands, and surveyed them critically, drawing up her fawn sleeves above the wrists. Looking at them reminded her of her rings, which she had given to her husband before leaving for the beach. She silently reached out to him, and he, understanding, took the rings from his vest pocket and dropped them into her open palm. She slipped

them upon her fingers; then clasping her knees, she looked across at Robert and began to laugh. The rings sparkled upon her fingers. He sent back an answering smile.

**[1.11]** "What is it?" asked Pontellier, looking lazily and amused from one to the other. It was some utter nonsense; some adventure out there in the water, and they both tried to relate it at once. It did not seem half so amusing when told. They realized this, and so did Mr. Pontellier. He yawned and stretched himself. Then he got up, saying he had half a mind to go over to Klein's hotel and play a game of billiards.

**[1.12]** "Come go along, Lebrun," he proposed to Robert. But Robert admitted quite frankly that he preferred to stay where he was and talk to Mrs. Pontellier.

**[1.13]** "Well, send him about his business when he bores you, Edna," instructed her husband as he prepared to leave.

**[1.14]** "Here, take the umbrella," she exclaimed, holding it out to him. He accepted the sunshade, and lifting it over his head descended the steps and walked away.

**[1.15]** "Coming back to dinner?" his wife called after him. He halted a moment and shrugged his shoulders. He felt in his vest pocket; there was a ten-dollar bill there. He did not know; perhaps he would return for the early dinner and perhaps he would not. It all depended upon the company which he found over at Klein's and the size of "the game." He did not say this, but she



understood it, and laughed, nodding good-by to him.

**[1.16]** Both children wanted to follow their father when they saw him starting out. He kissed them and promised to bring them back bonbons and peanuts.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 1

**[1.1]** (Gilmore 1988): The repetitions in the final lines of the book bring the reader's mind back to the parrot in the opening (81). (Greer 1989): 55. (Block 1995): 207.

**[1.3]** (Morris and Dunn 1988): 95. (Greer 1989): 55-56. (Block 1995): Like the caged parrot, Edna finds herself being misunderstood (207).

**[1.6]** (Balliwala 1995): 198.

**[1.7]** (Giorcelli 1988): Aline Lebrun is always dressed in white and represents Edna's good fairy (136). (Morris and Dunn 1988): 95.

**[1.8]** (Delbanco 1988): 101. (Jones 1989): The setting of Grand Isle is sensual and

spontaneous, like the lifestyle on the island (59). (Rowe 1989): Edna's appearance through Leonce's cigar smoke begins to establish the groundwork for one of the novel's themes: males gawking at females (13).

[1.9] (Juneja 1995): Leonce's attitude that he owns Edna is reflected in his statement (113). (Tripathi 1995): The very first statement made by Leonce already shows his arrogance (149).

[1.10] (Fox-Genovese 1988): Chopin views marriage as a relationship in which women are treated as objects rather than free individuals (35). (Giorcelli 1988): Leonce does not realize that a "phoenixlike" new identity is about to emerge from Edna's ashes (113). Edna's hands are a symbol of her spirituality (127). Leonce treats his possessions (including Edna) as goods. (Martin 1988): Leonce acts as if Edna's temporarily damaged skin is an asset lost (19). (Sweet-Hurd 1988): 105. (Rowe 1989): When in public, Edna's body is considered an object of desire by Leonce, as well as by her lovers (1-2). The burning of Leonce's cigar is transferred to the burning of Edna's skin; this is the first bodily representation of Edna in the novel (14). (Stange 1989): Leonce's obvious feeling of ownership over Edna serves as Edna's own perception of herself at the opening of the novel (139). (Bande 1995): These first few lines set the tone of the story (160). (Bharathi 1995): 95. (Block 1995): 211. (Juneja 1995): 113-14. (Paul 1995): 49. (Ghosh 1995): 231. (Ramamoorthi 1995): 182. (Stange 1995): Leonce's exaggeration about Edna's tan shows that he thinks he owns her (21). (Tripathi 1995): Leonce's comment irritates Edna

because he speaks as if she is a damaged piece of property (149). (Vevaina 1995): 84.  
(Viswanath 1995): 127.

## CHAPTER 2

**[2.1]** Mrs. Pontellier's eyes were quick and bright; they were a yellowish brown, about the color of her hair. She had a way of turning them swiftly upon an object and holding them there as if lost in some inward maze of contemplation or thought.

**[2.2]** Her eyebrows were a shade darker than her hair. They were thick and almost horizontal, emphasizing the depth of her eyes. She was rather handsome than beautiful. Her face was captivating by reason of a certain frankness of expression and a contradictory subtle play of features. Her manner was engaging.

**[2.3]** Robert rolled a cigarette. He smoked cigarettes because he could not afford cigars, he said. He had a cigar in his pocket which Mr. Pontellier had presented him with, and he was saving it for his after-dinner smoke.

**[2.4]** This seemed quite proper and natural on his part. In coloring he was not unlike his companion. A clean-shaved face made the resemblance

more pronounced than it would otherwise have been. There rested no shadow of care upon his open countenance. His eyes gathered in and reflected the light and languor of the summer day.

**[2.5]** Mrs. Pontellier reached over for a palm-leaf fan that lay on the porch and began to fan herself, while Robert sent between his lips light puffs from his cigarette. They chatted incessantly: about the things around them; their amusing adventure out in the water-it had again assumed its entertaining aspect; about the wind, the trees, the people who had gone to the Chênrière; about the children playing croquet under the oaks, and the Farival twins, who were now performing the overture to "The Poet and the Peasant."

**[2.6]** Robert talked a good deal about himself. He was very young, and did not know any better. Mrs. Pontellier talked a little about herself for the same reason. Each was interested in what the other said. Robert spoke of his intention to go to Mexico in the autumn, where fortune awaited him. He was always intending to go to Mexico, but some way never got there. Meanwhile he held on to his modest position in a mercantile house in New Orleans, where an equal familiarity with English, French and Spanish gave him no small value as a clerk and correspondent.

**[2.7]** He was spending his summer vacation, as he always did, with his mother at Grand Isle. In former times, before Robert could remember, "the house" had been a summer luxury of the Lebruns. Now, flanked by its dozen or more cottages, which were always filled with exclusive visitors from the "*Quartier*

*Français*," it enabled Madame Lebrun to maintain the easy and comfortable existence which appeared to be her birthright.

**[2.8]** Mrs. Pontellier talked about her father's Mississippi plantation and her girlhood home in the old Kentucky bluegrass country. She was an American woman, with a small infusion of French which seemed to have been lost in dilution. She read a letter from her sister, who was away in the East, and who had engaged herself to be married. Robert was interested, and wanted to know what manner of girls the sisters were, what the father was like, and how long the mother had been dead.

**[2.9]** When Mrs. Pontellier folded the letter it was time for her to dress for the early dinner.

**[2.10]** "I see Léonce isn't coming back," she said, with a glance in the direction whence her husband had disappeared. Robert supposed he was not, as there were a good many New Orleans club men over at Klein's.

**[2.11]** When Mrs. Pontellier left him to enter her room, the young man descended the steps and strolled over toward the croquet players, where, during the half-hour before dinner, he amused himself with the little Pontellier children, who were very fond of him.

[2.1] (Bauer and Lakritz 1988): While Leonce views Edna as simply a piece of property, the narrator describes Edna in entirely another way, showing her as a beautiful, complex woman (50). (Giorcelli 1988): Even the description of Edna here indicates that she is neither simply attractive nor simply thoughtful, but rather falls somewhere in between these two possibilities (112; 119). (Showalter 1988): 49. (Bande 1995): 163.

[2.2] (Bauer and Lakritz 1988): Chopin describes Edna as a beautiful, complex woman, unlike the way that Leonce views her: as a valuable piece of property (50). (Delbanco 1988): Edna's change has already begun (98). (Giorcelli 1988): Even the description of Edna indicates that she is neither simply attractive nor simply thoughtful, but rather is somewhere in between (112). (Jones 1989): 64. (Bande 1995): 163. (Juneja 1995): 116. (Poovalingam 1995): Edna's fundamental uncertainty can be noted in her face (223).

[2.4] (Giorcelli 1988): Robert shares some of the same physical and psychological traits with Edna, traits that make him seem more feminine and her seem more masculine (116). (Greer 1989): Chopin's description implies Edna's idealism (51).

[2.6] (George 1988): Although Robert's habit of talking to himself is a female trait, it is overlooked because of his youth (55). (Greer 1989): Chopin's remark about Robert's value to his employer shows his intellect and Chopin's idealism (51). (Viswanath 1995): Mutual interest in what each other had to say helped bring Robert and Edna together (128).

**[2.8]** (Giorcelli 1988): Ethnically and genetically, Edna is a complex person (112).

### **CHAPTER 3**

**[3.1]** It was eleven o'clock that night when Mr. Pontellier returned from Klein's hotel. He was in an excellent humor, in high spirits, and very talkative. His entrance awoke his wife, who was in bed and fast asleep when he came in. He talked to her while he undressed, telling her anecdotes and bits of news and gossip that he had gathered during the day. From his trousers pockets he took a fistful of crumpled bank notes and a good deal of silver coin, which he piled on the bureau indiscriminately with keys, knife, handkerchief, and whatever else happened to be in his pockets. She was overcome with sleep, and answered him with little half utterances.

**[3.2]** He thought it very discouraging that his wife, who was the sole object of his existence, evinced so little interest in things which concerned him, and valued so little his conversation.

**[3.3]** Mr. Pontellier had forgotten the bonbons and peanuts for the boys. Notwithstanding he loved them very much, and went into the adjoining room

where they slept to take a look at them and make sure that they were resting comfortably. The result of his investigation was far from satisfactory. He turned and shifted the youngsters about in bed. One of them began to kick and talk about a basket full of crabs.

**[3.4]** Mr. Pontellier returned to his wife with the information that Raoul had a high fever and needed looking after. Then he lit a cigar and went and sat near the open door to smoke it.

**[3.5]** Mrs. Pontellier was quite sure Raoul had no fever. He had gone to bed perfectly well, she said, and nothing had ailed him all day. Mr. Pontellier was too well acquainted with fever symptoms to be mistaken. He assured her the child was consuming at that moment in the next room.

**[3.6]** He reproached his wife with her inattention, her habitual neglect of the children. If it was not a mother's place to look after children, whose on earth was it? He himself had his hands full with his brokerage business. He could not be in two places at once; making a living for his family on the street, and staying at home to see that no harm befell them. He talked in a monotonous, insistent way.

**[3.7]** Mrs. Pontellier sprang out of bed and went into the next room. She soon came back and sat on the edge of the bed, leaning her head down on the pillow. She said nothing, and refused to answer her husband when he questioned her. When his cigar was smoked out he went to bed, and in half a minute he was fast asleep.



**[3.8]** Mrs. Pontellier was by that time thoroughly awake. She began to cry a little, and wiped her eyes on the sleeve of her *peignoir*. Blowing out the candle, which her husband had left burning, she slipped her bare feet into a pair of satin *mules* at the foot of the bed and went out on the porch, where she sat down in the wicker chair and began to rock gently to and fro.

**[3.9]** It was then past midnight. The cottages were all dark. A single faint light gleamed out from the hallway of the house. There was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak, and the everlasting voice of the sea, that was not uplifted at that soft hour. It broke like a mournful lullaby upon the night.

**[3.10]** The tears came so fast to Mrs. Pontellier's eyes that the damp sleeve of her *peignoir* no longer served to dry them. She was holding the back of her chair with one hand; her loose sleeve had slipped almost to the shoulder of her uplifted arm. Turning, she thrust her face, steaming and wet, into the bend of her arm, and she went on crying there, not caring any longer to dry her face, her eyes, her arms. She could not have told why she was crying. Such experiences as the foregoing were not uncommon in her married life. They seemed never before to have weighed much against the abundance of her husband's kindness and a uniform devotion which had come to be tacit and self-understood.

**[3.11]** An indescribable oppression, which seemed to generate in some unfamiliar part of her consciousness, filled her whole being with a vague

anguish. It was like a shadow, like a mist passing across her soul's summer day.

It was strange and unfamiliar; it was a mood. She did not sit there inwardly upbraiding her husband, lamenting at Fate, which had directed her footsteps to the path which they had taken. She was just having a good cry all to herself.

The mosquitoes made merry over her, biting her firm, round arms and nipping at her bare insteps.

**[3.12]** The little stinging, buzzing imps succeeded in dispelling a mood which might have held her there in the darkness half a night longer.

**[3.13]** The following morning Mr. Pontellier was up in good time to take the rockaway which was to convey him to the steamer at the wharf. He was returning to the city to his business, and they would not see him again at the Island till the coming Saturday. He had regained his composure, which seemed to have been somewhat impaired the night before. He was eager to be gone, as he looked forward to a lively week in Carondelet Street.

**[3.14]** Mr. Pontellier gave his wife half of the money which he had brought away from Klein's hotel the evening before. She liked money as well as most women, and, accepted it with no little satisfaction.

**[3.15]** "It will buy a handsome wedding present for Sister Janet!" she exclaimed, smoothing out the bills as she counted them one by one.

**[3.16]** "Oh! we'll treat Sister Janet better than that, my dear," he laughed, as he prepared to kiss her good-by.

**[3.17]** The boys were tumbling about, clinging to his legs, imploring that

numerous things be brought back to them. Mr. Pontellier was a great favorite, and ladies, men, children, even nurses, were always on hand to say goodby to him. His wife stood smiling and waving, the boys shouting, as he disappeared in the old rockaway down the sandy road.

**[3.18]** A few days later a box arrived for Mrs. Pontellier from New Orleans. It was from her husband. It was filled with *friandises*, with luscious and toothsome bits--the finest of fruits, *patés*, a rare bottle or two, delicious syrups, and bonbons in abundance.

**[3.19]** Mrs. Pontellier was always very generous with the contents of such a box; she was quite used to receiving them when away from home. The *patés* and fruit were brought to the dining-room; the bonbons were passed around. And the ladies, selecting with dainty and discriminating fingers and a little greedily, all declared that Mr. Pontellier was the best husband in the world. Mrs. Pontellier was forced to admit that she knew of none better.

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### NOTES TO CHAPTER 3

**[3.1]** (Balliwala 1995): 198.

**[3.2]** (Sweet-Hurd 1988): 105. (Balliwala 1995): 198. (Block 1995): 211.

**[3.4]** (Rowe 1989): This is Edna's first occurrence of physical lethargy, but not her last (11).

**[3.6]** (Jacobsen 1989): 104. (Rowe 1989): Leonce's complaints and criticism establish his authority as Edna's husband and her position as his servant (11). (Balliwala 1995): Leonce takes an opportunity to make Edna feel guilty about the children (198). (Block 1995): 206. (Paul 1995): 45. (Paul 1995): Leonce feels that motherhood is the reason for a woman's existence and that caring for her children is her most important function (56). (Ghosh 1995): Leonce thinks of Edna only as his wife and as the mother of his children (231). (Ramamoorthi 1995): Edna feels oppressed by Leonce's reprimands (183). (Viswanath 1995): Leonce misinterprets Edna's failure to lavish her affection on her children as neglect (128).

**[3.7]** (Rowe 1989): Because Edna refuses to answer Leonce, the reader does not learn about Raoul's illness (12).

**[3.9]** (Giorcelli 1988): The owl, symbol of wisdom, is an animal commonly linked both to Athene and to Persephone (134).

**[3.10]** (Juneja 1995): Edna cannot understand why she feels this way today but did not

feel so before today (114). (Ghosh 1995): 231.

**[3.11]** (Bauer and Lakritz 1988): The narrator appears to know Edna better than anyone can know another person (50). (Giorcelli 1988): 134. (Martin 1988): Edna's depression, which is caused by her internalization of the cultural standards of passive femininity, overtakes her at times (21). (Showalter 1988): 48. (Rowe 1989): This scene exemplifies the results of male dominance in a marriage (11-12). (Bharathi 1995): Edna's lack of fitting in and the social constraints she faces create a feeling of oppression and distress in her soul (95). (Ramamoorthi 1995): 183. (Viswanath 1995): This is the first sign of Edna's awakening (128).

**[3.12]** (Rowe 1989): The mosquitoes bring Edna back to reality from her distressed mood (12).

**[3.18]** (Martin 1988): Sending gifts to his family is a way for Leonce to show that he is a good provider; Edna shares the gifts with her friends to show her husband's economic status (19). (Paul 1995): 63.

**[3.19]** (Rankin 1988): Those who believe in Leonce's generosity think that Leonce has reason to be dissatisfied with Edna's behavior, while others see Leonce as arrogant and condescending (153). (Sweet-Hurd 1988): 105. (Balliwala 1995): Leonce sends material gifts, but he is completely oblivious to needs other than tangible ones (198). (Bande

1995): Some critics take this line as an indication that the cause of Edna's troubles is an unhappy marriage (160). (Paul 1995): Leonce's generosity causes him to be considered a perfect husband, and Edna cannot disagree with this opinion (49). (Viswanath 1995): Edna's oppression grows into a feeling of living a false life since Leonce presents himself as a perfect husband (128).

## CHAPTER 4

**[4.1]** It would have been a difficult matter for Mr. Pontellier to define to his own satisfaction or any one else's wherein his wife failed in her duty toward their children. It was something which he felt rather than perceived, and he never voiced the feeling without subsequent regret and ample atonement.

**[4.2]** If one of the little Pontellier boys took a tumble whilst at play, he was not apt to rush crying to his mother's arms for comfort; he would more likely pick himself up, wipe the water out of his eyes and the sand out of his mouth, and go on playing. Tots as they were, they pulled together and stood their ground in childish battles with doubled fists and uplifted voices, which usually prevailed against the other mother-tots. The quadroon nurse was looked upon as a huge encumbrance, only good to button up waists and panties and to brush

and part hair; since it seemed to be a law of society that hair must be parted and brushed.

**[4.3]** In short, Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The motherwomen seemed to prevail that summer at Grand Isle. It was easy to know them, fluttering about with extended, protecting wings when any harm, real or imaginary, threatened their precious brood. They were women who idolized their children, worshiped their husbands, and esteemed it a holy privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels.

**[4.4]** Many of them were delicious in the rôle; one of them was the embodiment of every womanly grace and charm. If her husband did not adore her, he was a brute, deserving of death by slow torture. Her name was Adèle Ratignolle. There are no words to describe her save the old ones that have served so often to picture the bygone heroine of romance and the fair lady of our dreams. There was nothing subtle or hidden about her charms; her beauty was all there, flaming and apparent: the spun-gold hair that comb nor confining pin could restrain; the blue eyes that were like nothing but sapphires; two lips that pouted, that were so red one could only think of cherries or some other delicious crimson fruit in looking at them. She was growing a little stout, but it did not seem to detract an iota from the grace of every step, pose, gesture. One would not have wanted her white neck a mite less full or her beautiful arms more slender. Never were hands more exquisite than hers, and it was a joy to look at them when she threaded her needle or adjusted her gold thimble to her taper

middle finger as she sewed away on the little night-drawers or fashioned a bodice or a bib.

**[4.5]** Madame Ratignolle was very fond of Mrs. Pontellier, and often she took her sewing and went over to sit with her in the afternoons. She was sitting there the afternoon of the day the box arrived from New Orleans. She had possession of the rocker, and she was busily engaged in sewing upon a diminutive pair of night-drawers.

**[4.6]** She had brought the pattern of the drawers for Mrs. Pontellier to cut out--a marvel of construction, fashioned to enclose a baby's body so effectually that only two small eyes might look out from the garment, like an Eskimo's. They were designed for winter wear, when treacherous drafts came down chimneys and insidious currents of deadly cold found their way through key-holes.

**[4.7]** Mrs. Pontellier's mind was quite at rest concerning the present material needs of her children, and she could not see the use of anticipating and making winter night garments the subject of her summer meditations. But she did not want to appear unamiable and uninterested, so she had brought forth newspapers, which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and under Madame Ratignolle's directions she had cut a pattern of the impervious garment.

**[4.8]** Robert was there, seated as he had been the Sunday before, and Mrs. Pontellier also occupied her former position on the upper step, leaning listlessly against the post. Beside her was a box of bonbons, which she held out at intervals to Madame Ratignolle.



**[4.9]** That lady seemed at a loss to make a selection, but finally settled upon a stick of nougat, wondering if it were not too rich; whether it could possibly hurt her. Madame Ratignolle had been married seven years. About every two years she had a baby. At that time she had three babies, and was beginning to think of a fourth one. She was always talking about her "condition." Her "condition" was in no way apparent, and no one would have known a thing about it but for her persistence in making it the subject of conversation.

**[4.10]** Robert started to reassure her, asserting that he had known a lady who had subsisted upon nougat during the entire--but seeing the color mount into Mrs. Pontellier's face he checked himself and changed the subject.

**[4.11]** Mrs. Pontellier, though she had married a Creole, was not thoroughly at home in the society of Creoles; never before had she been thrown so intimately among them. There were only Creoles that summer at Lebrun's. They all knew each other, and felt like one large family, among whom existed the most amicable relations. A characteristic which distinguished them and which impressed Mrs. Pontellier most forcibly was their entire absence of prudery. Their freedom of expression was at first incomprehensible to her, though she had no difficulty in reconciling it with a lofty chastity which in the Creole woman seems to be inborn and unmistakable.

**[4.12]** Never would Edna Pontellier forget the shock with which she heard Madame Ratignolle relating to old Monsieur Farival the harrowing story of one of her *accouchements*, withholding no intimate detail. She was growing

accustomed to like shocks, but she could not keep the mounting color back from her cheeks. Oftener than once her coming had interrupted the droll story with which Robert was entertaining some amused group of married women.

**[4.13]** A book had gone the rounds of the *pension*. When it came her turn to read it, she did so with profound astonishment. She felt moved to read the book in secret and solitude, though none of the others had done so,—to hide it from view at the sound of approaching footsteps. It was openly criticised and freely discussed at table. Mrs. Pontellier gave over being astonished, and concluded that wonders would never cease.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 4

**[4.1]** (Block 1995): Edna's psychological growth is stunted by motherhood (212).

**[4.3]** (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (Jones 1988): 121. (Martin 1988): 19-20. (Showalter 1988): 45. (Jacobsen 1989): The traditional characteristics of womanhood are not found in Edna, who opposes the idea of a self-sacrificing motherhood (105-106). (Jones 1989): Edna is often unhappy because the role required of her by society is not the same as the one she desires (60). (Stange 1989): 146-147. (Amin 1995): Edna's role of sexual freedom begins early in the novel, even before she meets Robert. She is not like the other women on

Grand Isle because she does not hover over her children. (Balliwala 1995): 192. (Bande 1995): Edna secretly resents her role as a mother, rejecting the status of caretaker (163). (Bharathi 1995): Edna does not belong in the same group as the rest of these women (95). (Block 1995): Adele and Mademoiselle Reisz stand for completely varying lifestyles and symbolize separate facets of Edna's consciousness (204, 212). (Juneja 1995): Adele is the archetype of the "mother-woman" (116). (Paul 1995): Edna is different from these women because she is a woman first and a mother second. (Ghosh 1995): 231. (Ramamoorthi 1995): Edna rejects being sanctified as one of these women (183). (Stange 1995): Adele and Edna represent the opposite poles of motherhood, because Edna does not give of herself to her children as Adele does (30). (Viswanath 1995): Chopin continues to illustrate the differences between the other women and Edna (129).

[4.4] (George 1988): The manner in which Adele speaks is typical of the speech of women of this time. She is polite, chooses topics of domestic interest, and defers to men (57). (Giorcelli 1988): Adele is described as if she were a goddess (121). (Skaggs 1988): If this were truly a romantic novel, Adele would be the heroine rather than a foil to the main character (82). (Jacobsen 1989): Adele fits the mold of the archetypal wife and mother, having no identity outside her relationship with her husband and children (120). (Stange 1989): Adele's hands, physical symbols of her devotion to work, fascinate Edna. They also indicate Adele's femininity because of their whiteness (143). Linked with the golden thimble, Adele's hands symbolize her role in her family because they work; however, Edna's hands marked only with a golden ring, symbolize her own role in her family (143;

145). (Stange 1989): Adele's appearance indicates her wealth and her value as a piece of property owned by her husband (144). (Juneja 1995): 116. (Paul 1995): 57, 63. (Stange 1995): Adele's hands at work (wearing a gold thimble, while Edna's wear a gold ring) indicate her dedication to her position in her family as mother (26). Her hands are symbols of her wealth because of their whiteness and beauty (26). Chopin's description of Adele identifies femininity as corporeal property (27). Adele's beauty is a measure of her worth to her husband (27). In Adele Edna recognizes what she needs to do to find her own independence (28). (Viswanath 1995): Chopin expresses the fact that Edna is an unusual woman by contrasting her to Adele (128).

[4.7] (Solomon 1988): 118.

[4.9] (Stange 1989): It is not clear whether Madame Ratignolle's spacing of two years between pregnancies is a result of chance or whether she plans it. By choosing to become pregnant, she solidifies her role as mother-woman (147). (Stange 1995): Adele enjoys her role as mother, choosing the selflessness of motherhood (30). (Viswanath 1995): Edna is shocked that Adele will talk of such things in mixed company (129).

[4.11] (Bauer and Lakritz 1988): Edna's characteristics appear to be genetic rather than learned (50-51). (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (S. Jones 1988): Edna is surprised by the behavior of the Creoles (122). (Walker 1988): Chopin makes obvious the wide variance between Edna's social mores and those of the Creoles (71). (Jones 1989): Edna is unfamiliar with,

and confused by, the freedoms of expression the Creoles enjoy (62; 64). (Stange 1989): 148. (Block 1995): According to patriarchal ideals, the perfect woman was without passion (210). (Paul 1995): The freedom of expression enjoyed by the Creole woman was based on a strong belief in chastity (43).

[4.12] (Jones 1989): 62. (Stange 1989): Whether it results from blushing or sunburn, Edna's redness emphasizes her exposure to outside forces (148-149). (Stange 1995): Adele's openness about motherhood constantly embarrasses Edna, making her feel as if her private life is now part of the public domain (31).

[4.13] (Walker 1988): Chopin points out the variance between Edna's mores and those of the Creoles (71). (Stange 1995): The Creole community felt free to discuss sex and childbirth in mixed company (31).

## CHAPTER 5

[5.1] They formed a congenial group sitting there that summer afternoon -- Madame Ratignolle sewing away, often stopping to relate a story or incident with much expressive gesture of her perfect hands; Robert and Mrs. Pontellier

sitting idle, exchanging occasional words, glances or smiles which indicated a certain advanced stage of intimacy and *camaraderie*.

**[5.2]** He had lived in her shadow during the past month. No one thought anything of it. Many had predicted that Robert would devote himself to Mrs. Pontellier when he arrived. Since the age of fifteen, which was eleven years before, Robert each summer at Grand Isle had constituted himself the devoted attendant of some fair dame or damsel. Sometimes it was a young girl, again a widow; but as often as not it was some interesting married woman.

**[5.3]** For two consecutive seasons he lived in the sunlight of Mademoiselle Duvigne's presence. But she died between summers; then Robert posed as an inconsolable, prostrating himself at the feet of Madame Ratignolle for whatever crumbs of sympathy and comfort she might be pleased to vouchsafe.

**[5.4]** Mrs. Pontellier liked to sit and gaze at her fair companion as she might look upon a faultless Madonna.

**[5.5]** "Could any one fathom the cruelty beneath that fair exterior?" murmured Robert. "She knew that I adored her once, and she let me adore her. It was 'Robert, come; go; stand up; sit down; do this; do that; see if the baby sleeps; my thimble, please, that I left God knows where. Come and read Daudet to me while I sew.'"

**[5.6]** "*Par exemple!* I never had to ask. You were always there under my feet, like a troublesome cat."

**[5.7]** "You mean like an adoring dog. And just as soon as Ratignolle appeared on the scene, then it WAS like a dog. '*Passez! Adieu! Allez vous-en!*'"

**[5.8]** "Perhaps I feared to make Alphonse jealous," she interjoined, with excessive naïveté. That made them all laugh. The right hand jealous of the left! The heart jealous of the soul! But for that matter, the Creole husband is never jealous; with him the gangrene passion is one which has become dwarfed by disuse.

**[5.9]** Meanwhile Robert, addressing Mrs. Pontellier, continued to tell of his one time hopeless passion for Madame Ratignolle; of sleepless nights, of consuming flames till the very sea sizzled when he took his daily plunge. While the lady at the needle kept up a little running, contemptuous comment:

**[5.10]** "*Blagueur--farceur--gros bête, va!*"

**[5.11]** He never assumed this seriocomic tone when alone with Mrs. Pontellier. She never knew precisely what to make of it; at that moment it was impossible for her to guess how much of it was jest and what proportion was earnest. It was understood that he had often spoken words of love to Madame Ratignolle, without any thought of being taken seriously. Mrs. Pontellier was glad he had not assumed a similar role toward herself. It would have been unacceptable and annoying.

**[5.12]** Mrs. Pontellier had brought her sketching materials, which she sometimes dabbled with in an unprofessional way. She liked the dabbling. She felt in it satisfaction of a kind which no other employment afforded her.

**[5.13]** She had long wished to try herself on Madame Ratignolle. Never had that lady seemed a more tempting subject than at that moment, seated there like some sensuous Madonna, with the gleam of the fading day enriching her splendid color.

**[5.14]** Robert crossed over and seated himself upon the step below Mrs. Pontellier, that he might watch her work. She handled her brushes with a certain ease and freedom which came, not from long and close acquaintance with them, but from a natural aptitude. Robert followed her work with close attention, giving forth little ejaculatory expressions of appreciation in French, which he addressed to Madame Ratignolle.

**[5.15]** *"Mais ce n'est pas mal! Elle s'y connait, elle a de la force, oui."*

**[5.16]** During his oblivious attention he once quietly rested his head against Mrs. Pontellier's arm. As gently she repulsed him. Once again he repeated the offense. She could not but believe it to be thoughtlessness on his part; yet that was no reason she should submit to it. She did not remonstrate, except again to repulse him quietly but firmly. He offered no apology.

**[5.17]** The picture completed bore no resemblance to Madame Ratignolle. She was greatly disappointed to find that it did not look like her. But it was a fair enough piece of work, and in many respects satisfying.

**[5.18]** Mrs. Pontellier evidently did not think so. After surveying the sketch critically she drew a broad smudge of paint across its surface, and crumpled the paper between her hands.



**[5.19]** The youngsters came tumbling up the steps, the quadron following at the respectful distance which they required her to observe. Mrs. Pontellier made them carry her paints and things into the house. She sought to detain them for a little talk and some pleasantries. But they were greatly in earnest. They had only come to investigate the contents of the bonbon box. They accepted without murmuring what she chose to give them, each holding out two chubby hands scoop-like, in the vain hope that they might be filled; and then away they went.

**[5.20]** The sun was low in the west, and the breeze soft and languorous that came up from the south, charged with the seductive odor of the sea. Children freshly befurbelowed, were gathering for their games under the oaks. Their voices were high and penetrating.

**[5.21]** Madame Ratignolle folded her sewing, placing thimble, scissors, and thread all neatly together in the roll, which she pinned securely. She complained of faintness. Mrs. Pontellier flew for the cologne water and a fan. She bathed Madame Ratignolle's face with cologne, while Robert plied the fan with unnecessary vigor.

**[5.22]** The spell was soon over, and Mrs. Pontellier could not help wondering if there were not a little imagination responsible for its origin, for the rose tint had never faded from her friend's face.

**[5.23]** She stood watching the fair woman walk down the long line of galleries with the grace and majesty which queens are sometimes supposed to

possess. Her little ones ran to meet her. Two of them clung about her white skirts, the third she took from its nurse and with a thousand endearments bore it along in her own fond, encircling arms. Though, as everybody well knew, the doctor had forbidden her to lift so much as a pin!

**[5.24]** "Are you going bathing?" asked Robert of Mrs. Pontellier. It was not so much a question as a reminder.

**[5.25]** "Oh, no," she answered, with a tone of indecision. "I'm tired; I think not." Her glance wandered from his face away toward the Gulf, whose sonorous murmur reached her like a loving but imperative entreaty.

**[5.26]** "Oh, come!" he insisted. "You mustn't miss your bath. Come on. The water must be delicious; it will not hurt you. Come."

**[5.27]** He reached up for her big, rough straw hat that hung on a peg outside the door, and put it on her head. They descended the steps, and walked away together toward the beach. The sun was low in the west and the breeze was soft and warm.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 5

**[5.1]** (Paul 1995): Edna has found a soulmate in Robert because they have the same interests and can find humor in the most trivial things (48).

**[5.2]** (Delbanco 1988): Robert removes himself from the real world by coming to Grand Isle, where he turns into something between a joker and a gigolo (93). (Jones 1989): Nobody but Edna takes Robert's advances seriously (64). (Balliwala 1995): Robert is somewhat the male complement to Edna because he, too, is playing at life until he confesses his love for Edna (196). (Block 1995): Robert, like Leonce, neglects to accept Edna's autonomy (211). (Ghosh 1995): 236. (Juneja 1995): No one is surprised when Robert pays his attentions to Edna (115). (Paul 1995): 52.

**[5.3]** (Vevaina 1995): 89.

**[5.4]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna looks at Adele as a man would look at her (121). (Stange 1989): Edna is attracted to Adele (143). (Stange 1995): Observing Adele as a model of social wealth, Edna begins her own self-seeking (27).

**[5.6]** (Paul 1995): 52.

**[5.7]** (Paul 1995): 52.

**[5.8]** (Stange 1989): Adele represents the system of male ownership of a wife (143). (Paul 1995): Creole society deals with extra-marital relations by pretending that they do not exist (44).

**[5.9]** (Delbanco 1988): 93.

**[5.11]** (Delbanco 1988): 93.

**[5.12]** (LeFew 1989): Edna escapes through her art because it serves as a tangible means by which she can express her desires (77). (Paul 1995): 60. (Ramamoorthi 1995): Edna considers painting her chance to make life golden (183). (Vevaina 1995): Aphrodite encourages women to be creative (85).

**[5.13]** (Lattin 1988): Edna's role as a mother is contrasted with that of Adele, whose children basically define who she is (42). (Stange 1989): Edna wants to paint Adele because of the richness of her appearance and her physical attractiveness (144). (Vevaina 1995): 88.

**[5.17]** (Stange 1989): Disappointed with her sketch of Adele, Edna uses her right as creator of the sketch to destroy it (144). (Stange 1995): The sketch becomes the second object (after Adele's hands) that Edna studies critically (27).

**[5.18]** (Stange 1989): 144. (Stange 1995): Edna exhibits her ownership of the sketch by destroying it.

**[5.23]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna looks at Adele as a man would look at her (121). (Stange 1989): Adele is a regal woman, as Edna also aspires to be, although they both are articles of value (153).

**[5.26]** (Rowe 1989): 5. (Paul 1995): 63.

**[5.27]** (Rowe 1989): Edna's sun bonnet (which hangs on a phallic peg) is a feminine decoration, belonging either to her father or to her lover; it therefore causes her to be unable to be seen as a woman (5).

## **CHAPTER 6**

**[6.1]** Edna Pontellier could not have told why, wishing to go to the beach with Robert, she should in the first place have declined, and in the second place have followed in obedience to one of the two contradictory impulses which impelled her.

**[6.2]** A certain light was beginning to dawn dimly within her, --the light which, showing the way, forbids it.

**[6.3]** At that early period it served but to bewilder her. It moved her to

dreams, to thoughtfulness, to the shadowy anguish which had overcome her the midnight when she had abandoned herself to tears.

**[6.4]** In short, Mrs. Pontellier was beginning to realize her position in the universe as a human being, and to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. This may seem like a ponderous weight of wisdom to descend upon the soul of a young woman of twenty-eight--perhaps more wisdom than the Holy Ghost is usually pleased to vouchsafe to any woman.

**[6.5]** But the beginning of things, of a world especially, is necessarily vague, tangled, chaotic, and exceedingly disturbing. How few of us ever emerge from such beginning! How many souls perish in its tumult!

**[6.6]** The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude; to lose itself in mazes of inward contemplation.

**[6.7]** The voice of the sea speaks to the soul. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 6

**[6.2]** (Thornton 1988): 140. (Gremillion 1989): Edna seeks a power that is impossible to achieve (170). Her childlike belief leads her to think she can obtain this power (170).

(Amin 1995): The sea's seduction pulls Edna towards her self-realization (71). (Jacob 1995): This is the first of five different awakenings in the novel (105). Light is one of the two symbols Chopin uses to illustrate the theme of awakening (105). (Poovalingam 1995): 224. (Vevaina 1995): 97.

**[6.4]** (Fox-Genovese 1988): Chopin uses Edna's language to show the distinction between recognizing oneself as an individual and recognizing oneself as someone related to other people or to society as a whole (34). (Thornton 1988): 140. (Jacobsen 1989): 101. (S. Jones 1988): 121. (Jones 1989): 61. (Stange 1989): 139. (Amin 1995): The sea seduces Edna into her sexual self-realization (71). (Bande 1995): 164. (Gopalan 1995): 174. (Jacob 1995): Edna is beginning to realize that there are forces larger than she that control one's destiny (109). (Juneja 1995): Chopin finds it ironic that a woman cannot be given her own independence (114-15). (Ghosh 1995): Leonce never notices Edna's gradual change (233). (Stange 1995): Edna acknowledges her position as Leonce's wife (possession) by reaching out her hands for her wedding rings -- the symbols of his ownership of her (22). Edna's action of putting the rings back on herself (rather than having Leonce replace them on her hands) suggests that Edna owns herself (22). Appearing naked and exposed, Edna's hands suggest that they are hers alone, but as soon as she places her rings back on her hands she belongs to Leonce (25). (Tripathi 1995): 149. (Vevaina 1995): 97. (Viswanath 1995): Chopin's sympathy for Edna is expressed here (129).

[6.5] (Thornton 1988): 140. (Jones 1989): Chopin shows that it is easier to accept an identity given by society than to create an identity for oneself (66). (Gopalan 1995): 174. (Juneja 1995): Chopin's tone in this statement is melancholy (115). (Poovalingam 1995): Edna's inner turmoil as she begins to become awakened leads her to anguish (224).

[6.6] (Dyer 1988): 126, 130. (Lattin 1988): Chopin uses the sea to seduce the reader into his/her own thoughtfulness (40). (Martin 1988): 20. (Showalter 1988): Edna lives in her own little world, never noticing the women of color around her and never associating their situations in life with her own (50). (Gremillion 1989): The sea incites one to be in focus with his/her own self, feeling complete and safe (170). (LeFew 1989): Both the sea and music symbolize the ebb and flow of Edna's psyche (80). (Bande 1995): 166. (Jacob 1995): The sea is one of the two symbols Chopin uses to illustrate the theme of awakening (105). It promises wisdom (105). (Juneja 1995): 115. (Paul 1995): For Edna, the sea represents freedom from responsibilities and duties (63). (Ramamoorthi 1995): 179.

[6.7] (Dyer 1988): 126. (Gremillion 1989): 174. (Bande 1995): (Jacob 1995): The feel of the sea on Edna's body is actually the feel of death (105). (Juneja 1995): 115. (Paul 1995): Turning to the sea is analogous to turning inward into one's own being. Edna continuously links Robert with the sea, spending much of her time in the water while he is away (64). (Poovalingam 1995): The sea brings Edna back to life from her dull existence (223). (Ramamoorthi 1995): As Edna walks into the sea, she feels like a newborn woman (180). (Vevaina 1995): Edna is enticed by the sea, in spite of her fear of it (84).



(Viswanath 1995): Communing with the sea gives Edna moments of self-realization (129).

## CHAPTER 7

**[7.1]** Mrs. Pontellier was not a woman given to confidences, a characteristic hitherto contrary to her nature. Even as a child she had lived her own small life all within herself. At a very early period she had apprehended instinctively the dual life--that outward existence which conforms, the inward life which questions.

**[7.2]** That summer at Grand Isle she began to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her. There may have been--there must have been--influences, both subtle and apparent, working in their several ways to induce her to do this; but the most obvious was the influence of Adèle Ratignolle. The excessive physical charm of the Creole had first attracted her, for Edna had a sensuous susceptibility to beauty. Then the candor of the woman's whole existence, which every one might read, and which formed so striking a contrast to her own habitual reserve--this might have furnished a link. Who can tell what metals the gods use in forging the subtle bond which we call sympathy, which we might as well call love.

**[7.3]** The two women went away one morning to the beach together, arm in arm, under the huge white sunshade. Edna had prevailed upon Madame Ratignolle to leave the children behind, though she could not induce her to relinquish a diminutive roll of needlework, which Adèle begged to be allowed to slip into the depths of her pocket. In some unaccountable way they had escaped from Robert.

**[7.4]** The walk to the beach was no inconsiderable one, consisting as it did of a long, sandy path, upon which a sporadic and tangled growth that bordered it on either side made frequent and unexpected inroads. There were acres of yellow camomile reaching out on either hand. Further away still, vegetable gardens abounded, with frequent small plantations of orange or lemon trees intervening. The dark green clusters glistened from afar in the sun.

**[7.5]** The women were both of goodly height, Madame Ratignolle possessing the more feminine and matronly figure. The charm of Edna Pontellier's physique stole insensibly upon you. The lines of her body were long, clean and symmetrical; it was a body which occasionally fell into splendid poses; there was no suggestion of the trim, stereotyped fashion-plate about it. A casual and indiscriminating observer, in passing, might not cast a second glance upon the figure. But with more feeling and discernment he would have recognized the noble beauty of its modeling, and the graceful severity of poise and movement, which made Edna Pontellier different from the crowd.

**[7.6]** She wore a cool muslin that morning--white, with a waving vertical

line of brown running through it; also a white linen collar and the big straw hat which she had taken from the peg outside the door. The hat rested any way on her yellow-brown hair, that waved a little, was heavy, and clung close to her head.

**[7.7]** Madame Ratignolle, more careful of her complexion, had twined a gauze veil about her head. She wore dogskin gloves, with gauntlets that protected her wrists. She was dressed in pure white, with a fluffiness of ruffles that became her. The draperies and fluttering things which she wore suited her rich, luxuriant beauty as a greater severity of line could not have done.

**[7.8]** There were a number of bath-houses along the beach, of rough but solid construction, built with small, protecting galleries facing the water. Each house consisted of two compartments, and each family at Lebrun's possessed a compartment for itself, fitted out with all the essential paraphernalia of the bath and whatever other conveniences the owners might desire. The two women had no intention of bathing; they had just strolled down to the beach for a walk and to be alone and near the water. The Pontellier and Ratignolle compartments adjoined one another under the same roof.

**[7.9]** Mrs. Pontellier had brought down her key through force of habit. Unlocking the door of her bath-room she went inside, and soon emerged, bringing a rug, which she spread upon the floor of the gallery, and two huge hair pillows covered with crash, which she placed against the front of the building.

**[7.10]** The two seated themselves there in the shade of the porch, side

by side, with their backs against the pillows and their feet extended. Madame Ratignolle removed her veil, wiped her face with a rather delicate handkerchief, and fanned herself with the fan which she always carried suspended somewhere about her person by a long, narrow ribbon. Edna removed her collar and opened her dress at the throat. She took the fan from Madame Ratignolle and began to fan both herself and her companion. It was very warm, and for a while they did nothing but exchange remarks about the heat, the sun, the glare. But there was a breeze blowing, a choppy, stiff wind that whipped the water into froth. It fluttered the skirts of the two women and kept them for a while engaged in adjusting, readjusting, tucking in, securing hair-pins and hat-pins. A few persons were sporting some distance away in the water. The beach was very still of human sound at that hour. The lady in black was reading her morning devotions on the porch of a neighboring bathhouse. Two young lovers were exchanging their hearts' yearnings beneath the children's tent, which they had found unoccupied.

**[7.11]** Edna Pontellier, casting her eyes about, had finally kept them at rest upon the sea. The day was clear and carried the gaze out as far as the blue sky went; there were a few white clouds suspended idly over the horizon. A lateen sail was visible in the direction of Cat Island, and others to the south seemed almost motionless in the far distance.

**[7.12]** "Of whom--of what are you thinking?" asked Adèle of her companion, whose countenance she had been watching with a little amused

attention, arrested by the absorbed expression which seemed to have seized and fixed every feature into a statuesque repose.

**[7.13]** "Nothing," returned Mrs. Pontellier, with a start, adding at once: "How stupid! But it seems to me it is the reply we make instinctively to such a question. Let me see," she went on, throwing back her head and narrowing her fine eyes till they shone like two vivid points of light. "Let me see. I was really not conscious of thinking of anything; but perhaps I can retrace my thoughts."

**[7.14]** "Oh! never mind!" laughed Madame Ratignolle. "I am not quite so exacting. I will let you off this time. It is really too hot to think, especially to think about thinking."

**[7.15]** "But for the fun of it," persisted Edna. "First of all, the sight of the water stretching so far away, those motionless sails against the blue sky, made a delicious picture that I just wanted to sit and look at. The hot wind beating in my face made me think--without any connection that I can trace of a summer day in Kentucky, of a meadow that seemed as big as the ocean to the very little girl walking through the grass, which was higher than her waist. She threw out her arms as if swimming when she walked, beating the tall grass as one strikes out in the water. Oh, I see the connection now!"

**[7.16]** "Where were you going that day in Kentucky, walking through the grass?"

**[7.17]** "I don't remember now. I was just walking diagonally across a big field. My sun-bonnet obstructed the view. I could see only the stretch of green

before me, and I felt as if I must walk on forever, without coming to the end of it. I don't remember whether I was frightened or pleased. I must have been entertained.

[7.18] "Likely as not it was Sunday," she laughed; "and I was running away from prayers, from the Presbyterian service, read in a spirit of gloom by my father that chills me yet to think of."

[7.19] "And have you been running away from prayers ever since, *ma chère*?" asked Madame Ratignolle, amused.

[7.20] "No! oh, no!" Edna hastened to say. "I was a little unthinking child in those days, just following a misleading impulse without question. On the contrary, during one period of my life religion took a firm hold upon me; after I was twelve and until--until--why, I suppose until now, though I never thought much about it--just driven along by habit. But do you know," she broke off, turning her quick eyes upon Madame Ratignolle and leaning forward a little so as to bring her face quite close to that of her companion, "sometimes I feel this summer as if I were walking through the green meadow again; idly, aimlessly, unthinking and unguided."

[7.21] Madame Ratignolle laid her hand over that of Mrs. Pontellier, which was near her. Seeing that the hand was not withdrawn, she clasped it firmly and warmly. She even stroked it a little, fondly, with the other hand, murmuring in an undertone, "*Pauvre chérie*."

[7.22] The action was at first a little confusing to Edna, but she soon lent

herself readily to the Creole's gentle caress. She was not accustomed to an outward and spoken expression of affection, either in herself or in others. She and her younger sister, Janet, had quarreled a good deal through force of unfortunate habit. Her older sister, Margaret, was matronly and dignified, probably from having assumed matronly and housewifely responsibilities too early in life, their mother having died when they were quite young, Margaret was not effusive; she was practical. Edna had had an occasional girl friend, but whether accidentally or not, they seemed to have been all of one type--the self-contained. She never realized that the reserve of her own character had much, perhaps everything, to do with this. Her most intimate friend at school had been one of rather exceptional intellectual gifts, who wrote fine-sounding essays, which Edna admired and strove to imitate; and with her she talked and glowed over the English classics, and sometimes held religious and political controversies.

**[7.23]** Edna often wondered at one propensity which sometimes had inwardly disturbed her without causing any outward show or manifestation on her part. At a very early age--perhaps it was when she traversed the ocean of waving grass--she remembered that she had been passionately enamored of a dignified and sad-eyed cavalry officer who visited her father in Kentucky. She could not leave his presence when he was there, nor remove her eyes from his face, which was something like Napoleon's, with a lock of black hair falling across the forehead. But the cavalry officer melted imperceptibly out of her

existence.

**[7.24]** At another time her affections were deeply engaged by a young gentleman who visited a lady on a neighboring plantation. It was after they went to Mississippi to live. The young man was engaged to be married to the young lady, and they sometimes called upon Margaret, driving over of afternoons in a buggy. Edna was a little miss, just merging into her teens; and the realization that she herself was nothing, nothing, nothing to the engaged young man was a bitter affliction to her. But he, too, went the way of dreams.

**[7.25]** She was a grown young woman when she was overtaken by what she supposed to be the climax of her fate. It was when the face and figure of a great tragedian began to haunt her imagination and stir her senses. The persistence of the infatuation lent it an aspect of genuineness. The hopelessness of it colored it with the lofty tones of a great passion.

**[7.26]** The picture of the tragedian stood enframed upon her desk. Any one may possess the portrait of a tragedian without exciting suspicion or comment. (This was a sinister reflection which she cherished.) In the presence of others she expressed admiration for his exalted gifts, as she handed the photograph around and dwelt upon the fidelity of the likeness. When alone she sometimes picked it up and kissed the cold glass passionately.

**[7.27]** Her marriage to Léonce Pontellier was purely an accident, in this respect resembling many other marriages which masquerade as the decrees of Fate. It was in the midst of her secret great passion that she met him. He fell in



love, as men are in the habit of doing, and pressed his suit with an earnestness and an ardor which left nothing to be desired. He pleased her; his absolute devotion flattered her. She fancied there was a sympathy of thought and taste between them, in which fancy she was mistaken. Add to this the violent opposition of her father and her sister Margaret to her marriage with a Catholic, and we need seek no further for the motives which led her to accept Monsieur Pontellier. for her husband.

**[7.28]** The acme of bliss, which would have been a marriage with the tragedian, was not for her in this world. As the devoted wife of a man who worshiped her, she felt she would take her place with a certain dignity in the world of reality, closing the portals forever behind her upon the realm of romance and dreams.

**[7.29]** But it was not long before the tragedian had gone to join the cavalry officer and the engaged young man and a few others; and Edna found herself face to face with the realities. She grew fond of her husband, realizing with some unaccountable satisfaction that no trace of passion or excessive and fictitious warmth colored her affection, thereby threatening its dissolution.

**[7.30]** She was fond of her children in an uneven, impulsive way. She would sometimes gather them passionately to her heart; she would sometimes forget them. The year before they had spent part of the summer with their grandmother Pontellier in Iberville. Feeling secure regarding their happiness and welfare, she did not miss them except with an occasional intense longing.

Their absence was a sort of relief, though she did not admit this, even to herself. It seemed to free her of a responsibility which she had blindly assumed and for which Fate had not fitted her.

**[7.31]** Edna did not reveal so much as all this to Madame Ratignolle that summer day when they sat with faces turned to the sea. But a good part of it escaped her. She had put her head down on Madame Ratignolle's shoulder. She was flushed and felt intoxicated with the sound of her own voice and the unaccustomed taste of candor. It muddled her like wine, or like a first breath of freedom.

**[7.32]** There was the sound of approaching voices. It was Robert, surrounded by a troop of children, searching for them. The two little Pontelliers were with him, and he carried Madame Ratignolle's little girl in his arms. There were other children beside, and two nurse-maids followed, looking disagreeable and resigned.

**[7.33]** The women at once rose and began to shake out their draperies and relax their muscles. Mrs. Pontellier threw the cushions and rug into the bath-house. The children all scampered off to the awning, and they stood there in a line, gazing upon the intruding lovers, still exchanging their vows and sighs. The lovers got up, with only a silent protest, and walked slowly away somewhere else.

**[7.34]** The children possessed themselves of the tent, and Mrs. Pontellier went over to join them.

**[7.35]** Madame Ratignolle begged Robert to accompany her to the house; she complained of cramp in her limbs and stiffness of the joints. She leaned draggily upon his arm as they walked.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 7

**[7.1]** (Gilmore 1988): Edna's concealed life is the real one, while the false self is the one she shows to her family and friends (82). (Giorcelli 1988): Mentally Edna is trapped between these two worlds (112). (Jones 1988): Because Edna's true identity differs from her social role, she lives two lives (121). (Morris and Dunn 1988): 95. (Toth 1988): Like Edna, Chopin pursued her own privacy, freedom, and a life of her own outside of her roles as wife and mother (61). (Walker 1988): Edna's strict Presbyterian background makes it hard for her to be as open as the Creoles (71). (Jones 1989): The standards of society have been so well set in Edna's psyche that she never has been able to accept her own thoughts and desires as anything to be acted on (60-61). (Bande 1995): Edna's perplexed inner being is the same self that causes her to listen to the seductive voice of the sea and to fantasize (161). Edna's two selves never coincide (161). (Block 1995): Edna realizes that hers is a limited place within language (207). (Juneja 1995): Edna has always been aware of her lifestyle, but is gradually realizing that she is not fulfilled by it (114). (Paul 1995):

Edna finds it difficult to continue a dual existence and begins to rebel against it (44).

(Poovalingain 1995): Edna could have easily been a recluse (222). (Triakha 1995): The environs of Grand Isle, along with Robert, create turmoil in Edna (149). (Vevaina 1995): 96. (Viswanath 1995): 129.

[7.2] (George 1988): 58. (Giorcelli 1988): Edna's regard for Adele is more like what a man would feel than the feelings of another woman (121). (Martin 1988): Edna does not look at the world as others do, but rather lives in a world of dreams (21). (Showalter 1988): Adele starts Edna on the first step of her journey towards self-discovery by showing her what female love is like (45). (Walker 1988): Edna is enticed by the relaxed lifestyle of the Creoles (71). (Stange 1989): Edna is attracted to Adele (143). Her friendship with Adele is Edna's major stimulus for seeking her own individuality (148). (Poovalingam 1995): 223. (Stange 1995): The appearance of a female's body suggests the position within society of her husband, for one can tell the wealth of a man by the condition of wife's body, especially her hands (25). Adele's openness is characteristic of the Creole community's lack of prudery (31). (Vevaina 1995): 87.

[7.5] (Giorcelli 1988): Even the description of Edna indicates that she is at neither one end of the spectrum nor at the other, but rather is somewhere in between (112). (Viswanath 1995): Chopin describes Edna in a way that makes her seem different in appearance from the other women (128, 129).

[7.6] (Giorcelli 1988): 112.

[7.7] (Stange 1989): Adele's appearance indicates the richness of her person and her value as a piece of property owned by her husband (144). (Stange 1995): Adele's physical appearance (her body is as beautiful as her clothes) is a reminder of the property system in which women represent their husbands' wealth (26).

[7.13] (Martin 1988): Edna does not look at life as others do; her world is one of the unconscious, daydreams, and the particular -- all traits usually attributed to women (21).

[7.15] (Rowe 1989): For Edna to swim in either the ocean or the Kentucky grass, she must consider her body as a form of activity rather than a social or natural thing (4). (Paul 1995): 63. (Poovalingam 1995): The association of the sea with Edna's childhood memory of the grass is more than nostalgic; it suggests a fixed mental state (222-23).

[7.16] (Rowe 1989): 4.

[7.17] (Rowe 1989): 4. (Viswanath 1995): The pursuit described here is still going on in Edna's adult life (129).

[7.18] (Giorcelli 1988): 112. (Walker 1988): 68. (Gremillion 1989): As a child Edna thought of the world as a part of herself and was unable to realize any constrictions that

the world placed on her as an individual (169). (Rowe 1989): 4. (Vevaina 1995): Early on Edna questions the authority of religion (97).

[7.20] (Dyer 1988): 128. (Giorcelli 1988): This is how Edna has lived the last twenty-eight years of her life; one wonders if this is the way she wanders into the sea (109). (Martin 1988): Edna's personality is bipolar, since she is both a child of nature and one trapped by sensitivity without any common sense (21). (Showalter 1988): 45. (Poovalingam 1995): Edna is aware of how dangerous an unthinking impulse can be (223).

[7.22] (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (Showalter 1988): Adele's caresses are the first Edna has ever received from another woman; she is not used to such openness between women (45). The two women's relationship is more than sympathy; Edna, being motherless, uses Adele as a surrogate mother (45). (Toth 1988): Edna's childhood friends have a great similarity to Chopin's childhood friends (62). (Bande 1995): Edna is a withdrawn person and has been so since her girlhood (162). (Gopalan 1995): Margaret was the main mother figure for Edna when she was growing up (175).

[7.23] (Morris and Dunn 1988): 96. (Stange 1989): Her relationship with Adele encourages Edna to examine her own inner self (149). (Amin 1995): In her youth Edna was lonely, but she possessed a vivid imagination, which served as a breeding ground for secret infatuations with visitors such as the cavalry officer (70). (Bande 1995): Edna often

fantasized about men during her girlhood, until Leonce comes along and changes her fantasies to reality (162). Even as early as Edna's childhood, she has two separate selves within her soul, but she does not realize this until after she falls in love with Robert (161). (Paul 1995): 50. (Poovalingam 1995): Edna's infatuations and fantasies could have made her a recluse (222). (Stange 1995): As Edna begins to examine her private thoughts, she recognizes a propensity for infatuation (32). (Vevaina 1995): Like Persephone, when Edna is young her attitude is passive and her actions are submissive, as is evidenced by her dreams of the officer (84).

**[7.24]** (Amin 1995): In her youth Edna was lonely, but she possessed a vivid imagination, which served as a breeding ground for secret infatuations with visitors to her father's plantation (70). (Poovalingam 1995): 222. (Vevaina 1995): Like Persephone, when Edna is young her attitude is passive and her actions are submissive, as is evidenced by her dreams of the visitor (84).

**[7.25]** (Franklin 1988): Edna is prone to infatuation and recognizes this as a flaw (147). (Amin 1995): In her youth Edna was lonely, but possessed a vivid imagination, which served as a breeding ground for secret infatuations with men such as the tragedian (70). (Block 1995): Edna's previous infatuations had all been with men who were unattainable, and therefore Edna believes that love is hopeless (215). (Paul 1995): Robert stirs the same emotions in Edna -- he is obtainable but not obtainable (50). (Vevaina 1995): Like Persephone, when Edna is young her attitude is passive and her actions are submissive, as

is evidenced by her dreams of the tragedian (84).

**[7.26]** (Gilmore 1988): As a young woman, Edna thought the photograph was a true likeness of the tragedian, but as she begins to awaken, she realizes that imitations are never as good as reality (78). (Stange 1989): Edna has a tendency to become infatuated with different men (149). (Stange 1995): This photograph is to Edna as Edna is to Leonce, a possession. She is the owner of it. The glass resembles a mirror, showing Edna kissing herself rather than the tragedian. The photograph is a concrete example of Edna's sexuality, since it can be shown in public and kissed in private (32).

**[7.27]** (Martin 1988): 21. (Showalter 1988): Edna marries Leonce because she considers him a paternal guardian who will not make many demands on her domestically, sexually, or emotionally (49). (Walker 1988): Edna's marriage is not one manifesting desire, but is rather her way to leave her strict Kentucky home as well as to rebel against her father, who did not want her to marry a Catholic (71). (Greer 1989): 51. (Bande 1995): Edna feels that her marriage is not unlike those of others around her (161). (Ghosh 1995): 231. (Tripathi 1995): 149. (Vevaina 1995): Edna is enticed into marriage, as sometimes happens to women who resemble Persephone (84).

**[7.28]** (Giorcelli 1988): Images of portals and temples are used to illustrate what marriage was for Edna (127-128). (Bande 1995): Edna steps into the role of wife and mother, which is socially required of her. In doing so, she feels herself becoming the



personification of the dependent female (163). (Vevaina 1995): Edna soon realizes that she and Leonce have nothing in common (84).

[7.29] (Showalter 1988): 49. (Toth 1988): It is likely that, like the Pontelliers, Chopin's parents shared no common interests (61). (Bande 1995): Edna's regard for her husband is unemotional (163). (Block 1995): When Edna married Leonce she was satisfied with a passionless marriage because that made the relationship seem safe (215).

[7.30] (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (Jacobs 1988): 109. (Jones 1989): Edna is often unhappy because the role required of her by society is not the role she desires (60). (Stange 1989): While Adele welcomes the role of mother, Edna does not, declining the requirement of selflessness (148). (Amin 1995): 74. (Block 1995): Edna constantly struggles with her desire for independence and with her role as a mother (212). (Ghosh 1995): 231. (Stange 1995): Although motherhood appears to be forced upon Edna, it nonetheless gives her her first sense of identity (30). By rejecting the mother-woman role, Edna rids herself of a role she has been forced to accept (31). (Bande 1995): 163. (Gopalan 1995): Her children have hardly any claim on Edna; theirs is a complicated relationship (176). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's life does not revolve around her children, as Adele's does (89). Edna is relieved when her husband and children are gone (96).

[7.31] (Showalter 1988): 45. (Paul 1995): The sea has a liberating effect on Edna -- an

effect which helps her to speak more freely than ever before (45).

[7.33] (Sweet-Hurd 1988): 106.

## CHAPTER 8

[8.1] "Do me a favor, Robert," spoke the pretty woman at his side, almost as soon as she and Robert had started their slow, homeward way. She looked up in his face, leaning on his arm beneath the encircling shadow of the umbrella which he had lifted.

[8.2] "Granted; as many as you like," he returned, glancing down into her eyes that were full of thoughtfulness and some speculation.

[8.3] "I only ask for one; let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

[8.4] "*Tiens!*" he exclaimed, with a sudden, boyish laugh. "*Voilà que Madame Ratignolle est jalouse!*"

[8.5] "Nonsense! I'm in earnest; I mean what I say. Let Mrs. Pontellier alone."

[8.6] "Why?" he asked; himself growing serious at his companion's

solicitation.

**[8.7]** "She is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously."

**[8.8]** His face flushed with annoyance, and taking off his soft hat he began to beat it impatiently against his leg as he walked. "Why shouldn't she take me seriously?" he demanded sharply. "Am I a comedian, a clown, a jack-in-the-box? Why shouldn't she? You Creoles! I have no patience with you! Am I always to be regarded as a feature of an amusing programme? I hope Mrs. Pontellier does take me seriously. I hope she has discernment enough to find in me something besides the *blagueur*. If I thought there was any doubt--"

**[8.9]** "Oh, enough, Robert!" she broke into his heated outburst. "You are not thinking of what you are saying. You speak with about as little reflection as we might expect from one of those children down there playing in the sand. If your attentions to any married women here were ever offered with any intention of being convincing, you would not be the gentleman we all know you to be, and you would be unfit to associate with the wives and daughters of the people who trust you."

**[8.10]** Madame Ratignolle had spoken what she believed to be the law and the gospel. The young man shrugged his shoulders impatiently.

**[8.11]** "Oh! well! That isn't it," slamming his hat down vehemently upon his head. "You ought to feel that such things are not flattering to say to a fellow."

**[8.12]** "Should our whole intercourse consist of an exchange of compliments? *Ma foi!*"

**[8.13]** "It isn't pleasant to have a woman tell you--" he went on, unheedingly, but breaking off suddenly: "Now if I were like Arobin--you remember Alcée Arobin and that story of the consul's wife at Biloxi?" And he related the story of Alcée Arobin and the consul's wife; and another about the tenor of the French Opera, who received letters which should never have been written; and still other stories, grave and gay, till Mrs. Pontellier and her possible propensity for taking young men seriously was apparently forgotten.

**[8.14]** Madame Ratignolle, when they had regained her cottage, went in to take the hour's rest which she considered helpful. Before leaving her, Robert begged her pardon for the impatience--he called it rudeness--with which he had received her well-meant caution.

**[8.15]** "You made one mistake, Adèle," he said, with a light smile; "there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking me seriously. You should have warned me against taking myself seriously. Your advice might then have carried some weight and given me subject for some reflection. *Au revoir*. But you look tired," he added, solicitously. "Would you like a cup of bouillon? Shall I stir you a toddy? Let me mix you a toddy with a drop of Angostura."

**[8.16]** She acceded to the suggestion of bouillon, which was grateful and acceptable. He went himself to the kitchen, which was a building apart from the cottages and lying to the rear of the house. And he himself brought her the

golden-brown bouillon, in a dainty Sevres cup, with a flaky cracker or two on the saucer.

**[8.17]** She thrust a bare, white arm from the curtain which shielded her open door, and received the cup from his hands. She told him he was a *bon garçon*, and she meant it. Robert thanked her and turned away toward "the house."

**[8.18]** The lovers were just entering the grounds of the *pension*. They were leaning toward each other as the wateroaks bent from the sea. There was not a particle of earth beneath their feet. Their heads might have been turned upside-down, so absolutely did they tread upon blue ether. The lady in black, creeping behind them, looked a trifle paler and more jaded than usual. There was no sign of Mrs. Pontellier and the children. Robert scanned the distance for any such apparition. They would doubtless remain away till the dinner hour. The young man ascended to his mother's room. It was situated at the top of the house, made up of odd angles and a queer, sloping ceiling. Two broad dormer windows looked out toward the Gulf, and as far across it as a man's eye might reach. The furnishings of the room were light, cool, and practical.

**[8.19]** Madame Lebrun was busily engaged at the sewing-machine. A little black girl sat on the floor, and with her hands worked the treadle of the machine. The Creole woman does not take any chances which may be avoided of imperiling her health.

**[8.20]** Robert went over and seated himself on the broad sill of one of the

dormer windows. He took a book from his pocket and began energetically to read it, judging by the precision and frequency with which he turned the leaves. The sewing-machine made a resounding clatter in the room; it was of a ponderous, by-gone make. In the lulls, Robert and his mother exchanged bits of desultory conversation.

**[8.21]** "Where is Mrs. Pontellier?"

**[8.22]** "Down at the beach with the children."

**[8.23]** "I promised to lend her the Goncourt. Don't forget to take it down when you go; it's there on the bookshelf over the small table." Clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! for the next five or eight minutes.

**[8.24]** "Where is Victor going with the rockaway?"

**[8.25]** "The rockaway? Victor?"

**[8.26]** "Yes; down there in front. He seems to be getting ready to drive away somewhere."

**[8.27]** "Call him." Clatter, clatter!

**[8.28]** Robert uttered a shrill, piercing whistle which might have been heard back at the wharf.

**[8.29]** "He won't look up."

**[8.30]** Madame Lebrun flew to the window. She called "Victor!" She waved a handkerchief and called again. The young fellow below got into the vehicle and started the horse off at a gallop.

**[8.31]** Madame Lebrun went back to the machine, crimson with

annoyance. Victor was the younger son and brother--a *tête montée*, with a temper which invited violence and a will which no ax could break.

**[8.32]** "Whenever you say the word I'm ready to thrash any amount of reason into him that he's able to hold."

**[8.33]** "If your father had only lived!" Clatter, clatter, clatter, clatter, bang! It was a fixed belief with Madame Lebrun that the conduct of the universe and all things pertaining thereto would have been manifestly of a more intelligent and higher order had not Monsieur Lebrun been removed to other spheres during the early years of their married life.

**[8.34]** "What do you hear from Montel?" Montel was a middleaged gentleman whose vain ambition and desire for the past twenty years had been to fill the void which Monsieur Lebrun's taking off had left in the Lebrun household. Clatter, clatter, bang, clatter!

**[8.35]** "I have a letter somewhere," looking in the machine drawer and finding the letter in the bottom of the workbasket. "He says to tell you he will be in Vera Cruz the beginning of next month,"-- clatter, clatter!--"and if you still have the intention of joining him"--bang! clatter, clatter, bang!

**[8.36]** "Why didn't you tell me so before, mother? You know I wanted--"Clatter, clatter, clatter!

**[8.37]** "Do you see Mrs. Pontellier starting back with the children? She will be in late to luncheon again. She never starts to get ready for luncheon till the last minute." Clatter, clatter! "Where are you going?"

**[8.38]** "Where did you say the Goncourt was?"

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 8

**[8.7]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna, feeling the world around her as alien, is deemed to be different from the others (114). (Walker 1988): Adele recognizes Edna as an outsider to their culture. Edna does indeed take Robert seriously (72). (Jones 1989): 64. (Juneja 1995): 116. (Tripathi 1995): 149. (Vevaina 1995): 89.

**[8.8]** (Jones 1989): Robert is tired of not being taken seriously and therefore welcomes serious attention from Edna (64).

**[8.10]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna looks at Adele as a man would look at her.

**[8.15]** (Balliwala 1995): Robert is hurt when Adele does not take his association with Edna seriously (196).

**[8.18]** (Giorcelli 1988): Madame Lebrun's home implies that she represents the stereotypical good fairy while Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment is characteristic of the dwelling of a bad witch (135-36). (Solomon 1988): Chopin uses the lovers as a backdrop,



emphasizing their remoteness (115). (Paul 1995): When alone, Edna and Robert seem to be in a world of their own (51).

**[8.19]** (Rowe 1989): Chopin gives several examples of women (servants) whose work could possibly perform miracles (17).

## **CHAPTER 9**

**[9.1]** Every light in the hall was ablaze; every lamp turned as high as it could be without smoking the chimney or threatening explosion. The lamps were fixed at intervals against the wall, encircling the whole room. Some one had gathered orange and lemon branches, and with these fashioned graceful festoons between. The dark green of the branches stood out and glistened against the white muslin curtains which draped the windows, and which puffed, floated, and flapped at the capricious will of a stiff breeze that swept up from the Gulf.

**[9.2]** It was Saturday night a few weeks after the intimate conversation held between Robert and Madame Ratignolle on their way from the beach. An

unusual number of husbands, fathers, and friends had come down to stay over Sunday; and they were being suitably entertained by their families, with the material help of Madame Lebrun. The dining tables had all been removed to one end of the hall, and the chairs ranged about in rows and in clusters. Each little family group had had its say and exchanged its domestic gossip earlier in the evening. There was now an apparent disposition to relax; to widen the circle of confidences and give a more general tone to the conversation.

**[9.3]** Many of the children had been permitted to sit up beyond their usual bedtime. A small band of them were lying on their stomachs on the floor looking at the colored sheets of the comic papers which Mr. Pontellier had brought down. The little Pontellier boys were permitting them to do so, and making their authority felt.

**[9.4]** Music, dancing, and a recitation or two were the entertainments furnished, or rather, offered. But there was nothing systematic about the programme, no appearance of prearrangement nor even premeditation.

**[9.5]** At an early hour in the evening the Farival twins were prevailed upon to play the piano. They were girls of fourteen, always clad in the Virgin's colors, blue and white, having been dedicated to the Blessed Virgin at their baptism. They played a duet from "Zampa," and at the earnest solicitation of every one present followed it with the overture to "The Poet and the Peasant."

**[9.6]** "*Allez vous-en! Sapristi!*" shrieked the parrot outside the door. He was the only being present who possessed sufficient candor to admit that he

was not listening to these gracious performances for the first time that summer. Old Monsieur Farival, grandfather of the twins, grew indignant over the interruption, and insisted upon having the bird removed and consigned to regions of darkness. Victor Lebrun objected; and his decrees were as immutable as those of Fate. The parrot fortunately offered no further interruption to the entertainment, the whole venom of his nature apparently having been cherished up and hurled against the twins in that one impetuous outburst.

**[9.7]** Later a young brother and sister gave recitations, which every one present had heard many times at winter evening entertainments in the city.

**[9.8]** A little girl performed a skirt dance in the center of the floor. The mother played her accompaniments and at the same time watched her daughter with greedy admiration and nervous apprehension. She need have had no apprehension. The child was mistress of the situation. She had been properly dressed for the occasion in black tulle and black silk tights. Her little neck and arms were bare, and her hair, artificially crimped, stood out like fluffy black plumes over her head. Her poses were full of grace, and her little black-shod toes twinkled as they shot out and upward with a rapidity and suddenness which were bewildering.

**[9.9]** But there was no reason why every one should not dance. Madame Ratignolle could not, so it was she who gaily consented to play for the others. She played very well, keeping excellent waltz time and infusing an expression into the strains which was indeed inspiring. She was keeping up her music on

account of the children, she said; because she and her husband both considered it a means of brightening the home and making it attractive.

**[9.10]** Almost every one danced but the twins, who could not be induced to separate during the brief period when one or the other should be whirling around the room in the arms of a man. They might have danced together, but they did not think of it.

**[9.11]** The children were sent to bed. Some went submissively; others with shrieks and protests as they were dragged away. They had been permitted to sit up till after the ice-cream, which naturally marked the limit of human indulgence.

**[9.12]** The ice-cream was passed around with cake--gold and silver cake arranged on platters in alternate slices; it had been made and frozen during the afternoon back of the kitchen by two black women, under the supervision of Victor. It was pronounced a great success--excellent if it had only contained a little less vanilla or a little more sugar, if it had been frozen a degree harder, and if the salt might have been kept out of portions of it. Victor was proud of his achievement, and went about recommending it and urging every one to partake of it to excess.

**[9.13]** After Mrs. Pontellier had danced twice with her husband, once with Robert, and once with Monsieur Ratignolle, who was thin and tall and swayed like a reed in the wind when he danced, she went out on the gallery and seated herself on the low window-sill, where she commanded a view of all that went on

in the hall and could look out toward the Gulf. There was a soft effulgence in the east. The moon was coming up, and its mystic shimmer was casting a million lights across the distant, restless water.

**[9.14]** "Would you like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play?" asked Robert, coming out on the porch where she was. Of course Edna would like to hear Mademoiselle Reisz play; but she feared it would be useless to entreat her. "I'll ask her," he said.

**[9.15]** "I'll tell her that you want to hear her. She likes you. She will come." He turned and hurried away to one of the far cottages, where Mademoiselle Reisz was shuffling away. She was dragging a chair in and out of her room, and at intervals objecting to the crying of a baby, which a nurse in the adjoining cottage was endeavoring to put to sleep. She was a disagreeable little woman, no longer young, who had quarreled with almost every one, owing to a temper which was self-assertive and a disposition to trample upon the rights of others. Robert prevailed upon her without any too great difficulty.

**[9.16]** She entered the hall with him during a lull in the dance. She made an awkward, imperious little bow as she went in. She was a homely woman, with a small weazened face and body and eyes that glowed. She had absolutely no taste in dress, and wore a batch of rusty black lace with a bunch of artificial violets pinned to the side of her hair.

**[9.17]** "Ask Mrs. Pontellier what she would like to hear me play," she requested of Robert. She sat perfectly still before the piano, not touching the

keys, while Robert carried her message to Edna at the window. A general air of surprise and genuine satisfaction fell upon every one as they saw the pianist enter. There was a settling down, and a prevailing air of expectancy everywhere. Edna was a trifle embarrassed at being thus signaled out for the imperious little woman's favor. She would not dare to choose, and begged that Mademoiselle Reisz would please herself in her selections.

**[9.18]** Edna was what she herself called very fond of music. Musical strains, well rendered, had a way of evoking pictures in her mind. She sometimes liked to sit in the room of mornings when Madame Ratignolle played or practiced. One piece which that lady played Edna had entitled "Solitude." It was a short, plaintive, minor strain. The name of the piece was something else, but she called it "Solitude." When she heard it there came before her imagination the figure of a man standing beside a desolate rock on the seashore. He was naked. His attitude was one of hopeless resignation as he looked toward a distant bird winging its flight away from him.

**[9.19]** Another piece called to her mind a dainty young woman clad in an Empire gown, taking mincing dancing steps as she came down a long avenue between tall hedges. Again, another reminded her of children at play, and still another of nothing on earth but a demure lady stroking a cat.

**[9.20]** The very first chords which Mademoiselle Reisz struck upon the piano sent a keen tremor down Mrs. Pontellier's spinal column. It was not the first time she had heard an artist at the piano. Perhaps it was the first time she

was ready, perhaps the first time her being was tempered to take an impress of the abiding truth.

**[9.21]** She waited for the material pictures which she thought would gather and blaze before her imagination. She waited in vain. She saw no pictures of solitude, of hope, of longing, or of despair. But the very passions themselves were aroused within her soul, swaying it, lashing it, as the waves daily beat upon her splendid body. She trembled, she was choking, and the tears blinded her.

**[9.22]** Mademoiselle had finished. She arose, and bowing her stiff, lofty bow, she went away, stopping for neither, thanks nor applause. As she passed along the gallery she patted Edna upon the shoulder.

**[9.23]** "Well, how did you like my music?" she asked. The young woman was unable to answer; she pressed the hand of the pianist convulsively. Mademoiselle Reisz perceived her agitation and even her tears. She patted her again upon the shoulder as she said:

**[9.24]** "You are the only one worth playing for. Those others? Bah!" and she went shuffling and sidling on down the gallery toward her room.

**[9.25]** But she was mistaken about "those others." Her playing had aroused a fever of enthusiasm. "What passion!" "What an artist!" "I have always said no one could play Chopin like Mademoiselle Reisz!" "That last prelude! Bon Dieu! It shakes a man!"

**[9.26]** It was growing late, and there was a general disposition to

disband. But some one, perhaps it was Robert, thought of a bath at that mystic hour and under that mystic moon.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 9

[9.8] (Paul 1995): 57.

[9.9] (Showalter 1988): Adele considers art a motherly duty she is obliged to teach to her children; women's art is often regarded more as a social activity than as a serious pursuit (45). (Solomon 1988): 118. (Balliwala 1995): Adele's reason for playing music is completely opposite from that of Mademoiselle Reisz, whose music is her passion (192). (Block 1995): Edna paints for herself, while Adele provides music for her children (205).

[9.10] (Gilmore 1988): 77.

[9.13] (Dyer 1988): 128.

[9.15] (Solomon 1988): While Adele plays to please the crowd, Mademoiselle Reisz shows only contempt for her audience (118). (Jones 1989): 61. (Amin 1995): 73. (Battawala 1995): Mademoiselle Reisz reminds one of the wicked witch in *Sleeping*



*Beauty*, although this witch is not wicked but rather a wise old woman to whom Edna should listen (190). (Block 1995): Mademoiselle Reisz provides advice for Edna that no one else can, but she lacks the things Edna wants, such as love and sexuality (205).

[9.16] (Vevaina 1995): 87.

[9.17] (Solomon 1988): 118.

[9.18] (Delbanco 1988): Both of Edna's worlds are dominated by a solitary person intruding into an unpopulated vista (96). (Giorcelli 1988): At the end of the novel, Edna stands alone in the nude, which recalls this image she had while listening to Mademoiselle Reisz's music (122). (Showalter 1988): Edna conceives of privacy as foreign, male, and awesome (33). (LeFevre 1989): Music greatly affects Edna throughout the novel, but here she allows the music to take her psyche to another place (78). (Rowe 1989): The man in Edna's imagination is sensually charged because Robert is there. Edna forbids herself to desire the man because sexual desire is unthinkable (3). (Ramamoorthi 1995): Adele's music always brings visual images to Edna's mind (183). (Viswanath 1995): Edna waited for this flashback to appear in her mind (130).

[9.19] (Showalter 1988): Edna's daydreams as she listens to Adele play imply the constraints society imposes on females (45). (Ramamoorthi 1995): Adele's music always brings visual images to Edna's mind (183).

[9.20] (Gilmore 1988): 77. (Giorcelli 1988): Edna craves abstractions and illusions that she herself creates (121). (LeFew 1989): 79. (Ellis 1994): Mademoiselle Reisz's music attends Edna's awakening, perhaps even beginning it. Chopin uses the music to chronicle Edna's journey toward finding her true self (145). (Jacob 1995): Edna finds it hard to admit the emotion that Reisz's music awakens in her (107). (Vevaina 1995): 98.

[9.21] (Gilmore 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz's music deeply moves Edna because it forces her to face her own emotions (78). (Martin 1988): Edna does not look at the world as others do, but rather lives in a dream-like world (21). (Showalter 1988): The music, by Frederic Chopin, becomes the signal for entering a realm of restrained desire between Edna and Robert that Mademoiselle Reisz controls (47). (LeFew 1989): In this scene the music implies desire and serves as a symbol of Edna's will (79). (Ellis 1994): Mademoiselle Reisz's music attends Edna's awakening, perhaps even beginning it. Chopin uses the music to chronicle Edna's journey toward finding her true self (145). (Jacob 1995): Later, Chopin juxtaposes Edna's beautiful body with Reisz's ugliness (107). (Triakha 1995): Mademoiselle Reisz's music stirs Edna's inner possibilities (150). (Vevaina 1995): 87. (Viswanath 1995): 130.

**CHAPTER 10**

**[10.1]** At all events Robert proposed it, and there was not a dissenting voice. There was not one but was ready to follow when he led the way. He did not lead the way, however, he directed the way; and he himself loitered behind with the lovers, who had betrayed a disposition to linger and hold themselves apart. He walked between them, whether with malicious or mischievous intent was not wholly clear, even to himself.

**[10.2]** The Pontelliers and Ratignolles walked ahead; the women leaning upon the arms of their husbands. Edna could hear Robert's voice behind them, and could sometimes hear what he said. She wondered why he did not join them. It was unlike him not to. Of late he had sometimes held away from her for an entire day, redoubling his devotion upon the next and the next, as though to make up for hours that had been lost. She missed him the days when some pretext served to take him away from her, just as one misses the sun on a cloudy day without having thought much about the sun when it was shining.

**[10.3]** The people walked in little groups toward the beach. They talked and laughed; some of them sang. There was a band playing down at Klein's hotel, and the strains reached them faintly, tempered by the distance. There were strange, rare odors abroad-- a tangle of the sea smell and of weeds and damp, new-plowed earth, mingled with the heavy perfume of a field of white

blossoms somewhere near. But the night sat lightly upon the sea and the land. There was no weight of darkness; there were no shadows. The white light of the moon had fallen upon the world like the mystery and the softness of sleep.

**[10.4]** Most of them walked into the water as though into a native element. The sea was quiet now, and swelled lazily in broad billows that melted into one another and did not break except upon the beach in little foamy crests that coiled back like slow, white serpents.

**[10.5]** Edna had attempted all summer to learn to swim. She had received instructions from both the men and women; in some instances from the children. Robert had pursued a system of lessons almost daily; and he was nearly at the point of discouragement in realizing the futility of his efforts. A certain ungovernable dread hung about her when in the water, unless there was a hand near by that might reach out and reassure her.

**[10.6]** But that night she was like the little tottering, stumbling, clutching child, who of a sudden realizes its powers, and walks for the first time alone, boldly and with over-confidence. She could have shouted for joy. She did shout for joy, as with a sweeping stroke or two she lifted her body to the surface of the water.

**[10.7]** A feeling of exultation overtook her, as if some power of significant import had been given her to control the working of her body and her soul. She grew daring and reckless, overestimating her strength. She wanted to swim far out, where no woman had swum before.

**[10.8]** Her unlooked-for achievement was the subject of wonder, applause, and admiration. Each one congratulated himself that his special teachings had accomplished this desired end.

**[10.9]** "How easy it is!" she thought. "It is nothing," she said aloud; "why did I not discover before that it was nothing. Think of the time I have lost splashing about like a baby!" She would not join the groups in their sports and bouts, but intoxicated with her newly conquered power, she swam out alone.

**[10.10]** She turned her face seaward to gather in an impression of space and solitude, which the vast expanse of water, meeting and melting with the moonlit sky, conveyed to her excited fancy. As she swam she seemed to be reaching out for the unlimited in which to lose herself.

**[10.11]** Once she turned and looked toward the shore, toward the people she had left there. She had not gone any great distance that is, what would have been a great distance for an experienced swimmer. But to her unaccustomed vision the stretch of water behind her assumed the aspect of a barrier which her unaided strength would never be able to overcome.

**[10.12]** A quick vision of death smote her soul, and for a second of time appalled and enfeebled her senses. But by an effort she rallied her staggering faculties and managed to regain the land.

**[10.13]** She made no mention of her encounter with death and her flash of terror, except to say to her husband, "I thought I should have perished out there alone."

**[10.14]** "You were not so very far, my dear; I was watching you", he told her.

**[10.15]** Edna went at once to the bath-house, and she had put on her dry clothes and was ready to return home before the others had left the water. She started to walk away alone. They all called to her and shouted to her. She waved a dissenting hand, and went on, paying no further heed to their renewed cries which sought to detain her.

**[10.16]** "Sometimes I am tempted to think that Mrs. Pontellier is capricious," said Madame Lebrun, who was amusing herself immensely and feared that Edna's abrupt departure might put an end to the pleasure.

**[10.17]** "I know she is," assented Mr. Pontellier; "sometimes, not often."

**[10.18]** Edna had not traversed a quarter of the distance on her way home before she was overtaken by Robert.

**[10.19]** "Did you think I was afraid?" she asked him, without a shade of annoyance.

**[10.20]** "No; I knew you weren't afraid."

**[10.21]** "Then why did you come? Why didn't you stay out there with the others?"

**[10.22]** "I never thought of it."

**[10.23]** "Thought of what?"

**[10.24]** "Of anything. What difference does it make?"

**[10.25]** "I'm very tired," she uttered, complainingly.

**[10.26]** "I know you are."

**[10.27]** "You don't know anything about it. Why should you know? I never was so exhausted in my life. But it isn't unpleasant. A thousand emotions have swept through me to-night. I don't comprehend half of them. Don't mind what I'm saying; I am just thinking aloud. I wonder if I shall ever be stirred again as Mademoiselle Reisz's playing moved me to-night. I wonder if any night on earth will ever again be like this one. It is like a night in a dream. The people about me are like some uncanny, half-human beings. There must be spirits abroad to-night."

**[10.28]** "There are," whispered Robert, "Didn't you know this was the twenty-eighth of August?"

**[10.29]** "The twenty-eighth of August?"

**[10.30]** "Yes. On the twenty-eighth of August, at the hour of midnight, and if the moon is shining--the moon must be shining--a spirit that has haunted these shores for ages rises up from the Gulf. With its own penetrating vision the spirit seeks some one mortal worthy to hold him company, worthy of being exalted for a few hours into realms of the semi-celestials. His search has always hitherto been fruitless, and he has sunk back, disheartened, into the sea. But to-night he found Mrs. Pontellier. Perhaps he will never wholly release her from the spell. Perhaps she will never again suffer a poor, unworthy earthling to walk in the shadow of her divine presence."

**[10.31]** "Don't banter me," she said, wounded at what appeared to be his

flippancy. He did not mind the entreaty, but the tone with its delicate note of pathos was like a reproach. He could not explain; he could not tell her that he had penetrated her mood and understood. He said nothing except to offer her his arm, for, by her own admission, she was exhausted. She had been walking alone with her arms hanging limp, letting her white skirts trail along the dewy path. She took his arm, but she did not lean upon it. She let her hand lie listlessly, as though her thoughts were elsewhere--somewhere in advance of her body, and she was striving to overtake them.

**[10.32]** Robert assisted her into the hammock which swung from the post before her door out to the trunk of a tree.

**[10.33]** "Will you stay out here and wait for Mr. Pontellier?" he asked.

**[10.34]** "I'll stay out here. Good-night."

**[10.35]** "Shall I get you a pillow?"

**[10.36]** "There's one here," she said, feeling about, for they were in the shadow.

**[10.37]** "It must be soiled; the children have been tumbling it about."

**[10.38]** "No matter." And having discovered the pillow, she adjusted it beneath her head. She extended herself in the hammock with a deep breath of relief. She was not a supercilious or an over-dainty woman. She was not much given to reclining in the hammock, and when she did so it was with no cat-like suggestion of voluptuous ease, but with a beneficent repose which seemed to invade her whole body.



**[10.39]** "Shall I stay with you till Mr. Pontellier comes?" asked Robert, seating himself on the outer edge of one of the steps and taking hold of the hammock rope which was fastened to the post.

**[10.40]** "If you wish. Don't swing the hammock. Will you get my white shawl which I left on the window-sill over at the house?"

**[10.41]** "Are you chilly?"

**[10.42]** "No; but I shall be presently."

**[10.43]** "Presently?" he laughed. "Do you know what time it is? How long are you going to stay out here?"

**[10.44]** "I don't know. Will you get the shawl?"

**[10.45]** "Of course I will," he said, rising. He went over to the house, walking along the grass. She watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight. It was past midnight. It was very quiet.

**[10.46]** When he returned with the shawl she took it and kept it in her hand. She did not put it around her.

**[10.47]** "Did you say I should stay till Mr. Pontellier came back?"

**[10.48]** "I said you might if you wished to."

**[10.49]** He seated himself again and rolled a cigarette, which he smoked in silence. Neither did Mrs. Pontellier speak. No multitude of words could have been more significant than those moments of silence, or more pregnant with the first-felt throbbings of desire.

**[10.50]** When the voices of the bathers were heard approaching, Robert

said good-night. She did not answer him. He thought she was asleep. Again she watched his figure pass in and out of the strips of moonlight as he walked away.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 10

**[10.2]** (Giorcelli 1988): 125.

**[10.3]** (Showalter 1988): This scene implies Edna's self-focused sensuality (43). (Tripathi 1995): Chopin uses natural elements to arouse Edna to realize important truths (154-55).

**[10.4]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna, in her first swim, reminds the reader of Athene, the messenger between Hades and reality (134).

**[10.5]** (Amin 1995): Before Edna learns to swim, the sea seems dangerous to her, but it is Robert's hand that persuades her to recognize that she can control both her body and her soul (71). (Block 1995): Edna's life is like a body in the sea because she relies on others to support her (209). (Ghosh 1995): 236.

**[10.6]** (Jones 1989): Chopin compares Edna's learning to swim with a child's learning to

walk (69). (Paul 1995): The analogy of a child learning to walk shows Edna's need for help and security until she learns to swim (64). (Poovalingam 1995): When Edna develops the confidence to swim, she behaves like a child (225).

**[10.7]** (S. Jones 1988): Edna develops a childlike confidence (125). (Lattin 1988): Swimming makes Edna feel as if she has control over her own being (43). (Martin 1988): Edna never gains the strength or endurance to swim very well for any length of time (22). (Jones 1989): Like a child, Edna feels that her potential is unlimited (70). (Block 1995): Edna's power is given to her rather than coming from within, which proves that she does not possess the strength to go beyond the confines that bind her (209). Edna fails to realize her limitations, in the sea as well as in her life (210). (Ghosh 1995): Edna is thrilled over the power to control her body -- a power that gives her the drive she needs to break the confines society has placed upon her (235; 240). (Jacob 1995): 109. (Juneja 1995): Edna's awakening and her ability to swim have become one and the same (115). (Paul 1995): Edna experiences feelings of rebirth, baptism, and power (64). (Tripathi 1995): Edna's learning to swim symbolizes her liberation (150).

**[10.9]** (Showalter 1988): Edna's emotional highs are countered by depression and daydreaming (48). (Block 1995): 206.

**[10.10]** (Dyer 1988): 127. (Giorcelli 1988): Edna craves the abstractions and illusions she creates for herself (121). (Gremillion 1989): Edna achieves her first taste of power while swimming in the sea (170). (LeFevre 1989): Both the sea and music symbolize the ebb and

flow of Edna's psyche (80). (Vevaina 1995): 99.

**[10.11]** (Block 1995): 209.

**[10.12]** (Dyer 1988): Edna sees the connection between death and the sea (130). Some of Chopin's language resembles Whitman's in his "Out of the Cradle Endlessly Rocking" (131). (S. Jones 1988): Edna's over-confidence causes her glimpse of death, which foreshadows her suicide (125). (Jones 1989): Edna's vision foreshadows her suicide (70). (Juneja 1995): 115. (Vevaina 1995): 99.

**[10.13]** (Block 1995): 206.

**[10.14]** (Block 1995): Leonce condescends to Edna with his reply, emphasizing her dependence by speaking to her as if she is powerless (206).

**[10.30]** (Dyer 1988): Chopin shared the idea of a romantic sea with Herman Melville (127). Robert's remark is confirmed by Edna's progressive regal behavior (128). (Giorcelli 1988): 128. (Paul 1995): Robert romantically interprets Edna's mastery of swimming (52). (Vevaina 1995): 85.

**[10.31]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna's mind and body are trying to become one (119). (Block 1995): Like Edna, Robert shows his immaturity, especially because of his inability to tell

Edna what he feels for her (214).

**[10.49]** (Giorcelli 1988): 113. (Jacobs 1988): 109. (Showalter 1988): This scene implies Edna's self-focused sensuality (43-44). (Block 1995): 210. (Paul 1995): As Edna becomes friendlier with Robert she becomes more aware of her selfhood; their closeness causes a stir of desire within her (45). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's realization of her feelings for Robert is a positive result of her choice to leave her family (98).

## CHAPTER 11

**[11.1]** "What are you doing out here, Edna? I thought I should find you in bed," said her husband, when he discovered her lying there. He had walked up with Madame Lebrun and left her at the house. His wife did not reply.

**[11.2]** "Are you asleep?" he asked, bending down close to look at her.

**[11.3]** "No." Her eyes gleamed bright and intense, with no sleepy shadows, as they looked into his.

**[11.4]** "Do you know it is past one o'clock? Come on," and he mounted the steps and went into their room.

**[11.5]** "Edna!" called Mr. Pontellier from within, after a few moments had

gone by.

**[11.6]** "Don't wait for me," she answered. He thrust his head through the door.

**[11.7]** "You will take cold out there," he said, irritably. "What folly is this? Why don't you come in?"

**[11.8]** "It isn't cold; I have my shawl."

**[11.9]** "The mosquitoes will devour you."

**[11.10]** "There are no mosquitoes."

**[11.11]** She heard him moving about the room; every sound indicating impatience and irritation. Another time she would have gone in at his request. She would, through habit, have yielded to his desire; not with any sense of submission or obedience to his compelling wishes, but unthinkingly, as we walk, move, sit, stand, go through the daily treadmill of the life which has been portioned out to us.

**[11.12]** "Edna, dear, are you not coming in soon?" he asked again, this time fondly, with a note of entreaty.

**[11.13]** "No; I am going to stay out here."

**[11.14]** "This is more than folly," he blurted out. "I can't permit you to stay out there all night. You must come in the house instantly."

**[11.15]** With a writhing motion she settled herself more securely in the hammock. She perceived that her will had blazed up, stubborn and resistant. She could not at that moment have done other than denied and resisted. She

wondered if her husband had ever spoken to her like that before, and if she had submitted to his command. Of course she had; she remembered that she had. But she could not realize why or how she should have yielded, feeling as she then did.

**[11.16]** "Léonce, go to bed, " she said I mean to stay out here. I don't wish to go in, and I don't intend to. Don't speak to me like that again; I shall not answer you."

**[11.17]** Mr. Pontellier had prepared for bed, but he slipped on an extra garment. He opened a bottle of wine, of which he kept a small and select supply in a buffet of his own. He drank a glass of the wine and went out on the gallery and offered a glass to his wife. She did not wish any. He drew up the rocker, hoisted his slippered feet on the rail, and proceeded to smoke a cigar. He smoked two cigars; then he went inside and drank another glass of wine. Mrs. Pontellier again declined to accept a glass when it was offered to her. Mr. Pontellier once more seated himself with elevated feet, and after a reasonable interval of time smoked some more cigars.

**[11.18]** Edna began to feel like one who awakens gradually out of a dream, a delicious, grotesque, impossible dream, to feel again the realities pressing into her soul. The physical need for sleep began to overtake her; the exuberance which had sustained and exalted her spirit left her helpless and yielding to the conditions which crowded her in.

**[11.19]** The stillest hour of the night had come, the hour before dawn,

when the world seems to hold its breath. The moon hung low, and had turned from silver to copper in the sleeping sky. The old owl no longer hooted, and the water-oaks had ceased to moan as they bent their heads.

**[11.20]** Edna arose, cramped from lying so long and still in the hammock. She tottered up the steps, clutching feebly at the post before passing into the house.

**[11.21]** "Are you coming in, Léonce?" she asked, turning her face toward her husband.

**[11.22]** "Yes, dear," he answered, with a glance following a misty puff of smoke. "Just as soon as I have finished my cigar."

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 11

**[11.7]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna has had enough of Leonce's power over her (99).

**[11.8]** (Viswanath 1995): 130.

**[11.9]** (Rowe 1989): 12.

**[11.10]** (Rowe 1989): 12.



[11.11] (Jacobsen 1989): The second conflict between Leonce and Edna proves to be more of a battle of wills (104-105). (Ghosh 1995): 232. (Vevaina 1995): 96.

[11.12] (Block 1995): Leonce's gentle request is a pretense to disguise his determination that his wife should do as he does (206). (Ghosh 1995): 232.

[11.13] (Ghosh 1995): 232.

[11.14] (Block 1995): When Edna does not respond to Leonce's request, he commands her to come inside (206). (Ghosh 1995): 232.

[11.15] (Jacobs 1988): Rebellion is the only form of will used by Edna (110). (Bande 1995): 163. (Paul 1995): Mr. Pontellier's irritated tone is no match for Edna's newly found will (45). (Ghosh 1995): 232.

[11.16] (Rowe 1989): Edna refuses to allow Leonce to force her into going inside (12). (Paul 1995): Up to this point someone else has always directed Edna, but now she will direct her own life (45). (Ghosh 1995): 232. (Vevaina 1995): Edna begins to question her husband's authority by refusing to obey his command to go to bed on the night of her first swim (96).

[11.18] (Giorcelli 1988): 128. (Gremillion 1989): The power Edna feels temporarily while swimming in the ocean cannot be fully achieved (171). (Rowe 1989): Edna's rebellion against Leonce is comparable to that of an industrial worker (12). (Bande 1995): 159. (Block 1995): Edna does not possess the inner strength to rid herself of her social constraints (209). Edna prefers to live in a dream world rather than set goals and pursue them (210). (Paul 1995): 63.

[11.19] (Triखा 1995): Chopin uses elements of nature to arouse Edna to realize an important truth (155).

[11.20] (Rowe 1989): Leonce has been smoking and drinking in order to dull his sexual desire (14).

[11.21] (Rowe 1989): 14.

## CHAPTER 12

[12.1] She slept but a few hours. They were troubled and feverish hours, disturbed with dreams that were intangible, that eluded her, leaving only an

impression upon her half-awakened senses of something unattainable. She was up and dressed in the cool of the early morning. The air was invigorating and steadied somewhat her faculties. However, she was not seeking refreshment or help from any source, either external or from within. She was blindly following whatever impulse moved her, as if she had placed herself in alien hands for direction, and freed her soul of responsibility.

**[12.2]** Most of the people at that early hour were still in bed and asleep. A few, who intended to go over to the *Chênière* for mass, were moving about. The lovers, who had laid their plans the night before, were already strolling toward the wharf. The lady in black, with her Sunday prayer-book, velvet and gold-clasped, and her Sunday silver beads, was following them at no great distance. Old Monsieur Farival was up, and was more than half inclined to do anything that suggested itself. He put on his big straw hat, and taking his umbrella from the stand in the hall, followed the lady in black, never overtaking her.

**[12.3]** The little negro girl who worked Madame Lebrun's sewing-machine was sweeping the galleries with long, absent-minded strokes of the broom. Edna sent her up into the house to awaken Robert.

**[12.4]** "Tell him I am going to the *Chênière*. The boat is ready; tell him to hurry."

**[12.5]** He had soon joined her. She had never sent for him before. She had never asked for him. She had never seemed to want him before. She did

not appear conscious that she had done anything unusual in commanding his presence. He was apparently equally unconscious of anything extraordinary in the situation. But his face was suffused with a quiet glow when he met her.

**[12.6]** They went together back to the kitchen to drink coffee. There was no time to wait for any nicety of service. They stood outside the window and the cook passed them their coffee and a roll, which they drank and ate from the window-sill. Edna said it tasted good. She had not thought of coffee nor of anything. He told her he had often noticed that she lacked forethought.

**[12.7]** "Wasn't it enough to think of going to the *Chênrière* and waking you up?" she laughed. "Do I have to think of everything?--as Léonce says when he's in a bad humor. I don't blame him; he'd never be in a bad humor if it weren't for me."

**[12.8]** They took a short cut across the sands. At a distance they could see the curious procession moving toward the wharf--the lovers, shoulder to shoulder, creeping; the lady in black, gaining steadily upon them; old Monsieur Farival, losing ground inch by inch, and a young barefooted Spanish girl, with a red kerchief on her head and a basket on her arm, bringing up the rear.

**[12.9]** Robert knew the girl, and he talked to her a little in the boat. No one present understood what they said. Her name was Mariequita. She had a round, sly, piquant face and pretty black eyes. Her hands were small, and she kept them folded over the handle of her basket. Her feet were broad and coarse. She did not strive to hide them. Edna looked at her feet, and noticed the

sand and slime between her brown toes.

**[12.10]** Beudelet grumbled because Mariequita was there, taking up so much room. In reality he was annoyed at having old Monsieur Farival, who considered himself the better sailor of the two. But he would not quarrel with so old a man as Monsieur Farival, so he quarreled with Mariequita. The girl was deprecatory at one moment, appealing to Robert. She was saucy the next, moving her head up and down, making "eyes" at Robert and making "mouths" at Beudelet.

**[12.11]** The lovers were all alone. They saw nothing, they heard nothing. The lady in black was counting her beads for the third time. Old Monsieur Farival talked incessantly of what he knew about handling a boat, and of what Beudelet did not know on the same subject.

**[12.12]** Edna liked it all. She looked Mariequita up and down, from her ugly brown toes to her pretty black eyes, and back again.

**[12.13]** "Why does she look at me like that?" inquired the girl of Robert.

**[12.14]** "Maybe she thinks you are pretty. Shall I ask her?"

**[12.15]** "No. Is she your sweetheart?"

**[12.16]** "She's a married lady, and has two children."

**[12.17]** "Oh! well! Francisco ran away with Sylvano's wife, who had four children. They took all his money and one of the children and stole his boat."

**[12.18]** "Shut up!"

**[12.19]** "Does she understand?"

[12.20] "Oh, hush!"

[12.21] "Are those two married over there--leaning on each other?"

[12.22] "Of course not," laughed Robert.

[12.23] "Of course not," echoed Mariequita, with a serious, confirmatory bob of the head.

[12.24] The sun was high up and beginning to bite. The swift breeze seemed to Edna to bury the sting of it into the pores of her face and hands. Robert held his umbrella over her.

[12.25] As they went cutting sidewise through the water, the sails bellied taut, with the wind filling and overflowing them. Old Monsieur Farival laughed sardonically at something as he looked at the sails, and Beaufort swore at the old man under his breath.

[12.26] Sailing across the bay to the *Chênière Caminada*, Edna felt as if she were being borne away from some anchorage which had held her fast, whose chains had been loosening--had snapped the night before when the mystic spirit was abroad, leaving her free to drift whithersoever she chose to set her sails. Robert spoke to her incessantly; he no longer noticed Mariequita. The girl had shrimps in her bamboo basket. They were covered with Spanish moss. She beat the moss down impatiently, and muttered to herself sullenly.

[12.27] "Let us go to Grande Terre to-morrow?" said Robert in a low voice.

[12.28] "What shall we do there?"

**[12.29]** "Climb up the hill to the old fort and look at the little wriggling gold snakes, and watch the lizards sun themselves."

**[12.30]** She gazed away toward Grande Terre and thought she would like to be alone there with Robert, in the sun, listening to the ocean's roar and watching the slimy lizards writhe in and out among the ruins of the old fort.

**[12.31]** "And the next day or the next we can sail to the Bayou Brulow," he went on.

**[12.32]** "What shall we do there?"

**[12.33]** "Anything--cast bait for fish."

**[12.34]** "No; we'll go back to Grande Terre. Let the fish alone."

**[12.35]** "We'll go wherever you like," he said. "I'll have Tonie come over and help me patch and trim my boat. We shall not need Beaudalet nor any one. Are you afraid of the pirogue?"

**[12.36]** "Oh, no."

**[12.37]** "Then I'll take you some night in the pirogue when the moon shines. Maybe your Gulf spirit will whisper to you in which of these islands the treasures are hidden--direct you to the very spot, perhaps."

**[12.38]** "And in a day we should be rich!" she laughed. "I'd give it all to you, the pirate gold and every bit of treasure we could dig up. I think you would know how to spend it. Pirate gold isn't a thing to be hoarded or utilized. It is something to squander and throw to the four winds, for the fun of seeing the golden specks fly."

**[12.39]** "We'd share it, and scatter it together," he said. His face flushed.

**[12.40]** They all went together up to the quaint little Gothic church of Our Lady of Lourdes, gleaming all brown and yellow with paint in the sun's glare.

**[12.41]** Only Beaudalet remained behind, tinkering at his boat, and Mariequita walked away with her basket of shrimps, casting a look of childish ill humor and reproach at Robert from the corner of her eye.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 12

**[12.1]** (Giorcelli 1988): 120. (Jacobs 1988): 109. (Block 1995): 208. (Block 1995): Edna continues to behave immaturely and irresponsibly, allowing her impulses to control her and denying the rights of others (216).

**[12.5]** (Rowe 1989): Edna sends for Robert in Chapter 12 after refusing Leonce's advances in the previous chapter (14).

**[12.6]** (Poovalingam 1995): Robert indicates that Edna often behaves impetuously and immaturely (225).

**[12.7]** (Paul 1995): 49.



[12.9] (Solomon 1988): Chopin uses Mariequita to show the restrictions on Edna's options (115).

[12.11] (Paul 1995): When together, Edna and Robert seem to be in a world of their own (51).

[12.15] (Paul 1995): 51. (Solomon 1988): Mariequita asks the question that Robert had not asked himself (116).

[12.16] (Solomon 1988): 116. (Paul 1995): The outside appearances of Edna and Robert are nothing like the turmoil going on inside their heads (51).

[12.17] (Solomon 1988): It is ironic that a few moments after this explanation Robert tells Edna about dreaming of sailing with her in his boat (116).

[12.26] (Giorcelli 1988): 128. (Jacobs 1988): 109. (Rowe 1989): Chopin gives several examples of women (servants) whose work could possibly perform miracles (17). (Paul 1995): While the anchorage offers refuge, it also represents repression (51). (Viswanath 1995): Edna's desire for freedom consumes her so that she begins to think of herself only (130).

[12.29] (Rowe 1989): 15.

[12.30] (Rowe 1989): 15.

[12.37] (Rowe 1989): 15.

## CHAPTER 13

[13.1] A feeling of oppression and drowsiness overcame Edna during the service. Her head began to ache, and the lights on the altar swayed before her eyes. Another time she might have made an effort to regain her composure; but her one thought was to quit the stifling atmosphere of the church and reach the open air. She arose, climbing over Robert's feet with a muttered apology. Old Monsieur Farival, flurried, curious, stood up, but upon seeing that Robert had followed Mrs. Pontellier, he sank back into his seat. He whispered an anxious inquiry of the lady in black, who did not notice him or reply, but kept her eyes fastened upon the pages of her velvet prayer-book.

[13.2] "I felt giddy and almost overcome," Edna said, lifting her hands instinctively to her head and pushing her straw hat up from her forehead. "I couldn't have stayed through the service." They were outside in the shadow of

the church. Robert was full of solicitude.

**[13.3]** "It was folly to have thought of going in the first place, let alone staying. Come over to Madame Antoine's; you can rest there." He took her arm and led her away, looking anxiously and continuously down into her face.

**[13.4]** How still it was, with only the voice of the sea whispering through the reeds that grew in the salt-water pools! The long line of little gray, weather-beaten houses nestled peacefully among the orange trees. It must always have been God's day on that low, drowsy island, Edna thought. They stopped, leaning over a jagged fence made of sea-drift, to ask for water. A youth, a mild-faced Acadian, was drawing water from the cistern, which was nothing more than a rusty buoy, with an opening on one side, sunk in the ground. The water which the youth handed to them in a tin pail was not cold to taste, but it was cool to her heated face, and it greatly revived and refreshed her.

**[13.5]** Madame Antoine's cot was at the far end of the village. She welcomed them with all the native hospitality, as she would have opened her door to let the sunlight in. She was fat, and walked heavily and clumsily across the floor. She could speak no English, but when Robert made her understand that the lady who accompanied him was ill and desired to rest, she was all eagerness to make Edna feel at home and to dispose of her comfortably. **[13.6]**

The whole place was immaculately clean, and the big, four-posted bed, snow-white, invited one to repose. It stood in a small side room which looked out across a narrow grass plot toward the shed, where there was a disabled boat

lying keel upward.

**[13.7]** Madame Antoine had not gone to mass. Her son Tonie had, but she supposed he would soon be back, and she invited Robert to be seated and wait for him. But he went and sat outside the door and smoked. Madame Antoine busied herself in the large front room preparing dinner. She was boiling mullets over a few red coals in the huge fireplace.

**[13.8]** Edna, left alone in the little side room, loosened her clothes, removing the greater part of them. She bathed her face, her neck and arms in the basin that stood between the windows. She took off her shoes and stockings and stretched herself in the very center of the high, white bed. How luxurious it felt to rest thus in a strange, quaint bed, with its sweet country odor of laurel lingering about the sheets and mattress! She stretched her strong limbs that ached a little. She ran her fingers through her loosened hair for a while. She looked at her round arms as she held them straight up and rubbed them one after the other, observing closely, as if it were something she saw for the first time, the fine, firm quality and texture of her flesh. She clasped her hands easily above her head, and it was thus she fell asleep.

**[13.9]** She slept lightly at first, half awake and drowsily attentive to the things about her. She could hear Madame Antoine's heavy, scraping tread as she walked back and forth on the sanded floor. Some chickens were clucking outside the windows, scratching for bits of gravel in the grass. Later she half heard the voices of Robert and Tonie talking under the shed. She did not stir.

Even her eyelids rested numb and heavily over her sleepy eyes. The voices went on--Tonie's slow, Acadian drawl, Robert's quick, soft, smooth French. She understood French imperfectly unless directly addressed, and the voices were only part of the other drowsy, muffled sounds lulling her senses.

**[13.10]** When Edna awoke it was with the conviction that she had slept long and soundly. The voices were hushed under the shed. Madame Antoine's step was no longer to be heard in the adjoining room. Even the chickens had gone elsewhere to scratch and cluck. The mosquito bar was drawn over her; the old woman had come in while she slept and let down the bar. Edna arose quietly from the bed, and looking between the curtains of the window, she saw by the slanting rays of the sun that the afternoon was far advanced. Robert was out there under the shed, reclining in the shade against the sloping keel of the overturned boat. He was reading from a book. Tonie was no longer with him. She wondered what had become of the rest of the party. She peeped out at him two or three times as she stood washing herself in the little basin between the windows.

**[13.11]** Madame Antoine had laid some coarse, clean towels upon a chair, and had placed a box of *poudre de riz* within easy reach. Edna dabbed the powder upon her nose and cheeks as she looked at herself closely in the little distorted mirror which hung on the wall above the basin. Her eyes were bright and wide awake and her face glowed.

**[13.12]** When she had completed her toilet she walked into the adjoining

room. She was very hungry. No one was there. But there was a cloth spread upon the table that stood against the wall, and a cover was laid for one, with a crusty brown loaf and a bottle of wine beside the plate. Edna bit a piece from the brown loaf, tearing it with her strong, white teeth. She poured some of the wine into the glass and drank it down. Then she went softly out of doors, and plucking an orange from the low-hanging bough of a tree, threw it at Robert, who did not know she was awake and up.

**[13.13]** An illumination broke over his whole face when he saw her and joined her under the orange tree.

**[13.14]** "How many years have I slept?" she inquired. "The whole island seems changed. A new race of beings must have sprung up, leaving only you and me as past relics. How many ages ago did Madame Antoine and Tonie die? and when did our people from Grand Isle disappear from the earth?"

**[13.15]** He familiarly adjusted a ruffle upon her shoulder.

**[13.16]** "You have slept precisely one hundred years. I was left here to guard your slumbers; and for one hundred years I have been out under the shed reading a book. The only evil I couldn't prevent was to keep a broiled fowl from drying up."

**[13.17]** "If it has turned to stone, still will I eat it," said Edna, moving with him into the house. "But really, what has become of Monsieur Farival and the others?"

**[13.18]** "Gone hours ago. When they found that you were sleeping they

thought it best not to awake you. Any way, I wouldn't have let them. What was I here for?"

**[13.19]** "I wonder if Léonce will be uneasy!" she speculated, as she seated herself at table.

**[13.20]** "Of course not; he knows you are with me," Robert replied, as he busied himself among sundry pans and covered dishes which had been left standing on the hearth.

**[13.21]** "Where are Madame Antoine and her son?" asked Edna.

**[13.22]** "Gone to Vespers, and to visit some friends, I believe. I am to take you back in Tonie's boat whenever you are ready to go."

**[13.23]** He stirred the smoldering ashes till the broiled fowl began to sizzle afresh. He served her with no mean repast, dripping the coffee anew and sharing it with her. Madame Antoine had cooked little else than the mullets, but while Edna slept Robert had foraged the island. He was childishly gratified to discover her appetite, and to see the relish with which she ate the food which he had procured for her.

**[13.24]** "Shall we go right away?" she asked, after draining her glass and brushing together the crumbs of the crusty loaf.

**[13.25]** "The sun isn't as low as it will be in two hours," he answered.

**[13.26]** "The sun will be gone in two hours."

**[13.27]** "Well, let it go; who cares!"

**[13.28]** They waited a good while under the orange trees, till Madame

Antoine came back, panting, waddling, with a thousand apologies to explain her absence. Tonie did not dare to return. He was shy, and would not willingly face any woman except his mother.

**[13.29]** It was very pleasant to stay there under the orange trees, while the sun dipped lower and lower, turning the western sky to flaming copper and gold. The shadows lengthened and crept out like stealthy, grotesque monsters across the grass.

**[13.30]** Edna and Robert both sat upon the ground--that is, he lay upon the ground beside her, occasionally picking at the hem of her muslin gown.

**[13.31]** Madame Antoine seated her fat body, broad and squat, upon a bench beside the door. She had been talking all the afternoon, and had wound herself up to the storytelling pitch.

**[13.32]** And what stories she told them! But twice in her life she had left the *Chênrière Caminada*, and then for the briefest span. All her years she had squatted and waddled there upon the island, gathering legends of the Baratarians and the sea. The night came on, with the moon to lighten it. Edna could hear the whispering voices of dead men and the click of muffled gold.

**[13.33]** When she and Robert stepped into Tonie's boat, with the red lateen sail, misty spirit forms were prowling in the shadows and among the reeds, and upon the water were phantom ships, speeding to cover.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 13

**[13.1]** (Giorcelli 1988): 112. (Toth 1988): Like Edna, Chopin was disenchanted with religion and its ability to console (62). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's behavior suggests her doubtfulness about the authority of religion (97).

**[13.6]** (Giorcelli 1988): In this chapter Edna acts as if she is a princess in a fairytale rather than a grown woman, wife and mother (128).

**[13.8]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna learns that self-awareness begins with the sensation of touch (95). (Giorcelli 1988): In this chapter Edna acts as if she is a princess in a fairytale rather than a grown woman, wife and mother (128). (Showalter 1988): This scene evidences Edna's self-focused sensuality (44). (Jacobsen 1989): The bed serves as an altar, and the scent of the laurel functions as incense as Edna observes a communion of self (105). (Jones 1989): Edna begins to act according to the animalism of her nature (69). (Rowe 1989): By becoming familiar with her body, Edna becomes aware of her own selfhood. These moments of awareness usually occur in private (1). (Seidel 1989): This scene shows that Edna is willing to give herself enjoyment (100). (Block 1995): Edna is thrilled with her new sensuality and the realization of her body's desires (210). (Jacob 1995): Because of Edna's newfound sexuality, she becomes conscious of her physical body and its needs (108).

**[13.12]** (S. Jones 1988): As Edna is becoming aware of her body, she gives in to her animal nature (122). (Jacobsen 1989): Edna observes a sort of communion with the bread and wine left by Madame Antoine (105). (Jones 1989): Edna begins to behave instinctively and sensually (68-69).

**[13.14]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna even speaks as if she is in a fairytale, sounding like the awakening Sleeping Beauty (128). (Rosowski 1988): Chopin employs the idea of sleep and sleeping as they are used in fairytales (28).

**[13.16]** (Giorcelli 1988): The conversation resembles the kind found in a fairytale (128). (Jones 1989): Robert is Prince Charming to Edna's Sleeping Beauty (62). (Rosowski 1988): Chopin has Robert answer Edna's question as would a prince in a fairytale (28).

**[13.32]** (Rowe 1989): 15. (Paul 1995): 52.

**[13.33]** (Jones 1989): Chopin mixes fantasy with reality (62). (Paul 1995): 52.

**CHAPTER 14**

**[14.1]** The youngest boy, Etienne, had been very naughty, Madame Ratignolle said, as she delivered him into the hands of his mother. He had been unwilling to go to bed and had made a scene; whereupon she had taken charge of him and pacified him as well as she could. Raoul had been in bed and asleep for two hours.

**[14.2]** The youngster was in his long white nightgown, that kept tripping him up as Madame Ratignolle led him along by the hand. With the other chubby fist he rubbed his eyes, which were heavy with sleep and ill humor. Edna took him in her arms, and seating herself in the rocker, began to coddle and caress him, calling him all manner of tender names, soothing him to sleep.

**[14.3]** It was not more than nine o'clock. No one had yet gone to bed but the children.

**[14.4]** Léonce had been very uneasy at first, Madame Ratignolle said, and had wanted to start at once for the *Chênrière*. But Monsieur Farival had assured him that his wife was only overcome with sleep and fatigue, that Tonie would bring her safely back later in the day; and he had thus been dissuaded from crossing the bay. He had gone over to Klein's, looking up some cotton broker whom he wished to see in regard to securities, exchanges, stocks, bonds, or something of the sort, Madame Ratignolle did not remember what. He said he would not remain away late. She herself was suffering from heat and

oppression, she said. She carried a bottle of salts and a large fan. She would not consent to remain with Edna, for Monsieur Ratignolle was alone, and he detested above all things to be left alone.

**[14.5]** When Etienne had fallen asleep Edna bore him into the back room, and Robert went and lifted the mosquito bar that she might lay the child comfortably in his bed. The quadron had vanished. When they emerged from the cottage Robert bade Edna good-night.

**[14.6]** "Do you know we have been together the whole livelong day, Robert--since early this morning?" she said at parting.

**[14.7]** "All but the hundred years when you were sleeping. Goodnight."

**[14.8]** He pressed her hand and went away in the direction of the beach. He did not join any of the others, but walked alone toward the Gulf.

**[14.9]** Edna stayed outside, awaiting her husband's return. She had no desire to sleep or to retire; nor did she feel like going over to sit with the Ratignolles, or to join Madame Lebrun and a group whose animated voices reached her as they sat in conversation before the house. She let her mind wander back over her stay at Grand Isle; and she tried to discover wherein this summer had been different from any and every other summer of her life. She could only realize that she herself--her present self--was in some way different from the other self. That she was seeing with different eyes and making the acquaintance of new conditions in herself that colored and changed her environment, she did not yet suspect.

**[14.10]** She wondered why Robert had gone away and left her. It did not occur to her to think he might have grown tired of being with her the livelong day. She was not tired, and she felt that he was not. She regretted that he had gone. It was so much more natural to have him stay when he was not absolutely required to leave her.

**[14.11]** As Edna waited for her husband she sang low a little song that Robert had sung as they crossed the bay. It began with "Ah! *Si tu savais*," and every verse ended with "*si tu savais*."

**[14.12]** Robert's voice was not pretentious. It was musical and true. The voice, the notes, the whole refrain haunted her memory.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 14

**[14.2]** (Tripathi 1995): Chopin beautifully portrays her characters, as when she describes Edna's younger son (155).

**[14.9]** (Jacobs 1988): All of Edna's activities now begin to have a different significance (109). (S. Jones 1988): In this new environment Edna sees things differently (122-23).

(Jones 1989): Chopin points out the effect a different environment can have on someone (63). (Balliwala 1995): It is through Robert that Edna learns the agony of growing from

death into rebirth (195). (Bande 1995): Edna becomes aware of her two separate selves (163). (Paul 1995): Edna becomes aware that this summer is not like those of the past because she has undergone a sea change (45). (Vevaina 1995): Edna is only partially aware of the changes going on in her mind (85). Edna's realization that she is changing is obvious from her renewed interest in her old hobbies (97).

**[14.10]** (Gremillion 1989): Edna feels that she can control the feelings of others simply because she cares for them (171). (Block 1995): As usual, Edna takes others for granted, thinking only of herself and what she wants (214).

**[14.11]** (Gilmore 1988): 78.

**[14.12]** (George 1988): Robert's voice changes once he joins Leonce in business (55). (Gilmore 1988): 78. (Giorcelli 1988): 131.

## **CHAPTER 15**

**[15.1]** When Edna entered the dining-room one evening a little late, as was her habit, an unusually animated conversation seemed to be going on.

Several persons were talking at once, and Victor's voice was predominating, even over that of his mother. Edna had returned late from her bath, had dressed in some haste, and her face was flushed. Her head, set off by her dainty white gown, suggested a rich, rare blossom. She took her seat at table between old Monsieur Farival and Madame Ratignolle.

**[15.2]** As she seated herself and was about to begin to eat her soup, which had been served when she entered the room, several persons informed her simultaneously that Robert was going to Mexico. She laid her spoon down and looked about her bewildered. He had been with her, reading to her all the morning, and had never even mentioned such a place as Mexico. She had not seen him during the afternoon; she had heard some one say he was at the house, upstairs with his mother. This she had thought nothing of, though she was surprised when he did not join her later in the afternoon, when she went down to the beach.

**[15.3]** She looked across at him, where he sat beside Madame Lebrun, who presided. Edna's face was a blank picture of bewilderment, which she never thought of disguising. He lifted his eyebrows with the pretext of a smile as he returned her glance. He looked embarrassed and uneasy.

**[15.4]** "When is he going?" she asked of everybody in general, as if Robert were not there to answer for himself.

**[15.5]** "To-night!" "This very evening!" "Did you ever!" "What possesses him!" were some of the replies she gathered, uttered simultaneously in French

and English.

**[15.6]** "Impossible!" she exclaimed. "How can a person start off from Grand Isle to Mexico at a moment's notice, as if he were going over to Klein's or to the wharf or down to the beach?"

**[15.7]** "I said all along I was going to Mexico; I've been saying so for years!" cried Robert, in an excited and irritable tone, with the air of a man defending himself against a swarm of stinging insects.

**[15.8]** Madame Lebrun knocked on the table with her knife handle.

**[15.9]** "Please let Robert explain why he is going, and why he is going to-night," she called out. "Really, this table is getting to be more and more like Bedlam every day, with everybody talking at once. Sometimes--I hope God will forgive me--but positively, sometimes I wish Victor would lose the power of speech."

**[15.10]** Victor laughed sardonically as he thanked his mother for her holy wish, of which he failed to see the benefit to anybody, except that it might afford her a more ample opportunity and license to talk herself.

**[15.11]** Monsieur Farival thought that Victor should have been taken out in mid-ocean in his earliest youth and drowned. Victor thought there would be more logic in thus disposing of old people with an established claim for making themselves universally obnoxious. Madame Lebrun grew a trifle hysterical; Robert called his brother some sharp, hard names.

**[15.12]** "There's nothing much to explain, mother," he said; though he



explained, nevertheless--looking chiefly at Edna--that he could only meet the gentleman whom he intended to join at Vera Cruz by taking such and such a steamer, which left New Orleans on such a day; that Beaufort was going out with his lugger-load of vegetables that night, which gave him an opportunity of reaching the city and making his vessel in time.

**[15.13]** "But when did you make up your mind to all this?" demanded Monsieur Farival.

**[15.14]** "This afternoon," returned Robert, with a shade of annoyance.

**[15.15]** "At what time this afternoon?" persisted the old gentleman, with nagging determination, as if he were cross-questioning a criminal in a court of justice.

**[15.16]** "At four o'clock this afternoon, Monsieur Farival," Robert replied, in a high voice and with a lofty air, which reminded Edna of some gentleman on the stage.

**[15.17]** She had forced herself to eat most of her soup, and now she was picking the flaky bits of a *court bouillon* with her fork.

**[15.18]** The lovers were profiting by the general conversation on Mexico to speak in whispers of matters which they rightly considered were interesting to no one but themselves. The lady in black had once received a pair of prayer-beads of curious workmanship from Mexico, with very special indulgence attached to them, but she had never been able to ascertain whether the indulgence extended outside the Mexican border. Father Fochel of the

Cathedral had attempted to explain it; but he had not done so to her satisfaction.

And she begged that Robert would interest himself, and discover, if possible, whether she was entitled to the indulgence accompanying the remarkably curious Mexican prayer-beads.

**[15.19]** Madame Ratignolle hoped that Robert would exercise extreme caution in dealing with the Mexicans, who, she considered, were a treacherous people, unscrupulous and revengeful. She trusted she did them no injustice in thus condemning them as a race. She had known personally but one Mexican, who made and sold excellent tamales, and whom she would have trusted implicitly, so softspoken was he. One day he was arrested for stabbing his wife. She never knew whether he had been hanged or not.

**[15.20]** Victor had grown hilarious, and was attempting to tell an anecdote about a Mexican girl who served chocolate one winter in a restaurant in Dauphine Street. No one would listen to him but old Monsieur Farival, who went into convulsions over the droll story.

**[15.21]** Edna wondered if they had all gone mad, to be talking and clamoring at that rate. She herself could think of nothing to say about Mexico or the Mexicans.

**[15.22]** "At what time do you leave?" she asked Robert.

**[15.23]** "At ten," he told her. "Beaudelet wants to wait for the moon."

**[15.24]** "Are you all ready to go?"

**[15.25]** "Quite ready. I shall only take a hand-bag, and shall pack my

trunk in the city."

**[15.26]** He turned to answer some question put to him by his mother, and Edna, having finished her black coffee, left the table.

**[15.27]** She went directly to her room. The little cottage was close and stuffy after leaving the outer air. But she did not mind; there appeared to be a hundred different things demanding her attention indoors. She began to set the toilet-stand to rights, grumbling at the negligence of the quadroon, who was in the adjoining room putting the children to bed. She gathered together stray garments that were hanging on the backs of chairs, and put each where it belonged in closet or bureau drawer. She changed her gown for a more comfortable and commodious wrapper. She rearranged her hair, combing and brushing it with unusual energy. Then she went in and assisted the quadroon in getting the boys to bed.

**[15.28]** They were very playful and inclined to talk--to do anything but lie quiet and go to sleep. Edna sent the quadroon away to her supper and told her she need not return. Then she sat and told the children a story. Instead of soothing it excited them, and added to their wakefulness. She left them in heated argument, speculating about the conclusion of the tale which their mother promised to finish the following night.

**[15.29]** The little black girl came in to say that Madame Lebrun would like to have Mrs. Pontellier go and sit with them over at the house till Mr. Robert went away. Edna returned answer that she had already undressed, that she did not

feel quite well, but perhaps she would go over to the house later. She started to dress again, and got as far advanced as to remove her *peignoir*. But changing her mind once more she resumed the *peignoir*, and went outside and sat down before her door. She was overheated and irritable, and fanned herself energetically for a while. Madame Ratignolle came down to discover what was the matter.

**[15.30]** "All that noise and confusion at the table must have upset me," replied Edna, "and moreover, I hate shocks and surprises. The idea of Robert starting off in such a ridiculously sudden and dramatic way! As if it were a matter of life and death! Never saying a word about it all morning when he was with me."

**[15.31]** "Yes," agreed Madame Ratignolle. "I think it was showing us all--you especially--very little consideration. It wouldn't have surprised me in any of the others; those Lebruns are all given to heroics. But I must say I should never have expected such a thing from Robert. Are you not coming down? Come on, dear; it doesn't look friendly."

**[15.32]** "No," said Edna, a little sullenly. "I can't go to the trouble of dressing again; I don't feel like it."

**[15.33]** "You needn't dress; you look all right; fasten a belt around your waist. Just look at me!"

**[15.34]** "No," persisted Edna; "but you go on. Madame Lebrun might be offended if we both stayed away."

**[15.35]** Madame Ratignolle kissed Edna good-night, and went away, being in truth rather desirous of joining in the general and animated conversation which was still in progress concerning Mexico and the Mexicans.

**[15.36]** Somewhat later Robert came up, carrying his hand-bag.

**[15.37]** "Aren't you feeling well?" he asked.

**[15.38]** "Oh, well enough. Are you going right away?"

**[15.39]** He lit a match and looked at his watch. "In twenty minutes," he said. The sudden and brief flare of the match emphasized the darkness for a while. He sat down upon a stool which the children had left out on the porch.

**[15.40]** "Get a chair," said Edna.

**[15.41]** "This will do," he replied. He put on his soft hat and nervously took it off again, and wiping his face with his handkerchief, complained of the heat.

**[15.42]** "Take the fan," said Edna, offering it to him.

**[15.43]** "Oh, no! Thank you. It does no good; you have to stop fanning some time, and feel all the more uncomfortable afterward."

**[15.44]** "That's one of the ridiculous things which men always say. I have never known one to speak otherwise of fanning. How long will you be gone?"

**[15.45]** "Forever, perhaps. I don't know. It depends upon a good many things."

**[15.46]** "Well, in case it shouldn't be forever, how long will it be?"

**[15.47]** "I don't know."

**[15.48]** "This seems to me perfectly preposterous and uncalled for. I don't like it. I don't understand your motive for silence and mystery, never saying a word to me about it this morning." He remained silent, not offering to defend himself. He only said, after a moment:

**[15.49]** "Don't part from me in any ill humor. I never knew you to be out of patience with me before."

**[15.50]** "I don't want to part in any ill humor," she said. "But can't you understand? I've grown used to seeing you, to having you with me all the time, and your action seems unfriendly, even unkind. You don't even offer an excuse for it. Why, I was planning to be together, thinking of how pleasant it would be to see you in the city next winter."

**[15.51]** "So was I," he blurted. "Perhaps that's the--" He stood up suddenly and held out his hand. "Good-by, my dear Mrs. Pontellier; good-by. You won't--I hope you won't completely forget me." She clung to his hand, striving to detain him.

**[15.52]** "Write to me when you get there, won't you, Robert?" she entreated.

**[15.53]** "I will, thank you. Good-by."

**[15.54]** How unlike Robert! The merest acquaintance would have said something more emphatic than "I will, thank you; good-by," to such a request.

**[15.55]** He had evidently already taken leave of the people over at the house, for he descended the steps and went to join Beaufort, who was out

there with an oar across his shoulder waiting for Robert. They walked away in the darkness. She could only hear Beaudélet's voice; Robert had apparently not even spoken a word of greeting to his companion.

**[15.56]** Edna bit her handkerchief convulsively, striving to hold back and to hide, even from herself as she would have hidden from another, the emotion which was troubling--tearing--her. Her eyes were brimming with tears.

**[15.57]** For the first time she recognized the symptoms of infatuation which she had felt incipiently as a child, as a girl in her earliest teens, and later as a young woman. The recognition did not lessen the reality, the poignancy of the revelation by any suggestion or promise of instability. The past was nothing to her; offered no lesson which she was willing to heed. The future was a mystery which she never attempted to penetrate. The present alone was significant; was hers, to torture her as it was doing then with the biting conviction that she had lost that which she had held, that she had been denied that which her impassioned, newly awakened being demanded.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 15

**[15.6]** (Block 1995): Edna behaves immaturely and selfishly throughout her relationship with Robert (214).

**[15.16]** (Delbanco 1988): 93. (George 1988): Robert's voice, which had once seemed "musical and true" to Edna, now has lost its appeal (55).

**[15.42]** (Delbanco 1988): 99.

**[15.43]** (Delbanco 1988): 99. (Paul 1995): 53.

**[15.44]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna is beginning to feel the thrill of the experience of power, a feeling formerly monopolized by the men in her life (99).

**[15.54]** (Gilmore 1988): 83.

**[15.56]** (Block 1995): Edna cannot communicate her feelings -- an inability which illustrates her immaturity in their relationship (214).

**[15.57]** (Delbanco 1988): 99. (Giorcelli 1988): 114. (Jacobs 1988): 109. (Gremillion 1989): Edna's feelings for Robert are related to the feelings she experienced as a child (171). (Ghosh 1995): 236-37. (Jacobs 1995): Edna's infatuation with Robert is similar to her earlier infatuations of her girlhood (108). (Triakha 1995): Edna has been restless and searching since childhood (150). (Vevaina 1995): Edna re-thinks this earlier belief after Robert leaves; his leaving results in her angst of separation. Her lack of ability to cope



causes her suicide (99).

## CHAPTER 16

**[16.1]** "Do you miss your friend greatly?" asked Mademoiselle Reisz one morning as she came creeping up behind Edna, who had just left her cottage on her way to the beach. She spent much of her time in the water since she had acquired finally the art of swimming. As their stay at Grand Isle drew near its close, she felt that she could not give too much time to a diversion which afforded her the only real pleasurable moments that she knew. When Mademoiselle Reisz came and touched her upon the shoulder and spoke to her, the woman seemed to echo the thought which was ever in Edna's mind; or, better, the feeling which constantly possessed her.

**[16.2]** Robert's going had some way taken the brightness, the color, the meaning out of everything. The conditions of her life were in no way changed, but her whole existence was dulled, like a faded garment which seems to be no longer worth wearing. She sought him everywhere--in others whom she induced to talk about him. She went up in the mornings to Madame Lebrun's room, braving the clatter of the old sewing-machine. She sat there and chatted at

intervals as Robert had done. She gazed around the room at the pictures and photographs hanging upon the wall, and discovered in some corner an old family album, which she examined with the keenest interest, appealing to Madame Lebrun for enlightenment concerning the many figures and faces which she discovered between its pages.

**[16.3]** There was a picture of Madame Lebrun with Robert as a baby, seated in her lap, a round-faced infant with a fist in his mouth. The eyes alone in the baby suggested the man. And that was he also in kilts, at the age of five, wearing long curls and holding a whip in his hand. It made Edna laugh, and she laughed, too, at the portrait in his first long trousers; while another interested her, taken when he left for college, looking thin, long-faced, with eyes full of fire, ambition and great intentions. But there was no recent picture, none which suggested the Robert who had gone away five days ago, leaving a void and wilderness behind him.

**[16.4]** "Oh, Robert stopped having his pictures taken when he had to pay for them himself! He found wiser use for his money, he says," explained Madame Lebrun. She had a letter from him, written before he left New Orleans. Edna wished to see the letter, and Madame Lebrun told her to look for it either on the table or the dresser, or perhaps it was on the mantelpiece.

**[16.5]** The letter was on the bookshelf. It possessed the greatest interest and attraction for Edna; the envelope, its size and shape, the post-mark, the handwriting. She examined every detail of the outside before opening it. There

were only a few lines, setting forth that he would leave the city that afternoon, that he had packed his trunk in good shape, that he was well, and sent her his love and begged to be affectionately remembered to all. There was no special message to Edna except a postscript saying that if Mrs. Pontellier desired to finish the book which he had been reading to her, his mother would find it in his room, among other books there on the table. Edna experienced a pang of jealousy because he had written to his mother rather than to her.

**[16.6]** Every one seemed to take for granted that she missed him. Even her husband, when he came down the Saturday following Robert's departure, expressed regret that he had gone.

**[16.7]** "How do you get on without him, Edna?" he asked.

**[16.8]** "It's very dull without him," she admitted. Mr. Pontellier had seen Robert in the city, and Edna asked him a dozen questions or more. Where had they met? On Carondelet Street, in the morning. They had gone "in" and had a drink and a cigar together. What had they talked about? Chiefly about his prospects in Mexico, which Mr. Pontellier thought were promising. How did he look? How did he seem--grave, or gay, or how? Quite cheerful, and wholly taken up with the idea of his trip, which Mr. Pontellier found altogether natural in a young fellow about to seek fortune and adventure in a strange, queer country.

**[16.9]** Edna tapped her foot impatiently, and wondered why the children persisted in playing in the sun when they might be under the trees. She went down and led them out of the sun, scolding the quadron for not being more

attentive.

**[16.10]** It did not strike her as in the least grotesque that she should be making of Robert the object of conversation and leading her husband to speak of him. The sentiment which she entertained for Robert in no way resembled that which she felt for her husband, or had ever felt, or ever expected to feel. She had all her life long been accustomed to harbor thoughts and emotions which never voiced themselves. They had never taken the form of struggles. They belonged to her and were her own, and she entertained the conviction that she had a right to them and that they concerned no one but herself. Edna had once told Madame Ratignolle that she would never sacrifice herself for her children, or for any one. Then had followed a rather heated argument; the two women did not appear to understand each other or to be talking the same language. Edna tried to appease her friend, to explain.

**[16.11]** "I would give up the unessential; I would give my money, I would give my life for my children; but I wouldn't give myself. I can't make it more clear; it's only something which I am beginning to comprehend, which is revealing itself to me."

**[16.12]** "I don't know what you would call the essential, or what you mean by the unessential," said Madame Ratignolle, cheerfully; "but a woman who would give her life for her children could do no more than that--your Bible tells you so. I'm sure I couldn't do more than that."

**[16.13]** "Oh, yes you could!" laughed Edna.

**[16.14]** She was not surprised at Mademoiselle Reisz's question the morning that lady, following her to the beach, tapped her on the shoulder and asked if she did not greatly miss her young friend.

**[16.15]** "Oh, good morning, Mademoiselle; is it you? Why, of course I miss Robert. Are you going down to bathe?"

**[16.16]** "Why should I go down to bathe at the very end of the season when I haven't been in the surf all summer," replied the woman, disagreeably.

**[16.17]** "I beg your pardon," offered Edna, in some embarrassment, for she should have remembered that Mademoiselle Reisz's avoidance of the water had furnished a theme for much pleasantry. Some among them thought it was on account of her false hair, or the dread of getting the violets wet, while others attributed it to the natural aversion for water sometimes believed to accompany the artistic temperament. Mademoiselle offered Edna some chocolates in a paper bag, which she took from her pocket, by way of showing that she bore no ill feeling. She habitually ate chocolates for their sustaining quality; they contained much nutriment in small compass, she said. They saved her from starvation, as Madame Lebrun's table was utterly impossible; and no one save so impertinent a woman as Madame Lebrun could think of offering such food to people and requiring them to pay for it.

**[16.18]** "She must feel very lonely without her son," said Edna, desiring to change the subject. "Her favorite son, too. It must have been quite hard to let him go."

**[16.19]** Mademoiselle laughed maliciously.

**[16.20]** "Her favorite son! Oh, dear! Who could have been imposing such a tale upon you? Aline Lebrun lives for Victor, and for Victor alone. She has spoiled him into the worthless creature he is. She worships him and the ground he walks on. Robert is very well in a way, to give up all the money he can earn to the family, and keep the barest pittance for himself. Favorite son, indeed! I miss the poor fellow myself, my dear. I liked to see him and to hear him about the place the only Lebrun who is worth a pinch of salt. He comes to see me often in the city. I like to play to him. That Victor! hanging would be too good for him. It's a wonder Robert hasn't beaten him to death long ago."

**[16.21]** "I thought he had great patience with his brother," offered Edna, glad to be talking about Robert, no matter what was said.

**[16.22]** "Oh! he thrashed him well enough a year or two ago," said Mademoiselle. "It was about a Spanish girl, whom Victor considered that he had some sort of claim upon. He met Robert one day talking to the girl, or walking with her, or bathing with her, or carrying her basket--I don't remember what;--and he became so insulting and abusive that Robert gave him a thrashing on the spot that has kept him comparatively in order for a good while. It's about time he was getting another."

**[16.23]** "Was her name Mariequita?" asked Edna.

**[16.24]** "Mariequita--yes, that was it; Mariequita. I had forgotten. Oh, she's a sly one, and a bad one, that Mariequita!"

**[16.25]** Edna looked down at Mademoiselle Reisz and wondered how she could have listened to her venom so long. For some reason she felt depressed, almost unhappy. She had not intended to go into the water; but she donned her bathing suit, and left Mademoiselle alone, seated under the shade of the children's tent. The water was growing cooler as the season advanced. Edna plunged and swam about with an abandon that thrilled and invigorated her. She remained a long time in the water, half hoping that Mademoiselle Reisz would not wait for her.

**[16.26]** But Mademoiselle waited. She was very amiable during the walk back, and raved much over Edna's appearance in her bathing suit. She talked about music. She hoped that Edna would go to see her in the city, and wrote her address with the stub of a pencil on a piece of card which she found in her pocket.

**[16.27]** "When do you leave?" asked Edna.

**[16.28]** "Next Monday; and you?"

**[16.29]** "The following week," answered Edna, adding, "It has been a pleasant summer, hasn't it, Mademoiselle?"

**[16.30]** "Well," agreed Mademoiselle Reisz, with a shrug, "rather pleasant, if it hadn't been for the mosquitoes and the Farival twins."

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 16

[16.2] (Balliwala 1995): 195. (Block 1995): Edna sometimes seems to be dependent on Robert for her contentment (211). (Ghosh 1995): 237.

[16.9] (Block 1995): Edna scolds the quadroon, yet she often forgets her own children (213).

[16.10] (Stange 1989): Her relationship with Adele encourages Edna to examine her inner self (149). (Bande 1995): Up to this point in her life, Edna has lived a life of fragmentation, absorbed in her own thoughts, but now her feelings for Robert and her sense of responsibility are causing her difficulty in trying to merge the two selves (164). (Block 1995): In a patriarchal society women are not given a speaking voice, so Edna is used to being unable to voice her feelings (207) (213). (Stange 1995): Adele's openness makes Edna aware of her own private inner self (31). (Tripathi 1995): 151.

[16.11] (Rankin 1988): Edna cannot remove herself from her roles any more than the readers can remove themselves from the text (151). (Greer 1989): 51. (Rowe 1989): Edna's vital self is linked with her physical body and its submersion into the sea -- a submersion which enables her to feel the wholeness of her body (2). (Stange 1989): Edna finds it difficult to determine what it is that she refuses to give up (146). (Amin 1995): Edna's feelings would shock anyone in her society; her comment makes Adele fear that



she might harm her children by her lack of devotion to them (74). (Battiwala 1995): 189. (Block 1995): 207. (Juneja 1995): 116. (Paul 1995): Edna is honest with herself, but she does not understand the full meaning of this moment until much later (57). (Stange 1995): Edna is trying to understand her feeling of selfhood -- the value of owning herself (28). (Triakha 1995): Edna declares that no man shall determine her fate (153). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's need for independence shocks everyone around her, puzzling Adele and angering Leonce (86). Edna's realization that she is changing is obvious from her statement to Adele (97).

**[16.12]** (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet does not share the same opinion on giving one's self as Madame Ratignolle does (121-122). (Stange 1989): Because she gives her all to her family, Adele cannot imagine giving any more to her family (146). (Block 1995): Adele completely misses Edna's meaning; she does not understand that there is a difference between self and life (207).

**[16.17]** (Giorcelli 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz's fear of water is characteristic of the horror witches have of water; this fact is another example of how Reisz is represented as Edna's wicked witch (136).

**[16.24]** (Seidel 1989): 92.

**[16.25]** (Giorcelli 1988): Being in both the water and sun gives Edna a new sense of

herself (124).

## CHAPTER 17

[17.1] The Pontelliers possessed a very charming home on Esplanade Street in New Orleans. It was a large, double cottage, with a broad front veranda, whose round, fluted columns supported the sloping roof. The house was painted a dazzling white; the outside shutters, or jalousies, were green. In the yard, which was kept scrupulously neat, were flowers and plants of every description which flourishes in South Louisiana. Within doors the appointments were perfect after the conventional type. The softest carpets and rugs covered the floors; rich and tasteful draperies hung at doors and windows. There were paintings, selected with judgment and discrimination, upon the walls. The cut glass, the silver, the heavy damask which daily appeared upon the table were the envy of many women whose husbands were less generous than Mr. Pontellier.

[17.2] Mr. Pontellier was very fond of walking about his house examining its various appointments and details, to see that nothing was amiss. He greatly

valued his possessions, chiefly because they were his, and derived genuine pleasure from contemplating a painting, a statuette, a rare lace curtain--no matter what--after he had bought it and placed it among his household gods.

**[17.3]** On Tuesday afternoons--Tuesday being Mrs. Pontellier's reception day--there was a constant stream of callers--women who came in carriages or in the street cars, or walked when the air was soft and distance permitted. A light-colored mulatto boy, in dress coat and bearing a diminutive silver tray for the reception of cards, admitted them. A maid, in white fluted cap, offered the callers liqueur, coffee, or chocolate, as they might desire. Mrs. Pontellier, attired in a handsome reception gown, remained in the drawing-room the entire afternoon receiving her visitors. Men sometimes called in the evening with their wives.

**[17.4]** This had been the programme which Mrs. Pontellier had religiously followed since her marriage, six years before. Certain evenings during the week she and her husband attended the opera or sometimes the play.

**[17.5]** Mr. Pontellier left his home in the mornings between nine and ten o'clock, and rarely returned before half-past six or seven in the evening--dinner being served at half-past seven.

**[17.6]** He and his wife seated themselves at table one Tuesday evening, a few weeks after their return from Grand Isle. They were alone together. The boys were being put to bed; the patter of their bare, escaping feet could be heard occasionally, as well as the pursuing voice of the quadron, lifted in mild

protest and entreaty. Mrs. Pontellier did not wear her usual Tuesday reception gown; she was in ordinary house dress. Mr. Pontellier, who was observant about such things, noticed it, as he served the soup and handed it to the boy in waiting.

**[17.7]** "Tired out, Edna? Whom did you have? Many callers?" he asked. He tasted his soup and began to season it with pepper, salt, vinegar, mustard--everything within reach.

**[17.8]** "There were a good many," replied Edna, who was eating her soup with evident satisfaction. "I found their cards when I got home; I was out."

**[17.9]** "Out!" exclaimed her husband, with something like genuine consternation in his voice as he laid down the vinegar cruet and looked at her through his glasses. "Why, what could have taken you out on Tuesday? What did you have to do?"

**[17.10]** "Nothing. I simply felt like going out, and I went out."

**[17.11]** "Well, I hope you left some suitable excuse," said her husband, somewhat appeased, as he added a dash of cayenne pepper to the soup.

**[17.12]** "No, I left no excuse. I told Joe to say I was out, that was all."

**[17.13]** "Why, my dear, I should think you'd understand by this time that people don't do such things; we've got to observe *les convenances* if we ever expect to get on and keep up with the procession. If you felt that you had to leave home this afternoon, you should have left some suitable explanation for your absence.

**[17.14]** "This soup is really impossible; it's strange that woman hasn't learned yet to make a decent soup. Any free-lunch stand in town serves a better one. Was Mrs. Belthrop here?"

**[17.15]** "Bring the tray with the cards, Joe. I don't remember who was here."

**[17.16]** The boy retired and returned after a moment, bringing the tiny silver tray, which was covered with ladies' visiting cards. He handed it to Mrs. Pontellier.

**[17.17]** "Give it to Mr. Pontellier," she said.

**[17.18]** Joe offered the tray to Mr. Pontellier, and removed the soup.

**[17.19]** Mr. Pontellier scanned the names of his wife's callers, reading some of them aloud, with comments as he read.

**[17.20]** "'The Misses Delasidas.' I worked a big deal in futures for their father this morning; nice girls; it's time they were getting married. 'Mrs. Belthrop.' I tell you what it is, Edna; you can't afford to snub Mrs. Belthrop. Why, Belthrop could buy and sell us ten times over. His business is worth a good, round sum to me. You'd better write her a note. 'Mrs. James Highcamp.' Hugh! the less you have to do with Mrs. Highcamp, the better. 'Madame Laforcé.' Came all the way from Carrolton, too, poor old soul. 'Miss Wiggs,' 'Mrs. Eleanor Boltens.'" He pushed the cards aside.

**[17.21]** "Mercy!" exclaimed Edna, who had been fuming. "Why are you taking the thing so seriously and making such a fuss over it?"

**[17.22]** "I'm not making any fuss over it. But it's just such seeming trifles that we've got to take seriously; such things count."

**[17.23]** The fish was scorched. Mr. Pontellier would not touch it. Edna said she did not mind a little scorched taste. The roast was in some way not to his fancy, and he did not like the manner in which the vegetables were served.

**[17.24]** "It seems to me," he said, "we spend money enough in this house to procure at least one meal a day which a man could eat and retain his self-respect."

**[17.25]** "You used to think the cook was a treasure," returned Edna, indifferently.

**[17.26]** "Perhaps she was when she first came; but cooks are only human. They need looking after, like any other class of persons that you employ. Suppose I didn't look after the clerks in my office, just let them run things their own way; they'd soon make a nice mess of me and my business."

**[17.27]** "Where are you going?" asked Edna, seeing that her husband arose from table without having eaten a morsel except a taste of the highly-seasoned soup.

**[17.28]** "I'm going to get my dinner at the club. Good night." He went into the hall, took his hat and stick from the stand, and left the house.

**[17.29]** She was somewhat familiar with such scenes. They had often made her very unhappy. On a few previous occasions she had been completely deprived of any desire to finish her dinner. Sometimes she had gone into the

kitchen to administer a tardy rebuke to the cook. Once she went to her room and studied the cookbook during an entire evening, finally writing out a menu for the week, which left her harassed with a feeling that, after all, she had accomplished no good that was worth the name.

**[17.30]** But that evening Edna finished her dinner alone, with forced deliberation. Her face was flushed and her eyes flamed with some inward fire that lighted them. After finishing her dinner she went to her room, having instructed the boy to tell any other callers that she was indisposed.

**[17.31]** It was a large, beautiful room, rich and picturesque in the soft, dim light which the maid had turned low. She went and stood at an open window and looked out upon the deep tangle of the garden below. All the mystery and witchery of the night seemed to have gathered there amid the perfumes and the dusky and tortuous outlines of flowers and foliage. She was seeking herself and finding herself in just such sweet, half-darkness which met her moods. But the voices were not soothing that came to her from the darkness and the sky above and the stars. They jeered and sounded mournful notes without promise, devoid even of hope. She turned back into the room and began to walk to and fro down its whole length, without stopping, without resting. She carried in her hands a thin handkerchief, which she tore into ribbons, rolled into a ball, and flung from her. Once she stopped, and taking off her wedding ring, flung it upon the carpet. When she saw it lying there, she stamped her heel upon it, striving to crush it. But her small boot heel did not make an indenture, not a mark upon the little

glittering circlet.

**[17.32]** In a sweeping passion she seized a glass vase from the table and flung it upon the tiles of the hearth. She wanted to destroy something. The crash and clatter were what she wanted to hear.

**[17.33]** A maid, alarmed at the din of breaking glass, entered the room to discover what was the matter.

**[17.34]** "A vase fell upon the hearth," said Edna. "Never mind; leave it till morning."

**[17.35]** "Oh! you might get some of the glass in your feet, ma'am," insisted the young woman, picking up bits of the broken vase that were scattered upon the carpet. "And here's your ring, ma'am, under the chair."

**[17.36]** Edna held out her hand, and taking the ring, slipped it upon her finger.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 17

**[17.1]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna's home is both a symbol of Creole femininity and her prison (94-95). Edna has become an equal partner in her marriage (98). (Showalter 1988): 51.

(Jones 1989): Edna's and Leonce's home is structured and refined and represents a structured and refined lifestyle (59).

**[17.2]** (Balliwala 1995): Leonce views himself as supplier of his family's tangible needs,



and nothing more (198).

[17.3] (Showalter 1988): 51.

[17.4] (Jones 1989): Edna's life in New Orleans is rigid, planned, and programmed (59).

[17.6] (Delbanco 1988): Her children's lives are nothing more than background noise to Edna -- a fact which makes her relationship to her children similar to that of her husband (100).

[17.7] (Delbanco 1988): 100.

[17.10] (Ramamoorthi 1995): Edna is not being hard-headed; rather, this is her attempt to rebel against the custom that the woman has the duty of entertaining guests (184).

[17.13] (Dyer 1988): Leonce's language sounds like that found in Ibsen's *Hedda Gabler* and Fuller's *With the Procession* (128). (Greer 1989): Edna knows that she is an important part of her husband's success (52).

[17.20] (Martin 1988). Leonce's only concerns about Edna's refusals to entertain visitors concern his financial status (19). (Solomon 1988): Chopin uses Mrs. Highcamp as a foil whose lifestyle is impossible for Edna (116).

[17.26] (Paul 1995): Leonce tries to run his home as he would his office (49).

[17.30] (Viswanath 1995): 131.

[17.31] (Gremillion 1989): After returning home from Grand Isle, Edna is despondent and unhappy (172). Acting like a child, Edna tries to make her world match her wants by destroying her wedding ring, the symbol of her past choices (172). (Stange 1989): Edna's wedding ring has become her crown (151). (Bande 1995): The voices inside of Edna's head torment her (166). (Triakha 1995): This act is an obvious example of Edna's rebellion against marriage (150). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's behavior is a manifestation of her misgivings about the institution of marriage (96). (Viswanath 1995): Taking off her ring and stamping it shows Edna's need to be free (131).

[17.32] (Gremillion 1989): Destroying the vase is the only way Edna can feel that she has power (172). (Ramamoorthi 1995): 184.

[17.36] (Jacobs 1988): Edna is unable to maintain her will (110).

## CHAPTER 18

**[18.1]** The following morning Mr. Pontellier, upon leaving for his office, asked Edna if she would not meet him in town in order to look at some new fixtures for the library.

**[18.2]** "I hardly think we need new fixtures, Léonce. Don't let us get anything new; you are too extravagant. I don't believe you ever think of saving or putting by."

**[18.3]** "The way to become rich is to make money, my dear Edna, not to save it," he said. He regretted that she did not feel inclined to go with him and select new fixtures. He kissed her good-by, and told her she was not looking well and must take care of herself. She was unusually pale and very quiet.

**[18.4]** She stood on the front veranda as he quitted the house, and absently picked a few sprays of jessamine that grew upon a trellis near by. She inhaled the odor of the blossoms and thrust them into the bosom of her white morning gown. The boys were dragging along the banquette a small "express wagon," which they had filled with blocks and sticks. The quadron was following them with little quick steps, having assumed a fictitious animation and alacrity for the occasion. A fruit vender was crying his wares in the street.

**[18.5]** Edna looked straight before her with a self-absorbed expression upon her face. She felt no interest in anything about her. The street, the children, the fruit vender, the flowers growing there under her eyes, were all part and parcel of an alien world which had suddenly become antagonistic.

**[18.6]** She went back into the house. She had thought of speaking to the cook concerning her blunders of the previous night; but Mr. Pontellier had saved her that disagreeable mission, for which she was so poorly fitted. Mr. Pontellier's arguments were usually convincing with those whom he employed. He left home feeling quite sure that he and Edna would sit down that evening, and possibly a few subsequent evenings, to a dinner deserving of the name.

**[18.7]** Edna spent an hour or two in looking over some of her old sketches. She could see their shortcomings and defects, which were glaring in her eyes. She tried to work a little, but found she was not in the humor. Finally she gathered together a few of the sketches--those which she considered the least discreditable; and she carried them with her when, a little later, she dressed and left the house. She looked handsome and distinguished in her street gown. The tan of the seashore had left her face, and her forehead was smooth, white, and polished beneath her heavy, yellow-brown hair. There were a few freckles on her face, and a small, dark mole near the under lip and one on the temple, half-hidden in her hair.

**[18.8]** As Edna walked along the street she was thinking of Robert. She was still under the spell of her infatuation. She had tried to forget him, realizing the inutility of remembering. But the thought of him was like an obsession, ever pressing itself upon her. It was not that she dwelt upon details of their acquaintance, or recalled in any special or peculiar way his personality; it was his being, his existence, which dominated her thought, fading sometimes as if it

would melt into the mist of the forgotten, reviving again with an intensity which filled her with an incomprehensible longing.

**[18.9]** Edna was on her way to Madame Ratignolle's. Their intimacy, begun at Grand Isle, had not declined, and they had seen each other with some frequency since their return to the city. The Ratignolles lived at no great distance from Edna's home, on the corner of a side street, where Monsieur Ratignolle owned and conducted a drug store which enjoyed a steady and prosperous trade. His father had been in the business before him, and Monsieur Ratignolle stood well in the community and bore an enviable reputation for integrity and clearheadedness. His family lived in commodious apartments over the store, having an entrance on the side within the *porte cochère*. There was something which Edna thought very French, very foreign, about their whole manner of living. In the large and pleasant salon which extended across the width of the house, the Ratignolles entertained their friends once a fortnight with a *soirée musicale*, sometimes diversified by card-playing. There was a friend who played upon the 'cello. One brought his flute and another his violin, while there were some who sang and a number who performed upon the piano with various degrees of taste and agility. The Ratignolles' *soirées musicales* were widely known, and it was considered a privilege to be invited to them.

**[18.10]** Edna found her friend engaged in assorting the clothes which had returned that morning from the laundry. She at once abandoned her occupation upon seeing Edna, who had been ushered without ceremony into her

presence.

**[18.11]** "'Cité can do it as well as I; it is really her business," she explained to Edna, who apologized for interrupting her. And she summoned a young black woman, whom she instructed, in French, to be very careful in checking off the list which she handed her. She told her to notice particularly if a fine linen handkerchief of Monsieur Ratignolle's, which was missing last week, had been returned; and to be sure to set to one side such pieces as required mending and darning.

**[18.12]** Then placing an arm around Edna's waist, she led her to the front of the house, to the salon, where it was cool and sweet with the odor of great roses that stood upon the hearth in jars.

**[18.13]** Madame Ratignolle looked more beautiful than ever there at home, in a negligé which left her arms almost wholly bare and exposed the rich, melting curves of her white throat.

**[18.14]** "Perhaps I shall be able to paint your picture some day," said Edna with a smile when they were seated. She produced the roll of sketches and started to unfold them. "I believe I ought to work again. I feel as if I wanted to be doing something. What do you think of them? Do you think it worth while to take it up again and study some more? I might study for a while with Laidpore."

**[18.15]** She knew that Madame Ratignolle's opinion in such a matter would be next to valueless, that she herself had not alone decided, but

determined; but she sought the words of praise and encouragement that would help her to put heart into her venture.

**[18.16]** "Your talent is immense, dear!"

**[18.17]** "Nonsense!" protested Edna, well pleased.

**[18.18]** "Immense, I tell you," persisted Madame Ratignolle, surveying the sketches one by one, at close range, then holding them at arm's length, narrowing her eyes, and dropping her head on one side. "Surely, this Bavarian peasant is worthy of framing; and this basket of apples! never have I seen anything more lifelike. One might almost be tempted to reach out a hand and take one."

**[18.19]** Edna could not control a feeling which bordered upon complacency at her friend's praise, even realizing, as she did, its true worth. She retained a few of the sketches, and gave all the rest to Madame Ratignolle, who appreciated the gift far beyond its value and proudly exhibited the pictures to her husband when he came up from the store a little later for his midday dinner.

**[18.20]** Mr. Ratignolle was one of those men who are called the salt of the earth. His cheerfulness was unbounded, and it was matched by his goodness of heart, his broad charity, and common sense. He and his wife spoke English with an accent which was only discernible through its un-English emphasis and a certain carefulness and deliberation. Edna's husband spoke English with no accent whatever. The Ratignolles understood each other

perfectly. If ever the fusion of two human beings into one has been accomplished on this sphere it was surely in their union.

**[18.21]** As Edna seated herself at table with them she thought, "Better a dinner of herbs," though it did not take her long to discover that it was no dinner of herbs, but a delicious repast, simple, choice, and in every way satisfying.

**[18.22]** Monsieur Ratignolle was delighted to see her, though he found her looking not so well as at Grand Isle, and he advised a tonic. He talked a good deal on various topics, a little politics, some city news and neighborhood gossip. He spoke with an animation and earnestness that gave an exaggerated importance to every syllable he uttered. His wife was keenly interested in everything he said, laying down her fork the better to listen, chiming in, taking the words out of his mouth.

**[18.23]** Edna felt depressed rather than soothed after leaving them. The little glimpse of domestic harmony which had been offered her, gave her no regret, no longing. It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui. She was moved by a kind of commiseration for Madame Ratignolle,—a pity for that colorless existence which never uplifted its possessor beyond the region of blind contentment, in which no moment of anguish ever visited her soul, in which she would never have the taste of life's delirium. Edna vaguely wondered what she meant by "life's delirium." It had crossed her thought like some unsought, extraneous impression.



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NOTES TO CHAPTER 18

**[18.2]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna is learning to mimic Leonce's male nagging, which flusters him (99).

**[18.3]** (Rowe 1989): Chopin reverses the roles (usual for this time period) as she describes Edna concerned over Leonce's free spending (7).

**[18.4]** (Jones 1989): When back in her old environment, Edna loses interest in everything (63).

**[18.5]** (Delbanco 1988): Lack of sensory perception is another way Edna becomes like the men around her (100). (S. Jones 1988): When Edna returns to her home, nothing looks the same (123). (Bande 1995): When Robert leaves, Edna can now become a spectator of life, completely withdrawing from participation (163). (Block 1995): 208.

**[18.8]** (Jacobs 1988): Edna lacks the will to love, just as she lacks the will to be an artist (110). (Martin 1988): Edna does not look at life as others do, but rather lives in a dream-like world (21). (Bande 1995): Calling her feelings for Robert an infatuation saves

Edna from belittling herself (164). When Robert enters Edna's life, she again becomes involved in life (164). (Block 1995): 214. Edna misses the object of her desire more than she misses Robert himself, just as in her daydreams about the great tragedian (215). (Ghosh 1995): 237. (Paul 1995): 51.

**[18.9]** (Delbanco 1988): Monsieur Ratignolle is a classic Creole, living above his business -- the business his father left him (94). (Giorcelli 1988): 113. (Balliwala 1995): Adele views music as a social skill and nothing more, whereas Mademoiselle Reisz is passionate about music (192).

**[18.14]** (Giorcelli 1988): 120. (Stange 1989): Edna will later support herself on the income from her paintings (145). (Stange 1995): Seeing Adele in her own home makes Edna want to work to get out of her own home (27).

**[18.15]** (Jacobs 1988): Edna cannot will herself to paint (109). (Block 1995): Edna thinks that by painting she would convey her independence, but she still would need the approval and praise of others (209).

**[18.16]** (Rowe 1989): 19. (Showalter 1988): 45.

**[18.18]** (Rowe 1989): Edna's art is basically autobiographical (18-19).

**[18.20]** (Delbanco 1988): Leonce is also (though not as boldly as Edna) rebelling against

the traditions of the Creoles by learning to speak English without an accent and by moving into the national business world (94). (Showalter 1988): Edna is not jealous of the relationship between the Ratignolles, but rather feels sorry for Adele's dull life (49). (Gopalan 1995): Being in the presence of such a happy couple only upsets Edna, stirring her unsatisfied desires (177). (Paul 1995): 58.

**[18.21]** (Paul 1995): 63.

**[18.22]** (George 1988): Although Monsieur Ratignolle is by far the most appealing of all the male characters, his voice and manner of speaking make him appear domineering and controlling (55).

**[18.23]** (Bonner 1988): 103. (Franklin 1988): The narrator is somewhat critical of Edna's way of thinking (146). (Giorcelli 1988): Edna craves abstractions and illusions that she creates for herself (121). (Showalter 1988): 48, 49. (Solomon 1988): 118. (LeFew 1989): 81. (Bande 1995): Mrs. Ratignolle's lifestyle holds no interest for Edna, who sees it as anything but desirable (161) (165). (Juneja 1995): Edna feels sorry for Adele, whom Edna sees as trapped (117). (Paul 1995): 58. (Poovalingam 1995): Edna chooses death over living a dull life as Adele does (226). (Triksa 1995): 150. (Vevaina 1995): 96.

**CHAPTER 19**

**[19.1]** Edna could not help but think that it was very foolish, very childish, to have stamped upon her wedding ring and smashed the crystal vase upon the tiles. She was visited by no more outbursts, moving her to such futile expedients. She began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked. She completely abandoned her Tuesdays at home, and did not return the visits of those who had called upon her. She made no ineffectual efforts to conduct her household *en bonne ménagère*, going and coming as it suited her fancy, and, so far as she was able, lending herself to any passing caprice.

**[19.2]** Mr. Pontellier had been a rather courteous husband so long as he met a certain tacit submissiveness in his wife. But her new and unexpected line of conduct completely bewildered him. It shocked him. Then her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife angered him. When Mr. Pontellier became rude, Edna grew insolent. She had resolved never to take another step backward.

**[19.3]** "It seems to me the utmost folly for a woman at the head of a household, and the mother of children, to spend in an atelier days which would be better employed contriving for the comfort of her family."

**[19.4]** "I feel like painting," answered Edna. "Perhaps I shan't always feel like it."

**[19.5]** "Then in God's name paint! but don't let the family go to the devil. There's Madame Ratignolle; because she keeps up her music, she doesn't let everything else go to chaos. And she's more of a musician than you are a painter."

**[19.6]** "She isn't a musician, and I'm not a painter. It isn't on account of painting that I let things go."

**[19.7]** "On account of what, then?"

**[19.8]** "Oh! I don't know. Let me alone; you bother me."

**[19.9]** It sometimes entered Mr. Pontellier's mind to wonder if his wife were not growing a little unbalanced mentally. He could see plainly that she was not herself. That is, he could not see that she was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.

**[19.10]** Her husband let her alone as she requested, and went away to his office. Edna went up to her atelier--a bright room in the top of the house. She was working with great energy and interest, without accomplishing anything, however, which satisfied her even in the smallest degree. For a time she had the whole household enrolled in the service of art. The boys posed for her. They thought it amusing at first, but the occupation soon lost its attractiveness when they discovered that it was not a game arranged especially for their entertainment. The quadron sat for hours before Edna's palette, patient as a savage, while the house-maid took charge of the children, and the drawing-room

went undusted. But the housemaid, too, served her term as model when Edna perceived that the young woman's back and shoulders were molded on classic lines, and that her hair, loosened from its confining cap, became an inspiration. While Edna worked she sometimes sang low the little air, "*Ah! si tu savais!*"

**[19.11]** It moved her with recollections. She could hear again the ripple of the water, the flapping sail. She could see the glint of the moon upon the bay, and could feel the soft, gusty beating of the hot south wind. A subtle current of desire passed through her body, weakening her hold upon the brushes and making her eyes burn.

**[19.12]** There were days when she was very happy without knowing why. She was happy to be alive and breathing, when her whole being seemed to be one with the sunlight, the color, the odors, the luxuriant warmth of some perfect Southern day. She liked then to wander alone into strange and unfamiliar places. She discovered many a sunny, sleepy corner, fashioned to dream in. And she found it good to dream and to be alone and unmolested.

**[19.13]** There were days when she was unhappy, she did not know why,--when it did not seem worth while to be glad or sorry, to be alive or dead; when life appeared to her like a grotesque pandemonium and humanity like worms struggling blindly toward inevitable annihilation. She could not work on such a day, nor weave fancies to stir her pulses and warm her blood.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 19

[19.1] (Jacobs 1988): 109. (S. Jones 1988): Once Edna is back at home, she continues the behavior she had engaged in while on Grand Isle (122). (Jones 1989): Back home in New Orleans, Edna continues her island lifestyle of doing as she pleases (63). (Juneja 1995): As Edna moves toward more independence she stops pretending to be a good housewife (116).

[19.2] (Balliwala 1995): Leonce has no idea what is happening with Edna or their marriage (199). (Block 1995): Edna never vigorously attempts to advance to a fulfilling life (209). (Juneja 1995): Creole culture does not allow a wife to have her own identity (117). (Paul 1995): Leonce feels he has the right to be irritated with Edna's behavior because she is his possession and should behave in a wifely manner (49). (Ghosh 1995): 233. (Vevaina 1995): Leonce cannot understand Edna's need for independence and her attitude towards him and their children (86).

[19.4] (Jacobs 1988): Edna uses painting as an excuse for neglecting her children (110).

[19.5] (Solomon 1988): Leonce compares Edna to Adele, whom he considers to be the ideal wife and mother (118). (Seidel 1989): Edna does not consider Adele a true musician, such as Mademoiselle Reisz, nor does she consider herself a real artist (94).

**[19.6]** (Jacobs 1988): Edna admits that she is not an artist, but she cannot say why she paints (110). (Showalter 1988): Edna resents Leonce's considering Adele a model artist (46). (Seidel 1989): Edna, like Mademoiselle Reisz, goes against the social standards of caring for home, husband, and children (94).

**[19.9]** (Ewell 1988): Edna tries to prove who she is by declaring her independence from her husband (90). (Franklin 1988): Chopin's tone is both critical of and sympathetic to Leonce (146). (Gilmore 1988): As Edna awakens, Chopin describes her as growing into a person (82). (Lattin 1988): Chopin suggests the idea of rebirth, with Edna's clothes representing old skin, which is molted for the new (42). (Morris and Dunn 1988): 98. (Stange 1989): Friendship with Adele is the major stimulus for Edna to seek her individuality (148). (Balliwala 1995): 199. (Jacob 1995): 104. (Juneja 1995): The change in Edna irks Leonce (117). (Stange 1995): Adele's friendship helps Edna realize the selflessness required in motherhood, making Edna begin to relax her remoteness (31). (Wasson 1995): Leonce is more concerned with what others will think of Edna's behavior than what is going on inside her (138).

**[19.10]** (LeFew 1989): Edna feels that she will never be satisfied in this life (77). (Vevaina 1995): Edna is more enthusiastic about her painting after being stimulated by her Aphrodite self (86).



[19.11] (Martin 1988): Edna does not look at life as others do, but rather lives in a dream-like world (21). (LeFew 1989): This is one of several times when music greatly affects Edna (78).

[19.12] (Giorcelli 1988): 113. (Jacobs 1988): Edna's life begins to have new meaning (109).

[19.13] (Franklin 1988): Chopin here parodies Edna's romanticism (147). (Jones 1989): Edna lives in a fairytale world, telling herself stories when she feels in despair (71). (LeFew 1989): Edna feels that she will never be happy in this life (77). (Vevaina 1995): 96.

## CHAPTER 20

[20.1] It was during such a mood that Edna hunted up Mademoiselle Reisz. She had not forgotten the rather disagreeable impression left upon her by their last interview; but she nevertheless felt a desire to see her--above all, to listen while she played upon the piano. Quite early in the afternoon she started upon her quest for the pianist. Unfortunately she had mislaid or lost

Mademoiselle Reisz's card, and looking up her address in the city directory, she found that the woman lived on Bienville Street, some distance away. The directory which fell into her hands was a year or more old, however, and upon reaching the number indicated, Edna discovered that the house was occupied by a respectable family of mulattoes who had *chambres garnies* to let. They had been living there for six months, and knew absolutely nothing of a Mademoiselle Reisz. In fact, they knew nothing of any of their neighbors; their lodgers were all people of the highest distinction, they assured Edna. She did not linger to discuss class distinctions with Madame Pouponne, but hastened to a neighboring grocery store, feeling sure that Mademoiselle would have left her address with the proprietor.

**[20.2]** He knew Mademoiselle Reisz a good deal better than he wanted to know her, he informed his questioner. In truth, he did not want to know her at all, or anything concerning her--the most disagreeable and unpopular woman who ever lived in Bienville Street. He thanked heaven she had left the neighborhood, and was equally thankful that he did not know where she had gone.

**[20.3]** Edna's desire to see Mademoiselle Reisz had increased tenfold since these unlooked-for obstacles had arisen to thwart it. She was wondering who could give her the information she sought, when it suddenly occurred to her that Madame Lebrun would be the one most likely to do so. She knew it was useless to ask Madame Ratignolle, who was on the most distant terms with the

musician, and preferred to know nothing concerning her. She had once been almost as emphatic in expressing herself upon the subject as the corner grocer.

**[20.4]** Edna knew that Madame Lebrun had returned to the city, for it was the middle of November. And she also knew where the Lebruns lived, on Chartres Street.

**[20.5]** Their home from the outside looked like a prison, with iron bars before the door and lower windows. The iron bars were a relic of the old *régime*, and no one had ever thought of dislodging them. At the side was a high fence enclosing the garden. A gate or door opening upon the street was locked. Edna rang the bell at this side garden gate, and stood upon the banquette, waiting to be admitted.

**[20.6]** It was Victor who opened the gate for her. A black woman, wiping her hands upon her apron, was close at his heels. Before she saw them Edna could hear them in altercation, the woman--plainly an anomaly--claiming the right to be allowed to perform her duties, one of which was to answer the bell.

**[20.7]** Victor was surprised and delighted to see Mrs. Pontellier, and he made no attempt to conceal either his astonishment or his delight. He was a dark-browed, good-looking youngster of nineteen, greatly resembling his mother, but with ten times her impetuosity. He instructed the black woman to go at once and inform Madame Lebrun that Mrs. Pontellier desired to see her. The woman grumbled a refusal to do part of her duty when she had not been permitted to do it all, and started back to her interrupted task of weeding the garden.

Whereupon Victor administered a rebuke in the form of a volley of abuse, which, owing to its rapidity and incoherence, was all but incomprehensible to Edna. Whatever it was, the rebuke was convincing, for the woman dropped her hoe and went mumbling into the house.

**[20.8]** Edna did not wish to enter. It was very pleasant there on the side porch, where there were chairs, a wicker lounge, and a small table. She seated herself, for she was tired from her long tramp; and she began to rock gently and smooth out the folds of her silk parasol. Victor drew up his chair beside her. He at once explained that the black woman's offensive conduct was all due to imperfect training, as he was not there to take her in hand. He had only come up from the island the morning before, and expected to return next day. He stayed all winter at the island; he lived there, and kept the place in order and got things ready for the summer visitors.

**[20.9]** But a man needed occasional relaxation, he informed Mrs. Pontellier, and every now and again he drummed up a pretext to bring him to the city. My! but he had had a time of it the evening before! He wouldn't want his mother to know, and he began to talk in a whisper. He was scintillant with recollections. Of course, he couldn't think of telling Mrs. Pontellier all about it, she being a woman and not comprehending such things. But it all began with a girl peeping and smiling at him through the shutters as he passed by. Oh! but she was a beauty! Certainly he smiled back, and went up and talked to her. Mrs. Pontellier did not know him if she supposed he was one to let an

opportunity like that escape him. Despite herself, the youngster amused her. She must have betrayed in her look some degree of interest or entertainment. The boy grew more daring, and Mrs. Pontellier might have found herself, in a little while, listening to a highly colored story but for the timely appearance of Madame Lebrun.

**[20.10]** That lady was still clad in white, according to her custom of the summer. Her eyes beamed an effusive welcome. Would not Mrs. Pontellier go inside? Would she partake of some refreshment? Why had she not been there before? How was that dear Mr. Pontellier and how were those sweet children? Had Mrs. Pontellier ever known such a warm November?

**[20.11]** Victor went and reclined on the wicker lounge behind his mother's chair, where he commanded a view of Edna's face. He had taken her parasol from her hands while he spoke to her, and he now lifted it and twirled it above him as he lay on his back. When Madame Lebrun complained that it was so dull coming back to the city; that she saw so few people now; that even Victor, when he came up from the island for a day or two, had so much to occupy him and engage his time; then it was that the youth went into contortions on the lounge and winked mischievously at Edna. She somehow felt like a confederate in crime, and tried to look severe and disapproving.

**[20.12]** There had been but two letters from Robert, with little in them, they told her. Victor said it was really not worth while to go inside for the letters, when his mother entreated him to go in search of them. He remembered the

contents, which in truth he rattled off very glibly when put to the test.

**[20.13]** One letter was written from Vera Cruz and the other from the City of Mexico. He had met Montel, who was doing everything toward his advancement. So far, the financial situation was no improvement over the one he had left in New Orleans, but of course the prospects were vastly better. He wrote of the City of Mexico, the buildings, the people and their habits, the conditions of life which he found there. He sent his love to the family. He inclosed a check to his mother, and hoped she would affectionately remember him to all his friends. That was about the substance of the two letters. Edna felt that if there had been a message for her, she would have received it. The despondent frame of mind in which she had left home began again to overtake her, and she remembered that she wished to find Mademoiselle Reisz.

**[20.14]** Madame Lebrun knew where Mademoiselle Reisz lived. She gave Edna the address, regretting that she would not consent to stay and spend the remainder of the afternoon, and pay a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz some other day. The afternoon was already well advanced.

**[20.15]** Victor escorted her out upon the banquette, lifted her parasol, and held it over her while he walked to the car with her. He entreated her to bear in mind that the disclosures of the afternoon were strictly confidential. She laughed and bantered him a little, remembering too late that she should have been dignified and reserved.

**[20.16]** "How handsome Mrs. Pontellier looked!" said Madame Lebrun to

her son.

**[20.17]** "Ravishing!" he admitted. "The city atmosphere has improved her. Some way she doesn't seem like the same woman."

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 20

**[20.9]** (Balliwala 1995): 197.

**[20.11]** (Giorcelli 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz is rather grotesque in physical appearance -- once again a characteristic of a witch (136). (Balliwala 1995): 197.

## CHAPTER 21

**[21.1]** Some people contended that the reason Mademoiselle Reisz always chose apartments up under the roof was to discourage the approach of beggars, peddlars and callers. There were plenty of windows in her little front room. They were for the most part dingy, but as they were nearly always open it

did not make so much difference. They often admitted into the room a good deal of smoke and soot; but at the same time all the light and air that there was came through them. From her windows could be seen the crescent of the river, the masts of ships and the big chimneys of the Mississippi steamers. A magnificent piano crowded the apartment. In the next room she slept, and in the third and last she harbored a gasoline stove on which she cooked her meals when disinclined to descend to the neighboring restaurant. It was there also that she ate, keeping her belongings in a rare old buffet, dingy and battered from a hundred years of use.

**[21.2]** When Edna knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's front room door and entered, she discovered that person standing beside the window, engaged in mending or patching an old prunella gaiter. The little musician laughed all over when she saw Edna. Her laugh consisted of a contortion of the face and all the muscles of the body. She seemed strikingly homely, standing there in the afternoon light. She still wore the shabby lace and the artificial bunch of violets on the side of her head.

**[21.3]** "So you remembered me at last," said Mademoiselle. "I had said to myself, 'Ah, bah! she will never come.'"

**[21.4]** "Did you want me to come?" asked Edna with a smile.

**[21.5]** "I had not thought much about it," answered Mademoiselle. The two had seated themselves on a little bumpy sofa which stood against the wall. "I am glad, however, that you came. I have the water boiling back there, and



was just about to make some coffee. You will drink a cup with me. And how is *la belle dame*? Always handsome! always healthy! always contented!" She took Edna's hand between her strong wiry fingers, holding it loosely without warmth, and executing a sort of double theme upon the back and palm.

**[21.6]** "Yes," she went on; "I sometimes thought: 'She will never come. She promised as those women in society always do, without meaning it. She will not come.' For I really don't believe you like me, Mrs. Pontellier."

**[21.7]** "I don't know whether I like you or not," replied Edna, gazing down at the little woman with a quizzical look.

**[21.8]** The candor of Mrs. Pontellier's admission greatly pleased Mademoiselle Reisz. She expressed her gratification by repairing forthwith to the region of the gasoline stove and rewarding her guest with the promised cup of coffee. The coffee and the biscuit accompanying it proved very acceptable to Edna, who had declined refreshment at Madame Lebrun's and was now beginning to feel hungry. Mademoiselle set the tray which she brought in upon a small table near at hand, and seated herself once again on the lumpy sofa.

**[21.9]** "I have had a letter from your friend," she remarked, as she poured a little cream into Edna's cup and handed it to her.

**[21.10]** "My friend?"

**[21.11]** "Yes, your friend Robert. He wrote to me from the City of Mexico."

**[21.12]** "Wrote to *you*?" repeated Edna in amazement, stirring her coffee

absently.

**[21.13]** "Yes, to me. Why not? Don't stir all the warmth out of your coffee; drink it. Though the letter might as well have been sent to you; it was nothing but Mrs. Pontellier from beginning to end."

**[21.14]** "Let me see it," requested the young woman, entreatingly.

**[21.15]** "No; a letter concerns no one but the person who writes it and the one to whom it is written."

**[21.16]** "Haven't you just said it concerned me from beginning to end?"

**[21.17]** "It was written about you, not to you. 'Have you seen Mrs. Pontellier? How is she looking?' he asks. 'As Mrs. Pontellier says,' or 'as Mrs. Pontellier once said.' 'If Mrs. Pontellier should call upon you, play for her that Impromptu of Chopin's, my favorite. I heard it here a day or two ago, but not as you play it. I should like to know how it affects her,' and so on, as if he supposed we were constantly in each other's society."

**[21.18]** "Let me see the letter."

**[21.19]** "Oh, no."

**[21.20]** "Have you answered it?"

**[21.21]** "No."

**[21.22]** "Let me see the letter."

**[21.23]** "No, and again, no."

**[21.24]** "Then play the Impromptu for me."

**[21.25]** "It is growing late; what time do you have to be home?"

**[21.26]** "Time doesn't concern me. Your question seems a little rude.

Play the Impromptu."

**[21.27]** "But you have told me nothing of yourself. What are you doing?"

**[21.28]** "Painting!" laughed Edna. "I am becoming an artist. Think of it!"

**[21.29]** "Ah! an artist! You have pretensions, Madame."

**[21.30]** "Why pretensions? Do you think I could not become an artist?"

**[21.31]** "I do not know you well enough to say. I do not know your talent or your temperament. To be an artist includes much; one must possess many gifts--absolute gifts--which have not been acquired by one's own effort. And, moreover, to succeed, the artist must possess the courageous soul."

**[21.32]** "What do you mean by the courageous soul?"

**[21.33]** "Courageous, *ma foi!* The brave soul. The soul that dares and defies."

**[21.34]** "Show me the letter and play for me the Impromptu. You see that I have persistence. Does that quality count for anything in art?"

**[21.35]** "It counts with a foolish old woman whom you have captivated," replied Mademoiselle, with her wriggling laugh.

**[21.36]** The letter was right there at hand in the drawer of the little table upon which Edna had just placed her coffee cup. Mademoiselle opened the drawer and drew forth the letter, the topmost one. She placed it in Edna's hands, and without further comment arose and went to the piano.

**[21.37]** Mademoiselle played a soft interlude. It was an improvisation.

She sat low at the instrument, and the lines of her body settled into ungraceful curves and angles that gave it an appearance of deformity. Gradually and imperceptibly the interlude melted into the soft opening minor chords of the Chopin Impromptu.

**[21.38]** Edna did not know when the Impromptu began or ended. She sat in the sofa corner reading Robert's letter by the fading light. Mademoiselle had glided from the Chopin into the quivering lovenotes of Isolde's song, and back again to the Impromptu with its soulful and poignant longing.

**[21.39]** The shadows deepened in the little room. The music grew strange and fantastic--turbulent, insistent, plaintive and soft with entreaty. The shadows grew deeper. The music filled the room. It floated out upon the night, over the housetops, the crescent of the river, losing itself in the silence of the upper air.

**[21.40]** Edna was sobbing, just as she had wept one midnight at Grand Isle when strange, new voices awoke in her. She arose in some agitation to take her departure. "May I come again, Mademoiselle?" she asked at the threshold.

**[21.41]** "Come whenever you feel like it. Be careful; the stairs and landings are dark; don't stumble."

**[21.42]** Mademoiselle reentered and lit a candle. Robert's letter was on the floor. She stooped and picked it up. It was crumpled and damp with tears. Mademoiselle smoothed the letter out, restored it to the envelope, and replaced it in the table drawer.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER 21

**[21.1]** (Delbanco 1988): Reisz's home is autonomously domestic and fearlessly open to the world at the same time (95). (Giorcelli 1988): Reisz's apartment is characteristic of the dwelling of a wicked witch, which is what she represents in opposition to the good fairy represented by Aline Lebrun (135-36). Witches are ageless, and Mademoiselle Reisz appears to be as old as her ancient furniture (136).

**[21.2]** (Seidel 1989): 93.

**[21.3]** (Balliwala 1995): Reisz's posture of superiority could be a guard against sentimentality and idealism (191).

**[21.4]** (Balliwala 1995): 191.

**[21.5]** (Giorcelli 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz's traits resemble those of a witch (136). (Lattin 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz's fingers are cold, but they produce the music that contributes to Edna's awakening (42).

**[21.27]** (Jacob 1995): Mademoiselle Reisz has chosen her vocation over her sexuality and femininity; Chopin juxtaposes the ugliness of Reisz's body with Edna's beautiful body (107).

**[21.31]** (Jacobs 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz doubts that Edna has the will to be an artist (109). (Solomon 1988): 119. (LeFew 1989): 77. (Amin 1995): Mademoiselle Reisz's observation effectively dares Edna her to break away from the constraints of society (73). (Battiwala 1995): During Edna's suicide, she recalls Reisz's words, realizing her own irresponsibility (189). (Ghosh 1995): 236. (Paul 1995): 60. (Triakha 1995): 152. (Vevaina 1995): Reisz doubts that Edna has the courage to disregard social standards (87).

**[21.32]** (Martin 1988): 22.

**[21.33]** (Martin 1988): In order to develop male-associated skills, one would have to defy hundreds of years of male superiority and female passivity; Edna does not have this strength (22). (Showalter 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz expresses Chopin's need for independence and singularity in writing (35). (Solomon 1988): 119. (LeFew 1989): 77. (Ghosh 1995): 236. (Paul 1995): 60. (Ramamoorthi 1995): 184.

**[21.35]** (Showalter 1988): The relationship between Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna implies more than simple friendship; rather, perhaps Reisz represents a surrogate lover to Edna (46).

[21.37] (Giorcelli 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz's body gives the appearance of deformity, like the body of a witch (136).

[21.38] (Dyer 1988): The music exemplifies the way Chopin mixes romantic passion with expected disillusionment (129).

[21.39] (George 1988): 58. (Showalter 1988): The references to Frederic Chopin hint at Kate Chopin's desire to become an artist and also suggests her desire that her book will stir the emotions of the reader (47). (LeFew 1989): The music provides Edna a temporary relief from her worries (80).

[21.40] (Gilmore 1988): 78.

## CHAPTER 22

[22.1] One morning on his way into town Mr. Pontellier stopped at the house of his old friend and family physician, Doctor Mandeleet. The Doctor was a semi-retired physician, resting, as the saying is, upon his laurels. He bore a

reputation for wisdom rather than skill--leaving the active practice of medicine to his assistants and younger contemporaries--and was much sought for in matters of consultation. A few families, united to him by bonds of friendship, he still attended when they required the services of a physician. The Pontelliers were among these.

**[22.2]** Mr. Pontellier found the Doctor reading at the open window of his study. His house stood rather far back from the street, in the center of a delightful garden, so that it was quiet and peaceful at the old gentleman's study window. He was a great reader. He stared up disapprovingly over his eye-glasses as Mr. Pontellier entered, wondering who had the temerity to disturb him at that hour of the morning.

**[22.3]** "Ah, Pontellier! Not sick, I hope. Come and have a seat. What news do you bring this morning?" He was quite portly, with a profusion of gray hair, and small blue eyes which age had robbed of much of their brightness but none of their penetration.

**[22.4]** "Oh! I'm never sick, Doctor. You know that I come of tough fiber--of that old Creole race of Pontelliers that dry up and finally blow away. I came to consult--no, not precisely to consult--to talk to you about Edna. I don't know what ails her."

**[22.5]** "Madame Pontellier not well," marveled the Doctor. "Why, I saw her--I think it was a week ago--walking along Canal Street, the picture of health, it seemed to me."



**[22.6]** "Yes, yes; she seems quite well," said Mr. Pontellier, leaning forward and whirling his stick between his two hands; "but she doesn't act well. She's odd, she's not like herself. I can't make her out, and I thought perhaps you'd help me."

**[22.7]** "How does she act?" inquired the Doctor.

**[22.8]** "Well, it isn't easy to explain," said Mr. Pontellier, throwing himself back in his chair. "She lets the housekeeping go to the dickens."

**[22.9]** "Well, well; women are not all alike, my dear Pontellier. We've got to consider--"

**[22.10]** "I know that; I told you I couldn't explain. Her whole attitude--toward me and everybody and everything--has changed. You know I have a quick temper, but I don't want to quarrel or be rude to a woman, especially my wife; yet I'm driven to it, and feel like ten thousand devils after I've made a fool of myself. She's making it devilishly uncomfortable for me," he went on nervously. "She's got some sort of notion in her head concerning the eternal rights of women; and--you understand--we meet in the morning at the breakfast table."

**[22.11]** The old gentleman lifted his shaggy eyebrows, protruded his thick nether lip, and tapped the arms of his chair with his cushioned fingertips.

**[22.12]** "What have you been doing to her, Pontellier?"

**[22.13]** "Doing! *Parbleu!*"

**[22.14]** "Has she," asked the Doctor, with a smile, "has she been

associating of late with a circle of pseudo-intellectual women--super-spiritual superior beings? My wife has been telling me about them."

**[22.15]** "That's the trouble," broke in Mr. Pontellier, "she hasn't been associating with any one. She has abandoned her Tuesdays at home, has thrown over all her acquaintances, and goes tramping about by herself, moping in the street-cars, getting in after dark. I tell you she's peculiar. I don't like it; I feel a little worried over it."

**[22.16]** This was a new aspect for the Doctor. "Nothing hereditary?" he asked, seriously. "Nothing peculiar about her family antecedents, is there?"

**[22.17]** "Oh, no, indeed! She comes of sound old Presbyterian Kentucky stock. The old gentleman, her father, I have heard, used to atone for his weekday sins with his Sunday devotions. I know for a fact, that his race horses literally ran away with the prettiest bit of Kentucky farming land I ever laid eyes upon. Margaret--you know Margaret--she has all the Presbyterianism undiluted. And the youngest is something of a vixen. By the way, she gets married in a couple of weeks from now."

**[22.18]** "Send your wife up to the wedding," exclaimed the Doctor, foreseeing a happy solution. "Let her stay among her own people for a while; it will do her good."

**[22.19]** "That's what I want her to do. She won't go to the marriage. She says a wedding is one of the most lamentable spectacles on earth. Nice thing for a woman to say to her husband!" exclaimed Mr. Pontellier, fuming anew at

the recollection.

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

**[22.21]** "Oh! I couldn't do that; there'd be no reason for it," objected Mr. Pontellier.

**[22.22]** "Then I'll go around and see her," said the Doctor. "I'll drop in to dinner some evening *en bon ami*."

**[22.23]** "Do! by all means," urged Mr. Pontellier. "What evening will you come? Say Thursday. Will you come Thursday?" he asked, rising to take his leave.

**[22.24]** "Very well; Thursday. My wife may possibly have some engagement for me Thursday. In case she has, I shall let you know. Otherwise, you may expect me."

**[22.25]** Mr. Pontellier turned before leaving to say:

**[22.26]** "I am going to New York on business very soon. I have a big scheme on hand, and want to be on the field proper to pull the ropes and handle the ribbons. We'll let you in on the inside if you say so, Doctor," he laughed.

**[22.27]** "No, I thank you, my dear sir," returned the Doctor. "I leave such ventures to you younger men with the fever of life still in your blood."

**[22.28]** "What I wanted to say," continued Mr. Pontellier, with his hand on the knob; "I may have to be absent a good while. Would you advise me to take Edna along?"

**[22.29]** "By all means, if she wishes to go. If not, leave her here. Don't contradict her. The mood will pass, I assure you. It may take a month, two, three months--possibly longer, but it will pass; have patience."

**[22.30]** "Well, good-by, *a jeudi*," said Mr. Pontellier, as he let himself out.

**[22.31]** The Doctor would have liked during the course of conversation to ask, "Is there any man in the case?" but he knew his Creole too well to make such a blunder as that.

**[22.32]** He did not resume his book immediately, but sat for a while meditatively looking out into the garden.

**[22.5]** Edna is literally walking the line (Canal Street) dividing two worlds in the city, the world of a dying leisured culture and of a flourishing business culture (94).

**[22.6]** (Gilmore 1988): Leonce is wrong about Edna, because she has never been more her true self (83). (Block 1995): Leonce thinks there is something biologically wrong with Edna because she is not behaving the way he thinks a woman is supposed to behave (206).

**[22.9]** (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet believes that women are capable of achieving more in their lives than simply being housekeepers and nursemaids (119).

**[22.10]** (Jacobsen 1989): The first right that Edna takes for herself is the control of her marital sexuality when she refuses Leonce's advances (115) (120). (Jones 1989): 66. (Stange 1989): Edna asserts her rights by claiming her body as her own, to be given to her husband when she chooses (146). (Amin 1995): Leonce feels the only person he can confide in is Dr. Mandelet (75). (Bande 1995): 159. (Block 1995): 206. (Ghosh 1995): Leonce is too self-absorbed to notice the gradual change in Edna (233). (Stange 1995): Edna enforces her right of selfhood by withholding herself sexually from Leonce (29).

**[22.14]** (Jacobsen 1989): 120. (Jones 1989): It is important to note that Chopin never has Edna come in contact with women of this sort (66). (Bande 1995): Dr. Mandelet secretly surmises the root of Edna's problems as another man, but in reality, Edna's problems come more from a burning feeling of rejection than from loving Robert (159). (Paul

1995): The doctor implies that such association is the only reason a woman would be behaving in such a manner (44). (Vevaina 1995): Although Dr. Mandelet understands Edna, he is full of contempt for feminists (86). (Viswanath 1995): Dr. Mandelet's attitude illustrates how difficult it was for women to become independent (131).

[22.16] (Block 1995): By attributing Edna's actions to an illness, Dr. Mandelet and Leonce dismiss her behavior and continue to accept the assumptions of the male-dominated hierarchy (206).

[22.17] (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (Gopalan 1995): Edna's family also lives a dual life by sinning during the week and atoning on Sundays (174). Positioned between the righteous Margaret and the vixen Janet, Edna tries to become someone who can oblige both (175). (Jacob 1995): Because of her background, Edna is shocked by the relaxed behavior of the Creole women, especially in their free talk of sex (104). (Stange 1995): Kentucky was one of the few states that allowed married women to own separate property, to make contracts, and to keep their earnings (28).

[22.19] (Lattin 1988): Edna's words suggest Chopin's contempt for marriage (41). (Paul 1995): Edna has no use for weddings because marriage only binds one with responsibilities and duties (61). (Triakha 1995): Edna acquires a disgust for marriage and refuses to go to her sister's wedding (150). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's refusal to attend her sister's wedding evidences her doubtfulness about the institution of marriage (96).

[22.20] (Bauer and Lakritz 1988): Dr. Mandelet presents women as organisms that cannot be understood by science. His descriptions of Edna are used mainly to placate Leonce (49). (George 1988): 55. (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet understands that women are delicate creatures, but he does not agree with the common opinion that they are weak and unable to have lives outside their home (108). Although he does not claim to be an authority, Dr. Mandelet is known for his wisdom and experience in watching the behavior of humans (121). (Ghosh 1995): Dr. Mandelet shows his sense of male superiority when he dismisses Edna's change as a fleeting notion (233).

## CHAPTER 23

[23.1] Edna's father was in the city, and had been with them several days. She was not very warmly or deeply attached to him, but they had certain tastes in common, and when together they were companionable. His coming was in the nature of a welcome disturbance; it seemed to furnish a new direction for her emotions.

[23.2] He had come to purchase a wedding gift for his daughter, Janet, and an outfit for himself in which he might make a creditable appearance at her

marriage. Mr. Pontellier had selected the bridal gift, as every one immediately connected with him always deferred to his taste in such matters. And his suggestions on the question of dress--which too often assumes the nature of a problem were of inestimable value to his father-in-law. But for the past few days the old gentleman had been upon Edna's hands, and in his society she was becoming acquainted with a new set of sensations. He had been a colonel in the Confederate army, and still maintained, with the title, the military bearing which had always accompanied it. His hair and mustache were white and silky, emphasizing the rugged bronze of his face. He was tall and thin, and wore his coats padded, which gave a fictitious breadth and depth to his shoulders and chest. Edna and her father looked very distinguished together, and excited a good deal of notice during their perambulations. Upon his arrival she began by introducing him to her atelier and making a sketch of him. He took the whole matter very seriously. If her talent had been ten-fold greater than it was, it would not have surprised him, convinced as he was that he had bequeathed to all of his daughters the germs of a masterful capability, which only depended upon their own efforts to be directed toward successful achievement.

**[23.3]** Before her pencil he sat rigid and unflinching, as he had faced the cannon's mouth in days gone by. He resented the intrusion of the children, who gaped with wondering eyes at him, sitting so stiff up there in their mother's bright atelier. When they drew near he motioned them away with an expressive action of the foot, loath to disturb the fixed lines of his countenance, his arms, or his



rigid shoulders.

**[23.4]** Edna, anxious to entertain him, invited Mademoiselle Reisz to meet him, having promised him a treat in her piano playing; but Mademoiselle declined the invitation. So together they attended a *soirée musicale* at the Ratignolles'. Monsieur and Madame Ratignolle made much of the Colonel, installing him as the guest of honor and engaging him at once to dine with them the following Sunday, or any day which he might select. Madame coquetted with him in the most captivating and naive manner, with eyes, gestures, and a profusion of compliments, till the Colonel's old head felt thirty years younger on his padded shoulders. Edna marveled, not comprehending. She herself was almost devoid of coquetry.

**[23.5]** There were one or two men whom she observed at the *soirée musicale*; but she would never have felt moved to any kittenish display to attract their notice--to any feline or feminine wiles to express herself toward them. Their personality attracted her in an agreeable way. Her fancy selected them, and she was glad when a lull in the music gave them an opportunity to meet her and talk with her. Often on the street the glance of strange eyes had lingered in her memory, and sometimes had disturbed her.

**[23.6]** Mr. Pontellier did not attend these *soirées musicales*. He considered them *bourgeois*, and found more diversion at the club. To Madame Ratignolle he said the music dispensed at her *soirées* was too "heavy," too far beyond his untrained comprehension. His excuse flattered her. But she

disapproved of Mr. Pontellier's club, and she was frank enough to tell Edna so.

**[23.7]** "It's a pity Mr. Pontellier doesn't stay home more in the evenings. I think you would be more--well, if you don't mind my saying it--more united, if he did."

**[23.8]** "Oh! dear no!" said Edna, with a blank look in her eyes. "What should I do if he stayed home? We wouldn't have anything to say to each other."

**[23.9]** She had not much of anything to say to her father, for that matter; but he did not antagonize her. She discovered that he interested her, though she realized that he might not interest her long; and for the first time in her life she felt as if she were thoroughly acquainted with him. He kept her busy serving him and ministering to his wants. It amused her to do so. She would not permit a servant or one of the children to do anything for him which she might do herself. Her husband noticed, and thought it was the expression of a deep filial attachment which he had never suspected.

**[23.10]** The Colonel drank numerous "toddies" during the course of the day, which left him, however, imperturbed. He was an expert at concocting strong drinks. He had even invented some, to which he had given fantastic names, and for whose manufacture he required diverse ingredients that it devolved upon Edna to procure for him.

**[23.11]** When Doctor Mandelelet dined with the Pontelliers on Thursday he could discern in Mrs. Pontellier no trace of that morbid condition which her

husband had reported to him. She was excited and in a manner radiant. She and her father had been to the race course, and their thoughts when they seated themselves at table were still occupied with the events of the afternoon, and their talk was still of the track. The Doctor had not kept pace with turf affairs. He had certain recollections of racing in what he called "the good old times" when the Lecompte stables flourished, and he drew upon this fund of memories so that he might not be left out and seem wholly devoid of the modern spirit. But he failed to impose upon the Colonel, and was even far from impressing him with this trumped-up knowledge of bygone days. Edna had staked her father on his last venture, with the most gratifying results to both of them. Besides, they had met some very charming people, according to the Colonel's impressions. Mrs. Mortimer Merriman and Mrs. James Highcamp, who were there with Alcée Arobin, had joined them and had enlivened the hours in a fashion that warmed him to think of.

**[23.12]** Mr. Pontellier himself had no particular leaning toward horseracing, and was even rather inclined to discourage it as a pastime, especially when he considered the fate of that blue-grass farm in Kentucky. He endeavored, in a general way, to express a particular disapproval, and only succeeded in arousing the ire and opposition of his father-in-law. A pretty dispute followed, in which Edna warmly espoused her father's cause and the Doctor remained neutral.

**[23.13]** He observed his hostess attentively from under his shaggy

brows, and noted a subtle change which had transformed her from the listless woman he had known into a being who, for the moment, seemed palpitant with the forces of life. Her speech was warm and energetic. There was no repression in her glance or gesture. She reminded him of some beautiful, sleek animal waking up in the sun.

**[23.14]** The dinner was excellent. The claret was warm and the champagne was cold, and under their beneficent influence the threatened unpleasantness melted and vanished with the fumes of the wine.

**[23.15]** Mr. Pontellier warmed up and grew reminiscent. He told some amusing plantation experiences, recollections of old Iberville and his youth, when he hunted 'possum in company with some friendly darky; thrashed the pecan trees, shot the grosbec, and roamed the woods and fields in mischievous idleness.

**[23.16]** The Colonel, with little sense of humor and of the fitness of things, related a somber episode of those dark and bitter days, in which he had acted a conspicuous part and always formed a central figure. Nor was the Doctor happier in his selection, when he told the old, ever new and curious story of the waning of a woman's love, seeking strange, new channels, only to return to its legitimate source after days of fierce unrest. It was one of the many little human documents which had been unfolded to him during his long career as a physician. The story did not seem especially to impress Edna. She had one of her own to tell, of a woman who paddled away with her lover one night in a

piroque and never came back. They were lost amid the Baratarian Islands, and no one ever heard of them or found trace of them from that day to this. It was a pure invention. She said that Madame Antoine had related it to her. That, also, was an invention. Perhaps it was a dream she had had. But every glowing word seemed real to those who listened. They could feel the hot breath of the Southern night; they could hear the long sweep of the piroque through the glistening moonlit water, the beating of birds' wings, rising startled from among the reeds in the salt-water pools; they could see the faces of the lovers, pale, close together, rapt in oblivious forgetfulness, drifting into the unknown.

**[23.17]** The champagne was cold, and its subtle fumes played fantastic tricks with Edna's memory that night.

**[23.18]** Outside, away from the glow of the fire and the soft lamplight, the night was chill and murky. The Doctor doubled his old-fashioned cloak across his breast as he strode home through the darkness. He knew his fellow-creatures better than most men; knew that inner life which so seldom unfolds itself to unanointed eyes. He was sorry he had accepted Pontellier's invitation. He was growing old, and beginning to need rest and an imperturbed spirit. He did not want the secrets of other lives thrust upon him.

**[23.19]** "I hope it isn't Arobin," he muttered to himself as he walked. "I hope to heaven it isn't Alcée Arobin."

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 23

[23.2] (Gilmore 1988): As Edna paints her father's portrait, Chopin stresses that what is represented is different from what is real (76). (Walker 1988): Edna's father takes credit for all of his daughter's talents (72).

[23.3] (Delbanco 1988): Edna's pencil is a phallic symbol of daughterly usurpation (99). (Balliwala 1995): The Colonel takes seriously the task of sitting for his portrait (200).

[23.4] (George 1988): Adele's language and manner of speaking are typical of those of Creole women (55). (Jones 1989): 64. (Bharathi 1995): 95.

[23.5] (Bharathi 1995): 95.

[23.7] (Showalter 1988): 49.

[23.8] (George 1988): Because Leonce expects Edna to live up to his idea of social standards, their relationship steadily deteriorates (53-54). (Showalter 1988): It is obvious that Edna and Leonce have nothing in common; theirs is a marriage of convenience (49). (Paul 1995): Leonce's disappointment with Edna's lack of interest in his own interests manifests itself in accusations about her skill as a mother (48).

**[23.11]** (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet advocates Edna's right to live her life in her own way (108).

**[23.13]** (Giorcelli 1988): Dr. Mandelet may be mentally comparing Edna to a horse -- an animal considered sacred to Athene (134). (Lattin 1988): Edna has actually changed, losing her former repressed behavior. She is now a sexual, vibrant woman (42).

(Showalter 1988): Dr. Mandelet's vision of Edna indicates her sensuality (44). (Jacobsen 1989): 108, 120. (Jones 1989): Edna appears anything but ill to Dr. Mandelet (64). Dr. Mandelet is reminded of an animal, as Edna's behavior is unrestricted by societal standards (69).

**[23.16]** (Gilmore 1988): Edna's story is so real that it defies conventional representational art (77). Dr. Mandelet understands that Edna's story reveals the secrets of her inner soul (77). (Giorcelli 1988): One wonders if this is the way Edna is carried into the sea (109). Victor and Alcee are similar in their behavior and personalities (132). (Showalter 1988): Edna still daydreams about perfect lovers (50). (LeFew 1989): The woman in Edna's fantasy will forever remain a fantasy and not become Edna (81). (Bande 1995): Edna wishes she could be the woman in her made-up story (166). (Gopalan 1995): 174. (Jacob 1995): Edna tries to fashion a different ending for her own story (110).

**[23.18]** (Gilmore 1988): 77. (Balliwala 1995): Dr. Mandelet surmises that Edna is in love

with another man, but, because he is a wise man, does not tell Leonce (200).

**[23.19]** (Block 1995): Dr. Mandelet senses that Edna is having an affair (208).

## **CHAPTER 24**

**[24.1]** Edna and her father had a warm, and almost violent dispute upon the subject of her refusal to attend her sister's wedding. Mr. Pontellier declined to interfere, to interpose either his influence or his authority. He was following Doctor Mandelet's advice, and letting her do as she liked. The Colonel reproached his daughter for her lack of filial kindness and respect, her want of sisterly affection and womanly consideration. His arguments were labored and unconvincing. He doubted if Janet would accept any excuse--forgetting that Edna had offered none. He doubted if Janet would ever speak to her again, and he was sure Margaret would not.

**[24.2]** Edna was glad to be rid of her father when he finally took himself off with his wedding garments and his bridal gifts, with his padded shoulders, his Bible reading, his "toddies" and ponderous oaths.

**[24.3]** Mr. Pontellier followed him closely. He meant to stop at the



wedding on his way to New York and endeavor by every means which money and love could devise to atone somewhat for Edna's incomprehensible action.

**[24.4]** "You are too lenient, too lenient by far, Léonce," asserted the Colonel. "Authority, coercion are what is needed. Put your foot down good and hard; the only way to manage a wife. Take my word for it."

**[24.5]** The Colonel was perhaps unaware that he had coerced his own wife into her grave. Mr. Pontellier had a vague suspicion of it which he thought it needless to mention at that late day.

**[24.6]** Edna was not so consciously gratified at her husband's leaving home as she had been over the departure of her father. As the day approached when he was to leave her for a comparatively long stay, she grew melting and affectionate, remembering his many acts of consideration and his repeated expressions of an ardent attachment. She was solicitous about his health and his welfare. She bustled around, looking after his clothing, thinking about heavy underwear, quite as Madame Ratignolle would have done under similar circumstances. She cried when he went away, calling him her dear, good friend, and she was quite certain she would grow lonely before very long and go to join him in New York.

**[24.7]** But after all, a radiant peace settled upon her when she at last found herself alone. Even the children were gone. Old Madame Pontellier had come herself and carried them off to Iberville with their quadroon. The old madame did not venture to say she was afraid they would be neglected during

Léonce's absence; she hardly ventured to think so. She was hungry for them—even a little fierce in her attachment. She did not want them to be wholly "children of the pavement," she always said when begging to have them for a space. She wished them to know the country, with its streams, its fields, its woods, its freedom, so delicious to the young. She wished them to taste something of the life their father had lived and known and loved when he, too, was a little child.

**[24.8]** When Edna was at last alone, she breathed a big, genuine sigh of relief. A feeling that was unfamiliar but very delicious came over her. She walked all through the house, from one room to another, as if inspecting it for the first time. She tried the various chairs and lounges, as if she had never sat and reclined upon them before. And she perambulated around the outside of the house, investigating, looking to see if windows and shutters were secure and in order. The flowers were like new acquaintances; she approached them in a familiar spirit, and made herself at home among them. The garden walks were damp, and Edna called to the maid to bring out her rubber sandals. And there she stayed, and stooped, digging around the plants, trimming, picking dead, dry leaves. The children's little dog came out, interfering, getting in her way. She scolded him, laughed at him, played with him. The garden smelled so good and looked so pretty in the afternoon sunlight. Edna plucked all the bright flowers she could find, and went into the house with them, she and the little dog.

**[24.9]** Even the kitchen assumed a sudden interesting character which

she had never before perceived. She went in to give directions to the cook, to say that the butcher would have to bring much less meat, that they would require only half their usual quantity of bread, of milk and groceries. She told the cook that she herself would be greatly occupied during Mr. Pontellier's absence, and she begged her to take all thought and responsibility of the larder upon her own shoulders.

**[24.10]** That night Edna dined alone. The candelabra, with a few candles in the center of the table, gave all the light she needed. Outside the circle of light in which she sat, the large dining-room looked solemn and shadowy. The cook, placed upon her mettle, served a delicious repast--a luscious tenderloin broiled à point. The wine tasted good; the marron glacé seemed to be just what she wanted. It was so pleasant, too, to dine in a comfortable peignoir.

**[24.11]** She thought a little sentimentally about Léonce and the children, and wondered what they were doing. As she gave a dainty scrap or two to the doggie, she talked intimately to him about Etienne and Raoul. He was beside himself with astonishment and delight over these companionable advances, and showed his appreciation by his little quick, snappy barks and a lively agitation.

**[24.12]** Then Edna sat in the library after dinner and read Emerson until she grew sleepy. She realized that she had neglected her reading, and determined to start anew upon a course of improving studies, now that her time was completely her own to do with as she liked.

**[24.13]** After a refreshing bath, Edna went to bed. And as she snuggled comfortably beneath the eiderdown a sense of restfulness invaded her, such as she had not known before.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 24

**[24.1]** (Block 1995): Like Leonce, Edna's father utilizes language to try to confine her to a certain social role (206). The Colonel cannot understand why Edna refuses to go to her sister's wedding; her behavior does not reflect his idea of what a woman should be (207).

**[24.2]** (George 1988): The Colonel is as much a stereotypical male as Leonce (54-55).

(Walker 1988): Edna's father reminds her of her strict Presbyterian background, so she is happy to see him leave New Orleans (69).

**[24.4]** (George 1988): The Colonel tries unsuccessfully to get Leonce to force Edna to conform to the conventional standards of society (55). (Lattin 1988): Edna's father expects Leonce to make her behave in the manner expected by the mores of society (41).

(Walker 1988): The Colonel is critical of the manner in which Leonce deals with Edna

(72). (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet sees no need for masculine control over Edna as

recommended to Leonce by Edna's father (108). (Balliwala 1995): The assertive male in

the Colonel comes out (200). (Paul 1995): The colonel's attitude about women explains Edna's ambivalence towards him (48). (Viswanath 1995): 131.

**[24.6]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna behaves like a child with a guilty conscience (97). (Ghosh 1995): 231.

**[24.7]** (Paul 1995): Leonce's mother depended on her children rather than they on her (57; 63).

**[24.8]** (Delbanco 1988): Finally alone, Edna feels pride of ownership and sensory exhilaration as she walks through the house (97) The novel holds Edna in suspension between opposite genders (98). (Giorcelli 1988): 120. (Paul 1995): 63.

**[24.10]** (Paul 1995): 63.

## **CHAPTER 25**

**[25.1]** When the weather was dark and cloudy Edna could not work. She needed the sun to mellow and temper her mood to the sticking point. She had

reached a stage when she seemed to be no longer feeling her way, working, when in the humor, with sureness and ease. And being devoid of ambition, and striving not toward accomplishment, she drew satisfaction from the work in itself.

**[25.2]** On rainy or melancholy days Edna went out and sought the society of the friends she had made at Grand Isle. Or else she stayed indoors and nursed a mood with which she was becoming too familiar for her own comfort and peace of mind. It was not despair; but it seemed to her as if life were passing by, leaving its promise broken and unfulfilled. Yet there were other days when she listened, was led on and deceived by fresh promises which her youth held out to her.

**[25.3]** She went again to the races, and again. Alcée Arobin and Mrs. Highcamp called for her one bright afternoon in Arobin's drag. Mrs. Highcamp was a worldly but unaffected, intelligent, slim, tall blonde woman in the forties, with an indifferent manner and blue eyes that stared. She had a daughter who served her as a pretext for cultivating the society of young men of fashion. Alcée Arobin was one of them. He was a familiar figure at the race course, the opera, the fashionable clubs. There was a perpetual smile in his eyes, which seldom failed to awaken a corresponding cheerfulness in any one who looked into them and listened to his good-humored voice. His manner was quiet, and at times a little insolent. He possessed a good figure, a pleasing face, not overburdened with depth of thought or feeling; and his dress was that of the conventional man of fashion.

**[25.4]** He admired Edna extravagantly, after meeting her at the races with her father. He had met her before on other occasions, but she had seemed to him unapproachable until that day. It was at his instigation that Mrs. Highcamp called to ask her to go with them to the Jockey Club to witness the turf event of the season.

**[25.5]** There were possibly a few track men out there who knew the race horse as well as Edna, but there was certainly none who knew it better. She sat between her two companions as one having authority to speak. She laughed at Arobin's pretensions, and deplored Mrs. Highcamp's ignorance. The race horse was a friend and intimate associate of her childhood. The atmosphere of the stables and the breath of the blue grass paddock revived in her memory and lingered in her nostrils. She did not perceive that she was talking like her father as the sleek geldings ambled in review before them. She played for very high stakes, and fortune favored her. The fever of the game flamed in her cheeks and eyes, and it got into her blood and into her brain like an intoxicant. People turned their heads to look at her, and more than one lent an attentive ear to her utterances, hoping thereby to secure the elusive but ever-desired "tip." Arobin caught the contagion of excitement which drew him to Edna like a magnet. Mrs. Highcamp remained, as usual, unmoved, with her indifferent stare and uplifted eyebrows.

**[25.6]** Edna stayed and dined with Mrs. Highcamp upon being urged to do so. Arobin also remained and sent away his drag.

**[25.7]** The dinner was quiet and uninteresting, save for the cheerful efforts of Arobin to enliven things. Mrs. Highcamp deplored the absence of her daughter from the races, and tried to convey to her what she had missed by going to the "Dante reading" instead of joining them. The girl held a geranium leaf up to her nose and said nothing, but looked knowing and noncommittal. Mr. Highcamp was a plain, bald-headed man, who only talked under compulsion. He was unresponsive. Mrs. Highcamp was full of delicate courtesy and consideration toward her husband. She addressed most of her conversation to him at table. They sat in the library after dinner and read the evening papers together under the droplight; while the younger people went into the drawing-room near by and talked. Miss Highcamp played some selections from Grieg upon the piano. She seemed to have apprehended all of the composer's coldness and none of his poetry. While Edna listened she could not help wondering if she had lost her taste for music.

**[25.8]** When the time came for her to go home, Mr. Highcamp grunted a lame offer to escort her, looking down at his slippers with tactless concern. It was Arobin who took her home. The car ride was long, and it was late when they reached Esplanade Street. Arobin asked permission to enter for a second to light his cigarette--his match safe was empty. He filled his match safe, but did not light his cigarette until he left her, after she had expressed her willingness to go to the races with him again.

**[25.9]** Edna was neither tired nor sleepy. She was hungry again, for the



Highcamp dinner, though of excellent quality, had lacked abundance. She rummaged in the larder and brought forth a slice of Gruyere and some crackers. She opened a bottle of beer which she found in the icebox. Edna felt extremely restless and excited. She vacantly hummed a fantastic tune as she poked at the wood embers on the hearth and munched a cracker.

**[25.10]** She wanted something to happen--something, anything; she did not know what. She regretted that she had not made Arobin stay a half hour to talk over the horses with her. She counted the money she had won. But there was nothing else to do, so she went to bed, and tossed there for hours in a sort of monotonous agitation.

**[25.11]** In the middle of the night she remembered that she had forgotten to write her regular letter to her husband; and she decided to do so next day and tell him about her afternoon at the Jockey Club. She lay wide awake composing a letter which was nothing like the one which she wrote next day. When the maid awoke her in the morning Edna was dreaming of Mr. Highcamp playing the piano at the entrance of a music store on Canal Street, while his wife was saying to Alcée Arobin, as they boarded an Esplanade Street car:

**[25.12]** "What a pity that so much talent has been neglected! but I must go."

**[25.13]** When, a few days later, Alcée Arobin again called for Edna in his drag, Mrs. Highcamp was not with him. He said they would pick her up. But as that lady had not been apprised of his intention of picking her up, she was not at

home. The daughter was just leaving the house to attend the meeting of a branch Folk Lore Society, and regretted that she could not accompany them. Arobin appeared nonplused, and asked Edna if there were any one else she cared to ask.

**[25.14]** She did not deem it worth while to go in search of any of the fashionable acquaintances from whom she had withdrawn herself. She thought of Madame Ratignolle, but knew that her fair friend did not leave the house, except to take a languid walk around the block with her husband after nightfall. Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed at such a request from Edna. Madame Lebrun might have enjoyed the outing, but for some reason Edna did not want her. So they went alone, she and Arobin.

**[25.15]** The afternoon was intensely interesting to her. The excitement came back upon her like a remittent fever. Her talk grew familiar and confidential. It was no labor to become intimate with Arobin. His manner invited easy confidence. The preliminary stage of becoming acquainted was one which he always endeavored to ignore when a pretty and engaging woman was concerned.

**[25.16]** He stayed and dined with Edna. He stayed and sat beside the wood fire. They laughed and talked; and before it was time to go he was telling her how different life might have been if he had known her years before. With ingenuous frankness he spoke of what a wicked, ill-disciplined boy he had been, and impulsively drew up his cuff to exhibit upon his wrist the scar from a saber

cut which he had received in a duel outside of Paris when he was nineteen. She touched his hand as she scanned the red cicatrice on the inside of his white wrist. A quick impulse that was somewhat spasmodic impelled her fingers to close in a sort of clutch upon his hand. He felt the pressure of her pointed nails in the flesh of his palm.

**[25.17]** She arose hastily and walked toward the mantel.

**[25.18]** "The sight of a wound or scar always agitates and sickens me," she said. "I shouldn't have looked at it."

**[25.19]** "I beg your pardon," he entreated, following her; "it never occurred to me that it might be repulsive."

**[25.20]** He stood close to her, and the effrontery in his eyes repelled the old, vanishing self in her, yet drew all her awakening sensuousness. He saw enough in her face to impel him to take her hand and hold it while he said his lingering good night.

**[25.21]** "Will you go to the races again?" he asked.

**[25.22]** "No," she said. "I've had enough of the races. I don't want to lose all the money I've won, and I've got to work when the weather is bright, instead of--"

**[25.23]** "Yes; work; to be sure. You promised to show me your work. What morning may I come up to your atelier? To-morrow?"

**[25.24]** "No!"

**[25.25]** "Day after?"

**[25.26]** "No, no."

**[25.27]** "Oh, please don't refuse me! I know something of such things. I might help you with a stray suggestion or two."

**[25.28]** "No. Good night. Why don't you go after you have said good night? I don't like you," she went on in a high, excited pitch, attempting to draw away her hand. She felt that her words lacked dignity and sincerity, and she knew that he felt it.

**[25.29]** "I'm sorry you don't like me. I'm sorry I offended you. How have I offended you? What have I done? Can't you forgive me?" And he bent and pressed his lips upon her hand as if he wished never more to withdraw them.

**[25.30]** "Mr. Arobin," she complained, "I'm greatly upset by the excitement of the afternoon; I'm not myself. My manner must have misled you in some way. I wish you to go, please." She spoke in a monotonous, dull tone. He took his hat from the table, and stood with eyes turned from her, looking into the dying fire. For a moment or two he kept an impressive silence.

**[25.31]** "Your manner has not misled me, Mrs. Pontellier," he said finally. "My own emotions have done that. I couldn't help it. When I'm near you, how could I help it? Don't think anything of it, don't bother, please. You see, I go when you command me. If you wish me to stay away, I shall do so. If you let me come back, I--oh! you will let me come back?"

**[25.32]** He cast one appealing glance at her, to which she made no response. Alcée Arobin's manner was so genuine that it often deceived even

himself.

**[25.33]** Edna did not care or think whether it were genuine or not. When she was alone she looked mechanically at the back of her hand which he had kissed so warmly. Then she leaned her head down on the mantelpiece. She felt somewhat like a woman who in a moment of passion is betrayed into an act of infidelity, and realizes the significance of the act without being wholly awakened from its glamour. The thought was passing vaguely through her mind, "What would he think?"

**[25.34]** She did not mean her husband; she was thinking of Robert Lebrun. Her husband seemed to her now like a person whom she had married without love as an excuse.

**[25.35]** She lit a candle and went up to her room. Alcée Arobin was absolutely nothing to her. Yet his presence, his manners, the warmth of his glances, and above all the touch of his lips upon her hand had acted like a narcotic upon her.

**[25.36]** She slept a languorous sleep, interwoven with vanishing dreams.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 25

**[25.1]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna's utmost moment of self-realization comes when she begins

to take enjoyment in the inherent value of her work (98-99). (Giorcelli 1988): 117.

(Jacobs 1988): Edna lacks both the courage and the ambition to be an artist (109).

(Martin 1988): Just as with swimming, Edna has a passive attitude towards her painting, never showing a real commitment to her work (22). Her actions are still ruled by the sun, which is the symbol of male power (22). (Amin 1995): 72. (Block 1995): 209.

**[25.2]** (Giorcelli 1988): 120. (Block 1995): Although Edna often finds herself dissatisfied and depressed, she does nothing to change her life (209).

**[25.3]** (Solomon 1988): Chopin uses Mrs. Highcamp as a foil whose lifestyle is unobtainable for Edna (117). (Triakha 1995): 151.

**[25.5]** (Giorcelli 1988): 120. The horse is conventionally a sacred animal to Athene (134). (Paul 1995): Horse racing offers Arobin a common ground with Edna (54).

**[25.7]** While Mrs. Highcamp is older and more sophisticated than Adele, her manner of speaking is also typical of the standard Creole woman, since she defers to men (57).

**[25.9]** (LeFevre 1989): This is one of several times in the novel when music affects Edna (78). (Block 1995): 209.

**[25.10]** (Jacobs 1988): 109. (LeFevre 1989): Edna is persistently tormented by her desires

whenever she is not busy (81). (Block 1995): Edna lacks concrete goals to make things happen in her life (209). (Paul 1995): Arobin stirs the urge of sensuality and animalism within Edna (55).

[25.15] (Delbanco 1988): Chopin gives Edna the desire for sex, alcohol, gambling, and other things that most men desire (101). (Paul 1995): 55.

[25.16] (Franklin 1988): Arobin represents the promiscuous side of Eros (147). (Rowe 1989): Arobin hints at intimacy by showing Edna a small part of his body, but she pulls her hand back after touching him as if by some will other than her own. In a small way she is repeating the duel with her nails (23).

[25.18] (Rowe 1989): 23.

[25.22] (Delbanco 1988): Edna realizes that her desire for gambling is dangerous (101). (Rowe 1989): Edna tries to end her relationship with Arobin by not going to the races with him (23).

[25.23] (Delbanco 1988): 102.

[25.24] (Delbanco 1988): 102.

[25.25] (Delbanco 1988): 102.

[25.26] (Delbanco 1988): 102.

[25.27] (Delbanco 1988): 102.

[25.28] (Delbanco 1988): Arobin has no interest in love, but is attracted to Edna as a woman who has rejected her marriage, who is an artist, and who gambles like a man. She knows that if he goes to her studio, his presence there could ruin her (102). [25.34] (Ghosh 1995): 234.

[25.35] (Giorcelli 1988): Robert later reacts much the same way when Edna kisses him (131). (Showalter 1988): In such instances as this one, Edna exhibits passive sexuality (48). (Ghosh 1995): Although Edna is drawn to Alcee, she does not love him and derives no sense of fulfillment from their relationship (238).

## CHAPTER 26

[26.1] Alcée Arobin wrote Edna an elaborate note of apology, palpitant



with sincerity. It embarrassed her; for in a cooler, quieter moment it appeared to her, absurd that she should have taken his action so seriously, so dramatically. She felt sure that the significance of the whole occurrence had lain in her own self-consciousness. If she ignored his note it would give undue importance to a trivial affair. If she replied to it in a serious spirit it would still leave in his mind the impression that she had in a susceptible moment yielded to his influence. After all, it was no great matter to have one's hand kissed. She was provoked at his having written the apology. She answered in as light and bantering a spirit as she fancied it deserved, and said she would be glad to have him look in upon her at work whenever he felt the inclination and his business gave him the opportunity.

**[26.2]** He responded at once by presenting himself at her home with all his disarming naïveté. And then there was scarcely a day which followed that she did not see him or was not reminded of him. He was prolific in pretexts. His attitude became one of good-humored subservience and tacit adoration. He was ready at all times to submit to her moods, which were as often kind as they were cold. She grew accustomed to him. They became intimate and friendly by imperceptible degrees, and then by leaps. He sometimes talked in a way that astonished her at first and brought the crimson into her face; in a way that pleased her at last, appealing to the animalism that stirred impatiently within her.

**[26.3]** There was nothing which so quieted the turmoil of Edna's senses as a visit to Mademoiselle Reisz. It was then, in the presence of that personality

which was offensive to her, that the woman, by her divine art, seemed to reach Edna's spirit and set it free.

**[26.4]** It was misty, with heavy, lowering atmosphere, one afternoon, when Edna climbed the stairs to the pianist's apartments under the roof. Her clothes were dripping with moisture. She felt chilled and pinched as she entered the room. Mademoiselle was poking at a rusty stove that smoked a little and warmed the room indifferently. She was endeavoring to heat a pot of chocolate on the stove. The room looked cheerless and dingy to Edna as she entered. A bust of Beethoven, covered with a hood of dust, scowled at her from the mantelpiece.

**[26.5]** "Ah! here comes the sunlight!" exclaimed Mademoiselle, rising from her knees before the stove. "Now it will be warm and bright enough; I can let the fire alone."

**[26.6]** She closed the stove door with a bang, and approaching, assisted in removing Edna's dripping mackintosh.

**[26.7]** "You are cold; you look miserable. The chocolate will soon be hot. But would you rather have a taste of brandy? I have scarcely touched the bottle which you brought me for my cold." A piece of red flannel was wrapped around Mademoiselle's throat; a stiff neck compelled her to hold her head on one side.

**[26.8]** "I will take some brandy," said Edna, shivering as she removed her gloves and overshoes. She drank the liquor from the glass as a man would have done. Then flinging herself upon the uncomfortable sofa she said,

"Mademoiselle, I am going to move away from my house on Esplanade Street."

[26.9] "Ah!" ejaculated the musician, neither surprised nor especially interested. Nothing ever seemed to astonish her very much. She was endeavoring to adjust the bunch of violets which had become loose from its fastening in her hair. Edna drew her down upon the sofa, and taking a pin from her own hair, secured the shabby artificial flowers in their accustomed place.

[26.10] "Aren't you astonished?"

[26.11] "Passably. Where are you going? to New York? to Iberville? to your father in Mississippi? where?"

[26.12] "Just two steps away," laughed Edna, "in a little four-room house around the corner. It looks so cozy, so inviting and restful, whenever I pass by; and it's for rent. I'm tired looking after that big house. It never seemed like mine, anyway--like home. It's too much trouble. I have to keep too many servants. I am tired bothering with them."

[26.13] "That is not your true reason, *ma belle*. There is no use in telling me lies. I don't know your reason, but you have not told me the truth." Edna did not protest or endeavor to justify herself.

[26.14] "The house, the money that provides for it, are not mine. Isn't that enough reason?"

[26.15] "They are your husband's," returned Mademoiselle, with a shrug and a malicious elevation of the eyebrows.

[26.16] "Oh! I see there is no deceiving you. Then let me tell you: It is a

caprice. I have a little money of my own from my mother's estate, which my father sends me by driblets. I won a large sum this winter on the races, and I am beginning to sell my sketches. Laidpore is more and more pleased with my work; he says it grows in force and individuality. I cannot judge of that myself, but I feel that I have gained in ease and confidence. However, as I said, I have sold a good many through Laidpore. I can live in the tiny house for little or nothing, with one servant. Old Celestine, who works occasionally for me, says she will come stay with me and do my work. I know I shall like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence."

**[26.17]** "What does your husband say?"

**[26.18]** "I have not told him yet. I only thought of it this morning. He will think I am demented, no doubt. Perhaps you think so."

**[26.19]** Mademoiselle shook her head slowly. "Your reason is not yet clear to me," she said.

**[26.20]** Neither was it quite clear to Edna herself; but it unfolded itself as she sat for a while in silence. Instinct had prompted her to put away her husband's bounty in casting off her allegiance. She did not know how it would be when he returned. There would have to be an understanding, an explanation. Conditions would some way adjust themselves, she felt; but whatever came, she had resolved never again to belong to another than herself.

**[26.21]** "I shall give a grand dinner before I leave the old house!" Edna exclaimed. "You will have to come to it, Mademoiselle. I will give you everything

that you like to eat and to drink. We shall sing and laugh and be merry for once." And she uttered a sigh that came from the very depths of her being.

**[26.22]** If Mademoiselle happened to have received a letter from Robert during the interval of Edna's visits, she would give her the letter unsolicited. And she would seat herself at the piano and play as her humor prompted her while the young woman read the letter.

**[26.23]** The little stove was roaring; it was red-hot, and the chocolate in the tin sizzled and sputtered. Edna went forward and opened the stove door, and Mademoiselle rising, took a letter from under the bust of Beethoven and handed it to Edna.

**[26.24]** "Another! so soon!" she exclaimed, her eyes filled with delight. "Tell me, Mademoiselle, does he know that I see his letters?"

**[26.25]** "Never in the world! He would be angry and would never write to me again if he thought so. Does he write to you? Never a line. Does he send you a message? Never a word. It is because he loves you, poor fool, and is trying to forget you, since you are not free to listen to him or to belong to him."

**[26.26]** "Why do you show me his letters, then?"

**[26.27]** "Haven't you begged for them? Can I refuse you anything? Oh! you cannot deceive me," and Mademoiselle approached her beloved instrument and began to play. Edna did not at once read the letter. She sat holding it in her hand, while the music penetrated her whole being like an effulgence, warming and brightening the dark places of her soul. It prepared her for joy and

exultation.

**[26.28]** "Oh!" she exclaimed, letting the letter fall to the floor. "Why did you not tell me?" She went and grasped Mademoiselle's hands up from the keys. "Oh! unkind! malicious! Why did you not tell me?"

**[26.29]** "That he was coming back? No great news, *ma foi*. I wonder he did not come long ago."

**[26.30]** "But when, when?" cried Edna, impatiently. "He does not say when."

**[26.31]** "He says 'very soon.' You know as much about it as I do; it is all in the letter."

**[26.32]** "But why? Why is he coming? Oh, if I thought--" and she snatched the letter from the floor and turned the pages this way and that way, looking for the reason, which was left untold.

**[26.33]** "If I were young and in love with a man," said Mademoiselle, turning on the stool and pressing her wiry hands between her knees as she looked down at Edna, who sat on the floor holding the letter, "it seems to me he would have to be some *grand esprit*; a man with lofty aims and ability to reach them; one who stood high enough to attract the notice of his fellow-men. It seems to me if I were young and in love I should never deem a man of ordinary caliber worthy of my devotion."

**[26.34]** "Now it is you who are telling lies and seeking to deceive me, Mademoiselle; or else you have never been in love, and know nothing about it.

Why," went on Edna, clasping her knees and looking up into Mademoiselle's twisted face, "do you suppose a woman knows why she loves? Does she select? Does she say to herself: 'Go to! Here is a distinguished statesman with presidential possibilities; I shall proceed to fall in love with him.' Or, 'I shall set my heart upon this musician, whose fame is on every tongue?' Or, 'This financier, who controls the world's money markets?'

**[26.35]** "You are purposely misunderstanding me, *ma reine*. Are you in love with Robert?"

**[26.36]** "Yes," said Edna. It was the first time she had admitted it, and a glow overspread her face, blotching it with red spots.

**[26.37]** "Why?" asked her companion. "Why do you love him when you ought not to?"

**[26.38]** Edna, with a motion or two, dragged herself on her knees before Mademoiselle Reisz, who took the glowing face between her two hands.

**[26.39]** "Why? Because his hair is brown and grows away from his temples; because he opens and shuts his eyes, and his nose is a little out of drawing; because he has two lips and a square chin, and a little finger which he can't straighten from having played baseball too energetically in his youth. Because--"

**[26.40]** "Because you do, in short," laughed Mademoiselle. "What will you do when he comes back?" she asked.

**[26.41]** "Do? Nothing, except feel glad and happy to be alive."

**[26.42]** She was already glad and happy to be alive at the mere thought of his return. The murky, lowering sky, which had depressed her a few hours before, seemed bracing and invigorating as she splashed through the streets on her way home.

**[26.43]** She stopped at a confectioner's and ordered a huge box of bonbons for the children in Iberville. She slipped a card in the box, on which she scribbled a tender message and sent an abundance of kisses.

**[26.44]** Before dinner in the evening Edna wrote a charming letter to her husband, telling him of her intention to move for a while into the little house around the block, and to give a farewell dinner before leaving, regretting that he was not there to share it, to help out with the menu and assist her in entertaining the guests. Her letter was brilliant and brimming with cheerfulness.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 26

**[26.2]** (S. Jones 1988): Edna seems not to have control of herself without the limitations imposed by social standards (124). (Jones 1989): Chopin reminds the reader that without the rules of conduct imposed by society, Edna behaves like an animal (69). (Block 1995): 211.



**[26.3]** (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (Showalter 1988): Chopin uses Mademoiselle Reisz to speak for her conception of art and of the artist (46). (LeFevre 1989): The only thing that can give Edna the inner peace she searches for is Mademoiselle Reisz's music (80). (Amin 1995): 73. (Balliwala 1995): On Edna's sad days, she visits Mademoiselle Reisz and comes away revived (191).

**[26.5]** (Dyer 1988): Chopin uses the color yellow to represent the sun, and Edna's friends begin to link her with the sun (130).

**[26.8]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna begins to do certain things, such as drinking liquor from a glass, that men do (121).

**[26.12]** (Delbanco 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz recognizes Edna's use of the word "mine" as showing that Edna is acquiring a taste for control (98). (Giorcelli 1988): 113.

**[26.16]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna uses financial explanations for her move (98). Edna enters the male world of articles of trade (98). (Gilmore 1988): As Edna begins to awaken, her painting improves (79). (Jacobs 1988): Edna's acts of rebellion show her compulsion to become independent (111). (Rowe 1989): The sources of Edna's income ultimately come from the male-dominated society from which she is trying to escape (19). (Amin 1995): 72. (Vevaina 1995): Edna's painting becomes better after being stimulated by her Aphrodite self (86).

[26.20] (Gilmore 1988): Edna's statement displays the notion that individualism means freedom to be one's own self -- a notion which has made women inferior to men (83). (Giorcelli 1988): Edna first confesses her wish to leave her family to Mademoiselle Reisz (137). (Jacobs 1988): Again Edna rebels (111). (Stange 1989): Edna's taking the rings contrasts with the behavior of a bride, who passively accepts the ring during a wedding ceremony (140). (Battiwala 1995): Edna ignores Adele's warnings about Arobin because of her vow to belong only to herself (190). (Block 1995): Edna tries only a little to change her life; instead, she lets society control her life (208). (Jacob 1995): Edna's move out of her husband's house illustrates that she is trying to hide from the truth that is unfolding within her; at the same time she is drawn towards the truth (107). (Paul 1995): 60. (Stange 1995): This scene is the turning point of the novel (22). (Viswanath 1995): While declaring that she will never belong to anyone, she cannot be alone and allows Arobin to become close to her (131).

[26.21] (Stange 1989): 151. (Stange 1995): Edna gives her reserved self away at her dinner, moving herself into wider circulation (33). Her dinner serves to initiate Edna, as the owner of her own sexual value, into the open market where she repeatedly sells herself (34).

[26.22] (Block 1995): Robert's indirect communication to Edna through Mademoiselle Reisz could reflect either the social mores of this time or Robert's lack of nerve to act on

his wishes (214).

**[26.23]** (Seidel 1989): The small stove in Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment creates the mental image of a witch's caldron. The hot fire and the sizzling chocolate symbolize the sexually-charged emotions between Mademoiselle Reisz and Edna (95).

**[26.25]** (Paul 1995): Edna's progress is hindered by even the thought that Robert may return some day (60).

**[26.27]** (LeFew 1989): Music greatly affects Edna throughout the novel, but here she associates music with passion (78). (Seidel 1989): While withholding the letters from Edna, Mademoiselle Reisz offers her interpretation of them (95). The wished-for sexual union with Robert is hinted at by the use of the word "penetrate" (95). (Paul 1995): 55.

**[26.33]** (Giorcelli 1988): Reisz is the first to tell Edna that she should not be in love with Robert (136-37). (Battiwala 1995): One wonders if Mademoiselle Reisz's feeling of superiority is not a guard against emotional involvement and idealism (191). (Paul 1995): Mademoiselle Reisz feels that no average man is good enough for her; she uses this as an excuse for her loneliness (60).

**[26.39]** (Block 1995): Edna realizes that she loves Robert unconditionally (214).

**CHAPTER 27**

**[27.1]** "What is the matter with you?" asked Arobin that evening. "I never found you in such a happy mood." Edna was tired by that time, and was reclining on the lounge before the fire.

**[27.2]** "Don't you know the weather prophet has told us we shall see the sun pretty soon?"

**[27.3]** "Well, that ought to be reason enough," he acquiesced. "You wouldn't give me another if I sat here all night imploring you." He sat close to her on a low tabouret, and as he spoke his fingers lightly touched the hair that fell a little over her forehead. She liked the touch of his fingers through her hair, and closed her eyes sensitively.

**[27.4]** "One of these days," she said, "I'm going to pull myself together for a while and think--try to determine what character of a woman I am; for, candidly, I don't know. By all the codes which I am acquainted with, I am a devilishly wicked specimen of the sex. But some way I can't convince myself that I am. I must think about it."

**[27.5]** "Don't. What's the use? Why should you bother thinking about it when I can tell you what manner of woman you are." His fingers strayed

occasionally down to her warm, smooth cheeks and firm chin, which was growing a little full and double.

**[27.6]** "Oh, yes! You will tell me that I am adorable; everything that is captivating. Spare yourself the effort."

**[27.7]** "No; I shan't tell you anything of the sort, though I shouldn't be lying if I did."

**[27.8]** "Do you know Mademoiselle Reisz?" she asked irrelevantly.

**[27.9]** "The pianist? I know her by sight. I've heard her play."

**[27.10]** "She says queer things sometimes in a bantering way that you don't notice at the time and you find yourself thinking about afterward."

**[27.11]** "For instance?"

**[27.12]** "Well, for instance, when I left her to-day, she put her arms around me and felt my shoulder blades, to see if my wings were strong, she said. 'The bird that would soar above the level plain of tradition and prejudice must have strong wings. It is a sad spectacle to see the weaklings bruised, exhausted, fluttering back to earth.'"

**[27.13]** "Whither would you soar?"

**[27.14]** "I'm not thinking of any extraordinary flights. I only half comprehend her."

**[27.15]** "I've heard she's partially demented," said Arobin.

**[27.16]** "She seems to me wonderfully sane," Edna replied.

**[27.17]** "I'm told she's extremely disagreeable and unpleasant. Why

have you introduced her at a moment when I desired to talk of you?"

**[27.18]** "Oh! talk of me if you like," cried Edna, clasping her hands beneath her head; "but let me think of something else while you do."

**[27.19]** "I'm jealous of your thoughts tonight. They're making you a little kinder than usual; but some way I feel as if they were wandering, as if they were not here with me." She only looked at him and smiled. His eyes were very near. He leaned upon the lounge with an arm extended across her, while the other hand still rested upon her hair. They continued silently to look into each other's eyes. When he leaned forward and kissed her, she clasped his head, holding his lips to hers.

**[27.20]** It was the first kiss of her life to which her nature had really responded. It was a flaming torch that kindled desire.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 27

**[27.4]** (Jacobs 1988): 110. (Thornton 1988): Edna is not thinking of Robert or Alcee at all, but is instead thinking of what Mademoiselle Reisz said earlier (139; 141). (Jacobsen 1989): Edna's journey toward independence necessitates a new vision of selfhood (119). (Jones 1989): Edna begins to look at herself with different eyes (63). Although Edna makes this statement, she never succeeds in this effort (66). (Battiwala 1995): 201. (Bande

1995): Edna can find no reason for any woman to leave her home and her children; if she does this, she will be substantiating her own evil (167). (Paul 1995): Arobin's purpose is to aid Edna in her recognition of her womanhood (55). (Poovalingam 1995): Because of her desires, Edna finds it hard to take herself lightly (224).

[27.5] (Delbanco 1988): 102. (George 1988): Arobin would, like Leonce, eventually oppress Edna (54). (Seidel 1989): Arobin feels that he can define Edna, but not Mademoiselle Reisz (85).

[27.6] (Delbanco 1988): 102. (Seidel 1989): Edna is not totally naive in the ways of seduction, expecting Arobin to flatter her (97).

[27.7] (Delbanco 1988): 102. (Seidel 1989): 97.

[27.12] (Dyer 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz knows from experience that life is hard for the idealist (129). Mademoiselle Reisz means both foolish and mighty by the word "spectacle" (142). (Franklin 1988): 147. (Gilmore 1988): 80. (Jacobs 1988): 110. (S. Jones 1988): 123. (Martin 1988): 22. (Showalter 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz expresses Chopin's own need for independence and singularity in writing (35). (Solomon 1988): 119. (Thornton 1988): 139. (Greer 1989): 56. (Jones 1989): Because of her new perspective, Edna is now free to soar (63). The bird that Edna sees at the end of the novel does not have strong wings, but rather a broken wing (70). (Seidel 1989): Edna recalls her conversation with

Mademoiselle Reisz, who challenges Edna to prove that she is strong (97). (Amin 1995): Through this imagery Chopin is explaining the predicament of women who stay caged by standards of society or break away from those standards and fly freely, as well as those who, after breaking away, are too weak to fly but fall, injuring themselves (73). (Balliwala 1995): The bird analogy becomes highly symbolic in the last scene of the novel, when Edna is in the act of suicide (191). (Bharathi 1995): Edna, tragically, does not belong to the group in Reisz's analogy with strong wings (95). (Ghosh 1995): 236. (Juneja 1995): This statement is recalled at the end of the novel, when the reader realizes that Edna is the bird with the broken wing (120-21). (Paul 1995): Edna finds that she is fulfilled in trying to break tradition and go beyond one's self; this is the point of the novel (60). (Vevaina 1995): Reisz cannot make Edna see Robert for what he really is, but because she cannot stand weaknesses in people, she offers this analogy of the bird, hoping that Edna has the courage to act on her desires (88).

[27.14] (Jacobs 1988): 110. (Thornton 1988): 139, 141.

[27.15] (George 1988): While Arobin views Mademoiselle Reisz as crazy, Edna views her as completely sensible (58). (Showalter 1988): Even to Arobin, Mademoiselle Reisz is detestable (46). (Seidel 1989): Arobin uses harsh words to describe Mademoiselle Reisz, who is not a woman whom he can control (85). (Battiwala 1995): 190.

[27.17] (Delbanco 1988): Edna uses Mademoiselle Reisz as a last defense against Arobin



and refuses to allow him to change her focus from business to sex (102). (Thornton 1988): 140. (Seidel 1989): The mention of Mademoiselle Reisz interrupts Arobin's seduction of Edna (85). Arobin uses harsh words to describe Mademoiselle Reisz, who is not a woman whom he can control (85).

**[27.18]** (Thornton 1988): Edna is daydreaming and is not listening to Alcee (140).

**[27.19]** (Thornton 1988): Arobin knows that something is not right; this is one of the few correct discernments he makes (140).

**[27.20]** (Giorcelli 1988): 115. (Jacobsen 1989): 105. (Balliwala 1995): Edna and Arobin are using each other, he for pleasure; she for an instrument in her own self-discovery (197). (Block 1995): Alcee's purpose in the novel is to satisfy Edna's sexual desires (213). (Ghosh 1995): Edna does not love Alcee, and therefore derives no sense of fulfillment from their relationship (238). (Gopalan 1995): The kiss is possible because Edna is emotionally involved with her fantasy (Robert) rather than with Arobin (176). (Viswanath 1995): The kiss is not a means of Edna giving in to desires, but rather an act of asserting herself (131).

**CHAPTER 28**

**[28.1]** Edna cried a little that night after Arobin left her. It was only one phase of the multitudinous emotions which had assailed her. There was with her an overwhelming feeling of irresponsibility. There was the shock of the unexpected and the unaccustomed. There was her husband's reproach looking at her from the external things around her which he had provided for her external existence. There was Robert's reproach making itself felt by a quicker, fiercer, more overpowering love, which had awakened within her toward him. Above all, there was understanding. She felt as if a mist had been lifted from her eyes, enabling her to take upon and comprehend the significance of life, that monster made up of beauty and brutality. But among the conflicting sensations which assailed her, there was neither shame nor remorse. There was a dull pang of regret because it was not the kiss of love which had inflamed her, because it was not love which had held this cup of life to her lips.

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**NOTES TO CHAPTER 28**

**[28.1]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna appears only occasionally to grasp reality, while at other times she is confused and uncertain (110). Edna regrets that Alcee's kiss was not the first kiss that "inflamed" her (115, 119-20). (Lattin 1988): 43. (Showalter 1988): Edna's affair

with Arobin only deepens her love for Robert (50). (Balliwala 1995): 197. (Bande 1995): Edna's conscience attacks her, ripping her apart (164). (Ghosh 1995): Edna has no remorse because she has already moved from the constraints imposed by social standards (239). (Tripathi 1995): Rather than blame Alcee because he is only a physical love interest, Edna confronts her own animalism (151). (Vevaina 1995): The conflicting results of Edna's leaving her family help her to understand life (98).

## CHAPTER 29

**[29.1]** Without even waiting for an answer from her husband regarding his opinion or wishes in the matter, Edna hastened her preparations for quitting her home on Esplanade Street and moving into the little house around the block. A feverish anxiety attended her every action in that direction. There was no moment of deliberation, no interval of repose between the thought and its fulfillment. Early upon the morning following those hours passed in Arobin's society, Edna set about securing her new abode and hurrying her arrangements for occupying it. Within the precincts of her home she felt like one who has

entered and lingered within the portals of some forbidden temple in which a thousand muffled voices bade her begone.

**[29.2]** Whatever was her own in the house, everything which she had acquired aside from her husband's bounty, she caused to be transported to the other house, supplying simple and meager deficiencies from her own resources.

**[29.3]** Arobin found her with rolled sleeves, working in company with the house-maid when he looked in during the afternoon. She was splendid and robust, and had never appeared handsomer than in the old blue gown, with a red silk handkerchief knotted at random around her head to protect her hair from the dust. She was mounted upon a high stepladder, unhooking a picture from the wall when he entered. He had found the front door open, and had followed his ring by walking in unceremoniously.

**[29.4]** "Come down!" he said. "Do you want to kill yourself?" She greeted him with affected carelessness, and appeared absorbed in her occupation.

**[29.5]** If he had expected to find her languishing, reproachful, or indulging in sentimental tears, he must have been greatly surprised.

**[29.6]** He was no doubt prepared for any emergency, ready for any one of the foregoing attitudes, just as he bent himself easily and naturally to the situation which confronted him.

**[29.7]** "Please come down," he insisted, holding the ladder and looking up at her.

**[29.8]** "No," she answered; "Ellen is afraid to mount the ladder. Joe is

working over at the 'pigeon house'--that's the name Ellen gives it, because it's so small and looks like a pigeon house--and some one has to do this."

**[29.9]** Arobin pulled off his coat, and expressed himself ready and willing to tempt fate in her place. Ellen brought him one of her dust-caps, and went into contortions of mirth, which she found it impossible to control, when she saw him put it on before the mirror as grotesquely as he could. Edna herself could not refrain from smiling when she fastened it at his request. So it was he who in turn mounted the ladder, unhooking pictures and curtains, and dislodging ornaments as Edna directed. When he had finished he took off his dust-cap and went out to wash his hands.

**[29.10]** Edna was sitting on the tabouret, idly brushing the tips of a feather duster along the carpet when he came in again.

**[29.11]** "Is there anything more you will let me do?" he asked.

**[29.12]** "That is all," she answered. "Ellen can manage the rest." She kept the young woman occupied in the drawing-room, unwilling to be left alone with Arobin.

**[29.13]** "What about the dinner?" he asked; "the grand event, the *coup d'état*?"

**[29.14]** "It will be day after to-morrow. Why do you call it the '*coup d'état*?' Oh! it will be very fine; all my best of everything--crystal, silver and gold, Sevres, flowers, music, and champagne to swim in. I'll let Léonce pay the bills. I wonder what he'll say when he sees the bills.

**[29.15]** "And you ask me why I call it a *coup d'état*?" Arobin had put on his coat, and he stood before her and asked if his cravat was plumb. She told him it was, looking no higher than the tip of his collar.

**[29.16]** "When do you go to the 'pigeon house?'--with all due acknowledgment to Ellen."

**[29.17]** "Day after to-morrow, after the dinner. I shall sleep there."

**[29.18]** "Ellen, will you very kindly get me a glass of water?" asked Arobin. "The dust in the curtains, if you will pardon me for hinting such a thing, has parched my throat to a crisp."

**[29.19]** "While Ellen gets the water," said Edna, rising, "I will say good-by and let you go. I must get rid of this grime, and I have a million things to do and think of."

**[29.20]** "When shall I see you?" asked Arobin, seeking to detain her, the maid having left the room.

**[29.21]** "At the dinner, of course. You are invited."

**[29.22]** "Not before?--not to-night or to-morrow morning or tomorrow noon or night? or the day after morning or noon? Can't you see yourself, without my telling you, what an eternity it is?"

**[29.23]** He had followed her into the hall and to the foot of the stairway, looking up at her as she mounted with her face half turned to him.

**[29.24]** "Not an instant sooner," she said. But she laughed and looked at him with eyes that at once gave him courage to wait and made it torture to wait.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER 29

**[29.1 ]** (Giorcelli 1988): Images of portals and temples are used to illustrate what marriage is for Edna (127-128).

**[29.3]** (Block 1995): 212.

**[29.4]** (Block 1995): Alcee, Leonce, and Robert have conventional ideas about sex roles in which men dominate and women are subservient (212).

**[29.7]** (Block 1995): 212.

**[29.8]** (Ewell 1988): 91. (Franklin 1988): 148. (Martin 1988): 22. (Jones 1989): 66. (Stange 1989): 150. (Amin 1995): 72. (Vevaina 1995): 86, 97.

**[29.13]** (Delbanco 1988): Robert hints that the only thing that will change in Edna's life is who is the ruler (102-103). (Juneja 1995): Arobin's description of Edna's party is appropriate (119).

[29.14] (Showalter 1988): 51-52. (Jacob 1995): 107.

## CHAPTER 30

**[30.1]** Though Edna had spoken of the dinner as a very grand affair, it was in truth a very small affair and very select, in so much as the guests invited were few and were selected with discrimination. She had counted upon an even dozen seating themselves at her round mahogany board, forgetting for the moment that Madame Ratignolle was to the last degree *souffrante* and unpresentable, and not foreseeing that Madame Lebrun would send a thousand regrets at the last moment. So there were only ten, after all, which made a cozy, comfortable number.

**[30.2]** There were Mr. and Mrs. Merriman, a pretty, vivacious little woman in the thirties; her husband, a jovial fellow, something of a shallow-pate, who laughed a good deal at other people's witticisms, and had thereby made himself extremely popular. Mrs. Highcamp had accompanied them. Of course, there was Alcée Arobin; and Mademoiselle Reisz had consented to come. Edna had sent her a fresh bunch of violets with black lace trimmings for her hair. Monsieur Ratignolle brought himself and his wife's excuses. Victor Lebrun, who happened



to be in the city, bent upon relaxation, had accepted with alacrity. There was a Miss Mayblunt, no longer in her teens, who looked at the world through lorgnettes and with the keenest interest. It was thought and said that she was intellectual; it was suspected of her that she wrote under a *nom de guerre*. She had come with a gentleman by the name of Gouvernail, connected with one of the daily papers, of whom nothing special could be said, except that he was observant and seemed quiet and inoffensive. Edna herself made the tenth, and at half-past eight they seated themselves at table, Arobin and Monsieur Ratignolle on either side of their hostess.

**[30.3]** Mrs. Highcamp sat between Arobin and Victor Lebrun. Then came Mrs. Merriman, Mr. Gouvernail, Miss Mayblunt, Mr. Merriman, and Mademoiselle Reisz next to Monsieur Ratignolle.

**[30.4]** There was something extremely gorgeous about the appearance of the table, an effect of splendor conveyed by a cover of pale yellow satin under strips of lace-work. There were wax candles, in massive brass candelabra, burning softly under yellow silk shades; full, fragrant roses, yellow and red, abounded. There were silver and gold, as she had said there would be, and crystal which glittered like the gems which the women wore.

**[30.5]** The ordinary stiff dining chairs had been discarded for the occasion and replaced by the most commodious and luxurious which could be collected throughout the house. Mademoiselle Reisz, being exceedingly diminutive, was elevated upon cushions, as small children are sometimes

hoisted at table upon bulky volumes.

**[30.6]** "Something new, Edna?" exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, with lorgnette directed toward a magnificent cluster of diamonds that sparkled, that almost sputtered, in Edna's hair, just over the center of her forehead.

**[30.7]** "Quite new; 'brand' new, in fact; a present from my husband. It arrived this morning from New York. I may as well admit that this is my birthday, and that I am twenty-nine. In good time I expect you to drink my health. Meanwhile, I shall ask you to begin with this cocktail, composed--would you say 'composed?'" with an appeal to Miss Mayblunt--"composed by my father in honor of Sister Janet's wedding."

**[30.8]** Before each guest stood a tiny glass that looked and sparkled like a garnet gem.

**[30.9]** "Then, all things considered," spoke Arobin, "it might not be amiss to start out by drinking the Colonel's health in the cocktail which he composed, on the birthday of the most charming of women--the daughter whom he invented."

**[30.10]** Mr. Merriman's laugh at this sally was such a genuine outburst and so contagious that it started the dinner with an agreeable swing that never slackened.

**[30.11]** Miss Mayblunt begged to be allowed to keep her cocktail untouched before her, just to look at. The color was marvelous! She could compare it to nothing she had ever seen, and the garnet lights which it emitted

were unspeakably rare. She pronounced the Colonel an artist, and stuck to it.

**[30.12]** Monsieur Ratignolle was prepared to take things seriously; the *mets*, the *entre-mets*, the service, the decorations, even the people. He looked up from his pompano and inquired of Arobin if he were related to the gentleman of that name who formed one of the firm of Laitner and Arobin, lawyers. The young man admitted that Laitner was a warm personal friend, who permitted Arobin's name to decorate the firm's letterheads and to appear upon a shingle that graced Perdido Street.

**[30.13]** "There are so many inquisitive people and institutions abounding," said Arobin, "that one is really forced as a matter of convenience these days to assume the virtue of an occupation if he has it not."

**[30.14]** Monsieur Ratignolle stared a little, and turned to ask Mademoiselle Reisz if she considered the symphony concerts up to the standard which had been set the previous winter. Mademoiselle Reisz answered Monsieur Ratignolle in French, which Edna thought a little rude, under the circumstances, but characteristic. Mademoiselle had only disagreeable things to say of the symphony concerts, and insulting remarks to make of all the musicians of New Orleans, singly and collectively. All her interest seemed to be centered upon the delicacies placed before her.

**[30.15]** Mr. Merriman said that Mr. Arobin's remark about inquisitive people reminded him of a man from Waco the other day at the St. Charles Hotel--but as Mr. Merriman's stories were always lame and lacking point, his wife

seldom permitted him to complete them. She interrupted him to ask if he remembered the name of the author whose book she had bought the week before to send to a friend in Geneva. She was talking "books" with Mr. Gouvernail and trying to draw from him his opinion upon current literary topics. Her husband told the story of the Waco man privately to Miss Mayblunt, who pretended to be greatly amused and to think it extremely clever.

**[30.16]** Mrs. Highcamp hung with languid but unaffected interest upon the warm and impetuous volubility of her left-hand neighbor, Victor Lebrun. Her attention was never for a moment withdrawn from him after seating herself at table; and when he turned to Mrs. Merriman, who was prettier and more vivacious than Mrs. Highcamp, she waited with easy indifference for an opportunity to reclaim his attention. There was the occasional sound of music, of mandolins, sufficiently removed to be an agreeable accompaniment rather than an interruption to the conversation. Outside the soft, monotonous splash of a fountain could be heard; the sound penetrated into the room with the heavy odor of jessamine that came through the open windows.

**[30.17]** The golden shimmer of Edna's satin gown spread in rich folds on either side of her. There was a soft fall of lace encircling her shoulders. It was the color of her skin, without the glow, the myriad living tints that one may sometimes discover in vibrant flesh. There was something in her attitude, in her whole appearance when she leaned her head against the high-backed chair and spread her arms, which suggested the regal woman, the one who rules, who

looks on, who stands alone.

**[30.18]** But as she sat there amid her guests, she felt the old ennui overtaking her; the hopelessness which so often assailed her, which came upon her like an obsession, like something extraneous, independent of volition. It was something which announced itself; a chill breath that seemed to issue from some vast cavern wherein discords waited. There came over her the acute longing which always summoned into her spiritual vision the presence of the beloved one, overpowering her at once with a sense of the unattainable.

**[30.19]** The moments glided on, while a feeling of good fellowship passed around the circle like a mystic cord, holding and binding these people together with jest and laughter. Monsieur Ratignolle was the first to break the pleasant charm. At ten o'clock he excused himself. Madame Ratignolle was waiting for him at home. She was *bien souffrante*, and she was filled with vague dread, which only her husband's presence could allay.

**[30.20]** Mademoiselle Reisz arose with Monsieur Ratignolle, who offered to escort her to the car. She had eaten well; she had tasted the good, rich wines, and they must have turned her head, for she bowed pleasantly to all as she withdrew from table. She kissed Edna upon the shoulder, and whispered: "*Bonne nuit, ma reine; soyez sage.*" She had been a little bewildered upon rising, or rather, descending from her cushions, and Monsieur Ratignolle gallantly took her arm and led her away.

**[30.21]** Mrs. Highcamp was weaving a garland of roses, yellow and red.

When she had finished the garland, she laid it lightly upon Victor's black curls. He was reclining far back in the luxurious chair, holding a glass of champagne to the light.

[30.22] As if a magician's wand had touched him, the garland of roses transformed him into a vision of Oriental beauty. His cheeks were the color of crushed grapes, and his dusky eyes glowed with a languishing fire.

[30.23] "*Sapristi!*" exclaimed Arobin.

[30.24] But Mrs. Highcamp had one more touch to add to the picture. She took from the back of her chair a white silken scarf, with which she had covered her shoulders in the early part of the evening. She draped it across the boy in graceful folds, and in a way to conceal his black, conventional evening dress. He did not seem to mind what she did to him, only smiled, showing a faint gleam of white teeth, while he continued to gaze with narrowing eyes at the light through his glass of champagne.

[30.25] "Oh! to be able to paint in color rather than in words!" exclaimed Miss Mayblunt, losing herself in a rhapsodic dream as she looked at him,

"There was a graven image of Desire

Painted with red blood on a ground of gold."

murmured Gouvernail, under his breath.

[30.26] The effect of the wine upon Victor was to change his accustomed

volubility into silence. He seemed to have abandoned himself to a reverie, and to be seeing pleasing visions in the amber bead.

**[30.27]** "Sing," entreated Mrs. Highcamp. "Won't you sing to us?"

**[30.28]** "Let him alone," said Arobin.

**[30.29]** "He's posing," offered Mr. Merriman; "let him have it out."

**[30.30]** "I believe he's paralyzed," laughed Mrs. Merriman. And leaning over the youth's chair, she took the glass from his hand and held it to his lips. He sipped the wine slowly, and when he had drained the glass she laid it upon the table and wiped his lips with her little filmy handkerchief.

**[30.31]** "Yes, I'll sing for you," he said, turning in his chair toward Mrs. Highcamp. He clasped his hands behind his head, and looking up at the ceiling began to hum a little, trying his voice like a musician tuning an instrument. Then, looking at Edna, he began to sing:

"Ah! si tu savais!"

**[30.32]** "Stop!" she cried, "don't sing that. I don't want you to sing it," and she laid her glass so impetuously and blindly upon the table as to shatter it against a carafe. The wine spilled over Arobin's legs and some of it trickled down upon Mrs. Highcamp's black gauze gown. Victor had lost all idea of courtesy, or else he thought his hostess was not in earnest, for he laughed and went on:

"Ah! si tu savais  
Ce que tes yeux me disent"--

**[30.33]** "Oh! you mustn't! you mustn't," exclaimed Edna, and pushing back her chair she got up, and going behind him placed her hand over his mouth. He kissed the soft palm that pressed upon his lips.

**[30.34]** "No, no, I won't, Mrs. Pontellier. I didn't know you meant it," looking up at her with caressing eyes. The touch of his lips was like a pleasing sting to her hand. She lifted the garland of roses from his head and flung it across the room.

**[30.35]** "Come, Victor; you've posed long enough. Give Mrs. Highcamp her scarf."

**[30.36]** Mrs. Highcamp undraped the scarf from about him with her own hands. Miss Mayblunt and Mr. Gouvernail suddenly conceived the notion that it was time to say good night. And Mr. and Mrs. Merriman wondered how it could be so late.

**[30.37]** Before parting from Victor, Mrs. Highcamp invited him to call upon her daughter, who she knew would be charmed to meet him and talk French and sing French songs with him. Victor expressed his desire and intention to call upon Miss Highcamp at the first opportunity which presented itself. He asked if Arobin were going his way. Arobin was not.



**[30.38]** The mandolin players had long since stolen away. A profound stillness had fallen upon the broad, beautiful street. The voices of Edna's disbanding guests jarred like a discordant note upon the quiet harmony of the night.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 30

**[30.1]** (Stange 1989): 151. (Stange 1995): Edna's dinner combines the private with the public (34). On one side of Edna sits Arobin, representing adulterous and extramarital serial liaisons. On the other side is Monsieur Ratignolle, representing the sacred union of Creole marriage (34).

**[30.2]** (Lattin 1988): 45.

**[30.4]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna embodies the brightness of the sun at her extravagant party (125). (Rowe 1989): Edna would not go with Leonce to pick out new fixtures for their home, but at her dinner party she is adorned to match her table settings (20). (Stange 1989): The women at the dinner are displayed as property, just as the furnishings of the house are displayed. Both are examples of material possessions and wealth (151). (Stange 1995): The wealth of the Pontelliers is obvious in the room's furnishings. The women also

represent wealth, with Edna reigning above them all (34).

**[30.5]** (Giorcelli 1988): Mademoiselle Reisz's body is so withered and deformed (like a witch's) that she must be propped up (136).

**[30.6]** (Giorcelli 1988): In her adornment Edna resembles the queen of the underworld, Persephone (128). (Rowe 1989): 21. (Stange 1989): The dinner exemplifies Edna's value as property, implying how she has sold herself over and over to her husband for jewelry and trinkets (151). (Stange 1995): The tiara, which is the traditional adornment of a young married woman, "sputters" while Edna's wedding rings are said to sparkle (34). Wearing her diamond tiara, Edna personifies and rules over Leonce's wealth (34).

**[30.7]** (Rowe 1989): 21. (Stange 1995): Although it is literally Edna's birthday, she is figuratively being "born" into a new person by the multiple definitions of personhood surrounding her (35).

**[30.9]** (Rowe 1989): 21. (Stange 1989): 152. (Stange 1995): Arobin compares the cocktail to the gift of Edna herself, thereby making her not only a gift from Leonce, but from her father as well (34-35). The dinner exemplifies the various changes taking place in Edna's public value. She is a ceremonial drink, an invention, a queen, and a gift (35).

**[30.10]** (Stange 1995): With this metaphorical defloration Edna is drained of the erotic

yearnings which constituted her selfhood (36).

**[30.12]** (Delbanco 1988): Arobin has no real occupation other than being a ladies' man (94).

**[30.13]** (Delbanco 1988): The people who once were the governing class of New Orleans are now seriously directionless (94).

**[30.22]** (Gilmore 1988): Chopin stresses that art cannot equal reality (76). (Giorcelli 1988): Victor is portrayed as Dionysus (128).

**[30.24]** (Giorcelli 1988): 128.

**[30.25]** (Gilmore 1988): However Arobin is depicted, the effect would be the imitation of a fantasy (76-77). (Lattin 1988): These are the only words spoken by Gouvenail, showing that he is deeply observing the scene as Edna becomes very emotional (45-46). (Stange 1995): The graven image represents Edna's desire (36).

**[30.32]** (Stange 1989): Victor's song conveys Edna's inner desires, for the words mean "if you knew what your eyes are saying to me" (153). (Stange 1995): By breaking the glass, Edna is breaking her characteristic coldness, symbolically letting loose the maternal blood that makes her valuable (36).

[30.34] (Solomon 1988): Edna is physically attracted to Victor (117).

## CHAPTER 31

[31.1] "Well?" questioned Arobin, who had remained with Edna after the others had departed.

[31.2] "Well," she reiterated, and stood up, stretching her arms, and feeling the need to relax her muscles after having been so long seated.

[31.3] "What next?" he asked.

[31.4] "The servants are all gone. They left when the musicians did. I have dismissed them. The house has to be closed and locked, and I shall trot around to the pigeon house, and shall send Celestine over in the morning to straighten things up."

[31.5] He looked around, and began to turn out some of the lights.

[31.6] "What about upstairs?" he inquired.

[31.7] "I think it is all right; but there may be a window or two unlatched. We had better look; you might take a candle and see. And bring me my wrap and hat on the foot of the bed in the middle room."

**[31.8]** He went up with the light, and Edna began closing doors and windows. She hated to shut in the smoke and the fumes of the wine. Arobin found her cape and hat, which he brought down and helped her to put on.

**[31.9]** When everything was secured and the lights put out, they left through the front door, Arobin locking it and taking the key, which he carried for Edna. He helped her down the steps.

**[31.10]** "Will you have a spray of jessamine?" he asked, breaking off a few blossoms as he passed.

**[31.11]** "No; I don't want anything."

**[31.12]** She seemed disheartened, and had nothing to say. She took his arm, which he offered her, holding up the weight of her satin train with the other hand. She looked down, noticing the black line of his leg moving in and out so close to her against the yellow shimmer of her gown. There was the whistle of a railway train somewhere in the distance, and the midnight bells were ringing. They met no one in their short walk.

**[31.13]** The "pigeon house" stood behind a locked gate, and a shallow *parterre* that had been somewhat neglected. There was a small front porch, upon which a long window and the front door opened. The door opened directly into the parlor; there was no side entry. Back in the yard was a room for servants, in which old Celestine had been ensconced.

**[31.14]** Edna had left a lamp burning low upon the table. She had succeeded in making the room look habitable and homelike. There were some

books on the table and a lounge near at hand. On the floor was a fresh matting, covered with a rug or two; and on the walls hung a few tasteful pictures. But the room was filled with flowers. These were a surprise to her. Arobin had sent them, and had had Celestine distribute them during Edna's absence. Her bedroom was adjoining, and across a small passage were the diningroom and kitchen.

**[31.15]** Edna seated herself with every appearance of discomfort.

**[31.16]** "Are you tired?" he asked.

**[31.17]** "Yes, and chilled, and miserable. I feel as if I had been wound up to a certain pitch--too tight--and something inside of me had snapped." She rested her head against the table upon her bare arm.

**[31.18]** "You want to rest," he said, "and to be quiet. I'll go; I'll leave you and let you rest."

**[31.19]** "Yes," she replied.

**[31.20]** He stood up beside her and smoothed her hair with his soft, magnetic hand. His touch conveyed to her a certain physical comfort. She could have fallen quietly asleep there if he had continued to pass his hand over her hair. He brushed the hair upward from the nape of her neck.

**[31.21]** "I hope you will feel better and happier in the morning," he said. "You have tried to do too much in the past few days. The dinner was the last straw; you might have dispensed with it."

**[31.22]** "Yes," she admitted; "it was stupid."

**[31.23]** "No, it was delightful; but it has worn you out." His hand had strayed to her beautiful shoulders, and he could feel the response of her flesh to his touch. He seated himself beside her and kissed her lightly upon the shoulder.

**[31.24]** "I thought you were going away," she said, in an uneven voice.

**[31.25]** "I am, after I have said good night."

**[31.26]** "Good night," she murmured.

**[31.27]** He did not answer, except to continue to caress her. He did not say good night until she had become supple to his gentle, seductive entreaties.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 31

**[31.4]** (Delbanco 1988): 103.

**[31.11]** (Stange 1989): Edna feels drained of erotic desire (153).

**[31.17]** (Stange 1989): 153.

**[31.20]** (Showalter 1988): The cat's soft coat and Edna's hair are both captivatingly sensual (44). (Block 1995): Edna becomes comfortable with Alcee and enjoys having him

near her, as long as it is on her terms (213).

**[31.23]** (Stange 1989): Edna can no longer control her sexual desire (153). (Stange 1995): Her skin's response exhibits the sexuality that is within circulation. Because of tonight's festivities, Edna can no longer feel any sensation as being her own sexual desire (36).

## CHAPTER 32

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



**[32.2]** But remembering Edna's whimsical turn of mind of late, and foreseeing that she had immediately acted upon her impetuous determination, he grasped the situation with his usual promptness and handled it with his well-known business tact and cleverness.

**[32.3]** The same mail which brought to Edna his letter of disapproval carried instructions--the most minute instructions--to a well-known architect concerning the remodeling of his home, changes which he had long contemplated, and which he desired carried forward during his temporary absence.

**[32.4]** Expert and reliable packers and movers were engaged to convey the furniture, carpets, pictures --everything movable, in short--to places of security. And in an incredibly short time the Pontellier house was turned over to the artisans. There was to be an addition--a small snugger; there was to be frescoing, and hardwood flooring was to be put into such rooms as had not yet been subjected to this improvement.

**[32.5]** Furthermore, in one of the daily papers appeared a brief notice to the effect that Mr. and Mrs. Pontellier were contemplating a summer sojourn abroad, and that their handsome residence on Esplanade Street was undergoing sumptuous alterations, and would not be ready for occupancy until their return. Mr. Pontellier had saved appearances!

**[32.6]** Edna admired the skill of his maneuver, and avoided any occasion to balk his intentions. When the situation as set forth by Mr. Pontellier was

accepted and taken for granted, she was apparently satisfied that it should be so.

**[32.7]** The pigeon house pleased her. It at once assumed the intimate character of a home, while she herself invested it with a charm which it reflected like a warm glow. There was with her a feeling of having descended in the social scale, with a corresponding sense of having risen in the spiritual. Every step which she took toward relieving herself from obligations added to her strength and expansion as an individual. She began to look with her own eyes; to see and to apprehend the deeper undercurrents of life. No longer was she content to "feed upon opinion" when her own soul had invited her.

**[32.8]** After a little while, a few days, in fact, Edna went up and spent a week with her children in Iberville. They were delicious February days, with all the summer's promise hovering in the air.

**[32.9]** How glad she was to see the children! She wept for very pleasure when she felt their little arms clasping her; their hard, ruddy cheeks pressed against her own glowing cheeks. She looked into their faces with hungry eyes that could not be satisfied with looking. And what stories they had to tell their mother! About the pigs, the cows, the mules! About riding to the mill behind Gluglu; fishing back in the lake with their Uncle Jasper; picking pecans with Lidie's little black brood, and hauling chips in their express wagon. It was a thousand times more fun to haul real chips for old lame Susie's real fire than to drag painted blocks along the banquette on Esplanade Street!

**[32.10]** She went with them herself to see the pigs and the cows, to look at the darkies laying the cane, to thrash the pecan trees, and catch fish in the back lake. She lived with them a whole week long, giving them all of herself, and gathering and filling herself with their young existence. They listened, breathless, when she told them the house in Esplanade Street was crowded with workmen, hammering, nailing, sawing, and filling the place with clatter. They wanted. to know where their bed was; what had been done with their rocking-horse; and where did Joe sleep, and where had Ellen gone, and the cook? But, above all, they were fired with a desire to see the little house around the block. Was there any place to play? Were there any boys next door? Raoul, with pessimistic foreboding, was convinced that there were only girls next door. Where would they sleep, and where would papa sleep? She told them the fairies would fix it all right.

**[32.11]** The old Madame was charmed with Edna's visit, and showered all manner of delicate attentions upon her. She was delighted to know that the Esplanade Street house was in a dismantled condition. It gave her the promise and pretext to keep the children indefinitely.

**[32.12]** It was with a wrench and a pang that Edna left her children. She carried away with her the sound of their voices and the touch of their cheeks. All along the journey homeward their presence lingered with her like the memory of a delicious song. But by the time she had regained the city the song no longer echoed in her soul. She was again alone.

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NOTES TO CHAPTER 32

**[32.1]** (Ghosh 1995): Leonce is more concerned with losing business than with what is happening to his wife's psyche (233).

**[32.7]** (Gilmore 1988): Chopin describes Edna's awakening as the process of growing into a person (82). (S. Jones 1988): Edna is free because of her new outlook (123). (Showalter 1988): 34. (Jones 1989): Edna begins to see herself as different from the way society views her (63). (Balliwala 1995): Edna begins to move towards her own possibilities because she discovers Eros in her own being in the shape of Robert (194). (Block 1995): To deny all of one's responsibilities is to ignore the rights of others (216). (Paul 1995): Edna learns that happiness can only exist within one's self and has nothing to do with anyone or anything else (47). (Ghosh 1995): Edna no longer feels as if she is one of Leonce's possessions (234). (Ramamoorthi 1995): The pigeon house becomes a symbol of Edna's freedom (185). (Tripathi 1995): Edna's decision to move is based on her resolve to belong only to herself, which makes her feel as if she has accomplished a spiritual rise (152).

**[32.8]** (Paul 1995): 63.

[32.9] (Block 1995): Edna struggles between her idea of motherhood and her need for independence (212).

[32.10] (Jacobs 1988): 111. (S. Jones 1988): When made to face the future, Edna thinks as if she were in a storybook world. Her fantasies seem totally inappropriate and immature (124). (Jones 1989): Whenever Edna must face the future, she tends to prefer a storybook world (71). (Paul 1995): Edna is thrilled with her children's escapades while visiting the country (58).

[32.12] (Giorcelli 1988): 118. (LeFew 1989): This is one of several times when music (or, in this case, melodious sounds) affect Edna (78). (Paul 1995): Edna is like any mother, enjoying her children, but she is much more than just a mother (58; 63).

## CHAPTER 33

[33.1] It happened sometimes when Edna went to see Mademoiselle Reisz that the little musician was absent, giving a lesson or making some small necessary household purchase. The key was always left in a secret hiding-place in the entry, which Edna knew. If Mademoiselle happened to be

away, Edna would usually enter and wait for her return.

**[33.2]** When she knocked at Mademoiselle Reisz's door one afternoon there was no response; so unlocking the door, as usual, she entered and found the apartment deserted, as she had expected. Her day had been quite filled up, and it was for a rest, for a refuge, and to talk about Robert, that she sought out her friend.

**[33.3]** She had worked at her canvas--a young Italian character study--all the morning, completing the work without the model; but there had been many interruptions, some incident to her modest housekeeping, and others of a social nature.

**[33.4]** Madame Ratignolle had dragged herself over, avoiding the too public thoroughfares, she said. She complained that Edna had neglected her much of late. Besides, she was consumed with curiosity to see the little house and the manner in which it was conducted. She wanted to hear all about the dinner party; Monsieur Ratignolle had left so early. What had happened after he left? The champagne and grapes which Edna sent over were *too* delicious. She had so little appetite; they had refreshed and toned her stomach. Where on earth was she going to put Mr. Pontellier in that little house, and the boys? And then she made Edna promise to go to her when her hour of trial overtook her.

**[33.5]** "At any time--any time of the day or night, dear," Edna assured her.

**[33.6]** Before leaving Madame Ratignolle said:

**[33.7]** "In some way you seem to me like a child, Edna. You seem to act without a certain amount of reflection which is necessary in this life. That is the reason I want to say you mustn't mind if I advise you to be a little careful while you are living here alone. Why don't you have some one come and stay with you? Wouldn't Mademoiselle Reisz come?"

**[33.8]** "No; she wouldn't wish to come, and I shouldn't want her always with me."

**[33.9]** "Well, the reason--you know how evil-minded the world is--some one was talking of Alcée Arobin visiting you. Of course, it wouldn't matter if Mr. Arobin had not such a dreadful reputation. Monsieur Ratignolle was telling me that his attentions alone are considered enough to ruin a woman's name."

**[33.10]** "Does he boast of his successes?" asked Edna, indifferently, squinting at her picture.

**[33.11]** "No, I think not. I believe he is a decent fellow as far as that goes. But his character is so well known among the men. I shan't be able to come back and see you; it was very, very imprudent to-day."

**[33.12]** "Mind the step!" cried Edna.

**[33.13]** "Don't neglect me," entreated Madame Ratignolle; "and don't mind what I said about Arobin, or having some one to stay with you."

**[33.14]** "Of course not," Edna laughed. "You may say anything you like to me." They kissed each other good-by. Madame Ratignolle had not far to go, and Edna stood on the porch a while watching her walk down the street.

**[33.15]** Then in the afternoon Mrs. Merriman and Mrs. Highcamp had made their "party call." Edna felt that they might have dispensed with the formality. They had also come to invite her to play *vingt-et-un* one evening at Mrs. Merriman's. She was asked to go early, to dinner, and Mr. Merriman or Mr. Arobin would take her home. Edna accepted in a half-hearted way. She sometimes felt very tired of Mrs. Highcamp and Mrs. Merriman.

**[33.16]** Late in the afternoon she sought refuge with Mademoiselle Reisz, and stayed there alone, waiting for her, feeling a kind of repose invade her with the very atmosphere of the shabby, unpretentious little room.

**[33.17]** Edna sat at the window, which looked out over the house-tops and across the river. The window frame was filled with pots of flowers, and she sat and picked the dry leaves from a rose geranium. The day was warm, and the breeze which blew from the river was very pleasant. She removed her hat and laid it on the piano. She went on picking the leaves and digging around the plants with her hat pin. Once she thought she heard Mademoiselle Reisz approaching. But it was a young black girl, who came in, bringing a small bundle of laundry, which she deposited in the adjoining room, and went away.

**[33.18]** Edna seated herself at the piano, and softly picked out with one hand the bars of a piece of music which lay open before her. A half-hour went by. There was the occasional sound of people going and coming in the lower hall. She was growing interested in her occupation of picking out the aria, when there was a second rap at the door. She vaguely wondered what these people



did when they found Mademoiselle's door locked.

**[33.19]** "Come in," she called, turning her face toward the door. And this time it was Robert Lebrun who presented himself. She attempted to rise; she could not have done so without betraying the agitation which mastered her at sight of him, so she fell back upon the stool, only exclaiming, "Why, Robert!"

**[33.20]** He came and clasped her hand, seemingly without knowing what he was saying or doing.

**[33.21]** "Mrs. Pontellier! How do you happen--oh! how well you look! Is Mademoiselle Reisz not here? I never expected to see you."

**[33.22]** "When did you come back?" asked Edna in an unsteady voice, wiping her face with her handkerchief. She seemed ill at ease on the piano stool, and he begged her to take the chair by the window. She did so, mechanically, while he seated himself on the stool.

**[33.23]** "I returned day before yesterday," he answered, while he leaned his arm on the keys, bringing forth a crash of discordant sound.

**[33.24]** "Day before yesterday!" she repeated, aloud; and went on thinking to herself, "day before yesterday," in a sort of an uncomprehending way. She had pictured him seeking her at the very first hour, and he had lived under the same sky since day before yesterday; while only by accident had he stumbled upon her. Mademoiselle must have lied when she said, "Poor fool, he loves you."

**[33.25]** "Day before yesterday," she repeated, breaking off a spray of

Mademoiselle's geranium; "then if you had not met me here to-day you wouldn't--when--that is, didn't you mean to come and see me?"

**[33.26]** "Of course, I should have gone to see you. There have been so many things--" he turned the leaves of Mademoiselle's music nervously. "I started in at once yesterday with the old firm. After all there is as much chance for me here as there was there--that is, I might find it profitable some day. The Mexicans were not very congenial."

**[33.27]** So he had come back because the Mexicans were not congenial; because business was as profitable here as there; because of any reason, and not because he cared to be near her. She remembered the day she sat on the floor, turning the pages of his letter, seeking the reason which was left untold.

**[33.28]** She had not noticed how he looked--only feeling his presence; but she turned deliberately and observed him. After all, he had been absent but a few months, and was not changed. His hair--the color of hers--waved back from his temples in the same way as before. His skin was not more burned than it had been at Grand Isle. She found in his eyes, when he looked at her for one silent moment, the same tender caress, with an added warmth and entreaty which had not been there before the same glance which had penetrated to the sleeping places of her soul and awakened them.

**[33.29]** A hundred times Edna had pictured Robert's return, and imagined their first meeting. It was usually at her home, whither he had sought her out at once. She always fancied him expressing or betraying in some way

his love for her. And here, the reality was that they sat ten feet apart, she at the window, crushing geranium leaves in her hand and smelling them, he twirling around on the piano stool, saying:

**[33.30]** "I was very much surprised to hear of Mr. Pontellier's absence; it's a wonder Mademoiselle Reisz did not tell me; and your moving--mother told me yesterday. I should think you would have gone to New York with him, or to Iberville with the children, rather than be bothered here with housekeeping. And you are going abroad, too, I hear. We shan't have you at Grand Isle next summer; it won't seem--do you see much of Mademoiselle Reisz? She often spoke of you in the few letters she wrote."

**[33.31]** "Do you remember that you promised to write to me when you went away?" A flush overspread his whole face.

**[33.32]** "I couldn't believe that my letters would be of any interest to you."

**[33.33]** "That is an excuse; it isn't the truth." Edna reached for her hat on the piano. She adjusted it, sticking the hat pin through the heavy coil of hair with some deliberation.

**[33.34]** "Are you not going to wait for Mademoiselle Reisz?" asked Robert.

**[33.35]** "No; I have found when she is absent this long, she is liable not to come back till late." She drew on her gloves, and Robert picked up his hat.

**[33.36]** "Won't you wait for her?" asked Edna.

**[33.37]** "Not if you think she will not be back till late," adding, as if

suddenly aware of some discourtesy in his speech, "and I should miss the pleasure of walking home with you." Edna locked the door and put the key back in its hiding-place.

**[33.38]** They went together, picking their way across muddy streets and sidewalks encumbered with the cheap display of small tradesmen. Part of the distance they rode in the car, and after disembarking, passed the Pontellier mansion, which looked broken and half torn asunder. Robert had never known the house, and looked at it with interest.

**[33.39]** "I never knew you in your home," he remarked.

**[33.40]** "I am glad you did not."

**[33.41]** "Why?" She did not answer. They went on around the corner, and it seemed as if her dreams were coming true after all, when he followed her into the little house.

**[33.42]** "You must stay and dine with me, Robert. You see I am all alone, and it is so long since I have seen you. There is so much I want to ask you."

**[33.43]** She took off her hat and gloves. He stood irresolute, making some excuse about his mother who expected him; he even muttered something about an engagement. She struck a match and lit the lamp on the table; it was growing dusk. When he saw her face in the lamp-light, looking pained, with all the soft lines gone out of it, he threw his hat aside and seated himself.

**[33.44]** "Oh! you know I want to stay if you will let me!" he exclaimed. All the softness came back. She laughed, and went and put her hand on his

shoulder.

**[33.45]** "This is the first moment you have seemed like the old Robert. I'll go tell Celestine." She hurried away to tell Celestine to set an extra place. She even sent her off in search of some added delicacy which she had not thought of for herself. And she recommended great care in dripping the coffee and having the omelet done to a proper turn.

**[33.46]** When she reentered, Robert was turning over magazines, sketches, and things that lay upon the table in great disorder. He picked up a photograph, and exclaimed:

**[33.47]** "Alcée Arobin! What on earth is his picture doing here?"

**[33.48]** "I tried to make a sketch of his head one day," answered Edna, "and he thought the photograph might help me. It was at the other house. I thought it had been left there. I must have packed it up with my drawing materials."

**[33.49]** "I should think you would give it back to him if you have finished with it."

**[33.50]** "Oh! I have a great many such photographs. I never think of returning them. They don't amount to anything." Robert kept on looking at the picture.

**[33.51]** "It seems to me--do you think his head worth drawing? Is he a friend of Mr. Pontellier's? You never said you knew him."

**[33.52]** "He isn't a friend of Mr. Pontellier's; he's a friend of mine. I always

knew him--that is, it is only of late that I know him pretty well. But I'd rather talk about you, and know what you have been seeing and doing and feeling out there in Mexico." Robert threw aside the picture.

**[33.53]** "I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the *Chênière*; the old fort at Grande Terre. I've been working like a machine, and feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting."

**[33.54]** She leaned her head upon her hand to shade her eyes from the light.

**[33.55]** "And what have you been seeing and doing and feeling all these days?" he asked.

**[33.56]** "I've been seeing the waves and the white beach of Grand Isle; the quiet, grassy street of the *Chênière Caminada*; the old sunny fort at Grande Terre. I've been working with a little more comprehension than a machine, and still feeling like a lost soul. There was nothing interesting."

**[33.57]** "Mrs. Pontellier, you are cruel," he said, with feeling, closing his eyes and resting his head back in his chair. They remained in silence till old Celestine announced dinner.

[33.3] (Gilmore 1988): 79. (Ramamoorthi 1995): 185.

[33.4] (Paul 1995): 63.

[33.7] (Giorcelli 1988): Adele would like to protect Edna (137). (Jones 1989): Edna acts on impulse, without considering how her actions might affect others (70-71).

(Poovalingam 1995): 226-27). (Vevaina 1995): 89.

[33.9] (Jacob 1995): 107. (Paul 1995): 55.

[33.24] (Gremillion 1989): Edna's idea of her relationship with Robert is not exactly what that relationship truly is (173).

[33.53] (Paul 1995): This is as close as Robert comes to declaring his love for Edna before he actually does admit that he loves her (53).

## CHAPTER 34

**[34.1]** The dining-room was very small. Edna's round mahogany would have almost filled it. As it was there was but a step or two from the little table to the kitchen, to the mantel, the small buffet, and the side door that opened out on the narrow brick-paved yard.

**[34.2]** A certain degree of ceremony settled upon them with the announcement of dinner. There was no return to personalities. Robert related incidents of his sojourn in Mexico, and Edna talked of events likely to interest him, which had occurred during his absence. The dinner was of ordinary quality, except for the few delicacies which she had sent out to purchase. Old Celestine, with a bandana *tignon* twisted about her head, hobbled in and out, taking a personal interest in everything; and she lingered occasionally to talk patois with Robert, whom she had known as a boy.

**[34.3]** He went out to a neighboring cigar stand to purchase cigarette papers, and when he came back he found that Celestine had served the black coffee in the parlor.

**[34.4]** "Perhaps I shouldn't have come back," he said. "When you are tired of me, tell me to go."

**[34.5]** "You never tire me. You must have forgotten the hours and hours at Grand Isle in which we grew accustomed to each other and used to being together."

**[34.6]** "I have forgotten nothing at Grand Isle," he said, not looking at her, but rolling a cigarette. His tobacco pouch, which he laid upon the table, was a



fantastic embroidered silk affair, evidently the handiwork of a woman.

**[34.7]** "You used to carry your tobacco in a rubber pouch," said Edna, picking up the pouch and examining the needlework.

**[34.8]** "Yes; it was lost."

**[34.9]** "Where did you buy this one? In Mexico?"

**[34.10]** "It was given to me by a Vera Cruz girl; they are very generous," he replied, striking a match and lighting his cigarette.

**[34.11]** "They are very handsome, I suppose, those Mexican women; very picturesque, with their black eyes and their lace scarfs."

**[34.12]** "Some are; others are hideous. just as you find women everywhere."

**[34.13]** "What was she like--the one who gave you the pouch? You must have known her very well."

**[34.14]** "She was very ordinary. She wasn't of the slightest importance. I knew her well enough."

**[34.15]** "Did you visit at her house? Was it interesting? I should like to know and hear about the people you met, and the impressions they made on you."

**[34.16]** "There are some people who leave impressions not so lasting as the imprint of an oar upon the water."

**[34.17]** "Was she such a one?"

**[34.18]** "It would be ungenerous for me to admit that she was of that

order and kind." He thrust the pouch back in his pocket, as if to put away the subject with the trifle which had brought it up.

**[34.19]** Arobin dropped in with a message from Mrs. Merriman, to say that the card party was postponed on account of the illness of one of her children.

**[34.20]** "How do you do, Arobin?" said Robert, rising from the obscurity.

**[34.21]** "Oh! Lebrun. To be sure! I heard yesterday you were back. How did they treat you down in Mexique?"

**[34.22]** "Fairly well."

**[34.23]** "But not well enough to keep you there. Stunning girls, though, in Mexico. I thought I should never get away from Vera Cruz when I was down there a couple of years ago."

**[34.24]** "Did they embroider slippers and tobacco pouches and hat-bands and things for you?" asked Edna.

**[34.25]** "Oh! my! no! I didn't get so deep in their regard. I fear they made more impression on me than I made on them."

**[34.26]** "You were less fortunate than Robert, then."

**[34.27]** "I am always less fortunate than Robert. Has he been imparting tender confidences?"

**[34.28]** "I've been imposing myself long enough," said Robert, rising, and shaking hands with Edna. "Please convey my regards to Mr. Pontellier when you write."

**[34.29]** He shook hands with Arobin and went away.

**[34.30]** "Fine fellow, that Lebrun," said Arobin when Robert had gone. "I never heard you speak of him."

**[34.31]** "I knew him last summer at Grand Isle," she replied. "Here is that photograph of yours. Don't you want it?"

**[34.32]** "What do I want with it? Throw it away." She threw it back on the table.

**[34.33]** "I'm not going to Mrs. Merriman's," she said. "If you see her, tell her so. But perhaps I had better write. I think I shall write now, and say that I am sorry her child is sick, and tell her not to count on me."

**[34.34]** "It would be a good scheme," acquiesced Arobin. "I don't blame you; stupid lot!"

**[34.35]** Edna opened the blotter, and having procured paper and pen, began to write the note. Arobin lit a cigar and read the evening paper, which he had in his pocket.

**[34.36]** "What is the date?" she asked. He told her.

**[34.37]** "Will you mail this for me when you go out?"

**[34.38]** "Certainly." He read to her little bits out of the newspaper, while she straightened things on the table.

**[34.39]** "What do you want to do?" he asked, throwing aside the paper. "Do you want to go out for a walk or a drive or anything? It would be a fine night to drive."

[34.40] "No; I don't want to do anything but just be quiet. You go away and amuse yourself. Don't stay."

[34.41] "I'll go away if I must; but I shan't amuse myself. You know that I only live when I am near you."

[34.42] He stood up to bid her good night.

[34.43] "Is that one of the things you always say to women?"

[34.44] "I have said it before, but I don't think I ever came so near meaning it," he answered with a smile. There were no warm lights in her eyes; only a dreamy, absent look.

[34.45] "Good night. I adore you. Sleep well," he said, and he kissed her hand and went away.

[34.46] She stayed alone in a kind of reverie--a sort of stupor. Step by step she lived over every instant of the time she had been with Robert after he had entered Mademoiselle Reisz's door. She recalled his words, his looks. How few and meager they had been for her hungry heart! A vision--a transcendently seductive vision of a Mexican girl arose before her. She writhed with a jealous pang. She wondered when he would come back. He had not said he would come back. She had been with him, had heard his voice and touched his hand. But some way he had seemed nearer to her off there in Mexico.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 34

**[34.16]** (Triakha 1995): Alcee means nothing to Edna (151).

**[34.46]** (Giorcelli 1988): Seeking a real love relationship, Edna is torn between fantasy and sexual attraction (119). (Block 1995): Edna prefers her dream of Robert more than the real Robert because the dream is unattainable (215). (Paul 1995): If Robert did someday return, Edna could then experience the jealousy of the Mexican girls (51).

## CHAPTER 35

**[35.1]** The morning was full of sunlight and hope. Edna could see before her no denial--only the promise of excessive joy. She lay in bed awake, with bright eyes full of speculation. "He loves you, poor fool." If she could but get that conviction firmly fixed in her mind, what mattered about the rest? She felt she had been childish and unwise the night before in giving herself over to despondency. She recapitulated the motives which no doubt explained Robert's reserve. They were not insurmountable; they would not hold if he really loved her; they could not hold against her own passion, which he must come to realize

in time. She pictured him going to his business that morning. She even saw how he was dressed; how he walked down one street, and turned the corner of another; saw him bending over his desk, talking to people who entered the office, going to his lunch, and perhaps watching for her on the street. He would come to her in the afternoon or evening, sit and roll his cigarette, talk a little, and go away as he had done the night before. But how delicious it would be to have him there with her! She would have no regrets, nor seek to penetrate his reserve if he still chose to wear it.

**[35.2]** Edna ate her breakfast only half dressed. The maid brought her a delicious printed scrawl from Raoul, expressing his love, asking her to send him some bonbons, and telling her they had found that morning ten tiny white pigs all lying in a row beside Lidie's big white pig.

**[35.3]** A letter also came from her husband, saying he hoped to be back early in March, and then they would get ready for that journey abroad which he had promised her so long, which he felt now fully able to afford; he felt able to travel as people should, without any thought of small economies--thanks to his recent speculations in Wall Street.

**[35.4]** Much to her surprise she received a note from Arobin, written at midnight from the club. It was to say good morning to her, to hope she had slept well, to assure her of his devotion, which he trusted she in some faintest manner returned.

**[35.5]** All these letters were pleasing to her. She answered the children

in a cheerful frame of mind, promising them bonbons, and congratulating them upon their happy find of the little pigs.

**[35.6]** She answered her husband with friendly evasiveness,--not with any fixed design to mislead him, only because all sense of reality had gone out of her life; she had abandoned herself to Fate, and awaited the consequences with indifference.

**[35.7]** To Arobin's note she made no reply. She put it under Celestine's stove-lid.

**[35.8]** Edna worked several hours with much spirit. She saw no one but a picture dealer, who asked her if it were true that she was going abroad to study in Paris.

**[35.9]** She said possibly she might, and he negotiated with her for some Parisian studies to reach him in time for the holiday trade in December.

**[35.10]** Robert did not come that day. She was keenly disappointed. He did not come the following day, nor the next. Each morning she awoke with hope, and each night she was a prey to despondency. She was tempted to seek him out. But far from yielding to the impulse, she avoided any occasion which might throw her in his way. She did not go to Mademoiselle Reisz's nor pass by Madame Lebrun's, as she might have done if he had still been in Mexico.

**[35.11]** When Arobin, one night, urged her to drive with him, she went--out to the lake, on the Shell Road. His horses were full of mettle, and even a little unmanageable. She liked the rapid gait at which they spun along,

and the quick, sharp sound of the horses' hoofs on the hard road. They did not stop anywhere to eat or to drink. Arobin was not needlessly imprudent. But they ate and they drank when they regained Edna's little dining-room--which was comparatively early in the evening.

**[35.12]** It was late when he left her. It was getting to be more than a passing whim with Arobin to see her and be with her. He had detected the latent sensuality, which unfolded under his delicate sense of her nature's requirements like a torpid, torrid, sensitive blossom.

**[35.13]** There was no despondency when she fell asleep that night; nor was there hope when she awoke in the morning.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 35

**[35.1]** (Gremillion 1989): Childlike Edna, thinking the whole world revolves around her, rationalizes why Robert did not seek her out immediately on his return (173). (Paul 1995): 63.

**[35.2]** (Paul 1995): 63.

**[35.6]** (Gremillion 1989): Edna does not try to change her world because she cannot



understand any constrictions placed on her (173). (Bande 1995): Edna is filled with self-hatred, but by directing her hate against fate, she hopes for relief from the attack (165). (Block 1995): Instead of chasing definite goals, Edna waits on fate to lead her (208).

[35.12] (Jacob 1995): 107.

## CHAPTER 36

[36.1] There was a garden out in the suburbs; a small, leafy corner, with a few green tables under the orange trees. An old cat slept all day on the stone step in the sun, and an old *mulatresse* slept her idle hours away in her chair at the open window, till, some one happened to knock on one of the green tables. She had milk and cream cheese to sell, and bread and butter. There was no one who could make such excellent coffee or fry a chicken so golden brown as she.

[36.2] The place was too modest to attract the attention of people of fashion, and so quiet as to have escaped the notice of those in search of pleasure and dissipation. Edna had discovered it accidentally one day when the

high-board gate stood ajar. She caught sight of a little green table, blotched with the checkered sunlight that filtered through the quivering leaves overhead.

Within she had found the slumbering *mulatresse*, the drowsy cat, and a glass of milk which reminded her of the milk she had tasted in Iberville.

**[36.3]** She often stopped there during her perambulations; sometimes taking a book with her, and sitting an hour or two under the trees when she found the place deserted. Once or twice she took a quiet dinner there alone, having instructed Celestine beforehand to prepare no dinner at home. It was the last place in the city where she would have expected to meet any one she knew.

**[36.4]** Still she was not astonished when, as she was partaking of a modest dinner late in the afternoon, looking into an open book, stroking the cat, which had made friends with her--she was not greatly astonished to see Robert come in at the tall garden gate.

**[36.5]** "I am destined to see you only by accident," she said, shoving the cat off the chair beside her. He was surprised, ill at ease, almost embarrassed at meeting her thus so unexpectedly.

**[36.6]** "Do you come here often?" he asked.

**[36.7]** "I almost live here," she said.

**[36.8]** "I used to drop in very often for a cup of Catiche's good coffee. This is the first time since I came back."

**[36.9]** "She'll bring you a plate, and you will share my dinner. There's always enough for two--even three." Edna had intended to be indifferent and as

reserved as he when she met him; she had reached the determination by a laborious train of reasoning, incident to one of her despondent moods. But her resolve melted when she saw him before designing Providence had led him into her path.

**[36.10]** "Why have you kept away from me, Robert?" she asked, closing the book that lay open upon the table.

**[36.11]** "Why are you so personal, Mrs. Pontellier? Why do you force me to idiotic subterfuges?" he exclaimed with sudden warmth. "I suppose there's no use telling you I've been very busy, or that I've been sick, or that I've been to see you and not found you at home. Please let me off with any one of these excuses."

**[36.12]** "You are the embodiment of selfishness," she said. "You save yourself something--I don't know what--but there is some selfish motive, and in sparing yourself you never consider for a moment what I think, or how I feel your neglect and indifference. I suppose this is what you would call unwomanly; but I have got into a habit of expressing myself. It doesn't matter to me, and you may think me unwomanly if you like."

**[36.13]** "No; I only think you cruel, as I said the other day. Maybe not intentionally cruel; but you seem to be forcing me into disclosures which can result in nothing; as if you would have me bare a wound for the pleasure of looking at it, without the intention or power of healing it."

**[36.14]** "I'm spoiling your dinner, Robert; never mind what I say. You

haven't eaten a morsel."

**[36.15]** "I only came in for a cup of coffee." His sensitive face was all disfigured with excitement.

**[36.16]** "Isn't this a delightful place?" she remarked. "I am so glad it has never actually been discovered. It is so quiet, so sweet, here. Do you notice there is scarcely a sound to be heard? It's so out of the way; and a good walk from the car. However, I don't mind walking. I always feel so sorry for women who don't like to walk; they miss so much--so many rare little glimpses of life; and we women learn so little of life on the whole.

**[36.17]** "Catiche's coffee is always hot. I don't know how she manages it, here in the open air. Celestine's coffee gets cold bringing it from the kitchen to the dining-room. Three lumps! How can you drink it so sweet? Take some of the cress with your chop; it's so biting and crisp. Then there's the advantage of being able to smoke with your coffee out here. Now, in the city--aren't you going to smoke?"

**[36.18]** "After a while," he said, laying a cigar on the table.

**[36.19]** "Who gave it to you?" she laughed.

**[36.20]** "I bought it. I suppose I'm getting reckless; I bought a whole box." She was determined not to be personal again and make him uncomfortable.

**[36.21]** The cat made friends with him, and climbed into his lap when he smoked his cigar. He stroked her silky fur, and talked a little about her. He

looked at Edna's book, which he had read; and he told her the end, to save her the trouble of wading through it, he said.

**[36.22]** Again he accompanied her back to her home; and it was after dusk when they reached the little "pigeon-house." She did not ask him to remain, which he was grateful for, as it permitted him to stay without the discomfort of blundering through an excuse which he had no intention of considering. He helped her to light the lamp; then she went into her room to take off her hat and to bathe her face and hands.

**[36.23]** When she came back Robert was not examining the pictures and magazines as before; he sat off in the shadow, leaning his head back on the chair as if in a reverie. Edna lingered a moment beside the table, arranging the books there. Then she went across the room to where he sat. She bent over the arm of his chair and called his name.

**[36.24]** "Robert," she said, "are you asleep?"

**[36.25]** "No," he answered, looking up at her.

**[36.26]** She leaned over and kissed him--a soft, cool, delicate kiss, whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being--then she moved away from him. He followed, and took her in his arms, just holding her close to him. She put her hand up to his face and pressed his cheek against her own. The action was full of love and tenderness. He sought her lips again. Then he drew her down upon the sofa beside him and held her hand in both of his.

**[36.27]** "Now you know," he said, "now you know what I have been

fighting against since last summer at Grand Isle; what drove me away and drove me back again."

**[36.28]** "Why have you been fighting against it?" she asked. Her face glowed with soft lights.

**[36.29]** "Why? Because you were not free; you were Léonce Pontellier's wife. I couldn't help loving you if you were ten times his wife; but so long as I went away from you and kept away I could help telling you so." She put her free hand up to his shoulder, and then against his cheek, rubbing it softly. He kissed her again. His face was warm and flushed.

**[36.30]** "There in Mexico I was thinking of you all the time, and longing for you."

**[36.31]** "But not writing to me," she interrupted.

**[36.32]** "Something put into my head that you cared for me; and I lost my senses. I forgot everything but a wild dream of your some way becoming my wife."

**[36.33]** "Your wife!"

**[36.34]** "Religion, loyalty, everything would give way if only you cared."

**[36.35]** "Then you must have forgotten that I was Léonce Pontellier's wife."

**[36.36]** "Oh! I was demented, dreaming of wild, impossible things, recalling men who had set their wives free, we have heard of such things."

**[36.37]** "Yes, we have heard of such things."

**[36.38]** "I came back full of vague, mad intentions. And when I got here--"

**[36.39]** "When you got here you never came near me!" She was still caressing his cheek.

**[36.40]** "I realized what a cur I was to dream of such a thing, even if you had been willing."

**[36.41]** She took his face between her hands and looked into it as if she would never withdraw her eyes more. She kissed him on the forehead, the eyes, the cheeks, and the lips.

**[36.42]** "You have been a very, very foolish boy, wasting your time dreaming of impossible things when you speak of Mr. Pontellier setting me free! I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose. If he were to say, 'Here, Robert, take her and be happy; she is yours,' I should laugh at you both."

**[36.43]** His face grew a little white. "What do you mean?" he asked.

**[36.44]** There was a knock at the door. Old Celestine came in to say that Madame Ratignolle's servant had come around the back way with a message that Madame had been taken sick and begged Mrs. Pontellier to go to her immediately.

**[36.45]** "Yes, yes," said Edna, rising; "I promised. Tell her yes--to wait for me. I'll go back with her."

**[36.46]** "Let me walk over with you," offered Robert.

**[36.47]** "No," she said; "I will go with the servant. She went into her room to put on her hat, and when she came in again she sat once more upon the sofa beside him. He had not stirred. She put her arms about his neck.

**[36.48]** "Good-by, my sweet Robert. Tell me good-by." He kissed her with a degree of passion which had not before entered into his caress, and strained her to him.

**[36.49]** "I love you," she whispered, "only you; no one but you. It was you who awoke me last summer out of a life-long, stupid dream. Oh! you have made me so unhappy with your indifference. Oh! I have suffered, suffered! Now you are here we shall love each other, my Robert. We shall be everything to each other. Nothing else in the world is of any consequence. I must go to my friend; but you will wait for me? No matter how late; you will wait for me, Robert?"

**[36.50]** "Don't go; don't go! Oh! Edna, stay with me," he pleaded. "Why should you go? Stay with me, stay with me."

**[36.51]** "I shall come back as soon as I can; I shall find you here." She buried her face in his neck, and said good-by again. Her seductive voice, together with his great love for her, had enthralled his senses, had deprived him of every impulse but the longing to hold her and keep her.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 36

[36.6] (Delbanco 1988): 104.

[36.7] (Delbanco 1988): 104.

[36.9] (Giorcelli 1988): 121.

[36.13] (Paul 1995): Robert does not want to be healed but would rather romanticize the wound (53).

[36.16] (Jones 1989): 63.

[36.21] (Rankin 1988): Robert and Edna are both readers (150).

[36.26] (Delbanco 1988): By giving Edna the control over this kiss, Chopin moves her more toward the masculine end of the spectrum and further away from the feminine (101).

(Giorcelli 1988): Robert reacts to Edna's kiss much the same way that Edna reacted to Victor's kiss earlier (131). (Paul 1995): 53.

[36.32] (Giorcelli 1988): 131. (Amin 1995): 77.

[36.41] (Delbanco 1988): By giving Edna the control over the encounter, Chopin moves

her more toward the masculine end of the spectrum and further away from the feminine (101). (Giorcelli 1988): 121.

**[36.42]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna's gift of herself is declined by Robert (101). (Ewell 1988): Edna tries to explain to Robert that nobody has the ability to set her free (91). (Giorcelli 1988): 117, 134. (Jacobs 1988): Edna wants to avoid the social standard of marriage (111). (Lattin 1988): 43. (Walker 1988): Robert leaves because he cannot understand the freedom with which Edna speaks (72). (Stange 1989): Edna expresses her freedom to give or not give herself as she chooses (146). Edna has refused her husband in order to have the freedom to give herself when and to whom she chooses (150). (Amin 1995): Edna does not define herself by being someone's wife or lover (78). (Block 1995): The intimacy between Edna and Robert is destroyed when she finally begins to talk about her feelings (215). (Ghosh 1995): 237-38). (Jacobs 1995): It is only through Robert's love and her discoveries of her own sexuality that she considers herself her own person (108). (Juneja 1995): Robert does not understand the importance of Edna's words (119). (Paul 1995): Edna's selfhood cannot be found in one other person, but she feels compelled to give herself to Robert in a moment of passion (46). (Ramamoorthi 1995): Edna learns that the freedom she so desperately wanted can be another form of bondage (185). (Stange 1995): Because she chooses to no longer sleep with her husband, Edna feels she can have sex with whomever she chooses (29). (Triksa 1995): Edna rejects anything that impedes her own free will (153). (Vevaina 1995): Even Robert cannot understand Edna's need for independence and is shocked at her remark (86).

**[36.43]** (Delbanco 1988): Robert's first glimpse of Edna's sexuality embarrasses him (95).

(Block 1995): Edna's bold announcement upsets Robert (215).

**[36.49]** (Showalter 1988): 50. (Amin 1995): It is only a short time before Edna rejects Robert (77). (Paul 1995): Edna demands a commitment from Robert (54). (Viswanath 1995): 132.

**[36.51]** (Block 1995): Robert wants Edna to be his, rather than recognizing her independence (211).

## **CHAPTER 37**

**[37.1]** Edna looked in at the drug store. Monsieur Ratignolle was putting up a mixture himself, very carefully, dropping a red liquid into a tiny glass. He was grateful to Edna for having come; her presence would be a comfort to his wife. Madame Ratignolle's sister, who had always been with her at such trying times, had not been able to come up from the plantation, and Adèle had been inconsolable until Mrs. Pontellier so kindly promised to come to her. The nurse

had been with them at night for the past week, as she lived a great distance away. And Dr. Mandelet had been coming and going all the afternoon. They were then looking for him any moment.

[37.2] Edna hastened upstairs by a private stairway that led from the rear of the store to the apartments above. The children were all sleeping in a back room. Madame Ratignolle was in the salon, whither she had strayed in her suffering impatience. She sat on the sofa, clad in an ample white *peignoir*, holding a handkerchief tight in her hand with a nervous clutch. Her face was drawn and pinched, her sweet blue eyes haggard and unnatural. All her beautiful hair had been drawn back and plaited. It lay in a long braid on the sofa pillow, coiled like a golden serpent. The nurse, a comfortable looking *Griffe* woman in white apron and cap, was urging her to return to her bedroom.

[37.3] "There is no use, there is no use," she said at once to Edna. "We must get rid of Mandelet; he is getting too old and careless. He said he would be here at half-past seven; now it must be eight. See what time it is, Josephine."

[37.4] The woman was possessed of a cheerful nature, and refused to take any situation too seriously, especially a situation with which she was so familiar. She urged Madame to have courage and patience. But Madame only set her teeth hard into her under lip, and Edna saw the sweat gather in beads on her white forehead. After a moment or two she uttered a profound sigh and wiped her face with the handkerchief rolled in a ball. She appeared exhausted. The nurse gave her a fresh handkerchief, sprinkled with cologne water.

**[37.5]** "This is too much!" she cried. "Mandelet ought to be killed! Where is Alphonse? Is it possible I am to be abandoned like this-neglected by every one?"

**[37.6]** "Neglected, indeed!" exclaimed the nurse. Wasn't she there? And here was Mrs. Pontellier leaving, no doubt, a pleasant evening at home to devote to her? And wasn't Monsieur Ratignolle coming that very instant through the hall? And Josephine was quite sure she had heard Doctor Mandelet's coupe. Yes, there it was, down at the door.

**[37.7]** Adèle consented to go back to her room. She sat on the edge of a little low couch next to her bed.

**[37.8]** Doctor Mandelet paid no attention to Madame Ratignolle's upbraidings. He was accustomed to them at such times, and was too well convinced of her loyalty to doubt it.

**[37.9]** He was glad to see Edna, and wanted her to go with him into the salon and entertain him. But Madame Ratignolle would not consent that Edna should leave her for an instant. Between agonizing moments, she chatted a little, and said it took her mind off her sufferings.

**[37.10]** Edna began to feel uneasy. She was seized with a vague dread. Her own like experiences seemed far away, unreal, and only half remembered. She recalled faintly an ecstasy of pain, the heavy odor of chloroform, a stupor which had deadened sensation, and an awakening to find a little new life to which she had given being, added to the great unnumbered multitude of souls

that come and go.

**[37.11]** She began to wish she had not come; her presence was not necessary. She might have invented a pretext for staying away; she might even invent a pretext now for going. But Edna did not go. With an inward agony, with a flaming, outspoken revolt against the ways of Nature, she witnessed the scene of torture.

**[37.12]** She was still stunned and speechless with emotion when later she leaned over her friend to kiss her and softly say good-by. Adèle, pressing her cheek, whispered in an exhausted voice: "Think of the children, Edna. Oh think of the children! Remember them!"

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 37

**[37.2]** (Giorcelli 1988): In this last scene in which Adele appears, she resembles Medusa, showing her dark side (137). (Lattin 1988): Edna's impression of Adele's hair shows her repugnance to nature (43).

**[37.8]** (Jacobsen 1989): 120.

**[37.9]** (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet considers Adele's pain to be what nature intended;

therefore he is not upset by seeing her in pain (120).

**[37.10]** (Giorcelli 1988): 133. (Showalter 1988): This is the first time Edna associates herself with another woman's agony (50). (Jacobsen 1989): Adele's delivery is different from the experiences of delivery that Edna remembers because Adele was not given any anesthesia. This was common for women of a lower socio-economic class than Edna's (120). (Stange 1989): By shutting out the memory of childbearing, Edna disconnects herself from the role of mother (148).

**[37.11]** (Franklin 1988): Edna is taken away from her spiritual labor by the physical labor of Adele (148). (Gremillion 1989): By contrasting Edna's world with the birth of a child, Chopin presents the irony of humanity which Edna cannot understand: that there are always limits and pain in life and that one cannot have the power of life without them (173). (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet tries to lessen the shock of Adele's delivery (101) (122-123). (Paul 1995): Edna rejects the roles that nature forces on women (58).

**[37.12]** (Dyer 1988): 128. (Franklin 1988): Edna could be thinking of future children as well as her current children (148). (Jacobs 1988): Adele presses Edna to make a decision by urging her to consider her children (111). (Rowe 1989): 11. (Stange 1989): 147. Edna is besieged by the sight of Adele in childbirth (154). (Bande 1995): Edna needs to be understood by Adele (161). (Block 1995): Adele uses the children to make Edna feel that it is nature's design for women to be mothers (212). (Jacob 1995): Adele is willing to bear

the pain of childbirth for her children, whereas Edna gives up everything, including her children, as she walks into the sea (106). (Stange 1995): Even after the pain of childbirth, Adele exhibits her maternal nature as she tells Edna to think of her children first (30).

## CHAPTER 38

**[38.1]** Edna still felt dazed when she got outside in the open air. The Doctor's coupe had returned for him and stood before the *porte cochère*. She did not wish to enter the coupe, and told Doctor Mandelet she would walk; she was not afraid, and would go alone. He directed his carriage to meet him at Mrs. Pontellier's, and he started to walk home with her.

**[38.2]** Up--away up, over the narrow street between the tall houses, the stars were blazing. The air was mild and caressing, but cool with the breath of spring and the night. They walked slowly, the Doctor with a heavy, measured tread and his hands behind him; Edna, in an absent-minded way, as she had walked one night at Grand Isle, as if her thoughts had gone ahead of her and she was striving to overtake them.

**[38.3]** "You shouldn't have been there, Mrs. Pontellier," he said. "That was no place for you. Adèle is full of whims at such times. There were a dozen



women she might have had with her, unimpressionable women. I felt that it was cruel, cruel. You shouldn't have gone."

**[38.4]** "Oh, well!" she answered, indifferently. "I don't know that it matters after all. One has to think of the children some time or other; the sooner the better."

**[38.5]** "When is Léonce coming back?"

**[38.6]** "Quite soon. Some time in March."

**[38.7]** "And you are going abroad?"

**[38.8]** "Perhaps--no, I am not going. I'm not going to be forced into doing things. I don't want to go abroad. I want to be let alone. Nobody has any right--except children, perhaps--and even then, it seems to me--or it did seem--" She felt that her speech was voicing the incoherency of her thoughts, and stopped abruptly.

**[38.9]** "The trouble is," sighed the Doctor, grasping her meaning intuitively, "that youth is given up to illusions. It seems to be a provision of Nature; a decoy to secure mothers for the race. And Nature takes no account of moral consequences, of arbitrary conditions which we create, and which we feel obliged to maintain at any cost."

**[38.10]** "Yes," she said. "The years that are gone seem like dreams--if one might go on sleeping and dreaming--but to wake up and find--oh! well! perhaps it is better to wake up after all, even to suffer, rather than to remain a dupe to illusions all one's life."

**[38.11]** "It seems to me, my dear child," said the Doctor at parting, holding her hand, "you seem to me to be in trouble. I am not going to ask for your confidence. I will only say that if ever you feel moved to give it to me, perhaps I might help you. I know I would understand, And I tell you there are not many who would--not many, my dear."

**[38.12]** "Some way I don't feel moved to speak of things that trouble me. Don't think I am ungrateful or that I don't appreciate your sympathy. There are periods of despondency and suffering which take possession of me. But I don't want anything but my own way. That is wanting a good deal, of course, when you have to trample upon the lives, the hearts, the prejudices of others--but no matter--still, I shouldn't want to trample upon the little lives. Oh! I don't know what I'm saying, Doctor. Good night. Don't blame me for anything."

**[38.13]** "Yes, I will blame you if you don't come and see me soon. We will talk of things you never have dreamt of talking about before. It will do us both good. I don't want you to blame yourself, whatever comes. Good night, my child."

**[38.14]** She let herself in at the gate, but instead of entering she sat upon the step of the porch. The night was quiet and soothing. All the tearing emotion of the last few hours seemed to fall away from her like a somber, uncomfortable garment, which she had but to loosen to be rid of. She went back to that hour before Adèle had sent for her; and her senses kindled afresh in thinking of Robert's words, the pressure of his arms, and the feeling of his lips upon her

own. She could picture at that moment no greater bliss on earth than possession of the beloved one. His expression of love had already given him to her in part. When she thought that he was there at hand, waiting for her, she grew numb with the intoxication of expectancy. It was so late; he would be asleep perhaps. She would awaken him with a kiss. She hoped he would be asleep that she might arouse him with her caresses.

**[38.15]** Still, she remembered Adèle's voice whispering, "Think of the children; think of them." She meant to think of them; that determination had driven into her soul like a death wound--but not to-night. To-morrow would be time to think of everything.

**[38.16]** Robert was not waiting for her in the little parlor. He was nowhere at hand. The house was empty. But he had scrawled on a piece of paper that lay in the lamplight:

**[38.17]** "I love you. Good-by--because I love you."

**[38.18]** Edna grew faint when she read the words. She went and sat on the sofa. Then she stretched herself out there, never uttering a sound. She did not sleep. She did not go to bed. The lamp sputtered and went out. She was still awake in the morning, when Celestine unlocked the kitchen door and came in to light the fire.

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## NOTES TO CHAPTER 38

**[38.2]** (Giorcelli 1988): These lines indicate Edna's futile efforts to become a complete person (119).

**[38.3]** (Jacobsen 1989): 122.

**[38.4]** (Jacobs 1988): 111.

**[38.8]** (Gilmore 1988): Edna is doing nothing more than demanding the same rights that men have always had (83). (Gremillion 1989): Edna finally realizes that having her desires met is impossible (173). (Jacobsen 1989): Edna's fumbling speech emphasizes her epiphany in realizing her role in the whole scheme of life (101). (Balliwala 1995): Edna feels Dr. Mandelet's compassion and feels comfortable telling him a little about the chaos going on inside her (200). (Block 1995): Dr. Mandelet responds to Edna's language, asking her to be open with him (208). (Paul 1995): This declaration is the next step in Edna's search for self-esteem (47). Edna feels that Dr. Mandelet is the one person who understands her feelings (61).

**[38.9]** (Ewell 1988): Dr. Mandelet understands that for young Victorian women, romance and passion are illusions and a source of confusion (92). (Giorcelli 1988): Dr. Mandelet forces Edna to look at reality rather than be content with her usual daydreaming (111).

(Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandeleet views childbirth as a trap for women, not as a source of power for them (116; 122-123). (Amin 1995): Edna realizes that passionate love lasts only long enough to leave children behind to be cared for ever after (76). (Vevaina 1995): The conversation between Edna and Dr. Mandeleet suggests a change in the old beliefs about the true meaning of life and also implies that the old Creole social mores are outdated (100).

**[38.10]** (Dyer 1988): 129. (Giorcelli 1988): It seems that Edna is only occasionally in touch with reality, while most of the time she is confused and uncertain (110). (Jacobsen 1989): 122. (Ghosh 1995): Edna tells Dr. Mandeleet that what she needs is the freedom to be an individual (234). (Jacob 1995): Edna does not regret her actions (108). (Juneja 1995): 120. (Paul 1995): Edna realizes that the gain of awakening is better than living in a world of illusions (47). (Poovalingam 1995): Edna finds her new awareness more than she can bear (226). (Vevaina 1995): 100.

**[38.11]** (George 1988): Dr. Mandeleet treats Edna as an inferior person (55). (Jacobsen 1989): 101, 123.

**[38.12]** (Delbanco 1988): Edna knows that she has lost her battle (103-104). (Dyer 1988): 128. (Gilmore 1988): Chopin forces the reader to ask why women feel that they must be like everyone else (83). (Jacobs 1988): 111. (Jacobsen 1989): Her own way also includes Edna's control over her own sexuality (105). (LeFew 1989): Freely expressing her desires

and passions would upset not only her life, but the lives of those around her; Edna knows this, but she cannot run away from her desires and passions (81). (Block 1995): 216.

(Block 1995): It is ironic that Edna feels this way because, in the end, she hurts her children by committing suicide (217). (Ghosh 1995): 234-36). (Paul 1995): Edna feels that no one except a woman's children has the right to make demands of her (58).

**[38.13]** (George 1988): It is already too late for Edna when Dr. Mandelet offers to talk with her (59). (Giorcelli 1988): Dr. Mandelet can be viewed as the foil to Edna's father (111). (Block 1995): Dr. Mandelet asks Edna to speak openly with him, showing that he is responsive to her voice (208).

**[38.14]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna thinks of her raging emotions as an "uncomfortable garment" (124). (Showalter 1988): Edna's moments of excitement are countered by depression and daydreaming (48). (Amin 1995): 76, 77.

**[38.15]** (Jacobs 1988): Edna finds it difficult to live with the guilt caused by her children (111). (Amin 1995): 77. (Paul 1995): The drudgery of responsibility and Edna's need to be free put her children in the position of adversaries (58).

**[38.17]** (Ewell 1988): Robert is unable to accept the reality of the situation (92). (Gilmore 1988): 80. (Seidel 1989): This is the only one of Robert's letters that Edna reads without Mademoiselle Reisz to give her interpretation or comments (98). (Juneja 1995): The note

represents Robert's reasons for leaving Edna a second time. His actions are governed by the morals of society; he knows that it is disreputable to have an affair with a married woman (119). (Paul 1995): Robert's note is not that of a man of principle, but rather the voice of a coward (54). (Triha 1995): Robert's note shows that he cannot go against social standards and mores and also that he does not completely understand Edna (154). (Vevaina 1995): Robert's note shatters Edna's illusion about love and induces her decision to end her life (98).

[38.18] (Bande1995): The lamp is symbolic for Edna, for it goes out as the fire is lit (166).

## CHAPTER 39

[39.1] Victor, with hammer and nails and scraps of scantling, was patching a corner of one of the galleries. Mariequita sat near by, dangling her legs, watching him work, and handing him nails from the tool-box. The sun was beating down upon them. The girl had covered her head with her apron folded into a square pad. They had been talking for an hour or more. She was never tired of hearing Victor describe the dinner at Mrs. Pontellier's. He exaggerated

every detail, making it appear a veritable Lucullean feast. The flowers were in tubs, he said. The champagne was quaffed from huge golden goblets. Venus rising from the foam could have presented no more entrancing a spectacle than Mrs. Pontellier, blazing with beauty and diamonds at the head of the board, while the other women were all of them youthful houris, possessed of incomparable charms.

**[39.2]** She got it into her head that Victor was in love with Mrs. Pontellier, and he gave her evasive answers, framed so as to confirm her belief. She grew sullen and cried a little, threatening to go off and leave him to his fine ladies. There were a dozen men crazy about her at the *Chénière*; and since it was the fashion to be in love with married people, why, she could run away any time she liked to New Orleans with Céлина's husband.

**[39.3]** Céлина's husband was a fool, a coward, and a pig, and to prove it to her, Victor intended to hammer his head into a jelly the next time he encountered him. This assurance was very consoling to Mariequita. She dried her eyes, and grew cheerful at the prospect.

**[39.4]** They were still talking of the dinner and the allurements of city life when Mrs. Pontellier herself slipped around the corner of the house. The two youngsters stayed dumb with amazement before what they considered to be an apparition. But it was really she in flesh and blood, looking tired and a little travel-stained.

**[39.5]** "I walked up from the wharf", she said, "and heard the hammering.



I supposed it was you, mending the porch. It's a good thing. I was always tripping over those loose planks last summer. How dreary and deserted everything looks!"

[39.6] It took Victor some little time to comprehend that she had come in Beaufort's lugger, that she had come alone, and for no purpose but to rest.

[39.7] "There's nothing fixed up yet, you see. I'll give you my room; it's the only place."

[39.8] "Any corner will do," she assured him.

[39.9] "And if you can stand Philomel's cooking," he went on, "though I might try to get her mother while you are here. Do you think she would come?" turning to Mariequita.

[39.10] Mariequita thought that perhaps Philomel's mother might come for a few days, and money enough.

[39.11] Beholding Mrs. Pontellier make her appearance, the girl had at once suspected a lovers' rendezvous. But Victor's astonishment was so genuine, and Mrs. Pontellier's indifference so apparent, that the disturbing notion did not lodge long in her brain. She contemplated with the greatest interest this woman who gave the most sumptuous dinners in America, and who had all the men in New Orleans at her feet.

[39.12] "What time will you have dinner?" asked Edna. "I'm very hungry; but don't get anything extra."

[39.13] "I'll have it ready in little or no time," he said, bustling and

packing away his tools. "You may go to my room to brush up and rest yourself. Mariequita will show you."

**[39.14]** "Thank you", said Edna. "But, do you know, I have a notion to go down to the beach and take a good wash and even a little swim, before dinner?"

**[39.15]** "The water is too cold!" they both exclaimed. "Don't think of it."

**[39.16]** "Well, I might go down and try--dip my toes in. Why, it seems to me the sun is hot enough to have warmed the very depths of the ocean. Could you get me a couple of towels? I'd better go right away, so as to be back in time. It would be a little too chilly if I waited till this afternoon."

**[39.17]** Mariequita ran over to Victor's room, and returned with some towels, which she gave to Edna.

**[39.18]** "I hope you have fish for dinner," said Edna, as she started to walk away; "but don't do anything extra if you haven't."

**[39.19]** "Run and find Philomel's mother," Victor instructed the girl. "I'll go to the kitchen and see what I can do. By Gimminy! Women have no consideration! She might have sent me word."

**[39.20]** Edna walked on down to the beach rather mechanically, not noticing anything special except that the sun was hot. She was not dwelling upon any particular train of thought. She had done all the thinking which was necessary after Robert went away, when she lay awake upon the sofa till morning.

**[39.21]** She had said over and over to herself: "To-day it is Arobin;

to-morrow it will be some one else. It makes no difference to me, it doesn't matter about Léonce Pontellier--but Raoul and Etienne!" She understood now clearly what she had meant long ago when she said to Adèle Ratignolle that she would give up the unessential, but she would never sacrifice herself for her children.

**[39.22]** Despondency had come upon her there in the wakeful night, and had never lifted. There was no one thing in the world that she desired. There was no human being whom she wanted near her except Robert; and she even realized that the day would come when he, too, and the thought of him would melt out of her existence, leaving her alone. The children appeared before her like antagonists who had overcome her; who had overpowered and sought to drag her into the soul's slavery for the rest of her days. But she knew a way to elude them. She was not thinking of these things when she walked down to the beach.

**[39.23]** The water of the Gulf stretched out before her, gleaming with the million lights of the sun. The voice of the sea is seductive, never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander in abysses of solitude. All along the white beach, up and down, there was no living thing in sight. A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water.

**[39.24]** Edna had found her old bathing suit still hanging, faded, upon its accustomed peg.

**[39.25]** She put it on, leaving her clothing in the bath-house. But when she was there beside the sea, absolutely alone, she cast the unpleasant, pricking garments from her, and for the first time in her life she stood naked in the open air, at the mercy of the sun, the breeze that beat upon her, and the waves that invited her.

**[39.26]** How strange and awful it seemed to stand naked under the sky! how delicious! She felt like some new-born creature, opening its eyes in a familiar world that it had never known.

**[39.27]** The foamy wavelets curled up to her white feet, and coiled like serpents about her ankles. She walked out. The water was chill, but she walked on. The water was deep, but she lifted her white body and reached out with a long, sweeping stroke. The touch of the sea is sensuous, enfolding the body in its soft, close embrace.

**[39.28]** She went on and on. She remembered the night she swam far out, and recalled the terror that seized her at the fear of being unable to regain the shore. She did not look back now, but went on and on, thinking of the blue-grass meadow that she had traversed when a little child, believing that it had no beginning and no end.

**[39.29]** Her arms and legs were growing tired.

**[39.30]** She thought of Léonce and the children. They were a part of her life. But they need not have thought that they could possess her, body and soul. How Mademoiselle Reisz would have laughed, perhaps sneered, if she knew!

"And you call yourself an artist! What pretensions, Madame! The artist must possess the courageous soul that dares and defies."

**[39.31]** Exhaustion was pressing upon and overpowering her.

**[39.32]** "Good-by--because I love you." He did not know; he did not understand. He would never understand. Perhaps Doctor Mandelet would have understood if she had seen him--but it was too late; the shore was far behind her, and her strength was gone.

**[39.33]** She looked into the distance, and the old terror flamed up for an instant, then sank again. Edna heard her father's voice and her sister Margaret's. She heard the barking of an old dog that was chained to the sycamore tree. The spurs of the cavalry officer clanged as he walked across the porch. There was the hum of bees, and the musky odor of pinks filled the air.

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#### NOTES TO CHAPTER 39

**[39.1]** (Dyer 1988): Some of Chopin's metaphors are similar to ones by Herman Melville (127). (Giorcelli 1988): Victor acted the part of Dionysus so well at Edna's party that he used the incident to make Mariequita jealous (130). (Morris and Dunn 1988): 96.

**[39.2]** (Solomon 1988): Mariequita's attitude is a direct contrast to that of Edna (116).

[39.11] (Jacobs 1988): 112.

[39.14] (Jacobs 1988): 112.

[39.16] (Jacobs 1988): 112.

[39.20] (Giorcelli 1988): The mystery around Edna's suicide allows for many different interpretations since she had nothing certain in her thoughts (139). (Jacobs 1988): 112.

[39.21] (Bonner 1988): 103. (Delbanco 1988): Edna begins to distinguish that there is a difference in the life that she was given and the prospect of designing her own life. The novel's most important question is the following: what makes an essential self? (95).

(Giorcelli 1988): 133-34. (Lattin 1988): In Edna's new state of selfhood, she understands for the first time the true meaning of her statement (43). (Solomon 1988): Edna's behavior with men is seen as similar to Mrs. Highcamp's (117). (Jacobsen 1989): 121. (Bande

1995): Edna is a woman who admonishes herself (166). (Block 1995): Instead of trying to find a satisfying relationship, Edna denies all relationship by committing suicide (217).

(Ghosh 1995): 235. Edna evaluates her life as she welcomes death (239). (Jacob 1995): 108. (Ramamoorthi 1995): 181.

[39.22] (Delbanco 1988): Edna's walk into the sea takes her out of limbo (104). (Dyer 1988): 128-29. (Ewell 1988): 92. (Giorcelli 1988): Edna's love is directed toward the sea

and the sun (122). (Jacobs 1988): 112. (Martin 1988): Edna's anger at her position as a female in a male-dominated world is expressed in the form of depression (23). (Showalter 1988): Edna evades life's responsibilities by drowning in the ocean (33). (50). (Gremillion 1989): Edna finally realizes that she cannot control her future (174). (Jacobsen 1989): The acknowledgment that her children are antagonists results from the childbirth scene (122). (Rowe 1989): Edna feels her children are antagonists only because they belong not to her but to a patriarchal legal system that rules her home (18). (Stange 1989): 154. (Amin 1995): Edna feels that children result from passionate love, remaining after the love fades to be cared for ever after (76). Chopin does not allow enough time between Edna's confession of her love for Robert and her dismissal of him (77). Edna's attitude towards her children is still as unsure at her death as it was while she was alive (78). (Jacob 1995): Suicide is the only way Edna has to escape her children (106; 108). (Juneja 1995): Edna can now relate to others as her own person rather than as someone's wife or mistress, allowing her to realize that one day she will no longer want Robert (120). (Poovalingam 1995): Edna does not believe in a chance of romantic fulfillment (226). (Viswanath 1995): Edna feels that the comfort of the sea is her only way out (132).

**[39.23]** (Dyer 1988): 129. (Gilmore 1988): 80. (Morris and Dunn 1988): 95. (Greer 1989): The sea is the foremost image in the novel (54) (56). (Jones 1989): The bird has a broken wing, although Mademoiselle Reisz told Edna that she had strong wings (70). (Amin 1995): The sea speaks to Edna's soul, encouraging it to roam the chasm of solitude (70). (Jacob 1995): The bird with the broken wing destroys Edna's vision of a new

beginning (109). (Juneja 1995): Edna is not thinking; she is only aware of her physical environment (120). (Paul 1995): This image brings to Edna's mind what Mademoiselle Reisz told her: the journey is what is important, not the destination (65). (Ramamoorthi 1995): Edna has thrown away her disguise, her social facade, and is delighted in her nakedness (180). The naked body mirrors the soul that has yearned to meet with Edna (180). (Tripathi 1995): Chopin uses the sea as the most stimulating energy behind Edna's intense spiritual awakening (154). (Vevaina 1995): Edna's opinion of the sea has changed from viewing it as a kind of threat to seeing it as a kind of invitation (99). (Viswanath 1995): 132.

**[39.25]** (Giorcelli 1988): 123. (Martin 1988): Edna's suicide is not intentional; rather, she is a passive character who is drawn into the sea (23). (Showalter 1988): 33. (Gremillion 1989): In the ocean Edna totally gives herself up to the possibility of an egocentric world (174). (Ghosh 1995): 240. (Gopalan 1995): Edna's suicide is her answer to all the insufficiencies of life. She chooses death over a life of dissatisfaction (177). (Juneja 1995): By taking off her clothes, Edna is ridding herself of all ties to social standards (121). (Paul 1995): Edna experiences a feeling of rebirth (64).

**[39.26]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna's dilemma becomes that of balancing opposites (122) (125). (Lattin 1988): Chopin hints of Edna's suicide as being the only way for her to maintain her reborn status (44). (Ghosh 1995): 240. (Jacob 1995): 108. (Juneja 1995): 121. (Paul 1995): 63. (Ramamoorthi 1995): The sea can symbolize both birth and death



(182).

**[39.27]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna is seduced by the sea under the sun (124). In the inner world, the serpent symbolizes rebirth, renewal and spiritual enlargement (134). (Martin 1988): Edna's suicide is not intentional; rather, she is a passive character who is drawn into the sea (23). (Greer 1989): 54. (Rowe 1989): Submerging her body into the sea enables Edna to feel the wholeness of her body (2).

**[39.28]** (Greer 1989): 57. (Gremillion 1989): In the ocean, Edna can act as if she lives in a world free of consequence (174). The ocean entices Edna to a world that is not real (175). (Ramamoorthi 1995): 182.

**[39.30]** (Giorcelli 1988): Edna has only half of what it takes to be an artist (119). (Martin 1988): 22. Because she is trapped by society's constraints, Edna is forced to escape; however, she does not willfully commit suicide (23). (Seidel 1989): 89. Edna's last thought of Mademoiselle is of one who would understand her, although she would also laugh at Edna (99). (Balliwala 1995): 191. Chopin herself probably resented the restrictions on her freedom that marriage and children caused (200). (Block 1995): Edna's behavior towards her children should not lead her to think that they possess her (216). (Ghosh 1995): Edna's last thoughts are about Leonce and the children (240). (Jacob 1995): Suicide is Edna's only way to keep herself free from the obligations of her husband and children (106; 107; 109). (Juneja 1995): Edna realizes that success is not guaranteed,

even to one who is daring and defiant (121). (Viswanath 1995): Edna is more in need of human relationships than Mademoiselle Reisz and will not settle for less than her complete freedom (132).

[39.31] (Martin 1988): Edna's suicide is not deliberate; rather, she passively descends into death, just as she floats along in life (23).

[39.32] (Jacobs 1988): 113. (Martin 1988): With her final words, Edna leaves the message that society's traditions cannot maintain and/or nurture the new woman (23). (Greer 1989): 54. (Jacobsen 1989): Dr. Mandelet was the only person who might have helped Edna understand herself (101). (Amin 1995): 77.

[39.33] (Jacobs 1988): Edna embodies the wish of every baby as she glides into mankind's common womb, the sea (113). (Showalter 1988): Drowning is a metaphor for femininity because of all the fluids the female body produces (52). (Thornton 1988): 143. (LeFew 1989): The final mental images Edna sees prove how tightly bound she is to her past and its memories, so she dies as connected to the world as she was on the day of her first swim (82). (Jacob 1995): The scenes of nature that flash through Edna's mind leave the reader to choose whether Edna's death is liberation or a backward-looking delusion (109). (Juneja 1995): Is Edna looking for the security of childhood or snubbing the present because she is unable to think that there is a future? (121). (Paul 1995): 65. (Ramamoorthi 1995): Chopin romanticizes Edna's death; there is no pain, only lovely sounds and aromas

(180). Her death is her rebellious choice to rid herself from the demands of social mores

(180). Edna's drowning signifies a ritualized rebirth, as death by water sometimes does

(181-82).

SEPARATE COMMENTS ON CHARACTERS  
AND OTHER SPECIFIC FEATURES OF THE NOVEL

ALCEE AROBIN: (Balliwala 1995): Alcee takes advantage of Edna's emotional weakness by seducing her (197).

THE COLONEL (EDNA'S FATHER): The Colonel, an arrogant and ostentatious patriarch, is actually unintelligent and crude (199).

DR. MANDELET: (Giorcelli 1988): Dr. Mandelet's name is a pun on "Mandalay," the mystic bay of Burma, a symbol of Eastern wisdom (112). His name may also stand for the French word for hand (127). (Balliwala 1995): Dr. Mandelet is prudent and compassionate, a different type of patriarch than Edna's father or Leonce (200).

EDNA: (Vevaina 1995): Edna personifies the Persephone and Aphrodite archetypes (83).

LEONCE: (Rowe 1989): Leonce signifies more than simply the usual threats of industrial capitalism to factory and domestic workers (7). (Amin 1995): Leonce, a husband who is proud of his many possessions, considers Edna his most beautiful and precious asset (70). (Balliwala 1995): Leonce is so completely dominated by social standards that he cannot operate outside of them (199). Stange (1995): Leonce regards himself as Edna's owner

(21).

ROBERT LEBRUN: (Amin 1995): It is Robert who stirs in Edna the realization of herself as her own person, not simply a piece of property belonging to her husband (70).

(Balliwala 1995): Robert represents Eros because he admits his love for Edna, knowing that he must not stay with her (194). Robert is also a bit of a Christ figure because Robert helps Edna to grow to believe in herself (195). He takes Edna on a metaphorical outing and, after a deep sleep, they share bread and wine (195).

VICTOR LEBRUN: (Giorcelli 1988): In Latin Victor means "winner." He is the youngest of all the men who flirt with Edna. (Balliwala 1995): Victor is Dionysus to Robert's Eros. Dionysus is linked to Christ through the mystery of wine and blood (197).

ADELE RATIGNOLLE: (Balliwala 1995): Adele is a caring, nurturing woman who is not very intelligent. She is content to live in the role created for her by society (192). (Vevaina 1995): Adele personifies the Demeter archetype (83).

MADemoiselle REISZ: (Lattin 1988): One of Edna's role models, Reisz is single, childless, somewhat asexual, ugly, and disagreeable (42). (Showalter 1988): Reisz is a rebel who is bold and free-spoken and who has no respect for social mores, breaking the basic rules of womanhood (46). (Balliwala 1995): Reisz is obviously a substitute for Edna's unconscious (191). (Block 1995): Reisz demands her independence by declining

to meet the needs of others (205). (Vevaina 1995): Reisz personifies the Artemis archetype (83).

THE SEA: (Amin 1995): It is the sea that Chopin uses to coax Edna's awakening and also her suicide (70).

## CONCLUSION

The process of gathering information for this thesis, reading how critics analyze *The Awakening*, and paraphrasing what they wrote about Chopin's novel has made it apparent that although there is sometimes general agreement about certain characters, topics, and passages, there are also often widely different views of those same characters, topics, and passages. For instance, some critics feel that Leonce Pontellier is a domineering, arrogant man, while others see him largely as a victim. As a way of concluding my thesis experience, I want to share some of what I have learned about the different interpretations of certain aspects of *The Awakening*, especially concerning some of the passages, the characters, the setting, and Edna's suicide.

Chopin chooses to place her heroine in only two locales, a Gulf Coast island and New Orleans, both of which have often been considered truly romantic locations. While the coastal sea is the foremost image in the novel, critics often note that Chopin frequently uses it to imply Edna's sensuality. Amina Amin, for instance, feels that it is the sea's seductiveness that pulls Edna towards her self-realization (71); without the influence of the sea (this critic suggests), Edna would never have found her own true self. In fact, a vast number of the critics consulted here use the word "seduction" when they write about Chopin's presentation of the sea. Not only do such critics argue that the sea seduces Edna, but Patricia Hopkins Lattin even comments that the sea also seduces the reader into a deeper thoughtfulness (40). Penelope A. LeFew, meanwhile, says that the sea symbolizes the ebb and flow of Edna's psyche (80), establishing a rhythm which the reader cannot help but notice. Critics often see the sea as symbolizing birth and new life, and

certainly Chopin hints at this as Edna gains self-confidence and independence as she learns to swim. At first, Edna sees the sea as a dangerous threat because she does not know how to swim, but after she does learn to swim (critics usually agree) she seems "re-born." Jo Ellen Jacobs, for instance, says that Edna embodies the wish of every baby as she glides into mankind's common womb, the sea (113). Many commentators argue that Chopin presents the sea as both comforting and dangerous. Coomi S. Vevaina, for example, writes that Edna's opinion of the sea changes from seeing it as a threat of harm to regarding it as inviting (99). He argues that once Edna feels the sensuality of the sea, it often invites her in for a swim and then, of course, it invites her to end her life in its comforting waters. In a different view, Joyce Dyer feels that Edna connects the sea with death (130).

The other locale that Chopin emphasizes in *The Awakening* is New Orleans, a city commonly known for its romantic aura. Edna escapes her strict Presbyterian background by marrying Leonce Pontellier and moving to New Orleans, but rather than finding a romantic life there, she finds one of domination and responsibility. Suzanne W. Jones writes that Edna's life in New Orleans is (ironically) rigid, planned, and programmed (59). The contrast between the free and easy lifestyle at Grand Isle and the rigid, demanding lifestyle in New Orleans helps the reader to understand why, after Edna discovers her true self, she can no longer endure the confines of her old way of life.

While most commentators seem to agree, however, about Chopin's use of setting in this novel, Edna's suicide is a topic that critics often view quite differently. Some feel that Edna's suicide results from her own weaknesses. Coomi S. Vevaina, for instance,



believes that Edna's incapacity to cope with life causes her suicide (99). In contrast, many critics, including Susan Jacob, see her suicide as the only way Edna has to escape her children (106). Meanwhile, some commentators feel that the suicide reflects Edna's feelings of guilt over her inability to live as society dictates. Thus Zareen Battiwala points out that, during the suicide, Edna recalls Mlle. Reisz's earlier words about her weakness and therefore realizes her own irresponsibility (189). Similarly, Tina Block writes that instead of trying to find a satisfying relationship, Edna denies all possibility of a relationship by committing suicide (217). However, some critics have raised an even more disturbing possibility by asking a very simple question: does Edna in fact choose death? Wendy Martin thinks that Edna's suicide is not intentional; Martin instead argues that Edna is a passive character who is merely drawn into the sea (23). Martin goes on to explain further that, because Edna is trapped by social constraints, she is forced to escape but does not willfully commit suicide (23). Her demise is not deliberate; instead (Martin believes) she merely descends into death, just as she simply floats along in life (23). In a complete contradiction of Martin's point of view, however, other critics see Edna's suicide as a strong, courageous ending to her life -- an ending she consciously chooses. Patricia Hopkins Lattin, for example, says that Chopin hints of Edna's suicide as the only way for her to maintain her reborn status (44), thus implying that suicide was her only choice. Critics, then, appear to view Edna's suicide either as a deliberately chosen act or as an unplanned seduction.

No matter how differently they view Edna's suicide, however, most critics agree that Edna is a complex woman. Tina Block, for example, writes that Edna, like the

caged parrot described in the novel's opening pages, finds herself often being misunderstood (207). She is (Block claims) misunderstood by practically everyone in the novel; she does not even understand herself or her own motives. Similarly, Cristina Giorcelli believes that Edna is, both ethnically and genetically, a complex person (112). Because of her strict Presbyterian upbringing, Edna does not fit in with the Cajuns at Grand Isle or in New Orleans. She finds it hard to adjust to their freedom in conversation and their relaxed lifestyle. Indeed, V. Bharathi states that Edna's failure to fit in, combined with the other social constraints she faces, creates a feeling of oppression and distress in her soul (95). Meanwhile, another critic, Premila Paul, argues that Edna is different from the Creole women in large part because she is a woman first and a mother second (63). Partly for this reason, many of the critics mention the fact that Edna lives two separate lives. Thus Cristina Giorcelli says that Edna is mentally trapped between two worlds (112), and Suzanne W. Jones writes that because Edna's true identity differs from her conventional social role, she lives two distinct forms of existence (121). In fact, Ganga Viswanath feels that Edna's oppression grows into a feeling of living a false life since Leonce presents himself as a perfect husband (128).

Although the women of Grand Isle might believe that Leonce Pontellier is indeed a perfect husband, most critics, as well as readers, do not. Leonce is often presented as the typical domineering husband of this time period. From the beginning of the novel, according to many commentators, the reader learns that Leonce feels that Edna is a possession, even if a valuable possession. Amina Amin writes that Leonce is proud of his many possessions and considers Edna his most beautiful and precious asset (70).

Margit Stange also states that Leonce regards himself as Edna's owner (21). Zareen Balliwala additionally notes that Leonce views himself as supplier of his family's tangible needs, and nothing more (198). According to this view, Leonce feels that his role is to provide for his family and that Edna's role is to nurture her husband and children. When Edna begins her change (a change which, according to Nibir K. Ghosh, Leonce never notices) Leonce's only concern is what others think. In fact, Wendy Martin writes that Leonce's only concerns about Edna's refusals to entertain visitors are concerns about the damage her refusals pose to his financial status (19). Other critics do, however, believe that Leonce notices the change in Edna, although they disagree about his level of awareness. Zareen Balliwala, for instance, states that Leonce has no clear idea what is happening with Edna or their marriage (199). On the other hand, Tina Block points out that Leonce thinks there is something biologically wrong with Edna because she is not behaving the way he thinks a woman is supposed to behave (206), and so he talks with Dr. Mandelet, hoping to find an easy explanation to what is wrong with Edna. Alternatively, Premila Paul argues that Leonce feels that motherhood is the reason for a woman's existence and that caring for her children is her most important function (56). Therefore Leonce thinks there must be something physically wrong with Edna since she shows so little interest in being a conventional mother. Ultimately it becomes clear that Leonce and Edna have nothing in common, and perhaps it is not even his fault that Edna is dissatisfied with their marriage since, after all, she did not marry him for love.

Edna believes that she is in love with Robert Lebrun. Although Chopin clearly uses Robert to push Edna towards her self-realization, critics nevertheless perceive

him from a variety of perspectives. Zareen Balliwala, for example, sees Robert as representing Eros because he admits his love for Edna, even though he knows he cannot have her (194). Balliwala also sees Robert as a sort of Christ figure who helps Edna to grow to believe in herself, taking her on a metaphorical outing where they sleep and awake to have bread and wine (195), just as Christ did with his disciples. Premila Paul likewise refers to Robert as Edna's soulmate because they share the same interests (48). Andrew Delbanco, in contrast, writes that Robert is something between a joker and a gigolo (93), while Tina Block sees him as fundamentally immature (214). Suzanne W. Jones, conversely, sees Robert almost as a Prince Charming to Edna's Sleeping Beauty (62) -- an explanation which makes perfect sense because both characters like to fantasize. However, Robert is ultimately viewed by many critics as a coward who cannot face his love for Edna.

Another character who arouses varying reactions from critics is Mademoiselle Reisz. Reisz is perceived by some commentators, for instance, as a possible role model for Edna in some respects. Thus, although Patricia Hopkins Lattin points out that Reisz is single, childless, somewhat asexual, ugly, and disagreeable (42), she nonetheless suggests that the pianist's singleness and childlessness are two traits that perhaps Edna both envies and admires in Reisz. Like Edna, Reisz is (according to Elaine Showalter) a rebel who is bold and free-spoken, having no respect for social mores and breaking the basic rules about womanhood (46). Zareen Balliwala likewise feels that Reisz is the embodiment of Edna's rebellious unconscious (191). On the other hand, some critics even see Reisz as a kind of symbolic of a witch. Cristina Giorcelli, for example, is the leading proponent of

this view. She points out that Mademoiselle Reisz, for one thing, is rather grotesque in her physical appearance, a trait which is a frequent characteristic of a witch (136). She also says that Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment resembles the living quarters characteristic of the archetypal bad witch (135-36). Witches are ageless and Giorcelli suggests that Reisz appears to be as old as her ancient furniture (136). Giorcelli even perceives Mademoiselle Reisz's wrinkled hands as resembling those of a witch (136). Patricia Hopkins Lattin agrees but says that although the old woman's fingers are cold (like those of a witch), they nonetheless produce the enchanting music that contributes to Edna's awakening (42). Kathryn Lee Seidel, meanwhile, asserts that the small stove in Mademoiselle Reisz's apartment suggests the mental image of a witch's caldron (95). However, Zareen Battiwala states that although Reisz physically reminds one of the wicked witch in *Sleeping Beauty*, the "witch" in Chopin's novel is not wicked but is, rather, a wise old woman to whom Edna should listen (190). Tina Block similarly contends that Mademoiselle Reisz provides advice for Edna that no one else can, but Block argues that Reisz lacks important qualities that Edna desires, such as love and sexuality (205). According to this view, Mademoiselle Reisz may indeed be a role model for Edna, but she cannot be a complete one, since she lacks any feelings or sensuality.

Another possible role model for Edna is Adele Ratignolle, the archetypal mother-woman. Critics seem to agree that Adele is a caring, nurturing woman who is dedicated to her husband and children and quite content with the role society has created for her. E. Laurie George points out that even the manner in which Adele speaks is typical of the women of this time, since she is polite, chooses topics of domestic interest, and

defers to men (57). Meanwhile, commentators react in strongly different ways when describing the relationship between Adele and Edna. Giorcelli and Stange, for instance, suggest that Edna is attracted to Adele just as a man would be, while Showalter feels that Adele serves as a surrogate mother to Edna (45). Most critics concur that Adele is certainly in some sense a possible role model for Edna, but commentators also concur that Adele is not, finally, a model whom Edna aspires to imitate.

In addition to offering opinions about major characters and important settings, the critics consulted for this study have also often focused great attention on a number of particular passages from Chopin's novel. Sometimes the commentators have differed in their interpretations of such passages, while at other times they have come to a fair degree of consensus. For instance, Chopin gives the reader a physical description of Edna in 2.2. Responding to that description, Dale Marie Bauer and Andrew M. Lakritz write that Chopin depicts Edna as a beautiful, complex woman, although Leonce mainly views her as a valuable piece of property (50). If anything, Leonce regards Edna as even more valuable precisely because of her beauty. However, other commentators respond differently to this same passage. Thus Andrew Delbanco gathers from the same description that Edna's change has already begun (98), while Cristina Giorcelli notes that Chopin's description of Edna indicates that she is an example of neither one nor the other of any one certain thing, but rather falls somewhere in between any imaginable set of oppositions (112). Her hair and eyes, for instance, are neither yellow nor brown, but are in between ("yellowish-brown"), and her eyes suggest an "inward maze of thought." Similarly, Edna's face presents a "contradictory subtle play of features," so it is easy to see why Giorcelli sees

Edna as "neither one nor the other." Chopin's choice of words certainly presents a mental picture of an extraordinary looking woman. N. Poovalingam even feels that Edna's uncertainty is already implied by this description of her face (223), and it is obvious why he feels this way. In this one single passage from the novel, then, a few sentences of physical description have been interpreted in at least four varying ways by four various critics. However, for a different kind of response to a specific passage, one might turn to 3.6, which all the critics consulted (Cherl L. Rose Jacobsen, John Carlos Rowe, Zareen Balliwala, Tina Block, Premila Paul, Nibir K. Ghosh, Parasuram Ramamoorthi, and Ganga Viswanath) interpret in roughly the same way. They all mention Leonce's authority over Edna, and they all note that while his role is that of provider, her role is that of nurturer. They also all mention the guilt he tries to impose on Edna and her feeling of oppression as a result of his reprimands. These two passages, then, illustrate both the widespread variety as well as the widespread agreement that particular sections of *The Awakening* have tended to provoke among Chopin's recent critics.

Another frequently mentioned passage is 7.2, in which Chopin suggests how the changes beginning to take place in Edna are influenced by Adele Ratignolle. The critical commentary sparked by this passage, like the commentary provoked by the physical description of Edna, has been highly varied. Thus Cristina Giorcelli (121) and Margit Stange (143) believe that Edna is attracted to Adele's physical beauty, while Stange also points out that the appearance of a woman's body, especially her hands, reveals the wealth of her husband (25). Elaine Showalter, meanwhile, suggests that Adele helps start Edna on her journey towards self-discovery by showing Edna what female love is like

(45). None of the critics doubts that Adele is a major catalyst of Edna's change, but different commentators tend to interpret Adele's impact in varying ways. This pattern -- of divergence of opinion concerning some passages but consensus of opinion concerning others -- typifies the ways critics have generally responded to specific moments in the novel.

However, Adele Ratignolle is not the only influence on Edna's awakening. Music also has a strong influence on Edna, beginning with Adele's playing and then with that of Mademoiselle Reisz. In passages 9.18 through 9.21, Chopin tells of the effect music has on Edna. Many critics agree that music is an important aspect of the novel. LeFevre, for instance, points out that in this passage Edna allows the music to take her psyche to another place in daydreams (78). Ellis, meanwhile, believes that Mademoiselle Reisz's music is actually what begins Edna's awakening (145). Several of the critics mention that Chopin uses music to chronicle Edna's journey towards self-discovery.

Another analogy used by Chopin to describe Edna's awakening is the process of learning to swim. In 10.7, for example, Chopin tells how thrilled Edna is when she learns to swim, feeling for the first time that she is in complete control of her life. The critics comment on this passage, saying that the act of learning to swim symbolizes Edna's liberation. Ghosh writes that Edna's thrill over the power to control her own body gives her the drive to break the confines that society has placed upon her (235).

Another particular moment that has elicited varying interpretations is the moment when Edna disrobes, readying herself for a nap. Andrew Delbanco views this scene as implying that Edna is learning that self-awareness begins with the sensation of



touch as she rubs her arms and caresses her body (95). Most critics agree with Delbanco that Edna's discovery is a sensual moment. However, Cheryl L. Rose Jacobsen describes the scene in a religious context, saying that the bed serves as an altar, with the scent of laurel functioning as incense as Edna observes a communion of self (105). Meanwhile, Cristina Giorcelli points out that in this scene Edna behaves as if she is a princess in a fairytale rather than a grown woman with a husband and a family (128). Again, one sees how the same scene can provoke a distinctly varying range of interpretations from the critics.

Critical analyses differ also as Edna tries to decide what kind of woman she is in 27.4. According to N. Poovalingam, Edna finds it hard to take herself lightly because of her desires (224). Meanwhile, Usha Bande observes that Edna is unable to find a valid reason for any woman to leave her home and her children (167). Interestingly, however, Suzanne W. Jones believes that even though Edna makes this statement, she never succeeds in the effort to discover what kind of woman she is (66). Here as elsewhere, Chopin places one small paragraph full of meaning -- meaning that can be interpreted as the reader (or critic) deems appropriate.

Perhaps the passage most often commented on by the critics is 37.12, in which Adele pleads with Edna to consider her children. Joyce Dyer (128), Jo Ellen Jacobs (111), John Carlos Rowe (11), Margit Stange (147), and Tina Block (212) agree that Adele, the archetypal mother-woman, is making one last appeal to Edna's conscience to do the right thing. Susan Jacob best summarizes this argument when she says that Adele is willing to bear the pain of childbirth, whereas Edna gives up everything, including her children, as

she walks into the sea (106). Adele's pleading words come back to Edna as she walks into the sea for the final time, and Patricia Hopkins Lattin believes that this is the first time that Edna understands the true meaning of Adele's statement (43).

As one might have expected, there are two polar opposite views of Edna's suicide, with the critics taking one side or the other. Most of the critics concur that Edna feels that the sea is her only way out. Commenting on passages 39.21 through 39.23, Nibir K. Ghosh says that Edna evaluates her life as she welcomes death (239); Susan Jacob views suicide as the only way Edna has to escape her children (106, 108); and Ganga Viswanath states that Edna feels that the comfort of the sea is her only escape (132). Amina Amin feels that the sea speaks to Edna's soul, encouraging it to roam within its chasm of solitude (70). However, a few of the critics feel that suicide was not the choice Edna should have made. Thus Tina Block surmises that instead of trying to find a satisfying relationship, Edna denies all relationships by committing suicide (217). Meanwhile, Elaine Showalter believes that Edna evades life's responsibilities by drowning in the ocean (33).

The more one reads what the critics have to say about *The Awakening*, the more one understands how frequently and drastically opinions often differ, which is one reason this thesis is important. For the undergraduate student, this thesis will serve to help him or her better understand the novel, teaching him or her to read more closely to find deeper meanings. The graduate student will, one hopes, appreciate having such a comprehensive document providing an overview of a much larger collection of critical analysis. The professional academic critic should find this thesis useful as a compilation of many examples critical analysis in one volume, thus saving hours of work and preventing

the likelihood of mere repetition in future analyses. The casual reader, who might not be familiar with Kate Chopin, will ideally find this edition helpful in understanding the details of the novel and providing insights into the mind of Chopin.

It is my hope that this thesis will make not only Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*, but also the best insights about it, more accessible to a wide range of readers, thereby allowing a more gratifying experience in the reading and/or the studying of this marvelous work of an extremely talented woman author. Ideally, my thesis will help ensure that Kate Chopin will continue to be recognized as an exceptionally talented author and as a woman who was indeed ahead of her time.