

SECTION III

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Notes from Underground* by Bruce McInnis

Love, Shame and the Underground Man

The protagonist in Fyodor Dostoyevsky's *Notes From Underground*, published in 1864, is often cited as a prototype of the anti-hero who characterizes much of 20th century literature. Underground Man, who is never named in the story, lives a solitary life in a sordid apartment he refers to as his "mouse hole". There he reads romantic novels and yearns for intimacy. He makes sporadic attempts to socialize with others, but sabotages each attempt through sheer rudeness and arrogance. In the course of the story, he tries to provoke a duel with an army officer, wrecks a convivial farewell party for an old school acquaintance and briefly confides in a prostitute, Liza, whom he later snubs and humiliates.

"We are stillborn, and for a long time, we have been brought into the world by parents who are dead themselves," Underground man writes in the final paragraph of *Notes From Underground* (p. 195). He is not only creating a metaphor for the society of his time, but also describing the psychological forces which have warped him into the grotesque creature that he is. Underground man's parents died when he was very young and he was left in the care of relatives who did not nurture him. On Page 138, he writes, "I had been sent to that school by some distant relatives in whose care I was. I have never heard of them since. I was ... already embittered by their nagging when they dumped me there." Thus he was, in effect, abandoned twice. This accounts for the deep sense of shame which pervades his notes and drives him into his "mouse hole". It also accounts for his painful hypersensitivity to insult and his determination to settle scores over insignificant slights. Children who are orphaned when they are too young to understand the nature of death often believe that their parents deliberately abandoned them because they are deeply flawed and they carry a sense of shame which haunts them throughout their lives. Since they cannot conceive that they may be worthy of love, they experience all relationships as power struggles. This pattern was set in Underground Man's relationship with his first (and last) school friend "I was already a tyrant at heart and wanted to be absolute ruler of his mind ... I'd wanted his total friendship just for the sake of winning it and making him submit to me" (p. 140). He yearns for the love he knew only when he was a very young child and finds some fulfillment in the romantic novels he reads in his "mouse hole", but he is threatened by intimacy because it awakens very old memories of the pain of abandonment. Hence, he habitually seeks relationships, then sabotages them. His early history of neglect has also left him with little conscience or empathy for others because these qualities develop in early childhood through close relationships with parental figures.

Underground Man realizes that he carries a great burden of shame: "the feeling of shame was always present and in the most unspeakable moments, it was like damnation itself" (p. 122). Unlike guilt, which is a sense that one has done something wrong, shame derives from a sense that one *is* something wrong. It does not depend on our perception of ourselves, but on how we think others perceive us. This is evident in Underground Man's hypersensitivity to insult which

he admits on Page 89: “I, for instance, am horribly sensitive. I’m suspicious and easily offended like a dwarf or a hunchback.” We speak of being shamed as “losing face” and shame is evident in Underground Man’s painful obsession with his face and the faces of others. He recalls that his classmates “laughed openly at my face and my puny figure although their own faces were incredibly stupid” (p. 138). Later, during his career at the government office, he encounters a co-worker with a pock-marked face. “I wouldn’t have had the courage to show such a mug to anyone ... ‘let my face be plain,’ I thought, ‘as long as it’s dignified, expressive, and above all incredibly intelligent” (p. 118). Because he is driven by shame, Underground Man is far less concerned about whether he is, in fact, intelligent than whether others think his face appears intelligent. His sense of self worth is not derived from what he is, but from what he thinks other people think he is. This preoccupation with appearances also manifests itself in his preoccupation with military officers and his obsession with having them recognize him as an equal. Officers are an appropriate choice for “special treatment” by Underground Man because their social status exceeds his and because they wear uniforms. They literally wear their status on their sleeves, hence to establish one’s equality with them would leave little doubt of one’s status in the public eye. Underground Man succeeds in bumping into the second officer on the street and is elated: “I had accomplished my goal and behaved with dignity; without yielding an inch, had put myself on an equal social footing with him in public” (p. 128). Zherkov, however, merely brushes Underground Man off, leaving him utterly humiliated. He consoles himself by fantasizing an elaborate revenge during which he drags Zherkov around the room by his ear, then challenges him to a duel. He previously fantasized a duel with the second officer as well. He recognizes that there is little chance that either challenge would be taken seriously, but he is consoled by this fantasy because duels were only fought between equals. Furthermore, dueling was traditionally a public ritual for settling scores and saving face, so Underground Man believes a duel would enhance his public image in a way that a private apology could not. As well, a duel would elevate his sense of having lost face to the level of the “literary quarrel” that he craves. Underground man does not define a “literary quarrel”, but it presumably derives from the romantic literature he devours in his mouse hole.

This steady diet of romantic literature feeds his yearning for the unconditional love he did not receive as a child, and the need sometimes becomes conscious as a vague, but overwhelming sense of love for all humanity. “It was never directed toward another human being, but it was such an overflowing love that there was no need to direct it”

(p. 130). However, when he tentatively seeks relationships in the mundane world, he is thwarted by the need for compromise, as when he decides to call on Anton Antonych. Antonych only receives on Tuesdays, “so I had to adjust my longing to embrace mankind so it’d fall on Tuesday” (p. 131). More to the point, his yearning for love is hopeless tangled in his need for recognition, which leads him to seek relationships with his social superiors, as well as his fear of abandonment which drives him to control others and, failing that, to sabotage relationships. Thus he invites himself to Zherkof’s party, insults everyone in general and Zherkof in particular (apparently hoping he will, at last, be challenged to a duel) and ruins the evening for the others. Meanwhile, he secretly dreams “of triumphing, conquering, forcing them to love me for, let’s say, ‘the loftiness of my thought and my incontestable wit” (p.141). He still cannot separate love from power and he has virtually no empathy for the feelings of others. This is evident in the apology he writes after the fact suggesting that he viewed the whole mess “with considerable detachment”

and “in my opinion it wasn’t anything for which a young man should be judged too harshly” (p.175). The letter is not an expression of regret, but a defence of any shame he may have brought on himself.

Liza is the only person in the book for whom Underground Man feels a shred of empathy, and in the end empathy is overpowered by his need to dominate and humiliate her. Initially, power is not an issue because he regards her as a virtual slave because he pays her. “All I have to do is whistle and, whether you want to or not, you have to come with me. I don’t have to obey your will, but you have to obey mine” (p.168). Furthermore, she does not trigger his sense of shame because, as a woman and a prostitute, her status is much lower than his. Thus, he is not concerned with her opinion of him and despite his obsession with faces, he does not at first notice hers, but sees only “two wide-open eyes examining me curiously and insistently” (p.157). It is significant that he begins to confide in her after the candle burns out, leaving them in darkness. He cannot see her face and – more to the point – she cannot see his. He takes a tentative step toward intimacy with an emotionally charged question, “do you still have your parents?” (p.158), then a significant association: “today, I saw some people carrying a coffin” (p.159). This opens the floodgates to long-repressed emotions and he pours out a long, disjointed diatribe about the degradation of her life as a prostitute and the future of poverty, exploitation, neglect, disease and death that awaits her. Occasionally, he digresses into fantasies of idealized love and family life. He has obviously borrowed most of this material from the reams of romantic fiction he read in his mouse hole, but it reflects his frustrated desire for love and intimacy and includes some significant admissions. “Your father and mother are part of you. Be it only once a year, they’ll still show you their love ... but I grew up without a family, and that’s why I’m like this ... you know, without feelings” (p.162). Eventually he drives her to tears and, on impulse, gives her his address and invites her to come and see him. He is, at best, ambivalent, but the impulse was apparently based on genuine concern and empathy for her. He feels “exhausted, broken and confused” as he walks home in the snow (p.174) but the next morning, he manages to dismiss the entire incident as “a disgusting outbreak of nerves”(p.174).

During the next few days, he has sporadic fantasies of romantic love for Lisa, interspersed with fits of rage, but when she arrives, he is plunged into shame. He is no longer paying her, so she is no longer in thrall to him and he is painfully aware of his shabby apartment and threadbare furniture. Moreover she arrives in time to hear his humiliating quarrel with Apollon, his servant. He tries to save face by sending Apollon out for tea, but lapses into shame and lashes out when she appeals to him to help her escape from prostitution, although there is still empathy beneath the rage, “Even my heart bled for her at this show of artlessness and unnecessary frankness, but something ugly inside me nipped in the bud any pity I may have had and it may have exacerbated my spite” (p. 187). He rages at her, then lapses into self-humiliation. “You and you alone are responsible for everything, because you happened to be at hand ... because I’m the most disgusting, most laughable, pettiest, most stupid and most envious of all the worms of the earth” (p.189). She hugs him and they cry together for several minutes, but he soon realizes their roles have reversed since the previous night. She is now the savior and he is the victim and “a new feeling flashed in my heart: the need to dominate and possess. Passion burned in my eyes as I fiercely clasped her hands” (p.190). She acquiesces, but soon realizes his passion really masks hatred and the need for revenge. She leaves, but as she goes, he manages to crumple a five ruble

note into her hand. It is his final attempt to humiliate her, but he discovers later that she threw the money back into the apartment as she left.

He makes a brief attempt to follow her, but turns back. Once again, the longing for love in Underground Man's soul struggled against the fear of abandonment, and once again, fear won.

Literary Analysis of *Notes from Underground*

(from the editor's desk)

Dostoevsky wrote this novel after his release from prison. Prison life and the convicts he associated with taught him much about the underprivileged life of the Russian peasantry. By that time, he was no longer enthralled with the ideas of utopianism, materialism and liberalism that advances in science and technology were spreading all over Europe. Leaders were fascinated by scientific advancements and were neglecting their responsibility to care for the poor of Russia. They reasoned that in order to lead a perfect life one must possess material goods. To have a better life one must have the means to procure them. They reasoned that those who had no wealth of their own, thus could not have a better life. The poor deserve their lot for they are nature's 'imperfect' beings. This was the logic the leaders followed. The supreme example of this utopian thinking was the Crystal Palace built in London in 1851 to house the great exhibits of art and science. This was not only an example of extreme waste but also a show of insensitivity against the poor and the underprivileged. Europe had just emerged from war brought on by Napoleon's forces and was heading towards another in the early 1900. Russia was undergoing political and social changes of the worst kind. Rational thought and social utopianism did not care if the people of Russia had proper shelter or food. Hard work and honest effort was not given any value. What was of value was inheritance that would secure immediate happiness. *Notes from Underground* is a political statement written in the form of a novel, as a critique against the insensitivity of the times.

In the novel, *Notes from Underground*, Dostoevsky takes the character of the Underground Man (UM) as a caricature of the man of Russia in the mid 1800s who is unable to take responsibility for any action or form a relationship with a woman because he is the puppet of social expectations. Society sees man as successful and perfect if he has an inheritance, is wealthy and is the possessor of material goods for then he can lead a better life. If he is poor then society considers him 'nature's imperfection', a shame, an embarrassment to human progress. In order to rise up to social expectations, the UM mimics social mannerisms, one of which is to rationalize his every action. He cannot act responsibly neither can he form a relationship because the reason he gives is that he was not shown any love in his childhood. While this is true, the UM can learn about love and feel it developing within him. But since feeling is not seen as an asset, as material goods and reason are, the UM has no means of developing a sense of true feeling. Although he is an orphan and comes from a poor background, he refuses to work honestly to improve his situation, because again, work

connotes menial labor. Instead, he makes excuses for his condition and blames his lack of empathy on his past. He is the product of a society that does not honor effort and hard work for both are conditions that define the labors of the poor. He is the product of a society that rationalizes blame and excuse as a virtue.

In analytical psychology, a person who is unable to take responsibility for his actions or form a loving relationship with a woman is said to be suffering from many complexes. UM's complexes of guilt, shame and fear are so deeply ingrained that he is unable to individuate in any way at all. The collective or cultural Shadow is too overpowering for UM to even attempt an alternate move. Which ever way he turns he feels the mocking eyes of society. So he mimics society's ways and becomes a pathetic puppet lost forever in the confusing unconscious of his self. He is in the grip of the archetypal Shadow and cannot individuate or separate himself from its malevolent influence. The support his anima or Lucy brings to him is also rejected as 'imperfect' for she represents empathy which again is derided by society especially from someone as low as a prostitute. The UM fails to see her as a fellow suffering human being. He sees himself as not in need of his anima support. Instead, he sees himself as equal to the image that the collective Shadow reflects. He has lost the power to differentiate between values that are true to him and those that society upholds as true for everyone in general.

Dostoevsky caricatures the UM as a 'mouse' who lives in the mouse hole. The image of a mouse is that of a man who has no bodily feelings; who is driven by instincts alone; who is ashamed to come out in the open; who is ashamed of himself in every way. His instincts shape his way of thinking which have no basis, no nourishment of feelings and emotions to counterbalance the hard edges of pure logic. The UM is not only totally one-sided, he is not a human being in the true sense of the term. He exists only but does not know how to live. Instinctual rationalizing with no emotional counterbalance has reduced the UM to a miserable mouse who can only scurry about picking the droppings left by others. Another image Dostoevsky gives in the *Notes* to symbolize a man driven by reason only, is that of an anthill. The insect life of the ant is one of repetitive work towards a common objective. The ant serves the collective Shadow. Like the mouse, the ant has no individuality.

Dostoevsky regarded the human condition to be far more complex, not as direct and simple or deterministic as rational thinking would like it to be. Dostoevsky rejects the idea of mapping out an organized way of living for all humans. He was one of the early writers to adopt the idea of a true, individual life for each person based on faith, empathy and good feeling. It was left for Jung to see the importance of the interaction between reason and emotion, the practical and the creative sides of a person's psyche to bring out the inherent complexity of human nature. Jung's notion of the four functions of the conscious are helpful aids to individuation.

SECTION III

LITERARY ANALYSIS

Kate Chopin's *The Awakening*

by Bruce McInnis

A Mother's Son in Love: Robert Lebrun in *The Awakening*

The Awakening by Kate Chopin, was published in 1899. The short novel chronicles the frustrations of a woman trapped in a stifling marriage to a staid, older man and subjected to the restrictions of the Creole subculture in Louisiana which worships women as mothers and homemakers, but offers them virtually no other roles. In the course of the story, the protagonist, Edna Pontellier, develops an erotic interest in a slightly younger man, Robert Lebrun. Robert reciprocates her affection, but is emotionally incapable of a romantic relationship with her because he, himself is a product of the Creole "mother culture". This essay suggests that Robert is incapable of a romantic relationship with Edna – or any woman -- because he is still enthralled by his mother.

Robert Lebrun cannot decide whether to either pursue a love relationship with Edna Pontellier or to leave her alone in *The Awakening* because he is still emotionally in thrall to his mother. He is the first-born son of a strong-willed widow with whom he lives during the summer and partially supports through a nondescript job as a clerk in a New Orleans mercantile firm. The novel does not indicate Robert's age, but his brother, Victor, is 19 so Robert is probably in his early to mid-20s, an age by which most men have managed to transfer their primary love from their mothers to women of their own choice. Circumstances in Robert's life have made this transition particularly difficult for him. He is his mother's first-born and her husband is dead, so the bond between mother and son is likely to be particularly close. She is also deeply involved in his life (as evidenced by the fact that she has arranged for a close friend to act as a potential business contact for him in Mexico). As well, the feminine ideal in the Creole culture in which they live is the "mother-woman": "women who idolized their children, worshipped their husbands and esteemed it a special privilege to efface themselves as individuals and grow wings as ministering angels" (p. 8). A woman whose only cultural identity is motherhood is likely to keep her sons in her aegis as long as possible.

Robert's emotional dependence on his mother, makes him incapable of pursuing serious, lasting relationships with women. His liaisons are ephemeral and superficial. Each summer he makes 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 interested married woman (p. 10). These women are unavailable for serious romantic relationships with Robert because of their ages or marital status. The relationships are unlikely to continue after both parties go home at the end of the summer. For Robert, any serious, romantic love for a woman of his own choosing would constitute a kind of infidelity to his mother because his relationship with her is tinged with eros. The text suggests this on page 99 when Robert and Edna are alone in her "pigeon house" and she

invites him to dinner. Robert does not accept immediately, but “ stood irresolute, making some excuse about his mother expecting him; he even muttered something about an engagement (p. 99).” Robert is making up excuses to avoid an intimate dinner with the woman he loves and his first thought is of a prior date with his mother!

Edna Pontellier appears at first glance to be a prime candidate for one of Robert’s summer flirtations. She is attractive, married and somewhat older than he. He probably does not realize at first that she is also lonely, frustrated in her marriage, and very vulnerable to extramarital romance. Adele Ratignole realizes Robert has “targeted” Edna and tries to warn him away from her: “I’m in earnest; I mean what I say. Let Mrs. Pontellier alone ... she is not one of us; she is not like us. She might make the unfortunate blunder of taking you seriously (p. 19).” Robert is insulted at first: “Why shouldn’t she take me seriously ... am I a comedian, a clown, a jack-in-the-box? (p. 20).” But a short time later, he reassures Adele (and perhaps himself) that “there is no earthly possibility of Mrs. Pontellier ever taking me seriously”. His ambivalence suggests he wants to be taken seriously as a man pursuing a woman, but he also does not want to be involved in any deep relationship. He wants the fun of flirtation without the risk of committed responsibility. But Edna does take him seriously and he, perhaps unconsciously, encourages her. He manages to find himself alone with her during a midnight swim and weaves a fanciful tale of a sea spirit who will “transport her into realms of the semi-celestials ... perhaps she will never again suffer a poor, unworthy earthling to walk in the shadow of her divine presence” (p. 29). This is heady stuff for a woman who longs to be creative and longs to be loved but feels trapped in a stifling marriage and a mundane life. Edna is convinced she has found a soul mate in Robert and he is convinced that he “has penetrated her mood and understood” (p. 29). He has, in fact, penetrated her mood, but the experience is less profound than he apparently wants to believe. Robert Lebrun is a kind of emotional chameleon, quick to sense the vulnerable places in a woman’s nature and reflect them back to her. He convinces Edna that he, too, hears the voice of the sea, just as he played the puppyish boy-lover to Adele Ratignolle, the quintessential mother-woman (p. 10). This keen intuition into feminine nature probably derives from his lifelong focus on his mother.

A short time after their midnight swim, Robert and Edna spend an enchanted afternoon together in the *Cheniere* where he again weaves fantasies for her and charms her with a timeless, romantic atmosphere. “Maybe 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...” he says (p. 35).

“And in a day, we should be rich ... pirate gold isn’t a thing to be hoarded ... it is something to squander and throw to the four winds,” she replies (p. 35).

“We’d share it and scatter it together,” he says.

This is their first mutual reference to “we” which suggests a future relationship together. Ironically, it is also their last intimate meeting. The next day, Robert announces that he is leaving that night for a long-awaited business trip to Mexico. He does not tell Edna the news himself, although they spend the morning together. Instead, he tells others, knowing she will learn of it by hearsay. He knows there will be a scene and he is afraid of her reaction, just as a small boy is afraid of his mother’s anger. This is evident in his placating tone when she tells him she is hurt and upset that he did not confide in her. “Don’t part from me in an ill humour,” He whines. “I never knew you to be out of sorts with me before (p. 44).” He nearly confesses his love for her as

he leaves, but he does not kiss her goodbye. Instead, he shakes hands and lapses into platitudes: "Goodbye my dear Mrs. Pontellier; goodbye. You won't – I hope you won't completely forget me (p. 45)." They are alone, so there is no need for discretion, but he is, once again, caught in ambivalence, and once again, he retreats.

He reluctantly promises to write to her from Mexico, but does not do so. Instead, he writes long, torrid letters about her in the third person and sends them to Mlle Reisz. When he returns, he does not seek out Edna or even let her know that he is back in town, but runs into her by accident at Mlle Reisz's apartment and walks home with her.

When they are alone in her "pigeon house", she invites him to stay for dinner. He vacillates, but finally accepts her invitation and there is a brief, relaxed moment when he seems to her like "the old Robert" (p. 99). However, "a certain degree of ceremony settled upon them with the announcement of dinner. There was no return to personalities (p. 100)." After dinner, Alcee Arobin, with whom Edna has pursued a liaison during Robert's absence, arrives to deliver a message. Robert has reason to suspect Edna has a love interest in Arobin, and almost gratefully makes Arobin's arrival an excuse to leave. "I've been imposing myself long enough ... please convey my regards to Mr. Pontellier when you write (p. 102)." This is a man so afraid of intimacy that he is relieved to leave the woman he loves, alone with his rival.

A short time after that visit, Robert and Edna meet by chance in a secluded garden and again, he goes home with her. This time, she kisses him: "a soft, cool, delicate kiss whose voluptuous sting penetrated his whole being" (p. 107). He confesses that he loves her, then quickly retreats into a pseudo-respectability, declaring that he dreams of making her his wife if only Leonce Pontellier would "set her free". In truth, Edna's marital status is not at the heart of Robert's ambivalence toward her. Many men have fallen in love with married women and faced agonizing decisions about how to deal with it. Robert's problem is that he cannot face the woman herself.

Edna responds to Robert's preposterous suggestion by offering herself as a lover. "I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier's possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose ... I love you, only you; no one but you ... now you are here, we shall love each-other, my Robert. We shall be everything to each other." Robert's ambivalence and passivity has left her no choice but to be the aggressor in declaring her love for him, but she has placed him in an impossible situation. He cannot decide to break off the relationship and confront her with his decision because he knows there will be a scene and he projects his small boy's fears of his mother's anger onto her. Neither can he offer to carry on a clandestine affair or take her away from her husband (a new life in Mexico would not seem out of the question) because of the gnawing sense that intimacy with her would constitute infidelity to his mother. So he responds as he has responded to the threat of intimacy throughout their brief relationship: he waits until her back is turned and slips away, just as he slipped away on his sudden trip to Mexico. This failure of nerve lies at the heart of his inability to love. He cannot be decisive in a relationship with a woman because of his emotional dependence on his mother, but he will remain in thrall to his mother until he summons the courage to invest eros and affection in a woman of his own.

Literary analysis of *The Awakening*

(from the editors desk)

Kate Chopin writes about a particular Creole community and the patriarchal expectations it has regarding married women. Most patriarchal societies expect women to be fulfilled with their roles as mothers and wives. They are shocked when marriage and motherhood seem to be inadequate and sometimes frustratingly empty. It is sad that patriarchy demands that women lead an organized life devoted solely to keeping the family happy. What this suggests is that patriarchy, while heaping responsibilities upon the woman, denies her any kind of individual life that is separate from the family. This lack of individuality creates a need that becomes an insatiable hunger.

In analytical psychology, the process of individuation permits a person to choose those values that appear true to her, thereby fulfilling her own expectations of herself and not remaining a slave to social expectations. In *The Awakening*, Edna Pontellier finds individuating a painful experience. Edna has a sexual awakening when she finds love with Robert Lebrun. In the Creole culture a woman is permitted to speak and think of her feelings but not to act them out. But Edna, does act out her feelings for Robert. She leaves her husband and moves into a home of her own to enable her to be more free with her lovers. But this move does not constitute independence. In psychological terms, such a woman becomes a slave to her passions. In fact, Edna is in dependency of her emotions. At one point Edna declares that she is not the possession of her husband, yet she wants to emotionally possess Robert. She wants a life with Robert and she also wants her sexual fulfillment with Alcee Arobin. Edna rejects the social expectations as too limiting but she also rejects the women who are psychologically her Shadow. She runs away from Adele for she presents an image of contented mother and wife, that Edna finds suffocating. She flees from Mlle. Reisz for she reflects an image of self-sufficiency but without the love element. While she rejects her personal Shadow (Adele, Mlle.Reisz), Edna is in the grips of her animus (Robert, Alcee). Edna refuses to confront her Shadow and to assimilate it into a learning curve: from Adele how to apply herself to her family responsibilities; from Mlle.Reisz, how to transform her sexual cravings into artistic expression. Edna also refuses to integrate her animus: to learn to love without surrendering her self-esteem.

In the event of running away and surrendering herself, Edna loses her sense of responsibility. Instead of individuating into a mature woman, Edna becomes a confused and depressed person who loses the ability to choose those values that can truly transform her into a unique person.

Like Edna, Robert too is a person who finds maturing a traumatic experience. He cannot relate to his anima because it reflects the image of his mother. He cannot develop past the mothering stage and enter into the stage of relatedness. Loving another and committing to a relationship, another kind of responsibility is a forbidding undertaking for Robert. He is in the infantile stage known as the 'puer' stage. While Robert still has many years to shift his anima image from mother to lover, Edna surrenders herself to the sea and forever forfeits her claims to become an unique individual. While Robert is a cowardly man, no doubt, incapable of relating to women, Edna is a greater coward who forsakes her children in order to find self-sufficiency by drowning in the sea. She does not live a unique life but her final act is

nonetheless unique to herself. To answer the question whether Edna's suicide is a cowardly surrender or a liberating triumph, I would opt for the former. For how can it be a triumph when she leaves behind two young children? Although it liberates her from the shackles of a rigid life, Edna herself is not liberated. She escapes or rather runs away from life as she has been doing all her life – running away from her Shadow while needlessly wanting to shackle her animus. In the end, she drowns in the sea, metaphorically embraced by her unconscious.

When *The Awakening* was published it was received with great applause. Kate Chopin was concerned about the ways in which a woman's position was regarded in her traditional Creole community. She created characters who were rebellious in their own way. However, by endorsing suicide as the only means of escape, Chopin reveals the restricted and confined aspect of their lives and the consequent damaging effect this has on the women who, psychologically, become too vulnerable to mature beyond a certain level.