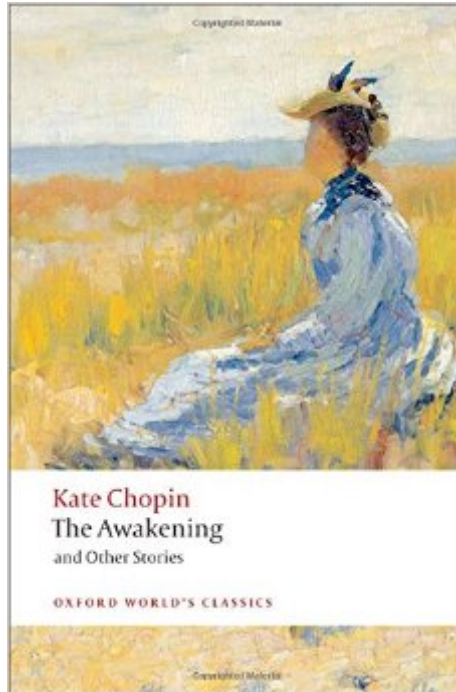


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# The Awakening: And Other Stories (Oxford World's Classics)



## Synopsis

Kate Chopin was one of the most individual and adventurous of nineteenth-century American writers, whose fiction explored new and often startling territory. When her most famous story, *The Awakening*, was first published in 1899, it stunned readers with its frank portrayal of the inner world of Edna Pontellier, and its daring criticisms of the limits of marriage and motherhood. The subtle beauty of her writing was contrasted with her unwomanly and sordid subject-matter: Edna's rejection of her domestic role, and her passionate quest for spiritual, sexual, and artistic freedom. From her first stories, Chopin was interested in independent characters who challenged convention. This selection, freshly edited from the first printing of each text, enables readers to follow her unfolding career as she experimented with a broad range of writing, from tales for children to decadent fin-de siècle sketches. *The Awakening* is set alongside thirty-two short stories, illustrating the spectrum of the fiction from her first published stories to her 1898 secret masterpiece, "The Storm."

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## Customer Reviews

At the start of the novel, Mrs Pontellier is experiencing the awakening of her consciousness: she is beginning to recognize her relations as an individual to the world within and about her. Her husband, a man of forty, regards her as a valuable piece of personal property. And yet she is the sole "object" of his existence. Why does she seem so little interested in things which concern him? Does she not value his conversation? A vague anguish in Mrs Pontellier is a symptom of something dark developing within. Is this unfamiliar feeling the sign of an inner revolt against Fate? What is the force behind the creation and the dispelling of our moods? As a young woman of twenty-eight, Edna Pontellier finds herself pondering on the nature of female wisdom. Is it about posing as a mother-as-angel in the home or is there something more? Can a new world be created in front of her, different from the one in which she had been living? Can a woman have access to a kind of wisdom belonging to the spirit, that only men had been previously vouchsafed? Edna is learning the pleasure of getting lost in the maze of inner contemplation. She wants to learn whether life has been the result of accident or the decree of Fate. The moon, the sea water and Chopin seem to cast a mystic spell upon her soul. Exulting with these feelings, she aims to conquer her own self, a feat prohibited to women at the time. The winter after the summer holidays at Grand Isle, and after her "friend" Robert has gone to Mexico, Edna Pontellier has already given certain steps towards the delirium of selfhood she craves for: she will only do as she pleases, and what she pleases the most is art. Is she not growing a little unbalanced mentally? For her, art is ultimately related to the rights of women.

The author, Kate Chopin, began to write when she was age thirty six. She had a ten year productive career the introduction by Nina Baym discloses. She died at age fifty three. Her work went out of print to be revived in the early 1960's. She wrote two novels and close to one hundred stories following the death of her husband and her mother. Women, including Kate Chopin, writing after the Civil War turned to regionalism. By 1893 railroads had wrought a tremendous change. Regional writing, as the introduction points out, is tourism of the imagination. The stories are short and skilfully done. Even the use of dialect for the Cajun and Creole speakers is not off-putting. The stories have a wonderful stripped down to the essence quality. One is reminded of Chekhov. In THE AWAKENING it is noted that the summer colony staying at the Lebrun cottages are almost entirely Creole. An exception is Edna Pontellier. She came from old Presbyterian Kentucky stock. Even as a child Edna tended to live in her own world. She feels a sense of exaltation when she learns to swim. She has children, a husband, and becomes infatuated with a young friend, Robert Lebrun. Later Robert leaves to go to Mexico. Returning to New Orleans, Edna spends time with the people

she has met at Grand Isles. Her husband is caught up in his household furnishings. When she decides to leave to live by herself in a smaller house, he prudently closes their large marital house to avoid gossip. Her absolute disregard for her duties as a wife shocks her husband. Her doctor can find no trace of the morbid condition ascribed to her. Robert Lebrun returns. He shows reserve. Leonce her husband and her children are part of Edna's life. She yields to the water of the gulf.

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