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## K. CHOPIN AS A PIONEER OF FEMINIST LITERATURE

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### Abstract

The article discusses the feminist themes in Kate Chopin's novel, "The Awakening," which challenged traditional gender roles and expectations when it was published in 1899. The article analyzes the novel using the methods of discourse analysis, continuous sampling, and interpreting a literary text. The research finds that the novel explores feminist ideas such as women's independence, new morality, patriarchal society, motherhood, and gender roles. The article cites several scholars who have identified "The Awakening" as a feminist work, and also discusses the controversy the novel faced upon its initial publication due to its portrayal of female sexuality and desire. The article concludes by noting that the novel continues to be widely recognized as an important feminist work that explores women's agency and autonomy.

**Keywords:** feminist literature, text interpretation, female independence, self-discovery, literary analyses.

## К. ШОПЕН ФЕМИНИСТІК ӘДЕБИЕТТІҢ НЕГІЗГІ САЛУЛАРЫНЫҢ БІРІ РЕТІНДЕ

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### Аңдатпа

Мақалада Кейт Шопеннің «Ояну» романындағы феминистік тақырыптар қарастырылады, ол 1899 жылы алғашқы жарияланғаннан кейін дәстүрлі гендерлік рөлдер мен үміттерге қарсы шықты. Мақалада дискурстық талдау, үздіксіз таңдау және көркем мәтінді интерпретациялау әдістері арқылы роман талданады. Басылым авторы романның әйел тәуелсіздігі, жаңа мораль, патриархалдық қоғам, аналық және гендерлік рөлдер сияқты феминистік идеяларды зерттейтінін көрсетеді. Мақалада «Оянуды» феминистік шығарма ретінде анықтаған бірнеше ғалымдардың сөздері келтіріліп, романның әйел нәзіктігін бейнелеуі және өзін-өзі жүзеге асыруға ұмтылу себебінен алғашқы жарияланғаннан бері тап болған қайшылықтар талқыланады. Мақала романның әйелдер агенттігі мен автономиясын зерттейтін маңызды феминистік жұмыс ретінде кеңінен танылуын жалғастыратынын атап өтеді.

**Түйін сөздер:** феминистік әдебиет, мәтінді түсіндіру, әйелдер тәуелсіздігі, өзін-өзі тану, әдеби талдау.

## К. ШОПЕН КАК ОДНА ИЗ ОСНОВАТЕЛЬНИЦ ФЕМИНИСТСКОЙ ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ

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### Аннотация

В статье рассматриваются феминистские темы в романе Кейт Шопен «Пробуждение», который бросил вызов традиционным гендерным ролям и ожиданиям после первой публикации в 1899 году. В статье анализируется роман с использованием методов дискурс-анализа, сплошной выборки и интерпретации литературного текста. Автор публикации показывает, что роман исследует феминистские идеи, такие как независимость женщин, новая мораль, патриархальное общество, материнство и гендерные роли. В статье цитируются несколько ученых, которые определили «Пробуждение» как феминистское произведение, а также обсуждается полемика, с которой роман столкнулся после его первоначальной публикации из-за изображения женской чувственности и стремления к самореализации. В заключении статьи отмечается, что роман по-прежнему широко признается важным феминистским произведением, исследующим свободу действий и автономию женщин.

**Ключевые слова:** феминистская литература, толкование текста, женская независимость, самопознание, литературный анализ.

### Introduction

Many literary scholars and critics consider “The Awakening” by Kate Chopin to be one of the first feminist novels, but it is difficult to definitively declare it as the first. There were other novels written before “The Awakening” that also addressed feminist themes, such as Mary Wollstonecraft’s “A Vindication of the Rights of Woman” and Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper.” Among such scholars are S. Gilbert, S. Gubar, E. Showalter; Seyersted and E. Toth.

S.M. Gilbert and S. Gubar, in their influential work “The Madwoman in the Attic” (1979), argue that “The Awakening” is a landmark feminist text that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations [1]. E. Showalter, in her book “A Literature of Their Own” (1977), identifies “The Awakening” as a precursor to the feminist literary tradition, which focused on women’s experiences and struggles [2]. P. Seyersted, a Chopin scholar and editor of the first edition of Chopin’s complete works, argues that “The Awakening” is a feminist novel that portrays Edna’s struggle against societal expectations and patriarchal norms [3].

E. Toth, a biographer of K. Chopin, also considers “The Awakening” to be a feminist novel that explores women’s agency and desire [4].

As for the most recent scholars the following can be mentioned. N. Walker, in her book “Kate Chopin: A Literary Life” (2010), contends that the novel under study is a feminist work that represents a significant turning point in the history of women’s literature [5]. C. Griffin Wolff, in her book “A Feast of Words” (1995), argues that “The Awakening” is a feminist masterpiece that critiques patriarchal society and portrays women’s struggles for independence and self-fulfillment [6]. S. Green and L. Tyler, in their article “Awakening and Re-emerging: The Awakening and Feminist Literary Theory” (2014), explore the novel’s feminist themes in relation to contemporary feminist literary theory [7]. Overall, “The Awakening” continues to be widely recognized as an important feminist work that challenges traditional gender roles and expectations, and explores women’s agency and autonomy.

However, “The Awakening” was groundbreaking for its time, as it challenged traditional gender roles and social norms, particularly in its portrayal of female sexuality and desire.

The novel’s protagonist, Edna Pontellier, defies societal expectations of women as self-sacrificing wives and mothers and instead asserts her own independence and autonomy. Additionally, “The Awakening” was met with controversy and criticism upon its initial publication in 1899, as its themes of female sexuality and desire were considered scandalous and immoral. Nevertheless, the novel has since been recognized as an important feminist work and a precursor to later feminist literature.

**Research methods.** Discourse analysis involves analyzing spoken or written language in a particular context, with a focus on how language is used to convey meaning and social identity. This method can be used to study a range of linguistic phenomena, such as language and power, language and gender, and language and culture. In the given article discourse analysis is used to identify the interrelation of language, gender and feminist ideas in the novel by K. Chopin “The Awakening”. The method of continuous sampling (or holistic sampling) in philological research involves the analysis of all available examples of linguistic phenomena in a text. The given method is used to choose extracts from the novel to maintain feminist ideas. The method of interpreting a literary text in philology is one of the main methods of analyzing literary works. It allows revealing the deep meaning of the text, identify the main ideas, get a deeper understanding of the text, its content, as well as to assess its cultural and historical context.

**Research results.** “The Awakening” by K. Chopin [8] is a novel that explores the life of a woman named Edna Pontellier and her journey towards self-discovery and empowerment. The novel can be seen as a feminist work as it challenges the traditional gender roles and expectations of women during the late 19th century. The following feminist ideas can be traced in the novel under study:

– Women’s independence: Edna’s journey towards independence and self-discovery is a central theme of the novel. She rejects the traditional role of a wife and mother and seeks to find her own identity and purpose in life.

– New morality: The novel explores the idea of female sensuality and desire. Edna’s sensual awakening is portrayed as a natural and valid part of her self-discovery.

– Patriarchal society: The novel critiques the patriarchal society in which Edna lives. The male-dominated society limits women’s opportunities and expectations, forcing them into a submissive role.

– Motherhood: The novel challenges the traditional notion of motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment of a woman’s life. Edna rejects the idea that being a mother is her sole purpose in life and seeks to find meaning outside of her role as a wife and mother.

– Gender roles: The novel explores the idea of gender roles and expectations, showing how they are constructed and enforced by society. Edna’s rejection of traditional gender roles can be seen as a feminist critique of the limitations placed on women by society.

**Discussion.** The ideas proposed above are expressed not directly, but through the behavior of the main character of the novel, her statements, relationships with other characters of the novel, etc.

The following examples support the idea of women’s independence:

– “She was becoming herself and daily casting aside that fictitious self which we assume like a garment with which to appear before the world.” [8; 62]. This quote from Chapter 12 shows Edna’s journey towards self-discovery and shedding the expectations of society.

– “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.” [8; 52]. In Chapter 6, Edna expresses her desire to prioritize her own identity and desires over the expectations of her role as a mother.

– “She wanted something to happen – something, anything: she did not know what.” [8; 80]. In Chapter 25, Edna expresses her desire for change and excitement in her life, showing her restlessness and yearning for independence.

– “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.” [8; 17]. In Chapter 6, Edna reflects on her journey towards realizing her own identity and rejecting the limitations of her gender.

– “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose.” [8; 113]. In Chapter 36, Edna declares her independence from her husband and the traditional expectations of marriage.

These examples show Edna’s growing awareness of her own identity and her desire to break free from the limitations of society’s expectations for women, and to choose her own path in life.

New morality is another feminist idea that can be found in the novel. The following examples demonstrate this idea.

– “She was not a mother-woman. The words seemed to start out of the very air: “Mother-woman!” It was foolishness, nonsense.” [8; 12]. Edna rejects the traditional role of a mother-woman, and instead seeks to find her own identity and purpose in life.

– “The voice of the sea is seductive; never ceasing, whispering, clamoring, murmuring, inviting the soul to wander for a spell in abysses of solitude.” [8; 18]. Edna is drawn to the freedom and sensuality of the sea, which represents her desire for liberation from the constraints of society.

– “I am no longer one of Mr. Pontellier’s possessions to dispose of or not. I give myself where I choose.” [8; 113]. Edna declares her independence and agency in choosing her own partners.

– “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.” [8; 57]. Edna seeks out solitude and self-discovery, which involves exploring her own sensuality and desires.

That is how Edna’s journey towards self-discovery and independence involves exploring her own sensuality and desires, and rejecting the traditional expectations placed on women by society. Thus, new morality is established.

Criticism of patriarchal society is another leading theme of the novel. The brightest examples are given below:

– “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.” [8; 57]. Mr. Pontellier’s expectation that his wife should prioritize his needs and interests over her own highlights the gender inequality in their relationship.

– “Her own personality, her soul, as it were, was now awakened.” [8; 57]. Edna’s awakening to her own identity and desires challenges the patriarchal assumption that women exist solely to serve others, such as their husbands and children.

– “The voice of the sea speaks to the soul.” [8; 18]. The metaphor of the sea as a liberating force that speaks to the soul emphasizes the contrast between nature and the stifling expectations of society.

– “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.” [8; 61].

Edna’s observation of Madame Ratignolle’s complacency with her role as a wife and mother highlights the limited options available to women in a patriarchal society.

– “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.” [8; 14]. Edna’s decision to read a book challenges patriarchal assumptions about women in secret highlights the danger and disapproval she faces for expressing feminist ideas.

The novel critiques patriarchal society by challenging gender inequality in relationships, highlighting the limited options available to women, and emphasizing the liberating potential of nature in contrast to societal expectations.

The “The Awakening” also challenges the traditional notion of motherhood, it can be seen in the following examples:

– “The mother-women 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.” [8; 12]. The description of “mother-women” as overprotective and defined by their role as mothers challenges the traditional notion of motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment of a woman’s life.

– “Mrs. Pontellier was not a mother-woman. The words seemed to start out of the very air: “Mother-woman!” It was absurd, whatever might be its meaning. She would never be that; she would never be a mother.” [8; 12]. Edna’s rejection of the traditional role of a “mother-woman” challenges the idea that motherhood is the only acceptable path for women.

– “It was not a condition of life which fitted her, and she could see in it but an appalling and hopeless ennui.” [8; 61]. Edna’s description of motherhood as an “appalling and hopeless ennui” challenges the idea that all women are naturally fulfilled by the experience of raising children.

– “She could not have gone through life tinting pictures in books, the pages of which were not yet cut. She wanted to touch it, to possess it, to swim in it, to have it surround her as water did.” [8; 61]. Edna’s desire to live a full, sensory life challenges the idea that women should be content with quiet domesticity.

– “She would give up the unessential; she would give her money; she would give her life for her children; but she wouldn’t give herself.” [8; 120]. Edna’s assertion that she will prioritize her own needs and desires challenges the idea that motherhood requires women to completely sacrifice themselves for their children.

Thus, “The Awakening” challenges the traditional notion of motherhood by rejecting the idea that all women are fulfilled by motherhood, and emphasizing the importance of women’s individual desires and agency.

Additionally, Edna rejects traditional gender roles.

– “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.” [8; 61]. Edna’s decision to prioritize her own desires over societal expectations of a woman’s domestic duties challenges the traditional gender role of women as submissive and obedient to social conventions.

– “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.” [8; 113]. Edna’s assertion of her own agency and

– independence challenges the traditional gender role of women as property and possessions of men.

– “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.” [8; 9]. Mr. Pontellier’s expectation that his wife should prioritize his needs and interests over her own highlights the gender inequality in their relationship, which Edna rejects by pursuing her own interests and desires.

– “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.” [8; 17]. Edna’s observation of Madame Ratignolle’s grace and majesty challenges the traditional gender role of women as passive and submissive, and suggests that women are capable of exerting power and influence.

Edna rejects traditional gender roles by asserting her own agency, prioritizing her own desires over societal expectations, and challenging gender inequality in relationships.

### Conclusion

The mentioned above themes and ideas can be related to several topics. The first one is feminism. The novel challenges traditional gender roles and expectations of women, emphasizing women’s agency, independence, and autonomy. The next is new morality. The novel explores Edna’s desires and sensuality, challenging societal expectations of women as passive and unsexual beings. Criticism of patriarchal society is another theme. The novel criticizes the patriarchal society that defines women’s roles and expectations, and highlights the consequences of women’s oppression and suppression of their desires. The novel also challenges the traditional notion of motherhood as the ultimate fulfillment of women’s lives, highlighting the diversity of women’s experiences and desires beyond their roles as mothers. Overall, “The Awakening” can be seen as a feminist novel that explores various themes related to women’s agency, autonomy, and liberation.

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