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Period 6 IB Lang/Lit HL 1

11/6/2019

**To what extent does Chopin’s background affect the development of Edna’s beliefs and actions in *The Awakening*?**

In *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, the protagonist, Edna, is portrayed as a highly controversial figure, criticized by some for irrationality but praised by others for free expression. She consistently searches for individual gratification, acting in ways abnormal to accepted societal norms of the time. The reactions of other characters towards Edna furthermore sharpens her idiosyncrasies throughout the novel, which seems to non-coincidentally correlate with aspects of Chopin’s childhood. The matriarchal structure of Chopin’s family, the trauma throughout her early years, and the bilingual and bicultural setting in which she grew up all found expression throughout the book. From Edna’s beliefs and actions in *The Awakening*, it can be inferred that Chopin lived a rather disagreeable childhood and yearned to explore the implications of feminine freedom in a patriarchal society.

The matriarchal surroundings in which Chopin grew up shaped the development of Edna as a character. Firstly, throughout her youth, Chopin was mentored by women, including not only her female family members but also nuns at the St. Louis Academy of the Sacred Heart. Such a background planted itself within the novel through Edna, who consults almost exclusively with female colleagues such as Mademoiselle Reisz. For example, Edna talks to Reisz about her plans to move to the pigeon house before carrying it out, and also explains her dreams of becoming an artist beforehand. Furthermore, because Chopin’s father died when she was 5, Chopin grew up in a family in which the mother was the head of the household, accentuating the idea of feminine freedom and power for Chopin. This idea found expression in the novel through Edna’s continuing acts striving to break free of Leonce’s control, as “[Edna] began to do as she liked and to feel as she liked” (76 Chopin). The feminist character of Chopin’s childhood is reflected in the development of Edna’s actions.

Trauma throughout Chopin’s childhood also helped formulate the way Edna dealt with problems. Her father died when Chopin was 5, and her beloved great-grandmother died when she was 11. Her half-brother enlisted in an army and ultimately died of typhoid fever. These events led Chopin to consider problems in a more extreme way, which is directly related to the development of Edna’s actions. In the novel, Edna considers suicide the optimal escape from her troubles in the world. Edna’s reaction is similar to the dramatic effect that trauma had on Chopin’s early years and is likely representative of how Chopin would probably have dealt with such problems.

[Body paragraph 3: maybe language/cultural aspects? Might have to revise thesis.]

(I feel like I didn’t choose workable focus points for which I could derive logical and coherent arguments with supporting evidence; I will continue to edit this)

Sources (for Chopin’s background):

* <https://www.katechopin.org/biography/>
* <https://archive.vcu.edu/english/engweb/webtexts/hour/katebio.html>

Concepts to include later:

* Edna’s lack of care for children – comparable to Chopin’s lost father?
* Cultural setting in Chopin’s time set culture in the awakening (French/English/colonial times)
* Social norms of Chopin’s time = generally equivalent to norms in book