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Close Reading Draft #1

Working Title : *Breaking Free* ?

Birds are beautiful creatures. They soar freely through the air, proclaiming their songs for the world to hear. It is not a surprise that these creatures have been captured and forced to live in cages for the entertainment of human-beings. Who would not want a thing of beauty as a permanent fixture of one's living room? In *The Awakening* by Kate Chopin, there are plenty of beautiful creatures that are trapped, either physically in cages or in one's societal place based on gender. The two trapped creatures share many similarities throughout the novel and the physical imprisonment of the birds can often symbolize the imprisonment Edna Pontellier experiences mentally throughout.

The novel begins with describing two sets of caged birds. A parrot situated in a cage on one side of the door and a mockingbird situated on the opposite side. "The parrot and the mockingbird were the property of Madame Lebrun, and they had the right to make all the noise they wished" (p.1). The aforementioned quote relates to Edna Pontellier in that she is also the property of another being (she is the property of her husband) as is stated on the following page when her husband is "looking at his wife as one looks at a valuable piece of property which has suffered some damage" (p.2). "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 goods" (p.58). Edna is just another one of Pontellier's possessions and he treats her as such. that she is also caged or trapped into her dwelling. It is also important to note that both of the birds are located on opposite sides

**Comment [1]:** (Meant to highlight the whole sentence - yikes-) This is a nice introduction

**Comment [2]:** Since this is the thesis, make sure it's very clear what/who you mean with the "two trapped creatures". Two is also confusing if you are talking about Edna along with the multiple birds in the story.

**Comment [3]:** It wouldn't be a Marcy paper without using this word at least once ;)

**Comment [4]:** There's a lot of great quotes here, but try to separate them a little more by adding more analysis. Also, the middle quote flows nicely while the other two are standing by themselves, which makes it harder to read.

outside the door. The birds, while still constricted, get to breathe the air of the outdoors and see the outdoors. The only thing standing between them and their freedom is the rods of the cages. The types of birds are also important to note. A parrot repeats phrases and words that it hears, unable to formulate its own thoughts or phrases. The mockingbird is similar in that it mocks or imitates the melodies of other birds. **Both birds are unable to**

When Edna goes outside to the porch “there was no sound abroad except the hooting of an old owl in the top of a water-oak” (p. 7). Edna cries literal tears as the owl cries into the night. Does the owl know why she cries in the night? Edna surely did not understand where her tears were coming from. An owl is yet another type of bird only active in the night. This bird, unlike the two previously mentioned birds thus far, is uncaged and outdoors. The aforementioned may symbolize the fact that Edna is free from the toils of being Mrs. Pontellier in the nighttime while her husband is sleeping and also free when she is outside in nature, where birds are supposed to be, not caged and **indoors.**

**The** parrot voices a displeasure with the provided musical entertainment, being “the only one present who possessed sufficient candor to admit that [s]he was not listening to these gracious performances for the first time that summer” (p.27). A few of the men present wish to have the parrot removed for this reason. Why should the bird be silenced for voicing her honest opinion? The answer to this is the same reasoning behind why **later on in the novel, Edna attempts to speak her voice of disapproval toward the treatment from her husband and subsequently is silenced just as the parrot had been earlier in the summer.** This rather short inclusion of the parrot being silenced for voicing its displeasure with her environment foreshadows that of a similar encounter Edna experiences later on, once again a bird being used to perhaps symbolize the emotions and feelings of the oppressed Edna. Consequently, the Parrot

**Comment [5]:** This is a strong paragraph. I like the contrast between the day/night and owl/other caged birds. Although the topic sentence could be clearer.

**Comment [6]:** In this paragraph and the one above it, I feel like you get to your point towards the end of the paragraph, and they are great arguments, but stronger points at the beginning of paragraphs helps the readers thoughts stay more organized

is unmoved by the melodies coinciding with the plunking of the keys of the piano, while Edna is completely moved into tremors by tunes. This could be because the musicians differed from when Edna was moved versus when the bird was displeased, but what could it also mean with the symbolism? Two fourteen-year-old girls were playing and the bird was annoyed. An old woman was playing and Edna was moved. The old woman had lived her life and the emotion placed behind her music was that of which Edna longed for. She longed for the freedom to play whatever she wanted. The little girls were still learning and being told what to play rather technically, which is part of the reason perhaps the bird was squaking over it. The chords of Mademoiselle Reisz, however were free and unrestricted by her years of experience. Birds are nature's natural music makers, so it is no surprise that Edna is enchanted by the freeing music played by 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" (p.92).

Comment [7]: Awkward wording here, might be confusing for the reader

Throughout the novel, Edna goes out and sits on the porch with a view of the gulf. This is perhaps the same view that the mockingbird and parrot have from their cages located outside the door. "I know I should like it, like the feeling of freedom and independence" (p.94).

In Edna's first moment of defiance of her husband while insisting to sleep in the hammock outside on the porch, "[t]he old owl no longer hooted, and the water oaks had ceased to moan as they bent their heads" (p.37). Edna has stood her ground and voiced her desire, going against the wishes of her husband and in this moment she has gained some of the freedom which before only the owl possessed, thus she was silenced as Edna could speak. It is almost as if the owl is silent in order to allow for Edna to speak her mind, listening to Edna's concerns and allowing them to be heard without the interruption of distant hoots.

Edna does her painting in her atelier which is a room in the top of the house (p.67). This is related to the symbolism of a bird in that birds build their nests in trees, often high up from the ground. It is fitting that Edna's place of escape in her home is at the highest level. Why do birds reside in the hightops of the trees? It is here that they are left alone, the only creatures up this high are fellow birds. They are "...good to dream and be alone and unmolested" (p.68), away from the predators of the ground, just as Edna is away from the oppression of running the house down below when she retreats to her little study atop the house. Similarly, Mademoiselle Reisz chooses to live on the upper levels of a building (p.72). This woman was the woman who brought such joyous music to Edna, and symbolizes a free bird, being unmarried and free to float around like the melodies she produces. It is only fitting that she lives atop a building, just like free birds live atop trees. She lives directly under the roof so as to "discourage the approach of beggars, peddlars, and callers" (p.72) or other annoyances of the street or ground level. Edna's refusal to come down from the high step ladder is yet another connection to the height of birds in trees. She is higher up than the rest of the people in the room (p.100) and even when pleaded with to come down, she refuses.

The smaller house in which Edna wishes to escape to is nicknamed the 'pigeon house' due to its size and how it looks (p.100). This name can also correlate to the freedom Edna will experience upon her escape. She will be free in this small house, like a bird is free in nature. It is only fitting that Edna's freedom house is named for a bird.

Even in the closing moments of the novel, the presence of a bird can be seen as symbolic of the something something Edna. "A bird with a broken wing was beating the air above, reeling, fluttering, circling disabled down, down to the water" (p.136). Edna has broken a bit in her

**Comment [8]:** This paragraph successfully uses evidence from throughout the book, rather than following the plot or only using one quote.

attempts at freedom and it is only fitting that a bird with a broken wing spirals down as Edna descends into the depths of the gulf.

**Comment [9]:** Make sure you end by restating your claim so you don't follow a plot summary.

#### Works Cited

Chopin, Kate. *The Awakening*. Signet Classics, 1976.

**Comment [10]:** Great job! You have a lot of great ideas that just need to be organized a little more! I'm glad you got past the writers block you wrote about in your first blog post :)